CENTAUR

MARCEL PROUST

In Search of Lost Time
[volumes 1 to 7]

Marcel Proust

IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME

[VOLUMES 1 TO 7]

Original title: *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1913-1927)
Translation: C. K. Scott Moncrieff (1889-1930) – vols. 1 to 6
Sydney Schiff (1868-1944) – vol. 7
2016 © Centaur Editions
centaur.editions@gmail.com

Table of Contents

SWANN'S WAY [VOLUME 1]
- Overture
- Combray
- Swann in Love
- Place-Names: The Name

WITHIN A BUDDING GROVE [VOLUME 2]
- Madame Swann at Home
- Place-Names: The Place
- Seascape, with Frieze of Girls

THE GUERMANTES WAY [VOLUME 3]
- Chapter 1
- Chapter 2

CITIES OF THE PLAIN [VOLUME 4]
- Introduction
- Chapter 1
- Chapter 2
- Chapter 3
- Chapter 4

THE CAPTIVE [VOLUME 5]
- Chapter 1 — Life with Albertine
- Chapter 2 — The Verdurins Quarrel with M. De Charlus
- Chapter 3 — Flight of Albertine

THE SWEET CHEAT GONE [VOLUME 6]
- Chapter 1 — Grief and Oblivion
- Chapter 2 — Mademoiselle De Forcheville
- Chapter 3 — Venice
- Chapter 4 — A Fresh Light Upon Robert De Saint-Loup

TIME REGAINED [VOLUME 7]
- Chapter 1 — Tansonville
- Chapter 2 — M. de Charlus During the War, His Opinions, His Pleasures
- Chapter 3 — An Afternoon Party at the House of the Princesse de Guermantes

Swann’s Way [Volume 1]

Du Côté de chez Swann (1922)
Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (1889-1930)

Overture

For a long time I used to go to bed early. Sometimes, when I had put out my candle, my eyes would close so quickly that I had not even time to say “I’m going to sleep.” And half an hour later the thought that it was time to go to sleep would awaken me; I would try to put away the book which, I imagined, was still in my hands, and to blow out the light; I had been thinking all the time, while I was asleep, of what I had just been reading, but my thoughts had run into a channel of their own, until I myself seemed actually to have become the subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This impression would persist for some moments after I was awake; it did not disturb my mind, but it lay like scales upon my eyes and prevented them from registering the fact that the candle was no longer burning. Then it would begin to seem unintelligible, as the thoughts of a former existence must be to a reincarnate spirit; the subject of my book would separate itself from me, leaving me free to choose whether I would form part of it or no; and at the same time my sight would return and I would be astonished to find myself in a state of darkness, pleasant and restful enough for the eyes, and even more, perhaps, for my mind, to which it appeared incomprehensible, without a cause, a matter dark indeed.

I would ask myself what o’clock it could be; I could hear the whistling of trains, which, now nearer and now farther off, punctuating the distance like the note of a bird in a forest, shewed me in perspective the deserted countryside through which a traveller would be hurrying towards the nearest station: the path that he followed being fixed for ever in his memory by the general excitement due to being in a strange place, to doing unusual things, to the last words of conversation, to farewells exchanged beneath an unfamiliar lamp which echoed still in his ears amid the silence of the night; and to the delightful prospect of being once again at home.

I would lay my cheeks gently against the comfortable cheeks of my pillow, as plump and blooming as the cheeks of babyhood. Or I would strike a match to look at my watch. Nearly midnight. The hour when an invalid, who has been

obliged to start on a journey and to sleep in a strange hotel, awakens in a moment of illness and sees with glad relief a streak of daylight shewing under his bedroom door. Oh, joy of joys! it is morning. The servants will be about in a minute: he can ring, and some one will come to look after him. The thought of being made comfortable gives him strength to endure his pain. He is certain he heard footsteps: they come nearer, and then die away. The ray of light beneath his door is extinguished. It is midnight; some one has turned out the gas; the last servant has gone to bed, and he must lie all night in agony with no one to bring him any help.

I would fall asleep, and often I would be awake again for short snatches only, just long enough to hear the regular creaking of the wainscot, or to open my eyes to settle the shifting kaleidoscope of the darkness, to savour, in an instantaneous flash of perception, the sleep which lay heavy upon the furniture, the room, the whole surroundings of which I formed but an insignificant part and whose unconsciousness I should very soon return to share. Or, perhaps, while I was asleep I had returned without the least effort to an earlier stage in my life, now for ever outgrown; and had come under the thrall of one of my childish terrors, such as that old terror of my great-uncle's pulling my curls, which was effectually dispelled on the day — the dawn of a new era to me — on which they were finally cropped from my head. I had forgotten that event during my sleep; I remembered it again immediately I had succeeded in making myself wake up to escape my great-uncle's fingers; still, as a measure of precaution, I would bury the whole of my head in the pillow before returning to the world of dreams.

Sometimes, too, just as Eve was created from a rib of Adam, so a woman would come into existence while I was sleeping, conceived from some strain in the position of my limbs. Formed by the appetite that I was on the point of gratifying, she it was, I imagined, who offered me that gratification. My body, conscious that its own warmth was permeating hers, would strive to become one with her, and I would awake. The rest of humanity seemed very remote in comparison with this woman whose company I had left but a moment ago: my cheek was still warm with her kiss, my body bent beneath the weight of hers. If, as would sometimes happen, she had the appearance of some woman whom I had known in waking hours, I would abandon myself altogether to the sole quest of her, like people who set out on a journey to see with their own eyes some city that they have always longed to visit, and imagine that they can taste in reality what has charmed their fancy. And then, gradually, the memory of her would dissolve and vanish, until I had forgotten the maiden of my dream.

When a man is asleep, he has in a circle round him the chain of the hours, the sequence of the years, the order of the heavenly host. Instinctively, when he awakes, he looks to these, and in an instant reads off his own position on the earth's surface and the amount of time that has elapsed during his slumbers; but this ordered procession is apt to grow confused, and to break its ranks. Suppose that, towards morning, after a night of insomnia, sleep descends upon him while he is reading, in quite a different position from that in which he normally goes to sleep, he has only to lift his arm to arrest the sun and turn it back in its course, and, at the moment of waking, he will have no idea of the time, but will conclude that he has just gone to bed. Or suppose that he gets drowsy in some even more abnormal position; sitting in an armchair, say, after dinner: then the world will fall topsy-turvy from its orbit, the magic chair will carry him at full speed through time and space, and when he opens his eyes again he will imagine that he went to sleep months earlier and in some far distant country. But for me it was enough if, in my own bed, my sleep was so heavy as completely to relax my consciousness; for then I lost all sense of the place in which I had gone to sleep, and when I awoke at midnight, not knowing where I was, I could not be sure at first who I was; I had only the most rudimentary sense of existence, such as may lurk and flicker in the depths of an animal's consciousness; I was more destitute of human qualities than the cave-dweller; but then the memory, not yet of the place in which I was, but of various other places where I had lived, and might now very possibly be, would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being, from which I could never have escaped by myself: in a flash I would traverse and surmount centuries of civilisation, and out of a half-visualised succession of oil-lamps, followed by shirts with turned-down collars, would put together by degrees the component parts of my ego.

Perhaps the immobility of the things that surround us is forced upon them by our conviction that they are themselves, and not anything else, and by the immobility of our conceptions of them. For it always happened that when I awoke like this, and my mind struggled in an unsuccessful attempt to discover where I was, everything would be moving round me through the darkness: things, places, years. My body, still too heavy with sleep to move, would make an effort to construe the form which its tiredness took as an orientation of its various members, so as to induce from that where the wall lay and the furniture stood, to piece together and to give a name to the house in which it must be living. Its memory, the composite memory of its ribs, knees, and shoulder-blades offered it a whole series of rooms in which it had at one time or another slept;

while the unseen walls kept changing, adapting themselves to the shape of each successive room that it remembered, whirling madly through the darkness. And even before my brain, lingering in consideration of when things had happened and of what they had looked like, had collected sufficient impressions to enable it to identify the room, it, my body, would recall from each room in succession what the bed was like, where the doors were, how daylight came in at the windows, whether there was a passage outside, what I had had in my mind when I went to sleep, and had found there when I awoke. The stiffened side underneath my body would, for instance, in trying to fix its position, imagine itself to be lying, face to the wall, in a big bed with a canopy; and at once I would say to myself, “Why, I must have gone to sleep after all, and Mamma never came to say good night!” for I was in the country with my grandfather, who died years ago; and my body, the side upon which I was lying, loyally preserving from the past an impression which my mind should never have forgotten, brought back before my eyes the glimmering flame of the night-light in its bowl of Bohemian glass, shaped like an urn and hung by chains from the ceiling, and the chimney-piece of Siena marble in my bedroom at Com-bray, in my great-aunt’s house, in those far distant days which, at the moment of waking, seemed present without being clearly denned, but would become plainer in a little while when I was properly awake.

Then would come up the memory of a fresh position; the wall slid away in another direction; I was in my room in Mme. de Saint-Loup’s house in the country; good heavens, it must be ten o’clock, they will have finished dinner! I must have overslept myself, in the little nap which I always take when I come in from my walk with Mme. de Saint-Loup, before dressing for the evening. For many years have now elapsed since the Combray days, when, coming in from the longest and latest walks, I would still be in time to see the reflection of the sunset glowing in the panes of my bedroom window. It is a very different kind of existence at Tansonville now with Mme. de Saint-Loup, and a different kind of pleasure that I now derive from taking walks only in the evenings, from visiting by moonlight the roads on which I used to play, as a child, in the sunshine; while the bedroom, in which I shall presently fall asleep instead of dressing for dinner, from afar off I can see it, as we return from our walk, with its lamp shining through the window, a solitary beacon in the night.

These shifting and confused gusts of memory never lasted for more than a few seconds; it often happened that, in my spell of uncertainty as to where I was, I did not distinguish the successive theories of which that uncertainty was

composed any more than, when we watch a horse running, we isolate the successive positions of its body as they appear upon a bioscope. But I had seen first one and then another of the rooms in which I had slept during my life, and in the end I would revisit them all in the long course of my waking dream: rooms in winter, where on going to bed I would at once bury my head in a nest, built up out of the most diverse materials, the corner of my pillow, the top of my blankets, a piece of a shawl, the edge of my bed, and a copy of an evening paper, all of which things I would contrive, with the infinite patience of birds building their nests, to cement into one whole; rooms where, in a keen frost, I would feel the satisfaction of being shut in from the outer world (like the sea-swallow which builds at the end of a dark tunnel and is kept warm by the surrounding earth), and where, the fire keeping in all night, I would sleep wrapped up, as it were, in a great cloak of snug and savoury air, shot with the glow of the logs which would break out again in flame: in a sort of alcove without walls, a cave of warmth dug out of the heart of the room itself, a zone of heat whose boundaries were constantly shifting and altering in temperature as gusts of air ran across them to strike freshly upon my face, from the corners of the room, or from parts near the window or far from the fireplace which had therefore remained cold — or rooms in summer, where I would delight to feel myself a part of the warm evening, where the moonlight striking upon the half-opened shutters would throw down to the foot of my bed its enchanted ladder; where I would fall asleep, as it might be in the open air, like a titmouse which the breeze keeps poised in the focus of a sunbeam — or sometimes the Louis XVI room, so cheerful that I could never feel really unhappy, even on my first night in it: that room where the slender columns which lightly supported its ceiling would part, ever so gracefully, to indicate where the bed was and to keep it separate; sometimes again that little room with the high ceiling, hollowed in the form of a pyramid out of two separate storeys, and partly walled with mahogany, in which from the first moment my mind was drugged by the unfamiliar scent of flowering grasses, convinced of the hostility of the violet curtains and of the insolent indifference of a clock that chattered on at the top of its voice as though I were not there; while a strange and pitiless mirror with square feet, which stood across one corner of the room, cleared for itself a site I had not looked to find tenanted in the quiet surroundings of my normal field of vision: that room in which my mind, forcing itself for hours on end to leave its moorings, to elongate itself upwards so as to take on the exact shape of the room, and to reach to the summit of that monstrous funnel, had passed so many anxious nights while my

body lay stretched out in bed, my eyes staring upwards, my ears straining, my nostrils sniffing uneasily, and my heart beating; until custom had changed the colour of the curtains, made the clock keep quiet, brought an expression of pity to the cruel, slanting face of the glass, disguised or even completely dispelled the scent of flowering grasses, and distinctly reduced the apparent loftiness of the ceiling. Custom! that skilful but unhurrying manager who begins by torturing the mind for weeks on end with her provisional arrangements; whom the mind, for all that, is fortunate in discovering, for without the help of custom it would never contrive, by its own efforts, to make any room seem habitable.

Certainly I was now well awake; my body had turned about for the last time and the good angel of certainty had made all the surrounding objects stand still, had set me down under my bedclothes, in my bedroom, and had fixed, approximately in their right places in the uncertain light, my chest of drawers, my writing-table, my fireplace, the window overlooking the street, and both the doors. But it was no good my knowing that I was not in any of those houses of which, in the stupid moment of waking, if I had not caught sight exactly, I could still believe in their possible presence; for memory was now set in motion; as a rule I did not attempt to go to sleep again at once, but used to spend the greater part of the night recalling our life in the old days at Combray with my great-aunt, at Balbec, Paris, Doncières, Venice, and the rest; remembering again all the places and people that I had known, what I had actually seen of them, and what others had told me.

At Combray, as every afternoon ended, long before the time when I should have to go up to bed, and to lie there, unsleeping, far from my mother and grandmother, my bedroom became the fixed point on which my melancholy and anxious thoughts were centred. Some one had had the happy idea of giving me, to distract me on evenings when I seemed abnormally wretched, a magic lantern, which used to be set on top of my lamp while we waited for dinner-time to come: in the manner of the master-builders and glass-painters of gothic days it substituted for the opaqueness of my walls an impalpable iridescence, supernatural phenomena of many colours, in which legends were depicted, as on a shifting and transitory window. But my sorrows were only increased, because this change of lighting destroyed, as nothing else could have done, the customary impression I had formed of my room, thanks to which the room itself, but for the torture of having to go to bed in it, had become quite endurable. For now I no longer recognised it, and I became uneasy, as though I were in a room in some hotel or furnished lodging, in a place where I had just arrived, by train, for the

first time.

Riding at a jerky trot, Golo, his mind filled with an infamous design, issued from the little three-cornered forest which dyed dark-green the slope of a convenient hill, and advanced by leaps and bounds towards the castle of poor Geneviève de Brabant. This castle was cut off short by a curved line which was in fact the circumference of one of the transparent ovals in the slides which were pushed into position through a slot in the lantern. It was only the wing of a castle, and in front of it stretched a moor on which Geneviève stood, lost in contemplation, wearing a blue girdle. The castle and the moor were yellow, but I could tell their colour without waiting to see them, for before the slides made their appearance the old-gold sonorous name of Brabant had given me an unmistakable clue. Golo stopped for a moment and listened sadly to the little speech read aloud by my great-aunt, which he seemed perfectly to understand, for he modified his attitude with a docility not devoid of a degree of majesty, so as to conform to the indications given in the text; then he rode away at the same jerky trot. And nothing could arrest his slow progress. If the lantern were moved I could still distinguish Golo's horse advancing across the window-curtains, swelling out with their curves and diving into their folds. The body of Golo himself, being of the same supernatural substance as his steed's, overcame all material obstacles — everything that seemed to bar his way — by taking each as it might be a skeleton and embodying it in himself: the door-handle, for instance, over which, adapting itself at once, would float invincibly his red cloak or his pale face, never losing its nobility or its melancholy, never shewing any sign of trouble at such a transubstantiation.

And, indeed, I found plenty of charm in these bright projections, which seemed to have come straight out of a Merovingian past, and to shed around me the reflections of such ancient history. But I cannot express the discomfort I felt at such an intrusion of mystery and beauty into a room which I had succeeded in filling with my own personality until I thought no more of the room than of myself. The anaesthetic effect of custom being destroyed, I would begin to think and to feel very melancholy things. The door-handle of my room, which was different to me from all the other doorhandles in the world, inasmuch as it seemed to open of its own accord and without my having to turn it, so unconscious had its manipulation become; lo and behold, it was now an astral body for Golo. And as soon as the dinner-bell rang I would run down to the dining-room, where the big hanging lamp, ignorant of Golo and Bluebeard but well acquainted with my family and the dish of stewed beef, shed the same light

as on every other evening; and I would fall into the arms of my mother, whom the misfortunes of Geneviève de Brabant had made all the dearer to me, just as the crimes of Golo had driven me to a more than ordinarily scrupulous examination of my own conscience.

But after dinner, alas, I was soon obliged to leave Mamma, who stayed talking with the others, in the garden if it was fine, or in the little parlour where everyone took shelter when it was wet. Everyone except my grandmother, who held that "It is a pity to shut oneself indoors in the country," and used to carry on endless discussions with my father on the very wettest days, because he would send me up to my room with a book instead of letting me stay out of doors. "That is not the way to make him strong and active," she would say sadly, "especially this little man, who needs all the strength and character that he can get." My father would shrug his shoulders and study the barometer, for he took an interest in meteorology, while my mother, keeping very quiet so as not to disturb him, looked at him with tender respect, but not too hard, not wishing to penetrate the mysteries of his superior mind. But my grandmother, in all weathers, even when the rain was coming down in torrents and Françoise had rushed indoors with the precious wicker armchairs, so that they should not get soaked — you would see my grandmother pacing the deserted garden, lashed by the storm, pushing back her grey hair in disorder so that her brows might be more free to imbibe the life-giving draughts of wind and rain. She would say, "At last one can breathe!" and would run up and down the soaking paths — too straight and symmetrical for her liking, owing to the want of any feeling for nature in the new gardener, whom my father had been asking all morning if the weather were going to improve — with her keen, jerky little step regulated by the various effects wrought upon her soul by the intoxication of the storm, the force of hygiene, the stupidity of my education and of symmetry in gardens, rather than by any anxiety (for that was quite unknown to her) to save her plum-coloured skirt from the spots of mud under which it would gradually disappear to a depth which always provided her maid with a fresh problem and filled her with fresh despair.

When these walks of my grandmother's took place after dinner there was one thing which never failed to bring her back to the house: that was if (at one of those points when the revolutions of her course brought her, moth-like, in sight of the lamp in the little parlour where the liqueurs were set out on the card-table) my great-aunt called out to her: "Bathilde! Come in and stop your husband from drinking brandy!" For, simply to tease her (she had brought so foreign a type of

mind into my father's family that everyone made a joke of it), my great-aunt used to make my grandfather, who was forbidden liqueurs, take just a few drops. My poor grandmother would come in and beg and implore her husband not to taste the brandy; and he would become annoyed and swallow his few drops all the same, and she would go out again sad and discouraged, but still smiling, for she was so humble and so sweet that her gentleness towards others, and her continual subordination of herself and of her own troubles, appeared on her face blended in a smile which, unlike those seen on the majority of human faces, had no trace in it of irony, save for herself, while for all of us kisses seemed to spring from her eyes, which could not look upon those she loved without yearning to bestow upon them passionate caresses. The torments inflicted on her by my great-aunt, the sight of my grandmother's vain entreaties, of her in her weakness conquered before she began, but still making the futile endeavour to wean my grandfather from his liqueur-glass — all these were things of the sort to which, in later years, one can grow so well accustomed as to smile at them, to take the tormentor's side with a. happy determination which deludes one into the belief that it is not, really, tormenting; but in those days they filled me with such horror that I longed to strike my great-aunt. And yet, as soon as I heard her "Bathilde! Come in and stop your husband from drinking brandy!" in my cowardice I became at once a man, and did what all we grown men do when face to face with suffering and injustice; I preferred not to see them; I ran up to the top of the house to cry by myself in a little room beside the schoolroom and beneath the roof, which smelt of orris-root, and was scented also by a wild currant-bush which had climbed up between the stones of the outer wall and thrust a flowering branch in through the half-opened window. Intended for a more special and a baser use, this room, from which, in the daytime, I could see as far as the keep of Roussainville-le-Pin, was for a long time my place of refuge, doubtless because it was the only room whose door Ï was allowed to lock, whenever my occupation was such as required an inviolable solitude; reading or dreaming, secret tears or paroxysms of desire. Alas! I little knew that my own lack of will-power, my delicate health, and the consequent uncertainty as to my future weighed far more heavily on my grandmother's mind than any little breach of the rules by her husband, during those endless perambulations, afternoon and evening, in which we used to see passing up and down, obliquely raised towards the heavens, her handsome face with its brown and wrinkled cheeks, which with age had acquired almost the purple hue of tilled fields in autumn, covered, if she were walking abroad, by a half-lifted veil, while upon

them either the cold or some sad reflection invariably left the drying traces of an involuntary tear.

My sole consolation when I went upstairs for the night was that Mamma would come in and kiss me after I was in bed. But this good night lasted for so short a time: she went down again so soon that the moment in which I heard her climb the stairs, and then caught the sound of her garden dress of blue muslin, from which hung little tassels of plaited straw, rustling along the double-doored corridor, was for me a moment of the keenest sorrow. So much did I love that good night that I reached the stage of hoping that it would come as late as possible, so as to prolong the time of respite during which Mamma would not yet have appeared. Sometimes when, after kissing me, she opened the door to go, I longed to call her back, to say to her "Kiss me just once again," but I knew that then she would at once look displeased, for the concession which she made to my wretchedness and agitation in coming up to me with this kiss of peace always annoyed my father, who thought such ceremonies absurd, and she would have liked to try to induce me to outgrow the need, the custom of having her there at all, which was a very different thing from letting the custom grow up of my asking her for an additional kiss when she was already crossing the threshold. And to see her look displeased destroyed all the sense of tranquillity she had brought me a moment before, when she bent her loving face down over my bed, and held it out to me like a Host, for an act of Communion in which my lips might drink deeply the sense of her real presence, and with it the power to sleep. But those evenings on which Mamma stayed so short a time in my room were sweet indeed compared to those on which we had guests to dinner, and therefore she did not come at all. Our 'guests' were practically limited to M. Swann, who, apart from a few passing strangers, was almost the only person who ever came to the house at Combray, sometimes to a neighbourly dinner (but less frequently since his unfortunate marriage, as my family did not care to receive his wife) and sometimes after dinner, uninvited. On those evenings when, as we sat in front of the house beneath the big chestnut-tree and round the iron table, we heard, from the far end of the garden, not the large and noisy rattle which heralded and deafened as he approached with its ferruginous, interminable, frozen sound any member of the household who had put it out of action by coming in 'without ringing,' but the double peal — timid, oval, gilded — of the visitors' bell, everyone would at once exclaim "A visitor! Who in the world can it be?" but they knew quite well that it could only be M. Swann. My great-aunt, speaking in a loud voice, to set an example, in a tone which she

endeavoured to make sound natural, would tell the others not to whisper so; that nothing could be more unpleasant for a stranger coming in, who would be led to think that people were saying things about him which he was not meant to hear; and then my grandmother would be sent out as a scout, always happy to find an excuse for an additional turn in the garden, which she would utilise to remove surreptitiously, as she passed, the stakes of a rose-tree or two, so as to make the roses look a little more natural, as a mother might run her hand through her boy's hair, after the barber had smoothed it down, to make it stick out properly round his head.

And there we would all stay, hanging on the words which would fall from my grandmother's lips when she brought us back her report of the enemy, as though there had been some uncertainty among a vast number of possible invaders, and then, soon after, my grandfather would say: "I can hear Swann's voice." And, indeed, one could tell him only by his voice, for it was difficult to make out his face with its arched nose and green eyes, under a high forehead fringed with fair, almost red hair, dressed in the Bressant style, because in the garden we used as little light as possible, so as not to attract mosquitoes: and I would slip away as though not going for anything in particular, to tell them to bring out the syrups; for my grandmother made a great point, thinking it 'nicer of their not being allowed to seem anything out of the ordinary, which we kept for visitors only. Although a far younger man, M. Swann was very much attached to my grandfather, who had been an intimate friend, in his time, of Swann's father, an excellent but an eccentric man in whom the least little thing would, it seemed, often check the flow of his spirits and divert the current of his thoughts. Several times in the course of a year I would hear my grandfather tell at table the story, which never varied, of the behaviour of M. Swann the elder upon the death of his wife, by whose bedside he had watched day and night. My grandfather, who had not seen him for a long time, hastened to join him at the Swanns' family property on the outskirts of Combray, and managed to entice him for a moment, weeping profusely, out of the death-chamber, so that he should not be present when the body was laid in its coffin. They took a turn or two in the park, where there was a little sunshine. Suddenly M. Swann seized my grandfather by the arm and cried, "Oh, my dear old friend, how fortunate we are to be walking here together on such a charming day! Don't you see how pretty they are, all these trees — my hawthorns, and my new pond, on which you have never congratulated me? You look as glum as a night-cap. Don't you feel this little breeze? Ah! whatever you may say, it's good to be alive all the same, my

dear Amédée!" And then, abruptly, the memory of his dead wife returned to him, and probably thinking it too complicated to inquire into how, at such a time, he could have allowed himself to be carried away by an impulse of happiness, he confined himself to a gesture which he habitually employed whenever any perplexing question came into his mind: that is, he passed his hand across his forehead, dried his eyes, and wiped his glasses. And he could never be consoled for the loss of his wife, but used to say to my grandfather, during the two years for which he survived her, "It's a funny thing, now; I very often think of my poor wife, but I cannot think of her very much at any one time." "Often, but a little at a time, like poor old Swann," became one of my grandfather's favourite phrases, which he would apply to all kinds of things. And I should have assumed that this father of Swann's had been a monster if my grandfather, whom I regarded as a better judge than myself, and whose word was my law and often led me in the long run to pardon offences which I should have been inclined to condemn, had not gone on to exclaim, "But, after all, he had a heart of gold."

For many years, albeit — and especially before his marriage — M. Swann the younger came often to see them at Combray, my great-aunt and grandparents never suspected that he had entirely ceased to live in the kind of society which his family had frequented, or that, under the sort of incognito which the name of Swann gave him among us, they were harbouring — with the complete innocence of a family of honest innkeepers who have in their midst some distinguished highwayman and never know it — one of the smartest members of the Jockey Club, a particular friend of the Comte de Paris and of the Prince of Wales, and one of the men most sought after in the aristocratic world of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Our utter ignorance of the brilliant part which Swann was playing in the world of fashion was, of course, due in part to his own reserve and discretion, but also to the fact that middle-class people in those days took what was almost a Hindu view of society, which they held to consist of sharply defined castes, so that everyone at his birth found himself called to that station in life which his parents already occupied, and nothing, except the chance of a brilliant career or of a 'good' marriage, could extract you from that station or admit you to a superior caste. M. Swann, the father, had been a stockbroker; and so 'young Swann' found himself immured for life in a caste where one's fortune, as in a list of taxpayers, varied between such and such limits of income. We knew the people with whom his father had associated, and so we knew his own associates, the people with whom he was 'in a position to mix.' If he knew other people

besides, those were youthful acquaintances on whom the old friends of the family, like my relatives, shut their eyes all the more good-naturedly that Swann himself, after he was left an orphan, still came most faithfully to see us; but we would have been ready to wager that the people outside our acquaintance whom Swann knew were of the sort to whom he would not have dared to raise his hat, had he met them while he was walking with ourselves. Had there been such a thing as a determination to apply to Swann a social coefficient peculiar to himself, as distinct from all the other sons of other stockbrokers in his father's position, his coefficient would have been rather lower than theirs, because, leading a very simple life, and having always had a craze for 'antiques' and pictures, he now lived and piled up his collections in an old house which my grandmother longed to visit, but which stood on the Quai d'Orléans, a neighbourhood in which my great-aunt thought it most degrading to be quartered. "Are you really a connoisseur, now?" she would say to him; "I ask for your own sake, as you are likely to have 'fakes' palmed off on you by the dealers," for she did not, in fact, endow him with any critical faculty, and had no great opinion of the intelligence of a man who, in conversation, would avoid serious topics and shewed a very dull preciseness, not only when he gave us kitchen recipes, going into the most minute details, but even when my grandmother's sisters were talking to him about art. When challenged by them to give an opinion, or to express his admiration for some picture, he would remain almost impolitely silent, and would then make amends by furnishing (if he could) some fact or other about the gallery in which the picture was hung, or the date at which it had been painted. But as a rule he would content himself with trying to amuse us by telling us the story of his latest adventure — and he would have a fresh story for us on every occasion — with some one whom we ourselves knew, such as the Combray chemist, or our cook, or our coachman. These stories certainly used to make my great-aunt laugh, but she could never tell whether that was on account of the absurd parts which Swann invariably made himself play in the adventures, or of the wit that he shewed in telling us of them. "It is easy to see that you are a regular 'character,' M. Swann!"

As she was the only member of our family who could be described as a trifle 'common,' she would always take care to remark to strangers, when Swann was mentioned, that he could easily, if he had wished to, have lived in the Boulevard Haussmann or the Avenue de l'Opéra, and that he was the son of old M. Swann who must have left four or five million francs, but that it was a fad of his. A fad which, moreover, she thought was bound to amuse other people so much that in

Paris, when M. Swann called on New Year's Day bringing her a little packet of *marrons glacés*, she never failed, if there were strangers in the room, to say to him: "Well, M. Swann, and do you still live next door to the Bonded Vaults, so as to be sure of not missing your train when you go to Lyons?" and she would peep out of the corner of her eye, over her glasses, at the other visitors.

But if anyone had suggested to my aunt that this Swann, who, in his capacity as the son of old M. Swann, was 'fully qualified' to be received by any of the 'upper middle class,' the most respected barristers and solicitors of Paris (though he was perhaps a trifle inclined to let this hereditary privilege go into abeyance), had another almost secret existence of a wholly different kind: that when he left our house in Paris, saying that he must go home to bed, he would no sooner have turned the corner than he would stop, retrace his steps, and be off to some drawing-room on whose like no stockbroker or associate of stockbrokers had ever set eyes — that would have seemed to my aunt as extraordinary as, to a woman of wider reading, the thought of being herself on terms of intimacy with Aristaeus, of knowing that he would, when he had finished his conversation with her, plunge deep into the realms of Thetis, into an empire veiled from mortal eyes, in which Virgil depicts him as being received with open arms; or — to be content with an image more likely to have occurred to her, for she had seen it painted on the plates we used for biscuits at Combray — as the thought of having had to dinner Ali Baba, who, as soon as he found himself alone and unobserved, would make his way into the cave, resplendent with its unsuspected treasures.

One day when he had come to see us after dinner in Paris, and had begged pardon for being in evening clothes, Françoise, when he had gone, told us that she had got it from his coachman that he had been dining "with a princess." "A pretty sort of princess," drawled my aunt; "I know them," and she shrugged her shoulders without raising her eyes from her knitting, serenely ironical.

Altogether, my aunt used to treat him with scant ceremony. Since she was of the opinion that he ought to feel flattered by our invitations, she thought it only right and proper that he should never come to see us in summer without a basket of peaches or raspberries from his garden, and that from each of his visits to Italy he should bring back some photographs of old masters for me.

It seemed quite natural, therefore, to send to him whenever we wanted a recipe for some special sauce or for a pineapple salad for one of our big dinner-parties, to which he himself would not be invited, not seeming of sufficient importance to be served up to new friends who might be in our house for the first

time. If the conversation turned upon the Princes of the House of France, “Gentlemen, you and I will never know, will we, and don’t want to, do we?” my great-aunt would say tartly to Swann, who had, perhaps, a letter from Twickenham in his pocket; she would make him play accompaniments and turn over music on evenings when my grandmother’s sister sang; manipulating this creature, so rare and refined at other times and in other places, with the rough simplicity of a child who will play with some curio from the cabinet no more carefully than if it were a penny toy. Certainly the Swann who was a familiar figure in all the clubs of those days differed hugely from, the Swann created in my great-aunt’s mind when, of an evening, in our little garden at Combray, after the two shy peals had sounded from the gate, she would vitalise, by injecting into it everything she had ever heard about the Swann family, the vague and unrecognisable shape which began to appear, with my grandmother in its wake, against a background of shadows, and could at last be identified by the sound of its voice. But then, even in the most insignificant details of our daily life, none of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone, and need only be turned up like a page in an account-book or the record of a will; our social personality is created by the thoughts of other people. Even the simple act which we describe as “seeing some one we know” is, to some extent, an intellectual process. We pack the physical outline of the creature we see with all the ideas we have already formed about him, and in the complete picture of him which we compose in our minds those ideas have certainly the principal place. In the end they come to fill out so completely the curve of his cheeks, to follow so exactly the line of his nose, they blend so harmoniously in the sound of his voice that these seem to be no more than a transparent envelope, so that each time we see the face or hear the voice it is our own ideas of him which we recognise and to which we listen. And so, no doubt, from the Swann they had built up for their own purposes my family had left out, in their ignorance, a whole crowd of the details of his daily life in the world of fashion, details by means of which other people, when they met him, saw all the Graces enthroned in his face and stopping at the line of his arched nose as at a natural frontier; but they contrived also to put into a face from which its distinction had been evicted, a face vacant and roomy as an untenanted house, to plant in the depths of its unvalued eyes a lingering sense, uncertain but not unpleasing, half-memory and half-oblivion, of idle hours spent together after our weekly dinners, round the card-table or in the garden, during our companionable country life. Our friend’s bodily frame had been so well lined with this sense, and with various earlier memories of his

family, that their own special Swann had become to my people a complete and living creature; so that even now I have the feeling of leaving some one I know for another quite different person when, going back in memory, I pass from the Swann whom I knew later and more intimately to this early Swann — this early Swann in whom I can distinguish the charming mistakes of my childhood, and who, incidentally, is less like his successor than he is like the other people I knew at that time, as though one's life were a series of galleries in which all the portraits of any one period had a marked family likeness, the same (so to speak) tonality — this early Swann abounding in leisure, fragrant with the scent of the great chestnut-tree, of baskets of raspberries and of a sprig of tarragon.

And yet one day, when my grandmother had gone to ask some favour of a lady whom she had known at the Sacré Coeur (and with whom, because of our caste theory, she had not cared to keep up any degree of intimacy in spite of several common interests), the Marquise de Villeparisis, of the famous house of Bouillon, this lady had said to her:

"I think you know M. Swann very well; he is a great friend of my nephews, the des Laumes."

My grandmother had returned from the call full of praise for the house, which overlooked some gardens, and in which Mme. de Villeparisis had advised her to rent a flat; and also for a repairing tailor and his daughter, who kept a little shop in the courtyard, into which she had gone to ask them to put a stitch in her skirt, which she had torn on the staircase. My grandmother had found these people perfectly charming: the girl, she said, was a jewel, and the tailor a most distinguished man, the finest she had ever seen. For in her eyes distinction was a thing wholly independent of social position. She was in ecstasies over some answer the tailor had made, saying to Mamma:

"Sévigné would not have said it better!" and, by way of contrast, of a nephew of Mme. de Villeparisis whom she had met at the house:

"My dear, he is so common!"

Now, the effect of that remark about Swann had been, not to raise him in my great-aunt's estimation, but to lower Mme. de Villeparisis. It appeared that the deference which, on my grandmother's authority, we owed to Mme. de Villeparisis imposed on her the reciprocal obligation to do nothing that would render her less worthy of our regard, and that she had failed in her duty in becoming aware of Swann's existence and in allowing members of her family to associate with him. "How should she know Swann? A lady who, you always made out, was related to Marshal Mac-Mahon!" This view of Swann's social

atmosphere which prevailed in my family seemed to be confirmed later on by his marriage with a woman of the worst class, you might almost say a ‘fast’ woman, whom, to do him justice, he never attempted to introduce to us, for he continued to come to us alone, though he came more and more seldom; but from whom they thought they could establish, on the assumption that he had found her there, the circle, unknown to them, in which he ordinarily moved.

But on one occasion my grandfather read in a newspaper that M. Swann was one of the most faithful attendants at the Sunday luncheons given by the Duc de X——, whose father and uncle had been among our most prominent statesmen in the reign of Louis Philippe. Now my grandfather was curious to learn all the little details which might help him to take a mental share in the private lives of men like Mole, the Due Pasquier, or the Duc de Broglie. He was delighted to find that Swann associated with people who had known them. My great-aunt, however, interpreted this piece of news in a sense discreditable to Swann; for anyone who chose his associates outside the caste in which he had been born and bred, outside his ‘proper station,’ was condemned to utter degradation in her eyes. It seemed to her that such a one abdicated all claim to enjoy the fruits of those friendly relations with people of good position which prudent parents cultivate and store up for their children’s benefit, for my great-aunt had actually ceased to ‘see’ the son of a lawyer we had known because he had married a ‘Highness’ and had thereby stepped down — in her eyes — from the respectable position of a lawyer’s son to that of those adventurers, upstart footmen or stable-boys mostly, to whom we read that queens have sometimes shewn their favours. She objected, therefore, to my grandfather’s plan of questioning Swann, when next he came to dine with us, about these people whose friendship with him we had discovered. On the other hand, my grandmother’s two sisters, elderly spinsters who shared her nobility of character but lacked her intelligence, declared that they could not conceive what pleasure their brother-in-law could find in talking about such trifles. They were ladies of lofty ambition, who for that reason were incapable of taking the least interest in what might be called the ‘pinchbeck’ things of life, even when they had an historic value, or, generally speaking, in anything that was not directly associated with some object aesthetically precious. So complete was their negation of interest in anything which seemed directly or indirectly a part of our everyday life that their sense of hearing — which had gradually come to understand its own futility when the tone of the conversation, at the dinner-table, became frivolous or merely mundane, without the two old ladies’ being able to guide it back to the topic dear

to themselves — would leave its receptive channels unemployed, so effectively that they were actually becoming atrophied. So that if my grandfather wished to attract the attention of the two sisters, he would have to make use of some such alarm signals as mad-doctors adopt in dealing with their distracted patients; as by beating several times on a glass with the blade of a knife, fixing them at the same time with a sharp word and a compelling glance, violent methods which the said doctors are apt to bring with them into their everyday life among the sane, either from force of professional habit or because they think the whole world a trifle mad.

Their interest grew, however, when, the day before Swann was to dine with us, and when he had made them a special present of a case of Asti, my great-aunt, who had in her hand a copy of the *Figaro* in which to the name of a picture then on view in a Corot exhibition were added the words, "from the collection of M. Charles Swann," asked: "Did you see that Swann is 'mentioned' in the *Figaro*?"

"But I have always told you," said my grandmother, "that he had plenty of taste."

"You would, of course," retorted my great-aunt, "say anything just to seem different from *us*." For, knowing that my grandmother never agreed with her, and not being quite confident that it was her own opinion which the rest of us invariably endorsed, she wished to extort from us a wholesale condemnation of my grandmother's views, against which she hoped to force us into solidarity with her own.

But we sat silent. My grandmother's sisters having expressed a desire to mention to Swann this reference to him in the *Figaro*, my great-aunt dissuaded them. Whenever she saw in others an advantage, however trivial, which she herself lacked, she would persuade herself that it was no advantage at all, but a drawback, and would pity so as not to have to envy them.

"I don't think that would please him at all; I know very well, I should hate to see my name printed like that, as large as life, in the paper, and I shouldn't feel at all flattered if anyone spoke to me about it."

She did not, however, put any very great pressure upon my grandmother's sisters, for they, in their horror of vulgarity, had brought to such a fine art the concealment of a personal allusion in a wealth of ingenious circumlocution, that it would often pass unnoticed even by the person to whom it was addressed. As for my mother, her only thought was of managing to induce my father to consent to speak to Swann, not of his wife, but of his daughter, whom he worshipped,

and for whose sake it was understood that he had ultimately made his unfortunate marriage.

"You need only say a word; just ask him how she is. It must be so very hard for him."

My father, however, was annoyed: "No, no; you have the most absurd ideas. It would be utterly ridiculous."

But the only one of us in whom the prospect of Swann's arrival gave rise to an unhappy foreboding was myself. And that was because on the evenings when there were visitors, or just M. Swann in the house, Mamma did not come up to my room. I did not, at that time, have dinner with the family: I came out to the garden after dinner, and at nine I said good night and went to bed. But on these evenings I used to dine earlier than the others, and to come in afterwards and sit at table until eight o'clock, when it was understood that I must go upstairs; that frail and precious kiss which Mamma used always to leave upon my lips when I was in bed and just going to sleep I had to take with me from the dining-room to my own, and to keep inviolate all the time that it took me to undress, without letting its sweet charm be broken, without letting its volatile essence diffuse itself and evaporate; and just on those very evenings when I must needs take most pains to receive it with due formality, I had to snatch it, to seize it instantly and in public, without even having the time or being properly free to apply to what I was doing the punctiliousness which madmen use who compel themselves to exclude all other thoughts from their minds while they are shutting a door, so that when the sickness of uncertainty sweeps over them again they can triumphantly face and overcome it with the recollection of the precise moment in which the door was shut.

We were all in the garden when the double peal of the gate-bell sounded shyly. Everyone knew that it must be Swann, and yet they looked at one another inquiringly and sent my grandmother scouting.

"See that you thank him intelligibly for the wine," my grandfather warned his two sisters-in-law; "you know how good it is, and it is a huge case."

"Now, don't start whispering!" said my great-aunt. "How would you like to come into a house and find everyone muttering to themselves?"

"Ah! There's M. Swann," cried my father. "Let's ask him if he thinks it will be fine to-morrow."

My mother fancied that a word from her would wipe out all the unpleasantness which my family had contrived to make Swann feel since his marriage. She found an opportunity to draw him aside for a moment. But I

followed her: I could not bring myself to let her go out of reach of me while I felt that in a few minutes I should have to leave her in the dining-room and go up to my bed without the consoling thought, as on ordinary evenings, that she would come up, later, to kiss me.

"Now, M. Swann," she said, "do tell me about your daughter; I am sure she shews a taste already for nice things, like her papa."

"Come along and sit down here with us all on the verandah," said my grandfather, coming up to him. My mother had to abandon the quest, but managed to extract from the restriction itself a further refinement of thought, as great poets do when the tyranny of rhyme forces them into the discovery of their finest lines.

"We can talk about her again when we are by ourselves," she said, or rather whispered to Swann. "It is only a mother who can understand. I am sure that hers would agree with me."

And so we all sat down round the iron table. I should have liked not to think of the hours of anguish which I should have to spend, that evening, alone in my room, without the possibility of going to sleep: I tried to convince myself that they were of no importance, really, since I should have forgotten them next morning, and to fix my mind on thoughts of the future which would carry me, as on a bridge, across the terrifying abyss that yawned at my feet. But my mind, strained by this foreboding, distended like the look which I shot at my mother, would not allow any other impression to enter. Thoughts did, indeed, enter it, but only on the condition that they left behind them every element of beauty, or even of quaintness, by which I might have been distracted or beguiled. As a surgical patient, by means of a local anaesthetic, can look on with a clear consciousness while an operation is being performed upon him and yet feel nothing, I could repeat to myself some favourite lines, or watch my grandfather attempting to talk to Swann about the Duc d'Audriffet-Pasquier, without being able to kindle any emotion from one or amusement from the other. Hardly had my grandfather begun to question Swann about that orator when one of my grandmother's sisters, in whose ears the question echoed like a solemn but untimely silence which her natural politeness bade her interrupt, addressed the other with:

"Just fancy, Flora, I met a young Swedish governess to-day who told me some most interesting things about the co-operative movement in Scandinavia. We really must have her to dine here one evening."

"To be sure!" said her sister Flora, "but I haven't wasted my time either. I met such a clever old gentleman at M. Vinteuil's who knows Maubant quite

well, and Maubant has told him every little thing about how he gets up his parts. It is the most interesting thing I ever heard. He is a neighbour of M. Vinteuil's, and I never knew; and he is so nice besides."

"M. Vinteuil is not the only one who has nice neighbours," cried my aunt Céline in a voice which seemed loud because she was so timid, and seemed forced because she had been planning the little speech for so long; darting, as she spoke, what she called a 'significant glance' at Swann. And my aunt Flora, who realised that this veiled utterance was Céline's way of thanking Swann intelligibly for the Asti, looked at him with a blend of congratulation and irony, either just, because she wished to underline her sister's little epigram, or because she envied Swann his having inspired it, or merely because she imagined that he was embarrassed, and could not help having a little fun at his expense.

"I think it would be worth while," Flora went on, "to have this old gentleman to dinner. When you get him upon Maubant or Mme. Materna he will talk for hours on end."

"That must be delightful," sighed my grandfather, in whose mind nature had unfortunately forgotten to include any capacity whatsoever for becoming passionately interested in the co-operative movement among the ladies of Sweden or in the methods employed by Maubant to get up his parts, just as it had forgotten to endow my grandmother's two sisters with a grain of that precious salt which one has oneself to 'add to taste' in order to extract any savour from a narrative of the private life of Mole or of the Comte de Paris.

"I say!" exclaimed Swann to my grandfather, "what I was going to tell you has more to do than you might think with what you were asking me just now, for in some respects there has been very little change. I came across a passage in Saint-Simon this morning which would have amused you. It is in the volume which covers his mission to Spain; not one of the best, little more in fact than a journal, but at least it is a journal wonderfully well written, which fairly distinguishes it from the devastating journalism that we feel bound to read in these days, morning, noon and night."

"I do not agree with you: there are some days when I find reading the papers very pleasant indeed!" my aunt Flora broke in, to show Swann that she had read the note about his Corot in the *Figaro*.

"Yes," aunt Céline went one better. "When they write about things or people in whom we are interested."

"I don't deny it," answered Swann in some bewilderment. "The fault I find with our journalism is that it forces us to take an interest in some fresh triviality

or other every day, whereas only three or four books in a lifetime give us anything that is of real importance. Suppose that, every morning, when we tore the wrapper off our paper with fevered hands, a transmutation were to take place, and we were to find inside it — oh! I don't know; shall we say Pascal's *Pensées*?" He articulated the title with an ironic emphasis so as not to appear pedantic. "And then, in the gilt and tooled volumes which we open once in ten years," he went on, shewing that contempt for the things of this world which some men of the world like to affect, "we should read that the Queen of the Hellenes had arrived at Cannes, or that the Princesse de Léon had given a fancy dress ball. In that way we should arrive at the right proportion between 'information' and 'publicity.'" But at once regretting that he had allowed himself to speak, even in jest, of serious matters, he added ironically: "We are having a most entertaining conversation; I cannot think why we climb to these lofty summits," and then, turning to my grandfather: "Well, Saint-Simon tells how Maulevrier had had the audacity to offer his hand to his sons. You remember how he says of Maulevrier, 'Never did I find in that coarse bottle anything but ill-humour, boorishness, and folly.'"

"Coarse or not, I know bottles in which there is something very different!" said Flora briskly, feeling bound to thank Swann as well as her sister, since the present of Asti had been addressed to them both. Céline began to laugh.

Swann was puzzled, but went on: "'I cannot say whether it was his ignorance or a trap,' writes Saint-Simon; 'he wished to give his hand to my children. I noticed it in time to prevent him.'"

My grandfather was already in ecstasies over "ignorance or a trap," but Miss Céline — the name of Saint-Simon, a 'man of letters,' having arrested the complete paralysis of her sense of hearing — had grown angry.

"What! You admire that, do you? Well, it is clever enough! But what is the point of it? Does he mean that one man isn't as good as another? What difference can it make whether he is a duke or a groom so long as he is intelligent and good? He had a fine way of bringing up his children, your Saint-Simon, if he didn't teach them to shake hands with all honest men. Really and truly, it's abominable. And you dare to quote it!"

And my grandfather, utterly depressed, realising how futile it would be for him, against this opposition, to attempt to get Swann to tell him the stories which would have amused him, murmured to my mother: "Just tell me again that line of yours which always comforts me so much on these occasions. Oh, yes:

What virtues, Lord, Thou makest us abhor!

Good, that is, very good."

I never took my eyes off my mother. I knew that when they were at table I should not be permitted to stay there for the whole of dinner-time, and that Mamma, for fear of annoying my father, would not allow me to give her in public the series of kisses that she would have had in my room. And so I promised myself that in the dining-room, as they began to eat and drink and as I felt the hour approach, I would put beforehand into this kiss, which was bound to be so brief and stealthy in execution, everything that my own efforts could put into it: would look out very carefully first the exact spot on her cheek where I would imprint it, and would so prepare my thoughts that I might be able, thanks to these mental preliminaries, to consecrate the whole of the minute Mamma would allow me to the sensation of her cheek against my lips, as a painter who can have his subject for short sittings only prepares his palette, and from what he remembers and from rough notes does in advance everything which he possibly can do in the sitter's absence. But to-night, before the dinner-bell had sounded, my grandfather said with unconscious cruelty: "The little man looks tired; he'd better go up to bed. Besides, we are dining late to-night."

And my father, who was less scrupulous than my grandmother or mother in observing the letter of a treaty, went on: "Yes, run along; to bed with you."

I would have kissed Mamma then and there, but at that moment the dinner-bell rang.

"No, no, leave your mother alone. You've said good night quite enough. These exhibitions are absurd. Go on upstairs."

And so I must set forth without viaticum; must climb each step of the staircase 'against my heart,' as the saying is, climbing in opposition to my heart's desire, which was to return to my mother, since she had not, by her kiss, given my heart leave to accompany me forth. That hateful staircase, up which I always passed with such dismay, gave out a smell of varnish which had to some extent absorbed, made definite and fixed the special quality of sorrow that I felt each evening, and made it perhaps even more cruel to my sensibility because, when it assumed this olfactory guise, my intellect was powerless to resist it. When we have gone to sleep with a maddening toothache and are conscious of it only as a little girl whom we attempt, time after time, to pull out of the water, or as a line of Molière which we repeat incessantly to ourselves, it is a great relief to wake up, so that our intelligence can disentangle the idea of toothache from any artificial semblance of heroism or rhythmic cadence. It was the precise converse of this relief which I felt when my anguish at having to go up to my room

invaded my consciousness in a manner infinitely more rapid, instantaneous almost, a manner at once insidious and brutal as I breathed in — a far more poisonous thing than any moral penetration — the peculiar smell of the varnish upon that staircase.

Once in my room I had to stop every loophole, to close the shutters, to dig my own grave as I turned down the bed-clothes, to wrap myself in the shroud of my nightshirt. But before burying myself in the iron bed which had been placed there because, on summer nights, I was too hot among the rep curtains of the four-poster, I was stirred to revolt, and attempted the desperate stratagem of a condemned prisoner. I wrote to my mother begging her to come upstairs for an important reason which I could not put in writing. My fear was that Françoise, my aunt's cook who used to be put in charge of me when I was at Combray, might refuse to take my note. I had a suspicion that, in her eyes, to carry a message to my mother when there was a stranger in the room would appear flatly inconceivable, just as it would be for the door-keeper of a theatre to hand a letter to an actor upon the stage. For things which might or might not be done she possessed a code at once imperious, abundant, subtle, and uncompromising on points themselves imperceptible or irrelevant, which gave it a resemblance to those ancient laws which combine such cruel ordinances as the massacre of infants at the breast with prohibitions, of exaggerated refinement, against "seething the kid in his mother's milk," or "eating of the sinew which is upon the hollow of the thigh." This code, if one could judge it by the sudden obstinacy which she would put into her refusal to carry out certain of our instructions, seemed to have foreseen such social complications and refinements of fashion as nothing in Françoise's surroundings or in her career as a servant in a village household could have put into her head; and we were obliged to assume that there was latent in her some past existence in the ancient history of France, noble and little understood, just as there is in those manufacturing towns where old mansions still testify to their former courtly days, and chemical workers toil among delicately sculptured scenes of the Miracle of Theophilus or the Quatre Fils Aymon.

In this particular instance, the article of her code which made it highly improbable that — barring an outbreak of fire — Françoise would go down and disturb Mamma when M. Swann was there for so unimportant a person as myself was one embodying the respect she shewed not only for the family (as for the dead, for the clergy, or for royalty), but also for the stranger within our gates; a respect which I should perhaps have found touching in a book, but which never

failed to irritate me on her lips, because of the solemn and gentle tones in which she would utter it, and which irritated me more than usual this evening when the sacred character in which she invested the dinner-party might have the effect of making her decline to disturb its ceremonial. But to give myself one chance of success I lied without hesitation, telling her that it was not in the least myself who had wanted to write to Mamma, but Mamma who, on saying good night to me, had begged me not to forget to send her an answer about something she had asked me to find, and that she would certainly be very angry if this note were not taken to her. I think that Françoise disbelieved me, for, like those primitive men whose senses were so much keener than our own, she could immediately detect, by signs imperceptible by the rest of us, the truth or falsehood of anything that we might wish to conceal from her. She studied the envelope for five minutes as though an examination of the paper itself and the look of my handwriting could enlighten her as to the nature of the contents, or tell her to which article of her code she ought to refer the matter. Then she went out with an air of resignation which seemed to imply: “What a dreadful thing for parents to have a child like this!”

A moment later she returned to say that they were still at the ice stage and that it was impossible for the butler to deliver the note at once, in front of everybody; but that when the finger-bowls were put round he would find a way of slipping it into Mamma’s hand. At once my anxiety subsided; it was now no longer (as it had been a moment ago) until to-morrow that I had lost my mother, for my little line was going — to annoy her, no doubt, and doubly so because this contrivance would make me ridiculous in Swann’s eyes — but was going all the same to admit me, invisibly and by stealth, into the same room as herself, was going to whisper from me into her ear; for that forbidden and unfriendly dining-room, where but a moment ago the ice itself — with burned nuts in it — and the finger-bowls seemed to me to be concealing pleasures that were mischievous and of a mortal sadness because Mamma was tasting of them and I was far away, had opened its doors to me and, like a ripe fruit which bursts through its skin, was going to pour out into my intoxicated heart the gushing sweetness of Mamma’s attention while she was reading what I had written. Now I was no longer separated from her; the barriers were down; an exquisite thread was binding us. Besides, that was not all, for surely Mamma would come.

As for the agony through which I had just passed, I imagined that Swann would have laughed heartily at it if he had read my letter and had guessed its purpose; whereas, on the contrary, as I was to learn in due course, a similar

anguish had been the bane of his life for many years, and no one perhaps could have understood my feelings at that moment so well as himself; to him, that anguish which lies in knowing that the creature one adores is in some place of enjoyment where oneself is not and cannot follow — to him that anguish came through Love, to which it is in a sense predestined, by which it must be equipped and adapted; but when, as had befallen me, such an anguish possesses one's soul before Love has yet entered into one's life, then it must drift, awaiting Love's coming, vague and free, without precise attachment, at the disposal of one sentiment to-day, of another to-morrow, of filial piety or affection for a comrade. And the joy with which I first bound myself apprentice, when Françoise returned to tell me that my letter would be delivered; Swann, too, had known well that false joy which a friend can give us, or some relative of the woman we love, when on his arrival at the house or theatre where she is to be found, for some ball or party or 'first-night' at which he is to meet her, he sees us wandering outside, desperately awaiting some opportunity of communicating with her. He recognises us, greets us familiarly, and asks what we are doing there. And when we invent a story of having some urgent message to give to his relative or friend, he assures us that nothing could be more simple, takes us in at the door, and promises to send her down to us in five minutes. How much we love him — as at that moment I loved Françoise — the good-natured intermediary who by a single word has made supportable, human, almost propitious the inconceivable, infernal scene of gaiety in the thick of which we had been imagining swarms of enemies, perverse and seductive, beguiling away from us, even making laugh at us, the woman whom we love. If we are to judge of them by him, this relative who has accosted us and who is himself an initiate in those cruel mysteries, then the other guests cannot be so very demoniacal. Those inaccessible and torturing hours into which she had gone to taste of unknown pleasures — behold, a breach in the wall, and we are through it. Behold, one of the moments whose series will go to make up their sum, a moment as genuine as the rest, if not actually more important to ourself because our mistress is more intensely a part of it; we picture it to ourselves, we possess it, we intervene upon it, almost we have created it: namely, the moment in which he goes to tell her that we are waiting there below. And very probably the other moments of the party will not be essentially different, will contain nothing else so exquisite or so well able to make us suffer, since this kind friend has assured us that "Of course, she will be delighted to come down! It will be far more amusing for her to talk to you than to be bored up there." Alas! Swann had learned by experience that the good

intentions of a third party are powerless to control a woman who is annoyed to find herself pursued even into a ball-room by a man whom she does not love. Too often, the kind friend comes down again alone.

My mother did not appear, but with no attempt to safeguard my self-respect (which depended upon her keeping up the fiction that she had asked me to let her know the result of my search for something or other) made Françoise tell me, in so many words "There is no answer" — words I have so often, since then, heard the hall-porters in 'mansions' and the flunkeys in gambling-clubs and the like, repeat to some poor girl, who replies in bewilderment: "What! he's said nothing? It's not possible. You did give him my letter, didn't you? Very well, I shall wait a little longer." And just as she invariably protests that she does not need the extra gas which the porter offers to light for her, and sits on there, hearing nothing further, except an occasional remark on the weather which the porter exchanges with a messenger whom he will send off suddenly, when he notices the time, to put some customer's wine on the ice; so, having declined Françoise's offer to make me some tea or to stay beside me, I let her go off again to the servants' hall, and lay down and shut my eyes, and tried not to hear the voices of my family who were drinking their coffee in the garden.

But after a few seconds I realised that, by writing that line to Mamma, by approaching — at the risk of making her angry — so near to her that I felt I could reach out and grasp the moment in which I should see her again, I had cut myself off from the possibility of going to sleep until I actually had seen her, and my heart began to beat more and more painfully as I increased my agitation by ordering myself to keep calm and to acquiesce in my ill-fortune. Then, suddenly, my anxiety subsided, a feeling of intense happiness coursed through me, as when a strong medicine begins to take effect and one's pain vanishes: I had formed a resolution to abandon all attempts to go to sleep without seeing Mamma, and had decided to kiss her at all costs, even with the certainty of being in disgrace with her for long afterwards, when she herself came up to bed. The tranquillity which followed my anguish made me extremely alert, no less than my sense of expectation, my thirst for and my fear of danger.

Noiselessly I opened the window and sat down on the foot of my bed; hardly daring to move in case they should hear me from below. Things outside seemed also fixed in mute expectation, so as not to disturb the moonlight which, duplicating each of them and throwing it back by the extension, forwards, of a shadow denser and more concrete than its substance, had made the whole landscape seem at once thinner and longer, like a map which, after being folded

up, is spread out upon the ground. What had to move — a leaf of the chestnut-tree, for instance — moved. But its minute shuddering, complete, finished to the least detail and with utmost delicacy of gesture, made no discord with the rest of the scene, and yet was not merged in it, remaining clearly outlined. Exposed upon this surface of silence, which absorbed nothing from them, the most distant sounds, those which must have come from gardens at the far end of the town, could be distinguished with such exact 'finish' that the impression they gave of coming from a distance seemed due only to their 'pianissimo' execution, like those movements on muted strings so well performed by the orchestra of the Conservatoire that, although one does not lose a single note, one thinks all the same that they are being played somewhere outside, a long way from the concert hall, so that all the old subscribers, and my grandmother's sisters too, when Swann had given them his seats, used to strain their ears as if they had caught the distant approach of an army on the march, which had not yet rounded the corner of the Rue de Trévise.

I was well aware that I had placed myself in a position than which none could be counted upon to involve me in graver consequences at my parents' hands; consequences far graver, indeed, than a stranger would have imagined, and such as (he would have thought) could follow only some really shameful fault. But in the system of education which they had given me faults were not classified in the same order as in that of other children, and I had been taught to place at the head of the list (doubtless because there was no other class of faults from which I needed to be more carefully protected) those in which I can now distinguish the common feature that one succumbs to them by yielding to a nervous impulse. But such words as these last had never been uttered in my hearing; no one had yet accounted for my temptations in a way which might have led me to believe that there was some excuse for my giving in to them, or that I was actually incapable of holding out against them. Yet I could easily recognise this class of transgressions by the anguish of mind which preceded, as well as by the rigour of the punishment which followed them; and I knew that what I had just done was in the same category as certain other sins for which I had been severely chastised, though infinitely more serious than they. When I went out to meet my mother as she herself came up to bed, and when she saw that I had remained up so as to say good night to her again in the passage, I should not be allowed to stay in the house a day longer, I should be packed off to school next morning; so much was certain. Very good: had I been obliged, the next moment, to hurl myself out of the window, I should still have preferred such

a fate. For what I wanted now was Mamma, and to say good night to her. I had gone too far along the road which led to the realisation of this desire to be able to retrace my steps.

I could hear my parents' footsteps as they went with Swann; and, when the rattle of the gate assured me that he had really gone, I crept to the window. Mamma was asking my father if he had thought the lobster good, and whether M. Swann had had some of the coffee-and-pistachio ice. "I thought it rather so-so," she was saying; "next time we shall have to try another flavour."

"I can't tell you," said my great-aunt, "what a change I find in Swann. He is quite antiquated!" She had grown so accustomed to seeing Swann always in the same stage of adolescence that it was a shock to her to find him suddenly less young than the age she still attributed to him. And the others too were beginning to remark in Swann that abnormal, excessive, scandalous senescence, meet only in a celibate, in one of that class for whom it seems that the great day which knows no morrow must be longer than for other men, since for such a one it is void of promise, and from its dawn the moments steadily accumulate without any subsequent partition among his offspring.

"I fancy he has a lot of trouble with that wretched wife of his, who 'lives' with a certain Monsieur de Charlus, as all Combray knows. It's the talk of the town."

My mother observed that, in spite of this, he had looked much less unhappy of late. "And he doesn't nearly so often do that trick of his, so like his father, of wiping his eyes and passing his hand across his forehead. I think myself that in his heart of hearts he doesn't love his wife any more."

"Why, of course he doesn't," answered my grandfather. "He wrote me a letter about it, ages ago, to which I took care to pay no attention, but it left no doubt as to his feelings, let alone his love for his wife. Hullo! you two; you never thanked him for the Asti!" he went on, turning to his sisters-in-law.

"What! we never thanked him? I think, between you and me, that I put it to him quite neatly," replied my aunt Flora.

"Yes, you managed it very well; I admired you for it," said my aunt Céline.

"But you did it very prettily, too."

"Yes; I liked my expression about 'nice neighbours.'"

"What! Do you call that thanking him?" shouted my grandfather. "I heard that all right, but devil take me if I guessed it was meant for Swann. You may be quite sure he never noticed it."

"Come, come; Swann is not a fool. I am positive he appreciated the

compliment. You didn't expect me to tell him the number of bottles, or to guess what he paid for them."

My father and mother were left alone and sat down for a moment; then my father said: "Well, shall we go up to bed?"

"As you wish, dear, though I don't feel in the least like sleeping. I don't know why; it can't be the coffee-ice — it wasn't strong enough to keep me awake like this. But I see a light in the servants' hall: poor Françoise has been sitting up for me, so I will get her to unhook me while you go and undress."

My mother opened the latticed door which led from the hall to the staircase. Presently I heard her coming upstairs to close her window. I went quietly into the passage; my heart was beating so violently that I could hardly move, but at least it was throbbing no longer with anxiety, but with terror and with joy. I saw in the well of the stair a light coming upwards, from Mamma's candle. Then I saw Mamma herself: I threw myself upon her. For an instant she looked at me in astonishment, not realising what could have happened. Then her face assumed an expression of anger. She said not a single word to me; and, for that matter, I used to go for days on end without being spoken to, for far less offences than this. A single word from Mamma would have been an admission that further intercourse with me was within the bounds of possibility, and that might perhaps have appeared to me more terrible still, as indicating that, with such a punishment as was in store for me, mere silence, and even anger, were relatively puerile.

A word from her then would have implied the false calm in which one converses with a servant to whom one has just decided to give notice; the kiss one bestows on a son who is being packed off to enlist, which would have been denied him if it had merely been a matter of being angry with him for a few days. But she heard my father coming from the dressing-room, where he had gone to take off his clothes, and, to avoid the 'scene' which he would make if he saw me, she said, in a voice half-stifled by her anger: "Run away at once. Don't let your father see you standing there like a crazy jane!"

But I begged her again to "Come and say good night to me!" terrified as I saw the light from my father's candle already creeping up the wall, but also making use of his approach as a means of blackmail, in the hope that my mother, not wishing him to find me there, as find me he must if she continued to hold out, would give in to me, and say: "Go back to your room. I will come."

Too late: my father was upon us. Instinctively I murmured, though no one heard me, "I am done for!"

I was not, however. My father used constantly to refuse to let me do things which were quite clearly allowed by the more liberal charters granted me by my mother and grandmother, because he paid no heed to ‘Principles,’ and because in his sight there were no such things as ‘Rights of Man.’ For some quite irrelevant reason, or for no reason at all, he would at the last moment prevent me from taking some particular walk, one so regular and so consecrated to my use that to deprive me of it was a clear breach of faith; or again, as he had done this evening, long before the appointed hour he would snap out: “Run along up to bed now; no excuses!” But then again, simply because he was devoid of principles (in my grandmother’s sense), so he could not, properly speaking, be called inexorable. He looked at me for a moment with an air of annoyance and surprise, and then when Mamma had told him, not without some embarrassment, what had happened, said to her: “Go along with him, then; you said just now that you didn’t feel like sleep, so stay in his room for a little. I don’t need anything.”

“But dear,” my mother answered timidly, “whether or not I feel like sleep is not the point; we must not make the child accustomed...”

“There’s no question of making him accustomed,” said my father, with a shrug of the shoulders; “you can see quite well that the child is unhappy. After all, we aren’t gaolers. You’ll end by making him ill, and a lot of good that will do. There are two beds in his room; tell Françoise to make up the big one for you, and stay beside him for the rest of the night. I’m off to bed, anyhow; I’m not nervous like you. Good night.”

It was impossible for me to thank my father; what he called my sentimentality would have exasperated him. I stood there, not daring to move; he was still confronting us, an immense figure in his white nightshirt, crowned with the pink and violet scarf of Indian cashmere in which, since he had begun to suffer from neuralgia, he used to tie up his head, standing like Abraham in the engraving after Benozzo Gozzoli which M. Swann had given me, telling Sarah that she must tear herself away from Isaac. Many years have passed since that night. The wall of the staircase, up which I had watched the light of his candle gradually climb, was long ago demolished. And in myself, too, many things have perished which, I imagined, would last for ever, and new structures have arisen, giving birth to new sorrows and new joys which in those days I could not have foreseen, just as now the old are difficult of comprehension. It is a long time, too, since my father has been able to tell Mamma to “Go with the child.” Never again will such hours be possible for me. But of late I have been increasingly able to catch, if I listen attentively, the sound of the sobs which I had the strength

to control in my father's presence, and which broke out only when I found myself alone with Mamma. Actually, their echo has never ceased: it is only because life is now growing more and more quiet round about me that I hear them afresh, like those convent bells which are so effectively drowned during the day by the noises of the streets that one would suppose them to have been stopped for ever, until they sound out again through the silent evening air.

Mamma spent that night in my room: when I had just committed a sin so deadly that I was waiting to be banished from the household, my parents gave me a far greater concession than I should ever have won as the reward of a good action. Even at the moment when it manifested itself in this crowning mercy, my father's conduct towards me was still somewhat arbitrary, and regardless of my deserts, as was characteristic of him and due to the fact that his actions were generally dictated by chance expediencies rather than based on any formal plan. And perhaps even what I called his strictness, when he sent me off to bed, deserved that title less, really, than my mother's or grandmother's attitude, for his nature, which in some respects differed more than theirs from my own, had probably prevented him from guessing, until then, how wretched I was every evening, a thing which my mother and grandmother knew well; but they loved me enough to be unwilling to spare me that suffering, which they hoped to teach me to overcome, so as to reduce my nervous sensibility and to strengthen my will. As for my father, whose affection for me was of another kind, I doubt if he would have shewn so much courage, for as soon as he had grasped the fact that I was unhappy he had said to my mother: "Go and comfort him." Mamma stayed all night in my room, and it seemed that she did not wish to mar by recrimination those hours, so different from anything that I had had a right to expect; for when Françoise (who guessed that something extraordinary must have happened when she saw Mamma sitting by my side, holding my hand and letting me cry unchecked) said to her: "But, Madame, what is little Master crying for?" she replied: "Why, Françoise, he doesn't know himself: it is his nerves. Make up the big bed for me quickly and then go off to your own." And thus for the first time my unhappiness was regarded no longer as a fault for which I must be punished, but as an involuntary evil which had been officially recognised a nervous condition for which I was in no way responsible: I had the consolation that I need no longer mingle apprehensive scruples with the bitterness of my tears; I could weep henceforward without sin. I felt no small degree of pride, either, in Franchise's presence at this return to humane conditions which, not an hour after Mamma had refused to come up to my room and had sent the snubbing message

that I was to go to sleep, raised me to the dignity of a grown-up person, brought me of a sudden to a sort of puberty of sorrow, to emancipation from tears. I ought then to have been happy; I was not. It struck me that my mother had just made a first concession which must have been painful to her, that it was a first step down from the ideal she had formed for me, and that for the first time she, with all her courage, had to confess herself beaten. It struck me that if I had just scored a victory it was over her; that I had succeeded, as sickness or sorrow or age might have succeeded, in relaxing her will, in altering her judgment; that this evening opened a new era, must remain a black date in the calendar. And if I had dared now, I should have said to Mamma: “No, I don’t want you; you mustn’t sleep here.” But I was conscious of the practical wisdom, of what would be called nowadays the realism with which she tempered the ardent idealism of my grandmother’s nature, and I knew that now the mischief was done she would prefer to let me enjoy the soothing pleasure of her company, and not to disturb my father again. Certainly my mother’s beautiful features seemed to shine again with youth that evening, as she sat gently holding my hands and trying to check my tears; but, just for that reason, it seemed to me that this should not have happened; her anger would have been less difficult to endure than this new kindness which my childhood had not known; I felt that I had with an impious and secret finger traced a first wrinkle upon her soul and made the first white hair shew upon her head. This thought redoubled my sobs, and then I saw that Mamma, who had never allowed herself to go to any length of tenderness with me, was suddenly overcome by my tears and had to struggle to keep back her own. Then, as she saw that I had noticed this, she said to me, with a smile: “Why, my little buttercup, my little canary-boy, he’s going to make Mamma as silly as himself if this goes on. Look, since you can’t sleep, and Mamma can’t either, we mustn’t go on in this stupid way; we must do something; I’ll get one of your books.” But I had none there. “Would you like me to get out the books now that your grandmother is going to give you for your birthday? Just think it over first, and don’t be disappointed if there is nothing new for you then.”

I was only too delighted, and Mamma went to find a parcel of books in which I could not distinguish, through the paper in which it was wrapped, any more than its squareness and size, but which, even at this first glimpse, brief and obscure as it was, bade fair to eclipse already the paint-box of last New Year’s Day and the silkworms of the year before. It contained *La Mare au Diable*, *François le Champi*, *La Petite Fadette*, and*Les Maîtres Sonneurs*. My grandmother, as I learned afterwards, had at first chosen Mussel’s poems, a

volume of Rousseau, and *Indiana*; for while she considered light reading as unwholesome as sweets and cakes, she did not reflect that the strong breath of genius must have upon the very soul of a child an influence at once more dangerous and less quickening than those of fresh air and country breezes upon his body. But when my father had seemed almost to regard her as insane on learning the names of the books she proposed to give me, she had journeyed back by herself to Jouy-le-Vicomte to the bookseller's, so that there should be no fear of my not having my present in time (it was a burning hot day, and she had come home so unwell that the doctor had warned my mother not to allow her again to tire herself in that way), and had there fallen back upon the four pastoral novels of George Sand.

"My dear," she had said to Mamma, "I could not allow myself to give the child anything that was not well written."

The truth was that she could never make up her mind to purchase anything from which no intellectual profit was to be derived, and, above all, that profit which good things bestowed on us by teaching us to seek our pleasures elsewhere than in the barren satisfaction of worldly wealth. Even when she had to make some one a present of the kind called 'useful,' when she had to give an armchair or some table-silver or a walking-stick, she would choose 'antiques,' as though their long desuetude had effaced from them any semblance of utility and fitted them rather to instruct us in the lives of the men of other days than to serve the common requirements of our own. She would have liked me to have in my room photographs of ancient buildings or of beautiful places. But at the moment of buying them, and for all that the subject of the picture had an aesthetic value of its own, she would find that vulgarity and utility had too prominent a part in them, through the mechanical nature of their reproduction by photography. She attempted by a subterfuge, if not to eliminate altogether their commercial banality, at least to minimise it, to substitute for the bulk of it what was art still, to introduce, as it might be, several 'thicknesses' of art; instead of photographs of Chartres Cathedral, of the Fountains of Saint-Cloud, or of Vesuvius she would inquire of Swann whether some great painter had not made pictures of them, and preferred to give me photographs of 'Chartres Cathedral' after Corot, of the 'Fountains of Saint-Cloud' after Hubert Robert, and of 'Vesuvius' after Turner, which were a stage higher in the scale of art. But although the photographer had been prevented from reproducing directly the masterpieces or the beauties of nature, and had there been replaced by a great artist, he resumed his odious position when it came to reproducing the artist's interpretation. Accordingly,

having to reckon again with vulgarity, my grandmother would endeavour to postpone the moment of contact still further. She would ask Swann if the picture had not been engraved, preferring, when possible, old engravings with some interest of association apart from themselves, such, for example, as shew us a masterpiece in a state in which we can no longer see it to-day, as Morghen's print of the 'Cenacolo' of Leonardo before it was spoiled by restoration. It must be admitted that the results of this method of interpreting the art of making presents were not always happy. The idea which I formed of Venice, from a drawing by Titian which is supposed to have the lagoon in the background, was certainly far less accurate than what I have since derived from ordinary photographs. We could no longer keep count in the family (when my great-aunt tried to frame an indictment of my grandmother) of all the armchairs she had presented to married couples, young and old, which on a first attempt to sit down upon them had at once collapsed beneath the weight of their recipient. But my grandmother would have thought it sordid to concern herself too closely with the solidity of any piece of furniture in which could still be discerned a flourish, a smile, a brave conceit of the past. And even what in such pieces supplied a material need, since it did so in a manner to which we are no longer accustomed, was as charming to her as one of those old forms of speech in which we can still see traces of a metaphor whose fine point has been worn away by the rough usage of our modern tongue. In precisely the same way the pastoral novels of George Sand, which she was giving me for my birthday, were regular lumber-rooms of antique furniture, full of expressions that have fallen out of use and returned as imagery, such as one finds now only in country dialects. And my grandmother had bought them in preference to other books, just as she would have preferred to take a house that had a gothic dovecot, or some other such piece of antiquity as would have a pleasant effect on the mind, filling it with a nostalgic longing for impossible journeys through the realms of time.

Mamma sat down by my bed; she had chosen *François le Champi*, whose reddish cover and incomprehensible title gave it a distinct personality in my eyes and a mysterious attraction. I had not then read any real novels. I had heard it said that George Sand was a typical novelist. That prepared me in advance to imagine that *François le Champi*contained something inexpressibly delicious. The course of the narrative, where it tended to arouse curiosity or melt to pity, certain modes of expression which disturb or sadden the reader, and which, with a little experience, he may recognise as 'common form' in novels, seemed to me then distinctive — for to me a new book was not one of a number of similar

objects, but was like an individual man, unmatched, and with no cause of existence beyond himself — an intoxicating whiff of the peculiar essence of*François le Champi*. Beneath the everyday incidents, the commonplace thoughts and hackneyed words, I could hear, or overhear, an intonation, a rhythmic utterance fine and strange. The ‘action’ began: to me it seemed all the more obscure because in those days, when I read to myself, I used often, while I turned the pages, to dream of something quite different. And to the gaps which this habit made in my knowledge of the story more were added by the fact that when it was Mamma who was reading to me aloud she left all the love-scenes out. And so all the odd changes which take place in the relations between the miller’s wife and the boy, changes which only the birth and growth of love can explain, seemed to me plunged and steeped in a mystery, the key to which (as I could readily believe) lay in that strange and pleasant-sounding name of *Champi*, which draped the boy who bore it, I knew not why, in its own bright colour, purpurate and charming. If my mother was not a faithful reader, she was, none the less, admirable when reading a work in which she found the note of true feeling by the respectful simplicity of her interpretation and by the sound of her sweet and gentle voice. It was the same in her daily life, when it was not works of art but men and women whom she was moved to pity or admire: it was touching to observe with what deference she would banish from her voice, her gestures, from her whole conversation, now the note of joy which might have distressed some mother who had long ago lost a child, now the recollection of an event or anniversary which might have reminded some old gentleman of the burden of his years, now the household topic which might have bored some young man of letters. And so, when she read aloud the prose of George Sand, prose which is everywhere redolent of that generosity and moral distinction which Mamma had learned from my grandmother to place above all other qualities in life, and which I was not to teach her until much later to refrain from placing, in the same way, above all other qualities in literature; taking pains to banish from her voice any weakness or affectation which might have blocked its channel for that powerful stream of language, she supplied all the natural tenderness, all the lavish sweetness which they demanded to phrases which seemed to have been composed for her voice, and which were all, so to speak, within her compass. She came to them with the tone that they required, with the cordial accent which existed before they were, which dictated them, but which is not to be found in the words themselves, and by these means she smoothed away, as she read on, any harshness there might be or discordance in the tenses

of verbs, endowing the imperfect and the preterite with all the sweetness which there is in generosity, all the melancholy which there is in love; guided the sentence that was drawing to an end towards that which was waiting to begin, now hastening, now slackening the pace of the syllables so as to bring them, despite their difference of quantity, into a uniform rhythm, and breathed into this quite ordinary prose a kind of life, continuous and full of feeling.

My agony was soothed; I let myself be borne upon the current of this gentle night on which I had my mother by my side. I knew that such a night could not be repeated; that the strongest desire I had in the world, namely, to keep my mother in my room through the sad hours of darkness, ran too much counter to general requirements and to the wishes of others for such a concession as had been granted me this evening to be anything but a rare and casual exception. To-morrow night I should again be the victim of anguish and Mamma would not stay by my side. But when these storms of anguish grew calm I could no longer realise their existence; besides, tomorrow evening was still a long way off; I reminded myself that I should still have time to think about things, albeit that remission of time could bring me no access of power, albeit the coming event was in no way dependent upon the exercise of my will, and seemed not quite inevitable only because it was still separated from me by this short interval.

***

And so it was that, for a long time afterwards, when I lay awake at night and revived old memories of Combray, I saw no more of it than this sort of luminous panel, sharply defined against a vague and shadowy background, like the panels which a Bengal fire or some electric sign will illuminate and dissect from the front of a building the other parts of which remain plunged in darkness: broad enough at its base, the little parlour, the dining-room, the alluring shadows of the path along which would come M. Swann, the unconscious author of my sufferings, the hall through which I would journey to the first step of that staircase, so hard to climb, which constituted, all by itself, the tapering ‘elevation’ of an irregular pyramid; and, at the summit, my bedroom, with the little passage through whose glazed door Mamma would enter; in a word, seen always at the same evening hour, isolated from all its possible surroundings, detached and solitary against its shadowy background, the bare minimum of scenery necessary (like the setting one sees printed at the head of an old play, for its performance in the provinces) to the drama of my undressing, as though all

Combray had consisted of but two floors joined by a slender staircase, and as though there had been no time there but seven o'clock at night. I must own that I could have assured any questioner that Combray did include other scenes and did exist at other hours than these. But since the facts which I should then have recalled would have been prompted only by an exercise of the will, by my intellectual memory, and since the pictures which that kind of memory shews us of the past preserve nothing of the past itself, I should never have had any wish to ponder over this residue of Combray. To me it was in reality all dead.

Permanently dead? Very possibly.

There is a large element of hazard in these matters, and a second hazard, that of our own death, often prevents us from awaiting for any length of time the favours of the first.

I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and so effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognised their voice the spell is broken. We have delivered them: they have overcome death and return to share our life.

And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die.

Many years had elapsed during which nothing of Combray, save what was comprised in the theatre and the drama of my going to bed there, had any existence for me, when one day in winter, as I came home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, a thing I did not ordinarily take. I declined at first, and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. She sent out for one of those short, plump little cakes called 'petites madeleines,' which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted scallop of a pilgrim's shell. And soon, mechanically, weary after a dull day with the prospect of a depressing morrow, I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the

extraordinary changes that were taking place. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, but individual, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory — this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was myself. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, accidental, mortal. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I was conscious that it was connected with the taste of tea and cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature as theirs. Whence did it come? What did it signify? How could I seize upon and define it?

I drink a second mouthful, in which I find nothing more than in the first, a third, which gives me rather less than the second. It is time to stop; the potion is losing its magic. It is plain that the object of my quest, the truth, lies not in the cup but in myself. The tea has called up in me, but does not itself understand, and can only repeat indefinitely with a gradual loss of strength, the same testimony; which I, too, cannot interpret, though I hope at least to be able to call upon the tea for it again and to find it there presently, intact and at my disposal, for my final enlightenment. I put down my cup and examine my own mind. It is for it to discover the truth. But how? What an abyss of uncertainty whenever the mind feels that some part of it has strayed beyond its own borders; when it, the seeker, is at once the dark region through which it must go seeking, where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not so far exist, to which it alone can give reality and substance, which it alone can bring into the light of day.

And I begin again to ask myself what it could have been, this unremembered state which brought with it no logical proof of its existence, but only the sense that it was a happy, that it was a real state in whose presence other states of consciousness melted and vanished. I decide to attempt to make it reappear. I retrace my thoughts to the moment at which I drank the first spoonful of tea. I find again the same state, illumined by no fresh light. I compel my mind to make one further effort, to follow and recapture once again the fleeting sensation. And that nothing may interrupt it in its course I shut out every obstacle, every extraneous idea, I stop my ears and inhibit all attention to the sounds which come from the next room. And then, feeling that my mind is growing fatigued without having any success to report, I compel it for a change to enjoy that distraction which I have just denied it, to think of other things, to rest and refresh itself before the supreme attempt. And then for the second time I clear an empty

space in front of it. I place in position before my mind's eye the still recent taste of that first mouthful, and I feel something start within me, something that leaves its resting-place and attempts to rise, something that has been embedded like an anchor at a great depth; I do not know yet what it is, but I can feel it mounting slowly; I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed.

Undoubtedly what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory which, being linked to that taste, has tried to follow it into my conscious mind. But its struggles are too far off, too much confused; scarcely can I perceive the colourless reflection in which are blended the uncapturable whirling medley of radiant hues, and I cannot distinguish its form, cannot invite it, as the one possible interpreter, to translate to me the evidence of its contemporary, its inseparable paramour, the taste of cake soaked in tea; cannot ask it to inform me what special circumstance is in question, of what period in my past life.

Will it ultimately reach the clear surface of my consciousness, this memory, this old, dead moment which the magnetism of an identical moment has travelled so far to importune, to disturb, to raise up out of the very depths of my being? I cannot tell. Now that I feel nothing, it has stopped, has perhaps gone down again into its darkness, from which who can say whether it will ever rise? Ten times over I must essay the task, must lean down over the abyss. And each time the natural laziness which deters us from every difficult enterprise, every work of importance, has urged me to leave the thing alone, to drink my tea and to think merely of the worries of to-day and of my hopes for to-morrow, which let themselves be pondered over without effort or distress of mind.

And suddenly the memory returns. The taste was that of the little crumb of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before church-time), when I went to say good day to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of real or of lime-flower tea. The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it; perhaps because I had so often seen such things in the interval, without tasting them, on the trays in pastry-cooks' windows, that their image had dissociated itself from those Combray days to take its place among others more recent; perhaps because of those memories, so long abandoned and put out of mind, nothing now survived, everything was scattered; the forms of things, including that of the little scallop-shell of pastry, so richly sensual under its severe, religious folds, were either obliterated or had been so long dormant as

to have lost the power of expansion which would have allowed them to resume their place in my consciousness. But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.

And once I had recognized the taste of the crumb of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-flowers which my aunt used to give me (although I did not yet know and must long postpone the discovery of why this memory made me so happy) immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like the scenery of a theatre to attach itself to the little pavilion, opening on to the garden, which had been built out behind it for my parents (the isolated panel which until that moment had been all that I could see); and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square where I was sent before luncheon, the streets along which I used to run errands, the country roads we took when it was fine. And just as the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping in it little crumbs of paper which until then are without character or form, but, the moment they become wet, stretch themselves and bend, take on colour and distinctive shape, become flowers or houses or people, permanent and recognisable, so in that moment all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann’s park, and the water-lilies on the Vivonne and the good folk of the village and their little dwellings and the parish church and the whole of Combray and of its surroundings, taking their proper shapes and growing solid, sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea.

Combray

Combray at a distance, from a twenty-mile radius, as we used to see it from the railway when we arrived there every year in Holy Week, was no more than a church epitomising the town, representing it, speaking of it and for it to the horizon, and as one drew near, gathering close about its long, dark cloak, sheltering from the wind, on the open plain, as a shepherd gathers his sheep, the woolly grey backs of its flocking houses, which a fragment of its mediaeval ramparts enclosed, here and there, in an outline as scrupulously circular as that of a little town in a primitive painting. To live in, Combray was a trifle depressing, like its streets, whose houses, built of the blackened stone of the country, fronted with outside steps, capped with gables which projected long shadows downwards, were so dark that one had, as soon as the sun began to go down, to draw back the curtains in the sitting-room windows; streets with the solemn names of Saints, not a few of whom figured in the history of the early lords of Combray, such as the Rue Saint-Hilaire, the Rue Saint-Jacques, in which my aunt's house stood, the Rue Sainte-Hildegarde, which ran past her railings, and the Rue du Saint-Esprit, on to which the little garden gate opened; and these Combray streets exist in so remote a quarter of my memory, painted in colours so different from those in which the world is decked for me to-day, that in fact one and all of them, and the church which towered above them in the Square, seem to me now more unsubstantial than the projections of my magic-lantern; while at times I feel that to be able to cross the Rue Saint-Hilaire again, to engage a room in the Rue de l'Oiseau, in the old hostelry of the Oiseau Flesché, from whose windows in the pavement used to rise a smell of cooking which rises still in my mind, now and then, in the same warm gusts of comfort, would be to secure a contact with the unseen world more marvellously supernatural than it would be to make Golo's acquaintance and to chat with Geneviève de Brabant.

My grandfather's cousin — by courtesy my great-aunt — with whom we used to stay, was the mother of that aunt Léonie who, since her husband's (my uncle Octave's) death, had gradually declined to leave, first Combray, then her house in Combray, then her bedroom, and finally her bed; and who now never

‘came down,’ but lay perpetually in an indefinite condition of grief, physical exhaustion, illness, obsessions, and religious observances. Her own room looked out over the Rue Saint-Jacques, which ran a long way further to end in the Grand-Pré (as distinct from the Petit-Pré, a green space in the centre of the town where three streets met) and which, monotonous and grey, with the three high steps of stone before almost every one of its doors, seemed like a deep furrow cut by some sculptor of gothic images in the very block of stone out of which he had fashioned a Calvary or a Crib. My aunt’s life was now practically confined to two adjoining rooms, in one of which she would rest in the afternoon while they, aired the other. They were rooms of that country order which (just as in certain climes whole tracts of air or ocean are illuminated or scented by myriads of protozoa which we cannot see) fascinate our sense of smell with the countless odours springing from their own special virtues, wisdom, habits, a whole secret system of life, invisible, superabundant and profoundly moral, which their atmosphere holds in solution; smells natural enough indeed, and coloured by circumstances as are those of the neighbouring countryside, but already humanised, domesticated, confined, an exquisite, skilful, limpid jelly, blending all the fruits of the season which have left the orchard for the store-room, smells changing with the year, but plenishing, domestic smells, which compensate for the sharpness of hoar frost with the sweet savour of warm bread, smells lazy and punctual as a village clock, roving smells, pious smells; rejoicing in a peace which brings only an increase of anxiety, and in a prosiness which serves as a deep source of poetry to the stranger who passes through their midst without having lived amongst them. The air of those rooms was saturated with the fine bouquet of a silence so nourishing, so succulent that I could not enter them without a sort of greedy enjoyment, particularly on those first mornings, chilly still, of the Easter holidays, when I could taste it more fully, because I had just arrived then at Combray: before I went in to wish my aunt good day I would be kept waiting a little time in the outer room, where the sun, a wintry sun still, had crept in to warm itself before the fire, lighted already between its two brick sides and plastering all the room and everything in it with a smell of soot, making the room like one of those great open hearths which one finds in the country, or one of the canopied mantelpieces in old castles under which one sits hoping that in the world outside it is raining or snowing, hoping almost for a catastrophic deluge to add the romance of shelter and security to the comfort of a snug retreat; I would turn to and fro between the prayer-desk and the stamped velvet armchairs, each one always draped in its crocheted antimacassar, while the fire,

baking like a pie the appetising smells with which the air of the room, was thickly clotted, which the dewy and sunny freshness of the morning had already ‘raised’ and started to ‘set,’ puffed them and glazed them and fluted them and swelled them into an invisible though not impalpable country cake, an immense puff-pastry, in which, barely waiting to savour the crustier, more delicate, more respectable, but also drier smells of the cupboard, the chest-of-drawers, and the patterned wall-paper I always returned with an unconfessed gluttony to bury myself in the nondescript, resinous, dull, indigestible, and fruity smell of the flowered quilt.

In the next room I could hear my aunt talking quietly to herself. She never spoke save in low tones, because she believed that there was something broken in her head and floating loose there, which she might displace by talking too loud; but she never remained for long, even when alone, without saying something, because she believed that it was good for her throat, and that by keeping the blood there in circulation it would make less frequent the chokings and other pains to which she was liable; besides, in the life of complete inertia which she led she attached to the least of her sensations an extraordinary importance, endowed them with a Protean ubiquity which made it difficult for her to keep them secret, and, failing a confidant to whom she might communicate them, she used to promulgate them to herself in an unceasing monologue which was her sole form of activity. Unfortunately, having formed the habit of thinking aloud, she did not always take care to see that there was no one in the adjoining room, and I would often hear her saying to herself: “I must not forget that I never slept a wink” — for “never sleeping a wink” was her great claim to distinction, and one admitted and respected in our household vocabulary; in the morning Françoise would not ‘call’ her, but would simply ‘come to’ her; during the day, when my aunt wished to take a nap, we used to say just that she wished to ‘be quiet’ or to ‘rest’; and when in conversation she so far forgot herself as to say “what made me wake up,” or “I dreamed that,” she would flush and at once correct herself.

After waiting a minute, I would go in and kiss her; Françoise would be making her tea; or, if my aunt were feeling ‘upset,’ she would ask instead for her ‘tisane,’ and it would be my duty to shake out of the chemist’s little package on to a plate the amount of lime-blossom required for infusion in boiling water. The drying of the stems had twisted them into a fantastic trellis, in whose intervals the pale flowers opened, as though a painter had arranged them there, grouping them in the most decorative poses. The leaves, which had lost or altered their

own appearance, assumed those instead of the most incongruous things imaginable, as though the transparent wings of flies or the blank sides of labels or the petals of roses had been collected and pounded, or interwoven as birds weave the material for their nests. A thousand trifling little details — the charming prodigality of the chemist — details which would have been eliminated from an artificial preparation, gave me, like a book in which one is astonished to read the name of a person whom one knows, the pleasure of finding that these were indeed real lime-blossoms, like those I had seen, when coming from the train, in the Avenue de la Gare, altered, but only because they were not imitations but the very same blossoms, which had grown old. And as each new character is merely a metamorphosis from something older, in these little grey balls I recognised green buds plucked before their time; but beyond all else the rosy, moony, tender glow which lit up the blossoms among the frail forest of stems from which they hung like little golden roses — marking, as the radiance upon an old wall still marks the place of a vanished fresco, the difference between those parts of the tree which had and those which had not been ‘in bloom’ — shewed me that these were petals which, before their flowering-time, the chemist’s package had embalmed on warm evenings of spring. That rosy candlelight was still their colour, but half-extinguished and deadened in the diminished life which was now theirs, and which may be called the twilight of a flower. Presently my aunt was able to dip in the boiling infusion, in which she would relish the savour of dead or faded blossom, a little madeleine, of which she would hold out a piece to me when it was sufficiently soft.

At one side of her bed stood a big yellow chest-of-drawers of lemon-wood, and a table which served at once as pharmacy and as high altar, on which, beneath a statue of Our Lady and a bottle of Vichy-Célestins, might be found her service-books and her medical prescriptions, everything that she needed for the performance, in bed, of her duties to soul and body, to keep the proper times for pepsin and for vespers. On the other side her bed was bounded by the window: she had the street beneath her eyes, and would read in it from morning to night to divert the tedium of her life, like a Persian prince, the daily but immemorial chronicles of Combray, which she would discuss in detail afterwards with Françoise.

I would not have been five minutes with my aunt before she would send me away in case I made her tired. She would hold out for me to kiss her sad brow, pale and lifeless, on which at this early hour she would not yet have arranged the

false hair and through which the bones shone like the points of a crown of thorns-er the beads of a rosary, and she would say to me: “Now, my poor child, you must go away; go and get ready for mass; and if you see Françoise downstairs, tell her not to stay too long amusing herself with you; she must come up soon to see if I want anything.”

Françoise, who had been for many years in my aunt’s service and did not at that time suspect that she would one day be transferred entirely to ours, was a little inclined to desert my aunt during the months which we spent in her house. There had been in my infancy, before we first went to Combray, and when my aunt Léonie used still to spend the winter in Paris with her mother, a time when I knew Françoise so little that on New Year’s Day, before going into my great-aunt’s house, my mother put a five-franc piece in my hand and said: “Now, be careful. Don’t make any mistake. Wait until you hear me say ‘Good morning, Françoise,’ and I touch your arm before you give it to her.” No sooner had we arrived in my aunt’s dark hall than we saw in the gloom, beneath the frills of a snowy cap as stiff and fragile as if it had been made of spun sugar, the concentric waves of a smile of anticipatory gratitude. It was Françoise, motionless and erect, framed in the small doorway of the corridor like the statue of a saint in its niche. When we had grown more accustomed to this religious darkness we could discern in her features a disinterested love of all humanity, blended with a tender respect for the ‘upper classes’ which raised to the most honourable quarter of her heart the hope of receiving her due reward. Mamma pinched my arm sharply and said in a loud voice: “Good morning, Françoise.” At this signal my fingers parted and I let fall the coin, which found a receptacle in a confused but outstretched hand. But since we had begun to go to Combray there was no one I knew better than Françoise. We were her favourites, and in the first years at least, while she shewed the same consideration for us as for my aunt, she enjoyed us with a keener relish, because we had, in addition to our dignity as part of ‘the family’ (for she had for those invisible bonds by which community of blood unites the members of a family as much respect as any Greek tragedian), the fresh charm of not being her customary employers. And so with what joy would she welcome us, with what sorrow complain that the weather was still so bad for us, on the day of our arrival, just before Easter, when there was often an icy wind; while Mamma inquired after her daughter and her nephews, and if her grandson was good-looking, and what they were going to make of him, and whether he took after his granny.

Later, when no one else was in the room, Mamma, who knew that Françoise

was still mourning for her parents, who had been dead for years, would speak of them kindly, asking her endless little questions about them and their lives.

She had guessed that Françoise was not over-fond of her son-in-law, and that he spoiled the pleasure she found in visiting her daughter, as the two could not talk so freely when he was there. And so one day, when Françoise was going to their house, some miles from Combray, Mamma said to her, with a smile: "Tell me, Françoise, if Julien has had to go away, and you have Marguerite to yourself all day, you will be very sorry, but will make the best of it, won't you?"

And Françoise answered, laughing: "Madame knows everything; Madame is worse than the X-rays" (she pronounced 'x' with an affectation of difficulty and with a smile in deprecation of her, an unlettered woman's, daring to employ a scientific term) "they brought here for Mme. Octave, which see what is in your heart" — and she went off, disturbed that anyone should be caring about her, perhaps anxious that we should not see her in tears: Mamma was the first person who had given her the pleasure of feeling that her peasant existence, with its simple joys and sorrows, might offer some interest, might be a source of grief or pleasure to some one other than herself.

My aunt resigned herself to doing without Françoise to some extent during our visits, knowing how much my mother appreciated the services of so active and intelligent a maid, one who looked as smart at five o'clock in the morning in her kitchen, under a cap whose stiff and dazzling frills seemed to be made of porcelain, as when dressed for churchgoing; who did everything in the right way, who toiled like a horse, whether she was well or ill, but without noise, without the appearance of doing anything; the only one of my aunt's maids who when Mamma asked for hot water or black coffee would bring them actually boiling; she was one of those servants who in a household seem least satisfactory, at first, to a stranger, doubtless because they take no pains to make a conquest of him and shew him no special attention, knowing very well that they have no real need of him, that he will cease to be invited to the house sooner than they will be dismissed from it; who, on the other hand, cling with most fidelity to those masters and mistresses who have tested and proved their real capacity, and do not look for that superficial responsiveness, that slavish affability, which may impress a stranger favourably, but often conceals an utter barrenness of spirit in which no amount of training can produce the least trace of individuality.

When Françoise, having seen that my parents had everything they required, first went upstairs again to give my aunt her pepsin and to find out from her what she would take for luncheon, very few mornings passed but she was called upon

to give an opinion, or to furnish an explanation, in regard to some important event.

"Just fancy, Françoise, Mme. Goupil went by more than a quarter of an hour late to fetch her sister: if she loses any more time on the way I should not be at all surprised if she got in after the Elevation."

"Well, there'd be nothing wonderful in that," would be the answer. Or:

"Françoise, if you had come in five minutes ago, you would have seen Mme. Imbert go past with some asparagus twice the size of what mother Callot has: do try to find out from her cook where she got them. You know you've been putting asparagus in all your sauces this spring; you might be able to get some like these for our visitors."

"I shouldn't be surprised if they came from the Curé's," Françoise would say, and:

"I'm sure you wouldn't, my poor Françoise," my aunt would reply, raising her shoulders. "From the Curé's, indeed! You know quite well that he can never grow anything but wretched little twigs of asparagus, not asparagus at all. I tell you these ones were as thick as my arm. Not your arm, of course, but my-poor arm, which has grown so much thinner again this year." Or:

"Françoise, didn't you hear that bell just now! It split my head."

"No, Mme. Octave."

"Ah, poor girl, your skull must be very thick; you may thank God for that. It was Maguelone come to fetch Dr. Piperaud. He came out with her at once and they went off along the Rue de l'Oiseau. There must be some child ill."

"Oh dear, dear; the poor little creature!" would come with a sigh from Françoise, who could not hear of any calamity befalling a person unknown to her, even in some distant part of the world, without beginning to lament. Or:

"Françoise, for whom did they toll the passing-bell just now? Oh dear, of course, it would be for Mme. Rousseau. And to think that I had forgotten that she passed away the other night. Indeed, it is time the Lord called me home too; I don't know what has become of my head since I lost my poor Octave. But I am wasting your time, my good girl."

"Indeed no, Mme. Octave, my time is not so precious; whoever made our time didn't sell it to us. I am just going to see that my fire hasn't gone out."

In this way Françoise and my aunt made a critical valuation between them, in the course of these morning sessions, of the earliest happenings of the day. But sometimes these happenings assumed so mysterious or so alarming an air that my aunt felt she could not wait until it was time for Françoise to come

upstairs, and then a formidable and quadruple peal would resound through the house.

"But, Mme. Octave, it is not time for your pepsin," Françoise would begin. "Are you feeling faint?"

"No, thank you, Françoise," my aunt would reply, "that is to say, yes; for you know well that there is very seldom a time when I don't feel faint; one day I shall pass away like Mme. Rousseau, before I know where I am; but that is not why I rang. Would you believe that I have just seen, as plainly as I see you, Mme. Goupil with a little girl I didn't know at all. Run and get a pennyworth of salt from Camus. It's not often that Théodore can't tell you who a person is."

"But that must be M. Pupin's daughter," Françoise would say, preferring to stick to an immediate explanation, since she had been perhaps twice already into Camus's shop that morning.

"M. Pupin's daughter! Oh, that's a likely story, my poor Françoise. Do you think I should not have recognised M. Pupin's daughter!"

"But I don't mean the big one, Mme. Octave; I mean the little girl, he one who goes to school at Jouy. I seem to have seen her once already his morning."

"Oh, if that's what it is!" my aunt would say, "she must have come over for the holidays. Yes, that is it. No need to ask, she will have come over for the holidays. But then we shall soon see Mme. Sazerat come along and ring her sister's door-bell, for her luncheon. That will be it! I saw the boy from Galopin's go by with a tart. You will see that the tart was for Mme. Goupil."

"Once Mme. Goupil has anyone in the house, Mme. Octave, you won't be long in seeing all her folk going in to their luncheon there, for it's not so early as it was," would be the answer, for Françoise, who was anxious to retire downstairs to look after our own meal, was not sorry to leave my aunt with the prospect of such a distraction.

"Oh! not before midday!" my aunt would reply in a tone of resignation, darting an uneasy glance at the clock, but stealthily, so as not to let it be seen that she, who had renounced all earthly joys, yet found a keen satisfaction in learning that Mme. Goupil was expecting company to luncheon, though, alas, she must wait a little more than an hour still before enjoying the spectacle. "And it will come in the middle of my luncheon!" she would murmur to herself. Her luncheon was such a distraction in itself that she did not like any other to come at the same time. "At least, you will not forget to give me my creamed eggs on one of the flat plates?" These were the only plates which had pictures on them and my aunt used to amuse herself at every meal by reading the description on

whichever might have been sent up to her. She would put on her spectacles and spell out: “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,” “Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp,” and smile, and say “Very good indeed.”

“I may as well go across to Camus...” Françoise would hazard, seeing that my aunt had no longer any intention of sending her there.

“No, no; it’s not worth while now; it’s certain to be the Pupin girl. My poor Françoise, I am sorry to have made you come upstairs for nothing.”

But it was not for nothing, as my aunt well knew, that she had rung for Françoise, since at Combray a person whom one ‘didn’t know at all’ was as incredible a being as any mythological deity, and it was apt to be forgotten that after each occasion on which there had appeared in the Rue du Saint-Esprit or in the Square one of these bewildering phenomena, careful and exhaustive researches had invariably reduced the fabulous monster to the proportions of a person whom one ‘did know,’ either personally or in the abstract, in his or her civil status as being more or less closely related to some family in Combray. It would turn out to be Mme. Sauton’s son discharged from the army, or the Abbé Perdreau’s niece come home from her convent, or the Curé’s brother, a tax-collector at Châteaudun, who had just retired on a pension or had come over to Combray for the holidays. On first noticing them you have been impressed by the thought that there might be in Combray people whom you ‘didn’t know at all,’ simply because, you had failed to recognise or identify them at once. And yet long beforehand Mme. Sauton and the Curé had given warning that they expected their ‘strangers.’ In the evening, when I came in and went upstairs to tell my aunt the incidents of our walk, if I was rash enough to say to her that we had passed, near the Pont-Vieux, a man whom my grandfather didn’t know:

“A man grandfather didn’t know at all!” she would exclaim. “That’s a likely story.” None the less, she would be a little disturbed by the news, she would wish to have the details correctly, and so my grandfather would be summoned. “Who can it have been that you passed near the Pont-Vieux, uncle? A man you didn’t know at all?”

“Why, of course I did,” my grandfather would answer; “it was Prosper, Mme. Bouilleboeuf’s gardener’s brother.”

“Ah, well!” my aunt would say, calm again but slightly flushed still; “and the boy told me that you had passed a man you didn’t know at all!” After which I would be warned to be more careful of what I said, and not to upset my aunt so by thoughtless remarks. Everyone was so well known in Combray, animals as well as people, that if my aunt had happened to see a dog go by which she

‘didn’t know at all’ she would think about it incessantly, devoting to the solution of the incomprehensible problem all her inductive talent and her leisure hours.

“That will be Mme. Sazerat’s dog,” Françoise would suggest, without any real conviction, but in the hope of peace, and so that my aunt should not ‘split her head.’

“As if I didn’t know Mme. Sazerat’s dog!” — for my aunt’s critical mind would not so easily admit any fresh fact.

“Ah, but that will be the new dog M. Galopin has brought her from Lisieux.”

“Oh, if that’s what it is!”

“It seems, it’s a most engaging animal,” Françoise would go on, having got the story from Théodore, “as clever as a Christian, always in a good temper, always friendly, always everything that’s nice. It’s not often you see an animal so well-behaved at that age. Mme. Octave, it’s high time I left you; I can’t afford to stay here amusing myself; look, it’s nearly ten o’clock and my fire not lighted yet, and I’ve still to dress the asparagus.”

“What, Françoise, more asparagus! It’s a regular disease of asparagus you have got this year: you will make our Parisians sick of it.”

“No, no, Madame Octave, they like it well enough. They’ll be coming back from church soon as hungry as hunters, and they won’t eat it out of the back of their spoons, you’ll see.”

“Church! why, they must be there now; you’d better not lose any time. Go and look after your luncheon.”

While my aunt gossiped on in this way with Françoise I would have accompanied my parents to mass. How I loved it: how clearly I can see it still, our church at Combray! The old porch by which we went in, black, and full of holes as a cullender, was worn out of shape and deeply furrowed at the sides (as also was the holy water stoup to which it led us) just as if the gentle grazing touch of the cloaks of peasant-women going into the church, and of their fingers dipping into the water, had managed by agelong repetition to acquire a destructive force, to impress itself on the stone, to carve ruts in it like those made by cart-wheels upon stone gate-posts against which they are driven every day. Its memorial stones, beneath which the noble dust of the Abbots of Combray, who were buried there, furnished the choir with a sort of spiritual pavement, were themselves no longer hard and lifeless matter, for time had softened and sweetened them, and had made them melt like honey and flow beyond their proper margins, either surging out in a milky, frothing wave, washing from its

place a florid gothic capital, drowning the white violets of the marble floor; or else reabsorbed into their limits, contracting still further a crabbed Latin inscription, bringing a fresh touch of fantasy into the arrangement of its curtailed characters, closing together two letters of some word of which the rest were disproportionately scattered. Its windows were never so brilliant as on days when the sun scarcely shone, so that if it was dull outside you might be certain of fine weather in church. One of them was filled from top to bottom by a solitary figure, like the king on a playing-card, who lived up there beneath his canopy of stone, between earth and heaven; and in the blue light of its slanting shadow, on weekdays sometimes, at noon, when there was no service (at one of those rare moments when the airy, empty church, more human somehow and more luxurious with the sun shewing off all its rich furnishings, seemed to have almost a habitable air, like the hall — all sculptured stone and painted glass — of some mediaeval mansion), you might see Mme. Sazerat kneel for an instant, laying down on the chair beside her own a neatly corded parcel of little cakes which she had just bought at the baker's and was taking home for her luncheon. In another, a mountain of rosy snow, at whose foot a battle was being fought, seemed to have frozen the window also, which it swelled and distorted with its cloudy sleet, like a pane to which snowflakes have drifted and clung, but flakes illumined by a sunrise — the same, doubtless, which purpled the reredos of the altar with tints so fresh that they seemed rather to be thrown on it for a moment by a light shining from outside and shortly to be extinguished than painted and permanently fastened on the stone. And all of them were so old that you could see, here and there, their silvery antiquity sparkling with the dust of centuries and shewing in its threadbare brilliance the very cords of their lovely tapestry of glass. There was one among them which was a tall panel composed of a hundred little rectangular windows, of blue principally, like a great game of patience of the kind planned to beguile King Charles VI; but, either because a ray of sunlight had gleamed through it or because my own shifting vision had drawn across the window, whose colours died away and were rekindled by turns, a rare and transient fire — the next instant it had taken on all the iridescence of a peacock's tail, then shook and wavered in a flaming and fantastic shower, distilled and dropping from the groin of the dark and rocky vault down the moist walls, as though it were along the bed of some rainbow grotto of sinuous stalactites that I was following my parents, who marched before me, their prayer-books clasped in their hands; a moment later the little lozenge windows had put on the deep transparence, the unbreakable hardness of sapphires

clustered on some enormous breastplate; but beyond which could be distinguished, dearer than all such treasures, a fleeting smile from the sun, which could be seen and felt as well here, in the blue and gentle flood in which it washed the masonry, as on the pavement of the Square or the straw of the market-place; and even on our first Sundays, when we came down before Easter, it would console me for the blackness and bareness of the earth outside by making burst into blossom, as in some springtime in old history among the heirs of Saint Louis, this dazzling and gilded carpet of forget-me-nots in glass.

Two tapestries of high warp represented the coronation of Esther (in which tradition would have it that the weaver had given to Ahasuerus the features of one of the kings of France and to Esther those of a lady of Guermantes whose lover he had been); their colours had melted into one another, so as to add expression, relief, light to the pictures. A touch of red over the lips of Esther had strayed beyond their outline; the yellow on her dress was spread with such unctuous plumpness as to have acquired a kind of solidity, and stood boldly out from the receding atmosphere; while the green of the trees, which was still bright in Silk and wool among the lower parts of the panel, but had quite ‘gone’ at the top, separated in a paler scheme, above the dark trunks, the yellowing upper branches, tanned and half-obliterated by the sharp though sidelong rays of an invisible sun. All these things and, still more than these, the treasures which had come to the church from personages who to me were almost legendary figures (such as the golden cross wrought, it was said, by Saint Eloi and presented by Dagobert, and the tomb of the sons of Louis the Germanic in porphyry and enamelled copper), because of which I used to go forward into the church when we were making our way to our chairs as into a fairy-haunted valley, where the rustic sees with amazement on a rock, a tree, a marsh, the tangible proofs of the little people’s supernatural passage — all these things made of the church for me something entirely different from the rest of the town; a building which occupied, so to speak, four dimensions of space — the name of the fourth being Time — which had sailed the centuries with that old nave, where bay after bay, chapel after chapel, seemed to stretch across and hold down and conquer not merely a few yards of soil, but each successive epoch from which the whole building had emerged triumphant, hiding the rugged barbarities of the eleventh century in the thickness of its walls, through which nothing could be seen of the heavy arches, long stopped and blinded with coarse blocks of ashlar, except where, near the porch, a deep groove was furrowed into one wall by the tower-stair; and even there the barbarity was veiled by the graceful gothic arcade which

pressed coquettishly upon it, like a row of grown-up sisters who, to hide him from the eyes of strangers, arrange themselves smilingly in front of a countrified, unmannerly and ill-dressed younger brother; rearing into the sky above the Square a tower which had looked down upon Saint Louis, and seemed to behold him still; and thrusting down with its crypt into the blackness of a Merovingian night, through which, guiding us with groping finger-tips beneath the shadowy vault, ribbed strongly as an immense bat's wing of stone, Théodore or his sister would light up for us with a candle the tomb of Sigebert's little daughter, in which a deep hole, like the bed of a fossil, had been bored, or so it was said, "by a crystal lamp which, on the night when the Frankish princess was murdered, had left, of its own accord, the golden chains by which it was suspended where the apse is to-day and with neither the crystal broken nor the light extinguished had buried itself in the stone, through which it had gently forced its way."

And then the apse of Combray: what am I to say of that? It was so coarse, so devoid of artistic beauty, even of the religious spirit. From outside, since the street crossing which it commanded was on a lower level, its great wall was thrust upwards from a basement of unfaced ashlar, jagged with flints, in all of which there was nothing particularly ecclesiastical; the windows seemed to have been pierced at an abnormal height, and its whole appearance was that of a prison wall rather than of a church. And certainly in later years, were I to recall all the glorious apses that I had seen, it would never enter my mind to compare with any one of them the apse of Combray. Only, one day, turning out of a little street in some country town, I came upon three alley-ways that converged, and facing them an old wall, rubbed, worn, crumbling, and unusually high; with windows pierced in it far overhead and the same asymmetrical appearance as the apse of Combray. And at that moment I did not say to myself, as at Chartres I might have done or at Rheims, with what strength the religious feeling had been expressed in its construction, but instinctively I exclaimed "The Church!"

The church! A dear, familiar friend; close pressed in the Rue Saint-Hilaire, upon which its north door opened, by its two neighbours, Mme. Loiseau's house and the pharmacy of M. Rapin, against which its walls rested without interspace; a simple citizen of Combray, who might have had her number in the street had the streets of Combray borne numbers, and at whose door one felt that the postman ought to stop on his morning rounds, before going into Mme. Loiseau's and after leaving M. Rapin's, there existed, for all that, between the church and everything in Combray that was not the church a clear line of demarcation which I have never succeeded in eliminating from my mind. In vain might Mme.

Loiseau deck her window-sills with fuchsias, which developed the bad habit of letting their branches trail at all times and in all directions, head downwards, and whose flowers had no more important business, when they were big enough to taste the joys of life, than to go and cool their purple, congested cheeks against the dark front of the church; to me such conduct sanctified the fuchsias not at all; between the flowers and the blackened stones towards which they leaned, if my eyes could discern no interval, my mind preserved the impression of an abyss.

From a long way off one could distinguish and identify the steeple of Saint-Hilaire inscribing its unforgettable form upon a horizon beneath which Combray had not yet appeared; when from the train which brought us down from Paris at Easter-time my father caught sight of it, as it slipped into every fold of the sky in turn, its little iron cock veering continually in all directions, he would say: "Come, get your wraps together, we are there." And on one of the longest walks we ever took from Combray there was a spot where the narrow road emerged suddenly on to an immense plain, closed at the horizon by strips of forest over which rose and stood alone the fine point of Saint-Hilaire's steeple, but so sharpened and so pink that it seemed to be no more than sketched on the sky by the finger-nail of a painter anxious to give to such a landscape, to so pure a piece of 'nature,' this little sign of art, this single indication of human existence. As one drew near it and could make out the remains of the square tower, half in ruins, which still stood by its side, though without rivalling it in height, one was struck, first of all, by the tone, reddish and sombre, of its stones; and on a misty morning in autumn one would have called it, to see it rising above the violet thunder-cloud of the vineyards, a ruin of purple, almost the colour of the wild vine.

Often in the Square, as we came home, my grandmother would make me stop to look up at it. From the tower windows, placed two and two, one pair above another, with that right and original proportion in their spacing to which not only human faces owe their beauty and dignity, it released, it let fall at regular intervals flights of jackdaws which for a little while would wheel and caw, as though the ancient stones which allowed them to sport thus and never seemed to see them, becoming of a sudden uninhabitable and discharging some infinitely disturbing element, had struck them and driven them forth. Then after patterning everywhere the violet velvet of the evening air, abruptly soothed, they would return and be absorbed in the tower, deadly no longer but benignant, some perching here and there (not seeming to move, but snapping, perhaps, and swallowing some passing insect) on the points of turrets, as a seagull perches,

with an angler's immobility, on the crest of a wave. Without quite knowing why, my grandmother found in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that absence of vulgarity, pretension, and meanness which made her love — and deem rich in beneficent influences — nature itself, when the hand of man had not, as did my great-aunt's gardener, trimmed it, and the works of genius. And certainly every part one saw of the church served to distinguish the whole from any other building by a kind of general feeling which pervaded it, but it was in the steeple that the church seemed to display a consciousness of itself, to affirm its individual and responsible existence. It was the steeple which spoke for the church. I think, too, that in a confused way my grandmother found in the steeple of Combray what she prized above anything else in the world, namely, a natural air and an air of distinction. Ignorant of architecture, she would say:

"My dears, laugh at me if you like; it is not conventionally beautiful, but there is something in its quaint old face which pleases me. If it could play the piano, I am sure it would really *play*." And when she gazed on it, when her eyes followed the gentle tension, the fervent inclination of its stony slopes which drew together as they rose, like hands joined in prayer, she would absorb herself so utterly in the outpouring of the spire that her gaze seemed to leap upwards with it; her lips at the same time curving in a friendly smile for the worn old stones of which the setting sun now illumined no more than the topmost pinnacles, which, at the point where they entered that zone of sunlight and were softened and sweetened by it, seemed to have mounted suddenly far higher, to have become truly remote, like a song whose singer breaks into falsetto, an octave above the accompanying air.

It was the steeple of Saint-Hilaire which shaped and crowned and consecrated every occupation, every hour of the day, every point of view in the town. From my bedroom window I could discern no more than its base, which had been freshly covered with slates; but when on Sundays I saw these, in the hot light of a summer morning, blaze like a black sun I would say to myself: "Good heavens! nine o'clock! I must get ready for mass at once if I am to have time to go in and kiss aunt Léonie first," and I would know exactly what was the colour of the sunlight upon the Square, I could feel the heat and dust of the market, the shade behind the blinds of the shop into which Mamma would perhaps go on her way to mass, penetrating its odour of unbleached calico, to purchase a handkerchief or something, of which the draper himself would let her see what he had, bowing from the waist: who, having made everything ready for shutting up, had just gone into the back shop to put on his Sunday coat and to

wash his hands, which it was his habit, every few minutes and even on the saddest occasions, to rub one against the other with an air of enterprise, cunning, and success.

And again, after mass, when we looked in to tell Théodore to bring a larger loaf than usual because our cousins had taken advantage of the fine weather to come over from Thiberzy for luncheon, we had in front of us the steeple, which, baked and brown itself like a larger loaf still of ‘holy bread,’ with flakes and sticky drops on it of sunlight, pricked its sharp point into the blue sky. And in the evening, as I came in from my walk and thought of the approaching moment when I must say good night to my mother and see her no more, the steeple was by contrast so kindly, there at the close of day, that I would imagine it as being laid, like a brown velvet cushion, against — as being thrust into the pallid sky which had yielded beneath its pressure, had sunk slightly so as to make room for it, and had correspondingly risen on either side; while the cries of the birds wheeling to and fro about it seemed to intensify its silence, to elongate its spire still further, and to invest it with some quality beyond the power of words.

Even when our errands lay in places behind the church, from which it could not be seen, the view seemed always to have been composed with reference to the steeple, which would stand up, now here, now there, among the houses, and was perhaps even more affecting when it appeared thus without the church. And, indeed, there are many others which look best when seen in this way, and I can call to mind vignettes of housetops with surmounting steeples in quite another category of art than those formed by the dreary streets of Combray. I shall never forget, in a quaint Norman town not far from Balbec, two charming eighteenth-century houses, dear to me and venerable for many reasons, between which, when one looks up at them from a fine garden which descends in terraces to the river, the gothic spire of a church (itself hidden by the houses) soars into the sky with the effect of crowning and completing their fronts, but in a material so different, so precious, so beringed, so rosy, so polished, that it is at once seen to be no more a part of them than would be a part of two pretty pebbles lying side by side, between which it had been washed on the beach, the purple, crinkled spire of some sea-shell spun out into a turret and gay with glossy colour. Even in Paris, in one of the ugliest parts of the town, I know a window from which one can see across a first, a second, and even a third layer of jumbled roofs, street beyond street, a violet bell, sometimes ruddy, sometimes too, in the finest ‘prints’ which the atmosphere makes of it, of an ashy solution of black; which is, in fact, nothing else than the dome of Saint-Augustin, and which imparts to this

view of Paris the character of some of the Piranesi views of Rome. But since into none of these little etchings, whatever the taste my memory may have been able to bring to their execution, was it able to contribute an element I have long lost, the feeling which makes us not merely regard a thing as a spectacle, but believe in it as in a creature without parallel, so none of them keeps in dependence on it a whole section of my inmost life as does the memory of those aspects of the steeple of Combray from the streets behind the church. Whether one saw it at five o'clock when going to call for letters at the post-office, some doors away from one, on the left, raising abruptly with its isolated peak the ridge of housetops; or again, when one had to go in and ask for news of Mme. Sazerat, one's eyes followed the line where it ran low again beyond the farther, descending slope, and one knew that it would be the second turning after the steeple; or yet again, if pressing further afield one went to the station, one saw it obliquely, shewing in profile fresh angles and surfaces, like a solid body surprised at some unknown point in its revolution; or, from the banks of the Vivonne, the apse, drawn muscularly together and heightened in perspective, seemed to spring upwards with the effort which the steeple made to hurl its spire-point into the heart of heaven: it was always to the steeple that one must return, always it which dominated everything else, summing up the houses with an unexpected pinnacle, raised before me like the Finger of God, Whose Body might have been concealed below among the crowd of human bodies without fear of my confounding It, for that reason, with them. And so even to-day in any large provincial town, or in a quarter of Paris which I do not know well, if a passer-by who is 'putting me on the right road' shews me from afar, as a point to aim at, some belfry of a hospital, or a convent steeple lifting the peak of its ecclesiastical cap at the corner of the street which I am to take, my memory need only find in it some dim resemblance to that dear and vanished outline, and the passer-by, should he turn round to make sure that I have not gone astray, would see me, to his astonishment, oblivious of the walk that I had planned to take or the place where I was obliged to call, standing still on the spot, before that steeple, for hours on end, motionless, trying to remember, feeling deep within myself a tract of soil reclaimed from the waters of Lethe slowly drying until the buildings rise on it again; and then no doubt, and then more uneasily than when, just now, I asked him for a direction, I will seek my way again, I will turn a corner... but... the goal is in my heart...

On our way home from mass we would often meet M. Legrandin, who, detained in Paris by his professional duties as an engineer, could only (except in

the regular holiday seasons) visit his home at Combray between Saturday evenings and Monday mornings. He was one of that class of men who, apart from a scientific career in which they may well have proved brilliantly successful, have acquired an entirely different kind of culture, literary or artistic, of which they make no use in the specialised work of their profession, but by which their conversation profits. More ‘literary’ than many ‘men of letters’ (we were not aware at this period that M. Legrandin had a distinct reputation as a writer, and so were greatly astonished to find that a well-known composer had set some verses of his to music), endowed with a greater ease in execution than many painters, they imagine that the life they are obliged to lead is not that for which they are really fitted, and they bring to their regular occupations either a fantastic indifference or a sustained and lofty application, scornful, bitter, and conscientious. Tall, with a good figure, a fine, thoughtful face, drooping fair moustaches, a look of disillusionment in his blue eyes, an almost exaggerated refinement of courtesy; a talker such as we had never heard; he was in the sight of my family, who never ceased to quote him as an example, the very pattern of a gentleman, who took life in the noblest and most delicate manner. My grandmother alone found fault with him for speaking a little too well, a little too much like a book, for not using a vocabulary as natural as his loosely knotted Lavallière neckties, his short, straight, almost schoolboyish coat. She was astonished, too, at the furious invective which he was always launching at the aristocracy, at fashionable life, and ‘snobbishness’ — “undoubtedly,” he would say, “the sin of which Saint Paul is thinking when he speaks of the sin for which there is no forgiveness.”

Worldly ambition was a thing which my grandmother was so little capable of feeling, or indeed of understanding, that it seemed to her futile to apply so much heat to its condemnation. Besides, she thought it in not very good taste that M. Legrandin, whose sister was married to a country gentleman of Lower Normandy near Balbec, should deliver himself of such violent attacks upon the nobles, going so far as to blame the Revolution for not having guillotined them all.

“Well met, my friends!” he would say as he came towards us. “You are lucky to spend so much time here; to-morrow I have to go back to Paris, to squeeze back into my niche.

“Oh, I admit,” he went on, with his own peculiar smile, gently ironical, disillusioned and vague, “I have every useless thing in the world in my house there. The only thing wanting is the necessary thing, a great patch of open sky

like this. Always try to keep a patch of sky above your life, little boy," he added, turning to me. "You have a soul in you of rare quality, an artist's nature; never let it starve for lack of what it needs."

When, on our reaching the house, my aunt would send to ask us whether Mme. Goupil had indeed arrived late for mass, not one of us could inform her. Instead, we increased her anxiety by telling her that there was a painter at work in the church copying the window of Gilbert the Bad. Françoise was at once dispatched to the grocer's, but returned empty-handed owing to the absence of Théodore, whose dual profession of choirman, with a part in the maintenance of the fabric, and of grocer's assistant gave him not only relations with all sections of society, but an encyclopaedic knowledge of their affairs.

"Ah!" my aunt would sigh, "I wish it were time for Eulalie to come. She is really the only person who will be able to tell me."

Eulalie was a limping, energetic, deaf spinster who had 'retired' after the death of Mme. de la Bretonnerie, with whom she had been in service from her childhood, and had then taken a room beside the church, from which she would incessantly emerge, either to attend some service, or, when there was no service, to say a prayer by herself or to give Théodore a hand; the rest of her time she spent in visiting sick persons like my aunt Léonie, to whom she would relate everything that had occurred at mass or vespers. She was not above adding occasional pocket-money to the little income which was found for her by the family of her old employers by going from time to time to look after the Curé's linen, or that of some other person of note in the clerical world of Combray. Above a mantle of black cloth she wore a little white coif that seemed almost to attach her to some Order, and an infirmity of the skin had stained part of her cheeks and her crooked nose the bright red colour of balsam. Her visits were the one great distraction in the life of my aunt Léonie, who now saw hardly anyone else, except the reverend Curé. My aunt had by degrees erased every other visitor's name from her list, because they all committed the fatal error, in her eyes, of falling into one or other of the two categories of people she most detested. One group, the worse of the two, and the one of which she rid herself first, consisted of those who advised her not to take so much care of herself, and preached (even if only negatively and with no outward signs beyond an occasional disapproving silence or doubting smile) the subversive doctrine that a sharp walk in the sun and a good red beefsteak would do her more good (her, who had had two dreadful sips of Vichy water on her stomach for fourteen hours!) than all her medicine bottles and her bed. The other category was

composed of people who appeared to believe that she was more seriously ill than she thought, in fact that she was as seriously ill as she said. And so none of those whom she had allowed upstairs to her room, after considerable hesitation and at Franchise's urgent request, and who in the course of their visit had shewn how unworthy they were of the honour which had been done them by venturing a timid: "Don't you think that if you were just to stir out a little on really fine days...?" or who, on the other hand, when she said to them: "I am very low, very low; nearing the end, dear friends!" had replied: "Ah, yes, when one has no strength left! Still, you may last a while yet"; each party alike might be certain that her doors would never open to them again. And if Françoise was amused by the look of consternation on my aunt's face whenever she saw, from her bed, any of these people in the Rue du Saint-Esprit, who looked as if they were coming to see her, or heard her own door-bell ring, she would laugh far more heartily, as at a clever trick, at my aunt's devices (which never failed) for having them sent away, and at their look of discomfiture when they had to turn back without having seen her; and would be filled with secret admiration for her mistress, whom she felt to be superior to all these other people, inasmuch as she could and did contrive not to see them. In short, my aunt stipulated, at one and the same time, that whoever came to see her must approve of her way of life, commiserate with her in her sufferings, and assure her of an ultimate recovery.

In all this Eulalie excelled. My aunt might say to her twenty times in a minute: "The end is come at last, my poor Eulalie!", twenty times Eulalie would retort with: "Knowing your illness as you do, Mme. Octave, you will live to be a hundred, as Mme. Sazerin said to me only yesterday." For one of Eulalie's most rooted beliefs, and one that the formidable list of corrections which her experience must have compiled was powerless to eradicate, was that Mme. Sazerat's name was really Mme. Sazerin.

"I do not ask to live to a hundred," my aunt would say, for she preferred to have no definite limit fixed to the number of her days.

And since, besides this, Eulalie knew, as no one else knew, how to distract my aunt without tiring her, her visits, which took place regularly every Sunday, unless something unforeseen occurred to prevent them, were for my aunt a pleasure the prospect of which kept her on those days in a state of expectation, appetising enough to begin with, but at once changing to the agony of a hunger too long unsatisfied if Eulalie were a minute late in coming. For, if unduly prolonged, the rapture of waiting for Eulalie became a torture, and my aunt would never cease from looking at the time, and yawning, and complaining of

each of her symptoms in turn. Eulalie's ring, if it sounded from the front door at the very end of the day, when she was no longer expecting it, would almost make her ill. For the fact was that on Sundays she thought of nothing else than this visit, and the moment that our luncheon was ended Françoise would become impatient for us to leave the dining-room so that she might go upstairs to 'occupy' my aunt. But — and this more than ever from the day on which fine weather definitely set in at Combray — the proud hour of noon, descending from the steeple of Saint-Hilaire which it blazoned for a moment with the twelve points of its sonorous crown, would long have echoed about our table, beside the 'holy bread,' which too had come in, after church, in its familiar way; and we would still be found seated in front of our Arabian Nights plates, weighed down by the heat of the day, and even more by our heavy meal. For upon the permanent foundation of eggs, cutlets, potatoes, preserves, and biscuits, whose appearance on the table she no longer announced to us, Françoise would add — as the labour of fields and orchards, the harvest of the tides, the luck of the markets, the kindness of neighbours, and her own genius might provide; and so effectively that our bill of fare, like the quatrefoils that were carved on the porches of cathedrals in the thirteenth century, reflected to some extent the march of the seasons and the incidents of human life — a brill, because the fish-woman had guaranteed its freshness; a turkey, because she had seen a beauty in the market at Roussainville-le-Pin; cardoons with marrow, because she had never done them for us in that way before; a roast leg of mutton, because the fresh air made one hungry and there would be plenty of time for it to 'settle down' in the seven hours before dinner; spinach, by way of a change; apricots, because they were still hard to get; gooseberries, because in another fortnight there would be none left; raspberries, which M. Swann had brought specially; cherries, the first to come from the cherry-tree, which had yielded none for the last two years; a cream cheese, of which in those days I was extremely fond; an almond cake, because she had ordered one the evening before; a fancy loaf, because it was our turn to 'offer' the holy bread. And when all these had been eaten, a work composed expressly for ourselves, but dedicated more particularly to my father, who had a fondness for such things, a cream of chocolate, inspired in the mind, created by the hand of Françoise, would be laid before us, light and fleeting as an 'occasional piece' of music, into which she had poured the whole of her talent. Anyone who refused to partake of it, saying: "No, thank you, I have finished; I am not hungry," would at once have been lowered to the level of the Philistines who, when an artist makes them a present of one of his works,

examine its weight and material, whereas what is of value is the creator's intention and his signature. To have left even the tiniest morsel in the dish would have shewn as much discourtesy as to rise and leave a concert hall while the 'piece' was still being played, and under the composer's-very eyes.

At length my mother would say to me: "Now, don't stay here all day; you can go up to your room if you are too hot outside, but get a little fresh air first; don't start reading immediately after your food."

And I would go and sit down beside the pump and its trough, ornamented here and there, like a gothic font, with a salamander, which modelled upon a background of crumbling stone the quick relief of its slender, allegorical body; on the bench without a back, in the shade of a lilac-tree, in that little corner of the garden which communicated, by a service door, with the Rue du Saint-Esprit, and from whose neglected soil rose, in two stages, an outcrop from the house itself and apparently a separate building, my aunt's back-kitchen. One could see its red-tiled floor gleaming like por-phyry. It seemed not so much the cave of Françoise as a little temple of Venus. It would be overflowing with the offerings of the milkman, the fruiterer, the greengrocer, come sometimes from distant villages to dedicate here the first-fruits of their fields. And its roof was always surmounted by the cooing of a dove.

In earlier days I would not have lingered in the sacred grove which surrounded this temple, for, before going upstairs to read, I would steal into the little sitting-room which my uncle Adolphe, a brother of my grandfather and an old soldier who had retired from the service as a major, used to occupy on the ground floor, a room which, even when its opened windows let in the heat, if not actually the rays of the sun which seldom penetrated so far, would never fail to emit that vague and yet fresh odour, suggesting at once an open-air and an old-fashioned kind of existence, which sets and keeps the nostrils dreaming when one goes into a disused gun-room. But for some years now I had not gone into my uncle Adolphe's room, since he no longer came to Combray on account of a quarrel which had arisen between him and my family, by my fault, and in the following circumstances: Once or twice every month, in Paris, I used to be sent to pay him a. visit, as he was finishing his luncheon, wearing a plain alpaca coat, and waited upon by his servant in a working-jacket of striped linen, purple and white. He would complain that I had not been to see him for a long time; that he was being neglected; he would offer me a marchpane or a tangerine, and we would cross a room in which no one ever sat, whose fire was never lighted, whose walls were picked out with gilded mouldings, its ceiling painted blue in

imitation of the sky, and its furniture upholstered in satin, as at my grandparents', only yellow; then we would enter what he called his 'study,' a room whose walls were hung with prints which shewed, against a dark background, a plump and rosy goddess driving a car, or standing upon a globe, or wearing a star on her brow; pictures which were popular under the Second Empire because there was thought to be something about them that suggested Pompeii, which were then generally despised, and which now people are beginning to collect again for one single and consistent reason (despite any others which they may advance), namely, that they suggest the Second Empire. And there I would stay with my uncle until his man came, with a message from the coachman, to ask him at what time he would like the carriage. My uncle would then be lost in meditation, while his astonished servant stood there, not daring to disturb him by the least movement, wondering and waiting for his answer, which never varied. For in the end, after a supreme crisis of hesitation, my uncle would utter, infallibly, the words: "A quarter past two," which the servant would echo with amazement, but without disputing them: "A quarter past two! Very good, sir... I will go and tell him..."

At this date I was a lover of the theatre: a Platonic lover, of necessity, since my parents had not yet allowed me to enter one, and so incorrect was the picture I drew for myself of the pleasures to be enjoyed there that I almost believed that each of the spectators looked, as into a stereoscope, upon a stage and scenery which existed for himself alone, though closely resembling the thousand other spectacles presented to the rest of the audience individually.

Every morning I would hasten to the Moriss column to see what new plays it announced. Nothing could be more disinterested or happier than the dreams with which these announcements filled my mind, dreams which took their form from the inevitable associations of the words forming the title of the play, and also from the colour of the bills, still damp and wrinkled with paste, on which those words stood out. Nothing, unless it were such strange titles as the *Testament de César Girodot, or Oedipe-Roi*, inscribed not on the green bills of the Opéra-Comique, but on the wine-coloured bills of the Comédie-Française, nothing seemed to me to differ more profoundly from the sparkling white plume of the *Diamants de la Couronne* than the sleek, mysterious satin of the *Domino Noir*; and since my parents had told me that, for my first visit to the theatre, I should have to choose between these two pieces, I would study exhaustively and in turn the title of one and the title of the other (for those were all that I knew of either), attempting to snatch from each a foretaste of the pleasure which it

offered me, and to compare this pleasure with that latent in the other title, until in the end I had shewn myself such vivid, such compelling pictures of, on the one hand, a play of dazzling arrogance, and on the other a gentle, velvety play, that I was as little capable of deciding which play I should prefer to see as if, at the dinner-table, they had obliged me to choose between *rice à l'Impératrice* and the famous cream of chocolate.

All my conversations with my playfellows bore upon actors, whose art, although as yet I had no experience of it, was the first of all its numberless forms in which Art itself allowed me to anticipate its enjoyment. Between one actor's tricks of intonation and inflection and another's, the most trifling differences would strike me as being of an incalculable importance. And from what I had been told of them I would arrange them in the order of their talent in lists which I used to murmur to myself all day long: lists which in the end became petrified in my brain and were a source of annoyance to it, being irremovable.

And later, in my schooldays, whenever I ventured in class, when the master's head was turned, to communicate with some new friend, I would always begin by asking him whether he had begun yet to go to theatres, and if he agreed that our greatest actor was undoubtedly Got, our second Delaunay, and so on. And if, in his judgment, Febvre came below Thiron, or Delaunay below Coquelin, the sudden volatility which the name of Coquelin, forsaking its stony rigidity, would engender in my mind, in which it moved upwards to the second place, the rich vitality with which the name of Delaunay would suddenly be furnished, to enable it to slip down to fourth, would stimulate and fertilise my brain with a sense of bradding and blossoming life.

But if the thought of actors weighed so upon me, if the sight of Maubant, coming out one afternoon from the Théâtre-Français, had plunged me in the throes and sufferings of hopeless love, how much more did the name of a 'star,' blazing outside the doors of a theatre, how much more, seen through the window of a brougham which passed me in the street, the hair over her forehead abloom with roses, did the face of a woman who, I would think, was perhaps an actress, leave with me a lasting disturbance, a futile and painful effort to form a picture of her private life.

I classified, in order of talent, the most distinguished: Sarah Bernhardt, Berma, Bartet, Madeleine Brohan, Jeanne Samary; but I was interested in them all. Now my uncle knew many of them personally, and also ladies of another class, not clearly distinguished from actresses in my mind. He used to entertain them at his house. And if we went to see him on certain days only, that was

because on the other days ladies might come whom his family could not very well have met. So we at least thought; as for my uncle, his fatal readiness to pay pretty widows (who had perhaps never been married) and countesses (whose high-sounding titles were probably no more than *noms de guerre*) the compliment of presenting them to my grandmother or even of presenting to them some of our family jewels, had already embroiled him more than once with my grandfather. Often, if the name of some actress were mentioned in conversation, I would hear my father say, with a smile, to my mother: “One of your uncle’s friends,” and I would think of the weary novitiate through which, perhaps for years on end, a grown man, even a man of real importance, might have to pass, waiting on the doorstep of some such lady, while she refused to answer his letters and made her hall-porter drive him away; and imagine that my uncle was able to dispense a little jackanapes like myself from all these sufferings by introducing me in his own home to the actress, unapproachable by all the world, but for him an intimate friend.

And so — on the pretext that some lesson, the hour of which had been altered, now came at such an awkward time that it had already more than once prevented me, and would continue to prevent me, from seeing my uncle — one day, not one of the days which he set apart for our visits, I took advantage of the fact that my parents had had luncheon earlier than usual; I slipped out and, instead of going to read the playbills on their column, for which purpose I was allowed to go out unaccompanied, I ran all the way to his house. I noticed before his door a carriage and pair, with red carnations on the horses’ blinkers and in the coachman’s buttonhole. As I climbed the staircase I could hear laughter and a woman’s voice, and, as soon as I had rung, silence and the sound of shutting doors. The man-servant who let me in appeared embarrassed, and said that my uncle was extremely busy and probably could not see me; he went in, however, to announce my arrival, and the same voice I had heard before said: “Oh, yes! Do let him come in; just for a moment; it will be so amusing. Is that his photograph there, on your desk? And his mother (your niece, isn’t she?) beside it? The image of her, isn’t he? I should so like to see the little chap, just for a second.”

I could hear my uncle grumbling and growing angry; finally the manservant told me to come in.

On the table was the same plate of marchpanes that was always there; my uncle wore the same alapca coat as on other days; but opposite to him, in a pink silk dress with a great necklace of pearls about her throat, sat a young woman

who was just finishing a tangerine. My uncertainty whether I ought to address her as Madame or Mademoiselle made me blush, and not daring to look too much in her direction, in case I should be obliged to speak to her, I hurried across to kiss my uncle. She looked at me and smiled; my uncle said “My nephew!” without telling her my name or telling me hers, doubtless because, since his difficulties with my grandfather, he had endeavoured as far as possible to avoid any association of his family with this other class of acquaintance.

“How like his mother he is,” said the lady.

“But you have never seen my niece, except in photographs,” my uncle broke in quickly, with a note of anger.

“I beg your pardon, dear friend, I passed her on the staircase last year when you were so ill. It is true I only saw her for a moment, and your staircase is rather dark; but I saw well enough to see how lovely she was. This young gentleman has her beautiful eyes, and also this,” she went on, tracing a line with one finger across the lower part of her forehead. “Tell me,” she asked my uncle, “is your niece Mme. ——; is her name the same as yours?”

“He takes most after his father,” muttered my uncle, who was no more anxious to effect an introduction by proxy, in repeating Mamma’s name aloud, than to bring the two together in the flesh. “He’s his father all over, and also like my poor mother.”

“I have not met his father, dear,” said the lady in pink, bowing her head slightly, “and I never saw your poor mother. You will remember it was just after your great sorrow that we got to know one another.”

I felt somewhat disillusioned, for this young lady was in no way different from other pretty women whom I had seen from time to time at home, especially the daughter of one of our cousins, to whose house I went every New Year’s Day. Only better dressed; otherwise my uncle’s friend had the same quick and kindly glance, the same frank and friendly manner. I could find no trace in her of the theatrical appearance which I admired in photographs of actresses, nothing of the diabolical expression which would have been in keeping with the life she must lead. I had difficulty in believing that this was one of ‘those women,’ and certainly I should never have believed her one of the ‘smart ones’ had I not seen the carriage and pair, the pink dress, the pearly necklace, had I not been aware, too, that my uncle knew only the very best of them. But I asked myself how the millionaire who gave her her carriage and her flat and her jewels could find any pleasure in flinging his money away upon a woman who had so simple and respectable an appearance. And yet, when I thought of what her life must be like,

its immorality disturbed me more, perhaps, than if it had stood before me in some concrete and recognisable form, by its secrecy and invisibility, like the plot of a novel, the hidden truth of a scandal which had driven out of the home of her middle-class parents and dedicated to the service of all mankind which had brought to the flowering-point of her beauty, had raised to fame or notoriety this woman, the play of whose features, the intonations of whose voice, like so many others I already knew, made me regard her, in spite of myself, as a young lady of good family, her who was no longer of a family at all.

We had gone by this time into the 'study,' and my uncle, who seemed a trifle embarrassed by my presence, offered her a cigarette.

"No, thank you, dear friend," she said. "You know I only smoke the ones the Grand Duke sends me. I tell him that they make you jealous." And she drew from a case cigarettes covered with inscriptions in gold, in a foreign language. "Why, yes," she began again suddenly. "Of course I have met this young man's father with you. Isn't he your nephew? How on earth could I have forgotten? He was so nice, so charming to me," she went on, modestly and with feeling. But when I thought to myself what must actually have been the rude greeting (which, she made out, had been so charming), I, who knew my father's coldness and reserve, was shocked, as though at some indelicacy on his part, at the contrast between the excessive recognition bestowed on it and his never adequate geniality. It has since struck me as one of the most touching aspects of the part played in life by these idle, painstaking women that they devote all their generosity, all their talent, their transferable dreams of sentimental beauty (for, like all artists, they never seek to realise the value of those dreams, or to enclose them in the four-square frame of everyday life), and their gold, which counts for little, to the fashioning of a fine and precious setting for the rubbed and scratched and ill-polished lives of men. And just as this one filled the smoking-room, where my uncle was entertaining her in his alpaca coat, with her charming person, her dress of pink silk, her pearls, and the refinement suggested by intimacy with a Grand Duke, so, in the same way, she had taken some casual remark by my father, had worked it up delicately, given it a 'turn,' a precious title, set in it the gem of a glance from her own eyes, a gem of the first water, blended of humility and gratitude; and so had given it back transformed into a jewel, a work of art, into something altogether charming.

"Look here, my boy, it is time you went away," said my uncle.

I rose; I could scarcely resist a desire to kiss the hand of the lady in pink, but I felt that to do so would require as much audacity as a forcible abduction of her.

My heart beat loud while I counted out to myself “Shall I do it, shall I not?” and then I ceased to ask myself what I ought to do so as at least to do something. Blindly, hotly, madly, flinging aside all the reasons I had just found to support such action, I seized and raised to my lips the hand she held out to me.

“Isn’t he delicious! Quite a ladies’ man already; he takes after his uncle. He’ll be a perfect ‘gentleman,’” she went on, setting her teeth so as to give the word a kind of English accentuation. “Couldn’t he come to me some day for ‘a cup of tea,’ as our friends across the channel say; he need only send me a ‘blue’ in the morning?”

I had not the least idea of what a ‘blue’ might be. I did not understand half the words which the lady used, but my fear lest there should be concealed in them some question which it would be impolite in me not to answer kept me from withdrawing my close attention from them, and I was beginning to feel extremely tired.

“No, no; it is impossible,” said my uncle, shrugging his shoulders. “He is kept busy at home all day; he has plenty of work to do. He brings back all the prizes from his school,” he added in a lower tone, so that I should not hear this falsehood and interrupt with a contradiction. “You can’t tell; he may turn out a little Victor Hugo, a kind of Vaulabelle, don’t you know.”

“Oh, I love artistic people,” replied the lady in pink; “there is no one like them for understanding women. Them, and really nice men like yourself. But please forgive my ignorance. Who, what is Vaulabelle? Is it those gilt books in the little glass case in your drawing-room? You know you promised to lend them to me; I will take great care of them.”

My uncle, who hated lending people books, said nothing, and ushered me out into the hall. Madly in love with the lady in pink, I covered my old uncle’s tobacco-stained cheeks with passionate kisses, and while he, awkwardly enough, gave me to understand (without actually saying) that he would rather I did not tell my parents about this visit, I assured him, with tears in my eyes, that his kindness had made so strong an impression upon me that some day I would most certainly find a way of expressing my gratitude. So strong an impression had it made upon me that two hours later, after a string of mysterious utterances which did not strike me as giving my parents a sufficiently clear idea of the new importance with which I had been invested, I found it simpler to let them have a full account, omitting no detail, of the visit I had paid that afternoon. In doing this I had no thought of causing my uncle any unpleasantness. How could I have thought such a thing, since I did not wish it? And I could not suppose that my

parents would see any harm in a visit in which I myself saw none. Every day of our lives does not some friend or other ask us to make his apologies, without fail, to some woman to whom he has been prevented from writing; and do not we forget to do so, feeling that this woman cannot attach much importance to a silence which has none for ourselves? I imagined, like everyone else, that the brains of other people were lifeless and submissive receptacles with no power of specific reaction to any stimulus which might be applied to them; and I had not the least doubt that when I deposited in the minds of my parents the news of the acquaintance I had made at my uncle's I should at the same time transmit to them the kindly judgment I myself had based on the introduction. Unfortunately my parents had recourse to principles entirely different from those which I suggested they should adopt when they came to form their estimate of my uncle's conduct. My father and grandfather had 'words' with him of a violent order; as I learned indirectly. A few days later, passing my uncle in the street as he drove by in an open carriage, Î felt at once all the grief, the gratitude, the remorse which I should have liked to convey to him. Beside the immensity of these emotions I considered the merely to raise my hat to him would be incongruous and petty, and might make him think that I regarded myself as bound to shew him no more than the commonest form of courtesy. I decided to abstain from so inadéquate a gesture, and turned my head away. My uncle thought that, in doing so I was obeying my parents' orders; he never forgave them; and though he did not die until many years later, not one of us ever set eyes on him again.

And so I no longer used to go into the little sitting-room (now kept shut) of my uncle Adolphe; instead, after hanging about on the outskirts of the back-kitchen until Françoise appeared on its threshold and announced: "I am going to let the kitchen-maid serve the coffee and take up the hot water; it is time I went off to Mme. Octave," I would then decide to go indoors, and would go straight upstairs to my room to read. The kitchen-maid was an abstract personality, a permanent institution to which an invariable set of attributes assured a sort of fixity and continuity and identity throughout the long series of transitory human shapes in which that personality was incarnate; for we never found the same girl there two years running. In the year in which we ate such quantities of asparagus, the kitchen-maid whose duty it was to dress them was a poor sickly creature, some way 'gone' in pregnancy when we arrived at Com-bray for Easter, and it was indeed surprising that Françoise allowed her to run so many errands in the town and to do so much work in the house, for she was beginning

to find a difficulty in bearing before her the mysterious casket, fuller and larger every day, whose splendid outline could be detected through the folds of her ample smocks. These last recalled the cloaks in which Giotto shrouds some of the allegorical figures in his paintings, of which M. Swann had given me photographs. He it was who pointed out the resemblance, and when he inquired after the kitchen-maid he would say: “Well, how goes it with Giotto’s Charity?” And indeed the poor girl, whose pregnancy had swelled and stoutened every part of her, even to her face, and the vertical, squared outlines of her cheeks, did distinctly suggest those virgins, so strong and mannish as to seem matrons rather, in whom the Virtues are personified in the Arena Chapel. And I can see now that those Virtues and Vices of Padua resembled her in another respect as well. For just as the figure of this girl had been enlarged by the additional symbol which she carried in her body, without appearing to understand what it meant, without any rendering in her facial expression of all its beauty and spiritual significance, but carried as if it were an ordinary and rather heavy burden, so it is without any apparent suspicion of what she is about that the powerfully built housewife who is portrayed in the Arena beneath the label ‘Caritas,’ and a reproduction of whose portrait hung upon the wall of my schoolroom at Combray, incarnates that virtue, for it seems impossible, that any thought of charity can ever have found expression in her vulgar and energetic face. By a fine stroke of the painter’s invention she is tumbling all the treasures of the earth at her feet, but exactly as if she were treading grapes in a wine-press to extract their juice, or, still more, as if she had climbed on a heap of sacks to raise herself higher; and she is holding out her flaming heart to God, or shall we say ‘handing’ it to Him, exactly as a cook might hand up a corkscrew through the skylight of her underground kitchen to some one who had called down to ask her for it from the ground-level above. The ‘Invidia,’ again, should have had some look on her face of envy. But in this fresco, too, the symbol occupies so large a place and is represented with such realism; the serpent hissing between the lips of Envy is so huge, and so completely fills her wide-opened mouth that the muscles of her face are strained and contorted, like a child’s who is filling a balloon with his breath, and that Envy, and we ourselves for that matter, when we look at her, since all her attention and ours are concentrated on the action of her lips, have no time, almost, to spare for envious thoughts.

Despite all the admiration that M. Swann might profess for these figures of Giotto, it was a long time before I could find any pleasure in seeing in our schoolroom (where the copies he had brought me were hung) that Charity devoid

of charity, that Envy who looked like nothing so much as a plate in some medical book, illustrating the compression of the glottis or uvula by a tumour in the tongue, or by the introduction of the operator's instrument, a Justice whose greyish and meanly regular features were the very same as those which adorned the faces of certain good and pious and slightly withered ladies of Combray whom I used to see at mass, many of whom had long been enrolled in the reserve forces of Injustice. But in later years I understood that the arresting strangeness, the special beauty of these frescoes lay in the great part played in each of them by its symbols, while the fact that these were depicted, not as symbols (for the thought symbolised was nowhere expressed), but as real things, actually felt or materially handled, added something more precise and more literal to their meaning, something more concrete and more striking to the lesson they imparted. And even in the case of the poor kitchen-maid, was not our attention incessantly drawn to her belly by the load which filled it; and in the same way, again, are not the thoughts of men and women in the agony of death often turned towards the practical, painful, obscure, internal, intestinal aspect, towards that 'seamy side' of death which is, as it happens, the side that death actually presents to them and forces them to feel, a side which far more closely resembles a crushing burden, a difficulty in breathing, a destroying thirst, than the abstract idea to which we are accustomed to give the name of Death?

There must have been a strong element of reality in those Virtues and Vices of Padua, since they appeared to me to be as much alive as the pregnant servant-girl, while she herself appeared scarcely less allegorical than they. And, quite possibly, this lack (or seeming lack) of participation by a person's soul in the significant marks of its own special virtue has, apart from its aesthetic meaning, a reality which, if not strictly psychological, may at least be called physiognomical. Later on, when, in the course of my life, I have had occasion to meet with, in convents for instance, literally saintly examples of practical charity, they have generally had the brisk, decided, undisturbed, and slightly brutal air of a busy surgeon, the face in which one can discern no commiseration, no tenderness at the sight of suffering humanity, and no fear of hurting it, the face devoid of gentleness or sympathy, the sublime face of true goodness.

Then while the kitchen-maid — who, all unawares, made the superior qualities of Françoise shine with added lustre, just as Error, by force of contrast, enhances the triumph of Truth — took in coffee which (according to Mamma) was nothing more than hot water, and then carried up to our rooms hot water which was barely tepid, I would be lying stretched out on my bed, a book in my

hand, in my room which trembled with the effort to defend its frail, transparent coolness against the afternoon sun, behind its almost closed shutters through which, however, a reflection of the sunlight had contrived to slip in on its golden wings, remaining motionless, between glass and woodwork, in a corner, like a butterfly poised upon a flower. It was hardly light enough for me to read, and my feeling of the day's brightness and splendour was derived solely from the blows struck down below, in the Rue de la Curé, by Camus (whom Françoise had assured that my aunt was not 'resting' and that he might therefore make a noise), upon some old packing-cases from which nothing would really be sent flying but the dust, though the din of them, in the resonant atmosphere that accompanies hot weather, seemed to scatter broadcast a rain of blood-red stars; and from the flies who performed for my benefit, in their small concert, as it might be the chamber music of summer; evoking heat and light quite differently from an air of human music which, if you happen to have heard it during a fine summer, will always bring that summer back to your mind, the flies' music is bound to the season by a closer, a more vital tie — born of sunny days, and not to be reborn but with them, containing something of their essential nature, it not merely calls up their image in our memory, but gives us a guarantee that they do really exist, that they are close around us, immediately accessible.

This dim freshness of my room was to the broad daylight of the street what the shadow is to the sunbeam, that is to say, equally luminous, and presented to my imagination the entire panorama of summer, which my senses, if I had been out walking, could have tasted and enjoyed in fragments only; and so was quite in harmony with my state of repose, which (thanks to the adventures related in my books, which had just excited it) bore, like a hand reposing motionless in a stream of running water, the shock and animation of a torrent of activity and life.

But my grandmother, even if the weather, after growing too hot, had broken, and a storm, or just a shower, had burst over us, would come up and beg me to go outside. And as I did not wish to leave off my book, I would go on with it in the garden, under the chestnut-tree, in a little sentry-box of canvas and matting, in the farthest recesses of which I used to sit and feel that I was hidden from the eyes of anyone who might be coming to call upon the family.

And then my thoughts, did not they form a similar sort of hiding-hole, in the depths of which I felt that I could bury myself and remain invisible even when I was looking at what went on outside? When I saw any external object, my consciousness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, enclosing it in a slender, incorporeal outline which prevented me from ever coming directly

in contact with the material form; for it would volatilise itself in some way before I could touch it, just as an incandescent body which is moved towards something wet never actually touches moisture, since it is always preceded, itself, by a zone of evaporation. Upon the sort of screen, patterned with different states and impressions, which my consciousness would quietly unfold while I was reading, and which ranged from the most deeply hidden aspirations of my heart to the wholly external view of the horizon spread out before my eyes at the foot of the garden, what was from the first the most permanent and the most intimate part of me, the lever whose incessant movements controlled all the rest, was my belief in the philosophic richness and beauty of the book I was reading, and my desire to appropriate these to myself, whatever the book might be. For even if I had purchased it at Combray, having seen it outside Borange's, whose grocery lay too far from our house for Françoise to be able to deal there, as she did with Camus, but who enjoyed better custom as a stationer and bookseller; even if I had seen it, tied with string to keep it in its place in the mosaic of monthly parts and pamphlets which adorned either side of his doorway, a doorway more mysterious, more teeming with suggestion than that of a cathedral, I should have noticed and bought it there simply because I had recognised it as a book which had been well spoken of, in my hearing, by the school-master or the school-friend who, at that particular time, seemed to me to be entrusted with the secret of Truth and Beauty, things half-felt by me, half-incomprehensible, the full understanding of which was the vague but permanent object of my thoughts.

Next to this central belief, which, while I was reading, would be constantly a motion from my inner self to the outer world, towards the discovery of Truth, came the emotions aroused in me by the action in which I would be taking part, for these afternoons were crammed with more dramatic and sensational events than occur, often, in a whole lifetime. These were the events which took place in the book I was reading. It is true that the people concerned in them were not what Françoise would have called 'real people.' But none of the feelings which the joys or misfortunes of a 'real' person awaken in us can be awakened except through a mental picture of those joys or misfortunes; and the ingenuity of the first novelist lay in his understanding that, as the picture was the one essential element in the complicated structure of our emotions, so that simplification of it which consisted in the suppression, pure and simple, of 'real' people would be a decided improvement. A'real' person, profoundly as we may sympathise with him, is in a great measure perceptible only through our senses, that is to say, he

remains opaque, offers a dead weight which our sensibilities have not the strength to lift. If some misfortune comes to him, it is only in one small section of the complete idea we have of him that we are capable of feeling any emotion; indeed it is only in one small section of the complete idea he has of himself that he is capable of feeling any emotion either. The novelist's happy discovery was to think of substituting for those opaque sections, impenetrable by the human spirit, their equivalent in immaterial sections, things, that is, which the spirit can assimilate to itself. After which it matters not that the actions, the feelings of this new order of creatures appear to us in the guise of truth, since we have made them our own, since it is in ourselves that they are happening, that they are holding in thrall, while we turn over, feverishly, the pages of the book, our quickened breath and staring eyes. And once the novelist has brought us to that state, in which, as in all purely mental states, every emotion is multiplied ten-fold, into which his book comes to disturb us as might a dream, but a dream more lucid, and of a more lasting impression than those which come to us in sleep; why, then, for the space of an hour he sets free within us all the joys and sorrows in the world, a few of which, only, we should have to spend years of our actual life in getting to know, and the keenest, the most intense of which would never have been revealed to us because the slow course of their development stops our perception of them. It is the same in life; the heart changes, and that is our worst misfortune; but we learn of it only from reading or by imagination; for in reality its alteration, like that of certain natural phenomena, is so gradual that, even if we are able to distinguish, successively, each of its different states, we are still spared the actual sensation of change.

Next to, but distinctly less intimate a part of myself than this human element, would come the view, more or less projected before my eyes, of the country in which the action of the story was taking place, which made a far stronger impression on my mind than the other, the actual landscape which would meet my eyes when I raised them from my book. In this way, for two consecutive summers I used to sit in the heat of our Com-bray garden, sick with a longing inspired by the book I was then reading for a land of mountains and rivers, where I could see an endless vista of sawmills, where beneath the limpid currents fragments of wood lay mouldering in beds of watercress; and nearby, rambling and clustering along low walls, purple flowers and red. And since there was always lurking in my mind the dream of a woman who would enrich me with her love, that dream in those two summers used to be quickened with the freshness and coolness of running water; and whoever she might be, the woman

whose image I called to mind, purple flowers and red would at once spring up on either side of her like complementary colours.

This was not only because an image of which we dream remains for ever distinguished, is adorned and enriched by the association of colours not its own which may happen to surround it in our mental picture; for the scenes in the books I read were to me not merely scenery more vividly portrayed by my imagination than any which Combray could spread before my eyes but otherwise of the same kind. Because of the selection that the author had made of them, because of the spirit of faith in which my mind would exceed and anticipate his printed word, as it might be interpreting a revelation, these scenes used to give me the impression — one which I hardly ever derived from any place in which I might happen to be, and never from our garden, that undistinguished product of the strictly conventional fantasy of the gardener whom my grandmother so despised — of their being actually part of Nature herself, and worthy to be studied and explored.

Had my parents allowed me, when I read a book, to pay a visit to the country it described, I should have felt that I was making an enormous advance towards the ultimate conquest of truth. For even if we have the sensation of being always enveloped in, surrounded by our own soul, still it does not seem a fixed and immovable prison; rather do we seem to be borne away with it, and perpetually struggling to pass beyond it, to break out into the world, with a perpetual discouragement as we hear endlessly, all around us, that unvarying sound which is no echo from without, but the resonance of a vibration from within. We try to discover in things, endeared to us on that account, the spiritual glamour which we ourselves have cast upon them; we are disillusioned, and learn that they are in themselves barren and devoid of the charm which they owed, in our minds, to the association of certain ideas; sometimes we mobilise all our spiritual forces in a glittering array so as to influence and subjugate other human beings who, as we very well know, are situated outside ourselves, where we can never reach them. And so, if I always imagined the woman I loved as in a setting of whatever places I most longed, at the time, to visit; if in my secret longings it was she who attracted me to them, who opened to me the gate of an unknown world, that was not by the mere hazard of a simple association of thoughts; no, it was because my dreams of travel and of love were only moments — which I isolate artificially to-day as though I were cutting sections, at different heights, in a jet of water, rainbow-flashing but seemingly without flow or motion — were only drops in a single, undeviat-ing, irresistible outrush of all

the forces of my life.

And then, as I continue to trace the outward course of these impressions from their close-packed intimate source in my consciousness, and before I come to the horizon of reality which envelops them, I discover pleasures of another kind, those of being comfortably seated, of tasting the good scent on the air, of not being disturbed by any visitor; and, when an hour chimed from the steeple of Saint-Hilaire, of watching what was already spent of the afternoon fall drop by drop until I heard the last stroke which enabled me to add up the total sum, after which the silence that followed seemed to herald the beginning, in the blue sky above me, of that long part of the day still allowed me for reading, until the good dinner which Françoise was even now preparing should come to strengthen and refresh me after the strenuous pursuit of its hero through the pages of my book. And, as each hour struck, it would seem to me that a few seconds only had passed since the hour before; the latest would inscribe itself, close to its predecessor, on the sky's surface, and I would be unable to believe that sixty minutes could be squeezed into the tiny arc of blue which was comprised between their two golden figures. Sometimes it would even happen that this precocious hour would sound two strokes more than the last; there must then have been an hour which I had not heard strike; something which had taken place had not taken place for me; the fascination of my book, a magic as potent as the deepest slumber, had stopped my enchanted ears and had obliterated the sound of that golden bell from the azure surface of the enveloping silence. Sweet Sunday afternoons beneath the chestnut-tree in our Combray garden, from which I was careful to eliminate every commonplace incident of my actual life, replacing them by a career of strange adventures and ambitions in a land watered by living streams, you still recall those adventures and ambitions to my mind when I think of you, and you embody and preserve them by virtue of having little by little drawn round and enclosed them (while I went on with my book and the heat of the day declined) in the gradual crystallisation, slowly altering in form and dappled with a pattern of chestnut-leaves, of your silent, sonorous, fragrant, limpid hours.

Sometimes I would be torn from my book, in the middle of the afternoon, by the gardener's daughter, who came running like a mad thing, overturning an orange-tree in its tub, cutting a finger, breaking a tooth, and screaming out "They're coming, they're coming!" so that Françoise and I should run too and not miss anything of the show. That was on days when the cavalry stationed in Combray went out for some military exercise, going as a rule by the Rue Sainte-

Hildegarde. While our servants, sitting in a row on their chairs outside the garden railings, stared at the people of Combray taking their Sunday walks and were stared at in return, the gardener's daughter, through the gap which there was between two houses far away in the Avenue de la Gare, would have spied the glitter of helmets. The servants then hurried in with their chairs, for when the troopers filed through the Rue Sainte-Hildegarde they filled it from side to side, and their jostling horses scraped against the walls of the houses, covering and drowning the pavements like banks which present too narrow a channel to a river in flood.

"Poor children," Françoise would exclaim, in tears almost before she had reached the railings; "poor boys, to be mown down like grass in a meadow. It's just shocking to think of," she would go on, laying a hand over her heart, where presumably she had felt the shock.

"A fine sight, isn't it, Mme. Françoise, all these young fellows not caring two straws for their lives?" the gardener would ask, just to 'draw' her. And he would not have spoken in vain.

"Not caring for their lives, is it? Why, what in the world is there that we should care for if it's not our lives, the only gift the Lord never offers us a second time? Oh dear, oh dear; you're right all the same; it's quite true, they don't care! I can remember them in '70; in those wretched wars they've no fear of death left in them; they're nothing more nor less than madmen; and then they aren't worth the price of a rope to hang them with; they're not men any more, they're lions." For by her way of thinking, to compare a man with a lion, which she used to pronounce 'lie-on,' was not at all complimentary to the man.

The Rue Sainte-Hildegarde turned too sharply for us to be able to see people approaching at any distance, and it was only through the gap between those two houses in the Avenue de la Gare that we could still make out fresh helmets racing along towards us, and flashing in the sunlight. The gardener wanted to know whether there were still many to come, and he was thirsty besides, with the sun beating down upon his head. So then, suddenly, his daughter would leap out, as though from a beleaguered city, would make a sortie, turn the street corner, and, having risked her life a hundred times over, reappear and bring us, with a jug of liquorice-water, the news that there were still at least a thousand of them, pouring along without a break from the direction of Thiberzy and Méséglise. Françoise and the gardener, having 'made up' their difference, would discuss the line to be followed in case of war.

"Don't you see, Françoise," he would say. "Revolution would be better,

because then no one would need to join in unless he liked."

"Oh, yes, I can see that, certainly; it's more straightforward."

The gardener believed that, as soon as war was declared, they would stop all the railways.

"Yes, to be sure; so that we sha'n't get away," said Françoise.

And the gardener would assent, with "Ay, they're the cunning ones," for he would not allow that war was anything but a kind of trick which the state attempted to play on the people, or that there was a man in the world who would not run away from it if he had the chance to do so.

But Françoise would hasten back to my aunt, and I would return to my book, and the servants would take their places again outside the gate to watch the dust settle on the pavement, and the excitement caused by the passage of the soldiers subside. Long after order had been restored, an abnormal tide of humanity would continue to darken the streets of Corn-bray. And in front of every house, even of those where it was not, as a rule, 'done,' the servants, and sometimes even the masters would sit and stare, festooning their doorsteps with a dark, irregular fringe, like the border of shells and sea-weed which a stronger tide than usual leaves on the beach, as though trimming it with embroidered crape, when the sea itself has retreated.

Except on such days as these, however, I would as a rule be left to read in peace. But the interruption which a visit from Swann once made, and the commentary which he then supplied to the course of my reading, which had brought me to the work of an author quite new to me, called Bergotte, had this definite result that for a long time afterwards it was not against a wall gay with spikes of purple blossom, but on a wholly different background, the porch of a gothic cathedral, that I would see outlined the figure of one of the women of whom I dreamed.

I had heard Bergotte spoken of, for the first time, by a friend older than myself, for whom I had a strong admiration, a precious youth of the name of Bloch. Hearing me confess my love of the *Nuit d'Octobre*, he had burst out in a bray of laughter, like a bugle-call, and told me, by way of warning: "You must conquer your vile taste for A. de Musset, Esquire. He is a bad egg, one of the very worst, a pretty detestable specimen. I am bound to admit, natheless," he added graciously, "that he, and even the man Racine, did, each of them, once in his life, compose a line which is not only fairly rhythmical, but has also what is in my eyes the supreme merit of meaning absolutely nothing. One is

La blanche Oloossone et la blanche Camire,

and the other

La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë.

They were submitted to my judgment, as evidence for the defence of the two runagates, in an article by my very dear master Father Lecomte, who is found pleasing in the sight of the immortal gods. By which token, here is a book which I have not the time, just now, to read, a book recommended, it would seem, by that colossal fellow. He regards, or so they tell me, its author, one Bergotte, Esquire, as a subtle scribe, more subtle, indeed, than any beast of the field; and, albeit he exhibits on occasion a critical pacifism, a tenderness in suffering fools, for which it is impossible to account, and hard to make allowance, still his word has weight with me as it were the Delphic Oracle. Read you then this lyrical prose, and, if the Titanic master-builder of rhythm who composed *Bhagavat* and the *Lévrier de Magnus* speaks not falsely, then, by Apollo, you may taste, even you, my master, the ambrosial joys of Olympus." It was in an ostensible vein of sarcasm that he had asked me to call him, and that he himself called me, "my master." But, as a matter of fact, we each derived a certain amount of satisfaction from the mannerism, being still at the age in which one believes that one gives a thing real existence by giving it a name.

Unfortunately I was not able to set at rest, by further talks with Bloch, in which I might have insisted upon an explanation, the doubts he had engendered in me when he told me that fine lines of poetry (from which I, if you please, expected nothing less than the revelation of truth itself) were all the finer if they meant absolutely nothing. For, as it happened, Bloch was not invited to the house again. At first, he had been well received there. It is true that my grandfather made out that, whenever I formed a strong attachment to any one of my friends and brought him home with me, that friend was invariably a Jew; to which he would not have objected on principle — indeed his own friend Swann was of Jewish extraction — had he not found that the Jews whom I chose as friends were not usually of the best type. And so I was hardly ever able to bring a new friend home without my grandfather's humming the "O, God of our fathers" from *La Juive*, or else "Israel, break thy chain," singing the tune alone, of course, to an "um-ti-tum-ti-tum, tra-la"; but I used to be afraid of my friend's recognising the sound, and so being able to reconstruct the words.

Before seeing them, merely on hearing their names, about which, as often as not, there was nothing particularly Hebraic, he would divine not only the Jewish origin of such of my friends as might indeed be of the chosen people, but even some dark secret which was hidden in their family.

"And what do they call your friend who is coming this evening?"

"Dumont, grandpapa."

"Dumont! Oh, I'm frightened of Dumont."

And he would sing:

Archers, be on your guard!
Watch without rest, without sound,

and then, after a few adroit questions on points of detail, he would call out "On guard! on guard," or, if it were the victim himself who had already arrived, and had been obliged, unconsciously, by my grandfather's subtle examination, to admit his origin, then my grandfather, to shew us that he had no longer any doubts, would merely look at us, humming almost inaudibly the air of

What! do you hither guide the feet
Of this timid Israelite?

or of

Sweet vale of Hebron, dear paternal fields,

or, perhaps, of

Yes, I am of the chosen race.

These little eccentricities on my grandfather's part implied no ill-will whatsoever towards my friends. But Bloch had displeased my family for other reasons. He had begun by annoying my father, who, seeing him come in with wet clothes, had asked him with keen interest:

"Why, M. Bloch, is there a change in the weather; has it been raining? I can't understand it; the barometer has been 'set fair.'"

Which drew from Bloch nothing more instructive than "Sir, I am absolutely incapable of telling you whether it has rained. I live so resolutely apart from

physical contingencies that my senses no longer trouble to inform me of them."

"My poor boy," said my father after Bloch had gone, "your friend is out of his mind. Why, he couldn't even tell me what the weather was like. As if there could be anything more interesting! He is an imbecile."

Next, Bloch had displeased my grandmother because, after luncheon, when she complained of not feeling very well, he had stifled a sob and wiped the tears from his eyes.

"You cannot imagine that he is sincere," she observed to me. "Why he doesn't know me. Unless he's mad, of course."

And finally he had upset the whole household when he arrived an hour and a half late for luncheon and covered with mud from head to foot, and made not the least apology, saying merely: "I never allow myself to be influenced in the smallest degree either by atmospheric disturbances or by the arbitrary divisions of what is known as Time. I would willingly reintroduce to society the opium pipe of China or the Malayan kriss, but I am wholly and entirely without instruction in those infinitely more pernicious (besides being quite bleakly bourgeois) implements, the umbrella and the watch."

In spite of all this he would still have been received at Combray. He was, of course, hardly the friend my parents would have chosen for me; they had, in the end, decided that the tears which he had shed on hearing of my grandmother's illness were genuine enough; but they knew, either instinctively or from their own experience, that our early impulsive emotions have but little influence over our later actions and the conduct of our lives; and that regard for moral obligations, loyalty to our friends, patience in finishing our work, obedience to a rule of life, have a surer foundation in habits solidly formed and blindly followed than in these momentary transports, ardent but sterile. They would have preferred to Bloch, as companions for myself, boys who would have given me no more than it is proper, by all the laws of middle-class morality, for boys to give one another, who would not unexpectedly send me a basket of fruit because they happened, that morning, to have thought of me with affection, but who, since they were incapable of inclining in my favour, by any single impulse of their imagination and emotions, the exact balance of the duties and claims of friendship, were as incapable of loading the scales to my prejudice. Even the injuries we do them will not easily divert from the path of their duty towards us those conventional natures of which my great-aunt furnished a type: who, after quarrelling for years with a niece, to whom she never spoke again, yet made no change in the will in which she had left that niece the whole of her fortune,

because she was her next-of-kin, and it was the ‘proper thing’ to do.

But I was fond of Bloch; my parents wished me to be happy; and the insoluble problems which I set myself on such texts as the ‘absolutely meaningless’ beauty of *La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë* tired me more and made me more unwell than I should have been after further talks with him, unwholesome as those talks might seem to my mother’s mind. And he would still have been received at Combray but for one thing. That same night, after dinner, having informed me (a piece of news which had a great influence on my later life, making it happier at one time and then more unhappy) that no woman ever thought of anything but love, and that there was not one of them whose resistance a man could not overcome, he had gone on to assure me that he had heard it said on unimpeachable authority that my great-aunt herself had led a ‘gay’ life in her younger days, and had been notoriously ‘kept.’ I could not refrain from passing on so important a piece of information to my parents; the next time Bloch called he was not admitted, and afterwards, when I met him in the street, he greeted me with extreme coldness.

But in the matter of Bergotte he had spoken truly.

For the first few days, like a tune which will be running in one’s head and maddening one soon enough, but of which one has not for the moment ‘got hold,’ the things I was to love so passionately in Bergotte’s style had not yet caught my eye. I could not, it is true, lay down the novel of his which I was reading, but I fancied that I was interested in the story alone, as in the first dawn of love, when we go every day to meet a woman at some party or entertainment by the charm of which we imagine it is that we are attracted. Then I observed the rare, almost archaic phrases which he liked to employ at certain points, where a hidden flow of harmony, a prelude contained and concealed in the work itself would animate and elevate his style; and it was at such points as these, too, that he would begin to speak of the “vain dream of life,” of the “inexhaustible torrent of fair forms,” of the “sterile, splendid torture of understanding and loving,” of the “moving effigies which ennoble for all time the charming and venerable fronts of our cathedrals”; that he would express a whole system of philosophy, new to me, by the use of marvellous imagery, to the inspiration of which I would naturally have ascribed that sound of harping which began to chime and echo in my ears, an accompaniment to which that imagery added something ethereal and sublime. One of these passages of Bergotte, the third or fourth which I had detached from the rest, filled me with a joy to which the meagre joy I had tasted in the first passage bore no comparison, a joy which I felt myself to have

experienced in some innermost chamber of my soul, deep, undivided, vast, from which all obstructions and partitions seemed to have been swept away. For what had happened was that, while I recognised in this passage the same taste for uncommon phrases, the same bursts of music, the same idealist philosophy which had been present in the earlier passages without my having taken them into account as the source of my pleasure, I now no longer had the impression of being confronted by a particular passage in one of Bergotte's works, which traced a purely bi-dimensional figure in outline upon the surface of my mind, but rather of the 'ideal passage' of Bergotte, common to every one of his books, and to which all the earlier, similar passages, now becoming merged in it, had added a kind of density and volume, by which my own understanding seemed to be enlarged.

I was by no means Bergotte's sole admirer; he was the favourite writer also of a friend of my mother's, a highly literary lady; while Dr. du, Boulbon had kept all his patients waiting until he finished Bergotte's latest volume; and it was from his consulting room, and from a house in a park near Combray that some of the first seeds were scattered of that taste for Bergotte, a rare-growth in those days, but now so universally acclimatised that one finds it flowering everywhere throughout Europe and America, and even in the tiniest villages, rare still in its refinement, but in that alone. What my mother's friend, and, it would seem, what Dr. du Boulbon liked above all in the writings of Bergotte was just what I liked, the same flow of melody, the same old-fashioned phrases, and certain others, quite simple and familiar, but so placed by him, in such prominence, as to hint at a particular quality of taste on his part; and also, in the sad parts of his books, a sort of roughness, a tone that was almost harsh. And he himself, no doubt, realised that these were his principal attractions. For in his later books, if he had hit upon some great truth, or upon the name of an historic cathedral, he would break off his narrative, and in an invocation, an apostrophe, a lengthy prayer, would give a free outlet to that effluence which, in the earlier volumes, remained buried beneath the form of his prose, discernible only in a rippling of its surface, and perhaps even more delightful, more harmonious when it was thus veiled from the eye, when the reader could give no precise indication of where the murmur of the current began, or of where it died away. These passages in which he delighted were our favourites also. For my own part I knew all of them by heart. I felt even disappointed when he resumed the thread of his narrative. Whenever he spoke of something whose beauty had until then remained hidden from me, of pine-forests or of hailstorms, of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, of *Athalie*, or

of *Phèdre*, by some piece of imagery he would make their beauty explode and drench me with its essence. And so, dimly realising that the universe contained innumerable elements which my feeble senses would be powerless to discern, did he not bring them within my reach, I wished that I might have his opinion, some metaphor of his, upon everything in the world, and especially upon such things as I might have an opportunity, some day, of seeing for myself; and among such things, more particularly still upon some of the historic buildings of France, upon certain views of the sea, because the emphasis with which, in his books, he referred to these shewed that he regarded them as rich in significance and beauty. But, alas, upon almost everything in the world his opinion was unknown to me. I had no doubt that it would differ entirely from my own, since his came down from an unknown sphere towards which I was striving to raise myself; convinced that my thoughts would have seemed pure foolishness to that perfected spirit, I had so completely obliterated them all that, if I happened to find in one of his books something which had already occurred to my own mind, my heart would swell with gratitude and pride as though some deity had, in his infinite bounty, restored it to me, had pronounced it to be beautiful and right. It happened now and then that a page of Bergotte would express precisely those ideas which I used often at night, when I was unable to sleep, to write to my grandmother and mother, and so concisely and well that his page had the appearance of a collection of mottoes for me to set at the head of my letters. And so too, in later years, when I began to compose a book of my own, and the quality of some of my sentences seemed so inadequate that I could not make up my mind to go on with the undertaking, I would find the equivalent of my sentences in Bergotte's. But it was only then, when I read them in his pages, that I could enjoy them; when it was I myself who composed them, in my anxiety that they should exactly reproduce what I seemed to have detected in my mind, and in my fear of their not turning out 'true to life,' I had no time to ask myself whether what I was writing would be pleasant to read! But indeed there was no kind of language, no kind of ideas which I really liked, except these. My feverish and unsatisfactory attempts were themselves a token of my love, a love which brought me no pleasure, but was, for all that, intense and deep. And so, when I came suddenly upon similar phrases in the writings of another, that is to say stripped of their familiar accompaniment of scruples and repressions and self-tormentings, I was free to indulge to the full my own appetite for such things, just as a cook who, once in a while, has no dinner to prepare for other people, can then find time to gormandise himself. And so, when I had found, one day, in

a book by Bergotte, some joke about an old family servant, to which his solemn and magnificent style added a great deal of irony, but which was in principle what I had often said to my grandmother about Françoise, and when, another time, I had discovered that he thought not unworthy of reflection in one of those mirrors of absolute Truth which were his writings, a remark similar to one which I had had occasion to make on our friend M. Legrandin (and, moreover, my remarks on Françoise and M. Legrandin were among those which I would most resolutely have sacrificed for Bergotte's sake, in the belief that he would find them quite without interest); then it was suddenly revealed to me that my own humble existence and the Realms of Truth were less widely separated than I had supposed, that at certain points they were actually in contact; and in my new-found confidence and joy I wept upon his printed page, as in the arms of a long-lost father.

From his books I had formed an impression of Bergotte as a frail and disappointed old man, who had lost his children, and had never found any consolation. And so I would read, or rather sing his sentences in my brain, with rather more *dolce*, rather more *lento* than he himself had, perhaps, intended, and his simplest phrase would strike my ears with something peculiarly gentle and loving in its intonation. More than anything else in the world I cherished his philosophy, and had pledged myself to it in lifelong devotion. It made me impatient to reach the age when I should be eligible to attend the class at school called 'Philosophy.' I did not wish to learn or do anything else there, but simply to exist and be guided entirely by the mind of Bergotte, and, if I had been told then that the metaphysicians whom I was actually to follow there resembled him in nothing, I should have been struck down by the despair a young lover feels who has sworn lifelong fidelity, when a friend speaks to him of the other mistresses he will have in time to come.

One Sunday, while I was reading in the garden, I was interrupted by Swann, who had come to call upon my parents.

"What are you reading? May I look? Why, it's Bergotte! Who has been telling you about him?"

I replied that Bloch was responsible.

"Oh, yes, that boy I saw here once, who looks so like the Bellini portrait of Mahomet II. It's an astonishing likeness; he has the same arched eyebrows and hooked nose and prominent cheekbones. When his beard comes he'll be Mahomet himself. Anyhow he has good taste, for Bergotte is a charming creature." And seeing how much I seemed to admire Bergotte, Swann, who

never spoke at all about the people he knew, made an exception in my favour and said: “I know him well; if you would like him to write a few words on the title-page of your book I could ask him for you.”

I dared not accept such an offer, but bombarded Swann with questions about his friend. “Can you tell me, please, who is his favourite actor?”

“Actor? No, I can’t say. But I do know this: there’s not a man on the stage whom he thinks equal to Berma; he puts her above everyone. Have you seen her?”

“No, sir, my parents do not allow me to go to the theatre.”

“That is a pity. You should insist. Berma in *Phèdre*, in the *Cid*; well, she’s only an actress, if you like, but you know that I don’t believe very much in the ‘hierarchy’ of the arts.” As he spoke I noticed, what had often struck me before in his conversations with my grandmother’s sisters, that whenever he spoke of serious matters, whenever he used an expression which seemed to imply a definite opinion upon some important subject, he would take care to isolate, to sterilise it by using a special intonation, mechanical and ironic, as though he had put the phrase or word between inverted commas, and was anxious to disclaim any personal responsibility for it; as who should say “the ‘hierarchy,’ don’t you know, as silly people call it.” But then, if it was so absurd, why did he say the ‘hierarchy’? A moment later he went on: “Her acting will give you as noble an inspiration as any masterpiece of art in the world, as — oh, I don’t know — “ and he began to laugh, “shall we say the Queens of Chartres?” Until then I had supposed that his horror of having to give a serious opinion was something Parisian and refined, in contrast to the provincial dogmatism of my grandmother’s sisters; and I had imagined also that it was characteristic of the mental attitude towards life of the circle in which Swann moved, where, by a natural reaction from the ‘lyrical’ enthusiasms of earlier generations, an excessive importance was given to small and precise facts, formerly regarded as vulgar, and anything in the nature of ‘phrase-making’ was banned. But now I found myself slightly shocked by this attitude which Swann invariably adopted when face to face with generalities. He appeared unwilling to risk even having an opinion, and to be at his ease only when he could furnish, with meticulous accuracy, some precise but unimportant detail. But in so doing he did not take into account that even here he was giving an opinion, holding a brief (as they say) for something, that the accuracy of his details had an importance of its own. I thought again of the dinner that night, when I had been so unhappy because Mamma would not be coming up to my room, and when he had dismissed the

balls given by the Princesse de Léon as being of no importance. And yet it was to just that sort of amusement that he was devoting his life. For what other kind of existence did he reserve the duties of saying in all seriousness what he thought about things, of formulating judgments which he would not put between inverted commas; and when would he cease to give himself up to occupations of which at the same, time he made out that they were absurd? I noticed, too, in the manner in which Swann spoke to me of Bergotte, something which, to do him justice, was not peculiar to himself, but was shared by all that writer's admirers at that time, at least by my mother's friend and by Dr. du Boulbon. Like Swann, they would say of Bergotte: "He has a charming mind, so individual, he has a way of his own of saying things, which is a little far-fetched, but so pleasant. You never need to look for his name on the title-page, you can tell his work at once." But none of them had yet gone so far as to say "He is a great writer, he has great talent." They did not even credit him with talent at all. They did not speak, because they were not aware of it. We are very slow in recognising in the peculiar physiognomy of a new writer the type which is labelled 'great talent' in our museum of general ideas. Simply because that physiognomy is new and strange, we can find in it no resemblance to what we are accustomed to call talent. We say rather originality, charm, delicacy, strength; and then one day we add up the sum of these, and find that it amounts simply to talent.

"Are there any books in which Bergotte has written about Berma?" I asked M. Swann.

"I think he has, in that little essay on Racine, but it must be out of print. Still, there has perhaps been a second impression. I will find out. Anyhow, I can ask Bergotte himself all that you want to know next time he comes to dine with us. He never misses a week, from one year's end to another. He is my daughter's greatest friend. They go about together, and look at old towns and cathedrals and castles."

As I was still completely ignorant of the different grades in the social hierarchy, the fact that my father found it impossible for us to see anything of Swann's wife and daughter had, for a long time, had the contrary effect of making me imagine them as separated from us by an enormous gulf, which greatly enhanced their dignity and importance in my eyes. I was sorry that my mother did not dye her hair and redden her lips, as I had heard our neighbour, Mme. Sazerat, say that Mme. Swann did, to gratify not her husband but M. de Charlus; and I felt that, to her, we must be an object of scorn, which distressed me particularly on account of the daughter, such a pretty little girl, as I had

heard, and one of whom I used often to dream, always imagining her with the same features and appearance, which I bestowed upon her quite arbitrarily, but with a charming effect. But from this afternoon, when I had learned that Mlle. Swann was a creature living in such rare and fortunate circumstances, bathed, as in her natural element, in such a sea of privilege that, if she should ask her parents whether anyone were coming to dinner, she would be answered in those two syllables, radiant with celestial light, would hear the name of that golden guest who was to her no more than an old friend of her family, Bergotte; that for her the intimate conversation at table, corresponding to what my great-aunt's conversation was for me, would be the words of Bergotte upon all those subjects which he had not been able to take up in his writings, and on which I would fain have heard him utter oracles; and that, above all, when she went to visit other towns, he would be walking by her side, unrecognised and glorious, like the gods who came down, of old, from heaven to dwell among mortal men: then I realised both the rare worth of a creature such as Mlle. Swann, and, at the same time, how coarse and ignorant I should appear to her; and I felt so keenly how pleasant and yet how impossible it would be for me to become her friend that I was filled at once with longing and with despair. And usually, from this time forth, when I thought of her, I would see her standing before the porch of a cathedral, explaining to me what each of the statues meant, and, with a smile which was my highest commendation, presenting me, as her friend, to Bergotte. And invariably the charm of all the fancies which the thought of cathedrals used to inspire in me, the charm of the hills and valleys of the Ile de France and of the plains of Normandy, would radiate brightness and beauty over the picture I had formed in my mind of Mlle. Swann; nothing more remained but to know and to love her. Once we believe that a fellow-creature has a share in some unknown existence to which that creature's love for ourselves can win us admission, that is, of all the preliminary conditions which Love exacts, the one to which he attaches most importance, the one which makes him generous or indifferent as to the rest. Even those women who pretend that they judge a man by his exterior only, see in that exterior an emanation from some special way of life. And that is why they fall in love with a soldier or a fireman, whose uniform makes them less particular about his face; they kiss and believe that beneath the crushing breastplate there beats a heart different from the rest, more gallant, more adventurous, more tender; and so it is that a young king or a crown prince may travel in foreign countries and make the most gratifying conquests, and yet lack entirely that regular and classic profile which would be indispensable, I dare say,

in an outside-broker.

While I was reading in the garden, a thing my great-aunt would never have understood my doing save on a Sunday, that being the day on which it was unlawful to indulge in any serious occupation, and on which she herself would lay aside her sewing (on a week-day she would have said, “How you can go on amusing yourself with a book; it isn’t Sunday, you know!” putting into the word ‘amusing’ an implication of childishness and waste of time), my aunt Léonie would be gossiping with Françoise until it was time for Eulalie to arrive. She would tell her that she had just seen Mme. Goupil go by “without an umbrella, in the silk dress she had made for her the other day at Châteaudun. If she has far to go before vespers, she may get it properly soaked.”

“Very likely” (which meant also “very likely not”) was the answer, for Françoise did not wish definitely to exclude the possibility of a happier alternative.

“There, now,” went on my aunt, beating her brow, “that reminds me that I never heard if she got to church this morning before the Elevation. I must remember to ask Eulalie... Françoise, just look at that black cloud behind the steeple, and how poor the light is on the slates, you may be certain it will rain before the day is out. It couldn’t possibly keep on like this, it’s been too hot. And the sooner the better, for until the storm breaks my Vichy water won’t ‘go down,’” she concluded, since, in her mind, the desire to accelerate the digestion of her Vichy water was of infinitely greater importance than her fear of seeing Mme. Goupil’s new dress ruined.

“Very likely.”

“And you know that when it rains in the Square there’s none too much shelter.” Suddenly my aunt turned pale. “What, three o’clock!” she exclaimed. “But vespers will have begun already, and I’ve forgotten my pepsin! Now I know why that Vichy water has been lying on my stomach.” And falling precipitately upon a prayer-book bound in purple velvet, with gilt clasps, out of which in her haste she let fall a shower of the little pictures, each in a lace fringe of yellowish paper, which she used to mark the places of the greater feasts of the church, my aunt, while she swallowed her drops, began at full speed to mutter the words of the sacred text, its meaning being slightly clouded in her brain by the uncertainty whether the pepsin, when taken so long after the Vichy, would still be able to overtake it and to ‘send it down.’ “Three o’clock! It’s unbelievable how time flies.”

A little tap at the window, as though some missile had struck it, followed by

a plentiful, falling sound, as light, though, as if a shower of sand were being sprinkled from a window overhead; then the fall spread, took on an order, a rhythm, became liquid, loud, drumming, musical, innumerable, universal. It was the rain.

"There, Françoise, what did I tell you? How it's coming down! But I think I heard the bell at the garden gate: go along and see who can be outside in this weather."

Françoise went and returned. “It’s Mme. Amédée” (my grandmother). “She said she was going for a walk. It’s raining hard, all the same.”

“I’m not at all surprised,” said my aunt, looking up towards the sky. “I’ve always said that she was not in the least like other people. Well, I’m glad it’s she and not myself who’s outside in all this.”

“Mme. Amédée is always the exact opposite of the rest,” said Françoise, not unkindly, refraining until she should be alone with the other servants from stating her belief that my grandmother was ‘a bit off her head.’

“There’s Benediction over! Eulalie will never come now,” sighed my aunt. “It will be the weather that’s frightened her away.”

“But it’s not five o’clock yet, Mme. Octave, it’s only half-past four.”

“Only half-past four! And here am I, obliged to draw back the small curtains, just to get a tiny streak of daylight. At half-past four! Only a week before the Rogation-days. Ah, my poor Françoise, the dear Lord must be sorely vexed with us. The world is going too far in these days. As my poor Octave used to say, we have forgotten God too often, and He is taking vengeance upon us.”

A bright flush animated my aunt’s cheeks; it was Eulalie. As ill luck would have it, scarcely had she been admitted to the presence when Françoise reappeared and, with a smile which was meant to indicate her full participation in the pleasure which, she had no doubt, her tidings would give my aunt, articulating each syllable so as to shew that, in spite of her having to translate them into indirect speech, she was repeating, as a good servant should, the very words which the new visitor had condescended to use, said: “His reverence the Curé would be delighted, enchanted, if Mme. Octave is not resting just now, and could see him. His reverence does not wish to disturb Mme. Octave. His reverence is downstairs; I told him to go into the parlour.”

Had the truth been known, the Curé’s visits gave my aunt no such ecstatic pleasure as Françoise supposed, and the air of jubilation with which she felt bound to illuminate her face whenever she had to announce his arrival, did not altogether correspond to what was felt by her invalid. The Curé (an excellent man, with whom I am sorry now that I did not converse more often, for, even if he cared nothing for the arts, he knew a great many etymologies), being in the habit of shewing distinguished visitors over his church (he had even planned to compile a history of the Parish of Com-bray), used to weary her with his endless explanations, which, incidentally, never varied in the least degree. But when his visit synchronized exactly with Eulalie’s it became frankly distasteful to my

aunt. She would have preferred to make the most of Eulalie, and not to have had the whole of her circle about her at one time. But she dared not send the Curé away, and had to content herself with making a sign to Eulalie not to leave when he did, so that she might have her to herself for a little after he had gone.

"What is this I have been hearing, Father, that a painter has set up his easel in your church, and is copying one of the windows? Old as I am, I can safely say that I have never even heard of such a thing in all my life! What is the world coming to next, I wonder! And the ugliest thing in the whole church, too."

"I will not go so far as to say that it is quite the ugliest, for, although there are certain things in Saint-Hilaire which are well worth a visit, there are others that are very old now, in my poor basilica, the only one in all the diocese that has never even been restored. The Lord knows, our porch is dirty and out of date; still, it is of a majestic character; take, for instance, the Esther tapestries, though personally I would not give a brass farthing for the pair of them, but experts put them next after the ones at Sens. I can quite see, too, that apart from certain details which are — well, a trifle realistic, they shew features which testify to a genuine power of observation. But don't talk to me about the windows. Is it common sense, I ask you, to leave up windows which shut out all the daylight, and even confuse the eyes by throwing patches of colour, to which I should be hard put to it to give a name, on a floor in which there are not two slabs on the same level? And yet they refuse to renew the floor for me because, if you please, those are the tombstones of the Abbots of Combray and the Lords of Guermantes, the old Counts, you know, of Brabant, direct ancestors of the present Duc de Guermantes, and of his Duchesse also, since she was a lady of the Guermantes family, and married her cousin." (My grandmother, whose steady refusal to take any interest in 'persons' had ended in her confusing all their names and titles, whenever anyone mentioned the Duchesse de Guermantes used to make out that she must be related to Mme. de Villeparisis. The whole family would then burst out laughing; and she would attempt to justify herself by harking back to some invitation to a christening or funeral: "I feel sure that there was a Guermantes in it somewhere." And for once I would side with the others, and against her, refusing to admit that there could be any connection between her school-friend and the descendant of Geneviève de Brabant.)

"Look at Roussainville," the Curé went on. "It is nothing more nowadays than a parish of farmers, though in olden times the place must have had a considerable importance from its trade in felt hats and clocks. (I am not certain, by the way, of the etymology of Roussainville. I should dearly like to think that

the name was originally Rouville, from *Radulfi villa*, analogous, don't you see, to Châteauroux, *Castrum Radulfi*, but we will talk about that some other time.) Very well; the church there has superb windows, almost all quite modern, including that most imposing 'Entry of Louis-Philippe into Combray' which would be more in keeping, surely, at Combray itself, and which is every bit as good, I understand, as the famous windows at Chartres. Only yesterday I met Dr. Percepied's brother, who goes in for these things, and he told me that he looked upon it as a most beautiful piece of work. But, as I said to this artist, who, by the way, seems to be a most civil fellow, and is a regular virtuoso, it appears, with his brush; what on earth, I said to him, do you find so extraordinary in this window, which is, if anything, a little dingier than the rest?"

"I am sure that if you were to ask his Lordship," said my aunt in a resigned tone, for she had begun to feel that she was going to be 'tired,' "he would never refuse you a new window."

"You may depend upon it, Mme. Octave," replied the Curé. "Why, it was just his Lordship himself who started the outcry about the window, by proving that it represented Gilbert the Bad, a Lord of Guermantes and a direct descendant of Geneviève de Brabant, who was a daughter of the House of Guermantes, receiving absolution from Saint Hilaire."

"But I don't see where Saint Hilaire comes in."

"Why yes, have you never noticed, in the corner of the window, a lady in a yellow robe? Very well, that is Saint Hilaire, who is also known, you will remember, in certain parts of the country as Saint Illiers, Saint Hèlier, and even, in the Jura, Saint Ylie. But these various corruptions of *Sanctus Hilarius* are by no means the most curious that have occurred in the names of the blessed Saints. Take, for example, my good Eulalie, the case of your own patron, *Sancta Eulalia*; do you know what she has become in Burgundy? Saint Eloi, nothing more nor less! The lady has become a gentleman. Do you hear that, Eulalie, after you are dead they will make a man of you!"

"Father will always have his joke."

"Gilbert's brother, Charles the Stammerer, was a pious prince, but, having early in life lost his father, Pepin the Mad, who died as a result of his mental infirmity, he wielded the supreme power with all the arrogance of a man who has not been subjected to discipline in his youth, so much so that, whenever he saw a man in a town whose face he did not remember, he would massacre the whole place, to the last inhabitant. Gilbert, wishing to be avenged on Charles, caused the church at Combray to be burned down, the original church, that was, which

Théodebert, when he and his court left the country residence he had near here, at Thiberzy (which is, of course,*Theodeberiacus*), to go out and fight the Burgundians, had promised to build over the tomb of Saint Hilaire if the Saint brought him; victory. Nothing remains of it now but the crypt, into which Théodore has probably taken you, for Gilbert burned all the rest. Finally, he defeated the unlucky Charles with the aid of William" which the Curé pronounced "Will'am" "the Conqueror, which is why so many English still come to visit the place. But he does not appear to have managed to win the affection of the people of Combray, for they fell upon him as he was coming out from mass, and cut off his head. Théodore has a little book, that he lends people, which tells you the whole story.

"But what is unquestionably the most remarkable thing about our church is the view from the belfry, which is full of grandeur. Certainly in your case, since you are not very strong, I should never recommend you: to climb our seven and ninety steps, just half the number they have in the famous cathedral at Milan. It is quite tiring enough for the most active person, especially as you have to go on your hands and knees, if you don't wish to crack your skull, and you collect all the cobwebs off the staircase upon your clothes. In any case you should be well wrapped up," he went on, without noticing my aunt's fury at the mere suggestion that she could ever, possibly, be capable of climbing into his belfry, "for there's a strong breeze there, once you get to the top. Some people even assure me that they have felt the chill of death up there. No matter, on Sundays there are always clubs and societies, who come, some of them, long distances to admire our beautiful panorama, and they always go home charmed. Wait now, next Sunday, if the weather holds, you will be sure to find a lot of people there, for Rogation-tide. You must admit, certainly, that the view from up there is like a fairy-tale, with what you might call vistas along the plain, which have quite a special charm of their own. On a clear day you can see as far as Verneuil. And then another thing; you can see at the same time places which you are in the habit of seeing one without the other, as, for instance, the course of the Vivonne and the ditches at Saint-Assise-lès-Combray, which are separated, really, by a screen of tall trees; or, to take another example, there are all the canals at Jouy-le-Vicomte, which is *Gaudiacus vicecomitis*, as of course you know. Each time that I have been to Jouy I have seen a bit of a canal in one place, and then I have turned a corner and seen another, but when I saw the second I could no longer see the first. I tried in vain to imagine how they lay by one another; it was no good. But, from the top of Saint-Hilaire, it's quite another matter; the whole countryside is

spread out before you like a map. Only, you cannot make out the water; you would say that there were great rifts in the town, slicing it up so neatly that it looks like a loaf of bread which still holds together after it has been cut up. To get it all quite perfect you would have to be in both places at once; up here on the top of Saint-Hilaire and down there at Jouy-le-Vicomte."

The Curé had so much exhausted my aunt that no sooner had he gone than she was obliged to send away Eulalie also.

"Here, my poor Eulalie," she said in a feeble voice, drawing a coin from a small purse which lay ready to her hand. "This is just something so that you shall not forget me in your prayers."

"Oh, but, Mme. Octave, I don't think I ought to; you know very well that I don't come here for that!" So Eulalie would answer, with the same hesitation and the same embarrassment, every Sunday, as though each temptation were the first, and with a look of displeasure which enlivened my aunt and never offended her, for if it so happened that Eulalie, when she took the money, looked a little less sulky than usual, my aunt would remark afterwards, "I cannot think what has come over Eulalie; I gave her just the trifle I always give, and she did not look at all pleased."

"I don't think she has very much to complain of, all the same," Françoise would sigh grimly, for she had a tendency to regard as petty cash all that my aunt might give her for herself or her children, and as treasure riotously squandered on a pampered and ungrateful darling the little coins slipped, Sunday by Sunday, into Eulalie's hand, but so discreetly passed that Françoise never managed to see them. It was not that she wanted to have for herself the money my aunt bestowed on Eulalie. She already enjoyed a sufficiency of all that my aunt possessed, in the knowledge that the wealth of the mistress automatically ennobled and glorified the maid in the eyes of the world; and that she herself was conspicuous and worthy to be praised throughout Combray, Jouy-le-Vicomte, and other cities of men, on account of my aunt's many farms, her frequent and prolonged visits from the Curé, and the astonishing number of bottles of Vichy water which she consumed. Françoise was avaricious only for my aunt; had she had control over my aunt's fortune (which would have more than satisfied her highest ambition) she would have guarded it from the assaults of strangers with a maternal ferocity. She would, however, have seen no great harm in what my aunt, whom she knew to be incurably generous, allowed herself to give away, had she given only to those who were already rich. Perhaps she felt that such persons, not being actually in need of my aunt's presents, could not be suspected of simulating

affection for her on that account. Besides, presents offered to persons of great wealth and position, such as Mme. Sazerat, M. Swann, M. Legrandin and Mme. Goupil, to persons of the ‘same class’ as my aunt, and who would naturally ‘mix with her,’ seemed to Françoise to be included among the ornamental customs of that strange and brilliant life led by rich people, who hunted and shot, gave balls and paid visits, a life which she would contemplate with an admiring smile. But it was by no means the same thing if, for this princely exchange of courtesies, my aunt substituted mere charity, if her beneficiaries were of the class which Françoise would label “people like myself,” or “people no better than myself,” people whom she despised even more if they did not address her always as “Mme. Françoise,” just to shew that they considered themselves to be ‘not as good.’ And when she saw that, despite all her warnings, my aunt continued to do exactly as she pleased, and to fling money away with both hands (or so, at least, Françoise believed) on undeserving objects, she began to find that the presents she herself received from my aunt were very tiny compared to the imaginary riches squandered upon Eulalie, There was not, in the neighbourhood of Combray, a farm of such prosperity and importance that Françoise doubted Eulalie’s ability to buy it, without thinking twice, out of the capital which her visits to my aunt had ‘brought in.’ It must be added that Eulalie had formed an exactly similar estimate of the vast and secret hoards of Françoise. So, every Sunday, after Eulalie had gone, Françoise would mercilessly prophesy her coming downfall. She hated Eulalie, but was at the same time afraid of her, and so felt bound, when Eulalie was there, to ‘look pleasant.’ But she would make up for that after the other’s departure; never, it is true, alluding to her by name, bul hinting at her in Sibylline oracles, or in utterances of a comprehensive character, like those of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher, but so worded that their special application could not escape my aunt. After peering out at the side of the curtain to see whether Eulalie had shut the front-door behind her; “Flatterers know how to make themselves welcome, and to gather up the crumbs; but have patience, have patience; our God is a jealous God, and one fine day He will be avenged upon them!” she would declaim, with the sidelong, insinuating glance of Joash, thinking of Athaliah alone when he says that the

prosperity
Of wicked men runs like a torrent past,
And soon is spent.

But on this memorable afternoon, when the Curé had come as well, and by his interminable visit had drained my aunt's strength, Françoise followed Eulalie from the room, saying: "Mme. Octave, I will leave you to rest; you look utterly tired out."

And my aunt answered her not a word, breathing a sigh so faint that it seemed it must prove her last, and lying there with closed eyes, as though already dead. But hardly had Françoise arrived downstairs, when four peals of a bell, pulled with the utmost violence, reverberated through the house, and my aunt, sitting erect upon her bed, called out: "Has Eulalie gone yet? Would you believe it; I forgot to ask her whether Mme. Goupil arrived in church before the Elevation. Run after her, quick!"

But Françoise returned alone, having failed to overtake Eulalie. "It is most provoking," said my aunt, shaking her head. "The one important thing that I had to ask her."

In this way life went by for my aunt Léonie, always the same, in the gentle uniformity of what she called, with a pretence of deprecation but with a deep tenderness, her 'little jog-trot.' Respected by all and sundry, not merely in her own house, where every one of us, having learned the futility of recommending any healthier mode of life, had become gradually resigned to its observance, but in the village as well, where, three streets away, a tradesman who had to hammer nails into a packing-case would send first to Françoise to make sure that my aunt was not 'resting' — her 'little jog-trot' was, none the less, brutally disturbed on one occasion in this same year. Like a fruit hidden among its leaves, which has grown and ripened unobserved by man, until it falls of its own accord, there came upon us one night the kitchen-maid's confinement. Her pains were unbearable, and, as there was no midwife in Combray, Françoise had to set off before dawn to fetch one from Thiberzy. My aunt was unable to 'rest,' owing to the cries of the girl, and as Françoise, though the distance was nothing, was very late in returning, her services were greatly missed. And so, in the course of the morning, my mother said to me: "Run upstairs, and see if your aunt wants anything."

I went into the first of her two rooms, and through the open door of the other saw my aunt lying on her side, asleep. I could hear her breathing, in what was almost distinguishable as a snore. I was just going to slip away when something, probably the sound of my entry, interrupted her sleep, and made it 'change speed,' as they say of motorcars nowadays, for the music of her snore broke off for a second and began again on a lower note; then she awoke, and half turned

her face, which I could see for the first time; a kind of horror was imprinted on it; plainly she had just escaped from some terrifying dream. She could not see me from where she was lying, and I stood there not knowing whether I ought to go forward or to retire; but all at once she seemed to return to a sense of reality, and to grasp the falsehood of the visions that had terrified her; a smile of joy, a pious act of thanksgiving to God, Who is pleased to grant that life shall be less cruel than our dreams, feebly illumined her face, and, with the habit she had formed of speaking to herself, half-aloud, when she thought herself alone, she murmured: “The Lord be praised! We have nothing to disturb us here but the kitchen-maid’s baby. And I’ve been dreaming that my poor Octave had come back to life, and was trying to make me take a walk every day!” She stretched out a hand towards her rosary, which was lying on the small table, but sleep was once again getting the mastery, and did not leave her the strength to reach it; she fell asleep, calm and contented, and I crept out of the room on tiptoe, without either her or anyone’s else ever knowing, from that day to this, what I had seen and heard.

When I say that, apart from such rare happenings as this confinement, my aunt’s ‘little jog-trot’ never underwent any variation, I do not include those variations which, repeated at regular intervals and in identical form, did no more, really, than print a sort of uniform pattern upon the greater uniformity of her life. So, for instance, every Saturday, as Françoise had to go in the afternoon to market at Roussainville-le-Pin, the whole household would have to have luncheon an hour earlier. And my aunt had so thoroughly acquired the habit of this weekly exception to her general habits, that she clung to it as much as to the rest. She was so well ‘routined’ to it, as Françoise would say, that if, on a Saturday, she had had to wait for her luncheon until the regular hour, it would have ‘upset’ her as much as if she had had, on an ordinary day, to put her luncheon forward to its Saturday time. Incidentally this acceleration of luncheon gave Saturday, for all of us, an individual character, kindly and rather attractive. At the moment when, ordinarily, there was still an hour to be lived through before meal-time sounded, we would all know that in a few seconds we should see the endives make their precocious appearance, followed by the special favour of an omelette, an unmerited steak. The return of this asymmetrical Saturday was one of those petty occurrences, intra-mural, localised, almost civic, which, in uneventful lives and stable orders of society, create a kind of national unity, and become the favourite theme for conversation, for pleasantries, for anecdotes which can be embroidered as the narrator pleases; it would have

provided a nucleus, ready-made, for a legendary cycle, if any of us had had the epic mind. At daybreak, before we were dressed, without rhyme or reason, save for the pleasure of proving the strength of our solidarity, we would call to one another good-humoredly, cordially, patriotically, “Hurry up; there’s no time to be lost; don’t forget, it’s Saturday!” while my aunt, gossiping with Françoise, and reflecting that the day would be even longer than usual, would say, “You might cook them a nice bit of veal, seeing that it’s Saturday.” If, at half-past ten, some one absent-mindedly pulled out a watch and said, “I say, an hour-and-a-half still before luncheon,” everyone else would be in ecstasies over being able to retort at once: “Why, what are you thinking about? Have you for-gotten that it’s Saturday?” And a quarter of an hour later we would still be laughing, and reminding ourselves to go up and tell aunt Léonie about this absurd mistake, to amuse her. The very face of the sky appeared to undergo a change. After luncheon the sun, conscious that it was Saturday, would blaze an hour longer in the zenith, and when some one, thinking that we were late in starting for our walk, said, “What, only two o’clock!” feeling the heavy throb go by him of the twin strokes from the steeple of Saint-Hilaire (which as a rule passed no one at that hour upon the highways, deserted for the midday meal or for the nap which follows it, or on the banks of the bright and ever-flowing stream, which even the angler had abandoned, and so slipped unaccompanied into the vacant sky, where only a few loitering clouds remained to greet them) the whole family would respond in chorus: “Why, you’re forgetting; we had luncheon an hour earlier; you know very well it’s Saturday.”

The surprise of a ‘barbarian’ (for so we termed everyone who was not acquainted with Saturday’s special customs) who had called at eleven o’clock to speak to my father, and had found us at table, was an event which used to cause Françoise as much merriment as, perhaps, anything that had ever happened in her life. And if she found it amusing that the nonplussed visitor should not have known, beforehand, that we had our luncheon an hour earlier on Saturday, it was still more irresistibly funny that my father himself (fully as she sympathised, from the bottom of her heart, with the rigid chauvinism which prompted him) should never have dreamed that the barbarian could fail to be aware of so simple a matter, and so had replied, with no further enlightenment of the other’s surprise at seeing us already in the dining-room: “You see, it’s Saturday.” On reaching this point in the story, Françoise would pause to wipe the tears of merriment from her eyes, and then, to add to her own enjoyment, would prolong the dialogue, inventing a further reply for the visitor to whom the word ‘Saturday’

had conveyed nothing. And so far from our objecting to these interpolations, we would feel that the story was not yet long enough, and would rally her with: “Oh, but surely he said something else as well. There was more than that, the first time you told it.”

My great-aunt herself would lay aside her work, and raise her head and look on at us over her glasses.

The day had yet another characteristic feature, namely, that during May we used to go out on Saturday evenings after dinner to the ‘Month of Mary’ devotions.

As we were liable, there, to meet M. Vinteuil, who held very strict views on “the deplorable untidiness of young people, which seems to be encouraged in these days,” my mother would first see that there was nothing out of order in my appearance, and then we would set out for the church. It was in these ‘Month of Mary’ services that I can remember having first fallen in love with hawthorn-blossom. The hawthorn was not merely in the church, for there, holy ground as it was, we had all of us a right of entry; but, arranged upon the altar itself, inseparable from the mysteries in whose celebration it was playing a part, it thrust in among the tapers and the sacred vessels its rows of branches, tied to one another horizontally in a stiff, festal scheme of decoration; and they were made more lovely still by the scalloped outline of the dark leaves, over which were scattered in profusion, as over a bridal train, little clusters of buds of a dazzling whiteness. Though I dared not look at them save through my fingers, I could feel that the formal scheme was composed of living things, and that it was Nature herself who, by trimming the shape of the foliage, and by adding the crowning ornament of those snowy buds, had made the decorations worthy of what was at once a public rejoicing and a solemn mystery. Higher up on the altar, a flower had opened here and there with a careless grace, holding so unconcernedly, like a final, almost vaporous bedizening, its bunch of stamens, slender as gossamer, which clouded the flower itself in a white mist, that in following these with my eyes, in trying to imitate, somewhere inside myself, the action of their blossoming, I imagined it as a swift and thoughtless movement of the head with an enticing glance from her contracted pupils, by a young girl in white, careless and alive.

M. Vinteuil had come in with his daughter and had sat down beside us. He belonged to a good family, and had once been music-master to my grandmother’s sisters; so that when, after losing his wife and inheriting some property, he had retired to the neighbourhood of Combray, we used often to

invite him to our house. But with his intense prudishness he had given up coming, so as not to be obliged to meet Swann, who had made what he called “a most unsuitable marriage, as seems to be the fashion in these days.” My mother, on hearing that he ‘composed,’ told him by way of a compliment that, when she came to see him, he must play her something of his own. M. Vinteuil would have liked nothing better, but he carried politeness and consideration for others to so fine a point, always putting himself in their place, that he was afraid of boring them, or of appearing egotistical, if he carried out, or even allowed them to suspect what were his own desires. On the day when my parents had gone to pay him a visit, I had accompanied them, but they had allowed me to remain outside, and as M. Vinteuil’s house, Montjouvain, stood on a site actually hollowed out from a steep hill covered with shrubs, among which I took cover, I had found myself on a level with his drawing-room, upstairs, and only a few feet away from its window. When a servant came in to tell him that my parents had arrived, I had seen M. Vinteuil run to the piano and lay out a sheet of music so as to catch the eye. But as soon as they entered the room he had snatched it away and hidden it in a corner. He was afraid, no doubt, of letting them suppose that he was glad to see them only because it gave him a chance of playing them some of his compositions. And every time that my mother, in the course of her visit, had returned to the subject of his playing, he had hurriedly protested: “I cannot think who put that on the piano; it is not the proper place for it at all,” and had turned the conversation aside to other topics, simply because those were of less interest to himself.

His one and only passion was for his daughter, and she, with her somewhat boyish appearance, looked so robust that it was hard to restrain a smile when one saw the precautions her father used to take for her health, with spare shawls always in readiness to wrap around her shoulders. My grandmother had drawn our attention to the gentle, delicate, almost timid expression which might often be caught flitting across the face, dusted all over with freckles, of this otherwise stolid child. When she had spoken, she would at once take her own words in the sense in which her audience must have heard them, she would be alarmed at the possibility of a misunderstanding, and one would see, in clear outline, as though in a transparency, beneath the mannish face of the ‘good sort’ that she was, the finer features of a young woman in tears.

When, before turning to leave the church, I made a genuflection before the altar, I felt suddenly, as I rose again, a bitter-sweet fragrance of almonds steal towards me from the hawthorn-blossom, and I then noticed that on the flowers

themselves were little spots of a creamier colour, in which I imagined that this fragrance must lie concealed, as the taste of an almond cake lay in the burned parts, or the sweetness of Mlle. Vinteuil's cheeks beneath their freckles. Despite the heavy, motionless silence of the hawthorns, these gusts of fragrance came to me like the murmuring of an intense vitality, with which the whole altar was quivering like a roadside hedge explored by living antennae, of which I was reminded by seeing some stamens, almost red in colour, which seemed to have kept the springtime virulence, the irritant power of stinging insects now transmuted into flowers.

Outside the church we would stand talking for a moment with M. Vinteuil, in the porch. Boys would be chevying one another in the Square, and he would interfere, taking the side of the little ones and lecturing the big. If his daughter said, in her thick, comfortable voice, how glad she had been to see us, immediately it would seem as though some elder and more sensitive sister, latent in her, had blushed at this thoughtless, schoolboyish utterance, which had, perhaps, made us think that she was angling for an invitation to the house. Her father would then arrange a cloak over her shoulders, they would clamber into a little dog-cart which she herself drove, and home they would both go to Montjouvain. As for ourselves, the next day being Sunday, with no need to be up and stirring before high mass, if it was a moonlight night and warm, then, instead of taking us home at once, my father, in his thirst for personal distinction, would lead us on a long walk round by the Calvary, which my mother's utter incapacity for taking her bearings, or even for knowing which road she might be on, made her regard as a triumph of his strategic genius. Sometimes we would go as far as the viaduct, which began to stride on its long legs of stone at the railway station, and to me typified all the wretchedness of exile beyond the last outposts of civilisation, because every year, as we came down from Paris, we would be warned to take special care, when we got to Combray, not to miss the station, to be ready before the train stopped, since it would start again in two minutes and proceed across the viaduct, out of the lands of Christendom, of which Combray, to me, represented the farthest limit. We would return by the Boulevard de la Gare, which contained the most attractive villas in the town. In each of their gardens the moonlight, copying the art of Hubert Robert, had scattered its broken staircases of white marble, its fountains of water and gates temptingly ajar. Its beams had swept away the telegraph office. All that was left of it was a column, half shattered, but preserving the beauty of a ruin which endures for all time. I would by now be dragging my weary limbs, and ready to

drop with sleep; the balmy scent of the lime-trees seemed a consolation which I could obtain only at the price of great suffering and exhaustion, and not worthy of the effort. From gates far apart the watchdogs, awakened by our steps in the silence, would set up an antiphonal barking, as I still hear them bark, at times, in the evenings, and it is in their custody (when the public gardens of Combray were constructed on its site) that the Boulevard de la Gare must have taken refuge, for wherever I may be, as soon as they begin their alternate challenge and acceptance, I can see it again with all its lime-trees, and its pavement glistening beneath the moon.

Suddenly my father would bring us to a standstill and ask my mother — "Where are we?" Utterly worn out by the walk but still proud of her husband, she would lovingly confess that she had not the least idea. He would shrug his shoulders and laugh. And then, as though it had slipped, with his latchkey, from his waistcoat pocket, he would point out to us, when it stood before our eyes, the back-gate of our own garden, which had come hand-in-hand with the familiar corner of the Rue du Saint-Esprit, to await us, to greet us at the end of our wanderings over paths unknown. My mother would murmur admiringly "You really are wonderful!" And from that instant I had not to take another step; the ground moved forward under my feet in that garden where, for so long, my actions had ceased to require any control, or even attention, from my will. Custom came to take me in her arms, carried me all the way up to my bed, and laid me down there like a little child.

Although Saturday, by beginning an hour earlier, and by depriving her of the services of Françoise, passed more slowly than other days for my aunt, yet, the moment it was past, and a new week begun, she would look forward with impatience to its return, as something that embodied all the novelty and distraction which her frail and disordered body was still able to endure. This was not to say, however, that she did not long, at times, for some even greater variation, that she did not pass through those abnormal hours in which one thirsts for something different from what one has, when those people who, through lack of energy or imagination, are unable to generate any motive power in themselves, cry out, as the clock strikes or the postman knocks, in their eagerness for news (even if it be bad news), for some emotion (even that of grief); when the heartstrings, which prosperity has silenced, like a harp laid by, yearn to be plucked and sounded again by some hand, even a brutal hand, even if it shall break them; when the will, which has with such difficulty brought itself to subdue its impulse, to renounce its right to abandon itself to its own

uncontrolled desires, and consequent sufferings, would fain cast its guiding reins into the hands of circumstances, coercive and, it may be, cruel. Of course, since my aunt's strength, which was completely drained by the slightest exertion, returned but drop by drop into the pool of her repose, the reservoir was very slow in filling, and months would go by before she reached that surplus which other people use up in their daily activities, but which she had no idea — and could never decide how to employ. And I have no doubt that then — just as a desire to have her potatoes served with béchamel sauce, for a change, would be formed, ultimately, from the pleasure she found in the daily reappearance of those mashed potatoes of which she was never 'tired' — she would extract from the accumulation of those monotonous days (on which she so much depended) a keen expectation of some domestic cataclysm, instantaneous in its happening, but violent enough to compel her to put into effect, once for all, one of those changes which she knew would be beneficial to her health, but to which she could never make up her mind without some such stimulus. She was genuinely fond of us; she would have enjoyed the long luxury of weeping for our untimely decease; coming at a moment when she felt 'well' and was not in a perspiration, the news that the house was being destroyed by a fire, in which all the rest of us had already perished, a fire which, in a little while, would not leave one stone standing upon another, but from which she herself would still have plenty of time to escape without undue haste, provided that she rose at once from her bed, must often have haunted her dreams, as a prospect which combined with the two minor advantages of letting her taste the full savour of her affection for us in long years of mourning, and of causing universal stupefaction in the village when she should sally forth to conduct our obsequies, crushed but courageous, moribund but erect, the paramount and priceless boon of forcing her at the right moment, with no time to be lost, no room for weakening hesitations, to go off and spend the summer at her charming farm of Mirougrain, where there was a waterfall. Inasmuch as nothing of this sort had ever occurred, though indeed she must often have pondered the success of such a manœuvre as she lay alone absorbed in her interminable games of patience (and though it must have plunged her in despair from the first moment of its realisation, from the first of those little unforeseen facts, the first word of calamitous news, whose accents can never afterwards be expunged from the memory, everything that bears upon it the imprint of actual, physical death, so terribly different from the logical abstraction of its possibility) she would fall back from time to time, to add an interest to her life, upon imagining other, minor catastrophes, which she would

follow up with passion. She would beguile herself with a sudden suspicion that Françoise had been robbing her, that she had set a trap to make certain, and had caught her betrayer red-handed; and being in the habit, when she made up a game of cards by herself, of playing her own and her adversary's hands at once, she would first stammer out Françoise's awkward apologies, and then reply to them with such a fiery indignation that any of us who happened to intrude upon her at one of these moments would find her bathed in perspiration, her eyes blazing, her false hair pushed awry and exposing the baldness of her brows. Françoise must often, from the next room, have heard these mordant sarcasms levelled at herself, the mere framing of which in words would not have relieved my aunt's feelings sufficiently, had they been allowed to remain in a purely immaterial form, without the degree of substance and reality which she added to them by murmuring them half-aloud. Sometimes, however, even these counterpane dramas would not satisfy my aunt; she must see her work staged. And so, on a Sunday, with all the doors mysteriously closed, she would confide in Eulalie her doubts of Françoise's integrity and her determination to be rid of her, and on another day she would confide in Françoise her suspicions of the disloyalty of Eulalie, to whom the front-door would very soon be closed for good. A few days more, and, disgusted with her latest confidant, she would again be 'as thick as thieves' with the traitor, while, before the next performance, the two would once more have changed their parts. But the suspicions which Eulalie might occasionally breed in her were no more than a fire of straw, which must soon subside for lack of fuel, since Eulalie was not living with her in the house. It was a very different matter when the suspect was Françoise, of whose presence under the same roof as herself my aunt was perpetually conscious, while for fear of catching cold, were she to leave her bed, she would never dare go downstairs to the kitchen to see for herself whether there was, indeed, any foundation for her suspicions. And so on by degrees, until her mind had no other occupation than to attempt, at every hour of the day, to discover what was being done, what was being concealed from her by Françoise. She would detect the most furtive movement of Françoise's features, something contradictory in what she was saying, some desire which she appeared to be screening. And she would shew her that she was unmasked, by, a single word, which made Françoise turn pale, and which my aunt seemed to find a cruel satisfaction in driving into her unhappy servant's heart. And the very next Sunday a disclosure by Eulalie — like one of those discoveries which suddenly open up an unsuspected field for exploration to some new science which has hitherto followed only the beaten

paths — proved to my aunt that her own worst suspicions fell a long way short of the appalling truth. “But Françoise ought to know that,” said Eulalie, “now that you have given her a carriage.”

“Now that I have given her a carriage!” gasped my aunt.

“Oh, but I didn’t know; I only thought so; I saw her go by yesterday in her open coach, as proud as Artaban, on her way to Roussainville market. I supposed that it must be Mme. Octave who had given it to her.”

So on by degrees, until Françoise and my aunt, the quarry and the hunter, could never cease from trying to forestall each other’s devices. My mother was afraid lest Françoise should develop a genuine hatred of my aunt, who was doing everything in her power to annoy her. However that might be, Françoise had come, more and more, to pay an infinitely scrupulous attention to my aunt’s least word and gesture. When she had to ask her for anything she would hesitate, first, for a long time, making up her mind how best to begin. And when she had uttered her request, she would watch my aunt covertly, trying to guess from the expression on her face what she thought of it, and how she would reply. And in this way — whereas an artist who had been reading memoirs of the seventeenth century, and wished to bring himself nearer to the great Louis, would consider that he was making progress in that direction when he constructed a pedigree that traced his own descent from some historic family, or when he engaged in correspondence with one of the reigning Sovereigns of Europe, and so would shut his eyes to the mistake he was making in seeking to establish a similarity by an exact and therefore lifeless copy of mere outward forms — a middle-aged lady in a small country town, by doing no more than yield whole-hearted obedience to her own irresistible eccentricities, and to a spirit of mischief engendered by the utter idleness of her existence, could see, without ever having given a thought to Louis XIV, the most trivial occupations of her daily life, her morning toilet, her luncheon, her afternoon nap, assume, by virtue of their despotic singularity, something of the interest that was to be found in what Saint-Simon used to call the ‘machinery’ of life at Versailles; and was able, too, to persuade herself that her silence, a shade of good humour or of arrogance on her features, would provide Françoise with matter for a mental commentary as tense with passion and terror, as did the silence, the good humour or the arrogance of the King when a courtier, or even his greatest nobles, had presented a petition to him, at the turning of an avenue, at Versailles.

One Sunday, when my aunt had received simultaneous visits from the Curé and from Eulalie, and had been left alone, afterwards, to rest, the whole family

went upstairs to bid her good night, and Mamma ventured to condole with her on the unlucky coincidence that always brought both visitors to her door at the same time.

"I hear that things went wrong again to-day, Léonie," she said kindly, "you have had all your friends here at once."

And my great-aunt interrupted with: "Too many good things..." for, since her daughter's illness, she felt herself in duty bound to revive her as far as possible by always drawing her attention to the brighter side of things. But my father had begun to speak.

"I should like to take advantage," he said, "of the whole family's being here together, to tell you a story, so as not to have to begin all over again to each of you separately. I am afraid we are in M. Legrandin's bad books; he would hardly say 'How d'ye do' to me this morning."

I did not wait to hear the end of my father's story, for I had been with him myself after mass when we had passed M. Legrandin; instead, I went downstairs to the kitchen to ask for the bill of fare for our dinner, which was of fresh interest to me daily, like the news in a paper, and excited me as might the programme of a coming festivity.

As M. Legrandin had passed close by us on our way from church, walking by the side of a lady, the owner of a country house in the neighbourhood, whom we knew only by sight, my father had saluted him in a manner at once friendly and reserved, without stopping in his walk; M. Legrandin had barely acknowledged the courtesy, and then with an air of surprise, as though he had not recognised us, and with that distant look characteristic of people who do not wish to be agreeable, and who from the suddenly receding depths of their eyes seem to have caught sight of you at the far end of an interminably straight road, and at so great a distance that they content themselves with directing towards you an almost imperceptible movement of the head, in proportion to your doll-like dimensions.

Now, the lady who was walking with Legrandin was a model of virtue, known and highly respected; there could be no question of his being out for amorous adventure, and annoyed at being detected; and my father asked himself how he could possibly have displeased our friend.

"I should be all the more sorry to feel that he was angry with us," he said, "because among all those people in their Sunday clothes there is something about him, with his little cut-away coat and his soft neckties, so little 'dressed-up,' so genuinely simple; an air of innocence, almost, which is really attractive."

But the vote of the family council was unanimous, that my father had imagined the whole thing, or that Legrandin, at the moment in question, had been preoccupied in thinking about something else. Anyhow, my father's fears were dissipated no later than the following evening. As we returned from a long walk we saw, near the Pont-Vieux, Legrandin himself, who, on account of the holidays, was spending a few days more in Combray. He came up to us with outstretched hand: "Do you know, master book-lover," he asked me, "this line of Paul Desjardins?

Now are the woods all black, but still the sky is blue.

Is not that a fine rendering of a moment like this? Perhaps you have never read Paul Desjardins. Read him, my boy, read him; in these days he is converted, they tell me, into a preaching friar, but he used to have the most charming water-colour touch —

Now are the woods all black, but still the sky is blue.

May you always see a blue sky overhead, my young friend; and then, even when the time comes, which is coming now for me, when the woods are all black, when night is fast falling, you will be able to console yourself, as I am doing, by looking up to the sky." He took a cigarette from his pocket and stood for a long time, his eyes fixed on the horizon. "Goodbye, friends!" he suddenly exclaimed, and left us.

At the hour when I usually went downstairs to find out what there was for dinner, its preparation would already have begun, and Françoise, a colonel with all the forces of nature for her subalterns, as in the fairy-tales where giants hire themselves out as scullions, would be stirring the coals, putting the potatoes to steam, and, at the right moment, finishing over the fire those culinary masterpieces which had been first got ready in some of the great array of vessels, triumphs of the potter's craft, which ranged from tubs and boilers and cauldrons and fish kettles down to jars for game, moulds for pastry, and tiny pannikins for cream, and included an entire collection of pots and pans of every shape and size. I would stop by the table, where the kitchen-maid had shelled them, to inspect the platoons of peas, drawn up in ranks and numbered, like little green marbles, ready for a game; but what fascinated me would be the asparagus, tinged with ultramarine and rosy pink which ran from their heads, finely stippled in mauve and azure, through a series of imperceptible changes to their white feet, still stained a little by the soil of their garden-bed: a rainbow-loveliness that was not of this world. I felt that these celestial hues indicated the presence of exquisite creatures who had been pleased to assume vegetable form, who,

through the disguise which covered their firm and edible flesh, allowed me to discern in this radiance of earliest dawn, these hinted rainbows, these blue evening shades, that precious quality which I should recognise again when, all night long after a dinner at which I had partaken of them, they played (lyrical and coarse in their jesting as the fairies in Shakespeare's *Dream*) at transforming my humble chamber into a bower of aromatic perfume.

Poor Giotto's Charity, as Swann had named her, charged by Françoise with the task of preparing them for the table, would have them lying beside her in a basket; sitting with a mournful air, as though all the sorrows of the world were heaped upon her; and the light crowns of azure which capped the asparagus shoots above their pink jackets would be finely and separately outlined, star by star, as in Giotto's fresco are the flowers banded about the brows, or patterning the basket of his Virtue at Padua. And, meanwhile, Françoise would be turning on the spit one of those chickens, such as she alone knew how to roast, chickens which had wafted far abroad from Combray the sweet savour of her merits, and which, while she was serving them to us at table, would make the quality of kindness predominate for the moment in my private conception of her character; the aroma of that cooked flesh, which she knew how to make so unctuous and so tender, seeming to me no more than the proper perfume of one of her many virtues.

But the day on which, while my father took counsel with his family upon our strange meeting with Legrandin, I went down to the kitchen, was one of those days when Giotto's Charity, still very weak and ill after her recent confinement, had been unable to rise from her bed; Françoise, being without assistance, had fallen into arrears. When I went in, I saw her in the back-kitchen which opened on to the courtyard, in process of killing a chicken; by its desperate and quite natural resistance, which Françoise, beside herself with rage as she attempted to slit its throat beneath the ear, accompanied with shrill cries of "Filthy creature! Filthy creature!" it made the saintly kindness and unction of our servant rather less prominent than it would do, next day at dinner, when it made its appearance in a skin gold-embroidered like a chasuble, and its precious juice was poured out drop by drop as from a pyx. When it was dead Françoise mopped up its streaming blood, in which, however, she did not let her rancour drown, for she gave vent to another burst of rage, and, gazing down at the carcass of her enemy, uttered a final "Filthy creature!"

I crept out of the kitchen and upstairs, trembling all over; I could have prayed, then, for the instant dismissal of Françoise. But who would have baked

me such hot rolls, boiled me such fragrant coffee, and even — roasted me such chickens? And, as it happened, everyone else had already had to make the same cowardly reckoning. For my aunt Léonie knew (though I was still in ignorance of this) that Françoise, who, for her own daughter or for her nephews, would have given her life without a murmur, shewed a singular implacability in her dealings with the rest of the world. In spite of which my aunt still retained her, for, while conscious of her cruelty, she could appreciate her services. I began gradually to realise that Françoise's kindness, her compunction, the sum total of her virtues concealed many of these back-kitchen tragedies, just as history reveals to us that the reigns of the kings and queens who are portrayed as kneeling with clasped hands in the windows of churches, were stained by oppression and bloodshed. I had taken note of the fact that, apart from her own kinsfolk, the sufferings of humanity inspired in her a pity which increased in direct ratio to the distance separating the sufferers from herself. The tears which flowed from her in torrents when she read of the misfortunes of persons unknown to her, in a newspaper, were quickly stemmed once she had been able to form a more accurate mental picture of the victims. One night, shortly after her confinement, the kitchen-maid was seized with the most appalling pains; Mamma heard her groans, and rose and awakened Françoise, who, quite unmoved, declared that all the outcry was mere malingering, that the girl wanted to 'play the mistress' in the house. The doctor, who had been afraid of some such attack, had left a marker in a medical dictionary which we had, at the page on which the symptoms were described, and had told us to turn up this passage, where we would find the measures of 'first aid' to be adopted. My mother sent Françoise to fetch the book, warning her not to let the marker drop out. An hour elapsed, and Françoise had not returned; my mother, supposing that she had gone back to bed, grew vexed, and told me to go myself to the bookcase and fetch the volume. I did so, and there found Françoise who, in her curiosity to know what the marker indicated, had begun to read the clinical account of these after-pains, and was violently sobbing, now that it was a question of a type of illness with which she was not familiar. At each painful symptom mentioned by the writer she would exclaim: "Oh, oh, Holy Virgin, is it possible that God wishes any wretched human creature to suffer so? Oh, the poor girl!"

But when I had called her, and she had returned to the bedside of Giotto's Charity, her tears at once ceased to flow; she could find no stimulus for that pleasant sensation of tenderness and pity which she very well knew, having been moved to it often enough by the perusal of newspapers; nor any other pleasure of

the same kind in her sense of weariness and irritation at being pulled out of bed in the middle of the night for the kitchen-maid; so that at the sight of those very sufferings, the printed account of which had moved her to tears, she had nothing to offer but ill-tempered mutterings, mingled with bitter sarcasm, saying, when she thought that we had gone out of earshot: "Well, she need never have done what she must have done to bring all this about! She found that pleasant enough, I dare say! She had better not put on any airs now. All the same, he must have been a god-forsaken young man to go after *that*. Dear, dear, it's just as they used to say in my poor mother's country:

Snaps and snails and puppy-dogs' tails,
And dirty sluts in plenty,
Smell sweeter than roses in young men's noses
When the heart is one-and-twenty."

Although, when her grandson had a slight cold in his head, she would Bet off at night, even if she were ill also, instead of going to bed, to see whether he had everything that he wanted, covering ten miles on foot before daybreak so as to be in time to begin her work, this same love for her own people, and her desire to establish the future greatness of her house on a solid foundation reacted, in her policy with regard to the other servants, in one unvarying maxim, which was never to let any of them set foot in my aunt's room; indeed she shewed a sort of pride in not allowing anyone else to come near my aunt, preferring, when she herself was ill, to get out of bed and to administer the Vichy water in person, rather than to concede to the kitchen-maid the right of entry into her mistress's presence. There is a species of hymenoptera, observed by Fabre, the burrowing wasp, which in order to provide a supply of fresh meat for her offspring after her own decease, calls in the science of anatomy to amplify the resources of her instinctive cruelty, and, having made a collection of weevils and spiders, proceeds with marvellous knowledge and skill to pierce the nerve-centre on which their power of locomotion (but none of their other vital functions) depends, so that the paralysed insect, beside which her egg is laid, will furnish the larva, when it is hatched, with a tamed and inoffensive quarry, incapable either of flight or of resistance, but perfectly fresh for the larder: in the same way Françoise had adopted, to minister to her permanent and unfaltering resolution to render the house uninhabitable to any other servant, a series of crafty and pitiless stratagems. Many years later we discovered that, if we had been fed on

asparagus day after day throughout that whole season, it was because the smell of the plants gave the poor kitchen-maid, who had to prepare them, such violent attacks of asthma that she was finally obliged to leave my aunt's service.

Alas! we had definitely to alter our opinion of M. Legrandin. On one-of the Sundays following our meeting with him on the Pont-Vieux, after which my father had been forced to confess himself mistaken, as mass drew to an end, and, with the sunshine and the noise of the outer world, something else invaded the church, an atmosphere so far from sacred that Mme. Goupil, Mme. Percepied (all those, in fact, who a moment ago, when I arrived a little late, had been sitting motionless, their eyes fixed on their prayer-books; who, I might even have thought, had not seen me come in, had not their feet moved slightly to push away the little kneeling-desk which was preventing me from getting to my chair) began in loud voices to discuss with us all manner of utterly mundane topics, as though we were already outside in the Square, we saw, standing on the sun-baked steps of the porch, dominating the many-coloured tumult of the market, Legrandin himself, whom the husband of the lady we had seen with him, on the previous occasion, was just going to introduce to the wife of another large landed proprietor of the district. Legrandin's face shewed an extraordinary zeal and animation; he made a profound bow, with a subsidiary backward movement which brought his spine sharply up into a position behind its starting-point, a gesture in which he must have been trained by the husband of his sister, Mme. de Cambremer. This rapid recovery caused a sort of tense muscular wave to ripple over Legrandin's hips, which I had not supposed to be so fleshy; I cannot say why, but this undulation of pure matter, this wholly carnal fluency, with not the least hint in it of spiritual significance, this wave lashed to a fury by the wind of an assiduity, an obsequiousness of the basest sort, awoke my mind suddenly to the possibility of a Legrandin altogether different from the one whom we knew. The lady gave him some message for her coachman, and while he was stepping down to her carriage the impression of joy, timid and devout, which the introduction had stamped there, still lingered on his face. Carried away in a sort of dream, he smiled, then he began to hurry back towards the lady; he was walking faster than usual, and his shoulders swayed backwards and forwards, right and left, in the most absurd fashion; altogether he looked, so utterly had he abandoned himself to it, ignoring all other considerations, as though he were the lifeless and wire-pulled puppet of his own happiness. Meanwhile we were coming out through the porch; we were passing close beside him; he was too well bred to turn his head away; but he fixed his eyes, which had suddenly

changed to those of a seer, lost in the profundity of his vision, on so distant a point of the horizon that he could not see us, and so had not to acknowledge our presence. His face emerged, still with an air of innocence, from his straight and pliant coat, which looked as though conscious of having been led astray, in spite of itself, and plunged into surroundings of a detested splendour. And a spotted necktie, stirred by the breezes of the Square, continued to float in front of Legrandin, like the standard of his proud isolation, of his noble independence. Just as we reached the house my mother discovered that we had forgotten the 'Saint-Honoré,' and asked my father to go back with me and tell them to send it up at once. Near the church we met Legrandin, coming towards us with the same lady, whom he was escorting to her carriage. He brushed past us, and did not interrupt what he was saying to her, but gave us, out of the corner of his blue eye, a little sign, which began and ended, so to speak, inside his eyelids, and as it did not involve the least movement of his facial muscles, managed to pass quite unperceived by the lady; but, striving to compensate by the intensity of his feelings for the somewhat restricted field in which they had to find expression, he made that blue chink, which was set apart for us, sparkle with all the animation of cordiality, which went far beyond mere playfulness, and almost touched the border-line of roguery; he subtilised the refinements of good-fellowship into a wink of connivance, a hint, a hidden meaning, a secret understanding, all the mysteries of complicity in a plot, and finally exalted his assurances of friendship to the level of protestations of affection, even of a declaration of love, lighting up for us, and for us alone, with a secret and languid flame invisible by the great lady upon his other side, an enamoured pupil in a countenance of ice.

Only the day before he had asked my parents to send me to dine with him on this same Sunday evening. "Come and bear your aged friend company," he had said to me. "Like the nosegay which a traveller sends us from some land to which we shall never go again, come and let me breathe from the far country of your adolescence the scent of those flowers of spring among which I also used to wander, many years ago. Come with the primrose, with the canon's beard, with the gold-cup; come with the stone-crop, whereof are posies made, pledges of love, in the Balzacian flora, come with that flower of the Resurrection morning, the Easter daisy, come with the snowballs of the guelder-rose, which begin to embalm with their fragrance the alleys of your great-aunt's garden ere the last snows of Lent are melted from its soil. Come with the glorious silken raiment of the lily, apparel fit for Solomon, and with the many-coloured enamel of the

pansies, but come, above all, with the spring breeze, still cooled by the last frosts of wirier, wafting apart, for the two butterflies' sake, that have waited outside all morning, the closed portals of the first Jerusalem rose."

The question was raised at home whether, all things considered, I ought still to be sent to dine with M. Legrandin. But my grandmother refused to believe that he could have been impolite.

"You admit yourself that he appears at church there, quite simply dressed, and all that; he hardly looks like a man of fashion." She added that; in any event, even if, at the worst, he had been intentionally rude, it was far better for us to pretend that we had noticed nothing. And indeed my father himself, though more annoyed than any of us by the attitude which Legrandin had adopted, may still have held in reserve a final uncertainty as to its true meaning. It was like every attitude or action which reveals a man's deep and hidden character; they bear no relation to what he has previously said, and we cannot confirm our suspicions by the culprit's evidence, for he will admit nothing; we are reduced to the evidence of our own senses, and we ask ourselves, in the face of this detached and incoherent fragment of recollection, whether indeed our senses have not been the victims of a hallucination; with the result that such attitudes, and these alone are of importance in indicating character, are the most apt to leave us in perplexity.

I dined with Legrandin on the terrace of his house, by moonlight. "There is a charming quality, is there not," he said to me, "in this silence; for hearts that are wounded, as mine is, a novelist, whom you will read in time to come, claims that there is no remedy but silence and shadow. And see you this, my boy, there comes in all lives a time, towards which you still have far to go, when the weary eyes can endure but one kind of light, the light which a fine evening like this prepares for us in the stillroom of darkness, when the ears can listen to no music save what the moonlight breathes through the flute of silence."

I could hear what M. Legrandin was saying; like everything that he said, it sounded attractive; but I was disturbed by the memory of a lady whom I had seen recently for the first time; and thinking, now that I knew that Legrandin was on friendly terms with several of the local aristocracy, that perhaps she also was among his acquaintance, I summoned up all my courage and said to him: "Tell me, sir, do you, by any chance, know the lady — the ladies of Guermantes?" and I felt glad because, in pronouncing the name, I had secured a sort of power over it, by the mere act of drawing it up out of my dreams and giving it an objective existence in the world of spoken things.

But, at the sound of the word Guermantes, I saw in the middle of each of our

friend's blue eyes a little brown dimple appear, as though they had been stabbed by some invisible pin-point, while the rest of his pupils, reacting from the shock, received and secreted the azure overflow. His fringed eyelids darkened, and drooped. His mouth, which had been stiffened and seared with bitter lines, was the first to recover, and smiled, while his eyes still seemed full of pain, like the eyes of a good-looking martyr whose body bristles with arrows.

"No, I do not know them," he said, but instead of uttering so simple a piece of information, a reply in which there was so little that could astonish me, in the natural and conversational tone which would have befitted it, he recited it with a separate stress upon each word, leaning forward, bowing his head, with at once the vehemence which a man gives, so as to be believed, to a highly improbable statement (as though the fact that he did not know the Guermantes could be due only to some strange accident of fortune) and with the emphasis of a man who, finding himself unable to keep silence about what is to him a painful situation, chooses to proclaim it aloud, so as to convince his hearers that the confession he is making is one that causes him no embarrassment, but is easy, agreeable, spontaneous, that the situation in question, in this case the absence of relations with the Guermantes family, might very well have been not forced upon, but actually designed by Legrandin himself, might arise from some family tradition, some moral principle or mystical vow which expressly forbade his seeking their society.

"No," he resumed, explaining by his words the tone in which they were uttered. "No, I do not know them; I have never wished to know them; I have always made a point of preserving complete independence; at heart, as you know, I am a bit of a Radical. People are always coming to me about it, telling me I am mistaken in not going to Guermantes, that I make myself seem ill-bred, uncivilised, an old bear. But that's not the sort of reputation that can frighten me; it's too true! In my heart of hearts I care for nothing in the world now but a few churches, books — two or three, pictures — rather more, perhaps, and the light of the moon when the fresh breeze of youth (such as yours) wafts to my nostrils the scent of gardens whose flowers my old eyes are not sharp enough, now, to distinguish."

I did not understand very clearly why, in order to refrain from going to the houses of people whom one did not know, it should be necessary to cling to one's independence, nor how that could give one the appearance of a savage or a bear. But what I did understand was this, that Legrandin was not altogether truthful when he said that he cared only for churches, moonlight, and youth; he

cared also, he cared a very great deal, for people who lived in country houses, and would be so much afraid, when in their company, of incurring their displeasure that he would never dare to let them see that he numbered, as well, among his friends middle-class people, the families of solicitors and stockbrokers, preferring, if the truth must be known, that it should be revealed in his absence, when he was out of earshot, that judgment should go against him (if so it must) by default: in a word, he was a snob. Of course he would never have admitted all or any of this in the poetical language which my family and I so much admired. And if I asked him, "Do you know the Guermantes family?" Legrandin the talker would reply, "No, I have never cared to know them." But unfortunately the talker was now subordinated to another Legrandin, whom he kept carefully hidden in his breast, whom he would never consciously exhibit, because this other could tell stories about our own Legrandin and about his snobbishness which would have ruined his reputation for ever; and this other Legrandin had replied to me already in that wounded look, that stiffened smile, the undue gravity of his tone in uttering those few words, in the thousand arrows by which our own Legrandin had instantaneously been stabbed and sickened, like a Saint Sebastian of snobbery:

"Oh, how you hurt me! No, I do not know the Guermantes family. Do not remind me of the great sorrow of my life." And since this other, this irrepressible, dominant, despotic Legrandin, if he lacked our Legrandin's charming vocabulary, shewed an infinitely greater promptness in expressing himself, by means of what are called 'reflexes,' it followed that, when Legrandin the talker attempted to silence him, he would already have spoken, and it would be useless for our friend to deplore the bad impression which the revelations of his *alter ego* must have caused, since he could do no more now than endeavour to mitigate them.

This was not to say that M. Legrandin was anything but sincere when he inveighed against snobs. He could not (from his own knowledge, at least) be aware that he was one also, since it is only with the passions of others that we are ever really familiar, and what we come to find out about our own can be no more than what other people have shewn us. Upon ourselves they react but indirectly, through our imagination, which substitutes for our actual, primary motives other, secondary motives, less stark and therefore more decent. Never had Legrandin's snobbishness impelled him to make a habit of visiting a duchess as such. Instead, it would set his imagination to make that duchess appear, in Legrandin's eyes, endowed with all the graces. He would be drawn towards the

duchess, assuring himself the while that he was yielding to the attractions of her mind, and her other virtues, which the vile race of snobs could never understand. Only his fellow-snobs knew that he was of their number, for, owing to their inability to appreciate the intervening efforts of his imagination, they saw in close juxtaposition the social activities of Legrandin and their primary cause.

At home, meanwhile, we had no longer any illusions as to M. Legrandin, and our relations with him had become much more distant. Mamma would be greatly delighted whenever she caught him red-handed in the sin, which he continued to call the unpardonable sin, of snobbery. As for my father, he found it difficult to take Legrandin's airs in so light, in so detached a spirit; and when there was some talk, one year, of sending me to spend the long summer holidays at Balbec with my grandmother, he said: "I must, most certainly, tell Legrandin that you are going to Balbec, to see whether he will offer you an introduction to his sister. He probably doesn't remember telling us that she lived within a mile of the place."

My grandmother, who held that, when one went to the seaside, one ought to be on the beach from morning to night, to taste the salt breezes, and that one should not know anyone in the place, because calls and parties and excursions were so much time stolen from what belonged, by rights, to the sea-air, begged him on no account to speak to Legrandin of our plans; for already, in her mind's eye, she could see his sister, Mme. de Cambremer, alighting from her carriage at the door of our hotel just as we were on the point of going out fishing, and obliging us to remain indoors all afternoon to entertain her. But Mamma laughed her fears to scorn, for she herself felt that the danger was not so threatening, and that Legrandin would shew no undue anxiety to make us acquainted with his sister. And, as it happened, there was no need for any of us to introduce the subject of Balbec, for it was Legrandin himself who, without the least suspicion that we had ever had any intention of visiting those parts, walked into the trap uninvited one evening, when we met him strolling on the banks of the Vivonne.

"There are tints in the clouds this evening, violets and blues, which are very beautiful, are they not, my friend?" he said to my father. "Especially a blue which is far more floral than atmospheric, a cineraria blue, which it is surprising to see in the sky. And that little pink cloud there, has it not just the tint of some flower, a carnation or hydrangea? Nowhere, perhaps, except on the shores of the English Channel, where Normandy merges into Brittany, have I been able to find such copious examples of what you might call a vegetable kingdom in the clouds. Down there, close to Balbec, among all those places which are still so

uncivilised, there is a little bay, charmingly quiet, where the sunsets of the Auge Valley, those red-and-gold sunsets (which, all the same, I am very far from despising) seem commonplace and insignificant; for in that moist and gentle atmosphere these heavenly flower-beds will break into blossom, in a few moments, in the evenings, incomparably lovely, and often lasting for hours before they fade. Others shed their leaves at once, and then it is more beautiful still to see the sky strewn with the scattering of their innumerable petals, sulphurous yellow and rosy red. In that bay, which they call the Opal Bay, the golden sands appear more charming still from being fastened, like fair Andromeda, to those terrible rocks of the surrounding coast, to that funereal shore, famed for the number of its wrecks, where every winter many a brave vessel falls a victim to the perils of the sea. Balbec! the oldest bone in the geological skeleton that underlies our soil, the true Ar-mor, the sea, the land's end, the accursed region which Anatole France — an enchanter whose works our young friend ought to read — has so well depicted, beneath its eternal fogs, as though it were indeed the land of the Cimmerians in the Odyssey. Balbec; yes, they are building hotels there now, superimposing them upon its ancient and charming soil, which they are powerless to alter; how delightful it is, down there, to be able to step out at once into regions so primitive and so entrancing."

"Indeed! And do you know anyone at Balbec?" inquired my father. "This young man is just going to spend a couple of months there with his grandmother, and my wife too, perhaps."

Legrandin, taken unawares by the question at a moment when he was looking directly at my father, was unable to turn aside his gaze, and so concentrated it with steadily increasing intensity — smiling mournfully the while — upon the eyes of his questioner, with an air of friendliness and frankness and of not being afraid to look him in the face, until he seemed to have penetrated my father's skull, as it had been a ball of glass, and to be seeing, at the moment, a long way beyond and behind it, a brightly coloured cloud, which provided him with a mental alibi, and would enable him to establish the theory that, just when he was being asked whether he knew anyone at Balbec, he had been thinking of something else, and so had not heard the question. As a rule these tactics make the questioner proceed to ask, "Why, what are you thinking about?" But my father, inquisitive, annoyed, and cruel, repeated: "Have you friends, then, in that neighbourhood, that you know Balbec so well?"

In a final and desperate effort the smiling gaze of Legrandin struggled to the extreme limits of its tenderness, vagueness, candour, and distraction; then

feeling, no doubt, that there was nothing left for it now but to answer, he said to us: “I have friends all the world over, wherever there are companies of trees, stricken but not defeated, which have come together to offer a common supplication, with pathetic obstinacy, to an inclement sky which has no mercy upon them.”

“That is not quite what I meant,” interrupted my father, obstinate as a tree and merciless as the sky. “I asked you, in case anything should happen to my mother-in-law and she wanted to feel that she was not all alone down there, at the ends of the earth, whether you knew any of the people.”

“There as elsewhere, I know everyone and I know no one,” replied Legrandin, who was by no means ready yet to surrender; “places I know well, people very slightly. But, down there, the places themselves seem to me just like people, rare and wonderful people, of a delicate quality which would have been corrupted and ruined by the gift of life. Perhaps it is a castle which you encounter upon the cliff’s edge; standing there by the roadside, where it has halted to contemplate its sorrows before an evening sky, still rosy, through which a golden moon is climbing; while the fishing-boats, homeward bound, creasing the watered silk of the Channel, hoist its pennant at their mastheads and carry its colours. Or perhaps it is a simple dwelling-house that stands alone, ugly, if anything, timid-seeming but full of romance, hiding from every eye some imperishable secret of happiness and disenchantment. That land which knows not truth,” he continued with Machiavellian subtlety, “that land of infinite fiction makes bad reading for any boy; and is certainly not what I should choose or recommend for my young friend here, who is already so much inclined to melancholy, for a heart already predisposed to receive its impressions. Climates that breathe amorous secrets and futile regrets may agree with an old and disillusioned man like myself; but they must always prove fatal to a temperament which is still unformed. Believe me,” he went on with emphasis, “the waters of that bay — more Breton than Norman — may exert a sedative influence, though even that is of questionable value, upon a heart which, like mine, is no longer unbroken, a heart for whose wounds there is no longer anything to compensate. But at your age, my boy, those waters are contra-indicated.... Good night to you, neighbours,” he added, moving away from us with that evasive abruptness to which we were accustomed; and then, turning towards us, with a phy-sicianly finger raised in warning, he resumed the consultation: “No Balbec before you are fifty!” he called out to me, “and even then it must depend on the state of the heart.”

My father spoke to him of it again, as often as we met him, and tortured him with questions, but it was labour in vain: like that scholarly swindler who devoted to the fabrication of forged palimpsests a wealth of skill and knowledge and industry the hundredth part of which would have sufficed to establish him in a more lucrative — but an honourable occupation, M. Legrandin, had we insisted further, would in the end have constructed a whole system of ethics, and a celestial geography of Lower Normandy, sooner than admit to us that, within a mile of Balbec, his own sister was living in her own house; sooner than find himself obliged to offer us a letter of introduction, the prospect of which would never have inspired him with such terror had he been absolutely certain — as, from his knowledge of my grandmother's character, he really ought to have been certain — that in no circumstances whatsoever would we have dreamed of making use of it.

***

We used always to return from our walks in good time to pay aunt Léonie a visit before dinner. In the first weeks of our Combray holidays, when the days ended early, we would still be able to see, as we turned into the Rue du Saint-Esprit, a reflection of the western sky from the windows of the house and a band of purple at the foot of the Calvary, which was mirrored further on in the pond; a fiery glow which, accompanied often by a cold that burned and stung, would associate itself in my mind with the glow of the fire over which, at that very moment, was roasting the chicken that was to furnish me, in place of the poetic pleasure I had found in my walk, with the sensual pleasures of good feeding, warmth and rest. But in summer, when we came back to the house, the sun would not have set; and while we were upstairs paying our visit to aunt Léonie its rays, sinking until they touched and lay along her window-sill, would there be caught and held by the large inner curtains and the bands which tied them back to the wall, and split and scattered and filtered; and then, at last, would fall upon and inlay with tiny flakes of gold the lemonwood of her chest-of-drawers, illuminating the room in their passage with the same delicate, slanting, shadowed beams that fall among the boles of forest trees. But on some days, though very rarely, the chest-of-drawers would long since have shed its momentary adornments, there would no longer, as we turned into the Rue du Saint-Esprit, be any reflection from the western sky burning along the line of window-panes; the pond beneath the Calvary would have lost its fiery glow,

sometimes indeed had changed already to an opalescent pallor, while a long ribbon of moonlight, bent and broken and broadened by every ripple upon the water's surface, would be lying across it, from end to end. Then, as we drew near the house, we would make out a figure standing upon the doorstep, and Mamma would say to me: "Good heavens! There is Françoise looking out for us; your aunt must be anxious; that means we are late."

And without wasting time by stopping to take off our 'things' we would fly upstairs to my aunt Léonie's room to reassure her, to prove to her by our bodily presence that all her gloomy imaginings were false, that, on the contrary, nothing had happened to us, but that we had gone the 'Guermantes way,' and, good lord, when one took that walk, my aunt knew well enough that one could never say at what time one would be home.

"There, Françoise," my aunt would say, "didn't I tell you that they must have gone the Guermantes way? Good gracious! They must be hungry! And your nice leg of mutton will be quite dried up now, after all the hours it's been waiting. What a time to come in! Well, and so you went the Guermantes way?"

"But, Leonie, I supposed you knew," Mamma would answer. "I thought that Françoise had seen us go out by the little gate, through the kitchen-garden."

For there were, in the environs of Combray, two 'ways' which we used to take for our walks, and so diametrically opposed that we would actually leave the house by a different door, according to the way we had chosen: the way towards Méséglise-la-Vineuse, which we called also 'Swann's way,' because, to get there, one had to pass along the boundary of M. Swann's estate, and the 'Guermantes way.' Of Méséglise-la-Vineuse, to tell the truth, I never knew anything more than the way there, and the strange people who would come over on Sundays to take the air in Combray, people whom, this time, neither my aunt nor any of us would 'know at all,' and whom we would therefore assume to be 'people who must have come over from Méséglise.' As for Guermantes, I was to know it well enough one day, but that day had still to come; and, during the whole of my boyhood, if Méséglise was to me something as inaccessible as the horizon, which remained hidden from sight, however far one went, by the folds of a country which no longer bore the least resemblance to the country round Combray; Guermantes, on the other hand, meant no more than the ultimate goal, ideal rather than real, of the 'Guermantes way,' a sort of abstract geographical term like the North Pole or the Equator. And so to 'take the Guermantes way' in order to get to Méséglise, or vice versa, would have seemed to me as nonsensical a proceeding as to turn to the east in order to reach the west. Since my father

used always to speak of the ‘Méséglise way’ as comprising the finest view of a plain that he knew anywhere, and of the ‘Guermantes way’ as typical of river scenery, I had invested each of them, by conceiving them in this way as two distinct entities, with that cohesion, that unity which belongs only to the figments of the mind; the smallest detail of either of them appeared to me as a precious thing, which exhibited the special excellence of the whole, while, immediately beside them, in the first stages of our walk, before we had reached the sacred soil of one or the other, the purely material roads, at definite points on which they were set down as the ideal view over a plain and the ideal scenery of a river, were no more worth the trouble of looking at them than, to a keen playgoer and lover of dramatic art, are the little streets which may happen to run past the walls of a theatre. But, above all, I set between them, far more distinctly than the mere distance in miles and yards and inches which separated one from the other, the distance that there was between the two parts of my brain in which I used to think of them, one of those distances of the mind which time serves only to lengthen, which separate things irremediably from one another, keeping them for ever upon different planes. And this distinction was rendered still more absolute because the habit we had of never going both ways on the same day, or in the course of the same walk, but the ‘Méséglise way’ one time and the ‘Guermantes way’ another, shut them up, so to speak, far apart and unaware of each other’s existence, in the sealed vessels — between which there could be no communication — of separate afternoons.

When we had decided to go the ‘Méséglise way’ we would start (without undue haste, and even if the sky were clouded over, since the walk was not very long, and did not take us too far from home), as though we were not going anywhere in particular, by the front-door of my aunt’s house, which opened on to the Rue du Saint-Esprit. We would be greeted by the gunsmith, we would drop our letters into the box, we would tell Théodore, from Françoise, as we passed, that she had run out of oil or coffee, and we would leave the town by the road which ran along the white fence of M. Swann’s park. Before reaching it we would be met on our way by the scent of his lilac-trees, come out to welcome strangers. Out of the fresh little green hearts of their foliage the lilacs raised inquisitively over the fence of the park their plumes of white or purple blossom, which glowed, even in the shade, with the sunlight in which they had been bathed. Some of them, half-concealed by the little tiled house, called the Archers’ Lodge, in which Swann’s keeper lived, overtopped its gothic gable with their rosy minaret. The nymphs of spring would have seemed coarse and vulgar

in comparison with these young houris, who retained, in this French garden, the pure and vivid colouring of a Persian miniature. Despite my desire to throw my arms about their pliant forms and to draw down towards me the starry locks that crowned their fragrant heads, we would pass them by without stopping, for my parents had ceased to visit Tansonville since Swann's marriage, and, so as not to appear to be looking into his park, we would, instead of taking the road which ran beside its boundary and then climbed straight up to the open fields, choose another way, which led in the same direction, but circuitously, and brought us out rather too far from home.

One day my grandfather said to my 'father: "Don't you remember Swann's telling us yesterday that his wife and daughter had gone off to Rheims and that he was taking the opportunity of spending a day or two in Paris? We might go along by the park, since the ladies are not at home; that will make it a little shorter."

We stopped for a moment by the fence. Lilac-time was nearly over; some of the trees still thrust aloft, in tall purple chandeliers, their tiny balls of blossom, but in many places among their foliage where, only a week before, they had still been breaking in waves of fragrant foam, these were now spent and shrivelled and discoloured, a hollow scum, dry and scentless. My grandfather pointed out to my father in what respects the appearance of the place was still the same, and how far it had altered since the walk that he had taken with old M. Swann, on the day of his wife's death; and he seized the opportunity to tell us, once again, the story of that walk.

In front of us a path bordered with nasturtiums rose in the full glare of the sun towards the house. But to our right the park stretched away into the distance, on level ground. Overshadowed by the tall trees which stood close around it, an 'ornamental water' had been constructed by Swann's parents but, even in his most artificial creations, nature is the material upon which man has to work; certain spots will persist in remaining surrounded by the vassals of their own especial sovereignty, and will raise their immemorial standards among all the 'laid-out' scenery of a park, just as they would have done far from any human interference, in a solitude which must everywhere return to engulf them, springing up out of the necessities of their exposed position, and superimposing itself upon the work of man's hands. And so it was that, at the foot of the path which led down to this artificial lake, there might be seen, in its two tiers woven of trailing forget-me-nots below and of periwinkle flowers above, the natural, delicate, blue garland which binds the luminous, shadowed brows of water-

nymphs; while the iris, its swords sweeping every way in regal profusion, stretched out over agrimony and water-growing king-cups the lilied sceptres, tattered glories of yellow and purple, of the kingdom of the lake.

The absence of Mlle. Swann, which — since it preserved me from the terrible risk of seeing her appear on one of the paths, and of being identified and scorned by this so privileged little girl who had Bergotte for a friend and used to go with him to visit cathedrals — made the exploration of Tan-sonville, now for the first time permitted me, a matter of indifference to myself, seemed however to invest the property, in my grandfather's and father's eyes, with a fresh and transient charm, and (like an entirely cloudless sky when one is going mountaineering) to make the day extraordinarily propitious for a walk in this direction; I should have liked to see their reckoning proved false, to see, by a miracle, Mlle. Swann appear, with her father, so close to us that we should not have time to escape, and should therefore be obliged to make her acquaintance. And so, when I suddenly noticed a straw basket lying forgotten on the grass by the side of a line whose float was bobbing in the water, I made a great effort to keep my father and grandfather looking in another direction, away from this sign that she might, after all, be in residence. Still, as Swann had told us that he ought not, really, to go away just then, as he had some people staying in the house, the line might equally belong to one of these guests. Not a footstep was to be heard on any of the paths. Somewhere in one of the tall trees, making a stage in its height, an invisible bird, desperately attempting to make the day seem shorter, was exploring with a long, continuous note the solitude that pressed it on every side, but it received at once so unanimous an answer, so powerful a repercussion of silence and of immobility that, one would have said, it had arrested for all eternity the moment which it had been trying to make pass more quickly. The sunlight fell so implacably from a fixed sky that one was naturally inclined to slip away out of the reach of its attentions, and even the slumbering water, whose repose was perpetually being invaded by the insects that swarmed above its surface, while it dreamed, no doubt, of some imaginary maelstrom, intensified the uneasiness which the sight of that floating cork had wrought in me, by appearing to draw it at full speed across the silent reaches of a mirrored firmament; now almost vertical, it seemed on the point of plunging down out of sight, and I had begun to ask myself whether, setting aside the longing and the terror that I had of making her acquaintance, it was not actually my duty to warn Mlle. Swann that the fish was biting — when I was obliged to run after my father and grandfather, who were calling me, and were surprised that I had not

followed them along the little path, climbing up hill towards the open fields, into which they had already turned. I found the whole path throbbing with the fragrance of hawthorn-blossom. The hedge resembled a series of chapels, whose walls were no longer visible under the mountains of flowers that were heaped upon their altars; while underneath, the sun cast a square of light upon the ground, as though it had shone in upon them through a window; the scent that swept out over me from them was as rich, and as circumscribed in its range, as though I had been standing before the Lady-altar, and the flowers, themselves adorned also, held out each its little bunch of glittering stamens with an air of inattention, fine, radiating ‘nerves’ in the flamboyant style of architecture, like those which, in church, framed the stair to the rood-loft or closed the perpendicular tracery of the windows, but here spread out into pools of fleshy white, like strawberry-beds in spring. How simple and rustic, in comparison with these, would seem the dog-roses which, in a few weeks’ time, would be climbing the same hillside path in the heat of the sun, dressed in the smooth silk of their blushing pink bodices, which would be undone and scattered by the first breath of wind.

But it was in vain that I lingered before the hawthorns, to breathe in, to marshal! before my mind (which knew not what to make of it), to lose in order to rediscover their invisible and unchanging odour, to absorb myself in the rhythm which disposed their flowers here and there with the light-heartedness of youth, and at intervals as unexpected as certain intervals of music; they offered me an indefinite continuation of the same charm, in an inexhaustible profusion, but without letting me delve into it any more deeply, like those melodies which one can play over a hundred times in succession without coming any nearer to their secret. I turned away from them for a moment so as to be able to return to them with renewed strength. My eyes followed up the slope which, outside the hedge, rose steeply to the fields, a poppy that had strayed and been lost by its fellows, or a few cornflowers that had fallen lazily behind, and decorated the ground here and there with their flowers like the border of a tapestry, in which may be seen at intervals hints of the rustic theme which appears triumphant in the panel itself; infrequent still, spaced apart as the scattered houses which warn us that we are approaching a village, they betokened to me the vast expanse of waving corn beneath the fleecy clouds, and the sight of a single poppy hoisting upon its slender rigging and holding against the breeze its scarlet ensign, over the buoy of rich black earth from which it sprang, made my heart beat as does a wayfarer’s when he perceives, upon some low-lying ground, an old and broken

boat which is being caulked and made seaworthy, and cries out, although he has not yet caught sight of it, “The Sea!”

And then I returned to my hawthorns, and stood before them as one stands before those masterpieces of painting which, one imagines, one will be better able to ‘take in’ when one has looked away, for a moment, at something else; but in vain did I shape my fingers into a frame, so as to have nothing but the hawthorns before my eyes; the sentiment which they aroused in me remained obscure and vague, struggling and failing to free itself, to float across and become one with the flowers. They themselves offered me no enlightenment, and I could not call upon any other flowers to satisfy this mysterious longing. And then, inspiring me with that rapture which we feel on seeing a work by our favourite painter quite different from any of those that we already know, or, better still, when some one has taken us and set us down in front of a picture of which we have hitherto seen no more than a pencilled sketch, or when a piece of music which we have heard played over on the piano bursts out again in our ears with all the splendour and fullness of an orchestra, my grandfather called me to him, and, pointing to the hedge of Tansonville, said: “You are fond of hawthorns; just look at this pink one; isn’t it pretty?”

And it was indeed a hawthorn, but one whose flowers were pink, and lovelier even than the white. It, too, was in holiday attire, for one of those days which are the only true holidays, the holy days of religion, because they are not appointed by any capricious accident, as secular holidays are appointed, upon days which are not specially ordained for such observances, which have nothing about them that is essentially festal — but it was attired even more richly than the rest, for the flowers which clung to its branches, one above another, so thickly as to leave no part of the tree undecorated, like the tassels wreathed about the crook of a rococo shepherdess, were every one of them ‘in colour,’ and consequently of a superior quality, by the aesthetic standards of Combray, to the ‘plain,’ if one was to judge by the scale of prices at the ‘stores’ in the Square, or at Camus’s, where the most expensive biscuits were those whose sugar was pink. And for my own part I set a higher value on cream cheese when it was pink, when I had been allowed to tinge it with crushed strawberries. And these flowers had chosen precisely the colour of some edible and delicious thing, or of some exquisite addition to one’s costume for a great festival, which colours, inasmuch as they make plain the reason for their superiority, are those whose beauty is most evident to the eyes of children, and for that reason must always seem more vivid and more natural than any other tints, even after the child’s mind has

realised that they offer no gratification to the appetite, and have not been selected by the dressmaker. And, indeed, I had felt at once, as I had felt before the white blossom, but now still more marvelling, that it was in no artificial manner, by no device of human construction, that the festal intention of these flowers was revealed, but that it was Nature herself who had spontaneously expressed it (with the simplicity of a woman from a village shop, labouring at the decoration of a street altar for some procession) by burying the bush in these little rosettes, almost too ravishing in colour, this rustic 'pompadour.' High up on the branches, like so many of those tiny rose-trees, their pots concealed in jackets of paper lace, whose slender stems rise in a forest from the altar on the greater festivals, a thousand buds were swelling and opening, paler in colour, but each disclosing as it burst, as at the bottom of a cup of pink marble, its blood-red stain, and suggesting even more strongly than the full-blown flowers the special, irresistible quality of the hawthorn-tree, which, wherever it budded, wherever it was about to blossom, could bud and blossom in pink flowers alone. Taking its place in the hedge, but as different from the rest as a young girl in holiday attire among a crowd of dowdy women in everyday clothes, who are staying at home, equipped and ready for the 'Month of Mary,' of which it seemed already to form a part, it shone and smiled in its cool, rosy garments, a Catholic bush indeed, and altogether delightful.

The hedge allowed us a glimpse, inside the park, of an alley bordered with jasmine, pansies, and verbenas, among which the stocks held open their fresh plump purses, of a pink as fragrant and as faded as old Spanish leather, while on the gravel-path a long watering-pipe, painted green, coiling across the ground, poured, where its holes were, over the flowers whose perfume those holes inhaled, a vertical and prismatic fan of infinitesimal, rainbow-coloured drops. Suddenly I stood still, unable to move, as happens when something appears that requires not only our eyes to take it in, but involves a deeper kind of perception and takes possession of the whole of our being. A little girl, with fair, reddish hair, who appeared to be returning from a walk, and held a trowel in her hand, was looking at us, raising towards us a face powdered with pinkish freckles. Her black eyes gleamed, and as I did not at that time know, and indeed have never since learned how to reduce to its objective elements any strong impression, since I had not, as they say, enough 'power of observation' to isolate the sense of their colour, for a long time afterwards, whenever I thought of her, the memory of those bright eyes would at once present itself to me as a vivid azure, since her complexion was fair; so much so that, perhaps, if her eyes had not been quite so

black — which was what struck one most forcibly on first meeting her — I should not have been, as I was, especially enamoured of their imagined blue.

I gazed at her, at first with that gaze which is not merely a messenger from the eyes, but in whose window all the senses assemble and lean out, petrified and anxious, that gaze which would fain reach, touch, capture, bear off in triumph the body at which it is aimed, and the soul with the body; then (so frightened was I lest at any moment my grandfather and father, catching sight of the girl, might tear me away from her, by making me run on in front of them) with another, an unconsciously appealing look, whose object was to force her to pay attention to me, to see, to know me. She cast a glance forwards and sideways, so as to take stock of my grandfather and father, and doubtless the impression she formed of them was that we were all absurd people, for she turned away with an indifferent and contemptuous air, withdrew herself so as to spare her face the indignity of remaining within their field of vision; and while they, continuing to walk on without noticing her, had overtaken and passed me, she allowed her eyes to wander, over the space that lay between us, in my direction, without any particular expression, without appearing to have seen me, but with an intensity, a half-hidden smile which I was unable to interpret, according to the instruction I had received in the ways of good breeding, save as a mark of infinite disgust; and her hand, at the same time, sketched in the air an indelicate gesture, for which, when it was addressed in public to a person whom one did not know, the little dictionary of manners which I carried in my mind supplied only one meaning, namely, a deliberate insult.

“Gilberte, come along; what are you doing?” called out in a piercing tone of authority a lady in white, whom I had not seen until that moment, while, a little way beyond her, a gentleman in a suit of linen ‘ducks,’ whom I did not know either, stared at me with eyes which seemed to be starting from his head; the little girl’s smile abruptly faded, and, seizing her trowel, she made off without turning to look again hi my direction, with an air of obedience, inscrutable and sly.

And so was wafted to my ears the name of Gilberte, bestowed on me like a talisman which might, perhaps, enable me some day to rediscover her whom its syllables had just endowed with a definite personality, whereas, a moment earlier, she had been only something vaguely seen. So it came to me, uttered across the heads of the stocks and jasmines, pungent and cool as the drops which fell from the green watering-pipe; impregnating and irradiating the zone of pure air through which it had passed, which it set apart and isolated from all other air,

with the mystery of the life of her whom its syllables designated to the happy creatures that lived and walked and travelled in her company; unfolding through the arch of the pink hawthorn, which opened at the height of my shoulder, the quintessence of their familiarity — so exquisitely painful to myself — with her, and with all that unknown world of her existence, into which I should never penetrate.

For a moment (while we moved away, and my grandfather murmured: “Poor Swann, what a life they are leading him; fancy sending him away so that she can be left alone with her Charlus — for that was Charlus: I recognised him at once! And the child, too; at her age, to be mixed up in all that!”) the impression left on me by the despotic tone in which Gilberte’s mother had spoken to her, without her replying, by exhibiting her to me as being obliged to yield obedience to some one else, as not being indeed superior to the whole world, calmed my sufferings somewhat, revived some hope in me, and cooled the ardour of my love. But very soon that love surged up again in me like a reaction by which my humiliated heart was endeavouring to rise to Gilberte’s level, or to draw her down to its own. I loved her; I was sorry not to have had the time and the inspiration to insult her, to do her some injury, to force her to keep some memory of me. I knew her to be so beautiful that I should have liked to be able to retrace my steps so as to shake my fist at her and shout, “I think you are hideous, grotesque; you are utterly disgusting!” However, I walked away, carrying with me, then and for ever afterwards, as the first illustration of a type of happiness rendered inaccessible to a little boy of my kind by certain laws of nature which it was impossible to transgress, the picture of a little girl with reddish hair, and a skin freckled with tiny pink marks, who held a trowel in her hand, and smiled as she directed towards me a long and subtle and inexpressive stare. And already the charm with which her name, like a cloud of incense, had filled that archway in the pink hawthorn through which she and I had, together, heard its sound, was beginning to conquer, to cover, to embalm, to beautify everything with which it had any association: her grandparents, whom my own had been so unspeakably fortunate as to know, the glorious profession of a stockholder, even the melancholy neighbourhood of the Champs-Elysées, where she lived in Paris.

“Léonie,” said my grandfather on our return, “I wish we had had you with us this afternoon. You would never have known Tansonville. If I had had the courage I would have cut you a branch of that pink hawthorn you used to like so much.” And so my grandfather told her the story of our walk, either just to amuse her, or perhaps because there was still some hope that she might be

stimulated to rise from her bed and to go out of doors. For in earlier days she had been very fond of Tansonville, and, moreover, Swann's visits had been the last that she had continued to receive, at a time when she had already closed her doors to all the world. And just as, when he called, in these later days, to inquire for her (and she was still the only person in our household whom he would ask to see), she would send down to say that she was tired at the moment and resting, but that she would be happy to see him another time, so, this evening, she said to my grandfather, "Yes, some day when the weather is fine I shall go for a drive as far as the gate of the park." And in saying this she was quite sincere. She would have liked to see Swann and Tansonville again; but the mere wish to do so sufficed for all that remained of her strength, which its fulfilment would have more than exhausted. Sometimes a spell of fine weather made her a little more energetic, she would rise and put on her clothes; but before she had reached the outer room she would be 'tired' again, and would insist on returning to her bed. The process which had begun in her — and in her a little earlier only than it must come to all of us — was the great and general renunciation which old age makes in preparation for death, the chrysalis stage of life, which may be observed wherever life has been unduly prolonged; even in old lovers who have lived for one another with the utmost intensity of passion, and in old friends bound by the closest ties of mental sympathy, who, after a certain year, cease to make, the necessary journey, or even to cross the street to see one another, cease to correspond, and know well that they will communicate no more in this world. My aunt must have been perfectly well aware that she would not see Swann again, that she would never leave her own house any more, but this ultimate seclusion seemed to be accepted by her with all the more readiness for the very reason which, to our minds, ought to have made it more unbearable; namely, that such a seclusion was forced upon her by the gradual and steady diminution in her strength which she was able to measure daily, which, by making every action, every movement 'tiring' to her if not actually painful, gave to inaction, isolation and silence the blessed, strengthening and refreshing charm of repose.

My aunt did not go to see the pink hawthorn in the hedge, but at all hours of the day I would ask the rest of my family whether she was not going to go, whether she used not, at one time, to go often to Tansonville, trying to make them speak of Mlle. Swann's parents and grandparents, who appeared to me to be as great and glorious as gods. The name, which had for me become almost mythological, of Swann — when I talked with my family I would grow sick with longing to hear them utter it; I dared not pronounce it myself, but I would draw

them into a discussion of matters which led naturally to Gilberte and her family, in which she was involved, in speaking of which I would feel myself not too remotely banished from her company; and I would suddenly force my father (by pretending, for instance, to believe that my grandfather's business had been in our family before his day, or that the hedge with the pink hawthorn which my aunt Léonie wished to visit was on common ground) to correct my statements, to say, as though in opposition to me and of his own accord: "No, no, the business belonged to *Swann's* father, that hedge is part of *Swann's* park." And then I would be obliged to pause for breath; so stifling was the pressure, upon that part of me where it was for ever inscribed, of that name which, at the moment when I heard it, seemed to me fuller, more portentous than any other name, because it was burdened with the weight of all the occasions on which I had secretly uttered it in my mind. It caused me a pleasure which I was ashamed to have dared to demand from my parents, for so great was it that to have procured it for me must have involved them in an immensity of effort, and with no recompense, since for them there was no pleasure in the sound. And so I would prudently turn the conversation. And by a scruple of conscience, also. All the singular seductions which I had stored up in the sound of that word Swann, I found again as soon as it was uttered. And then it occurred to me suddenly that my parents could not fail to experience the same emotions, that they must find themselves sharing my point of view, that they perceived in their turn, that they condoned, that they even embraced my visionary longings, and I was as wretched as though I had ravished and corrupted the innocence of their hearts.

That year my family fixed the day of their return to Paris rather earlier than usual. On the morning of our departure I had had my hair curled, to be ready to face the photographer, had had a new hat carefully set upon my head, and had been buttoned into a velvet jacket; a little later my mother, after searching everywhere for me, found me standing in tears on that steep little hillside close to Tansonville, bidding a long farewell to my hawthorns, clasping their sharp branches to my bosom, and (like a princess in a tragedy, oppressed by the weight of all her senseless jewellery) with no gratitude towards the officious hand which had, in curling those ringlets, been at pains to collect all my hair upon my forehead; trampling underfoot the curl-papers which I had torn from my head, and my new hat with them. My mother was not at all moved by my tears, but she could not suppress a cry at the sight of my battered headgear and my ruined jacket. I did not, however, hear her. "Oh, my poor little hawthorns," I was assuring them through my sobs, "it is not you that want to make me unhappy, to

force me to leave you. You, you have never done me any harm. So I shall always love you." And, drying my eyes, I promised them that, when I grew up, I would never copy the foolish example of other men, but that even in Paris, on fine spring days, instead of paying calls and listening to silly talk, I would make excursions into the country to see the first hawthorn-trees in bloom.

Once in the fields we never left them again during the rest of our Méséglise walk. They were perpetually crossed, as though by invisible streams of traffic, by the wind, which was to me the tutelary genius of Combray. Every year, on the day of our arrival, in order to feel that I really was at Combray, I would climb the hill to find it running again through my clothing, and setting me running in its wake. One always had the wind for companion when one went the 'Méséglise way,' on that swelling plain which stretched, mile beyond mile, without any disturbance of its gentle contour. I knew that Mlle. Swann used often to go and spend a few days at Laon, and, for all that it was many miles away, the distance was obviated by the absence of any intervening obstacle; when, on hot afternoons, I would see a breath of wind emerge from the farthest horizon, bowing the heads of the corn in distant fields, pouring like a flood over all that vast expanse, and finally settling down, warm and rustling, among the clover and sainfoin at my feet, that plain which was common to us both seemed then to draw us together, to unite us; I would imagine that the same breath had passed by her also, that there was some message from her in what it was whispering to me, without my being able to understand it, and I would catch and kiss it as it passed. On my left was a village called Champieu (*Campus Pagani*, according to the Curé). On my right I could see across the cornfields the two crocketed, rustic spires of Saint-André-des-Champs, themselves as tapering, scaly, plated, honeycombed, yellowed, and roughened as two ears of wheat.

At regular intervals, among the inimitable ornamentation of their leaves, which can be mistaken for those of no other fruit-tree, the apple-trees were exposing their broad petals of white satin, or hanging in shy bunches their unopened, blushing buds. It was while going the 'Méséglise way' that I first noticed the circular shadow which apple-trees cast upon the sunlit ground, and also those impalpable threads of golden silk which the setting sun weaves slantingly downwards from beneath their leaves, and which I would see my father slash through with his stick without ever making them swerve from their straight path.

Sometimes in the afternoon sky a white moon would creep up like a little cloud, furtive, without display, suggesting an actress who does not have to 'come

on' for a while, and so goes 'in front' in her ordinary clothes to watch the rest of the company for a moment, but keeps in the background, not wishing to attract attention to herself. I was glad to find her image reproduced in books and paintings, though these works of art were very different — at least in my earlier years, before Bloch had attuned my eyes and mind to more subtle harmonies — from those in which the moon seems fair to me to-day, but in which I should not have recognised her then. It might be, for instance, some novel by Saintine, some landscape by Gleyre, in which she is cut out sharply against the sky, in the form of a silver sickle, some work as unsophisticated and as incomplete as were, at that date, my own impressions, and which it enraged my grandmother's sisters to see me admire. They held that one ought to set before children, and that children shewed their own innate good taste in admiring, only such books and pictures as they would continue to admire when their minds were developed and mature. No doubt they regarded aesthetic values as material objects which an unclouded vision could not fail to discern, without needing to have their equivalent in experience of life stored up and slowly ripening in one's heart.

It was along the 'Méséglise way,' at Montjouvain, a house built on the edge of a large pond, and overlooked by a steep, shrub-grown hill, that M. Vinteuil lived. And so we used often to meet his daughter driving her dogcart at full speed along the road. After a certain year we never saw her alone, but always accompanied by a friend, a girl older than herself, with an evil reputation in the neighbourhood, who in the end installed herself permanently, one day, at Montjouvain. People said: "That poor M. Vinteuil must be blinded by love not to see what everyone is talking about, and to let his daughter — a man who is horrified if you use a word in the wrong sense — bring a woman like that to live under his roof. He says that she is a most superior woman, with a heart of gold, and that she would have shewn extraordinary musical talent if she had only been trained. He may be sure it is not music that she is teaching his daughter." But M. Vinteuil assured them that it was, and indeed it is remarkable that people never fail to arouse admiration of their normal qualities in the relatives of anyone with whom they are in physical intercourse. Bodily passion, which has been so unjustly decried, compels its victims to display every vestige that is in them of unselfishness and generosity, and so effectively that they shine resplendent in the eyes of all beholders. Dr. Percepied, whose loud voice and bushy eyebrows enabled him to play to his heart's content the part of 'double-dealer,' a part to which he was not, otherwise, adapted, without in the least degree compromising his unassailable and quite unmerited reputation of being a kind-hearted old

curmudgeon, could make the Curé and everyone else laugh until they cried by saying in a harsh voice: “What d’ye say to this, now? It seems that she plays music with her friend, Mlle. Vinteuil. That surprises you, does it? Oh, I know nothing, nothing at all. It was Papa Vinteuil who told me all about it yesterday. After all, she has every right to be fond of music, that girl. I should never dream of thwarting the artistic vocation of a child; nor Vinteuil either, it seems. And then he plays music too, with his daughter’s friend. Why, gracious heavens, it must be a regular musical box, that house out there! What are you laughing at? I say they’ve been playing too much music, those people. I met Papa Vinteuil the other day, by the cemetery. It was all he could do to keep on his feet.”

Anyone who, like ourselves, had seen M. Vinteuil, about this time, avoiding people whom he knew, and turning away as soon as he caught sight of them, changed in a few months into an old man, engulfed in a sea of sorrows, incapable of any effort not directly aimed at promoting his daughter’s happiness, spending whole days beside his wife’s grave, could hardly have failed to realise that he was gradually dying of a broken heart, could hardly have supposed that he paid no attention to the rumours which were going about. He knew, perhaps he even believed, what his neighbours were saying. There is probably no one, however rigid his virtue, who is not liable to find himself, by the complexity of circumstances, living at close quarters with the very vice which he himself has been most outspoken in condemning, without at first recognising it beneath the disguise which it assumes on entering his presence, so as to wound him and to make him suffer; the odd words, the unaccountable attitude, one evening, of a person whom he has a thousand reasons for loving. But for a man of M. Vinteuil’s sensibility it must have been far more painful than for a hardened man of the world to have to resign himself to one of those situations which are wrongly supposed to occur in Bohemian circles only; for they are produced whenever there needs to establish itself in the security necessary to its development a vice which Nature herself has planted in the soul of a child, perhaps by no more than blending the virtues of its father and mother, as she might blend the colours of their eyes. And yet however much M. Vinteuil may have known of his daughter’s conduct it did not follow that his adoration of her grew any less. The facts of life do not penetrate to the sphere in which our beliefs are cherished; as it was not they that engendered those beliefs, so they are powerless to destroy them; they can aim at them continual blows of contradiction and disproof without weakening them; and an avalanche of miseries and maladies coming, one after another, without interruption into the

bosom of a family, will not make it lose faith in either the clemency of its God or the capacity of its physician. But when M. Vinteuil regarded his daughter and himself from the point of view of the world, and of their reputation, when he attempted to place himself by her side in the rank which they occupied in the general estimation of their neighbours, then he was bound to give judgment, to utter his own and her social condemnation in precisely the terms which the inhabitant of Combray most hostile to him and his daughter would have employed; he saw himself and her in 'low,' in the very 'lowest water,' inextricably stranded; and his manners had of late been tinged with that humility, that respect for persons who ranked above him and to whom he must now look up (however far beneath him they might hitherto have been), that tendency to search for some means of rising again to their level, which is an almost mechanical result of any human misfortune.

One day, when we were walking with Swann in one of the streets of Combray, M. Vinteuil, turning out of another street, found himself so suddenly face to face with us all that he had not time to escape; and Swann, with that almost arrogant charity of a man of the world who, amid the dissolution of all his own moral prejudices, finds in another's shame merely a reason for treating him with a friendly benevolence, the outward signs of which serve to enhance and gratify the self-esteem of the bestower because he feels that they are all the more precious to him upon whom they are bestowed, conversed at great length with M. Vinteuil, with whom for a long time he had been barely on speaking terms, and invited him, before leaving us, to send his daughter over, one day, to play at Tansonville. It was an invitation which, two years earlier, would have enraged M. Vinteuil, but which now filled him with so much gratitude that he felt himself obliged to refrain from the indiscretion of accepting. Swann's friendly regard for his daughter seemed to him to be in itself so honourable, so precious a support for his cause that he felt it would perhaps be better to make no use of it, so as to have the wholly Platonic satisfaction of keeping it in reserve.

"What a charming man!" he said to us, after Swann had gone, with the same enthusiasm and veneration which make clever and pretty women of the middle classes fall victims to the physical and intellectual charms of a duchess, even though she be ugly and a fool. "What a charming man! What a pity that he should have made such a deplorable marriage!"

And then, so strong an element of hypocrisy is there in even the most sincere of men, who cast off, while they are talking to anyone, the opinion they actually hold of him and will express when he is no longer there, my family

joined with M. Vinteuil in deploring Swann's marriage, invoking principles and conventions which (all the more because they invoked them in common with him, as though we were all thorough good fellows of the same sort) they appeared to suggest were in no way infringed at Mont-jouvain. M. Vinteuil did not send his daughter to visit Swann, an omission which Swann was the first to regret. For constantly, after meeting M. Vinteuil, he would remember that he had been meaning for a long time to ask him about some one of the same name as himself, one of his relatives, Swann supposed. And on this occasion he determined that he would not forget what he had to say to him when M. Vinteuil should appear with his daughter at Tansonville.

Since the 'Méséglise way' was the shorter of the two that we used to take for our walks round Combray, and for that reason was reserved for days of uncertain weather, it followed that the climate of Méséglise shewed an unduly high rainfall, and we would never lose sight of the fringe of Rous-sainville wood, so that we could, at any moment, run for shelter beneath its dense thatch of leaves.

Often the sun would disappear behind a cloud, which impinged on its roundness, but whose edge the sun gilded in return. The brightness, though not the light of day, would then be shut off from a landscape in which all life appeared to be suspended, while the little village of Roussainville carved in relief upon the sky the white mass of its gables, with a startling precision of detail. A gust of wind blew from its perch a rook, which floated away and settled in the distance, while beneath a paling sky the woods on the horizon assumed a deeper tone of blue, as though they were painted in one of those cameos which you still find decorating the walls of old houses.

But on other days would begin to fall the rain, of which we had had due warning from the little barometer-figure which the spectacle-maker hung out in his doorway. Its drops, like migrating birds which fly off in a body at a given moment, would come down out of the sky in close marching order. They would never drift apart, would make no movement at random in their rapid course, but each one, keeping in its place, would draw after it the drop which was following, and the sky would be as greatly darkened as by the swallows flying south. We would take refuge among the trees. And when it seemed that their flight was accomplished, a few last drops, feebler and slower than the rest, would still come down. But we would emerge from our shelter, for the rain was playing a game, now, among the branches, and, even when it was almost dry again underfoot, a stray drop or two, lingering in the hollow of a leaf, would run down and hang glistening from the point of it until suddenly it splashed plump upon our

upturned faces from the whole height of the tree.

Often, too, we would hurry for shelter, tumbling in among all its stony saints and patriarchs, into the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs, How typically French that church was! Over its door the saints, the kings of chivalry with lilies in their hands, the wedding scenes and funerals were carved as they might have been in the mind of Françoise. The sculptor had also recorded certain anecdotes of Aristotle and Virgil, precisely as Françoise in her kitchen would break into speech about Saint Louis as though she herself had known him, generally in order to depreciate, by contrast with him, my grandparents, whom she considered less ‘righteous.’ One could see that the ideas which the mediaeval artist and the mediaeval peasant (who had survived to cook for us in the nineteenth century) had of classical and of early Christian history, ideas whose inaccuracy was atoned for by their honest simplicity, were derived not from books, but from a tradition at once ancient and direct, unbroken, oral, degraded, unrecognisable, and alive. Another Combray person whom I could discern also, potential and typified, in the gothic sculptures of Saint-André-des-Champs was young Théodore, the assistant in Camus’s shop. And, indeed, Françoise herself was well aware that she had in him a countryman and contemporary, for when my aunt was too ill for Françoise to be able, unaided, to lift her in her bed or to carry her to her chair, rather than let the kitchen-maid come upstairs and, perhaps, ‘make an impression’ on my aunt, she would send out for Théodore. And this lad, who was regarded, and quite rightly, in the town as a ‘bad character,’ was so abounding in that spirit which had served to decorate the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs, and particularly in the feelings of respect due, in Franchise’s eyes, to all ‘poor invalids,’ and, above all, to her own ‘poor mistress,’ that he had, when he bent down to raise my aunt’s head from her pillow, the same air of préraphaélite simplicity and zeal which the little angels in the bas-reliefs wear, who throng, with tapers in their hands, about the deathbed of Our Lady, as though those carved faces of stone, naked and grey like trees in winter, were, like them, asleep only, storing up life and waiting to flower again in countless plebeian faces, reverend and cunning as the face of Théodore, and glowing with the ruddy brilliance of ripe apples.

There, too, not fastened to the wall like the little angels, but detached from the porch, of more than human stature, erect upon her pedestal as upon a footstool, which had been placed there to save her feet from contact with the wet ground, stood a saint with the full cheeks, the firm breasts which swelled out inside her draperies like a cluster of ripe grapes inside a bag, the narrow

forehead, short and stubborn nose, deep-set eyes, and strong, thick-skinned, courageous expression of the country-women of those parts. This similarity, which imparted to the statue itself a kindliness that I had not looked to find in it, was corroborated often by the arrival of some girl from the fields, come, like ourselves, for shelter beneath the porch, whose presence there — as when the leaves of a climbing plant have grown up beside leaves carved in stone — seemed intended by fate to allow us, by confronting it with its type in nature, to form a critical estimate of the truth of the work of art. Before our eyes, in the distance, a promised or an accursed land, Roussainville, within whose walls I had never penetrated, Roussainville was now, when the rain had ceased for us, still being chastised, like a village in the Old Testament, by all the innumerable spears and arrows of the storm, which beat down obliquely upon the dwellings of its inhabitants, or else had already received the forgiveness of the Almighty, Who had restored to it the light of His sun, which fell upon it in rays of uneven length, like the rays of a monstrance upon an altar.

Sometimes, when the weather had completely broken, we were obliged to go home and to remain shut up indoors. Here and there, in the distance, in a landscape which, what with the failing light and saturated atmosphere, resembled a seascape rather, a few solitary houses clinging to the lower slopes of a hill whose heights were buried in a cloudy darkness shone out like little boats which had folded their sails and would ride at anchor, all night, upon the sea. But what mattered rain or storm? In summer, bad weather is no more than a passing fit of superficial ill-temper expressed by the permanent, underlying fine weather; a very different thing from the fluid and unstable ‘fine weather’ of winter, its very opposite, in fact; for has it not (firmly established in the soil, on which it has taken solid form in dense masses of foliage over which the rain may pour in torrents without weakening the resistance offered by their real and lasting happiness) hoisted, to keep them flying throughout the season, in the village streets, on the walls of the houses and in their gardens, its silken banners, violet and white. Sitting in the little parlour, where I would pass the time until dinner with a book, I might hear the water dripping from our chestnut-trees, but I would know that the shower would only glaze and brighten the greenness of their thick, crumpled leaves, and that they themselves had undertaken to remain there, like pledges of summer, all through the rainy night, to assure me of the fine weather’s continuing; it might rain as it pleased, but to-morrow, over the white fence of Tansonville, there would surge and flow, numerous as ever, a sea of little heart-shaped leaves; and without the least anxiety I could watch the poplar in the Rue

des Perchamps praying for mercy, bowing in desperation before the storm; without the least anxiety I could hear, at the far end of the garden, the last peals of thunder growling among our lilac-trees.

If the weather was bad all morning, my family would abandon the idea of a walk, and I would remain at home. But, later on, I formed the habit of going out by myself on such days, and walking towards Méséglise-la-Vineuse, during that autumn when we had to come to Combray to settle the division of my aunt Léonie's estate; for she had died at last, leaving both parties among her neighbours triumphant in the fact of her demise — those who had insisted that her mode of life was enfeebling and must ultimately kill her, and, equally, those who had always maintained that she suffered from some disease not imaginary, but organic, by the visible proof of which the most sceptical would be obliged to own themselves convinced, once she had succumbed to it; causing no intense grief to any save one of her survivors, but to that one a grief savage in its violence. During the long fortnight of my aunt's last illness Françoise never went out of her room for an instant, never took off her clothes, allowed no one else to do anything for my aunt, and did not leave her body until it was actually in its grave. Then, at last, we understood that the sort of terror in which Françoise had lived of my aunt's harsh words, her suspicions and her anger, had developed in her a sentiment which we had mistaken for hatred, and which was really veneration and love. Her true mistress, whose decisions it had been impossible to foresee, from whose stratagems it had been so hard to escape, of whose good nature it had been so easy to take advantage, her sovereign, her mysterious and omnipotent monarch was no more. Compared with such a mistress we counted for very little. The time had long passed when, on our first coming to spend our holidays at Combray, we had been of equal importance, in Franchise's eyes, with my aunt.

During that autumn my parents, finding the days so fully occupied with the legal formalities that had to be gone through, and discussions with solicitors and farmers, that they had little time for walks which, as it happened, the weather made precarious, began to let me go, without them, along the 'Méséglise way,' wrapped up in a huge Highland plaid which protected me from the rain, and which I was all the more ready to throw over my shoulders because I felt that the stripes of its gaudy tartan scandalised Françoise, whom it was impossible to convince that the colour of one's clothes had nothing whatever to do with one's mourning for the dead, and to whom the grief which we had shewn on my aunt's death was wholly unsatisfactory, since we had not entertained the neighbours to

a great funeral banquet, and did not adopt a special tone when we spoke of her, while I at times might be heard humming a tune. I am sure that in a book — and to that extent my feelings were closely akin to those of Françoise — such a conception of mourning, in the manner of the *Chanson de Roland* and of the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs, would have seemed most attractive. But the moment that Françoise herself approached, some evil spirit would urge me to attempt to make her angry, and I would avail myself of the slightest pretext to say to her that I regretted my aunt's death because she had been a good woman in spite of her absurdities, but not in the least because she was my aunt; that she might easily have been my aunt and yet have been so odious that her death would not have caused me a moment's sorrow; statements which, in a book, would have struck me as merely fatuous.

And if Françoise then, inspired like a poet with a flood of confused reflections upon bereavement, grief, and family memories, were to plead her inability to rebut my theories, saying: "I don't know how to *espress*myself" — I would triumph over her with an ironical and brutal common sense worthy of Dr. Percepied; and if she went on: "All the same she was a*geological* relation; there is always the respect due to your *geology*," I would shrug my shoulders and say: "It is really very good of me to discuss the matter with an illiterate old woman who cannot speak her own language," adopting, to deliver judgment on Françoise, the mean and narrow outlook of the pedant, whom those who are most contemptuous of him in the impartiality of their own minds are only too prone to copy when they are obliged to play a part upon the vulgar stage of life.

My walks, that autumn, were all the more delightful because I used to take them after long hours spent over a book. When I was tired of reading, after a whole morning in the house, I would throw my plaid across my shoulders and set out; my body, which in a long spell of enforced immobility had stored up an accumulation of vital energy, was now obliged, like a spinning-top wound and let go, to spend this in every direction. The walls of houses, the Tansonville hedge, the trees of Roussainville wood, the bushes against which Montjouvain leaned its back, all must bear the blows of my walking-stick or umbrella, must hear my shouts of happiness, blows and shouts being indeed no more than expressions of the confused ideas which exhilarated me, and which, not being developed to the point at which they might rest exposed to the light of day, rather than submit to a slow and difficult course of elucidation, found it easier and more pleasant to drift into an immediate outlet. And so it is that the bulk of what appear to be the emotional renderings of our inmost sensations do no more than

relieve us of the burden of those sensations by allowing them to escape from us in an indistinct form which does not teach us how it should be interpreted. When I attempt to reckon up all that I owe to the ‘Méséglise way,’ all the humble discoveries of which it was either the accidental setting or the direct inspiration and cause, I am reminded that it was in that same autumn, on one of those walks, near the bushy precipice which guarded Montjouvain from the rear, that I was struck for the first time by this lack of harmony between our impressions and their normal forms of expression. After an hour of rain and wind, against which I had put up a brisk fight, as I came to the edge of the Montjouvain pond, and reached a little hut, roofed with tiles, in which M. Vinteuil’s gardener kept his tools, the sun shone out again, and its golden rays, washed clean by the shower, blazed once more in the sky, on the trees, on the wall of the hut, and on the still wet tiles of the roof, which had a chicken perching upon its ridge. The wind pulled out sideways the wild grass that grew in the wall, and the chicken’s downy feathers, both of which things let themselves float upon the wind’s breath to their full extent, with the unresisting submissiveness of light and lifeless matter. The tiled roof cast upon the pond, whose reflections were now clear again in the sunlight, a square of pink marble, the like of which I had never observed before. And, seeing upon the water, where it reflected the wall, a pallid smile responding to the smiling sky, I cried aloud in my enthusiasm, brandishing my furled umbrella: “Damn, damn, damn, damn!” But at the same time I felt that I was in duty bound not to content myself with these unilluminating words, but to endeavour to see more clearly into the sources of my enjoyment.

And it was at that moment, too — thanks to a peasant who went past, apparently in a bad enough humour already, but more so when he nearly received my umbrella in his face, and who replied without any cordiality to my “Fine day, what! good to be out walking!” — that I learned that identical emotions do not spring up in the hearts of all men simultaneously, by a pre-established order. Later on I discovered that, whenever I had read for too long and was in a mood for conversation, the friend to whom I would be burning to say something would at that moment have finished indulging himself in the delights of conversation, and wanted nothing now but to be left to read undisturbed. And if I had been thinking with affection of my parents, and forming the most sensible and proper plans for giving them pleasure, they would have been using the same interval of time to discover some misdeed that I had already forgotten, and would begin to scold me severely, just as I flung myself upon them with a kiss.

Sometimes to the exhilaration which I derived from being alone would be added an alternative feeling, so that I could not be clear in my mind to which I should give the casting vote; a feeling stimulated by the desire to see rise up before my eyes a peasant-girl whom I might clasp in my arms. Coming abruptly, and without giving me time to trace it accurately to its source among so many ideas of a very different kind, the pleasure which accompanied this desire seemed only a degree superior to what was given me by my other thoughts. I found an additional merit in everything that was in my mind at the moment, in the pink reflection of the tiled roof, the wild grass in the wall, the village of Roussainville into which I had long desired to penetrate, the trees of its wood and the steeple of its church, created in them by this fresh emotion which made them appear more desirable only because I thought it was they that had provoked it, and which seemed only to wish to bear me more swiftly towards them when it filled my sails with a potent, unknown, and propitious breeze. But if this desire that a woman should appear added for me something more exalting than the charms of nature, they in their turn enlarged what I might, in the woman's charm, have found too much restricted. It seemed to me that the beauty of the trees was hers also, and that, as for the spirit of those horizons, of the village of Roussainville, of the books which I was reading that year, it was her kiss which would make me master of them all; and, my imagination drawing strength from contact with my sensuality, my sensuality expanding through all the realms of my imagination, my desire had no longer any bounds. Moreover — just as in moments of musing contemplation of nature, the normal actions of the mind being suspended, and our abstract ideas of things set on one side, we believe with the profoundest faith in the originality, in the individual existence of the place in which we may happen to be — the passing figure which my desire evoked seemed to be not any one example of the general type of 'woman,' but a necessary and natural product of the soil. For at that time everything which was not myself, the earth and the creatures upon it, seemed to me more precious, more important, endowed with a more real existence than they appear to full-grown men. And between the earth and its creatures I made no distinction. I had a desire for a peasant-girl from Méséglise or Roussainville, for a fisher-girl from Balbec, just as I had a desire for Balbec and Méséglise. The pleasure which those girls were empowered to give me would have seemed less genuine, I should have had no faith in it any longer, if I had been at liberty to modify its conditions as I chose. To meet in Paris a fisher-girl from Balbec or a peasant-girl from Méséglise would have been like receiving the present of a shell which I had

never seen upon the beach, or of a fern which I had never found among the woods, would have stripped from the pleasure which she was about to give me all those other pleasures in the thick of which my imagination had enwrapped her. But to wander thus among the woods of Roussainville without a peasant-girl to embrace was to see those woods and yet know nothing of their secret treasure, their deep-hidden beauty. That girl whom I never saw save dappled with the shadows of their leaves, was to me herself a plant of local growth, only taller than the rest, and one whose structure would enable me to approach more closely than in them to the intimate savour of the land from which she had sprung. I could believe this all the more readily (and also that the caresses by which she would bring that savour to my senses were themselves of a particular kind, yielding a pleasure which I could never derive from any but herself) since I was still, and must for long remain, in that period of life when one has not yet separated the fact of this sensual pleasure from the various women in whose company one has tasted it, when one has not reduced it to a general idea which makes one regard them thenceforward as the variable instruments of a pleasure that is always the same. Indeed, that pleasure does not exist, isolated and formulated in the consciousness, as the ultimate object with which one seeks a woman's company, or as the cause of the uneasiness which, in anticipation, one then feels. Hardly even does one think of oneself, but only how to escape from oneself. Obscurely awaited, immanent and concealed, it rouses to such a paroxysm, at the moment when at last it makes itself felt, those other pleasures which we find in the tender glance, in the kiss of her who is by our side, that it seems to us, more than anything else, a sort of transport of gratitude for the kindness of heart of our companion and for her touching predilection of ourselves, which we measure by the benefits, by the happiness that she showers upon us.

Alas, it was in vain that I implored the dungeon-keep of Roussainville, that I begged it to send out to meet me some daughter of its village, appealing to it as to the sole confidant to whom I had disclosed my earliest desire when, from the top floor of our house at Combray, from the little room that smelt of orris-root, I had peered out and seen nothing but its tower, framed in the square of the half-opened window, while, with the heroic scruples of a traveller setting forth for unknown climes, or of a desperate wretch hesitating on the verge of self-destruction, faint with emotion, I explored, across the bounds of my own experience, an untrodden path which, I believed, might lead me to my death, even — until passion spent itself and left me shuddering among the sprays of

flowering currant which, creeping in through the window, tumbled all about my body. In vain I called upon it now. In vain I compressed the whole landscape into my field of vision, draining it with an exhaustive gaze which sought to extract from it a female creature. I might go alone as far as the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs: never did I find there the girl whom I should inevitably have met, had I been with my grandfather, and so unable to engage her in conversation. I would fix my eyes, without limit of time, upon the trunk of a distant tree, from behind which she must appear and spring towards me; my closest scrutiny left the horizon barren as before; night was falling; without any hope now would I concentrate my attention, as though to force up out of it the creatures which it must conceal, upon that sterile soil, that stale and outworn land; and it was no longer in lightness of heart, but with sullen anger that I aimed blows at the trees of Roussainville wood, from among which no more living creatures made their appearance than if they had been trees painted on the stretched canvas background of a panorama, when, unable to resign myself to having to return home without having held in my arms the woman I so greatly desired, I was yet obliged to retrace my steps towards Combray, and to admit to myself that the chance of her appearing in my path grew smaller every moment. And if she had appeared, would I have dared to speak to her? I felt that she would have regarded me as mad, for I no longer thought of those desires which came to me on my walks, but were never realized, as being shared by others, or as having any existence apart from myself. They seemed nothing more now than the purely subjective, impotent, illusory creatures of my temperament. They were in no way connected now with nature, with the world of real things, which from now onwards lost all its charm and significance, and meant no more to my life than a purely conventional framework, just as the action of a novel is framed in the railway carriage, on a seat of which a traveller is reading it to pass the time.

And it is perhaps from another impression which I received at Montjouvain, some years later, an impression which at that time was without meaning, that there arose, long afterwards, my idea of that cruel side of human passion called ‘sadism.’ We shall see, in due course, that for quite another reason the memory of this impression was to play an important part in my life. It was during a spell of very hot weather; my parents, who had been obliged to go away for the whole day, had told me that I might stay out as late as I pleased; and having gone as far as the Montjouvain pond, where I enjoyed seeing again the reflection of the tiled roof of the hut, I had lain down in the shade and gone to sleep among the bushes on the steep slope that rose up behind the house, just

where I had waited for my parents, years before, one day when they had gone to call on M. Vinteuil. It was almost dark when I awoke, and I wished to rise and go away, but I saw Mlle. Vinteuil (or thought, at least, that I recognised her, for I had not seen her often at Combray, and then only when she was still a child, whereas she was now growing into a young woman), who probably had just come in, standing in front of me, and only a few feet away from me, in that room in which her father had entertained mine, and which she had now made into a little sitting-room for herself. The window was partly open; the lamp was lighted; I could watch her every movement without her being able to see me; but, had I gone away, I must have made a rustling sound among the bushes, she would have heard me, and might have thought that I had been hiding there in order to spy upon her.

She was in deep mourning, for her father had but lately died. We had not gone to see her; my mother had not cared to go, on account of that virtue which alone in her fixed any bounds to her benevolence — namely, modesty; but she pitied the girl from the depths of her heart. My mother had not forgotten the sad end of M. Vinteuil's life, his complete absorption, first in having to play both mother and nursery-maid to his daughter, and, later, in the suffering which she had caused him; she could see the tortured expression which was never absent from the old man's face in those terrible last years; she knew that he had definitely abandoned the task of transcribing in fair copies the whole of his later work, the poor little pieces, we imagined, of an old music-master, a retired village organist, which, we assumed, were of little or no value in themselves, though we did not despise them, because they were of such great value to him and had been the chief motive of his life before he sacrificed them to his daughter; pieces which, being mostly not even written down, but recorded only in his memory, while the rest were scribbled on loose sheets of paper, and quite illegible, must now remain unknown for ever; my mother thought, also, of that other and still more cruel renunciation to which M. Vinteuil had been driven, that of seeing the girl happily settled, with an honest and respectable future; when she called to mind all this utter and crushing misery that had come upon my aunts' old music-master, she was moved to very real grief, and shuddered to think of that other grief, so different in its bitterness, which Mlle. Vinteuil must now be feeling, tinged with remorse at having virtually killed her father. "Poor M. Vinteuil," my mother would say, "he lived for his daughter, and now he has died for her, without getting his reward. Will he get it now, I wonder, and in what form? It can only come to him from her."

At the far end of Mlle. Vinteuil's sitting-room, on the mantelpiece, stood a small photograph of her father which she went briskly to fetch, just as the sound of carriage wheels was heard from the road outside, then flung herself down on a sofa and drew close beside her a little table on which she placed the photograph, just as, long ago, M. Vinteuil had 'placed' beside him the piece of music which he would have liked to play over to my parents. And then her friend came in. Mlle. Vinteuil greeted her without rising, clasping her hands behind her head, and drew her body to one side of the sofa, as though to 'make room.' But no sooner had she done this than she appeared to feel that she was perhaps suggesting a particular position to her friend, with an emphasis which might well be regarded as importunate. She thought that her friend would prefer, no doubt, to sit down at some distance from her, upon a chair; she felt that she had been indiscreet; her sensitive heart took fright; stretching herself out again over the whole of the sofa, she closed her eyes and began to yawn, so as to indicate that it was a desire to sleep, and that alone, which had made her lie down there. Despite the rude and hectoring familiarity with which she treated her companion I could recognise in her the obsequious and reticent advances, the abrupt scruples and restraints which had characterised her father. Presently she rose and came to the window, where she pretended to be trying to close the shutters and not succeeding.

"Leave them open," said her friend. "I am hot."

"But it's too dreadful! People will see us," Mlle. Vinteuil answered. And then she guessed, probably, that her friend would think that she had uttered these words simply in order to provoke a reply in certain other words, which she seemed, indeed, to wish to hear spoken, but, from prudence, would let her friend be the first to speak. And so, although I could not see her face clearly enough, I am sure that the expression must have appeared on it which my grandmother had once found so delightful, when she hastily went on: "When I say 'see us' I mean, of course, see us reading. It's so dreadful to think that in every trivial little thing you do some one may be overlooking you."

With the instinctive generosity of her nature, a courtesy beyond her control, she refrained from uttering the studied words which, she had felt, were indispensable for the full realisation of her desire. And perpetually, in the depths of her being, a shy and suppliant maiden would kneel before that other element, the old campaigner, battered but triumphant, would intercede with him and oblige him to retire.

"Oh, yes, it is so extremely likely that people are looking at us at this time of

night in this densely populated district!" said her friend, with bitter irony. "And what if they are?" she went on, feeling bound to annotate with a malicious yet affectionate wink these words which she was repeating, out of good nature, like a lesson prepared beforehand which, she knew, it would please Mlle. Vinteuil to hear. "And what if they are? All the better that they should see us."

Mlle. Vinteuil shuddered and rose to her feet. In her sensitive and scrupulous heart she was ignorant what words ought to flow, spontaneously, from her lips, so as to produce the scene for which her eager senses clamoured. She reached out as far as she could across the limitations of her true character to find the language appropriate to a vicious young woman such as she longed to be thought, but the words which, she imagined, such a young woman might have uttered with sincerity sounded unreal in her own mouth. And what little she allowed herself to say was said in a strained tone, in which her ingrained timidity paralysed her tendency to freedom and audacity of speech; while she kept on interrupting herself with: "You're sure you aren't cold? You aren't too hot? You don't want to sit and read by yourself?...

"Your ladyship's thoughts seem to be rather 'warm' this evening," she concluded, doubtless repeating a phrase which she had heard used, on some earlier occasion, by her friend.

In the V-shaped opening of her crape bodice Mlle. Vinteuil felt the sting of her friend's sudden kiss; she gave a little scream and ran away; and then they began to chase one another about the room, scrambling over the furniture, their wide sleeves fluttering like wings, clucking and crowing like a pair of amorous fowls. At last Mlle. Vinteuil fell down exhausted upon the sofa, where she was screened from me by the stooping body of her friend. But the latter now had her back turned to the little table on which the old music-master's portrait had been arranged. Mlle. Vinteuil realised that her friend would not see it unless her attention were drawn to it, and so exclaimed, as if she herself had just noticed it for the first time: "Oh! there's my father's picture looking at us; I can't think who can have put it there; I'm sure I've told them twenty times, that is not the proper place for it."

I remembered the words that M. Vinteuil had used to my parents in apologising for an obtrusive sheet of music. This photograph was, of course, in common use in their ritual observances, was subjected to daily profanation, for the friend replied in words which were evidently a liturgical response: "Let him stay there. He can't trouble us any longer. D'you think he'd start whining, d'you think he'd pack you out of the house if he could see you now, with the window

open, the ugly old monkey?”

To which Mlle. Vinteuil replied, “Oh, please!” — a gentle reproach which testified to the genuine goodness of her nature, not that it was prompted by any resentment at hearing her father spoken of in this fashion (for that was evidently a feeling which she had trained herself, by a long course of sophistries, to keep in close subjection at such moments), but rather because it was the bridle which, so as to avoid all appearance of egotism, she herself used to curb the gratification which her friend was attempting to procure for her. It may well have been, too, that the smiling moderation with which she faced and answered these blasphemies, that this tender and hypocritical rebuke appeared to her frank and generous nature as a particularly shameful and seductive form of that criminal attitude towards life which she was endeavouring to adopt. But she could not resist the attraction of being treated with affection by a woman who had just shewn herself so implacable towards the defenceless dead; she sprang on to the knees of her friend and held out a chaste brow to be kissed; precisely as a daughter would have done to her mother, feeling with exquisite joy that they would thus, between them, inflict the last turn of the screw of cruelty, in robbing M. Vinteuil, as though they were actually rifling his tomb, of the sacred rights of fatherhood. Her friend took the girl’s head in her hands and placed a kiss on her brow with a docility prompted by the real affection she had for Mlle. Vinteuil, as well as by the desire to bring what distraction she could into the dull and melancholy life of an orphan.

“Do you know what I should like to do to that old horror?” she said, taking up the photograph. She murmured in Mlle. Vinteuil’s ear something that I could not distinguish.

“Oh! You would never dare.”

“Not dare to spit on it? On that?” shouted the friend with deliberate brutality.

I heard no more, for Mlle. Vinteuil, who now seemed weary, awkward, preoccupied, sincere, and rather sad, came back to the window and drew the shutters close; but I knew now what was the reward that M. Vinteuil, in return for all the suffering that he had endured in his lifetime, on account of his daughter, had received from her after his death.

And yet I have since reflected that if M. Vinteuil had been able to be present at this scene, he might still, and in spite of everything, have continued to believe in his daughter’s soundness of heart, and that he might even, in so doing, have been not altogether wrong. It was true that in all Mlle. Vinteuil’s actions the

appearance of evil was so strong and so consistent that it would have been hard to find it exhibited in such completeness save in what is nowadays called a ‘sadist’; it is behind the footlights of a Paris theatre, and not under the homely lamp of an actual country house, that one expects to see a girl leading her friend on to spit upon the portrait of a father who has lived and died for nothing and no one but herself; and when we find in real life a desire for melodramatic effect, it is generally the ‘sadic’ instinct that is responsible for it. It is possible that, without being in the least inclined towards ‘sadism,’ a girl might have shewn the same outrageous cruelty as Mlle. Vinteuil in desecrating the memory and defying the wishes of her dead father, but she would not have given them deliberate expression in an act so crude in its symbolism, so lacking in subtlety; the criminal element in her behaviour would have been less evident to other people, and even to herself, since she would not have admitted to herself that she was doing wrong. But, appearances apart, in Mlle. Vinteuil’s soul, at least in the earlier stages, the evil element was probably not unmixed. A’sadist’ of her kind is an artist in evil, which a wholly wicked person could not be, for in that case the evil would not have been external, it would have seemed quite natural to her, and would not even have been distinguishable from herself; and as for virtue, respect for the dead, filial obedience, since she would never have practised the cult of these things, she would take no impious delight in their profanation. ‘Sadists’ of Mlle. Vinteuil’s sort are creatures so purely sentimental, so virtuous by nature, that even sensual pleasure appears to them as something bad, a privilege reserved for the wicked. And when they allow themselves for a moment to enjoy it they endeavour to impersonate, to assume all the outward appearance of wicked people, for themselves and their partners in guilt, so as to gain the momentary illusion of having escaped beyond the control of their own gentle and scrupulous natures into the inhuman world of pleasure. And I could understand how she must have longed for such an escape when I realised that it was impossible for her to effect it. At the moment when she wished to be thought the very antithesis of her father, what she at once suggested to me were the mannerisms, in thought and speech, of the poor old music-master. Indeed, his photograph was nothing; what she really desecrated, what she corrupted into ministering to her pleasures, but what remained between them and her and prevented her from any direct enjoyment of them, was the likeness between her face and his, his mother’s blue eyes which he had handed down to her, like some trinket to be kept in the family, those little friendly movements and inclinations which set up between the viciousness of Mlle. Vinteuil and herself a

phraseology, a mentality not designed for vice, which made her regard it as not in any way different from the numberless little social duties and courtesies to which she must devote herself every day. It was not evil that gave her the idea of pleasure, that seemed to her attractive; it was pleasure, rather, that seemed evil. And as, every time that she indulged in it, pleasure came to her attended by evil thoughts such as, ordinarily, had no place in her virtuous mind, she came at length to see in pleasure itself something diabolical, to identify it with Evil. Perhaps Mlle. Vinteuil felt that at heart her friend was not altogether bad, not really sincere when she gave vent to those blasphemous utterances. At any rate, she had the pleasure of receiving those kisses on her brow, those smiles, those glances; all feigned, perhaps, but akin in their base and vicious mode of expression to those which would have been discernible on the face of a creature formed not out of kindness and long-suffering, but out of self-indulgence and cruelty. She was able to delude herself for a moment into believing that she was indeed amusing herself in the way in which, with so unnatural an accomplice, a girl might amuse herself who really did experience that savage antipathy towards her father's memory. Perhaps she would not have thought of wickedness as a state so rare, so abnormal, so exotic, one which it was so refreshing to visit, had she been able to distinguish in herself, as in all her fellow-men and women, that indifference to the sufferings which they cause which, whatever names else be given it, is the one true, terrible and lasting form of cruelty.

If the 'Méséglise way' was so easy, it was a very different matter when we took the 'Guermantes way,' for that meant a long walk, and we must make sure, first, of the weather. When we seemed to have entered upon a spell of fine days, when Françoise, in desperation that not a drop was falling upon the 'poor crops,' gazing up at the sky and seeing there only a little white cloud floating here and there upon its calm, azure surface, groaned aloud and exclaimed: "You would say they were nothing more nor less than a lot of dogfish swimming about and sticking up their snouts! Ah, they never think of making it rain a little for the poor labourers! And then when the corn is all ripe, down it will come, rattling all over the place, and think no more of where it is falling than if it was on the sea!" — when my father's appeals to the gardener had met with the same encouraging answer several times in succession, then some one would say, at dinner: "To-morrow, if the weather holds, we might go the Guermantes way." And off we would set, immediately after luncheon, through the little garden gate which dropped us into the Rue des Perchamps, narrow and bent at a sharp angle, dotted with grass-plots over which two or three wasps would spend the day botanising,

a street as quaint as its name, from which its odd characteristics and its personality were, I felt, derived; a street for which one might search in vain through the Combray of to-day, for the public school now rises upon its site. But in my dreams of Combray (like those architects, pupils of Viollet-le-Duc, who, fancying that they can detect, beneath a Renaissance rood-loft and an eighteenth-century altar, traces of a Norman choir, restore the whole church to the state in which it probably was in the twelfth century) I leave not a stone of the modern edifice standing, I pierce through it and 'restore' the Rue des Perchamps. And for such reconstruction memory furnishes me with more detailed guidance than is generally at the disposal of restorers; the pictures which it has preserved — perhaps the last surviving in the world to-day, and soon to follow the rest into oblivion — of what Combray looked like in my childhood's days; pictures which, simply because it was the old Combray that traced their outlines upon my mind before it vanished, are as moving — if I may compare a humble landscape with those glorious works, reproductions of which my grandmother was so fond of bestowing on me — as those old engravings of the 'Cenacolo,' or that painting by Gentile Bellini, in which one sees, in a state in which they no longer exist, the masterpiece of Leonardo and the portico of Saint Mark's.

We would pass, in the Rue de l'Oiseau, before the old hostelry of the Oiseau Flesché, into whose great courtyard, once upon a time, would rumble the coaches of the Duchesses de Montpensier, de Guermantes, and de Montmorency, when they had to come down to Combray for some litigation with their farmers, or to receive homage from them. We would come at length to the Mall, among whose treetops I could distinguish the steeple of Saint-Hilaire. And I should have liked to be able to sit down and spend the whole day there, reading and listening to the bells, for it was so charming there and so quiet that, when an hour struck, you would have said not that it broke in upon the calm of the day, but that it relieved the day of its superfluity, and that the steeple, with the indolent, painstaking exactitude of a person who has nothing else to do, had simply, in order to squeeze out and let fall the few golden drops which had slowly and naturally accumulated in the hot sunlight, pressed, at a given moment, the distended surface of the silence.

The great charm of the 'Guermantes' way was that we had beside us, almost all the time, the course of the Vivonne. We crossed it first, ten minutes after leaving the house, by a foot-bridge called the Pont-Vieux. And every year, when we arrived at Combray, on Easter morning, after the sermon, if the weather was fine, I would run there to see (amid all the disorder that prevails on the morning

of a great festival, the gorgeous preparations for which make the everyday household utensils that they have not contrived to banish seem more sordid than ever) the river flowing past, sky-blue already between banks still black and bare, its only companions a clump of daffodils, come out before their time, a few primroses, the first in flower, while here and there burned the blue flame of a violet, its stem bent beneath the weight of the drop of perfume stored in its tiny horn. The Pont-Vieux led to a tow-path which, at this point, would be overhung in summer by the bluish foliage of a hazel, under which a fisherman in a straw hat seemed to have taken root. At Combray, where I knew everyone, and could always detect the blacksmith or grocer's boy through his disguise of a beadle's uniform or chorister's surplice, this fisherman was the only person whom I was never able to identify. He must have known my family, for he used to raise his hat when we passed; and then I would always be just on the point of asking his name, when some one would make a sign to me to be quiet, or I would frighten the fish. We would follow the tow-path which ran along the top of a steep bank, several feet above the stream. The ground on the other side was lower, and stretched in a series of broad meadows as far as the village and even to the distant railway-station. Over these were strewn the remains, half-buried in the long grass, of the castle of the old Counts of Combray, who, during the Middle Ages, had had on this side the course of the Vivonne as a barrier and defence against attack from the Lords of Guermantes and Abbots of Martinville. Nothing was left now but a few stumps of towers, hummocks upon the broad surface of the fields, hardly visible, broken battlements over which, in their day, the bowmen had hurled down stones, the watchmen had gazed out over Novepont, Clairefontaine, Martinville-le-Sec, Bailleau-l'Exempt, fiefs all of them of Guermantes, a ring in which Combray was locked; but fallen among the grass now, levelled with the ground, climbed and commanded by boys from the Christian Brothers' school, who came there in their playtime, or with lesson-books to be conned; emblems of a past that had sunk down and well-nigh vanished under the earth, that lay by the water's edge now, like an idler taking the air, yet giving me strong food for thought, making the name of Combray connote to me not the little town of to-day only, but an historic city vastly different, seizing and holding my imagination by the remote, incomprehensible features which it half-concealed beneath a spangled veil of buttercups. For the buttercups grew past numbering on this spot which they had chosen for their games among the grass, standing singly, in couples, in whole companies, yellow as the yolk of eggs, and glowing with an added lustre, I felt, because, being

powerless to consummate with my palate the pleasure which the sight of them never failed to give me, I would let it accumulate as my eyes ranged over their gilded expanse, until it had acquired the strength to create in my mind a fresh example of absolute, unproductive beauty; and so it had been from my earliest childhood, when from the tow-path I had stretched out my arms towards them, before even I could pronounce their charming name — a name fit for the Prince in some French fairy-tale; colonists, perhaps, in some far distant century from Asia, but naturalised now for ever in the village, well satisfied with their modest horizon, rejoicing in the sunshine and the water's edge, faithful to their little glimpse of the railway-station; yet keeping, none the less, as do some of our old paintings, in their plebeian simplicity, a poetic scintillation from the golden East.

I would amuse myself by watching the glass jars which the boys used to lower into the Vivonne, to catch minnows, and which, filled by the current of the stream, in which they themselves also were enclosed, at once 'containers' whose transparent sides were like solidified water and 'contents' plunged into a still larger container of liquid, flowing crystal, suggested an image of coolness more delicious and more provoking than the same water in the same jars would have done, standing upon a table laid for dinner, by shewing it as perpetually in flight between the impalpable water, in which my hands could not arrest it, and the insoluble glass, in which my palate could not enjoy it. I decided that I would come there again with a line and catch fish; I begged for and obtained a morsel of bread from our luncheon basket; and threw into the Vivonne pellets which had the power, it seemed, to bring about a chemical precipitation, for the water at once grew solid round about them in oval clusters of emaciated tadpoles, which until then it had, no doubt, been holding in solution, invisible, but ready and alert to enter the stage of crystallisation.

Presently the course of the Vivonne became choked with water-plants. At first they appeared singly, a lily, for instance, which the current, across whose path it had unfortunately grown, would never leave at rest for a moment, so that, like a ferry-boat mechanically propelled, it would drift over to one bank only to return to the other, eternally repeating its double journey. Thrust towards the bank, its stalk would be straightened out, lengthened, strained almost to breaking-point until the current again caught it, its green moorings swung back over their anchorage and brought the unhappy plant to what might fitly be called its starting-point, since it was fated not to rest there a moment before moving off once again. I would still find it there, on one walk after another, always in the same helpless state, suggesting certain victims of neurasthenia, among whom my

grandfather would have included my aunt Léonie, who present without modification, year after year, the spectacle of their odd and unaccountable habits, which they always imagine themselves to be on the point of shaking off, but which they always retain to the end; caught in the treadmill of their own maladies and eccentricities, their futile endeavours to escape serve only to actuate its mechanism, to keep in motion the clockwork of their strange, ineluctable, fatal daily round. Such as these was the water-lily, and also like one of those wretches whose peculiar torments, repeated indefinitely throughout eternity, aroused the curiosity of Dante, who would have inquired of them at greater length and in fuller detail from the victims themselves, had not Virgil, striding on ahead, obliged him to hasten after him at full speed, as I must hasten after my parents.

But farther on the current slackened, where the stream ran through a property thrown open to the public by its owner, who had made a hobby of aquatic gardening, so that the little ponds into which the Vivonne was here diverted were aflower with water-lilies. As the banks at this point were thickly wooded, the heavy shade of the trees gave the water a background which was ordinarily dark green, although sometimes, when we were coming home on a calm evening after a stormy afternoon, I have seen in its depths a clear, crude blue that was almost violet, suggesting a floor of Japanese cloisonné. Here and there, on the surface, floated, blushing like a strawberry, the scarlet heart of a lily set in a ring of white petals.

Beyond these the flowers were more frequent, but paler, less glossy, more thickly seeded, more tightly folded, and disposed, by accident, in festoons so graceful that I would fancy I saw floating upon the stream, as though after the dreary stripping of the decorations used in some Watteau festival, moss-roses in loosened garlands. Elsewhere a corner seemed to be reserved for the commoner kinds of lily; of a neat pink or white like rocket-flowers, washed clean like porcelain, with housewifely care; while, a little farther again, were others, pressed close together in a floating garden-bed, as though pansies had flown out of a garden like butterflies and were hovering with blue and burnished wings over the transparent shadowiness of this watery border; this skiey border also, for it set beneath the flowers a soil of a colour more precious, more moving than their own; and both in the afternoon, when it sparkled beneath the lilies in the kaleidoscope of a happiness silent, restless, and alert, and towards evening, when it was filled like a distant heaven with the roseate dreams of the setting sun, incessantly changing and ever remaining in harmony, about the more permanent

colour of the flowers themselves, with the utmost profundity, evanescence, and mystery — with a quiet suggestion of infinity; afternoon or evening, it seemed to have set them flowering in the heart of the sky.

After leaving this park the Vivonne began to flow again more swiftly. How often have I watched, and longed to imitate, when I should be free to live as I chose, a rower who had shipped his oars and lay stretched out on his back, his head down, in the bottom of his boat, letting it drift with the current, seeing nothing but the sky which slipped quietly above him, shewing upon his features a foretaste of happiness and peace.

We would sit down among the irises at the water's edge. In the holiday sky a lazy cloud streamed out to its full length. Now and then, crushed by the burden of idleness, a carp would heave up out of the water, with an anxious gasp. It was time for us to feed. Before starting homewards we would sit for a long time there, eating fruit and bread and chocolate, on the grass, over which came to our ears, horizontal, faint, but solid still and metallic, the sound of the bells of Saint-Hilaire, which had melted not at all in the atmosphere it was so well accustomed to traverse, but, broken piecemeal by the successive palpitation of all their sonorous strokes, throbbed as it brushed the flowers at our feet.

Sometimes, at the water's edge and embedded in trees, we would come upon a house of the kind called 'pleasure houses,' isolated and lost, seeing nothing of the world, save the river which bathed its feet. A young woman, whose pensive face and fashionable veils did not suggest a local origin, and who had doubtless come there, in the popular phrase, 'to bury herself,' to taste the bitter sweetness of feeling that her name, and still more the name of him whose heart she had once held, but had been unable to keep, were unknown there, stood framed in a window from which she had no outlook beyond the boat that was moored beside her door. She raised her eyes with an air of distraction when she heard, through the trees that lined the bank, the voices of passers-by of whom, before they came in sight, she might be certain that never had they known, nor would they know, the faithless lover, that nothing in their past lives bore his imprint, which nothing in their future would have occasion to receive. One felt that in her renunciation of life she had willingly abandoned those places in which she would at least have been able to see him whom she loved, for others where he had never trod. And I watched her, as she returned from some walk along a road where she had known that he would not appear, drawing from her submissive fingers long gloves of a precious, useless charm.

Never, in the course of our walks along the 'Guermantes way,' might we

penetrate as far as the source of the Vivonne, of which I had often thought, which had in my mind so abstract, so ideal an existence, that I had been as much surprised when some one told me that it was actually to be found in the same department, and at a given number of miles from Combray, as I had been on the day when I had learned that there was another fixed point somewhere on the earth's surface, where, according to the ancients, opened the jaws of Hell. Nor could we ever reach that other goal, to which I longed so much to attain, Guermantes itself. I knew that it was the residence of its proprietors, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, I knew that they were real personages who did actually exist, but whenever I thought about them I pictured them to myself either in tapestry, as was the 'Coronation of Esther' which hung in our church, or else in changing, rainbow colours, as was Gilbert the Bad in his window, where he passed from cabbage green, when I was dipping my fingers in the holy water stoup, to plum blue when I had reached our row of chairs, or again altogether impalpable, like the image of Geneviève de Brabant, ancestress of the Guermantes family, which the magic lantern sent wandering over the curtains of my room or flung aloft upon the ceiling — in short, always wrapped in the mystery of the Merovingian age, and bathed, as in a sunset, in the orange light which glowed from the resounding syllable 'antes.' And if, in spite of that, they were for me, in their capacity as a duke and a duchess, real people, though of an unfamiliar kind, this ducal personality was in its turn enormously distended, immaterialised, so as to encircle and contain that Guermantes of which they were duke and duchess, all that sunlit 'Guermantes way' of our walks, the course of the Vivonne, its water-lilies and its overshadowing trees, and an endless series of hot summer afternoons. And I knew that they bore not only the titles of Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, but that since the fourteenth century, when, after vain attempts to conquer its earlier lords in battle, they had allied themselves by marriage, and so became Counts of Combray, the first citizens, consequently, of the place, and yet the only ones among its citizens who did not reside in it — Comtes de Combray, possessing Combray, threading it on their string of names and titles, absorbing it in their personalities, and illustrating, no doubt, in themselves that strange and pious melancholy which was peculiar to Combray; proprietors of the town, though not of any particular house there; dwelling, presumably, out of doors, in the street, between heaven and earth, like that Gilbert de Guermantes, of whom I could see, in the stained glass of the apse of Saint-Hilaire, only the 'other side' in dull black lacquer, if I raised my eyes to look for him, when I was going to Camus's for a packet of salt.

And then it happened that, going the ‘Guermantes way,’ I passed occasionally by a row of well-watered little gardens, over whose hedges rose clusters of dark blossom. I would stop before them, hoping to gain some precious addition to my experience, for I seemed to have before my eyes a fragment of that riverside country which I had longed so much to see and know since coming upon a description of it by one of my favourite authors. And it was with that story-book land, with its imagined soil intersected by a hundred bubbling watercourses, that Guermantes, changing its form in my mind, became identified, after I heard Dr. Percepied speak of the flowers and the charming rivulets and fountains that were to be seen there in the ducal park. I used to dream that Mme. de Guermantes, taking a sudden capricious fancy for myself, invited me there, that all day long she stood fishing for trout by my side. And when evening came, holding my hand in her own, as we passed by the little gardens of her vassals, she would point out to me the flowers that leaned their red and purple spikes along the tops of the low walls, and would teach me all their names. She would make me tell her, too, all about the poems that I meant to compose. And these dreams reminded me that, since I wished, some day, to become a writer, it was high time to decide what sort of books I was going to write. But as soon as I asked myself the question, and tried to discover some subjects to which I could impart a philosophical significance of infinite value, my mind would stop like a clock, I would see before me vacuity, nothing, would feel either that I was wholly devoid of talent, or that, perhaps, a malady of the brain was hindering its development. Sometimes I would depend upon my father’s arranging everything for me. He was so powerful, in such favour with the people who ‘really counted,’ that he made it possible for us to transgress laws which Françoise had taught me to regard as more ineluctable than the laws of life and death, as when we were allowed to postpone for a year the compulsory repainting of the walls of our house, alone among all the houses in that part of Paris, or when he obtained permission from the Minister for Mme. Sazerat’s son, who had been ordered to some watering-place, to take his degree two months before the proper time, among the candidates whose surnames began with ‘A,’ instead of having to wait his turn as an ‘S.’ If I had fallen seriously ill, if I had been captured by brigands, convinced that my father’s understanding with the supreme powers was too complete, that his letters of introduction to the Almighty were too irresistible for my illness or captivity to turn out anything but vain illusions, in which there was no danger actually threatening me, I should have awaited with perfect composure the inevitable hour of my return to

comfortable realities, of my deliverance from bondage or restoration to health. Perhaps this want of talent, this black cavity which gaped in my mind when I ransacked it for the theme of my future writings, was itself no more, either, than an unsubstantial illusion, and would be brought to an end by the intervention of my father, who would arrange with the Government and with Providence that I should be the first writer of my day. But at other times, while my parents were growing impatient at seeing me loiter behind instead of following them, my actual life, instead of seeming an artificial creation by my father, and one which he could modify as he chose, appeared, on the contrary, to be comprised in a larger reality which had not been created for my benefit, from whose judgments there was no appeal, in the heart of which I was bound, helpless, without friend or ally, and beyond which no further possibilities lay concealed. It was evident to me then that I existed in the same manner as all other men, that I must grow old, that I must die like them, and that among them I was to be distinguished merely as one of those who have no aptitude for writing. And so, utterly despondent, I renounced literature for ever, despite the encouragements that had been given me by Bloch. This intimate, spontaneous feeling, this sense of the nullity of my intellect, prevailed against all the flattering speeches that might be lavished upon me, as a wicked man, when everyone is loud in the praise of his good deeds, is gnawed by the secret remorse of conscience.

One day my mother said: “You are always talking about Mme. de Guermantes. Well, Dr. Percepied did a great deal for her when she was ill, four years ago, and so she is coming to Combray for his daughter’s wedding. You will be able to see her in church.” It was from Dr. Percepied, as it happened, that I had heard most about Mme. de Guermantes, and he had even shewn us the number of an illustrated paper in which she was depicted in the costume which she had worn at a fancy dress ball given by the Princesse de Léon.

Suddenly, during the nuptial mass, the beadle, by moving to one side, enabled me to see, sitting in a chapel, a lady with fair hair and a large nose, piercing blue eyes, a billowy scarf of mauve silk, glossy and new and brilliant, and a little spot at the corner of her nose. And because on the surface of her face, which was red, as though she had been very warm, I could make out, diluted and barely perceptible, details which resembled the portrait that had been shewn to me; because, more especially, the particular features which I remarked in this lady, if I attempted to catalogue them, formulated themselves in precisely the same terms:— *a large nose, blue eyes*, as Dr. Percepied had used when describing in my presence the Duchesse de Guermantes, I said to myself: “This

lady is like the Duchesse de Guermantes." Now the chapel from which she was following the service was that of Gilbert the Bad; beneath its flat tombstones, yellowed and bulging like cells of honey in a comb, rested the bones of the old Counts of Brabant; and I remembered having heard it said that this chapel was reserved for the Guermantes family, whenever any of its members came to attend a ceremony at Combray; there was, indeed, but one woman resembling the portrait of Mme. de Guermantes who on that day, the very day on which she was expected to come there, could be sitting in that chapel: it was she! My disappointment was immense. It arose from my not having borne in mind, when I thought of Mme. de Guermantes, that I was picturing her to myself in the colours of a tapestry or a painted window, as living in another century, as being of another substance than the rest of the human race. Never had I taken into account that she might have a red face, a mauve scarf like Mme. Sazerat; and the oval curve of her cheeks reminded me so strongly of people whom I had seen at home that the suspicion brushed against my mind (though it was immediately banished) that this lady in her creative principle, in the molecules of her physical composition, was perhaps not substantially the Duchesse de Guermantes, but that her body, in ignorance of the name that people had given it, belonged to a certain type of femininity which included, also, the wives of doctors and tradesmen. "It is, it must be Mme. de Guermantes, and no one else!" were the words underlying the attentive and astonished expression with which I was gazing upon this image, which, naturally enough, bore no resemblance to those that had so often, under the same title of 'Mme. de Guermantes,' appeared to me in dreams, since this one had not been, like the others, formed arbitrarily by myself, but had sprung into sight for the first time, only a moment ago, here in church; an image which was not of the same nature, was not colourable at will, like those others that allowed themselves to imbibe the orange tint of a sonorous syllable, but which was so real that everything, even to the fiery little spot at the corner of her nose, gave an assurance of her subjection to the laws of life, as in a transformation scene on the stage a crease in the dress of a fairy, a quivering of her tiny finger, indicate the material presence of a living actress before our eyes, whereas we were uncertain, till then, whether we were not looking merely at a projection of limelight from a lantern.

Meanwhile I was endeavouring to apply to this image, which the prominent nose, the piercing eyes pinned down and fixed in my field of vision (perhaps because it was they that had first struck it, that had made the first impression on its surface, before I had had time to wonder whether the woman who thus

appeared before me might possibly be Mme. de Guermantes), to this fresh and unchanging image the idea: “It is Mme. de Guermantes”; but I succeeded only in making the idea pass between me and the image, as though they were two discs moving in separate planes, with a space between. But this Mme. de Guermantes of whom I had so often dreamed, now that I could see that she had a real existence independent of myself, acquired a fresh increase of power over my imagination, which, paralysed for a moment by contact with a reality so different from anything that it had expected, began to react and to say within me: “Great and glorious before the days of Charlemagne, the Guermantes had the right of life and death over their vassals; the Duchesse de Guermantes descends from Geneviève de Brabant. She does not know, nor would she consent to know, any of the people who are here to-day.”

And then — oh, marvellous independence of the human gaze, tied to the human face by a cord so loose, so long, so elastic that it can stray, alone, as far as it may choose — while Mme. de Guermantes sat in the chapel above the tombs of her dead ancestors, her gaze lingered here and wandered there, rose to the capitals of the pillars, and even rested upon myself, like a ray of sunlight straying down the nave, but a ray of sunlight which, at the moment when I received its caress, appeared conscious of where it fell. As for Mme. de Guermantes herself, since she remained there motionless, sitting like a mother who affects not to notice the rude or awkward conduct of her children who, in the course of their play, are speaking to people whom she does not know, it was impossible for me to determine whether she approved or condemned the vagrancy of her eyes in the careless detachment of her heart.

I felt it to be important that she should not leave the church before I had been able to look long enough upon her, reminding myself that for years past I had regarded the sight of her as a thing eminently to be desired, and I kept my eyes fixed on her, as though by gazing at her I should be able to carry away and incorporate, to store up, for later reference, in myself the memory of that prominent nose, those red cheeks, of all those details which struck me as so much precious, authentic, unparalleled information with regard to her face. And now that, whenever I brought my mind to bear upon that face — and especially, perhaps, in my determination, that form of the instinct of self-preservation with which we guard everything that is best in ourselves, not to admit that I had been in any way deceived — I found only beauty there; setting her once again (since they were one and the same person, this lady who sat before me and that Duchesse de Guermantes whom, until then, I had been used to conjure into an

imagined shape) apart from and above that common run of humanity with which the sight, pure and simple, of her in the flesh had made me for a moment confound her, I grew indignant when I heard people saying, in the congregation round me: “She is better looking than Mme. Sazerat” or “than Mlle. Vinteuil,” as though she had been in any way comparable with them. And my gaze resting upon her fair hair, her blue eyes, the lines of her neck, and overlooking the features which might have reminded me of the faces of other women, I cried out within myself, as I admired this deliberately unfinished sketch: “How lovely she is! What true nobility! it is indeed a proud Guermantes, the descendant of Geneviève de Brabant, that I have before me!” And the care which I took to focus all my attention upon her face succeeded in isolating it so completely that to-day, when I call that marriage ceremony to mind, I find it impossible to visualise any single person who was present except her, and the beadle who answered me in the affirmative when I inquired whether the lady was, indeed, Mme. de Guermantes. But her, I can see her still quite clearly, especially at the moment when the procession filed into the sacristy, lighted by the intermittent, hot sunshine of a windy and rainy day, where Mme. de Guermantes found herself in the midst of all those Combray people whose names, even, she did not know, but whose inferiority proclaimed her own supremacy so loud that she must, in return, feel for them a genuine, pitying sympathy, and whom she might count on impressing even more forcibly by virtue of her simplicity and natural charm. And then, too, since she could not bring into play the deliberate glances, charged with a definite meaning, which one directs, in a crowd, towards people whom one knows, but must allow her vague thoughts to escape continually from her eyes in a flood of blue light which she was powerless to control, she was anxious not to distress in any way, not to seem to be despising those humbler mortals over whom that current flowed, by whom it was everywhere arrested. I can see again to-day, above her mauve scarf, silky and buoyant, the gentle astonishment in her eyes, to which she had added, without daring to address it to anyone in particular, but so that everyone might enjoy his share of it, the almost timid smile of a sovereign lady who seems to be making an apology for her presence among the vassals whom she loves. This smile rested upon myself, who had never ceased to follow her with my eyes. And I, remembering the glance which she had let fall upon me during the service, blue as a ray of sunlight that had penetrated the window of Gilbert the Bad, said to myself, “Of course, she is thinking about me.” I fancied that I had found favour in her sight, that she would continue to think of me after she had left the church, and would, perhaps, grow

pensive again, that evening, at Guermantes, on my account. And at once I fell in love with her, for if it is sometimes enough to make us love a woman that she looks on us with contempt, as I supposed Mlle. Swann to have done, while we imagine that she cannot ever be ours, it is enough, also, sometimes that she looks on us kindly, as Mme. de Guermantes did then, while we think of her as almost ours already. Her eyes waxed blue as a periwinkle flower, wholly beyond my reach, yet dedicated by her to me; and the sun, bursting out again from behind a threatening cloud and darting the full force of its rays on to the Square and into the sacristy, shed a geranium glow over the red carpet laid down for the wedding, along which Mme. de Guermantes smilingly advanced, and covered its woollen texture with a nap of rosy velvet, a bloom of light, giving it that sort of tenderness, of solemn sweetness in the pomp of a joyful celebration, which characterises certain pages of *Lohengrin*, certain paintings by Carpaccio, and makes us understand how Baudelaire was able to apply to the sound of the trumpet the epithet ‘delicious.’

How often, after that day, in the course of my walks along the ‘Guermantes way,’ and with what an intensified melancholy did I reflect on my lack of qualification for a literary career, and that I must abandon all hope of ever becoming a famous author. The regret that I felt for this, while I lingered alone to dream for a little by myself, made me suffer so acutely that, in order not to feel it, my mind of its own accord, by a sort of inhibition in the instant of pain, ceased entirely to think of verse-making, of fiction, of the poetic future on which my want of talent precluded me from counting. Then, quite apart from all those literary preoccupations, and without definite attachment to anything, suddenly a roof, a gleam of sunlight reflected from a stone, the smell of a road would make me stop still, to enjoy the special pleasure that each of them gave me, and also because they appeared to be concealing, beneath what my eyes could see, something which they invited me to approach and seize from them, but which, despite all my efforts, I never managed to discover. As I felt that the mysterious object was to be found in them, I would stand there in front of them, motionless, gazing, breathing, endeavouring to penetrate with my mind beyond the thing seen or smelt. And if I had then to hasten after my grandfather, to proceed on my way, I would still seek to recover my sense of them by closing my eyes; I would concentrate upon recalling exactly the line of the roof, the colour of the stone, which, without my being able to understand why, had seemed to me to be teeming, ready to open, to yield up to me the secret treasure of which they were themselves no more than the outer coverings. It was certainly not any impression

of this kind that could or would restore the hope I had lost of succeeding one day in becoming an author and poet, for each of them was associated with some material object devoid of any intellectual value, and suggesting no abstract truth. But at least they gave me an unreasoning pleasure, the illusion of a sort of fecundity of mind; and in that way distracted me from the tedium, from the sense of my own impotence which I had felt whenever I had sought a philosophic theme for some great literary work. So urgent was the task imposed on my conscience by these impressions of form or perfume or colour — to strive for a perception of what lay hidden beneath them, that I was never long in seeking an excuse which would allow me to relax so strenuous an effort and to spare myself the fatigue that it involved. As good luck would have it, my parents called me; I felt that I had not, for the moment, the calm environment necessary for a successful pursuit of my researches, and that it would be better to think no more of the matter until I reached home, and not to exhaust myself in the meantime to no purpose. And so I concerned myself no longer with the mystery that lay hidden in a form or a perfume, quite at ease in my mind, since I was taking it home with me, protected by its visible and tangible covering, beneath which I should find it still alive, like the fish which, on days when I had been allowed to go out fishing, I used to carry back in my basket, buried in a couch of grass which kept them cool and fresh. Once in the house again I would begin to think of something else, and so my mind would become littered (as my room was with the flowers that I had gathered on my walks, or the odds and ends that people had given me) with a stone from the surface of which the sunlight was reflected, a roof, the sound of a bell, the smell of fallen leaves, a confused mass of different images, under which must have perished long ago the reality of which I used to have some foreboding, but which I never had the energy to discover and bring to light. Once, however, when we had prolonged our walk far beyond its ordinary limits, and so had been very glad to encounter, half way home, as afternoon darkened into evening, Dr. Percepied, who drove past us at full speed in his carriage, saw and recognised us, stopped, and made us jump in beside him, I received an impression of this sort which I did not abandon without having first subjected it to an examination a little more thorough. I had been set on the box beside the coachman, we were going like the wind because the Doctor had still, before returning to Combray, to call at Martinville-le-Sec, at the house of a patient, at whose door he asked us to wait for him. At a bend in the road I experienced, suddenly, that special pleasure, which bore no resemblance to any other, when I caught sight of the twin steeples of Martinville, on which the

setting sun was playing, while the movement of the carriage and the windings of the road seemed to keep them continually changing their position; and then of a third steeple, that of Vieuxvicq, which, although separated from them by a hill and a valley, and rising from rather higher ground in the distance, appeared none the less to be standing by their side.

In ascertaining and noting the shape of their spires, the changes of aspect, the sunny warmth of their surfaces, I felt that I was not penetrating to the full depth of my impression, that something more lay behind that mobility, that luminosity, something which they seemed at once to contain and to conceal.

The steeples appeared so distant, and we ourselves seemed to come so little nearer them, that I was astonished when, a few minutes later, we drew up outside the church of Martinville. I did not know the reason for the pleasure which I had found in seeing them upon the horizon, and the business of trying to find out what that reason was seemed to me irksome; I wished only to keep in reserve in my brain those converging lines, moving in the sunshine, and, for the time being, to think of them no more. And it is probable that, had I done so, those two steeples would have vanished for ever, in a great medley of trees and roofs and scents and sounds which I had noticed and set apart on account of the obscure sense of pleasure which they gave me, but without ever exploring them more fully. I got down from the box to talk to my parents while we were waiting for the Doctor to reappear. Then it was time to start; I climbed up again to my place, turning my head to look back, once more, at my steeples, of which, a little later, I caught a farewell glimpse at a turn in the road. The coachman, who seemed little inclined for conversation, having barely acknowledged my remarks, I was obliged, in default of other society, to fall back on my own, and to attempt to recapture the vision of my steeples. And presently their outlines and their sunlit surface, as though they had been a sort of rind, were stripped apart; a little of what they had concealed from me became apparent; an idea came into my mind which had not existed for me a moment earlier, framed itself in words in my head; and the pleasure with which the first sight of them, just now, had filled me was so much enhanced that, overpowered by a sort of intoxication, I could no longer think of anything but them. At this point, although we had now travelled a long way from Martinville, I turned my head and caught sight of them again, quite black this time, for the sun had meanwhile set. Every few minutes a turn in the road would sweep them out of sight; then they shewed themselves for the last time, and so I saw them no more.

Without admitting to myself that what lay buried within the steeples of

Martinville must be something analogous to a charming phrase, since it was in the form of words which gave me pleasure that it had appeared to me, I borrowed a pencil and some paper from the Doctor, and composed, in spite of the jolting of the carriage, to appease my conscience and to satisfy my enthusiasm, the following little fragment, which I have since discovered, and now reproduce, with only a slight revision here and there.

Alone, rising from the level of the plain, and seemingly lost in that expanse of open country, climbed to the sky the twin steeples of Martinville. Presently we saw three: springing into position confronting them by a daring volt, a third, a dilatory steeple, that of Vieuxvicq, was come to join them. The minutes passed, we were moving rapidly, and yet the three steeples were always a long way ahead of us, like three birds perched upon the plain, motionless and conspicuous in the sunlight. Then the steeple of Vieuxvicq withdrew, took its proper distance, and the steeples of Martinville remained alone, gilded by the light of the setting sun, which, even at that distance, I could see playing and smiling upon their sloped sides. We had been so long in approaching them that I was thinking of the time that must still elapse before we could reach them when, of a sudden, the carriage, having turned a corner, set us down at their feet; and they had flung themselves so abruptly in our path that we had barely time to stop before being dashed against the porch of the church.

We resumed our course; we had left Martinville some little time, and the village, after accompanying us for a few seconds, had already disappeared, when, lingering alone on the horizon to watch our flight, its steeples and that of Vieuxvicq waved once again, in token of farewell, their sun-bathed pinnacles. Sometimes one would withdraw, so that the other two might watch us for a moment still; then the road changed direction, they veered in the light like three golden pivots, and vanished from my gaze. But, a little later, when we were already close to Combray, the sun having set meanwhile, I caught sight of them for the last time, far away, and seeming no more now than three flowers painted upon the sky above the low line of fields. They made me think, too, of three maidens in a legend, abandoned in a solitary place over which night had begun to fall; and while we drew away from them at a gallop, I could see them timidly seeking their way, and, after some awkward, stumbling movements of their noble silhouettes, drawing close to one another, slipping one behind another, shewing nothing more, now, against the still rosy sky than a single dusky form, charming and resigned, and so vanishing in the night.

I never thought again of this page, but at the moment when, on my corner of

the box-seat, where the Doctor's coachman was in the habit of placing, in a hamper, the fowls which he had bought at Martinville market, I had finished writing it, I found such a sense of happiness, felt that it had so entirely relieved my mind of the obsession of the steeples, and of the mystery which they concealed, that, as though I myself were a hen and had just laid an egg, I began to sing at the top of my voice.

All day long, during these walks, I had been able to muse upon the pleasure that there would be in the friendship of the Duchesse de Guermantes, in fishing for trout, in drifting by myself in a boat on the Vivonne; and, greedy for happiness, I asked nothing more from life, in such moments, than that it should consist always of a series of joyous afternoons. But when, on our way home, I had caught sight of a farm, on the left of the road, at some distance from two other farms which were themselves close together, and from which, to return to Combray, we need only turn down an avenue of oaks, bordered on one side by a series of orchard-closes, each one planted at regular intervals with apple-trees which cast upon the ground, when they were lighted by the setting sun, the Japanese stencil of their shadows; then, sharply, my heart would begin to beat, I would know that in half an hour we should be at home, and that there, as was the rule on days when we had taken the 'Guermantes way' and dinner was, in consequence, served later than usual, I should be sent to bed as soon as I had swallowed my soup, so that my mother, kept at table, just as though there had been company to dinner, would not come upstairs to say good night to me in bed. The zone of melancholy which I then entered was totally distinct from that other zone, in which I had been bounding for joy a moment earlier, just as sometimes in the sky a band of pink is separated, as though by a line invisibly ruled, from a band of green or black. You may see a bird flying across the pink; it draws near the border-line, touches it, enters and is lost upon the black. The longings by which I had just now been absorbed, to go to Guermantes, to travel, to live a life of happiness — I was now so remote from them that their fulfilment would have afforded me no pleasure. How readily would I have sacrificed them all, just to be able to cry, all night long, in the arms of Mamma! Shuddering with emotion, I could not take my agonised eyes from my mother's face, which was not to appear that evening in the bedroom where I could see myself already lying, in imagination; and wished only that I were lying dead. And this state would persist until the morrow, when, the rays of morning leaning their bars of light, as the gardener might lean his ladder, against the wall overgrown with nasturtiums, which clambered up it as far as my window-sill, I would leap out of

bed to run down at once into the garden, with no thought of the fact that evening must return, and with it the hour when I must leave my mother. And so it was from the ‘Guermantes way’ that I learned to distinguish between these states which reigned alternately in my mind, during certain periods, going so far as to divide every day between them, each one returning to dispossess the other with the regularity of a fever and ague: contiguous, and yet so foreign to one another, so devoid of means of communication, that I could no longer understand, or even picture to myself, in one state what I had desired or dreaded or even done in the other.

So the ‘Méséglise way’ and the ‘Guermantes way’ remain for me linked with many of the little incidents of that one of all the divers lives along whose parallel lines we are moved, which is the most abundant in sudden reverses of fortune, the richest in episodes; I mean the life of the mind. Doubtless it makes in us an imperceptible progress, and the truths which have changed for us its meaning and its aspect, which have opened new paths before our feet, we had for long been preparing for their discovery; but that preparation was unconscious; and for us those truths date only from the day, from the minute when they became apparent. The flowers which played then among the grass, the water which rippled past in the sunshine, the whole landscape which served as environment to their apparition lingers around the memory of them still with its unconscious or unheeding air; and, certainly, when they were slowly scrutinised by this humble passer-by, by this dreaming child — as the face of a king is scrutinised by a petitioner lost in the crowd — that scrap of nature, that corner of a garden could never suppose that it would be thanks to him that they would be elected to survive in all their most ephemeral details; and yet the scent of hawthorn which strays plundering along the hedge from which, in a little while, the dog-roses will have banished it, a sound of footsteps followed by no echo, upon a gravel path, a bubble formed at the side of a waterplant by the current, and formed only to burst — my exaltation of mind has borne them with it, and has succeeded in making them traverse all these successive years, while all around them the one-trodden ways have vanished, while those who thronged those ways, and even the memory of those who thronged those trodden ways, are dead. Sometimes the fragment of landscape thus transported into the present will detach itself in such isolation from all associations that it floats uncertainly upon my mind, like a flowering isle of Delos, and I am unable to say from what place, from what time — perhaps, quite simply, from which of my dreams — it comes. But it is pre-eminently as the deepest layer of my mental soil, as firm sites on

which I still may build, that I regard the Méséglise and Guermantes ‘ways.’ It is because I used to think of certain things, of certain people, while I was roaming along them, that the things, the people which they taught me to know, and these alone, I still take seriously, still give me joy. Whether it be that the faith which creates has ceased to exist in me, or that reality will take shape in the memory alone, the flowers that people shew me nowadays for the first time never seem to me to be true flowers. The ‘Méséglise way’ with its lilacs, its hawthorns, its cornflowers, its poppies, its apple-trees, the ‘Guermantes way’ with its river full of tadpoles, its water-lilies, and its buttercups have constituted for me for all time the picture of the land in which I fain would pass my life, in which my only requirements are that I may go out fishing, drift idly in a boat, see the ruins of a gothic fortress in the grass, and find hidden among the cornfields — as Saint-André-des-Champs lay hidden — an old church, monumental, rustic, and yellow like a mill-stone; and the cornflowers, the hawthorns, the apple-trees which I may happen, when I go walking, to encounter in the fields, because they are situated at the same depth, on the level of my past life, at once establish contact with my heart. And yet, because there is an element of individuality in places, when I am seized with a desire to see again the ‘Guermantes way,’ it would not be satisfied were I led to the banks of a river in which were lilies as fair, or even fairer than those in the Vivonne, any more than on my return home in the evening, at the hour when there awakened in me that anguish which, later on in life, transfers itself to the passion of love, and may even become its inseparable companion, I should have wished for any strange mother to come in and say good night to me, though she were far more beautiful and more intelligent than my own. No: just as the one thing necessary to send me to sleep contented (in that untroubled peace which no mistress, in later years, has ever been able to give me, since one has doubts of them at the moment when one believes in them, and never can possess their hearts as I used to receive, in her kiss, the heart of my mother, complete, without scruple or reservation, unburdened by any liability save to myself) was that it should be my mother who came, that she should incline towards me that face on which there was, beneath her eye, something that was, it appears, a blemish, and which I loved as much as all the rest — so what I want to see again is the ‘Guermantes way’ as I knew it, with the farm that stood a little apart from the two neighbouring farms, pressed so close together, at the entrance to the oak avenue; those meadows upon whose surface, when it is polished by the sun to the mirroring radiance of a lake, are outlined the leaves of the apple-trees; that whole landscape whose individuality sometimes, at night, in

my dreams, binds me with a power that is almost fantastic, of which I can discover no trace when I awake.

No doubt, by virtue of having permanently and indissolubly combined in me groups of different impressions, for no reason save that they had made me feel several separate things at the same time, the Méséglise and Guermantes ‘ways’ left me exposed, in later life, to much disillusionment, and even to many mistakes. For often I have wished to see a person again without realising that it was simply because that person recalled to me a hedge of hawthorns in blossom; and I have been led to believe, and to make some one else believe in an aftermath of affection, by what was no more than an inclination to travel. But by the same qualities, and by their persistence in those of my impressions, to-day, to which they can find an attachment, the two ‘ways’ give to those impressions a foundation, depth, a dimension lacking from the rest. They invest them, too, with a charm, a significance which is for me alone. When, on a summer evening, the resounding sky growls like a tawny lion, and everyone is complaining of the storm, it is along the ‘Méséglise way’ that my fancy strays alone in ecstasy, inhaling, through the noise of falling rain, the odour of invisible and persistent lilac-trees.

And so I would often lie until morning, dreaming of the old days at Combray, of my melancholy and wakeful evenings there; of other days besides, the memory of which had been more lately restored to me by the taste — by what would have been called at Combray the ‘perfume’ — -of a cup of tea; and, by an association of memories, of a story which, many years after I had left the little place, had been told me of a love affair in which Swann had been involved before I was born; with that accuracy of detail which it is easier, often, to obtain when we are studying the lives of people who have been dead for centuries than when we are trying to chronicle those of our own most intimate friends, an accuracy which it seems as impossible to attain as it seemed impossible to speak from one town to another, before we learned of the contrivance by which that impossibility has been overcome. All these memories, following one after another, were condensed into a single substance, but had not so far coalesced that I could not discern between the three strata, between my oldest, my instinctive memories, those others, inspired more recently by a taste or ‘perfume,’ and those which were actually the memories of another, from whom I had acquired them at second hand — no fissures, indeed, no geological faults, but at least those veins, those streaks of colour which in certain rocks, in certain marbles, point to differences of origin, age, and formation.

It is true that, when morning drew near, I would long have settled the brief uncertainty of my waking dream, I would know in what room I was actually lying, would have reconstructed it round about me in the darkness, and — fixing my orientation by memory alone, or with the assistance of a feeble glimmer of light at the foot of which I placed the curtains and the window — would have reconstructed it complete and with its furniture, as an architect and an upholsterer might do, working upon an original, discarded plan of the doors and windows; would have replaced the mirrors and set the chest-of-drawers on its accustomed site. ‘But scarcely had daylight itself — and no longer the gleam from a last, dying ember on a brass curtain-rod, which I had mistaken for daylight — traced across the darkness, as with a stroke of chalk across a blackboard, its first white correcting ray, when the window, with its curtains, would leave the frame of the doorway, in which I had erroneously placed it, while, to make room for it, the writing-table, which my memory had clumsily fixed where the window ought to be, would hurry off at full speed, thrusting before it the mantelpiece, and sweeping aside the wall of the passage; the well of the courtyard would be enthroned on the spot where, a moment earlier, my dressing-room had lain, and the dwelling-place which I had built up for myself in the darkness would have gone to join all those other dwellings of which I had caught glimpses from the whirlpool of awakening; put to flight by that pale sign traced above my window-curtains by the uplifted forefinger of day.

Swann in Love

To admit you to the ‘little nucleus,’ the ‘little group,’ the ‘little clan’ at the Verdurins’, one condition sufficed, but that one was indispensable; you must give tacit adherence to a Creed one of whose articles was that the young pianist, whom Mme. Verdurin had taken under her patronage that year, and of whom she said “Really, it oughtn’t to be allowed, to play Wagner as well as that!” left both Planté and Rubinstein ‘sitting’; while Dr. Cottard was a more brilliant diagnostician than Potain. Each ‘new recruit’ whom the Verdurins failed to persuade that the evenings spent by other people, in other houses than theirs, were as dull as ditch-water, saw himself banished forthwith. Women being in this respect more rebellious than men, more reluctant to lay aside all worldly curiosity and the desire to find out for themselves whether other drawing-rooms might not sometimes be as entertaining, and the Verdurins feeling, moreover, that this critical spirit and this demon of frivolity might, by their contagion, prove fatal to the orthodoxy of the little church, they had been obliged to expel, one after another, all those of the ‘faithful’ who were of the female sex.

Apart from the doctor’s young wife, they were reduced almost exclusively that season (for all that Mme. Verdurin herself was a thoroughly ‘good’ woman, and came of a respectable middle-class family, excessively rich and wholly undistinguished, with which she had gradually and of her own accord severed all connection) to a young woman almost of a ‘certain class,’ a Mme. de Crécy, whom Mme. Verdurin called by her Christian name, Odette, and pronounced a ‘love,’ and to the pianist’s aunt, who looked as though she had, at one period, ‘answered the bell’: ladies quite ignorant of the world, who in their social simplicity were so easily led to believe that the Princesse de Sagan and the Duchesse de Guermantes were obliged to pay large sums of money to other poor wretches, in order to have anyone at their dinner-parties, that if somebody had offered to procure them an invitation to the house of either of those great dames, the old doorkeeper and the woman of ‘easy virtue’ would have contemptuously declined.

The Verdurins never invited you to dinner; you had your ‘place laid’ there.

There was never any programme for the evening's entertainment. The young pianist would play, but only if he felt inclined, for no one was forced to do anything, and, as M. Verdurin used to say: "We're all friends here. Liberty Hall, you know!"

If the pianist suggested playing the Ride of the Valkyries, or the Prelude to Tristan, Mme. Verdurin would protest, not that the music was displeasing to her, but, on the contrary, that it made too violent an impression. "Then you want me to have one of my headaches? You know quite well, it's the same every time he plays that. I know what I'm in for. Tomorrow, when I want to get up — nothing doing!" If he was not going to play they talked, and one of the friends — usually the painter who was in favour there that year — would "spin," as M. Verdurin put it, "a damned funny yarn that made 'em all split with laughter," and especially Mme. Verdurin, for whom — so strong was her habit of taking literally the figurative accounts of her emotions — Dr. Cottard, who was then just starting in general practice, would "really have to come one day and set her jaw, which she had dislocated with laughing too much."

Evening dress was barred, because you were all 'good pals,' and didn't want to look like the 'boring people' who were to be avoided like the plague, and only asked to the big evenings, which were given as seldom as possible, and then only if it would amuse the painter or make the musician better known. The rest of the time you were quite happy playing charades and having supper in fancy dress, and there was no need to mingle any strange element with the little 'clan.'

But just as the 'good pals' came to take a more and more prominent place in Mme. Verdurin's life, so the 'bores,' the 'nuisances' grew to include everybody and everything that kept her friends away from her, that made them sometimes plead 'previous engagements,' the mother of one, the professional duties of another, the 'little place in the country' of a third. If Dr. Cottard felt bound to say good night as soon as they rose from table, so as to go back to some patient who was seriously ill; "I don't know," Mme. Verdurin would say, "I'm sure it will do him far more good if you don't go disturbing him again this evening; he will have a good night without you; to-morrow morning you can go round early and you will find him cured." From the beginning of December it would make her quite ill to think that the 'faithful' might fail her on Christmas and New Year's Days. The pianist's aunt insisted that he must accompany her, on the latter, to a family dinner at her mother's.

"You don't suppose she'll die, your mother," exclaimed Mme. Verdurin bitterly, "if you don't have dinner with her on New Year's Day, like people in the

provinces!”

Her uneasiness was kindled again in Holy Week: “Now you, Doctor, you’re a sensible, broad-minded man; you’ll come, of course, on Good Friday, just like any other day?” she said to Cottard in the first year of the little ‘nucleus,’ in a loud and confident voice, as though there could be no doubt of his answer. But she trembled as she waited for it, for if he did not come she might find herself condemned to dine alone.

“I shall come on Good Friday — to say good-bye to you, for we are going to spend the holidays in Auvergne.”

“In Auvergne? To be eaten by fleas and all sorts of creatures! A fine lot of good that will do you!” And after a solemn pause: “If you had only told us, we would have tried to get up a party, and all gone there together, comfortably.”

And so, too, if one of the ‘faithful’ had a friend, or one of the ladies a young man, who was liable, now and then, to make them miss an evening, the Verdurins, who were not in the least afraid of a woman’s having a lover, provided that she had him in their company, loved him in their company and did not prefer him to their company, would say: “Very well, then, bring your friend along.” And he would be put to the test, to see whether he was willing to have no secrets from Mme. Verdurin, whether he was susceptible of being enrolled in the ‘little clan.’ If he failed to pass, the faithful one who had introduced him would be taken on one side, and would be tactfully assisted to quarrel with the friend or mistress. But if the test proved satisfactory, the newcomer would in turn be numbered among the ‘faithful.’ And so when, in the course of this same year, the courtesan told M. Verdurin that she had made the acquaintance of such a charming gentleman, M. Swann, and hinted that he would very much like to be allowed to come, M. Verdurin carried the request at once to his wife. He never formed an opinion on any subject until she had formed hers, his special duty being to carry out her wishes and those of the ‘faithful’ generally, which he did with boundless ingenuity.

“My dear, Mme. de Crécy has something to say to you. She would like to bring one of her friends here, a M. Swann. What do you say?”

“Why, as if anybody could refuse anything to a little piece of perfection like that. Be quiet; no one asked your opinion. I tell you that you are a piece of perfection.”

“Just as you like,” replied Odette, in an affected tone, and then went on: “You know I’m not fishing for compliments.”

“Very well; bring your friend, if he’s nice.”

Now there was no connection whatsoever between the ‘little nucleus’ and the society which Swann frequented, and a purely worldly man would have thought it hardly worth his while, when occupying so exceptional a position in the world, to seek an introduction to the Verdurins. But Swann was so ardent a lover that, once he had got to know almost all the women of the aristocracy, once they had taught him all that there was to learn, he had ceased to regard those naturalisation papers, almost a patent of nobility, which the Faubourg Saint-Germain had bestowed upon him, save as a sort of negotiable bond, a letter of credit with no intrinsic value, which allowed him to improvise a status for himself in some little hole in the country, or in some obscure quarter of Paris, where the good-looking daughter of a local squire or solicitor had taken his fancy. For at such times desire, or love itself, would revive in him a feeling of vanity from which he was now quite free in his everyday life, although it was, no doubt, the same feeling which had originally prompted him towards that career as a man of fashion in which he had squandered his intellectual gifts upon frivolous amusements, and had made use of his erudition in matters of art only to advise society ladies what pictures to buy and how to decorate their houses; and this vanity it was which made him eager to shine, in the sight of any fair unknown who had captivated him for the moment, with a brilliance which the name of Swann by itself did not emit. And he was most eager when the fair unknown was in humble circumstances. Just as it is not by other men of intelligence that an intelligent man is afraid of being thought a fool, so it is not by the great gentleman but by boors and ‘bounders’ that a man of fashion is afraid of finding his social value underrated. Three-fourths of the mental ingenuity displayed, of the social falsehoods scattered broadcast ever since the world began by people whose importance they have served only to diminish, have been aimed at inferiors. And Swann, who behaved quite simply and was at his ease when with a duchess, would tremble for fear of being despised, and would instantly begin to pose, were he to meet her grace’s maid.

Unlike so many people, who, either from lack of energy or else from a resigned sense of the obligation laid upon them by their social grandeur to remain moored like houseboats to a certain point on the bank of the stream of life, abstain from the pleasures which are offered to them above and below that point, that degree in life in which they will remain fixed until the day of their death, and are content, in the end, to describe as pleasures, for want of any better, those mediocre distractions, that just not intolerable tedium which is enclosed there with them; Swann would endeavour not to find charm and beauty in the

women with whom he must pass time, but to pass his time among women whom he had already found to be beautiful and charming. And these were, as often as not, women whose beauty was of a distinctly ‘common’ type, for the physical qualities which attracted him instinctively, and without reason, were the direct opposite of those that he admired in the women painted or sculptured by his favourite masters. Depth of character, or a melancholy expression on a woman’s face would freeze his senses, which would, however, immediately melt at the sight of healthy, abundant, rosy human flesh.

If on his travels he met a family whom it would have been more correct for him to make no attempt to know, but among whom a woman caught his eye, adorned with a special charm that was new to him, to remain on his ‘high horse’ and to cheat the desire that she had kindled in him, to substitute a pleasure different from that which he might have tasted in her company by writing to invite one of his former mistresses to come and join him, would have seemed to him as cowardly an abdication in the face of life, as stupid a renunciation of a new form of happiness as if, instead of visiting the country where he was, he had shut himself up in his own rooms and looked at ‘views’ of Paris. He did not immure himself in the solid structure of his social relations, but had made of them, so as to be able to set it up afresh upon new foundations wherever a woman might take his fancy, one of those collapsible tents which explorers carry about with them. Any part of it which was not portable or could not be adapted to some fresh pleasure he would discard as valueless, however enviable it might appear to others. How often had his credit with a duchess, built up of the yearly accumulation of her desire to do him some favour for which she had never found an opportunity, been squandered in a moment by his calling upon her, in an indiscreetly worded message, for a recommendation by telegraph which would put him in touch at once with one of her agents whose daughter he had noticed in the country, just as a starving man might barter a diamond for a crust of bread. Indeed, when it was too late, he would laugh at himself for it, for there was in his nature, redeemed by many rare refinements, an element of clownishness. Then he belonged to that class of intelligent men who have led a life of idleness, and who seek consolation and, perhaps, an excuse in the idea, which their idleness offers to their intelligence, of objects as worthy of their interest as any that could be attained by art or learning, the idea that ‘Life’ contains situations more interesting and more romantic than all the romances ever written. So, at least, he would assure and had no difficulty in persuading the more subtle among his friends in the fashionable world, notably the Baron de Charlus, whom he liked to

amuse with stories of the startling adventures that had befallen him, such as when he had met a woman in the train, and had taken her home with him, before discovering that she was the sister of a reigning monarch, in whose hands were gathered, at that moment, all the threads of European politics, of which he found himself kept informed in the most delightful fashion, or when, in the complexity of circumstances, it depended upon the choice which the Conclave was about to make whether he might or might not become the lover of somebody's cook.

It was not only the brilliant phalanx of virtuous dowagers, generals and academicians, to whom he was bound by such close ties, that Swann compelled with so much cynicism to serve him as panders. All his friends were accustomed to receive, from time to time, letters which called on them for a word of recommendation or introduction, with a diplomatic adroitness which, persisting throughout all his successive 'affairs' and using different pretexts, revealed more glaringly than the clumsiest indiscretion, a permanent trait in his character and an unvarying quest. I used often to recall to myself when, many years later, I began to take an interest in his character because of the similarities which, in wholly different respects, it offered to my own, how, when he used to write to my grandfather (though not at the time we are now considering, for it was about the date of my own birth that Swann's great 'affair' began, and made a long interruption in his amatory practices) the latter, recognising his friend's handwriting on the envelope, would exclaim: "Here is Swann asking for something; on guard!" And, either from distrust or from the unconscious spirit of devilry which urges us to offer a thing only to those who do not want it, my grandparents would meet with an obstinate refusal the most easily satisfied of his prayers, as when he begged them for an introduction to a girl who dined with us every Sunday, and whom they were obliged, whenever Swann mentioned her, to pretend that they no longer saw, although they would be wondering, all through the week, whom they could invite to meet her, and often failed, in the end, to find anyone, sooner than make a sign to him who would so gladly have accepted.

Occasionally a couple of my grandparents' acquaintance, who had been complaining for some time that they never saw Swann now, would announce with satisfaction, and perhaps with a slight inclination to make my grandparents envious of them, that he had suddenly become as charming as he could possibly be, and was never out of their house. My grandfather would not care to shatter their pleasant illusion, but would look at my grandmother, as he hummed the air of:

What is this mystery?
I cannot understand it;

or of:

Vision fugitive...;
In matters such as this
'Tis best to close one's eyes.

A few months later, if my grandfather asked Swann's new friend "What about Swann? Do you still see as much of him as ever?" the other's face would lengthen: "Never mention his name to me again!"

"But I thought that you were such friends..."

He had been intimate in this way for several months with some cousins of my grandmother, dining almost every evening at their house. Suddenly, and without any warning, he ceased to appear. They supposed him to be ill, and the lady of the house was going to send to inquire for him when, in her kitchen, she found a letter in his hand, which her cook had left by accident in the housekeeping book. In this he announced that he was leaving Paris and would not be able to come to the house again. The cook had been his mistress, and at the moment of breaking off relations she was the only one of the household whom he had thought it necessary to inform.

But when his mistress for the time being was a woman in society, or at least one whose birth was not so lowly, nor her position so irregular that he was unable to arrange for her reception in 'society,' then for her sake he would return to it, but only to the particular orbit in which she moved or into which he had drawn her. "No good depending on Swann for this evening," people would say; "don't you remember, it's his American's night at the Opera?" He would secure invitations for her to the most exclusive drawing-rooms, to those houses where he himself went regularly, for weekly dinners or for poker; every evening, after a slight 'wave' imparted to his stiffly brushed red locks had tempered with a certain softness the ardour of his bold green eyes, he would select a flower for his buttonhole and set out to meet his mistress at the house of one or other of the women of his circle; and then, thinking of the affection and admiration which the fashionable folk, whom he always treated exactly as he pleased, would, when he met them there, lavish upon him in the presence of the woman whom he loved, he would find a fresh charm in that worldly existence of which he had grown

weary, but whose substance, pervaded and warmly coloured by the flickering light which he had slipped into its midst, seemed to him beautiful and rare, now that he had incorporated in it a fresh love.

But while each of these attachments, each of these flirtations had been the realisation, more or less complete, of a dream born of the sight of a face or a form which Swann had spontaneously, and without effort on his part, found charming, it was quite another matter when, one day at the theatre, he was introduced to Odette de Crécy by an old friend of his own, who had spoken of her to him as a ravishing creature with whom he might very possibly come to an understanding; but had made her out to be harder of conquest than she actually was, so as to appear to be conferring a special favour by the introduction. She had struck Swann not, certainly, as being devoid of beauty, but as endowed with a style of beauty which left him indifferent, which aroused in him no desire, which gave him, indeed, a sort of physical repulsion; as one of those women of whom every man can name some, and each will name different examples, who are the converse of the type which our senses demand. To give him any pleasure her profile was too sharp, her skin too delicate, her cheek-bones too prominent, her features too tightly drawn. Her eyes were fine, but so large that they seemed to be bending beneath their own weight, strained the rest of her face and always made her appear unwell or in an ill humour. Some time after this introduction at the theatre she had written to ask Swann whether she might see his collections, which would interest her so much, she, "an ignorant woman with a taste for beautiful things," saying that she would know him better when once she had seen him in his 'home,' where she imagined him to be "so comfortable with his tea and his books"; although she had not concealed her surprise at his being in that part of the town, which must be so depressing, and was "not nearly smart enough for such a very smart man." And when he allowed her to come she had said to him as she left how sorry she was to have stayed so short a time in a house into which she was so glad to have found her way at last, speaking of him as though he had meant something more to her than the rest of the people she knew, and appearing to unite their two selves with a kind of romantic bond which had made him smile. But at the time of life, tinged already with disenchantment, which Swann was approaching, when a man can content himself with being in love for the pleasure of loving without expecting too much in return, this linking of hearts, if it is no longer, as in early youth, the goal towards which love, of necessity, tends, still is bound to love by so strong an association of ideas that it may well become the cause of love if it presents itself

first. In his younger days a man dreams of possessing the heart of the woman whom he loves; later, the feeling that he possesses the heart of a woman may be enough to make him fall in love with her. And 50, at an age when it would appear — since one seeks in love before everything else a subjective pleasure — that the taste for feminine beauty must play the larger part in its procreation, love may come into being, love of the most physical order, without any foundation in desire. At this time of life a man has already been wounded more than once by the darts of love; it no longer evolves by itself, obeying its own incomprehensible and fatal laws, before his passive and astonished heart. We come to its aid; we falsify it by memory and by suggestion; recognising one of its symptoms we recall and recreate the rest. Since we possess its hymn, engraved on our hearts in its entirety, there is no need of any woman to repeat the opening lines, potent with the admiration which her beauty inspires, for us to remember all that follows. And if she begin in the middle, where it sings of our existing, henceforward, for one another only, we are well enough attuned to that music to be able to take it up and follow our partner, without hesitation, at the first pause in her voice.

Odette de Crécy came again to see Swann; her visits grew more frequent, and doubtless each visit revived the sense of disappointment which he felt at the sight of a face whose details he had somewhat forgotten in the interval, not remembering it as either so expressive or, in spite of her youth, so faded; he used to regret, while she was talking to him, that her really considerable beauty was not of the kind which he spontaneously admired. It must be remarked that Odette's face appeared thinner and more prominent than it actually was, because her forehead and the upper part of her cheeks, a single and almost plane surface, were covered by the masses of hair which women wore at that period, drawn forward in a fringe, raised in crimped waves and falling in stray locks over her ears; while as for her figure, and she was admirably built, it was impossible to make out its continuity (on account of the fashion then prevailing, and in spite of her being one of the best-dressed women in Paris) for the corset, jetting forwards in an arch, as though over an imaginary stomach, and ending in a sharp point, beneath which bulged out the balloon of her double skirts, gave a woman, that year, the appearance of being composed of different sections badly fitted together; to such an extent did the frills, the flounces, the inner bodice follow, in complete independence, controlled only by the fancy of their designer or the rigidity of their material, the line which led them to the knots of ribbon, falls of lace, fringes of vertically hanging jet, or carried them along the bust, but

nowhere attached themselves to the living creature, who, according as the architecture of their fripperies drew them towards or away from her own, found herself either strait-laced to suffocation or else completely buried.

But, after Odette had left him, Swann would think with a smile of her telling him how the time would drag until he allowed her to come again; he remembered the anxious, timid way in which she had once begged him that it might not be very long, and the way in which she had looked at him then, fixing upon him her fearful and imploring gaze, which gave her a touching air beneath the bunches of artificial pansies fastened in the front of her round bonnet of white straw, tied with strings of black velvet. “And won’t you,” she had ventured, “come just once and take tea with me?” He had pleaded pressure of work, an essay — which, in reality, he had abandoned years ago — on Vermeer of Delft. “I know that I am quite useless,” she had replied, “a little wild thing like me beside a learned great man like you. I should be like the frog in the fable! And yet I should so much like to learn, to know things, to be initiated. What fun it would be to become a regular bookworm, to bury my nose in a lot of old papers!” she had gone on, with that self-satisfied air which a smart woman adopts when she insists that her one desire is to give herself up, without fear of soiling her fingers, to some unclean task, such as cooking the dinner, with her “hands right in the dish itself.” “You will only laugh at me, but this painter who stops you from seeing me,” she meant Vermeer, “I have never even heard of him; is he alive still? Can I see any of his things in Paris, so as to have some idea of what is going on behind that great brow which works so hard, that head which I feel sure is always puzzling away about things; just to be able to say ‘There, that’s what he’s thinking about!’ What a dream it would be to be able to help you with your work.”

He had sought an excuse in his fear of forming new friendships, which he gallantly described as his fear of a hopeless passion. “You are afraid of falling in love? How funny that is, when I go about seeking nothing else, and would give my soul just to find a little love somewhere!” she had said, so naturally and with such an air of conviction that he had been genuinely touched. “Some woman must have made you suffer. And you think that the rest are all like her. She can’t have understood you: you are so utterly different from ordinary men. That’s what I liked about you when I first saw you; I felt at once that you weren’t like everybody else.”

“And then, besides, there’s yourself —— “ he had continued, “I know what women are; you must have a whole heap of things to do, and never any time to

spare."

"I? Why, I have never anything to do. I am always free, and I always will be free if you want me. At whatever hour of the day or night it may suit you to see me, just send for me, and I shall be only too delighted to come. Will you do that? Do you know what I should really like — to introduce you to Mme. Verdurin, where I go every evening. Just fancy my finding you there, and thinking that it was a little for my sake that you had gone."

No doubt, in thus remembering their conversations, in thinking about her thus when he was alone, he did no more than call her image into being among those of countless other women in his romantic dreams; but if, thanks to some accidental circumstance (or even perhaps without that assistance, for the circumstance which presents itself at the moment when a mental state, hitherto latent, makes itself felt, may well have had no influence whatsoever upon that state), the image of Odette de Crécy came to absorb the whole of his dreams, if from those dreams the memory of her could no longer be eliminated, then her bodily imperfections would no longer be of the least importance, nor would the conformity of her body, more or less than any other, to the requirements of Swann's taste; since, having become the body of her whom he loved, it must henceforth be the only one capable of causing him joy or anguish.

It so happened that my grandfather had known — which was more than could be said of any other actual acquaintance — the family of these Ver-durins. But he had entirely severed his connection with what he called "young Verdurin," taking a general view of him as one who had fallen — though without losing hold of his millions — among the riff-raff of Bohemia. One day he received a letter from Swann asking whether my grandfather could put him in touch with the Verdurins. "On guard! on guard!" he exclaimed as he read it, "I am not at all surprised; Swann was bound to finish up like this. A nice lot of people! I cannot do what he asks, because, in the first place, I no longer know the gentleman in question. Besides, there must be a woman in it somewhere, and I don't mix myself up in such matters. Ah, well, we shall see some fun if Swann begins running after the little Verdurins."

And on my grandfather's refusal to act as sponsor, it was Odette herself who had taken Swann to the house.

The Verdurins had had dining with them, on the day when Swann made his first appearance, Dr. and Mme. Cottard, the young pianist and his aunt, and the painter then in favour, while these were joined, in the course of the evening, by several more of the 'faithful.'

Dr. Cottard was never quite certain of the tone in which he ought to reply to any observation, or whether the speaker was jesting or in earnest. And so in any event he would embellish all his facial expressions with the offer of a conditional, a provisional smile whose expectant subtlety would exonerate him from the charge of being a simpleton, if the remark addressed to him should turn out to have been facetious. But as he must also be prepared to face the alternative, he never dared to allow this smile a definite expression on his features, and you would see there a perpetually flickering uncertainty, in which you might decipher the question that he never dared to ask: “Do you really mean that?” He was no more confident of the manner in which he ought to conduct himself in the street, or indeed in life generally, than he was in a drawing-room; and he might be seen greeting passers-by, carriages, and anything that occurred with a malicious smile which absolved his subsequent behaviour of all impropriety, since it proved, if it should turn out unsuited to the occasion, that he was well aware of that, and that if he had assumed a smile, the jest was a secret of his own.

On all those points, however, where a plain question appeared to him to be permissible, the Doctor was unsparing in his endeavours to cultivate the wilderness of his ignorance and uncertainty and so to complete his education.

So it was that, following the advice given him by a wise mother on his first coming up to the capital from his provincial home, he would never let pass either a figure of speech or a proper name that was new to him without an effort to secure the fullest information upon it.

As regards figures of speech, he was insatiable in his thirst for knowledge, for often imagining them to have a more definite meaning than was actually the case, he would want to know what, exactly, was intended by those which he most frequently heard used: ‘devilish pretty,’ ‘blue blood,’ ‘a cat and dog life,’ ‘a day of reckoning,’ ‘a queen of fashion, ‘to give a free hand,’ ‘to be at a deadlock,’ and so forth; and in what particular circumstances he himself might make use of them in conversation. Failing these, he would adorn it with puns and other ‘plays upon words’ which he had learned by rote. As for the names of strangers which were uttered in his hearing, he used merely to repeat them to himself in a questioning tone, which, he thought, would suffice to furnish him with explanations for which he would not ostensibly seek.

As the critical faculty, on the universal application of which he prided himself, was, in reality, completely lacking, that refinement of good breeding which consists in assuring some one whom you are obliging in any way, without

expecting to be believed, that it is really yourself that is obliged to him, was wasted on Cottard, who took everything that he heard in its literal sense. However blind she may have been to his faults, Mme. Verdurin was genuinely annoyed, though she still continued to regard him as brilliantly clever, when, after she had invited him to see and hear Sarah Bernhardt from a stage box, and had said politely: “It is very good of you to have come, Doctor, especially as I’m sure you must often have heard Sarah Bernhardt; and besides, I’m afraid we’re rather too near the stage,” the Doctor, who had come into the box with a smile which waited before settling upon or vanishing from his face until some one in authority should enlighten him as to the merits of the spectacle, replied: “To be sure, we are far too near the stage, and one is getting sick of Sarah Bernhardt. But you expressed a wish that I should come. For me, your wish is a command. I am only too glad to be able to do you this little service. What would one not do to please you, you are so good.” And he went on, “Sarah Bernhardt; that’s what they call the Voice of God, ain’t it? You see, often, too, that she ‘sets the boards on fire.’ That’s an odd expression, ain’t it?” in the hope of an enlightening commentary, which, however, was not forthcoming.

“D’you know,” Mme. Verdurin had said to her husband, “I believe we are going the wrong way to work when we depreciate anything we offer the Doctor. He is a scientist who lives quite apart from our everyday existence; he knows nothing himself of what things are worth, and he accepts everything that we say as gospel.”

“I never dared to mention it,” M. Verdurin had answered, “but I’ve noticed the same thing myself.” And on the following New Year’s Day, instead of sending Dr. Cottard a ruby that cost three thousand francs, and pretending that it was a mere trifle, M. Verdurin bought an artificial stone for three hundred, and let it be understood that it was something almost impossible to match.

When Mme. Verdurin had announced that they were to see M. Swann that evening; “Swann!” the Doctor had exclaimed in a tone rendered brutal by his astonishment, for the smallest piece of news would always take utterly unawares this man who imagined himself to be perpetually in readiness for anything. And seeing that no one answered him, “Swann! Who on earth is Swann?” he shouted, in a frenzy of anxiety which subsided as soon as Mme. Verdurin had explained, “Why, Odette’s friend, whom she told us about.”

“Ah, good, good; that’s all right, then,” answered the Doctor, at once mollified. As for the painter, he was overjoyed at the prospect of Swann’s appearing at the Verdurins’, because he supposed him to be in love with Odette,

and was always ready to assist at lovers' meetings. "Nothing amuses me more than match-making," he confided to Cottard; "I have been tremendously successful, even with women!"

In telling the Verdurins that Swann was extremely 'smart,' Odette had alarmed them with the prospect of another 'bore.' When he arrived, however, he made an excellent impression, an indirect cause of which, though they did not know it, was his familiarity with the best society. He had, indeed, one of those advantages which men who have lived and moved in the world enjoy over others, even men of intelligence and refinement, who have never gone into society, namely that they no longer see it transfigured by the longing or repulsion with which it fills the imagination, but regard it as quite unimportant. Their good nature, freed from all taint of snobbishness and from the fear of seeming too friendly, grown independent, in fact, has the ease, the grace of movement of a trained gymnast each of whose supple limbs will carry out precisely the movement that is required without any clumsy participation by the rest of his body. The simple and elementary gestures used by a man of the world when he courteously holds out his hand to the unknown youth who is being introduced to him, and when he bows discreetly before the Ambassador to whom he is being introduced, had gradually pervaded, without his being conscious of it, the whole of Swann's social deportment, so that in the company of people of a lower grade than his own, such as the Verdurins and their friends, he instinctively shewed an assiduity, and made overtures with which, by their account, any of their 'bores' would have dispensed. He chilled, though for a moment only, on meeting Dr. Cottard; for seeing him close one eye with an ambiguous smile, before they had yet spoken to one another (a grimace which Cottard styled "letting 'em all come"), Swann supposed that the Doctor recognised him from having met him already somewhere, probably in some house of 'ill-fame,' though these he himself very rarely visited, never having made a habit of indulging in the mercenary sort of love. Regarding such an allusion as in bad taste, especially before Odette, whose opinion of himself it might easily alter for the worse, Swann assumed his most icy manner. But when he learned that the lady next to the Doctor was Mme. Cottard, he decided that so young a husband would not deliberately, in his wife's hearing, have made any allusion to amusements of that order, and so ceased to interpret the Doctor's expression in the sense which he had at first suspected. The painter at once invited Swann to visit his studio with Odette, and Swann found him very pleasant. "Perhaps you will be more highly favoured than I have been," Mme. Verdurin broke in, with mock resentment of

the favour, “perhaps you will be allowed to see Cottard’s portrait” (for which she had given the painter a commission). “Take care, Master Biche,” she reminded the painter, whom it was a time-honoured pleasantry to address as ‘Master,’ “to catch that nice look in his eyes, that witty little twinkle. You know, what I want to have most of all is his smile; that’s what I’ve asked you to paint — the portrait of his smile.” And since the phrase struck her as noteworthy, she repeated it very loud, so as to make sure that as many as possible of her guests should hear it, and even made use of some indefinite pretext to draw the circle closer before she uttered it again. Swann begged to be introduced to everyone, even to an old friend of the Verdurins, called Saniette, whose shyness, simplicity and good-nature had deprived him of all the consideration due to his skill in palaeography, his large fortune, and the distinguished family to which he belonged. When he spoke, his words came with a confusion which was delightful to hear because one felt that it indicated not so much a defect in his speech as a quality of his soul, as it were a survival from the age of innocence which he had never wholly outgrown. All the cop-sonants which he did not manage to pronounce seemed like harsh utterances of which his gentle lips were incapable. By asking to be made known to M. Saniette, Swann made M. Verdurin reverse the usual form of introduction (saying, in fact, with emphasis on the distinction: “M. Swann, pray let me present to you our friend Saniette”) but he aroused in Saniette himself a warmth of gratitude, which, however, the Verdurins never disclosed to Swann, since Saniette rather annoyed them, and they did not feel bound to provide him with friends. On the other hand the Verdurins were extremely touched by Swann’s next request, for he felt that he must ask to be introduced to the pianist’s aunt. She wore a black dress, as was her invariable custom, for she believed that a woman always looked well in black, and that nothing could be more distinguished; but her face was exceedingly red, as it always was for some time after a meal. She bowed to Swann with deference, but drew herself up again with great dignity. As she was entirely uneducated, and was afraid of making mistakes in grammar and pronunciation, she used purposely to speak in an indistinct and garbling manner, thinking that if she should make a slip it would be so buried in the surrounding confusion that no one could be certain whether she had actually made it or not; with the result that her talk was a sort of continuous, blurred expectoration, out of which would emerge, at rare intervals, those sounds and syllables of which she felt positive. Swann supposed himself entitled to poke a little mild fun at her in conversation with M. Verdurin, who, however, was not at all amused.

“She is such an excellent woman!” he rejoined. “I grant you that she is not exactly brilliant; but I assure you that she can talk most charmingly when you are alone with her.”

“I am sure she can,” Swann hastened to conciliate him. “All I meant was that she hardly struck me as ‘distinguished,’” he went on, isolating the epithet in the inverted commas of his tone, “and, after all, that is something of a compliment.”

“Wait a moment,” said M. Verdurin, “now, this will surprise you; she writes quite delightfully. You have never heard her nephew play? It is admirable; eh, Doctor? Would you like me to ask him to play something, M. Swann?”

“I should count myself most fortunate...” Swann was beginning, a trifle pompously, when the Doctor broke in derisively. Having once heard it said, and never having forgotten that in general conversation emphasis and the use of formal expressions were out of date, whenever he heard a solemn word used seriously, as the word ‘fortunate’ had been used just now by Swann, he at once assumed that the speaker was being deliberately pedantic. And if, moreover, the same word happened to occur, also, in what he called an old ‘tag’ or ‘saw,’ however common it might still be in current usage, the Doctor jumped to the conclusion that the whole thing was a joke, and interrupted with the remaining words of the quotation, which he seemed to charge the speaker with having intended to introduce at that point, although in reality it had never entered his mind.

“Most fortunate for France!” he recited wickedly, shooting up both arms with great vigour. M. Verdurin could not help laughing.

“What are all those good people laughing at over there? There’s no sign of brooding melancholy down in your corner,” shouted Mme. Verdurin. “You don’t suppose I find it very amusing to be stuck up here by myself on the stool of repentance,” she went on peevishly, like a spoiled child.

Mme. Verdurin was sitting upon a high Swedish chair of waxed pine-wood, which a violinist from that country had given her, and which she kept in her drawing-room, although in appearance it suggested a school ‘form,’ and ‘swore,’ as the saying is, at the really good antique furniture which she had besides; but she made a point of keeping on view the presents which her ‘faithful’ were in the habit of making her from time to time, so that the donors might have the pleasure of seeing them there when they came to the house. She tried to persuade them to confine their tributes to flowers and sweets, which had at least the merit of mortality; but she was never successful, and the house was gradually filled with

a collection of foot-warmers, cushions, clocks, screens, barometers and vases, a constant repetition and a boundless incongruity of useless but indestructible objects.

From this lofty perch she would take her spirited part in the conversation of the ‘faithful,’ and would revel in all their fun; but, since the accident to her jaw, she had abandoned the effort involved in real hilarity, and had substituted a kind of symbolical dumb-show which signified, without endangering or even fatiguing her in any way, that she was ‘laughing until she cried.’ At the least witticism aimed by any of the circle against a ‘bore,’ or against a former member of the circle who was now relegated to the limbo of ‘bores’ — and to the utter despair of M. Verdurin, who had always made out that he was just as easily amused as his wife, but who, since his laughter was the ‘real thing,’ was out of breath in a moment, and so was overtaken and vanquished by her device of a feigned but continuous hilarity — she would utter a shrill cry, shut tight her little bird-like eyes, which were beginning to be clouded over by a cataract, and quickly, as though she had only just time to avoid some indecent sight or to parry a mortal blow, burying her face in her hands, which completely engulfed it, and prevented her from seeing anything at all, she would appear to be struggling to suppress, to eradicate a laugh which, were she to give way to it, must inevitably leave her inanimate. So, stupefied with the gaiety of the ‘faithful,’ drunken with comradeship, scandal and asseveration, Mme. Verdurin, perched on her high seat like a cage-bird whose biscuit has been steeped in mulled wine, would sit aloft and sob with fellow-feeling.

Meanwhile M. Verdurin, after first asking Swann’s permission to light his pipe (“No ceremony here, you understand; we’re all pals!”), went and begged the young musician to sit down at the piano.

“Leave him alone; don’t bother him; he hasn’t come here to be tormented,” cried Mme. Verdurin. “I won’t have him tormented.”

“But why on earth should it bother him?” rejoined M. Verdurin. “I’m sure M. Swann has never heard the sonata in F sharp which we discovered; he is going to play us the pianoforte arrangement.”

“No, no, no, not my sonata!” she screamed, “I don’t want to be made to cry until I get a cold in the head, and neuralgia all down my face, like last time; thanks very much, I don’t intend to repeat that performance; you are all very kind and considerate; it is easy to see that none of you will have to stay in bed, for a week.”

This little scene, which was re-enacted as often as the young pianist sat

down to play, never failed to delight the audience, as though each of them were witnessing it for the first time, as a proof of the seductive originality of the ‘Mistress’ as she was styled, and of the acute sensitiveness of her musical ‘ear.’ Those nearest to her would attract the attention of the rest, who were smoking or playing cards at the other end of the room, by their cries of ‘Hear, hear!’ which, as in Parliamentary debates, shewed that something worth listening to was being said. And next day they would commiserate with those who had been prevented from coming that evening, and would assure them that the ‘little scene’ had never been so amusingly done.

“Well, all right, then,” said M. Verdurin, “he can play just the andante.”

“Just the *andante*! How you do go on,” cried his wife. “As if it weren’t ‘just the *andante*’ that breaks every bone in my body. The ‘Master’ is really too priceless! Just as though, ‘in the Ninth,’ he said ‘we need only have the *finale*,’ or ‘just the overture’ of the *Meistersinger*.”

The Doctor, however, urged Mme. Verdurin to let the pianist play, not because he supposed her to be malingering when she spoke of the distressing effects that music always had upon her, for he recognised the existence of certain neurasthenic states — but from his habit, common to many doctors, of at once relaxing the strict letter of a prescription as soon as it appeared to jeopardise, what seemed to him far more important, the success of some social gathering at which he was present, and of which the patient whom he had urged for once to forget her dyspepsia or headache formed an essential factor.

“You won’t be ill this time, you’ll find,” he told her, seeking at the same time to subdue her mind by the magnetism of his gaze. “And, if you are ill, we will cure you.”

“Will you, really?” Mme. Verdurin spoke as though, with so great a favour in store for her, there was nothing for it but to capitulate. Perhaps, too, by dint of saying that she was going to be ill, she had worked herself into a state in which she forgot, occasionally, that it was all only a ‘little scene,’ and regarded things, quite sincerely, from an invalid’s point of view. For it may often be remarked that invalids grow weary of having the frequency of their attacks depend always on their own prudence in avoiding them, and like to let themselves think that they are free to do everything that they most enjoy doing, although they are always ill after doing it, provided only that they place themselves in the hands of a higher authority which, without putting them to the least inconvenience, can and will, by uttering a word or by administering a tabloid, set them once again upon their feet.

Odette had gone to sit on a tapestry-covered sofa near the piano, saying to Mme. Verdurin, “I have my own little corner, haven’t I?”

And Mme. Verdurin, seeing Swann by himself upon a chair, made him get up. “You’re not at all comfortable there; go along and sit by Odette; you can make room for M. Swann there, can’t you, Odette?”

“What charming Beauvais!” said Swann, stopping to admire the sofa before he sat down on it, and wishing to be polite.

“I am glad you appreciate my sofa,” replied Mme. Verdurin, “and I warn you that if you expect ever to see another like it you may as well abandon the idea at once. They never made any more like it. And these little chairs, too, are perfect marvels. You can look at them in a moment. The emblems in each of the bronze mouldings correspond to the subject of the tapestry on the chair; you know, you combine amusement with instruction when you look at them; — I can promise you a delightful time, I assure you. Just look at the little border around the edges; here, look, the little vine on a red background in this one, the Bear and the Grapes. Isn’t it well drawn? What do you say? I think they knew a thing or two about design! Doesn’t it make your mouth water, this vine? My husband makes out that I am not fond of fruit, because I eat less than he does. But not a bit of it, I am greedier than any of you, but I have no need to fill my mouth with them when I can feed on them with my eyes. What are you all laughing at now, pray? Ask the Doctor; he will tell you that those grapes act on me like a regular purge. Some people go to Fontainebleau for cures; I take my own little Beauvais cure here. But, M. Swann, you mustn’t run away without feeling the little bronze mouldings on the backs. Isn’t it an exquisite surface? No, no, not with your whole hand like that; feel them property!”

“If Mme. Verdurin is going to start playing about with her bronzes,” said the painter, “we shan’t get any music to-night.”

“Be quiet, you wretch! And yet we poor women,” she went on, “are forbidden pleasures far less voluptuous than this. There is no flesh in the world as soft as these. None. When M. Verdurin did me the honour of being madly jealous... come, you might at least be polite. Don’t say that you never have been jealous!”

“But, my dear, I have said absolutely nothing. Look here, Doctor, I call you as a witness; did I utter a word?”

Swann had begun, out of politeness, to finger the bronzes, and did not like to stop.

“Come along; you can caress them later; now it is you that are going to be

caressed, caressed in the ear; you'll like that, I think. Here's the young gentleman who will take charge of that."

After the pianist had played, Swann felt and shewed more interest in him than in any of the other guests, for the following reason:

The year before, at an evening party, he had heard a piece of music played on the piano and violin. At first he had appreciated only the material quality of the sounds which those instruments secreted. And it had been a source of keen pleasure when, below the narrow ribbon of the violin-part, delicate, unyielding, substantial and governing the whole, he had suddenly perceived, where it was trying to surge upwards in a flowing tide of sound, the mass of the piano-part, multiform, coherent, level, and breaking everywhere in melody like the deep blue tumult of the sea, silvered and charmed into a minor key by the moonlight. But at a given moment, without being able to distinguish any clear outline, or to give a name to what was pleasing him, suddenly enraptured, he had tried to collect, to treasure in his memory the phrase or harmony — he knew not which — that had just been played, and had opened and expanded his soul, just as the fragrance of certain roses, wafted upon the moist air of evening, has the power of dilating our nostrils. Perhaps it was owing to his own ignorance of music that he had been able to receive so confused an impression, one of those that are, notwithstanding, our only purely musical impressions, limited in their extent, entirely original, and irreducible into any other kind. An impression of this order, vanishing in an instant, is, so to speak, an impression *sine materia*. Presumably the notes which we hear at such moments tend to spread out before our eyes, over surfaces greater or smaller according to their pitch and volume; to trace arabesque designs, to give us the sensation of breath or tenuity, stability or caprice. But the notes themselves have vanished before these sensations have developed sufficiently to escape submersion under those which the following, or even simultaneous notes have already begun to awaken in us. And this indefinite perception would continue to smother in its molten liquidity the *motifs*which now and then emerge, barely discernible, to plunge again and disappear and drown; recognised only by the particular kind of pleasure which they instil, impossible to describe, to recollect, to name; ineffable; — if our memory, like a labourer who toils at the laying down of firm foundations beneath the tumult of the waves, did not, by fashioning for us facsimiles of those fugitive phrases, enable us to compare and to contrast them with those that follow. And so, hardly had the delicious sensation, which Swann had experienced, died away, before his memory had furnished him with an immediate transcript, summary, it is true, and

provisional, but one on which he had kept his eyes fixed while the playing continued, so effectively that, when the same impression suddenly returned, it was no longer uncapturable. He was able to picture to himself its extent, its symmetrical arrangement, its notation, the strength of its expression; he had before him that definite object which was no longer pure music, but rather design, architecture, thought, and which allowed the actual music to be recalled. This time he had distinguished, quite clearly, a phrase which emerged for a few moments from the waves of sound. It had at once held out to him an invitation to partake of intimate pleasures, of whose existence, before hearing it, he had never dreamed, into which he felt that nothing but this phrase could initiate him; and he had been filled with love for it, as with a new and strange desire.

With a slow and rhythmical movement it led him here, there, everywhere, towards a state of happiness noble, unintelligible, yet clearly indicated. And then, suddenly having reached a certain point from which he was prepared to follow it, after pausing for a moment, abruptly it changed its direction, and in a fresh movement, more rapid, multiform, melancholy, incessant, sweet, it bore him off with it towards a vista of joys unknown. Then it vanished. He hoped, with a passionate longing, that he might find it again, a third time. And reappear it did, though without speaking to him more clearly, bringing him, indeed, a pleasure less profound. But when he was once more at home he needed it, he was like a man into whose life a woman, whom he has seen for a moment passing by, has brought a new form of beauty, which strengthens and enlarges his own power of perception, without his knowing even whether he is ever to see her again whom he loves already, although he knows nothing of her, not even her name.

Indeed this passion for a phrase of music seemed, in the first few months, to be bringing into Swann's life the possibility of a sort of re — juvenation. He had so long since ceased to direct his course towards any ideal goal, and had confined himself to the pursuit of ephemeral satisfactions, that he had come to believe, though without ever formally stating his belief even to himself, that he would remain all his life in that condition, which death alone could alter. More than this, since his mind no longer entertained any lofty ideals, he had ceased to believe in (although he could not have expressly denied) their reality. He had grown also into the habit of taking refuge in trivial considerations, which allowed him to set on one side matters of fundamental importance. Just as he had never stopped to ask himself whether he would not have done better by not going into society, knowing very well that if he had accepted an invitation he

must put in an appearance, and that afterwards, if he did not actually call, he must at least leave cards upon his hostess; so in his conversation he took care never to express with any warmth a personal opinion about a thing, but instead would supply facts and details which had a value of a sort in themselves, and excused him from shewing how much he really knew. He would be extremely precise about the recipe for a dish, the dates of a painter's birth and death, and the titles of his works. Sometimes, in spite of himself, he would let himself go so far as to utter a criticism of a work of art, or of some one's interpretation of life, but then he would cloak his words in a tone of irony, as though he did not altogether associate himself with what he was saying. But now, like a confirmed invalid whom, all of a sudden, a change of air and surroundings, or a new course of treatment, or, as sometimes happens, an organic change in himself, spontaneous and unaccountable, seems to have so far recovered from his malady that he begins to envisage the possibility, hitherto beyond all hope, of starting to lead — and better late than never — a wholly different life, Swann found in himself, in the memory of the phrase that he had heard, in certain other sonatas which he had made people play over to him, to see whether he might not, perhaps, discover his phrase among them, the presence of one of those invisible realities in which he had ceased to believe, but to which, as though the music had had upon the moral barrenness from which he was suffering a sort of recreative influence, he was conscious once again of a desire, almost, indeed, of the power to consecrate his life. But, never having managed to find out whose work it was that he had heard played that evening, he had been unable to procure a copy, and finally had forgotten the quest. He had indeed, in the course of the next few days, encountered several of the people who had been at the party with him, and had questioned them; but most of them had either arrived after or left before the piece was played; some had indeed been in the house, but had gone into another room to talk, and those who had stayed to listen had no clearer impression than the rest. As for his hosts, they knew that it was a recently published work which the musicians whom they had engaged for the evening had asked to be allowed to play; but, as these last were now on tour somewhere, Swann could learn nothing further. He had, of course, a number of musical friends, but, vividly as he could recall the exquisite and inexpressible pleasure which the little phrase had given him, and could see, still, before his eyes the forms that it had traced in outline, he was quite incapable of humming over to them the air. And so, at last, he ceased to think of it.

But to-night, at Mme. Verdurin's, scarcely had the little pianist begun to play

when, suddenly, after a high note held on through two whole bars, Swann saw it approaching, stealing forth from underneath that resonance, which was prolonged and stretched out over it, like a curtain of sound, to veil the mystery of its birth — and recognised, secret, whispering, articulate, the airy and fragrant phrase that he had loved. And it was so peculiarly itself, it had so personal a charm, which nothing else could have replaced, that Swann felt as though he had met, in a friend's drawing-room, a woman whom he had seen and admired, once, in the street, and had despaired of ever seeing her again. Finally the phrase withdrew and vanished, pointing, directing, diligent among the wandering currents of its fragrance, leaving upon Swann's features a reflection of its smile. But now, at last, he could ask the name of his fair unknown (and was told that it was the *andante* movement of Vinteuil's sonata for the piano and violin), he held it safe, could have it again to himself, at home, as often as he would, could study its language and acquire its secret.

And so, when the pianist had finished, Swann crossed the room and thanked him with a vivacity which delighted Mme. Verdurin.

"Isn't he charming?" she asked Swann, "doesn't he just understand it, his sonata, the little wretch? You never dreamed, did you, that a piano could be made to express all that? Upon my word, there's everything in it except the piano! I'm caught out every time I hear it; I think I'm listening to an orchestra. Though it's better, really, than an orchestra, more complete."

The young pianist bent over her as he answered, smiling and underlining each of his words as though he were making an epigram: "You are most generous to me."

And while Mme. Verdurin was saying to her husband, "Run and fetch him a glass of orangeade; it's well earned!" Swann began to tell Odette how he had fallen in love with that little phrase. When their hostess, who was a little way off, called out, "Well! It looks to me as though some one was saying nice things to you, Odette!" she replied, "Yes, very nice," and he found her simplicity delightful. Then he asked for some information about this Vinteuil; what else he had done, and at what period in his life he had composed the sonata; — what meaning the little phrase could have had for him, that was what Swann wanted most to know.

But none of these people who professed to admire this musician (when Swann had said that the sonata was really charming Mme. Verdurin had exclaimed, "I quite believe it! Charming, indeed! But you don't dare to confess that you don't know Vinteuil's sonata; you have no right not to know it!" — and

the painter had gone on with, “Ah, yes, it’s a very fine bit of work, isn’t it? Not, of course, if you want something ‘obvious,’ something ‘popular,’ but, I mean to say, it makes a very great impression on us artists.”), none of them seemed ever to have asked himself these questions, for none of them was able to reply.

Even to one or two particular remarks made by Swann on his favourite phrase, “D’you know, that’s a funny thing; I had never noticed it; I may as well tell you that I don’t much care about peering at things through a microscope, and pricking myself on pin-points of difference; no; we don’t waste time splitting hairs in this house; why not? well, it’s not a habit of ours, that’s all,” Mme. Verdurin replied, while Dr. Cottard gazed at her with open-mouthed admiration, and yearned to be able to follow her as she skipped lightly from one stepping-stone to another of her stock of ready-made phrases. Both he, however, and Mme. Cottard, with a kind of common sense which is shared by many people of humble origin, would always take care not to express an opinion, or to pretend to admire a piece of music which they would confess to each other, once they were safely at home, that they no more understood than they could understand the art of ‘Master’ Biche. Inasmuch as the public cannot recognise the charm, the beauty, even the outlines of nature save in the stereotyped impressions of an art which they have gradually assimilated, while an original artist starts by rejecting those impressions, so M. and Mme. Cottard, typical, in this respect, of the public, were incapable of finding, either in Vinteuil’s sonata or in Biche’s portraits, what constituted harmony, for them, in music or beauty in painting. It appeared to them, when the pianist played his sonata, as though he were striking haphazard from the piano a medley of notes which bore no relation to the musical forms to which they themselves were accustomed, and that the painter simply flung the colours haphazard upon his canvas. When, on one of these, they were able to distinguish a human form, they always found it coarsened and vulgarised (that is to say lacking all the elegance of the school of painting through whose spectacles they themselves were in the habit of seeing the people — real, living people, who passed them in the streets) and devoid of truth, as though M. Biche had not known how the human shoulder was constructed, or that a woman’s hair was not, ordinarily, purple.

And yet, when the ‘faithful’ were scattered out of earshot, the Doctor felt that the opportunity was too good to be missed, and so (while Mme. Verdurin was adding a final word of commendation of Vinteuil’s sonata) like a would-be swimmer who jumps into the water, so as to learn, but chooses a moment when there are not too many people looking on: “Yes, indeed; he’s what they call a

musician *di primo cartello*!" he exclaimed, with a sudden determination.

Swann discovered no more than that the recent publication of Vinteuil's sonata had caused a great stir among the most advanced school of musicians, but that it was still unknown to the general public.

"I know some one, quite well, called Vinteuil," said Swann, thinking of the old music-master at Combray who had taught my grandmother's sisters.

"Perhaps that's the man!" cried Mme. Verdurin.

"Oh, no!" Swann burst out laughing. "If you had ever seen him for a moment you wouldn't put the question."

"Then to put the question is to solve the problem?" the Doctor suggested.

"But it may well be some relative," Swann went on. "That would be bad enough; but, after all, there is no reason why a genius shouldn't have a cousin who is a silly old fool. And if that should be so, I swear there's no known or unknown form of torture I wouldn't undergo to get the old fool to introduce me to the man who composed the sonata; starting with the torture of the old fool's company, which would be ghastly."

The painter understood that Vinteuil was seriously ill at the moment, and that Dr. Potain despaired of his life.

"What!" cried Mme. Verdurin, "Do people still call in Potain?"

"Ah! Mme. Verdurin," Cottard simpered, "you forget that you are speaking of one of my colleagues — I should say, one of my masters."

The painter had heard, somewhere, that Vinteuil was threatened with the loss of his reason. And he insisted that signs of this could be detected in certain passages in the sonata. This remark did not strike Swann as ridiculous; rather, it puzzled him. For, since a purely musical work contains none of those logical sequences, the interruption or confusion of which, in spoken or written language, is a proof of insanity, so insanity diagnosed in a sonata seemed to him as mysterious a thing as the insanity of a dog or a horse, although instances may be observed of these.

"Don't speak to me about 'your masters'; you know ten times as much as he does!" Mme. Verdurin answered Dr. Cottard, in the tone of a woman who has the courage of her convictions, and is quite ready to stand up to anyone who disagrees with her. "Anyhow, you don't kill your patients!"

"But, Madame, he is in the Academy." The Doctor smiled with bitter irony. "If a sick person prefers to die at the hands of one of the Princes of Science... It is far more smart to be able to say, 'Yes, I have Potain.'"

"Oh, indeed! More smart, is it?" said Mme. Verdurin. "So there are fashions,

nowadays, in illness, are there? I didn't know that.... Oh, you do make me laugh!" she screamed, suddenly, burying her face in her hands. "And here was I, poor thing, talking quite seriously, and never seeing that you were pulling my leg."

As for M. Verdurin, finding it rather a strain to start laughing again over so small a matter, he was content with puffing out a cloud of smoke from his pipe, while he reflected sadly that he could never again hope to keep pace with his wife in her Atalanta-flights across the field of mirth.

"D'you know; we like your friend so very much," said Mme. Verdurin, later, when Odette was bidding her good night. "He is so unaffected, quite charming. If they're all like that, the friends you want to bring here, by all means bring them."

M. Verdurin remarked that Swann had failed, all the same, to appreciate the pianist's aunt.

"I dare say he felt a little strange, poor man," suggested Mme. Verdurin. "You can't expect him to catch the tone of the house the first time he comes; like Cottard, who has been one of our little 'clan' now for years. The first time doesn't count; it's just for looking round and finding out things. Odette, he understands all right, he's to join us to-morrow at the Châtelet. Perhaps you might call for him and bring him." "No, he doesn't want that."

"Oh, very well; just as you like. Provided he doesn't fail us at the last moment."

Greatly to Mme. Verdurin's surprise, he never failed them. He would go to meet them, no matter where, at restaurants outside Paris (not that they went there much at first, for the season had not yet begun), and more frequently at the play, in which Mme. Verdurin delighted. One evening, when they were dining at home, he heard her complain that she had not one of those permits which would save her the trouble of waiting at doors and standing in crowds, and say how useful it would be to them at first-nights, and gala performances at the Opera, and what a nuisance it had been, not having one, on the day of Gambetta's funeral. Swann never spoke of his distinguished friends, but only of such as might be regarded as detrimental, whom, therefore, he thought it snobbish, and in not very good taste to conceal; while he frequented the Faubourg Saint-Germain he had come to include, in the latter class, all his friends in the official world of the Third Republic, and so broke in, without thinking: "I'll see to that, all right. You shall have it in time for the *Danicheff* revival. I shall be lunching with the Prefect of Police to-morrow, as it happens, at the Elysée."

“What’s that? The Elysée?” Dr. Cottard roared in a voice of thunder.

“Yes, at M. Grévy’s,” replied Swann, feeling a little awkward at the effect which his announcement had produced.

“Are you often taken like that?” the painter asked Cottard, with mock-seriousness.

As a rule, once an explanation had been given, Cottard would say: “Ah, good, good; that’s all right, then,” after which he would shew not the least trace of emotion. But this time Swann’s last words, instead of the usual calming effect, had that of heating, instantly, to boiling-point his astonishment at the discovery that a man with whom he himself was actually sitting at table, a man who had no official position, no honours or distinction of any sort, was on visiting terms with the Head of the State.

“What’s that you say? M. Grévy? Do you know M. Grévy?” he demanded of Swann, in the stupid and incredulous tone of a constable on duty at the palace, when a stranger has come up and asked to see the President of the Republic; until, guessing from his words and manner what, as the newspapers say, ‘it is a case of,’ he assures the poor lunatic that he will be admitted at once, and points the way to the reception ward of the police infirmary.

“I know him slightly; we have some friends in common” (Swann dared not add that one of these friends was the Prince of Wales). “Anyhow, he is very free with his invitations, and, I assure you, his luncheon-parties are not the least bit amusing; they’re very simple affairs, too, you know; never more than eight at table,” he went on, trying desperately to cut out everything that seemed to shew off his relations with the President in a light too dazzling for the Doctor’s eyes.

Whereupon Cottard, at once conforming in his mind to the literal interpretation of what Swann was saying, decided that invitations from M. Grévy were very little sought after, were sent out, in fact, into the highways and hedge-rows. And from that moment he never seemed at all surprised to hear that Swann, or anyone else, was ‘always at the Elysée’; he even felt a little sorry for a man who had to go to luncheon-parties which, he himself admitted, were a bore.

“Ah, good, good; that’s quite all right then,” he said, in the tone of a customs official who has been suspicious up to now, but, after hearing your explanations, stamps your passport and lets you proceed on your journey without troubling to examine your luggage.

“I can well believe you don’t find them amusing, those parties; indeed, it’s very good of you to go to them!” said Mme. Verdurin, who regarded the President of the Republic only as a ‘bore’ to be especially dreaded, since he had

at his disposal means of seduction, and even of compulsion, which, if employed to captivate her ‘faithful,’ might easily make them ‘fail.’ “It seems, he’s as deaf as a post; and eats with his fingers.”

“Upon my word! Then it can’t be much fun for you, going there.” A note of pity sounded in the Doctor’s voice; and then struck by the number — only eight at table — “Are these luncheons what you would describe as ‘intimate’?” he inquired briskly, not so much out of idle curiosity as in his linguistic zeal.

But so great and glorious a figure was the President of the French Republic in the eyes of Dr. Cottard that neither the modesty of Swann nor the spite of Mme. Verdurin could ever wholly efface that first impression, and he never sat down to dinner with the Verdurins without asking anxiously, “D’you think we shall see M. Swann here this evening? He is a personal friend of M. Grévy’s. I suppose that means he’s what you’d call a ‘gentleman’?” He even went to the length of offering Swann a card of invitation to the Dental Exhibition.

“This will let you in, and anyone you take with you,” he explained, “but dogs are not admitted. I’m just warning you, you understand, because some friends of mine went there once, who hadn’t been told, and there was the devil to pay.”

As for M. Verdurin, he did not fail to observe the distressing effect upon his wife of the discovery that Swann had influential friends of whom he had never spoken.

If no arrangement had been made to ‘go anywhere,’ it was at the Verdurins’ that Swann would find the ‘little nucleus’ assembled, but he never appeared there except in the evenings, and would hardly ever accept their invitations to dinner, in spite of Odette’s entreaties.

“I could dine with you alone somewhere, if you’d rather,” she suggested.

“But what about Mme. Verdurin?”

“Oh, that’s quite simple. I need only say that my dress wasn’t ready, or that my cab came late. There is always some excuse.”

“How charming of you.”

But Swann said to himself that, if he could make Odette feel (by consenting to meet her only after dinner) that there were other pleasures which he preferred to that of her company, then the desire that she felt for his would be all the longer in reaching the point of satiety. Besides, as he infinitely preferred to Odette’s style of beauty that of a little working girl, as fresh and plump as a rose, with whom he happened to be simultaneously in love, he preferred to spend the first part of the evening with her, knowing that he was sure to see Odette later

on. For the same reason, he would never allow Odette to call for him at his house, to take him on to the Verdurins'. The little girl used to wait, not far from his door, at a street corner; Rémi, his coachman, knew where to stop; she would jump in beside him, and hold him in her arms until the carriage drew up at the Verdurins'. He would enter the drawing-room; and there, while Mme. Verdurin, pointing to the roses which he had sent her that morning, said: "I am furious with you!" and sent him to the place kept for him, by the side of Odette, the pianist would play to them — for their two selves, and for no one else — that little phrase by Vinteuil which was, so to speak, the national anthem of their love. He began, always, with a sustained tremolo from the violin part, which, for several bars, was unaccompanied, and filled all the foreground; until suddenly it seemed to be drawn aside, and — just as in those interiors by Pieter de Hooch, where the subject is set back a long way through the narrow framework of a half-opened door — infinitely remote, in colour quite different, velvety with the radiance of some intervening light, the little phrase appeared, dancing, pastoral, interpolated, episodic, belonging to another world. It passed, with simple and immortal movements, scattering on every side the bounties of its grace, smiling ineffably still; but Swann thought that he could now discern in it some disenchantment. It seemed to be aware how vain, how hollow was the happiness to which it shewed the way. In its airy grace there was, indeed, something definitely achieved, and complete in itself, like the mood of philosophic detachment which follows an outburst of vain regret. But little did that matter to him; he looked upon the sonata less in its own light — as what it might express, had, in fact, expressed to a certain musician, ignorant that any Swann or Odette, anywhere in the world, existed, when he composed it, and would express to all those who should hear it played in centuries to come — than as a pledge, a token of his love, which made even the Verdurins and their little pianist think of Odette and, at the same time, of himself — which bound her to him by a lasting tie; and at that point he had (whimsically entreated by Odette) abandoned the idea of getting some 'professional' to play over to him the whole sonata, of which he still knew no more than this one passage. "Why do you want the rest?" she had asked him. "Our little bit; that's all we need." He went farther; agonised by the reflection, at the moment when it passed by him, so near and yet so infinitely remote, that, while it was addressed to their ears, it knew them not, he would regret, almost, that it had a meaning of its own, an intrinsic and unalterable beauty, foreign to themselves, just as in the jewels given to us, or even in the letters written to us by a woman with whom we are in love, we find fault with the 'water' of a stone,

or with the words of a sentence because they are not fashioned exclusively from the spirit of a fleeting intimacy and of a ‘lass unparalleled.’

It would happen, as often as not, that he had stayed so long outside, with his little girl, before going to the Verdurins’ that, as soon as the little phrase had been rendered by the pianist, Swann would discover that it was almost time for Odette to go home. He used to take her back as far as the door of her little house in the Rue La Pérouse, behind the Arc de Triomphe. And it was perhaps on this account, and so as not to demand the monopoly of her favours, that he sacrificed the pleasure (not so essential to his well-being) of seeing her earlier in the evening, of arriving with her at the Verdurins’, to the exercise of this other privilege, for which she was grateful, of their leaving together; a privilege which he valued all the more because, thanks to it, he had the feeling that no one else would see her, no one would thrust himself between them, no one could prevent him from remaining with her in spirit, after he had left her for the night.

And so, night after night, she would be taken home in Swann’s carriage; and one night, after she had got down, and while he stood at the gate and murmured “Till to-morrow, then!” she turned impulsively from him, plucked a last lingering chrysanthemum in the tiny garden which flanked the pathway from the street to her house, and as he went back to his carriage thrust it into his hand. He held it pressed to his lips during the drive home, and when, in due course, the flower withered, locked it away, like something very precious, in a secret drawer of his desk.

He would escort her to her gate, but no farther. Twice only had he gone inside to take part in the ceremony — of such vital importance in her life — of ‘afternoon tea.’ The loneliness and emptiness of those short streets (consisting, almost entirely, of low-roofed houses, self-contained but not detached, their monotony interrupted here and there by the dark intrusion of some sinister little shop, at once an historical document and a sordid survival from the days when the district was still one of ill repute), the snow which had lain on the garden-beds or clung to the branches of the trees, the careless disarray of the season, the assertion, in this man-made city, of a state of nature, had all combined to add an element of mystery to the warmth, the flowers, the luxury which he had found inside.

Passing by (on his left-hand side, and on what, although raised some way above the street, was the ground floor of the house) Odette’s bedroom, which looked out to the back over another little street running parallel with her own, he had climbed a staircase that went straight up between dark painted walls, from

which hung Oriental draperies, strings of Turkish beads, and a huge Japanese lantern, suspended by a silken cord from the ceiling (which last, however, so that her visitors should not have to complain of the want of any of the latest comforts of Western civilisation, was lighted by a gas-jet inside), to the two drawing-rooms, large and small. These were entered through a narrow lobby, the wall of which, chequered with the lozenges of a wooden trellis such as you see on garden walls, only gilded, was lined from end to end by a long rectangular box in which bloomed, as though in a hothouse, a row of large chrysanthemums, at that time still uncommon, though by no means so large as the mammoth blossoms which horticulturists have since succeeded in making grow. Swann was irritated, as a rule, by the sight of these flowers, which had then been 'the rage' in Paris for about a year, but it had pleased him, on this occasion, to see the gloom of the little lobby shot with rays of pink and gold and white by the fragrant petals of these ephemeral stars, which kindle their cold fires in the murky atmosphere of winter afternoons. Odette had received him in a tea-gown of pink silk, which left her neck and arms bare. She had made him sit down beside her in one of the many mysterious little retreats which had been contrived in the various recesses of the room, sheltered by enormous palmtrees growing out of pots of Chinese porcelain, or by screens upon which were fastened photographs and fans and bows of ribbon. She had said at once, "You're not comfortable there; wait a minute, I'll arrange things for you," and with a titter of laughter, the complacency of which implied that some little invention of her own was being brought into play, she had installed behind his head and beneath his feet great cushions of Japanese silk, which she pummelled and buffeted as though determined to lavish on him all her riches, and regardless of their value. But when her footman began to come into the room, bringing, one after another, the innumerable lamps which (contained, mostly, in porcelain vases) burned singly or in pairs upon the different pieces of furniture as upon so many altars, rekindling in the twilight, already almost nocturnal, of this winter afternoon, the glow of a sunset more lasting, more roseate, more human — filling, perhaps, with romantic wonder the thoughts of some solitary lover, wandering in the street below and brought to a standstill before the mystery of the human presence which those lighted windows at once revealed and screened from sight — she had kept an eye sharply fixed on the servant, to see whether he set each of the lamps down in the place appointed it. She felt that, if he were to put even one of them where it ought not to be, the general effect of her drawing-room would be destroyed, and that her portrait, which rested upon a sloping easel draped with

plush, would not catch the light. And so, with feverish impatience, she followed the man's clumsy movements, scolding him severely when he passed too close to a pair of beaupots, which she made a point of always tidying herself, in case the plants should be knocked over — and went across to them now to make sure that he had not broken off any of the flowers. She found something 'quaint' in the shape of each of her Chinese ornaments, and also in her orchids, the cattleyas especially (these being, with chrysanthemums, her favourite flowers), because they had the supreme merit of not looking in the least like other flowers, but of being made, apparently, out of scraps of silk or satin. "It looks just as though it had been cut out of the lining of my cloak," she said to Swann, pointing to an orchid, with a shade of respect in her voice for so 'smart' a flower, for this distinguished, unexpected sister whom nature had suddenly bestowed upon her, so far removed from her in the scale of existence, and yet so delicate, so refined, so much more worthy than many real women of admission to her drawing-room. As she drew his attention, now to the fiery-tongued dragons painted upon a bowl or stitched upon a fire-screen, now to a fleshy cluster of orchids, now to a dromedary of inlaid silver-work with ruby eyes, which kept company, upon her mantelpiece, with a toad carved in jade, she would pretend now to be shrinking from the ferocity of the monsters or laughing at their absurdity, now blushing at the indecency of the flowers, now carried away by an irresistible desire to run across and kiss the toad and dromedary, calling them 'darlings.' And these affectations were in sharp contrast to the sincerity of some of her attitudes, notably her devotion to Our Lady of the Laghetto who had once, when Odette was living at Nice, cured her of a mortal illness, and whose medal, in gold, she always carried on her person, attributing to it unlimited powers. She poured out Swann's tea, inquired "Lemon or cream?" and, on his answering "Cream, please," went on, smiling, "A cloud!" And as he pronounced it excellent, "You see, I know just how you like it." This tea had indeed seemed to Swann, just as it seemed to her, something precious, and love is so far obliged to find some justification for itself, some guarantee of its duration in pleasures which, on the contrary, would have no existence apart from love and must cease with its passing, that when he left her, at seven o'clock, to go and dress for the evening, all the way home, sitting bolt upright in his brougham, unable to repress the happiness with which the afternoon's adventure had filled him, he kept on repeating to himself: "What fun it would be to have a little woman like that in a place where one could always be certain of finding, what one never can be certain of finding, a really good cup of tea." An hour or so later he received a

note from Odette, and at once recognised that florid handwriting, in which an affectation of British stiffness imposed an apparent discipline upon its shapeless characters, significant, perhaps, to less intimate eyes than his, of an untidiness of mind, a fragmentary education, a want of sincerity and decision. Swann had left his cigarette-case at her house. “Why,” she wrote, “did you not forget your heart also? I should never have let you have that back.”

More important, perhaps, was a second visit which he paid her, a little later. On his way to the house, as always when he knew that they were to meet, he formed a picture of her in his mind; and the necessity, if he was to find any beauty in her face, of fixing his eyes on the fresh and rosy protuberance of her cheekbones, and of shutting out all the rest of those cheeks which were so often languorous and sallow, except when they were punctuated with little fiery spots, plunged him in acute depression, as proving that one’s ideal is always unattainable, and one’s actual happiness mediocre. He was taking her an engraving which she had asked to see. She was not very well; she received him, wearing a wrapper of mauve *crêpe de Chine*, which draped her bosom, like a mantle, with a richly embroidered web. As she stood there beside him, brushing his cheek with the loosened tresses of her hair, bending one knee in what was almost a dancer’s pose, so that she could lean without tiring herself over the picture, at which she was gazing, with bended head, out of those great eyes, which seemed so weary and so sullen when there was nothing to animate her, Swann was struck by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro’s Daughter, which is to be seen in one of the Sixtine frescoes. He had always found a peculiar fascination in tracing in the paintings of the Old Masters, not merely the general characteristics of the people whom he encountered in his daily life, but rather what seems least susceptible of generalisation, the individual features of men and women whom he knew, as, for instance, in a bust of the Doge Loredan by Antonio Rizzo, the prominent cheekbones, the slanting eyebrows, in short, a speaking likeness to his own coachman Rémi; in the colouring of a Ghirlandaio, the nose of M. de Palancy; in a portrait by Tintoretto, the invasion of the plumpness of the cheek by an outcrop of whisker, the broken nose, the penetrating stare, the swollen eyelids of Dr. du Boulbon. Perhaps because he had always regretted, in his heart, that he had confined his attention to the social side of life, had talked, always, rather than acted, he felt that he might find a sort of indulgence bestowed upon him by those great artists, in his perception of the fact that they also had regarded with pleasure and had admitted into the canon of their works such types of physiognomy as give those works the

strongest possible certificate of reality and trueness to life; a modern, almost a topical savour; perhaps, also, he had so far succumbed to the prevailing frivolity of the world of fashion that he felt the necessity of finding in an old masterpiece some such obvious and refreshing allusion to a person about whom jokes could be made and repeated and enjoyed to-day. Perhaps, on the other hand, he had retained enough of the artistic temperament to be able to find a genuine satisfaction in watching these individual features take on a more general significance when he saw them, uprooted and disembodied, in the abstract idea of similarity between an historic portrait and a modern original, whom it was not intended to represent. However that might be, and perhaps because the abundance of impressions which he, for some time past, had been receiving — though, indeed, they had come to him rather through the channel of his appreciation of music — had enriched his appetite for painting as well, it was with an unusual intensity of pleasure, a pleasure destined to have a lasting effect upon his character and conduct, that Swann remarked Odette's resemblance to the Zipporah of that Alessandro de Mariano, to whom one shrinks from giving his more popular surname, now that 'Botticelli' suggests not so much the actual work of the Master as that false and banal conception of it which has of late obtained common currency. He no longer based his estimate of the merit of Odette's face on the more or less good quality of her cheeks, and the softness and sweetness — as of carnation-petals — which, he supposed, would greet his lips there, should he ever hazard an embrace, but regarded it rather as a skein of subtle and lovely silken threads, which his gazing eyes collected and wound together, following the curving line from the skein to the ball, where he mingled the cadence of her neck with the spring of her hair and the droop of her eyelids, as though from a portrait of herself, in which her type was made clearly intelligible.

He stood gazing at her; traces of the old fresco were apparent in her face and limbs, and these he tried incessantly, afterwards, to recapture, both when he was with Odette, and when he was only thinking of her in her absence; and, albeit his admiration for the Florentine masterpiece was probably based upon his discovery that it had been reproduced in her, the similarity enhanced her beauty also, and rendered her more precious in his sight. Swann reproached himself with his failure, hitherto, to estimate at her true worth a creature whom the great Sandro would have adored, and counted himself fortunate that his pleasure in the contemplation of Odette found a justification in his own system of aesthetic. He told himself that, in choosing the thought of Odette as the inspiration of his

dreams of ideal happiness, he was not, as he had until then supposed, falling back, merely, upon an expedient of doubtful and certainly inadequate value, since she contained in herself what satisfied the utmost refinement of his taste in art. He failed to observe that this quality would not naturally avail to bring Odette into the category of women whom he found desirable, simply because his desires had always run counter to his aesthetic taste. The words ‘Florentine painting’ were invaluable to Swann. They enabled him (gave him, as it were, a legal title) to introduce the image of Odette into a world of dreams and fancies which, until then, she had been debarred from entering, and where she assumed a new and nobler form. And whereas the mere sight of her in the flesh, by perpetually reviving his misgivings as to the quality of her face, her figure, the whole of her beauty, used to cool the ardour of his love, those misgivings were swept away and that love confirmed now that he could re-erect his estimate of her on the sure foundations of his aesthetic principles; while the kiss, the bodily surrender which would have seemed natural and but moderately attractive, had they been granted him by a creature of somewhat withered flesh and sluggish blood, coming, as now they came, to crown his adoration of a masterpiece in a gallery, must, it seemed, prove as exquisite as they would be supernatural.

And when he was tempted to regret that, for months past, he had done nothing but visit Odette, he would assure himself that he was not unreasonable in giving up much of his time to the study of an inestimably precious work of art, cast for once in a new, a different, an especially charming metal, in an unmatched exemplar which he would contemplate at one moment with the humble, spiritual, disinterested mind of an artist, at another with the pride, the selfishness, the sensual thrill of a collector.

On his study table, at which he worked, he had placed, as it were a photograph of Odette, a reproduction of Jethro’s Daughter. He would gaze in admiration at the large eyes, the delicate features in which the imperfection of her skin might be surmised, the marvellous locks of hair that fell along her tired cheeks; and, adapting what he had already felt to be beautiful, on aesthetic grounds, to the idea of a living woman, he converted it into a series of physical merits which he congratulated himself on finding assembled in the person of one whom he might, ultimately, possess. The vague feeling of sympathy which attracts a spectator to a work of art, now that he knew the type, in warm flesh and blood, of Jethro’s Daughter, became a desire which more than compensated, thenceforward, for that with which Odette’s physical charms had at first failed to inspire him. When he had sat for a long time gazing at the Botticelli, he would

think of his own living Botticelli, who seemed all the lovelier in contrast, and as he drew towards him the photograph of Zipporah he would imagine that he was holding Odette against his heart.

It was not only Odette's indifference, however, that he must take pains to circumvent; it was also, not infrequently, his own; feeling that, since Odette had had every facility for seeing him, she seemed no longer to have very much to say to him when they did meet, he was afraid lest the manner — at once trivial, monotonous, and seemingly unalterable — which she now adopted when they were together should ultimately destroy in him that romantic hope, that a day might come when she would make avowal of her passion, by which hope alone he had become and would remain her lover. And so to alter, to give a fresh moral aspect to that Odette, of whose unchanging mood he was afraid of growing weary, he wrote, suddenly, a letter full of hinted discoveries and feigned indignation, which he sent off so that it should reach her before dinner-time. He knew that she would be frightened, and that she would reply, and he hoped that, when the fear of losing him clutched at her heart, it would force from her words such as he had never yet heard her utter: and he was right — by repeating this device he had won from her the most affectionate letters that she had, so far, written him, one of them (which she had sent to him at midday by a special messenger from the Maison Dorée — it was the day of the Paris-Murcie Fête given for the victims of the recent floods in Murcia) beginning "My dear, my hand trembles so that I can scarcely write ——— "; and these letters he had kept in the same drawer as the withered chrysanthemum. Or else, if she had not had time to write, when he arrived at the Verdurins' she would come running up to him with an "I've something to say to you!" and he would gaze curiously at the revelation in her face and speech of what she had hitherto kept concealed from him of her heart.

Even as he drew near to the Verdurins' door, and caught sight of the great lamp-lit spaces of the drawing-room windows, whose shutters were never closed, he would begin to melt at the thought of the charming creature whom he would see, as he entered the room, basking in that golden light. Here and there the figures of the guests stood out, sharp and black, between lamp and window, shutting off the light, like those little pictures which one sees sometimes pasted here and there upon a glass screen, whose other panes are mere transparencies. He would try to make out Odette. And then, when he was once inside, without thinking, his eyes sparkled suddenly with such radiant happiness that M. Verdurin said to the painter: "H'm. Seems to be getting warm." Indeed, her

presence gave the house what none other of the houses that he visited seemed to possess: a sort of tactual sense, a nervous system which ramified into each of its rooms and sent a constant stimulus to his heart.

And so the simple and regular manifestations of a social organism, namely the ‘little clan,’ were transformed for Swann into a series of daily encounters with Odette, and enabled him to feign indifference to the prospect of seeing her, or even a desire not to see her; in doing which he incurred no very great risk since, even although he had written to her during the day, he would of necessity see her in the evening and accompany her home.

But one evening, when, irritated by the thought of that inevitable dark drive together, he had taken his other ‘little girl’ all the way to the Bois, so as to delay as long as possible the moment of his appearance at the Verdurins’, he was so late in reaching them that Odette, supposing that he did not intend to come, had already left. Seeing the room bare of her, Swann felt his heart wrung by sudden anguish; he shook with the sense that he was being deprived of a pleasure whose intensity he began then for the first time to estimate, having always, hitherto, had that certainty of finding it whenever he would, which (as in the case of all our pleasures) reduced, if it did not altogether blind him to its dimensions.

“Did you notice the face he pulled when he saw that she wasn’t here?” M. Verdurin asked his wife. “I think we may say that he’s hooked.”

“The face he pulled?” exploded Dr. Cottard who, having left the house for a moment to visit a patient, had just returned to fetch his wife and did not know whom they were discussing.

“D’you mean to say you didn’t meet him on the doorstep — the loveliest of Swanns?”

“No. M. Swann has been here?”

“Just for a moment. We had a glimpse of a Swann tremendously agitated. In a state of nerves. You see, Odette had left.”

“You mean to say that she has gone the ‘whole hog’ with him; that she has ‘burned her boats’?” inquired the Doctor cautiously, testing the meaning of his phrases.

“Why, of course not; there’s absolutely nothing in it; in fact, between you and me, I think she’s making a great mistake, and behaving like a silly little fool, which she is, incidentally.”

“Come, come, come!” said M. Verdurin, “How on earth do you know that there’s ‘nothing in it’? We haven’t been there to see, have we now?”

“She would have told me,” answered Mme. Verdurin with dignity. “I may

say that she tells me everything. As she has no one else at present, I told her that she ought to live with him. She makes out that she can't; she admits, she was immensely attracted by him, at first; but he's always shy with her, and that makes her shy with him. Besides, she doesn't care for him in that way, she says; it's an ideal love, 'Platonic,' you know; she's afraid of rubbing the bloom off — oh, I don't know half the things she says, how should I? And yet he's exactly the sort of man she wants."

"I beg to differ from you," M. Verdurin courteously interrupted. "I am only half satisfied with the gentleman. I feel that he 'poses.'"

Mme. Verdurin's whole body stiffened, her eyes stared blankly as though she had suddenly been turned into a statue; a device by means of which she might be supposed not to have caught the sound of that unutterable word which seemed to imply that it was possible for people to 'pose' in her house, and, therefore, that there were people in the world who 'mattered more' than herself.

"Anyhow, if there is nothing in it, I don't suppose it's because our friend believes in her virtue. And yet, you never know; he seems to believe in her intelligence. I don't know whether you heard the way he lectured her the other evening about Vinteuil's sonata. I am devoted to Odette, but really — to expound theories of aesthetic to her — the man must be a prize idiot."

"Look here, I won't have you saying nasty things about Odette," broke in Mme. Verdurin in her 'spoiled child' manner. "She is charming."

"There's no reason why she shouldn't be charming; we are not saying anything nasty about her, only that she is not the embodiment of either virtue or intellect. After all," he turned to the painter, "does it matter so very much whether she is virtuous or not? You can't tell; she might be a great deal less charming if she were."

On the landing Swann had run into the Verdurins' butler, who had been somewhere else a moment earlier, when he arrived, and who had been asked by Odette to tell Swann (but that was at least an hour ago) that she would probably stop to drink a cup of chocolate at Prévost's on her way home. Swann set off at once for Prévost's, but every few yards his carriage was held up by others, or by people crossing the street, loathsome obstacles each of which he would gladly have crushed beneath his wheels, were it not that a policeman fumbling with a note-book would delay him even longer than the actual passage of the pedestrian. He counted the minutes feverishly, adding a few seconds to each so as to be quite certain that he had not given himself short measure, and so, possibly, exaggerated whatever chance there might actually be of his arriving at

Prévost's in time, and of finding her still there. And then, in a moment of illumination, like a man in a fever who awakes from sleep and is conscious of the absurdity of the dream-shapes among which his mind has been wandering without any clear distinction between himself and them, Swann suddenly perceived how foreign to his nature were the thoughts which he had been revolving in his mind ever since he had heard at the Verdurins' that Odette had left, how novel the heartache from which he was suffering, but of which he was only now conscious, as though he had just woken up. What! all this disturbance simply because he would not see Odette, now, till to-morrow, exactly what he had been hoping, not an hour before, as he drove toward Mme. Verdurin's. He was obliged to admit also that now, as he sat in the same carriage and drove to Prévost's, he was no longer the same man, was no longer alone even — but that a new personality was there beside him, adhering to him, amalgamated with him, a creature from whom he might, perhaps, be unable to liberate himself, towards whom he might have to adopt some such stratagem as one uses to outwit a master or a malady. And yet, during this last moment in which he had felt that another, a fresh personality was thus conjoined with his own, life had seemed, somehow, more interesting.

It was in vain that he assured himself that this possible meeting at Prévost's (the tension of waiting for which so ravished, stripped so bare the intervening moments that he could find nothing, not one idea, not one memory in his mind beneath which his troubled spirit might take shelter and repose) would probably, after all, should it take place, be much the same as all their meetings, of no great importance. As on every other evening, once he was in Odette's company, once he had begun to cast furtive glances at her changing countenance, and instantly to withdraw his eyes lest she should read in them the first symbols of desire and believe no more in his indifference, he would cease to be able even to think of her, so busy would he be in the search for pretexts which would enable him not to leave her immediately, and to assure himself, without betraying his concern, that he would find her again, next evening, at the Verdurins'; pretexts, that is to say, which would enable him to prolong for the time being, and to renew for one day more the disappointment, the torturing deception that must always come to him with the vain presence of this woman, whom he might approach, yet never dared embrace.

She was not at Prevost's; he must search for her, then, in every restaurant upon the boulevards. To save time, while he went in one direction, he sent in the other his coachman Rémi (Rizzo's Doge Loredan) for whom he presently —

after a fruitless search — found himself waiting at the spot where the carriage was to meet him. It did not appear, and Swann tantalised himself with alternate pictures of the approaching moment, as one in which Rémi would say to him: “Sir, the lady is there,” or as one in which Rémi would say to him: “Sir, the lady was not in any of the cafés.” And so he saw himself faced by the close of his evening — a thing uniform, and yet bifurcated by the intervening accident which would either put an end to his agony by discovering Odette, or would oblige him to abandon any hope of finding her that night, to accept the necessity of returning home without having seen her.

The coachman returned; but, as he drew up opposite him, Swann asked, not “Did you find the lady?” but “Remind me, to-morrow, to order in some more firewood. I am sure we must be running short.” Perhaps he had persuaded himself that, if Rémi had at last found Odette in some café, where she was waiting for him still, then his night of misery was already obliterated by the realisation, begun already in his mind, of a night of joy, and that there was no need for him to hasten towards the attainment of a happiness already captured and held in a safe place, which would not escape his grasp again. But it was also by the force of inertia; there was in his soul that want of adaptability which can be seen in the bodies of certain people who, when the moment comes to avoid a collision, to snatch their clothes out of reach of a flame, or to perform any other such necessary movement, take their time (as the saying is), begin by remaining for a moment in their original position, as though seeking to find in it a starting-point, a source of strength and motion. And probably, if the coachman had interrupted him with, “I have found the lady,” he would have answered, “Oh, yes, of course; that’s what I told you to do. I had quite forgotten,” and would have continued to discuss his supply of firewood, so as to hide from his servant the emotion that he had felt, and to give himself time to break away from the thraldom of his anxieties and abandon himself to pleasure.

The coachman came back, however, with the report that he could not find her anywhere, and added the advice, as an old and privileged servant, “I think, sir, that all we can do now is to go home.”

But the air of indifference which Swann could so lightly assume when Rémi uttered his final, unalterable response, fell from him like a cast-off cloak when he saw Rémi attempt to make him abandon hope and retire from the quest.

“Certainly not!” he exclaimed. “We must find the lady. It is most important. She would be extremely put out — it’s a business matter — and vexed with me if she didn’t see me.”

“But I do not see how the lady can be vexed, sir,” answered Rémi, “since it was she that went away without waiting for you, sir, and said she was going to Prévost’s, and then wasn’t there.”

Meanwhile the restaurants were closing, and their lights began to go out. Under the trees of the boulevards there were still a few people strolling to and fro, barely distinguishable in the gathering darkness. Now and then the ghost of a woman glided up to Swann, murmured a few words in his ear, asked him to take her home, and left him shuddering. Anxiously he explored every one of these vaguely seen shapes, as though among the phantoms of the dead, in the realms of darkness, he had been searching for a lost Eurydice.

Among all the methods by which love is brought into being, among all the agents which disseminate that blessed bane, there are few so efficacious as the great gust of agitation which, now and then, sweeps over the human spirit. For then the creature in whose company we are seeking amusement at the moment, her lot is cast, her fate and ours decided, that is the creature whom we shall henceforward love. It is not necessary that she should have pleased us, up till then, any more, or even as much as others. All that is necessary is that our taste for her should become exclusive. And that condition is fulfilled so soon as — in the moment when she has failed to meet us — for the pleasure which we were on the point of enjoying in her charming company is abruptly substituted an anxious torturing desire, whose object is the creature herself, an irrational, absurd desire, which the laws of civilised society make it impossible to satisfy and difficult to assuage — the insensate, agonising desire to possess her.

Swann made Rémi drive him to such restaurants as were still open; it was the sole hypothesis, now, of that happiness which he had contemplated so calmly; he no longer concealed his agitation, the price he set upon their meeting, and promised, in case of success, to reward his coachman, as though, by inspiring in him a will to triumph which would reinforce his own, he could bring it to pass, by a miracle, that Odette — assuming that she had long since gone home to bed, — might yet be found seated in some restaurant on the boulevards. He pursued the quest as far as the Maison Dorée, burst twice into Tortoni’s and, still without catching sight of her, was emerging from the Café Anglais, striding with haggard gaze towards his carriage, which was waiting for him at the corner of the Boulevard des Italiens, when he collided with a person coming in the opposite direction; it was Odette; she explained, later, that there had been no room at Prévost’s, that she had gone, instead, to sup at the Maison Dorée, and had been sitting there in an alcove where he must have overlooked her, and that

she was now looking for her carriage.

She had so little expected to see him that she started back in alarm. As for him, he had ransacked the streets of Paris, not that he supposed it possible that he should find her, but because he would have suffered even more cruelly by abandoning the attempt. But now the joy (which, his reason had never ceased to assure him, was not, that evening at least, to be realised) was suddenly apparent, and more real than ever before; for he himself had contributed nothing to it by anticipating probabilities, — it remained integral and external to himself; there was no need for him to draw on his own resources to endow it with truth — ‘twas from itself that there emanated, ‘twas itself that projected towards him that truth whose glorious rays melted and scattered like the cloud of a dream the sense of loneliness which had lowered over him, that truth upon which he had supported, nay founded, albeit unconsciously, his vision of bliss. So will a traveller, who has come down, on a day of glorious weather, to the Mediterranean shore, and is doubtful whether they still exist, those lands which he has left, let his eyes be dazzled, rather than cast a backward glance, by the radiance streaming towards him from the luminous and unfading azure at his feet.

He climbed after her into the carriage which she had kept waiting, and ordered his own to follow.

She had in her hand a bunch of cattleyas, and Swann could see, beneath the film of lace that covered her head, more of the same flowers fastened to a swansdown plume. She was wearing, under her cloak, a flowing gown of black velvet, caught up on one side so as to reveal a large triangular patch of her white silk skirt, with an ‘insertion,’ also of white silk, in the cleft of her low-necked bodice, in which were fastened a few more cattleyas. She had scarcely recovered from the shock which the sight of Swann had given her, when some obstacle made the horse start to one side. They were thrown forward from their seats; she uttered a cry, and fell back quivering and breathless.

“It’s all right,” he assured her, “don’t be frightened.” And he slipped his arm round her shoulder, supporting her body against his own; then went on: “Whatever you do, don’t utter a word; just make a sign, yes or no, or you’ll be out of breath again. You won’t mind if I put the flowers straight on your bodice; the jolt has loosened them. I’m afraid of their dropping out; I’m just going to fasten them a little more securely.”

She was not used to being treated with so much formality by men, and smiled as she answered: “No, not at all; I don’t mind in the least.”

But he, chilled a little by her answer, perhaps, also, to bear out the pretence that he had been sincere in adopting the stratagem, or even because he was already beginning to believe that he had been, exclaimed: “No, no; you mustn’t speak. You will be out of breath again. You can easily answer in signs; I shall understand. Really and truly now, you don’t mind my doing this? Look, there is a little — I think it must be pollen, spilt over your dress, — may I brush it off with my hand? That’s not too hard; I’m not hurting you, am I? I’m tickling you, perhaps, a little; but I don’t want to touch the velvet in case I rub it the wrong way. But, don’t you see, I really had to fasten the flowers; they would have fallen out if I hadn’t. Like that, now; if I just push them a little farther down.... Seriously, I’m not annoying you, am I? And if I just sniff them to see whether they’ve really lost all their scent? I don’t believe I ever smelt any before; may I? Tell the truth, now.”

Still smiling, she shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly, as who should say, “You’re quite mad; you know very well that I like it.”

He slipped his other hand upwards along Odette’s cheek; she fixed her eyes on him with that languishing and solemn air which marks the women of the old Florentine’s paintings, in whose faces he had found the type of hers; swimming at the brink of her fringed lids, her brilliant eyes, large and finely drawn as theirs, seemed on the verge of breaking from her face and rolling down her cheeks like two great tears. She bent her neck, as all their necks may be seen to bend, in the pagan scenes as well as in the scriptural. And although her attitude was, doubtless, habitual and instinctive, one which she knew to be appropriate to such moments, and was careful not to forget to assume, she seemed to need all her strength to hold her face back, as though some invisible force were drawing it down towards Swann’s. And Swann it was who, before she allowed her face, as though despite her efforts, to fall upon his lips, held it back for a moment longer, at a little distance between his hands. He had intended to leave time for her mind to overtake her body’s movements, to recognise the dream which she had so long cherished and to assist at its realisation, like a mother invited as a spectator when a prize is given to the child whom she has reared and loves. Perhaps, moreover, Swann himself was fixing upon these features of an Odette not yet possessed, not even kissed by him, on whom he was looking now for the last time, that comprehensive gaze with which, on the day of his departure, a traveller strives to bear away with him in memory the view of a country to which he may never return.

But he was so shy in approaching her that, after this evening which had

begun by his arranging her cattleyas and had ended in her complete surrender, whether from fear of chilling her, or from reluctance to appear, even retrospectively, to have lied, or perhaps because he lacked the audacity to formulate a more urgent requirement than this (which could always be repeated, since it had not annoyed her on the first occasion), he resorted to the same pretext on the following days. If she had any cattleyas pinned to her bodice, he would say: “It is most unfortunate; the cattleyas don’t need tucking in this evening; they’ve not been disturbed as they were the other night; I think, though, that this one isn’t quite straight. May I see if they have more scent than the others?” Or else, if she had none: “Oh! no cattleyas this evening; then there’s nothing for me to arrange.” So that for some time there was no change from the procedure which he had followed on that first evening, when he had started by touching her throat, with his fingers first and then with his lips, but their caresses began invariably with this modest exploration. And long afterwards, when the arrangement (or, rather, the ritual pretence of an arrangement) of her cattleyas had quite fallen into desuetude, the metaphor “Do a cattleya,” transmuted into a simple verb which they would employ without a thought of its original meaning when they wished to refer to the act of physical possession (in which, paradoxically, the possessor possesses nothing), survived to commemorate in their vocabulary the long forgotten custom from which it sprang. And yet possibly this particular manner of saying “to make love” had not the precise significance of its synonyms. However disillusioned we may be about women, however we may regard the possession of even the most divergent types as an invariable and monotonous experience, every detail of which is known and can be described in advance, it still becomes a fresh and stimulating pleasure if the women concerned be — or be thought to be — so difficult as to oblige us to base our attack upon some unrehearsed incident in our relations with them, as was originally for Swann the arrangement of the cattleyas. He trembled as he hoped, that evening, (but Odette, he told himself, if she were deceived by his stratagem, could not guess his intention) that it was the possession of this woman that would emerge for him from their large and richly coloured petals; and the pleasure which he already felt, and which Odette tolerated, he thought, perhaps only because she was not yet aware of it herself, seemed to him for that reason — as it might have seemed to the first man when he enjoyed it amid the flowers of the earthly paradise — a pleasure which had never before existed, which he was striving now to create, a pleasure — and the special name which he was to give to it preserved its identity — entirely individual and new.

The ice once broken, every evening, when he had taken her home, he must follow her into the house; and often she would come out again in her dressing-gown, and escort him to his carriage, and would kiss him before the eyes of his coachman, saying: “What on earth does it matter what people see?” And on evenings when he did not go to the Verdurins’ (which happened occasionally, now that he had opportunities of meeting Odette elsewhere), when — more and more rarely — he went into society, she would beg him to come to her on his way home, however late he might be. The season was spring, the nights clear and frosty. He would come away from an evening party, jump into his victoria, spread a rug over his knees, tell the friends who were leaving at the same time, and who insisted on his going home with them, that he could not, that he was not going in their direction; then the coachman would start off at a fast trot without further orders, knowing quite well where he had to go. His friends would be left marvelling, and, as a matter of fact, Swann was no longer the same man. No one ever received a letter from him now demanding an introduction to a woman. He had ceased to pay any attention to women, and kept away from the places in which they were ordinarily to be met. In a restaurant, or in the country, his manner was deliberately and directly the opposite of that by which, only a few days earlier, his friends would have recognised him, that manner which had seemed permanently and unalterably his own. To such an extent does passion manifest itself in us as a temporary and distinct character, which not only takes the place of our normal character but actually obliterates the signs by which that character has hitherto been discernible. On the other hand, there was one thing that was, now, invariable, namely that wherever Swann might be spending the evening, he never failed to go on afterwards to Odette. The interval of space separating her from him was one which he must as inevitably traverse as he must descend, by an irresistible gravitation, the steep slope of life itself. To be frank, as often as not, when he had stayed late at a party, he would have preferred to return home at once, without going so far out of his way, and to postpone their meeting until the morrow; but the very fact of his putting himself to such inconvenience at an abnormal hour in order to visit her, while he guessed that his friends, as he left them, were saying to one another: “He is tied hand and foot; there must certainly be a woman somewhere who insists on his going to her at all hours,” made him feel that he was leading the life of the class of men whose existence is coloured by a love-affair, and in whom the perpetual sacrifice which they are making of their comfort and of their practical interests has engendered a spiritual charm. Then, though he may not consciously have taken this into

consideration, the certainty that she was waiting for him, that she was not anywhere or with anyone else, that he would see her before he went home, drew the sting from that anguish, forgotten, it is true, but latent and ever ready to be reawakened, which he had felt on the evening when Odette had left the Verdurins' before his arrival, an anguish the actual cessation of which was so agreeable that it might even be called a state of happiness. Perhaps it was to that hour of anguish that there must be attributed the importance which Odette had since assumed in his life. Other people are, as a rule, so immaterial to us that, when we have entrusted to any one of them the power to cause so much suffering or happiness to ourselves, that person seems at once to belong to a different universe, is surrounded with poetry, makes of our lives a vast expanse, quick with sensation, on which that person and ourselves are ever more or less in contact. Swann could not without anxiety ask himself what Odette would mean to him in the years that were to come. Sometimes, as he looked up from his victoria on those fine and frosty nights of early spring, and saw the dazzling moonbeams fall between his eyes and the deserted streets, he would think of that other face, gleaming and faintly roseate like the moon's, which had, one day, risen on the horizon of his mind and since then had shed upon the world that mysterious light in which he saw it bathed. If he arrived after the hour at which Odette sent her servants to bed, before ringing the bell at the gate of her little garden, he would go round first into the other street, over which, at the ground-level, among the windows (all exactly alike, but darkened) of the adjoining houses, shone the solitary lighted window of her room. He would rap upon the pane, and she would hear the signal, and answer, before running to meet him at the gate. He would find, lying open on the piano, some of her favourite music, the *Valse des Roses*, the *Pauvre Fou* of Tagliafico (which, according to the instructions embodied in her will, was to be played at her funeral); but he would ask her, instead, to give him the little phrase from Vinteuil's sonata. It was true that Odette played vilely, but often the fairest impression that remains in our minds of a favourite air is one which has arisen out of a jumble of wrong notes struck by unskilful fingers upon a tuneless piano. The little phrase was associated still, in Swann's mind, with his love for Odette. He felt clearly that this love was something to which there were no corresponding external signs, whose meaning could not be proved by any but himself; he realised, too, that Odette's qualities were not such as to justify his setting so high a value on the hours he spent in her company. And often, when the cold government of reason stood unchallenged, he would readily have ceased to sacrifice so many of his

intellectual and social interests to this imaginary pleasure. But the little phrase, as soon as it struck his ear, had the power to liberate in him the room that was needed to contain it; the proportions of Swann's soul were altered; a margin was left for a form of enjoyment which corresponded no more than his love for Odette to any external object, and yet was not, like his enjoyment of that love, purely individual, but assumed for him an objective reality superior to that of other concrete things. This thirst for an untasted charm, the little phrase would stimulate it anew in him, but without bringing him any definite gratification to assuage it. With the result that those parts of Swann's soul in which the little phrase had obliterated all care for material interests, those human considerations which affect all men alike, were left bare by it, blank pages on which he was at liberty to inscribe the name of Odette. Moreover, where Odette's affection might seem ever so little abrupt and disappointing, the little phrase would come to supplement it, to amalgamate with it its own mysterious essence. Watching Swann's face while he listened to the phrase, one would have said that he was inhaling an anaesthetic which allowed him to breathe more deeply. And the pleasure which the music gave him, which was shortly to create in him a real longing, was in fact closely akin, at such moments, to the pleasure which he would have derived from experimenting with perfumes, from entering into contract with a world for which we men were not created, which appears to lack form because our eyes cannot perceive it, to lack significance because it escapes our intelligence, to which we may attain by way of one sense only. Deep repose, mysterious refreshment for Swann, — for him whose eyes, although delicate interpreters of painting, whose mind, although an acute observer of manners, must bear for ever the indelible imprint of the barrenness of his life, — to feel himself transformed into a creature foreign to humanity, blinded, deprived of his logical faculty, almost a fantastic unicorn, a chimaera-like creature conscious of the world through his two ears alone. And as, notwithstanding, he sought in the little phrase for a meaning to which his intelligence could not descend, with what a strange frenzy of intoxication must he strip bare his innermost soul of the whole armour of reason, and make it pass, unattended, through the straining vessel, down into the dark filter of sound. He began to reckon up how much that was painful, perhaps even how much secret and unap-peased sorrow underlay the sweetness of the phrase; and yet to him it brought no suffering. What matter though the phrase repeated that love is frail and fleeting, when his love was so strong! He played with the melancholy which the phrase diffused, he felt it stealing over him, but like a caress which only deepened and sweetened his

sense of his own happiness. He would make Odette play him the phrase again, ten, twenty times on end, insisting that, while she played, she must never cease to kiss him. Every kiss provokes another. Ah, in those earliest days of love how naturally the kisses spring into life. How closely, in their abundance, are they pressed one against another; until lovers would find it as hard to count the kisses exchanged in an hour, as to count the flowers in a meadow in May. Then she would pretend to stop, saying: “How do you expect me to play when you keep on holding me? I can’t do everything at once. Make up your mind what you want; am I to play the phrase or do you want to play with me?” Then he would become annoyed, and she would burst out with a laugh which, was transformed, as it left her lips, and descended upon him in a shower of kisses. Or else she would look at him sulkily, and he would see once again a face worthy to figure in Botticelli’s ‘Life of Moses,’ he would place it there, giving to Odette’s neck the necessary inclination; and when he had finished her portrait in distemper, in the fifteenth century, on the wall of the Sixtine, the idea that she was, none the less, in the room with him still, by the piano, at that very moment, ready to be kissed and won, the idea of her material existence, of her being alive, would sweep over him with so violent an intoxication that, with eyes starting from his head and jaws that parted as though to devour her, he would fling himself upon this Botticelli maiden and kiss and bite her cheeks. And then, as soon as he had left the house, not without returning to kiss her once again, because he had forgotten to take away with him, in memory, some detail of her fragrance or of her features, while he drove home in his victoria, blessing the name of Odette who allowed him to pay her these daily visits, which, although they could not, he felt, bring any great happiness to her, still, by keeping him immune from the fever of jealousy — by removing from him every possibility of a fresh outbreak of the heart-sickness which had manifested itself in him that evening, when he had failed to find her at the Verdurins’ — might help him to arrive, without any recurrence of those crises, of which the first had been so distressing that it must also be the last, at the termination of this strange series of hours in his life, hours almost enchanted, in the same manner as these other, following hours, in which he drove through a deserted Paris by the light of the moon: noticing as he drove home that the satellite had now changed its position, relatively to his own, and was almost touching the horizon; feeling that his love, also, was obedient to these immutable laws of nature, he asked himself whether this period, upon which he had entered, was to last much longer, whether presently his mind’s eye would cease to behold that dear countenance, save as occupying a distant and

diminished position, and on the verge of ceasing to shed on him the radiance of its charm. For Swann was finding in things once more, since he had fallen in love, the charm that he had found when, in his adolescence, he had fancied himself an artist; with this difference, that what charm lay in them now was conferred by Odette alone. He could feel reawakening in himself the inspirations of his boyhood, which had been dissipated among the frivolities of his later life, but they all bore, now, the reflection, the stamp of a particular being; and during the long hours which he now found a subtle pleasure in spending at home, alone with his convalescent spirit, he became gradually himself again, but himself in thraldom to another.

He went to her only in the evenings, and knew nothing of how she spent her time during the day, any more than he knew of her past; so little, indeed, that he had not even the tiny, initial clue which, by allowing us to imagine what we do not know, stimulates a desire foreknowledge. And so he never asked himself what she might be doing, or what her life had been. Only he smiled sometimes at the thought of how, some years earlier, when he still did not know her, some one had spoken to him of a woman who, if he remembered rightly, must certainly have been Odette, as of a 'tart,' a 'kept' woman, one of those women to whom he still attributed (having lived but little in their company) the entire set of characteristics, fundamentally perverse, with which they had been, for many years, endowed by the imagination of certain novelists. He would say to himself that one has, as often as not, only to take the exact counterpart of the reputation created by the world in order to judge a person fairly, when with such a character he contrasted that of Odette, so good, so simple, so enthusiastic in the pursuit of ideals, so nearly incapable of not telling the truth that, when he had once begged her, so that they might dine together alone, to write to Mme. Verdurin, saying that she was unwell, the next day he had seen her, face to face with Mme. Verdurin, who asked whether she had recovered, blushing, stammering, and, in spite of herself, revealing in every feature how painful, what a torture it was to her to act a lie; and, while in her answer she multiplied the fictitious details of an imaginary illness, seeming to ask pardon, by her suppliant look and her stricken accents, for the obvious falsehood of her words.

On certain days, however, though these came seldom, she would call upon him in the afternoon, to interrupt his musings or the essay on Ver-meer to which he had latterly returned. His servant would come in to say that Mme. de Crécy was in the small drawing-room. He would go in search of her, and, when he opened the door, on Odette's blushing countenance, as soon as she caught sight

of Swann, would appear — changing the curve of her lips, the look in her eyes, the moulding of her cheeks — an all-absorbing smile. Once he was left alone he would see again that smile, and her smile of the day before, another with which she had greeted him sometime else, the smile which had been her answer, in the carriage that night, when he had asked her whether she objected to his rearranging her cattleyas; and the life of Odette at all other times, since he knew nothing of it, appeared to him upon a neutral and colourless background, like those sheets of sketches by Watteau upon which one sees, here and there, in every corner and in all directions, traced in three colours upon the buff paper, innumerable smiles. But, once in a while, illuminating a chink of that existence which Swann still saw as a complete blank, even if his mind assured him that it was not so, because he was unable to imagine anything that might occupy it, some friend who knew them both, and suspecting that they were in love, had not dared to tell him anything about her that was of the least importance, would describe Odette's figure, as he had seen her, that very morning, going on foot up the Rue Abbattucci, in a cape trimmed with skunks, wearing a Rembrandt hat, and a bunch of violets in her bosom. This simple outline reduced Swann to utter confusion by enabling him suddenly to perceive that Odette had an existence which was not wholly subordinated to his own; he burned to know whom she had been seeking to fascinate by this costume in which he had never seen her; he registered a vow to insist upon her telling him where she had been going at that intercepted moment, as though, in all the colourless life — a life almost nonexistent, since she was then invisible to him — of his mistress, there had been but a single incident apart from all those smiles directed towards himself; namely, her walking abroad beneath a Rembrandt hat, with a bunch of violets in her bosom.

Except when he asked her for Vinteuil's little phrase instead of the*Valse des Roses*, Swann made no effort to induce her to play the things that he himself preferred, nor, in literature any more than in music, to correct the manifold errors of her taste. He fully realised that she was not intelligent. When she said how much she would like him to tell her about the great poets, she had imagined that she would suddenly get to know whole pages of romantic and heroic verse, in the style of the Vicomte de Borelli, only even more moving. As for Vermeer of Delft, she asked whether he had been made to suffer by a woman, if it was a woman that had inspired him, and once Swann had told her that no one knew, she had lost all interest in that painter. She would often say: "I'm sure, poetry; well, of course, there'd be nothing like it if it was all true, if the poets really

believed the things they said. But as often as not you'll find there's no one so mean and calculating as those fellows. I know something about poetry. I had a friend, once, who was in love with a poet of sorts. In his verses he never spoke of anything but love, and heaven, and the stars. Oh! she was properly taken in! He had more than three hundred thousand francs out of her before he'd finished." If, then, Swann tried to shew her in what artistic beauty consisted, how one ought to appreciate poetry or painting, after a minute or two she would cease to listen, saying: "Yes... I never thought it would be like that." And he felt that her disappointment was so great that he preferred to lie to her, assuring her that what he had said was nothing, that he had only touched the surface, that he had not time to go into it all properly, that there was more in it than that. Then she would interrupt with a brisk, "More in it? What?... Do tell me!", but he did not tell her, for he realised how petty it would appear to her, and how different from what she had expected, less sensational and less touching; he was afraid, too, lest, disillusioned in the matter of art, she might at the same time be disillusioned in the greater matter of love.

With the result that she found Swann inferior, intellectually, to what she had supposed. "You're always so reserved; I can't make you out." She marvelled increasingly at his indifference to money, at his courtesy to everyone alike, at the delicacy of his mind. And indeed it happens, often enough, to a greater man than Swann ever was, to a scientist or artist, when he is not wholly misunderstood by the people among whom he lives, that the feeling in them which proves that they have been convinced of the superiority of his intellect is created not by any admiration for his ideas — for those are entirely beyond them — but by their respect for what they term his good qualities. There was also the respect with which Odette was inspired by the thought of Swann's social position, although she had no desire that he should attempt to secure invitations for herself. Perhaps she felt that such attempts would be bound to fail; perhaps, indeed, she feared lest, merely by speaking of her to his friends, he should provoke disclosures of an unwelcome kind. The fact remains that she had consistently held him to his promise never to mention her name. Her reason for not wishing to go into society was, she had told him, a quarrel which she had had, long ago, with another girl, who had avenged herself by saying nasty things about her. "But," Swann objected, "surely, people don't all know your friend." "Yes, don't you see, it's like a spot of oil; people are so horrid." Swann was unable, frankly, to appreciate this point; on the other hand, he knew that such generalisations as "People are so horrid," and "A word of scandal spreads like a spot of oil," were

generally accepted as true; there must, therefore, be cases to which they were literally applicable. Could Odette's case be one of these? He teased himself with the question, though not for long, for he too was subject to that mental oppression which had so weighed upon his father, whenever he was faced by a difficult problem. In any event, that world of society which concealed such terrors for Odette inspired her, probably, with no very great longing to enter it, since it was too far removed from the world which she already knew for her to be able to form any clear conception of it. At the same time, while in certain respects she had retained a genuine simplicity (she had, for instance, kept up a friendship with a little dressmaker, now retired from business, up whose steep and dark and fetid staircase she clambered almost every day), she still thirsted to be in the fashion, though her idea of it was not altogether that held by fashionable people. For the latter, fashion is a thing that emanates from a comparatively small number of leaders, who project it to a considerable distance — with more or less strength according as one is nearer to or farther from their intimate centre — over the widening circle of their friends and the friends of their friends, whose names form a sort of tabulated index. People 'in society' know this index by heart, they are gifted in such matters with an erudition from which they have extracted a sort of taste, of tact, so automatic in its operation that Swann, for example, without needing to draw upon his knowledge of the world, if he read in a newspaper the names of the people who had been guests at a dinner, could tell at once how fashionable the dinner had been, just as a man of letters, merely by reading a phrase, can estimate exactly the literary merit of its author. But Odette was one of those persons (an extremely numerous class, whatever the fashionable world may think, and to be found in every section of society) who do not share this knowledge, but imagine fashion to be something of quite another kind, which assumes different aspects according to the circle to which they themselves belong, but has the special characteristic — common alike to the fashion of which Odette used to dream and to that before which Mme. Cottard bowed — of being directly accessible to all. The other kind, the fashion of 'fashionable people,' is, it must be admitted, accessible also; but there are inevitable delays. Odette would say of some one: "He never goes to any place that isn't really smart."

And if Swann were to ask her what she meant by that, she would answer, with a touch of contempt, "Smart places! Why, good heavens, just fancy, at your age, having to be told what the smart places are in Paris! What do you expect me to say? Well, on Sunday mornings there's the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and

round the lake at five o'clock, and on Thursdays the Eden-Théâtre, and thé Hippodrome on Fridays; then there are the balls..."

"What balls?"

"Why, silly, the balls people give in Paris; the smart ones, I mean. Wait now, Herbinger, you know who I mean, the fellow who's in one of the jobbers' offices; yes, of course, you must know him, he's one of the best-known men in Paris, that great big fair-haired boy who wears such swagger clothes; he always has a flower in his buttonhole and a light-coloured overcoat with a fold down the back; he goes about with that old image, takes her to all the first-nights. Very well! He gave a ball the other night, and all the smart people in Paris were there. I should have loved to go! but you had to shew your invitation at the door, and I couldn't get one anywhere. After all, I'm just as glad, now, that I didn't go; I should have been killed in the crush, and seen nothing. Still, just to be able to say one had been to Herbinger's ball. You know how vain I am! However, you may be quite certain that half the people who tell you they were there are telling stories.... But I am surprised that you weren't there, a regular 'tip-topper' like you."

Swann made no attempt, however, to modify this conception of fashion; feeling that his own came no nearer to the truth, was just as fatuous, devoid of all importance, he saw no advantage to be gained by imparting it to his mistress, with the result that, after a few months, she ceased to take any interest in the people to whose houses he went, except when they were the means of his obtaining tickets for the paddock at race-meetings or first-nights at the theatre. She hoped that he would continue to cultivate such profitable acquaintances, but she had come to regard them as less smart since the day when she had passed the Marquise de Villeparisis in the street, wearing a black serge dress and a bonnet with strings.

"But she looks like a pew-opener, like an old charwoman, darling! That a marquise! Goodness knows I'm not a marquise, but you'd have to pay me a lot of money before you'd get me to go about Paris rigged out like that!"

Nor could she understand Swann's continuing to live in his house on the Quai d'Orléans, which, though she dared not tell him so, she considered unworthy of him.

It was true that she claimed to be fond of 'antiques,' and used to assume a rapturous and knowing air when she confessed how she loved to spend the whole day 'rummaging' in second-hand shops, hunting for 'bric-à-brac,' and things of the 'right date.' Although it was a point of honour, to which she

obstinately clung, as though obeying some old family custom, that she should never answer any questions, never give any account of what she did during the daytime, she spoke to Swann once about a friend to whose house she had been invited, and had found that everything in it was ‘of the period.’ Swann could not get her to tell him what ‘period’ it was. Only after thinking the matter over she replied that it was ‘mediaeval’; by which she meant that the walls were panelled. Some time later she spoke to him again of her friend, and added, in the hesitating but confident tone in which one refers to a person whom one has met somewhere, at dinner, the night before, of whom one had never heard until then, but whom one’s hosts seemed to regard as some one so celebrated and important that one hopes that one’s listener will know quite well who is meant, and will be duly impressed: “Her dining-room... is... eighteenth century!” Incidentally, she had thought it hideous, all bare, as though the house were still unfinished; women looked frightful in it, and it would never become the fashion. She mentioned it again, a third time, when she shewed Swann a card with the name and address of the man who had designed the dining-room, and whom she wanted to send for, when she had enough money, to see whether he could not do one for her too; not one like that, of course, but one of the sort she used to dream of, one which, unfortunately, her little house would not be large enough to contain, with tall sideboards, Renaissance furniture and fireplaces like the Château at Blois. It was on this occasion that she let out to Swann what she really thought of his abode on the Quai d’Orléans; he having ventured the criticism that her friend had indulged, not in the Louis XVI style, for, he went on, although that was not, of course, done, still it might be made charming, but in the ‘Sham-Antique.’

“You wouldn’t have her live, like you, among a lot of broken-down chairs and threadbare carpets!” she exclaimed, the innate respectability of the middle-class housewife rising impulsively to the surface through the acquired dilettantism of the ‘light woman.’

People who enjoyed ‘picking-up’ things, who admired poetry, despised sordid calculations of profit and loss, and nourished ideals of honour and love, she placed in a class by themselves, superior to the rest of humanity. There was no need actually to have those tastes, provided one talked enough about them; when a man had told her at dinner that he loved to wander about and get his hands all covered with dust in the old furniture shops, that he would never be really appreciated in this commercial age, since he was not concerned about the things that interested it, and that he belonged to another generation altogether,

she would come home saying: “Why, he’s an adorable creature; so sensitive! I had no idea,” and she would conceive for him a strong and sudden friendship. But, on the other hand, men who, like Swann, had these tastes but did not speak of them, left her cold. She was obliged, of course, to admit that Swann was most generous with his money, but she would add, pouting: “It’s not the same thing, you see, with him,” and, as a matter of fact, what appealed to her imagination was not the practice of disinterestedness, but its vocabulary.

Feeling that, often, he could not give her in reality the pleasures of which she dreamed, he tried at least to ensure that she should be happy in his company, tried not to contradict those vulgar ideas, that bad taste which she displayed on every possible occasion, which all the same he loved, as he could not help loving everything that came from her, which even fascinated him, for were they not so many more of those characteristic features, by virtue of which the essential qualities of the woman emerged, and were made visible? And so, when she was in a happy mood because she was going to see the *Reine Topaze*, or when her eyes grew serious, troubled, petulant, if she was afraid of missing the flower-show, or merely of not being in time for tea, with muffins and toast, at the Rue Royale tea-rooms, where she believed that regular attendance was indispensable, and set the seal upon a woman’s certificate of ‘smartness,’ Swann, enraptured, as all of us are, at times, by the natural behaviour of a child, or by the likeness of a portrait, which appears to be on the point of speaking, would feel so distinctly the soul of his mistress rising to fill the outlines of her face that he could not refrain from going across and welcoming it with his lips. “Oh, then, so little Odette wants us to take her to the flower-show, does she? she wants to be admired, does she? very well, we will take her there, we can but obey her wishes.” As Swann’s sight was beginning to fail, he had to resign himself to a pair of spectacles, which he wore at home, when working, while to face the world he adopted a single eyeglass, as being less disfiguring. The first time that she saw it in his eye, she could not contain herself for joy: “I really do think — for a man, that is to say — it is tremendously smart! How nice you look with it! Every inch a gentleman. All you want now is a title!” she concluded, with a tinge of regret in her voice. He liked Odette to say these things, just as, if he had been in love with a Breton girl, he would have enjoyed seeing her in her coif and hearing her say that she believed in ghosts. Always until then, as is common among men whose taste for the fine arts develops independently of their sensuality, a grotesque disparity had existed between the satisfactions which he would accord to either taste simultaneously; yielding to the seduction of works

of art which grew more and more subtle as the women in whose company he enjoyed them grew more illiterate and common, he would take a little servant-girl to a screened box in a theatre where there was some decadent piece which he had wished to see performed, or to an exhibition of impressionist painting, with the conviction, moreover, that an educated, 'society' woman would have understood them no better, but would not have managed to keep quiet about them so prettily. But, now that he was in love with Odette, all this was changed; to share her sympathies, to strive to be one with her in spirit was a task so attractive that he tried to find satisfaction in the things that she liked, and did find a pleasure, not only in copying her habits but in adopting her opinions, which was all the deeper because, as those habits and opinions sprang from no roots in her intelligence, they suggested to him nothing except that love, for the sake of which he had preferred them to his own. If he went again to *Serge Panine*, if he looked out for opportunities of going to watch Olivier Métra conducting, it was for the pleasure of being initiated into every one of the ideas in Odette's mind, of feeling that he had an equal share in all her tastes. This charm of drawing him closer to her, which her favourite plays and pictures and places possessed, struck him as being more mysterious than the intrinsic charm of more beautiful things and places, which appealed to him by their beauty, but without recalling her. Besides, having allowed the intellectual beliefs of his youth to grow faint, until his scepticism, as a finished 'man of the world,' had gradually penetrated them unawares, he held (or at least he had held for so long that he had fallen into the habit of saying) that the objects which we admire have no absolute value in themselves, that the whole thing is a matter of dates and castes, and consists in a series of fashions, the most vulgar of which are worth just as much as those which are regarded as the most refined. And as he had decided that the importance which Odette attached to receiving cards tot a private view was not in itself any more ridiculous than the pleasure which he himself had at one time felt in going to luncheon with the Prince of Wales, so he did not think that the admiration which she professed for Monte-Carlo or for the Righi was any more unreasonable than his own liking for Holland (which she imagined as ugly) and for Versailles (which bored her to tears). And so he denied himself the pleasure of visiting those places, consoling himself with the reflection that it was for her sake that he wished to feel, to like nothing that was not equally felt and liked by her.

Like everything else that formed part of Odette's environment, and was no more, in a sense, than the means whereby he might see and talk to her more

often, he enjoyed the society of the Verdurins. With them, since, at the heart of all their entertainments, dinners, musical evenings, games, suppers in fancy dress, excursions to the country, theatre parties, even the infrequent ‘big evenings’ when they entertained ‘bores,’ there were the presence of Odette, the sight of Odette, conversation with Odette, an inestimable boon which the Verdurins, by inviting him to their house, bestowed on Swann, he was happier in the little ‘nucleus’ than anywhere else, and tried to find some genuine merit in each of its members, imagining that his tastes would lead him to frequent their society for the rest of his life. Never daring to whisper to himself, lest he should doubt the truth of the suggestion, that he would always be in love with Odette, at least when he tried to suppose that he would always go to the Verdurins’ (a proposition which, a priori, raised fewer fundamental objections on the part of his intelligence), he saw himself for the future continuing to meet Odette every evening; that did not, perhaps, come quite to the same thing as his being permanently in love with her, but for the moment while he was in love with her, to feel that he would not, one day, cease to see her was all that he could ask. “What a charming atmosphere!” he said to himself. “How entirely genuine life is to these people! They are far more intelligent, far more artistic, surely, than the people one knows. Mme. Verdurin, in spite of a few trifling exaggerations which are rather absurd, has a sincere love of painting and music! What a passion for works of art, what anxiety to give pleasure to artists! Her ideas about some of the people one knows are not quite right, but then their ideas about artistic circles are altogether wrong! Possibly I make no great intellectual demands upon conversation, but I am perfectly happy talking to Cottard, although he does trot out those idiotic puns. And as for the painter, if he is rather unpleasantly affected when he tries to be paradoxical, still he has one of the finest brains that I have ever come across. Besides, what is most important, one feels quite free there, one does what one likes without constraint or fuss. What a flow of humour there is every day in that drawing-room! Certainly, with a few rare exceptions, I never want to go anywhere else again. It will become more and more of a habit, and I shall spend the rest of my life among them.”

And as the qualities which he supposed to be an intrinsic part of the Verdurin character were no more, really, than their superficial reflection of the pleasure which had been enjoyed in their society by his love for Odette, those qualities became more serious, more profound, more vital, as that pleasure increased. Since Mme. Verdurin gave Swann, now and then, what alone could constitute his happiness; since, on an evening when he felt anxious because

Odette had talked rather more to one of the party than to another, and, in a spasm of irritation, would not take the initiative by asking her whether she was coming home, Mme. Verdurin brought peace and joy to his troubled spirit by the spontaneous exclamation: “Odette! You’ll see M. Swann home, won’t you?”; since, when the summer holidays came, and after he had asked himself uneasily whether Odette might not leave Paris without him, whether he would still be able to see her every day, Mme. Verdurin was going to invite them both to spend the summer with her in the country; Swann, unconsciously allowing gratitude and self-interest to filter into his intelligence and to influence his ideas, went so far as to proclaim that Mme. Verdurin was “a great and noble soul.” Should any of his old fellow-pupils in the Louvre school of painting speak to him of some rare or eminent artist, “I’d a hundred times rather,” he would reply, “have the Verdurins.” And, with a solemnity of diction which was new in him: “They are magnanimous creatures, and magnanimity is, after all, the one thing that matters, the one thing that gives us distinction here on earth. Look you, there are only two classes of men, the magnanimous, and the rest; and I have reached an age when one has to take sides, to decide once and for all whom one is going to like and dislike, to stick to the people one likes, and, to make up for the time one has wasted with the others, never to leave them again as long as one lives. Very well!” he went on, with the slight emotion which a man feels when, even without being fully aware of what he is doing, he says something, not because it is true but because he enjoys saying it, and listens to his own voice uttering the words as though they came from some one else, “The die is now cast; I have elected to love none but magnanimous souls, and to live only in an atmosphere of magnanimity. You ask me whether Mme. Verdurin is really intelligent. I can assure you that she has given me proofs of a nobility of heart, of a loftiness of soul, to which no one could possibly attain — how could they? — without a corresponding loftiness of mind. Without question, she has a profound understanding of art. But it is not, perhaps, in that that she is most admirable; every little action, ingeniously, exquisitely kind, which she has performed for my sake, every friendly attention, simple little things, quite domestic and yet quite sublime, reveal a more profound comprehension of existence than all your textbooks of philosophy.”

***

He might have reminded himself, all the same, that there were various old

friends of his family who were just as simple as the Verdurins, companions of his early days who were just as fond of art, that he knew other ‘great-hearted creatures,’ and that, nevertheless, since he had cast his vote in favour of simplicity, the arts, and magnanimity, he had entirely ceased to see them. But these people did not know Odette, and, if they had known her, would never have thought of introducing her to him.

And so there was probably not, in the whole of the Verdurin circle, a single one of the ‘faithful’ who loved them, or believed that he loved them, as dearly as did Swann. And yet, when M. Verdurin said that he was not satisfied with Swann, he had not only expressed his own sentiments, he had unwittingly discovered his wife’s. Doubtless Swann had too particular an affection for Odette, as to which he had failed to take Mme. Verdurin daily into his confidence; doubtless the very discretion with which he availed himself of the Verdurins’ hospitality, refraining, often, from coming to dine with them for a reason which they never suspected, and in place of which they saw only an anxiety on his part not to have to decline an invitation to the house of some ‘bore’ or other; doubtless, also, and despite all the precautions which he had taken to keep it from them, the gradual discovery which they were making of his brilliant position in society — doubtless all these things contributed to their general annoyance with Swann. But the real, the fundamental reason was quite different. What had happened was that they had at once discovered in him a locked door, a reserved, impenetrable chamber in which he still professed silently to himself that the Princesse de Sagan was not grotesque, and that Cottard’s jokes were not amusing; in a word (and for all that he never once abandoned his friendly attitude towards them all, or revolted from their dogmas), they had discovered an impossibility of imposing those dogmas upon him, of entirely converting him to their faith, the like of which they had never come across in anyone before. They would have forgiven his going to the houses of ‘bores’ (to whom, as it happened, in his heart of hearts he infinitely preferred the Verdurins and all their little ‘nucleus’) had he consented to set a good example by openly renouncing those ‘bores’ in the presence of the ‘faithful.’ But that was an abjuration which, as they well knew, they were powerless to extort.

What a difference was there in a ‘newcomer’ whom Odette had asked them to invite, although she herself had met him only a few times, and on whom they were building great hopes — the Comte de Forcheville! (It turned out that he was nothing more nor less than the brother-in-law of Saniette, a discovery which filled all the ‘faithful’ with amazement: the manners of the old palaeographer

were so humble that they had always supposed him to be of a class inferior, socially, to their own, and had never expected to learn that he came of a rich and relatively aristocratic family.) Of course, Forcheville was enormously the ‘swell,’ which Swann was not or had quite ceased to be; of course, he would never dream of placing, as Swann now placed, the Verdurin circle above any other. But he lacked that natural refinement which prevented Swann from associating himself with the criticisms (too obviously false to be worth his notice) that Mme. Verdurin levelled at people whom he knew. As for the vulgar and affected tirades in which the painter sometimes indulged, the bag-man’s pleasantries which Cottard used to hazard, — whereas Swann, who liked both men sincerely, could easily find excuses for these without having either the courage or the hypocrisy to applaud them, Forcheville, on the other hand, was on an intellectual level which permitted him to be stupified, amazed by the invective (without in the least understanding what it all was about), and to be frankly delighted by the wit. And the very first dinner at the Verdurins’ at which Forcheville was present threw a glaring light upon all the differences between them, made his qualities start into prominence and precipitated the disgrace of Swann.

There was, at this dinner, besides the usual party, a professor from the Sorbonne, one Brichot, who had met M. and Mme. Verdurin at a watering-place somewhere, and, if his duties at the university and his other works of scholarship had not left him with very little time to spare, would gladly have come to them more often. For he had that curiosity, that superstitious outlook on life, which, combined with a certain amount of scepticism with regard to the object of their studies, earn for men of intelligence, whatever their profession, for doctors who do not believe in medicine, for schoolmasters who do not believe in Latin exercises, the reputation of having broad, brilliant, and indeed superior minds. He affected, when at Mme. Verdurin’s, to choose his illustrations from among the most topical subjects of the day, when he spoke of philosophy or history, principally because he regarded those sciences as no more, really, than a preparation for life itself, and imagined that he was seeing put into practice by the ‘little clan’ what hitherto he had known only from books; and also, perhaps, because, having had drilled into him as a boy, and having unconsciously preserved, a feeling of reverence for certain subjects, he thought that he was casting aside the scholar’s gown when he ventured to treat those subjects with a conversational licence, which seemed so to him only because the folds of the gown still clung.

Early in the course of the dinner, when M. de Forcheville, seated on the right of Mme. Verdurin, who, in the ‘newcomer’s’ honour, had taken great pains with her toilet, observed to her: “Quite original, that white dress,” the Doctor, who had never taken his eyes off him, so curious was he to learn the nature and attributes of what he called a “de,” and was on the look-out for an opportunity of attracting his attention, so as to come into closer contact with him, caught in its flight the adjective ‘*blanche*’ and, his eyes still glued to his plate, snapped out, “*Blanche*? Blanche of Castile?” then, without moving his head, shot a furtive glance to right and left of him, doubtful, but happy on the whole. While Swann, by the painful and futile effort which he made to smile, testified that he thought the pun absurd, Forcheville had shewn at once that he could appreciate its subtlety, and that he was a man of the world, by keeping within its proper limits a mirth the spontaneity of which had charmed Mme. Verdurin.

“What are you to say of a scientist like that?” she asked Forcheville. “You can’t talk seriously to him for two minutes on end. Is that the sort of thing you tell them at your hospital?” she went on, turning to the Doctor. “They must have some pretty lively times there, if that’s the case. I can see that I shall have to get taken in as a patient!”

“I think I heard the Doctor speak of that wicked old humbug, Blanche of Castile, if I may so express myself. Am I not right, Madame?” Brichot appealed to Mme. Verdurin, who, swooning with merriment, her eyes tightly closed, had buried her face in her two hands, from between which, now and then, escaped a muffled scream.

“Good gracious, Madame, I would not dream of shocking the reverent-minded, if there are any such around this table, *sub rosa*... I recognise, moreover, that our ineffable and Athenian — oh, how infinitely Athenian — Republic is capable of honouring, in the person of that obscurantist old she-Capet, the first of our chiefs of police. Yes, indeed, my dear host, yes, indeed!” he repeated in his ringing voice, which sounded a separate note for each syllable, in reply to a protest by M. Verdurin. “The Chronicle of Saint Denis, and the authenticity of its information is beyond question, leaves us no room for doubt on that point. No one could be more fitly chosen as Patron by a secularising proletariat than that mother of a Saint, who let him see some pretty fishy saints besides, as Suger says, and other great St. Bernards of the sort; for with her it was a case of taking just what you pleased.”

“Who is that gentleman?” Forcheville asked Mme. Verdurin. “He seems to speak with great authority.”

“What! Do you mean to say you don’t know the famous Brichot? Why, he’s celebrated all over Europe.”

“Oh, that’s Bréchot, is it?” exclaimed Forcheville, who had not quite caught the name. “You must tell me all about him”; he went on, fastening a pair of goggle eyes on the celebrity. “It’s always interesting to meet well-known people at dinner. But, I say, you ask us to very select parties here. No dull evenings in this house, I’m sure.”

“Well, you know what it is really,” said Mme. Verdurin modestly. “They feel safe here. They can talk about whatever they like, and the conversation goes off like fireworks. Now Brichot, this evening, is nothing. I’ve seen him, don’t you know, when he’s been with me, simply dazzling; you’d want to go on your knees to him. Well, with anyone else he’s not the same man, he’s not in the least witty, you have to drag the words out of him, he’s even boring.”

“That’s strange,” remarked Forcheville with fitting astonishment.

A sort of wit like Brichot’s would have been regarded as out-and-out stupidity by the people among whom Swann had spent his early life, for all that it is quite compatible with real intelligence. And the intelligence of the Professor’s vigorous and well-nourished brain might easily have been envied by many of the people in society who seemed witty enough to Swann. But these last had so thoroughly inculcated into him their likes and dislikes, at least in everything that pertained to their ordinary social existence, including that annex to social existence which belongs, strictly speaking, to the domain of intelligence, namely, conversation, that Swann could not see anything in Brichot’s pleasantries; to him they were merely pedantic, vulgar, and disgustingly coarse. He was shocked, too, being accustomed to good manners, by the rude, almost barrack-room tone which this student-in-arms adopted, no matter to whom he was speaking. Finally, perhaps, he had lost all patience that evening as he watched Mme. Verdurin welcoming, with such unnecessary warmth, this Forcheville fellow, whom it had been Odette’s unaccountable idea to bring to the house. Feeling a little awkward, with Swann there also, she had asked him on her arrival: “What do you think of my guest?”

And he, suddenly realising for the first time that Forcheville, whom he had known for years, could actually attract a woman, and was quite a good specimen of a man, had retorted: “Beastly!” He had, certainly, no idea of being jealous of Odette, but did not feel quite so happy as usual, and when Brichot, having begun to tell them the story of Blanche of Castile’s mother, who, according to him, “had been with Henry Planta-genet for years before they were married,” tried to

prompt Swann to beg him to continue the story, by interjecting “Isn’t that so, M. Swann?” in the martial accents which one uses in order to get down to the level of an unintelligent rustic or to put the ‘fear of God’ into a trooper, Swann cut his story short, to the intense fury of their hostess, by begging to be excused for taking so little interest in Blanche of Castile, as he had something that he wished to ask the painter. He, it appeared, had been that afternoon to an exhibition of the work of another artist, also a friend of Mme. Verdurin, who had recently died, and Swann wished to find out from him (for he valued his discrimination) whether there had really been anything more in this later work than the virtuosity which had struck people so forcibly in his earlier exhibitions.

“From that point of view it was extraordinary, but it did not seem to me to be a form of art which you could call ‘elevated,’” said Swann with a smile.

“Elevated... to the height of an Institute!” interrupted Cottard, raising his arms with mock solemnity. The whole table burst out laughing.

“What did I tell you?” said Mme. Verdurin to Forcheville. “It’s simply impossible to be serious with him. When you least expect it, out he comes with a joke.”

But she observed that Swann, and Swann alone, had not unbent. For one thing he was none too well pleased with Cottard for having secured a laugh at his expense in front of Forcheville. But the painter, instead of replying in a way that might have interested Swann, as he would probably have done had they been alone together, preferred to win the easy admiration of the rest by exercising his wit upon the talent of their dead friend.

“I went up to one of them,” he began, “just to see how it was done; I stuck my nose into it. Yes, I don’t think! Impossible to say whether it was done with glue, with soap, with sealing-wax, with sunshine, with leaven, with excrem...”

“And one make twelve!” shouted the Doctor, wittily, but just too late, for no one saw the point of his interruption.

“It looks as though it were done with nothing at all,” resumed the painter. “No more chance of discovering the trick than there is in the ‘Night Watch,’ or the ‘Regents,’ and it’s even bigger work than either Rembrandt or Hals ever did. It’s all there, — and yet, no, I’ll take my oath it isn’t.”

Then, just as singers who have reached the highest note in their compass, proceed to hum the rest of the air in falsetto, he had to be satisfied with murmuring, smiling the while, as if, after all, there had been something irresistibly amusing in the sheer beauty of the painting: “It smells all right; it makes your head go round; it catches your breath; you feel ticklish all over —

and not the faintest clue to how it's done. The man's a sorcerer; the thing's a conjuring-trick, it's a miracle," bursting outright into laughter, "it's dishonest!" Then stopping, solemnly raising his head, pitching his voice on a double-bass note which he struggled to bring into harmony, he concluded, "And it's so loyal!"

Except at the moment when he had called it "bigger than the 'Night Watch,'" a blasphemy which had called forth an instant protest from Mme. Verdurin, who regarded the 'Night Watch' as the supreme masterpiece of the universe (conjointly with the 'Ninth' and the 'Samothrace'), and at the word "excrement," which had made Forcheville throw a sweeping glance round the table to see whether it was 'all right,' before he allowed his lips to curve in a prudish and conciliatory smile, all the party (save Swann) had kept their fascinated and adoring eyes fixed upon the painter.

"I do so love him when he goes up in the air like that!" cried Mme. Verdurin, the moment that he had finished, enraptured that the table-talk should have proved so entertaining on the very night that Forcheville was dining with them for the first time. "Hallo, you!" she turned to her husband, "what's the matter with you, sitting there gaping like a great animal? You know, though, don't you," she apologised for him to the painter, "that he can talk quite well when he chooses; anybody would think it was the first time he had ever listened to you. If you had only seen him while you were speaking; he was just drinking it all in. And to-morrow he will tell us everything you said, without missing a word."

"No, really, I'm not joking!" protested the painter, enchanted by the success of his speech. "You all look as if you thought I was pulling your legs, that it was just a trick. I'll take you to see the show, and then you can say whether I've been exaggerating; I'll bet you anything you like, you'll come away more 'up in the air' than I am!"

"But we don't suppose for a moment that you're exaggerating; we only want you to go on with your dinner, and my husband too. Give M. Biche some more sole, can't you see his has got cold? We're not in any hurry; you're dashing round as if the house was on fire. Wait a little; don't serve the salad just yet."

Mme. Cottard, who was a shy woman and spoke but seldom, was not lacking, for all that, in self-assurance when a happy inspiration put the right word in her mouth. She felt that it would be well received; the thought gave her confidence, and what she was doing was done with the object not so much of shining herself, as of helping her husband on in his career. And so she did not

allow the word ‘salad,’ which Mme. Verdurin had just uttered, to pass unchallenged.

“It’s not a Japanese salad, is it?” she whispered, turning towards Odette.

And then, in her joy and confusion at the combination of neatness and daring which there had been in making so discreet and yet so unmistakable an allusion to the new and brilliantly successful play by Dumas, she broke down in a charming, girlish laugh, not very loud, but so irresistible that it was some time before she could control it.

“Who is that lady? She seems devilish clever,” said Forcheville.

“No, it is not. But we will have one for you if you will all come to dinner on Friday.”

“You will think me dreadfully provincial, sir,” said Mme. Cottard to Swann, “but, do you know, I haven’t been yet to this famous *Francillon*that everybody’s talking about. The Doctor has been (I remember now, he told me what a very great pleasure it had been to him to spend the evening with you there) and I must confess, I don’t see much sense in spending money on seats for him to take me, when he’s seen the play already. Of course an evening at the Théâtre-Français is never wasted, really; the acting’s so good there always; but we have some very nice friends,” (Mme. Cottard would hardly ever utter a proper name, but restricted herself to “some friends of ours” or “one of my friends,” as being more ‘distinguished,’ speaking in an affected tone and with all the importance of a person who need give names only when she chooses) “who often have a box, and are kind enough to take us to all the new pieces that are worth going to, and so I’m certain to see this *Francillon* sooner or later, and then I shall know what to think. But I do feel such a fool about it, I must confess, for, whenever I pay a call anywhere, I find everybody talking — it’s only natural — about that wretched Japanese salad. Really and truly, one’s beginning to get just a little tired of hearing about it,” she went on, seeing that Swann seemed less interested than she had hoped in so burning a topic. “I must admit, though, that it’s sometimes quite amusing, the way they joke about it: I’ve got a friend, now, who is most original, though she’s really a beautiful woman, most popular in society, goes everywhere, and she tells me that she got her cook to make one of these Japanese salads, putting in everything that young M. Dumas says you’re to put in, in the play. Then she asked just a few friends to come and taste it. I was not among the favoured few, I’m sorry to say. But she told us all about it on her next ‘day’; it seems it was quite horrible, she made us all laugh till we cried. I don’t know; perhaps it was the way she told it,” Mme. Cottard added doubtfully,

seeing that Swann still looked grave.

And, imagining that it was, perhaps, because he had not been amused by *Francillon*: “Well, I daresay I shall be disappointed with it, after all. I don’t suppose it’s as good as the piece Mme. de Crécy worships, *Serge Panine*. There’s a play, if you like; so deep, makes you think! But just fancy giving a receipt for a salad on the stage of the Théâtre-Français! Now,*Serge Panine* —! But then, it’s like everything that comes from the pen of M. Georges Ohnet, it’s so well written. I wonder if you know the *Maître des Forges*, which I like even better than *Serge Panine*.”

“Pardon me,” said Swann with polite irony, “but I can assure you that my want of admiration is almost equally divided between those masterpieces.”

“Really, now; that’s very interesting. And what don’t you like about them? Won’t you ever change your mind? Perhaps you think he’s a little too sad. Well, well, what I always say is, one should never argue about plays or novels. Everyone has his own way of looking at things, and what may be horrible to you is, perhaps, just what I like best.”

She was interrupted by Forcheville’s addressing Swann. What had happened was that, while Mme. Cottard was discussing *Francillon*, Forcheville had been expressing to Mme. Verdurin his admiration for what he called the “little speech” of the painter. “Your friend has such a flow of language, such a memory!” he had said to her when the painter had come to a standstill, “I’ve seldom seen anything like it. He’d make a first-rate preacher. By Jove, I wish I was like that. What with him and M. Bréchot you’ve drawn two lucky numbers to-night; though I’m not so sure that, simply as a speaker, this one doesn’t knock spots off the Professor. It comes more naturally with him, less like reading from a book. Of course, the way he goes on, he does use some words that are a bit realistic, and all that; but that’s quite the thing nowadays; anyhow, it’s not often I’ve seen a man hold the floor as cleverly as that, ‘hold the spittoon,’ as we used to say in the regiment, where, by the way, we had a man he rather reminds me of. You could take anything you liked — I don’t know what — this glass, say; and he’d talk away about it for hours; no, not this glass; that’s a silly thing to say, I’m sorry; but something a little bigger, like the battle of Waterloo, or anything of that sort, he’d tell you things you simply wouldn’t believe. Why, Swann was in the regiment then; he must have known him.”

“Do you see much of M. Swann?” asked Mme. Verdurin.

“Oh dear, no!” he answered, and then, thinking that if he made himself pleasant to Swann he might find favour with Odette, he decided to take this

opportunity of flattering him by speaking of his fashionable friends, but speaking as a man of the world himself, in a tone of good-natured criticism, and not as though he were congratulating Swann upon some undeserved good fortune: “Isn’t that so, Swann? I never see anything of you, do I? — But then, where on earth is one to see him? The creature spends all his time shut up with the La Trémoïlles, with the Laumes and all that lot!” The imputation would have been false at any time, and was all the more so, now that for at least a year Swann had given up going to almost any house but the Verdurins’. But the mere names of families whom the Verdurins did not know were received by them in a reproachful silence. M. Verdurin, dreading the painful impression which the mention of these ‘bores,’ especially when flung at her in this tactless fashion, and in front of all the ‘faithful,’ was bound to make on his wife, cast a covert glance at her, instinct with anxious solicitude. He saw then that in her fixed resolution to take no notice, to have escaped contact, altogether, with the news which had just been addressed to her, not merely to remain dumb but to have been deaf as well, as we pretend to be when a friend who has been in the wrong attempts to slip into his conversation some excuse which we should appear to be accepting, should we appear to have heard it without protesting, or when some one utters the name of an enemy, the very mention of whom in our presence is forbidden; Mme. Verdurin, so that her silence should have the appearance, not of consent but of the unconscious silence which inanimate objects preserve, had suddenly emptied her face of all life, of all mobility; her rounded forehead was nothing, now, but an exquisite study in high relief, which the name of those La Trémoïlles, with whom Swann was always ‘shut up,’ had failed to penetrate; her nose, just perceptibly wrinkled in a frown, exposed to view two dark cavities that were, surely, modelled from life. You would have said that her half-opened lips were just about to speak. It was all no more, however, than a wax cast, a mask in plaster, the sculptor’s design for a monument, a bust to be exhibited in the Palace of Industry, where the public would most certainly gather in front of it and marvel to see how the sculptor, in expressing the unchallengeable dignity of the Verdurins, as opposed to that of the La Trémoïlles or Laumes, whose equals (if not, indeed, their betters) they were, and the equals and betters of all other ‘bores’ upon the face of the earth, had managed to invest with a majesty that was almost Papal the whiteness and rigidity of his stone. But the marble at last grew animated and let it be understood that it didn’t do to be at all squeamish if one went to that house, since the woman was always tipsy and the husband so uneducated that he called a corridor a ‘collidor’!

“You’d need to pay me a lot of money before I’d let any of that lot set foot inside my house,” Mme. Verdurin concluded, gazing imperially down on Swann.

She could scarcely have expected him to capitulate so completely as to echo the holy simplicity of the pianist’s aunt, who at once exclaimed: “To think of that, now! What surprises me is that they can get anybody to go near them; I’m sure I should be afraid; one can’t be too careful. How can people be so common as to go running after them?”

But he might, at least, have replied, like Forcheville: “Gad, she’s a duchess; there are still plenty of people who are impressed by that sort of thing,” which would at least have permitted Mme. Verdurin the final retort, “And a lot of good may it do them!” Instead of which, Swann merely smiled, in a manner which shewed, quite clearly, that he could not, of course, take such an absurd suggestion seriously. M. Verdurin, who was still casting furtive and intermittent glances at his wife, could see with regret, and could understand only too well that she was now inflamed with the passion of a Grand Inquisitor who cannot succeed in stamping out a heresy; and so, in the hope of bringing Swann round to a retractation (for the courage of one’s opinions is always a form of calculating cowardice in the eyes of the ‘other side’), he broke in:

“Tell us frankly, now, what you think of them yourself. We shan’t repeat it to them, you may be sure.”

To which Swann answered: “Why, I’m not in the least afraid of the Duchess (if it is of the La Trémoïlles that you’re speaking). I can assure you that everyone likes going to see her. I don’t go so far as to say that she’s at all ‘deep’ — “ he pronounced the word as if it meant something ridiculous, for his speech kept the traces of certain mental habits which the recent change in his life, a rejuvenation illustrated by his passion for music, had inclined him temporarily to discard, so that at times he would actually state his views with considerable warmth — “but I am quite sincere when I say that she is intelligent, while her husband is positively a bookworm. They are charming people.”

His explanation was terribly effective; Mme. Verdurin now realised that this one state of unbelief would prevent her ‘little nucleus’ from ever attaining to complete unanimity, and was unable to restrain herself, in her fury at the obstinacy of this wretch who could not see what anguish his words were causing her, but cried aloud, from the depths of her tortured heart, “You may think so if you wish, but at least you need not say so to us.”

“It all depends upon what you call intelligence.” Forcheville felt that it was his turn to be brilliant. “Come now, Swann, tell us what you mean by

intelligence."

"There," cried Odette, "that's one of the big things I beg him to tell me about, and he never will."

"Oh, but..." protested Swann.

"Oh, but nonsense!" said Odette.

"A water-butt?" asked the Doctor.

"To you," pursued Forcheville, "does intelligence mean what they call clever talk; you know, the sort of people who worm their way into society?"

"Finish your sweet, so that they can take your plate away!" said Mme. Verdurin sourly to Saniette, who was lost in thought and had stopped eating. And then, perhaps a little ashamed of her rudeness, "It doesn't matter; take your time about it; there's no hurry; I only reminded you because of the others, you know; it keeps the servants back."

"There is," began Brichot, with a resonant smack upon every syllable, "a rather curious definition of intelligence by that pleasing old anarchist Fénelon..."

"Just listen to this!" Mme. Verdurin rallied Forcheville and the Doctor. "He's going to give us Fénelon's definition of intelligence. That's interesting. It's not often you get a chance of hearing that!"

But Brichot was keeping Fénelon's definition until Swann should have given his own. Swann remained silent, and, by this fresh act of recreancy, spoiled the brilliant tournament of dialectic which Mme. Verdurin was rejoicing at being able to offer to Forcheville.

"You see, it's just the same as with me!" Odette was peevish. "I'm not at all sorry to see that I'm not the only one he doesn't find quite up to his level."

"These de La Trémouailles whom Mme. Verdurin has exhibited to us as so little to be desired," inquired Brichot, articulating vigorously, "are they, by any chance, descended from the couple whom that worthy old snob, Sévigné, said she was delighted to know, because it was so good for her peasants? True, the Marquise had another reason, which in her case probably came first, for she was a thorough journalist at heart, and always on the look-out for 'copy.' And, in the journal which she used to send regularly to her daughter, it was Mme. de La Trémouaille, kept well-informed through all her grand connections, who supplied the foreign politics."

"Oh dear, no. I'm quite sure they aren't the same family," said Mme. Verdurin desperately.

Saniette who, ever since he had surrendered his untouched plate to the butler, had been plunged once more in silent meditation, emerged finally to tell

them, with a nervous laugh, a story of how he had once dined with the Duc de La Trémoïlle, the point of which was that the Duke did not know that George Sand was the pseudonym of a woman. Swann, who really liked Saniette, felt bound to supply him with a few facts illustrative of the Duke's culture, which would prove that such ignorance on his part was literally impossible; but suddenly he stopped short; he had realised, as he was speaking, that Saniette needed no proof, but knew already that the story was untrue for the simple reason that he had at that moment invented it. The worthy man suffered acutely from the Verdurins' always finding him so dull; and as he was conscious of having been more than ordinarily morose this evening, he had made up his mind that he would succeed in being amusing, at least once, before the end of dinner. He surrendered so quickly, looked so wretched at the sight of his castle in ruins, and replied in so craven a tone to Swann, appealing to him not to persist in a refutation which was already superfluous, "All right; all right; anyhow, even if I have made a mistake that's not a crime, I hope," that Swann longed to be able to console him by insisting that the story was indubitably true and exquisitely funny. The Doctor, who had been listening, had an idea that it was the right moment to interject "*Se non è vero*," but he was not quite certain of the words, and was afraid of being caught out.

After dinner, Forcheville went up to the Doctor. "She can't have been at all bad looking, Mme. Verdurin; anyhow, she's a woman you can really talk to; that's all I want. Of course she's getting a bit broad in the beam. But Mme. de Crécy! There's a little woman who knows what's what, all right. Upon my word and soul, you can see at a glance she's got the American eye, that girl has. We are speaking of Mme. de Crécy," he explained, as M. Verdurin joined them, his pipe in his mouth. "I should say that, as a specimen of the female form — "

"I'd rather have it in my bed than a clap of thunder!" the words came tumbling from Cottard, who had for some time been waiting in vain until Forcheville should pause for breath, so that he might get in his hoary old joke, a chance for which might not, he feared, come again, if the conversation should take a different turn; and he produced it now with that excessive spontaneity and confidence which may often be noticed attempting to cover up the coldness, and the slight flutter of emotion, inseparable from a prepared recitation. Forcheville knew and saw the joke, and was thoroughly amused. As for M. Verdurin, he was unsparing of his merriment, having recently discovered a way of expressing it by a symbol, different from his wife's, but equally simple and obvious. Scarcely had he begun the movement of head and shoulders of a man who was 'shaking with

laughter' than he would begin also to cough, as though, in laughing too violently, he had swallowed a mouthful of smoke from his pipe. And by keeping the pipe firmly in his mouth he could prolong indefinitely the dumb-show of suffocation and hilarity. So he and Mme. Verdurin (who, at the other side of the room, where the painter was telling her a story, was shutting her eyes preparatory to flinging her face into her hands) resembled two masks in a theatre, each representing Comedy, but in a different way.

M. Verdurin had been wiser than he knew in not taking his pipe out of his mouth, for Cottard, having occasion to leave the room for a moment, murmured a witty euphemism which he had recently acquired and repeated now whenever he had to go to the place in question: "I must just go and see the Duc d'Aumale for a minute," so drolly, that M. Verdurin's cough began all over again.

"Now, then, take your pipe out of your mouth; can't you see, you'll choke if you try to bottle up your laughter like that," counselled Mme. Verdurin, as she came round with a tray of liqueurs.

"What a delightful man your husband is; he has the wit of a dozen!" declared Forcheville to Mme. Ccttard. "Thank you, thank you, an old soldier like me can never say 'No' to a drink."

"M. de Forcheville thinks Odette charming," M. Verdurin told his wife.

"Why, do you know, she wants so much to meet you again some day at luncheon. We must arrange it, but don't on any account let Swann hear about it. He spoils everything, don't you know. I don't mean to say that you're not to come to dinner too, of course; we hope to see you very often. Now that the warm weather's coming, we're going to have dinner out of doors whenever we can. That won't bore you, will it, a quiet little dinner, now and then, in the Bois? Splendid, splendid, that will be quite delightful....

"Aren't you going to do any work this evening, I say?" she screamed suddenly to the little pianist, seeing an opportunity for displaying, before a 'newcomer' of Forcheville's importance, at once her unfailing wit and her despotic power over the 'faithful.'

"M. de Forcheville was just going to say something dreadful about you," Mme. Cottard warned her husband as he reappeared in the room. And he, still following up the idea of Forcheville's noble birth, which had obsessed him all through dinner, began again with: "I am treating a Baroness just now, Baroness Putbus; weren't there some Putbuses in the Crusades? Anyhow they've got a lake in Pomerania that's ten times the size of the Place de la Concorde. I am treating her for dry arthritis; she's a charming woman. Mme. Verdurin knows her

too, I believe."

Which enabled Forcheville, a moment later, finding himself alone with Mme. Cottard, to complete his favourable verdict on her husband with: "He's an interesting man, too; you can see that he knows some good people. Gad! but they get to know a lot of things, those doctors."

"D'you want me to play the phrase from the sonata for M. Swann?" asked the pianist.

"What the devil's that? Not the sonata-snake, I hope!" shouted M. de Forcheville, hoping to create an effect. But Dr. Cottard, who had never heard this pun, missed the point of it, and imagined that M. de Forcheville had made a mistake. He dashed in boldly to correct it: "No, no. The word isn't *serpent-à-sonates*, it's *serpent-à-sonnettes*!" he explained in a tone at once zealous, impatient, and triumphant.

Forcheville explained the joke to him. The Doctor blushed.

"You'll admit it's not bad, eh, Doctor?"

"Oh! I've known it for ages."

Then they were silenced; heralded by the waving tremolo of the violin-part, which formed a bristling bodyguard of sound two octaves above it — and as in a mountainous country, against the seeming immobility of a vertically falling torrent, one may distinguish, two hundred feet below, the tiny form of a woman walking in the valley — the little phrase had just appeared, distant but graceful, protected by the long, gradual unfurling of its transparent, incessant and sonorous curtain. And Swann, in his heart of hearts, turned to it, spoke to it as to a confidant in the secret of his love, as to a friend of Odette who would assure him that he need pay no attention to this Forcheville.

"Ah! you've come too late!" Mme. Verdurin greeted one of the 'faithful,' whose invitation had been only 'to look in after dinner,' "we've been having a simply incomparable Brichot! You never heard such eloquence! But he's gone. Isn't that so, M. Swann? I believe it's the first time you've met him," she went on, to emphasize the fact that it was to her that Swann owed the introduction. "Isn't that so; wasn't he delicious, our Brichot?"

Swann bowed politely.

"No? You weren't interested?" she asked dryly.

"Oh, but I assure you, I was quite enthralled. He is perhaps a little too peremptory, a little too jovial for my taste. I should like to see him a little less confident at times, a little more tolerant, but one feels that he knows a great deal, and on the whole he seems a very sound fellow."

The party broke up very late. Cottard's first words to his wife were: "I have rarely seen Mme. Verdurin in such form as she was to-night."

"What exactly is your Mme. Verdurin? A bit of a bad hat, eh?" said Forcheville to the painter, to whom he had offered a 'lift.' Odette watched his departure with regret; she dared not refuse to let Swann take her home, but she was moody and irritable in the carriage, and, when he asked whether he might come in, replied, "I suppose so," with an impatient shrug of her shoulders. When they had all gone, Mme. Verdurin said to her husband: "Did you notice the way Swann laughed, such an idiotic laugh, when we spoke about Mme. La Trémoïlle?"

She had remarked, more than once, how Swann and Forcheville suppressed the particle 'de' before that lady's name. Never doubting that it was done on purpose, to shew that they were not afraid of a title, she had made up her mind to imitate their arrogance, but had not quite grasped what grammatical form it ought to take. Moreover, the natural corruptness of her speech overcoming her implacable republicanism, she still said instinctively "the de La Trémoïlles," or, rather (by an abbreviation sanctified by the usage of music-hall singers and the writers of the 'captions' beneath caricatures, who elide the 'de'), "the d'La Trémoïlles," but she corrected herself at once to "Madame La Trémoïlle. — The*Duchess*, as Swann calls her," she added ironically, with a smile which proved that she was merely quoting, and would not, herself, accept the least responsibility for a classification so puerile and absurd.

"I don't mind saying that I thought him extremely stupid."

M. Verdurin took it up. "He's not sincere. He's a crafty customer, always hovering between one side and the other. He's always trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. What a difference between him and Forcheville. There, at least, you have a man who tells you straight out what he thinks. Either you agree with him or you don't. Not like the other fellow, who's never definitely fish or fowl. Did you notice, by the way, that Odette seemed all out for Forcheville, and I don't blame her, either. And then, after all, if Swann tries to

come the man of fashion over us, the champion of distressed Duchesses, at any rate the other man has got a title; he's always Comte de Forcheville!" he let the words slip delicately from his lips, as though, familiar with every page of the history of that dignity, he were making a scrupulously exact estimate of its value, in relation to others of the sort.

"I don't mind saying," Mme. Verdurin went on, "that he saw fit to utter some most venomous, and quite absurd insinuations against Brichot. Naturally, once he saw that Brichot was popular in this house, it was a way of hitting back at us, of spoiling our party. I know his sort, the dear, good friend of the family, who pulls you all to pieces on the stairs as he's going away."

"Didn't I say so?" retorted her husband. "He's simply a failure; a poor little wretch who goes through life mad with jealousy of anything that's at all big."

Had the truth been known, there was not one of the 'faithful' who was not infinitely more malicious than Swann; but the others would all take the precaution of tempering their malice with obvious pleasantries, with little sparks of emotion and cordiality; while the least indication of reserve on Swann's part, undraped in any such conventional formula as "Of course, I don't want to say anything — " to which he would have scorned to descend, appeared to them a deliberate act of treachery. There are certain original and distinguished authors in whom the least 'freedom of speech' is thought revolting because they have not begun by flattering the public taste, and serving up to it the commonplace expressions to which it is used; it was by the same process that Swann infuriated M. Verdurin. In his case as in theirs it was the novelty of his language which led his audience to suspect the blackness of his designs.

Swann was still unconscious of the disgrace that threatened him at the Verdurins', and continued to regard all their absurdities in the most rosy light, through the admiring eyes of love.

As a rule he made no appointments with Odette except for the evenings; he was afraid of her growing tired of him if he visited her during the day as well; at the same time he was reluctant to forfeit, even for an hour, the place that he held in her thoughts, and so was constantly looking out for an opportunity of claiming her attention, in any way that would not be displeasing to her. If, in a florist's or a jeweller's window, a plant or an ornament caught his eye, he would at once think of sending them to Odette, imagining that the pleasure which the casual sight of them had given him would instinctively be felt, also, by her, and would increase her affection for himself; and he would order them to be taken at once to the Rue La pérouse, so as to accelerate the moment in which, as she received

an offering from him, he might feel himself, in a sense, transported into her presence. He was particularly anxious, always, that she should receive these presents before she went out for the evening, so that her sense of gratitude towards him might give additional tenderness to her welcome when he arrived at the Verdurins', might even — for all he knew — if the shopkeeper made haste, bring him a letter from her before dinner, or herself, in person, upon his doorstep, come on a little extraordinary visit of thanks. As in an earlier phase, when he had experimented with the reflex action of anger and contempt upon her character, he sought now by that of gratification to elicit from her fresh particles of her intimate feelings, which she had never yet revealed.

Often she was embarrassed by lack of money, and under pressure from a creditor would come to him for assistance. He enjoyed this, as he enjoyed everything which could impress Odette with his love for herself, or merely with his influence, with the extent of the use that she might make of him. Probably if anyone had said to him, at the beginning, "It's your position that attracts her," or at this stage, "It's your money that she's really in love with," he would not have believed the suggestion, nor would he have been greatly distressed by the thought that people supposed her to be attached to him, that people felt them, to be united by any ties so binding as those of snobbishness or wealth. But even if he had accepted the possibility, it might not have caused him any suffering to discover that Odette's love for him was based on a foundation more lasting than mere affection, or any attractive qualities which she might have found in him; on a sound, commercial interest; an interest which would postpone for ever the fatal day on which she might be tempted to bring their relations to an end. For the moment, while he lavished presents upon her, and performed all manner of services, he could rely on advantages not contained in his person, or in his intellect, could forego the endless, killing effort to make himself attractive. And this delight in being a lover, in living by love alone, of the reality of which he was inclined to be doubtful, the price which, in the long run, he must pay for it, as a dilettante in immaterial sensations, enhanced its value in his eyes — as one sees people who are doubtful whether the sight of the sea and the sound of its waves are really enjoyable, become convinced that they are, as also of the rare quality and absolute detachment of their own taste, when they have agreed to pay several pounds a day for a room in an hotel, from which that sight and that sound may be enjoyed.

One day, when reflections of this order had brought him once again to the memory of the time when some one had spoken to him of Odette as of a 'kept'

woman, and when, once again, he had amused himself with contrasting that strange personification, the ‘kept’ woman — an iridescent mixture of unknown and demoniacal qualities, embroidered, as in some fantasy of Gustave Moreau, with poison-dripping flowers, interwoven with precious jewels — with that Odette upon whose face he had watched the passage of the same expressions of pity for a sufferer, resentment of an act of injustice, gratitude for an act of kindness, which he had seen, in earlier days, on his own mother’s face, and on the faces of friends; that Odette, whose conversation had so frequently turned on the things that he himself knew better than anyone, his collections, his room, his old servant, his banker, who kept all his title-deeds and bonds; — the thought of the banker reminded him that he must call on him shortly, to draw some money. And indeed, if, during the current month, he were to come less liberally to the aid of Odette in her financial difficulties than in the month before, when he had given her five thousand francs, if he refrained from offering her a diamond necklace for which she longed, he would be allowing her admiration for his generosity to decline, that gratitude which had made him so happy, and would even be running the risk of her imagining that his love for her (as she saw its visible manifestations grow fewer) had itself diminished. And then, suddenly, he asked himself whether that was not precisely what was implied by ‘keeping’ a woman (as if, in fact, that idea of ‘keeping’ could be derived from elements not at all mysterious nor perverse, but belonging to the intimate routine of his daily life, such as that thousand-franc note, a familiar and domestic object, torn in places and mended with gummed paper, which his valet, after paying the household accounts and the rent, had locked up hi a drawer in the old writing-desk whence he had extracted it to send it, with four others, to Odette) and whether it was not possible to apply to Odette, since he had known her (for he never imagined for a moment that she could ever have taken a penny from anyone else, before), that title, which he had believed so wholly inapplicable to her, of ‘kept’ woman. He could not explore the idea further, for a sudden access of that mental lethargy which was, with him, congenital, intermittent and providential, happened, at that moment, to extinguish every particle of light in his brain, as instantaneously as, at a later period, when electric lighting had been everywhere installed, it became possible, merely by fingering a switch, to cut off all the supply of light from a house. His mind fumbled, for a moment, in the darkness, he took off his spectacles, wiped the glasses, passed his hands over his eyes, but saw no light until he found himself face to face with a wholly different idea, the realisation that he must endeavour, in the coming month, to send Odette

six or seven thousand-franc notes instead of five, simply as a surprise for her and to give her pleasure.

In the evening, when he did not stay at home until it was time to meet Odette at the Verdurins', or rather at one of the open-air restaurants which they liked to frequent in the Bois and especially at Saint-Cloud, he would go to dine in one of those fashionable houses in which, at one time, he had been a constant guest. He did not wish to lose touch with people who, for all that he knew, might be of use, some day, to Odette, and thanks to whom he was often, in the meantime, able to procure for her some privilege or pleasure. Besides, he had been used for so long to the refinement and comfort of good society that, side by side with his contempt, there had grown up also a desperate need for it, with the result that, when he had reached the point after which the humblest lodgings appeared to him as precisely on a par with the most princely mansions, his senses were so thoroughly accustomed to the latter that he could not enter the former without a feeling of acute discomfort. He had the same regard — to a degree of identity which they would never have suspected — for the little families with small incomes who asked him to dances in their flats ("straight upstairs to the fifth floor, and the door on the left") as for the Princesse de Parme, who gave the most splendid parties in Paris; but he had not the feeling of being actually 'at the ball' when he found himself herded with the fathers of families in the bedroom of the lady of the house, while the spectacle of wash-hand-stands covered over with towels, and of beds converted into cloak-rooms, with a mass of hats and great-coats sprawling over their counterpanes, gave him the same stifling sensation that, nowadays, people who have been used for half a lifetime to electric light derive from a smoking lamp or a candle that needs to be snuffed. If he were dining out, he would order his carriage for half-past seven; while he changed his clothes, he would be wondering, all the time, about Odette, and in this way was never alone, for the constant thought of Odette gave to the moments in which he was separated from her the same peculiar charm as to those in which she was at his side. He would get into his carriage and drive off, but he knew that this thought had jumped in after him and had settled down upon his knee, like a pet animal which he might take everywhere, and would keep with him at the dinner-table, unobserved by his fellow-guests. He would stroke and fondle it, warm himself with it, and, as a feeling of languor swept over him, would give way to a slight shuddering movement which contracted his throat and nostrils — a new experience, this, — as he fastened the bunch of columbines in his buttonhole. He had for some time been feeling neither well nor happy,

especially since Odette had brought Forcheville to the Verdurins', and he would have liked to go away for a while to rest in the country. But he could never summon up courage to leave Paris, even for a day, while Odette was there. The weather was warm; it was the finest part of the spring. And for all that he was driving through a city of stone to immure himself in a house without grass or garden, what was incessantly before his eyes was a park which he owned, near Combray, where, at four in the afternoon, before coming to the asparagus-bed, thanks to the breeze that was wafted across the fields from Méséglise, he could enjoy the fragrant coolness of the air as well beneath an arbour of hornbeams in the garden as by the bank of the pond, fringed with forget-me-not and iris; and where, when he sat down to dinner, trained and twined by the gardener's skilful hand, there ran all about his table currant-bush and rose.

After dinner, if he had an early appointment in the Bois or at Saint-Cloud, he would rise from table and leave the house so abruptly — especially if it threatened to rain, and so to scatter the 'faithful' before their normal time — that on one occasion the Princesse des Laumes (at whose house dinner had been so late that Swann had left before the coffee came in, to join the Verdurins on the Island in the Bois) observed:

"Really, if Swann were thirty years older, and had diabetes, there might be some excuse for his running away like that. He seems to look upon us all as a joke."

He persuaded himself that the spring-time charm, which he could not go down to Combray to enjoy, he would find at least on the He des Cygnes or at Saint-Cloud. But as he could think only of Odette, he would return home not knowing even if he had tasted the fragrance of the young leaves, or if the moon had been shining. He would be welcomed by the little phrase from the sonata, played in the garden on the restaurant piano. If there was none in the garden, the Verdurins would have taken immense pains to have a piano brought out either from a private room or from the restaurant itself; not because Swann was now restored to favour; far from it. But the idea of arranging an ingenious form of entertainment for some one, even for some one whom they disliked, would stimulate them, during the time spent in its preparation, to a momentary sense of cordiality and affection. Now and then he would remind himself that another fine spring evening was drawing to a close, and would force himself to notice the trees and the sky. But the state of excitement into which Odette's presence never failed to throw him, added to a feverish ailment which, for some time now, had scarcely left him, robbed him of that sense of quiet and comfort which is an

indispensable background to the impressions that we derive from nature.

One evening, when Swann had consented to dine with the Verdurins, and had mentioned during dinner that he had to attend, next day, the annual banquet of an old comrades' association, Odette had at once exclaimed across the table, in front of everyone, in front of Forcheville, who was now one of the 'faithful,' in front of the painter, in front of Cottard:

"Yes, I know, you have your banquet to-morrow; I sha'n't see you, then, till I get home; don't be too late."

And although Swann had never yet taken offence, at all seriously, at Odette's demonstrations of friendship for one or other of the 'faithful,' he felt an exquisite pleasure on hearing her thus avow, before them all, with that calm immodesty, the fact that they saw each other regularly every evening, his privileged position in her house, and her own preference for him which it implied. It was true that Swann had often reflected that Odette was in no way a remarkable woman; and in the supremacy which he wielded over a creature so distinctly inferior to himself there was nothing that especially flattered him when he heard it proclaimed to all the 'faithful'; but since he had observed that, to several other men than himself, Odette seemed a fascinating and desirable woman, the attraction which her body held for him had aroused a painful longing to secure the absolute mastery of even the tiniest particles of her heart. And he had begun to attach an incalculable value to those moments passed in her house in the evenings, when he held her upon his knee, made her tell him what she thought about this or that, and counted over that treasure to which, alone of all his earthly possessions, he still clung. And so, after this dinner, drawing her aside, he took care to thank her effusively, seeking to indicate to her by the extent of his gratitude the corresponding intensity of the pleasures which it was in her power to bestow on him, the supreme pleasure being to guarantee him immunity, for as long as his love should last and he remain vulnerable, from the assaults of jealousy.

When he came away from his banquet, the next evening, it was pouring rain, and he had nothing but his victoria. A friend offered to take him home in a closed carriage, and as Odette, by the fact of her having invited him to come, had given him an assurance that she was expecting no one else, he could, with a quiet mind and an untroubled heart, rather than set off thus in the rain, have gone home and to bed. But perhaps, if she saw that he seemed not to adhere to his resolution to end every evening, without exception, in her company, she might grow careless, and fail to keep free for him just the one evening on which he

particularly desired it.

It was after eleven when he reached her door, and as he made his apology for having been unable to come away earlier, she complained that it was indeed very late; the storm had made her unwell, her head ached, and she warned him that she would not let him stay longer than half an hour, that at midnight she would send him away; a little while later she felt tired and wished to sleep.

"No cattleya, then, to-night?" he asked, "and I've been looking forward so to a nice little cattleya."

But she was irresponsive; saying nervously: "No, dear, no cattleya tonight. Can't you see, I'm not well?"

"It might have done you good, but I won't bother you."

She begged him to put out the light before he went; he drew the curtains close round her bed and left her. But, when he was in his own house again, the idea suddenly struck him that, perhaps, Odette was expecting some one else that evening, that she had merely pretended to be tired, that she had asked him to put the light out only so that he should suppose that she was going to sleep, that the moment he had left the house she had lighted it again, and had reopened her door to the stranger who was to be her guest for the night. He looked at his watch. It was about an hour and a half since he had left her; he went out, took a cab, and stopped it close to her house, in a little street running at right angles to that other street, which lay at the back of her house, and along which he used to go, sometimes, to tap upon her bedroom window, for her to let him in. He left his cab; the streets were all deserted and dark; he walked a few yards and came out almost opposite her house. Amid the glimmering blackness of all the row of windows, the lights in which had long since been put out, he saw one, and only one, from which overflowed, between the slats of its shutters, dosed like a wine-press over its mysterious golden juice, the light that filled the room within, a light which on so many evenings, as soon as he saw it, far off, as he turned into the street, had rejoiced his heart with its message: "She is there — expecting you," and now tortured him with: "She is there with the man she was expecting." He must know who; he tiptoed along by the wall until he reached the window, but between the slanting bars of the shutters he could see nothing; he could hear, only, in the silence of the night, the murmur of conversation. What agony he suffered as he watched that light, in whose golden atmosphere were moving, behind the closed sash, the unseen and detested pair, as he listened to that murmur which revealed the presence of the man who had crept in after his own departure, the perfidy of Odette, and the pleasures which she was at that moment

tasting with the stranger.

And yet he was not sorry that he had come; the torment which had forced him to leave his own house had lost its sharpness when it lost itg uncertainty, now that Odette's other life, of which he had had, at that first moment, a sudden helpless suspicion, was definitely there, almost within his grasp, before his eyes, in the full glare of the lamp-light, caught and kept there, an unwitting prisoner, in that room into which, when he would, he might force his way to surprise and seize it; or rather he would tap upon the shutters, as he had often done when he had come there very late, and by that signal Odette would at least learn that he knew, that he had seen the light and had heard the voices; while he himself, who a moment ago had been picturing her as laughing at him, as sharing with that other the knowledge of how effectively he had been tricked, now it was he that saw them, confident and persistent in their error, tricked and trapped by none other than himself, whom they believed to be a mile away, but who was there, in person, there with a plan, there with the knowledge that he was going, in another minute, to tap upon the shutter. And, perhaps, what he felt (almost an agreeable feeling) at that moment was something more than relief at the solution of a doubt, at the soothing of a pain; was an intellectual pleasure. If, since he had fallen in love, things had recovered a little of the delicate attraction that they had had for him long ago — though only when a light was shed upon them by a thought, a memory of Odette — now it was another of the faculties, prominent in the studious days of his youth, that Odette had quickened with new life, the passion for truth, but for a truth which, too, was interposed between himself and his mistress, receiving its light from her alone, a private and personal truth the sole object of which (an infinitely precious object, and one almost impersonal in its absolute beauty) was Odette — Odette in her activities, her environment, her projects, and her past. At every other period in his life, the little everyday words and actions of another person had always seemed wholly valueless to Swann; if gossip about such things were repeated to him, he would dismiss it as insignificant, and while he listened it was only the lowest, the most commonplace part of his mind that was interested; at such moments he felt utterly dull and uninspired. But in this strange phase of love the personality of another person becomes so enlarged, so deepened, that the curiosity which he could now feel aroused in himself, to know the least details of a woman's daily occupation, was the same thirst for knowledge with which he had once studied history. And all manner of actions, from which, until now, he would have recoiled in shame, such as spying, to-night, outside a window, to-morrow, for all

he knew, putting adroitly provocative questions to casual witnesses, bribing servants, listening at doors, seemed to him, now, to be precisely on a level with the deciphering of manuscripts, the weighing of evidence, the interpretation of old monuments, that was to say, so many different methods of scientific investigation, each one having a definite intellectual value and being legitimately employable in the search for truth.

As his hand stole out towards the shutters he felt a pang of shame at the thought that Odette would now know that he had suspected her, that he had returned, that he had posted himself outside her window. She had often told him what a horror she had of jealous men, of lovers who spied. What he was going to do would be extremely awkward, and she would detest him for ever after, whereas now, for the moment, for so long as he refrained from knocking, perhaps even in the act of infidelity, she loved him still. How often is not the prospect of future happiness thus sacrificed to one's impatient insistence upon an immediate gratification. But his desire to know the truth was stronger, and seemed to him nobler than his desire for her. He knew that the true story of certain events, which he would have given his life to be able to reconstruct accurately and in full, was to be read within that window, streaked with bars of light, as within the illuminated, golden boards of one of those precious manuscripts, by whose wealth of artistic treasures the scholar who consults them cannot remain unmoved. He yearned for the satisfaction of knowing the truth which so impassioned him in that brief, fleeting, precious transcript, on that translucent page, so warm, so beautiful. And besides, the advantage which he felt — which he so desperately wanted to feel — that he had over them, lay perhaps not so much in knowing as in being able to shew them that he knew. He drew himself up on tiptoe. He knocked. They had not heard; he knocked again; louder; their conversation ceased. A man's voice — he strained his ears to distinguish whose, among such of Odette's friends as he knew, the voice could be — asked:

"Who's that?"

He could not be certain of the voice. He knocked once again. The window first, then the shutters were thrown open. It was too late, now, to retire, and since she must know all, so as not to seem too contemptible, too jealous and inquisitive, he called out in a careless, hearty, welcoming tone:

"Please don't bother; I just happened to be passing, and saw the light. I wanted to know if you were feeling better."

He looked up. Two old gentlemen stood facing him, in the window, one of

them with a lamp in his hand; and beyond them he could see into the room, a room that he had never seen before. Having fallen into the habit, When he came late to Odette, of identifying her window by the fact that it was the only one still lighted in a row of windows otherwise all alike, he had been misled, this time, by the light, and had knocked at the window beyond hers, in the adjoining house. He made what apology he could and hurried home, overjoyed that the satisfaction of his curiosity had preserved their love intact, and that, having feigned for so long, when in Odette's company, a sort of indifference, he had not now, by a demonstration of jealousy, given her that proof of the excess of his own passion which, in a pair of lovers, fully and finally dispenses the recipient from the obligation to love the other enough. He never spoke to her of this misadventure, he ceased even to think of it himself. But now and then his thoughts in their wandering course would come upon this memory where it lay unobserved, would startle it into life, thrust it more deeply down into his consciousness, and leave him aching with a sharp, far-rooted pain. As though this had been a bodily pain, Swann's mind was powerless to alleviate it; in the case of bodily pain, however, since it is independent of the mind, the mind can dwell upon it, can note that it has diminished, that it has momentarily ceased. But with this mental pain, the mind, merely by recalling it, created it afresh. To determine not to think of it was but to think of it still, to suffer from it still. And when, in conversation with his friends, he forgot his sufferings, suddenly a word casually uttered would make him change countenance as a wounded man does when a clumsy hand has touched his aching limb. When he came away from Odette, he was happy, he felt calm, he recalled the smile with which, in gentle mockery, she had spoken to him of this man or of that, a smile which was all tenderness for himself; he recalled the gravity of her head which she seemed to have lifted from its axis to let it droop and fall, as though against her will, upon his lips, as she had done on that first evening in the carriage; her languishing gaze at him while she lay nestling in his arms, her bended head seeming to recede between her shoulders, as though shrinking from the cold.

But then, at once, his jealousy, as it had been the shadow of his love, presented him with the complement, with the converse of that new smile with which she had greeted him that very evening, — with which, now, perversely, she was mocking Swann while she tendered her love to another — of that lowering of her head, but lowered now to fall on other lips, and (but bestowed upon a stranger) of all the marks of affection that she had shewn to him. And all these voluptuous memories which he bore away from her house were, as one

might say, but so many sketches, rough plans, like the schemes of decoration which a designer submits to one in outline, enabling Swann to form an idea of the various attitudes, aflame or faint with passion, which she was capable of adopting for others. With the result that he came to regret every pleasure that he tasted in her company, every new caress that he invented (and had been so imprudent as to point out to her how delightful it was), every fresh charm that he found in her, for he knew that, a moment later, they would go to enrich the collection of instruments in his secret torture-chamber.

A fresh turn was given to the screw when Swann recalled a sudden expression which he had intercepted, a few days earlier, and for the first time, in Odette's eyes. It was after dinner at the Verdurins'. Whether it was because Forcheville, aware that Saniette, his brother-in-law, was not in favour with them, had decided to make a butt of him, and to shine at his expense, or because he had been annoyed by some awkward remark which Saniette had made to him, although it had passed unnoticed by the rest of the party who knew nothing of whatever tactless allusion it might conceal, or possibly because he had been for some time looking out for an opportunity of securing the expulsion from the house of a fellow-guest who knew rather too much about him, and whom he knew to be so nice-minded that he himself could not help feeling embarrassed at times merely by his presence in the room, Forcheville replied to Saniette's tactless utterance with such a volley of abuse, going out of his way to insult him, emboldened, the louder he shouted, by the fear, the pain, the entreaties of his victim, that the poor creature, after asking Mme. Verdurin whether he should stay and receiving no answer, had left the house in stammering confusion and with tears in his eyes. Odette had looked on, impassive, at this scene; but when the door had closed behind Saniette, she had forced the normal expression of her face down, as the saying is, by several pegs, so as to bring herself on to the same level of vulgarity as Forcheville; her eyes had sparkled with a malicious smile of congratulation upon his audacity, of ironical pity for the poor wretch who had been its victim; she had darted at him a look of complicity in the crime, which so clearly implied: "That's finished him off, or I'm very much mistaken. Did you see what a fool he looked? He was actually crying," that Forcheville, when his eyes met hers, sobered in a moment from the anger, or pretended anger with which he was still flushed, smiled as he explained: "He need only have made himself pleasant and he'd have been here still; a good scolding does a man no harm, at any time."

One day when Swann had gone out early in the afternoon to pay a call, and

had failed to find the person at home whom he wished to see, it occurred to him to go, instead, to Odette, at an hour when, although he never went to her house then as a rule, he knew that she was always at home, resting or writing letters until tea-time, and would enjoy seeing her for a moment, if it did not disturb her. The porter told him that he believed Odette to be in; Swann rang the bell, thought that he heard a sound, that he heard footsteps, but no one came to the door. Anxious and annoyed, he went round to the other little street, at the back of her house, and stood beneath her bedroom window; the curtains were drawn and he could see nothing; he knocked loudly upon the pane, he shouted; still no one came. He could see that the neighbours were staring at him. He turned away, thinking that, after all, he had perhaps been mistaken in believing that he heard footsteps; but he remained so preoccupied with the suspicion that he could turn his mind to nothing else. After waiting for an hour, he returned. He found her at home; she told him that she had been in the house when he rang, but had been asleep; the bell had awakened her; she had guessed that it must be Swann, and had run out to meet him, but he had already gone. She had, of course, heard him knocking at the window. Swann could at once detect in this story one of those fragments of literal truth which liars, when taken by surprise, console themselves by introducing into the composition of the falsehood which they have to invent, thinking that it can be safely incorporated, and will lend the whole story an air of verisimilitude. It was true that, when Odette had just done something which she did not wish to disclose, she would take pains to conceal it in a secret place in her heart. But as soon as she found herself face to face with the man to whom she was obliged to lie, she became uneasy, all her ideas melted like wax before a flame, her inventive and her reasoning faculties were paralysed, she might ransack her brain but would find only a void; still, she must say something, and there lay within her reach precisely the fact which she had wished to conceal, which, being the truth, was the one thing that had remained. She broke off from it a tiny fragment, of no importance in itself, assuring herself that, after all, it was the best thing to do, since it was a detail of the truth, and less dangerous, therefore, than a falsehood. “At any rate, this is true,” she said to herself; “that’s always something to the good; he may make inquiries; he will see that this is true; it won’t be this, anyhow, that will give me away.” But she was wrong; it was what gave her away; she had not taken into account that this fragmentary detail of the truth had sharp edges which could not: be made to fit in, except to those contiguous fragments of the truth from which she had arbitrarily detached it, edges which, whatever the fictitious details in which she might embed it,

would continue to shew, by their overlapping angles and by the gaps which she had forgotten to fill, that its proper place was elsewhere.

"She admits that she heard me ring, and then knock, that she knew it was myself, that she wanted to see me," Swann thought to himself. "But that doesn't correspond with the fact that she did not let me in."

He did not, however, draw her attention to this inconsistency, for he thought that, if left to herself, Odette might perhaps produce some falsehood which would give him a faint indication of the truth; she spoke; he did not interrupt her, he gathered up, with an eager and sorrowful piety, the words that fell from her lips, feeling (and rightly feeling, since she was hiding the truth behind them as she spoke) that, like the veil of a sanctuary, they kept a vague imprint, traced a faint outline of that infinitely precious and, alas, undiscoverable truth; — what she had been doing, that afternoon, at three o'clock, when he had called, — a truth of which he would never possess any more than these falsifications, illegible and divine traces, a truth which would exist henceforward only in the secretive memory of this creature, who would contemplate it in utter ignorance of its value, but would never yield it up to him. It was true that he had, now and then, a strong suspicion that Odette's daily activities were not hi themselves passionately interesting, and that such relations as she might have with other men did not exhale, naturally, in a universal sense, or for every rational being, a spirit of morbid gloom capable of infecting with fever or of inciting to suicide. He realised, at such moments, that that interest, that gloom, existed in him only as a malady might exist, and that, once he was cured of the malady, the actions of Odette, the kisses that she might have bestowed, would become once again as innocuous as those of countless other women. But the consciousness that the painful curiosity with which Swann now studied them had its origin only in himself was not enough to make him decide that it was unreasonable to regard that curiosity as important, and to take every possible step to satisfy it. Swann had, in fact, reached an age the philosophy of which — supported, in his case, by the current philosophy of the day, as well as by that of the circle in which he had spent most of his life, the group that surrounded the Princesse des Laumes, in which one's intelligence was understood to increase with the strength of one's disbelief in everything, and nothing real and incontestable was to be discovered, except the individual tastes of each of its members — is no longer that of youth, but a positive, almost a medical philosophy, the philosophy of men who, instead of fixing their aspirations upon external objects, endeavour to separate from the accumulation of the years already spent a definite residue of habits and passions

which they can regard as characteristic and permanent, and with which they will deliberately arrange, before anything else, that the kind of existence which they choose to adopt shall not prove inharmonious. Swann deemed it wise to make allowance in his life for the suffering which he derived from not knowing what Odette had done, just as he made allowance for the impetus which a damp climate always gave to his eczema; to anticipate in his budget the expenditure of a considerable sum on procuring, with regard to the daily occupations of Odette, information the lack of which would make him unhappy, just as he reserved a margin for the gratification of other tastes from which he knew that pleasure was to be expected (at least, before he had fallen in love) such as his taste for collecting things, or for good cooking.

When he proposed to take leave of Odette, and to return home, she begged him to stay a little longer, and even detained him forcibly, seizing him by the arm as he was opening the door to go. But he gave no thought to that, for, among the crowd of gestures and speeches and other little incidents which go to make up a conversation, it is inevitable that we should pass (without noticing anything that arouses our interest) by those that hide a truth for which our suspicions are blindly searching, whereas we stop to examine others beneath which nothing lies concealed. She kept on saying: “What a dreadful pity; you never by any chance come in the afternoon, and the one time you do come then I miss you.” He knew very well that she was not sufficiently in love with him to be so keenly distressed merely at having missed his visit, but as she was a good-natured woman, anxious to give him pleasure, and often sorry when she had done anything that annoyed him, he found it quite natural that she should be sorry, on this occasion, that she had deprived him of that pleasure of spending an hour in her company, which was so very great a pleasure, if not to herself, at any rate to him. All the same, it was a matter of so little importance that her air of unrelieved sorrow began at length to bewilder him. She reminded him, even more than was usual, of the faces of some of the women created by the painter of the Trimavera.’ She had, at that moment, their downcast, heartbroken expression, which seems ready to succumb beneath the burden of a grief too heavy to be borne, when they are merely allowing the Infant Jesus to play with a pomegranate, or watching Moses pour water into a trough. He had seen the same sorrow once before on her face, but when, he could no longer say. Then, suddenly, he remembered it; it was when Odette had lied, in apologising to Mme. Verdurin on the evening after the dinner from which she had stayed away on a pretext of illness, but really so that she might be alone with Swann. Surely, even had she been the most scrupulous

of women, she could hardly have felt remorse for so innocent a lie. But the lies which Odette ordinarily told were less innocent, and served to prevent discoveries which might have involved her in the most terrible difficulties with one or another of her friends. And so, when she lied, smitten with fear, feeling herself to be but feebly armed for her defence, unconfident of success, she was inclined to weep from sheer exhaustion, as children weep sometimes when they have not slept. She knew, also, that her lie, as a rule, was doing a serious injury to the man to whom she was telling it, and that she might find herself at his mercy if she told it badly. Therefore she felt at once humble and culpable in his presence. And when she had to tell an insignificant, social lie its hazardous associations, and the memories which it recalled, would leave her weak with a sense of exhaustion and penitent with a consciousness of wrongdoing.

What depressing lie was she now concocting for Swann's benefit, to give her that pained expression, that plaintive voice, which seemed to falter beneath the effort that she was forcing herself to make, and to plead for pardon? He had an idea that it was not merely the truth about what had occurred that afternoon that she was endeavouring to hide from him, but something more immediate, something, possibly, which had not yet happened, but might happen now at any time, and, when it did, would throw a light upon that earlier event. At that moment, he heard the front-door bell ring. Odette never stopped speaking, but her words dwindled into an inarticulate moan. Her regret at not having seen Swann that afternoon, at not having opened the door to him, had melted into a universal despair.

He could hear the gate being closed, and the sound of a carriage, as though some one were going away — probably the person whom Swann must on no account meet — after being told that Odette was not at home. And then, when he reflected that, merely by coming at an hour when he was not in the habit of coming, he had managed to disturb so many arrangements of which she did not wish him to know, he had a feeling of discouragement that amounted, almost, to distress. But since he was in love with Odette, since he was in the habit of turning all his thoughts towards her, the pity with which he might have been inspired for himself he felt for her only, and murmured: "Poor darling!" When finally he left her, she took up several letters which were lying on the table, and asked him if he would be so good as to post them for her. He walked along to the post-office, took the letters from his pocket, and, before dropping each of them into the box, scanned its address. They were all to tradesmen, except the last, which was to Forcheville. He kept it in his hand. "If I saw what was in this," he

argued, “I should know what she calls him, what she says to him, whether there really is anything between them. Perhaps, if I don’t look inside, I shall be lacking in delicacy towards Odette, since in this way alone I can rid myself of a suspicion which is, perhaps, a calumny on her, which must, in any case, cause her suffering, and which can never possibly be set at rest, once the letter is posted.”

He left the post-office and went home, but he had kept the last letter in his pocket. He lighted a candle, and held up close to its flame the envelope which he had not dared to open. At first he could distinguish nothing, but the envelope was thin, and by pressing it down on to the stiff card which it enclosed he was able, through the transparent paper, to read the concluding words. They were a coldly formal signature. If, instead of its being himself who was looking at a letter addressed to Forcheville, it had been Forcheville who had read a letter addressed to Swann, he might have found words in it of another, a far more tender kind! He took a firm hold of the card, which was sliding to and fro, the envelope being too large for it and then, by moving it with his finger and thumb, brought one line after another beneath the part of the envelope where the paper was not doubled, through which alone it was possible to read.

In spite of all these manoeuvres he could not make it out clearly. Not that it mattered, for he had seen enough to assure himself that the letter was about some trifling incident of no importance, and had nothing at all to do with love; it was something to do with Odette’s uncle. Swann had read quite plainly at the beginning of the line “I was right,” but did not understand what Odette had been right in doing, until suddenly a word which he had not been able, at first, to decipher, came to light and made the whole sentence intelligible: “I was right to open the door; it was my uncle.” To open the door! Then Forcheville had been there when Swann rang the bell, and she had sent him away; hence the sound that Swann had heard.

After that he read the whole letter; at the end she apologised for having treated Forcheville with so little ceremony, and reminded him that he had left his cigarette-case at her house, precisely what she had written to Swann after one of his first visits. But to Swann she had added: “Why did you not forget your heart also? I should never have let you have that back.” To Forcheville nothing of that sort; no allusion that could suggest any intrigue between them. And, really, he was obliged to admit that in all this business Forcheville had been worse treated than himself, since Odette was writing to him to make him believe that her visitor had been an uncle. From which it followed that he, Swann, was the man

to whom she attached importance, and for whose sake she had sent the other away. And yet, if there had been nothing between Odette and Forcheville, why not have opened the door at once, why have said, “I was right to open the door; it was my uncle.” Right? if she was doing nothing wrong at that moment how could Forcheville possibly have accounted for her not opening the door? For a time Swann stood still there, heartbroken, bewildered, and yet happy; gazing at this envelope which Odette had handed to him without a scruple, so absolute was her trust in his honour; through its transparent window there had been disclosed to him, with the secret history of an incident which he had despaired of ever being able to learn, a fragment of the life of Odette, seen as through a narrow, luminous incision, cut into its surface without her knowledge. Then his jealousy rejoiced at the discovery, as though that jealousy had had an independent existence, fiercely egotistical, gluttonous of every thing that would feed its vitality, even at the expense of Swann himself. Now it had food in store, and Swann could begin to grow uneasy afresh every evening, over the visits that Odette had received about five o’clock, and could seek to discover where Forcheville had been at that hour. For Swann’s affection for Odette still preserved the form which had been imposed on it, from the beginning, by his ignorance of the occupations in which she passed her days, as well as by the mental lethargy which prevented him from supplementing that ignorance by imagination. He was not jealous, at first, of the whole of Odette’s life, but of those moments only in which an incident, which he had perhaps misinterpreted, had led him to suppose that Odette might have played him false. His jealousy, like an octopus which throws out a first, then a second, and finally a third tentacle, fastened itself irremovably first to that moment, five o’clock in the afternoon, then to another, then to another again. But Swann was incapable of inventing his sufferings. They were only the memory, the perpetuation of a suffering that had come to him from without.

From without, however, everything brought him fresh suffering. He decided to separate Odette from Forcheville, by taking her away for a few days to the south. But he imagined that she was coveted by every male person in the hotel, and that she coveted them in return. And so he, who, in old days, when he travelled, used always to seek out new people and crowded places, might now be seen fleeing savagely from human society as if it had cruelly injured him. And how could he not have turned misanthrope, when in every man he saw a potential lover for Odette? Thus his jealousy did even more than the happy, passionate desire which he had originally felt for Odette had done to alter

Swann's character, completely changing, in the eyes of the world, even the outward signs by which that character had been intelligible.

A month after the evening on which he had intercepted and read Odette's letter to Forcheville, Swann went to a dinner which the Verdurins were giving in the Bois. As the party was breaking up he noticed a series of whispered discussions between Mme. Verdurin and several of her guests, and thought that he heard the pianist being reminded to come next day to a party at Chatou; now he, Swann, had not been invited to any party.

The Verdurins had spoken only in whispers, and in vague terms, but the painter, perhaps without thinking, shouted out: "There must be no lights of any sort, and he must play the Moonlight Sonata in the dark, for us to see by."

Mme. Verdurin, seeing that Swann was within earshot, assumed that expression in which the two-fold desire to make the speaker be quiet and to preserve, oneself, an appearance of guilelessness in the eyes of the listener, is neutralised in an intense vacuity; in which the unflinching signs of intelligent complicity are overlaid by the smiles of innocence, an expression invariably adopted by anyone who has noticed a blunder, the enormity of which is thereby at once revealed if not to those who have made it, at any rate to him in whose hearing it ought not to have been made. Odette seemed suddenly to be in despair, as though she had decided not to struggle any longer against the crushing difficulties of life, and Swann was anxiously counting the minutes that still separated him from the point at which, after leaving the restaurant, while he drove her home, he would be able to ask for an explanation, to make her promise, either that she would not go to Chatou next day, or that she would procure an invitation for him also, and to lull to rest in her arms the anguish that still tormented him. At last the carriages were ordered. Mme. Verdurin said to Swann:

"Good-bye, then. We shall see you soon, I hope," trying, by the friendliness of her manner and the constraint of her smile, to prevent him from noticing that she Was not saying, as she would always have until then:

"To-morrow, then, at Chatou, and at my house the day after." M. and Mme. Verdurin made Forcheville get into their carriage; Swann's was drawn up behind it, and he waited for theirs to start before helping Odette into his own.

"Odette, we'll take you," said Mme. Verdurin, "we've kept a little corner specially for you, beside M. de Forcheville."

"Yes, Mme. Verdurin," said Odette meekly.

"What! I thought I was to take you home," cried Swann, flinging discretion

to the winds, for the carriage-door hung open, time was precious, and he could not, in his present state, go home without her.

"But Mme. Verdurin has asked me..."

"That's all right, you can quite well go home alone; we've left you like this dozens of times," said Mme. Verdurin.

"But I had something important to tell Mme. de Crécy."

"Very well, you can write it to her instead."

"Good-bye," said Odette, holding out her hand.

He tried hard to smile, but could only succeed in looking utterly dejected.

"What do you think of the airs that Swann is pleased to put on with us?" Mme. Verdurin asked her husband when they had reached home. "I was afraid he was going to eat me, simply because we offered to take Odette back. It really is too bad, that sort of thing. Why doesn't he say, straight out, that we keep a disorderly house? I can't conceive how Odette can stand such manners. He positively seems to be saying, all the time, 'You belong to me!' I shall tell Odette exactly what I think about it all, and I hope she will have the sense to understand me." A moment later she added, inarticulate with rage: "No, but, don't you see, the filthy creature..." using unconsciously, and perhaps in satisfaction of the same obscure need to justify herself — like Françoise at Combray when the chicken refused to die — the very words which the last convulsions of an inoffensive animal in its death agony wring from the peasant who is engaged in taking its life. And when Mme. Verdurin's carriage had moved on, and Swann's took its place, his coachman, catching sight of his face, asked whether he was unwell, or had heard bad news.

Swann sent him away; he preferred to walk, and it was on foot, through the Bois, that he came home. He talked to himself, aloud, and in the same slightly affected tone which he had been used to adopt when describing the charms of the 'little nucleus' and extolling the magnanimity of the Verdurins. But just as the conversation, the smiles, the kisses of Odette became as odious to him as he had once found them charming, if they were diverted to others than himself, so the Verdurins' drawing-room, which, not an hour before, had still seemed to him amusing, inspired with a genuine feeling for art and even with a sort of moral aristocracy, now that it was another than himself whom Odette was going to meet there, to love there without restraint, laid bare to him all its absurdities, its stupidity, its shame.

He drew a fanciful picture, at which he shuddered in disgust, of the party next evening at Chatou. "Imagine going to Chatou, of all places! Like a lot of

drapers after closing time! Upon my word, these people are sublime in their smugness; they can't really exist; they must all have come out of one of Labiche's plays!"

The Cottards would be there; possibly Brichot. "Could anything be more grotesque than the lives of these little creatures, hanging on to one another like that. They'd imagine they were utterly lost, upon my soul they would, if they didn't all meet again to-morrow at *Chatou*!" Alas! there would be the painter there also, the painter who enjoyed match-making, who would invite Forcheville to come with Odette to his studio. He could see Odette, in a dress far too smart for the country, "for she is so vulgar in that way, and, poor little thing, she is such a fool!"

He could hear the jokes that Mme. Verdurin would make after dinner, jokes which, whoever the 'bore' might be at whom they were aimed, had always amused him because he could watch Odette laughing at them, laughing with him, her laughter almost a part of his. Now he felt that it was possibly at him that they would make Odette laugh. "What a fetid form of humour!" he exclaimed, twisting his mouth into an expression of disgust so violent that he could feel the muscles of his throat stiffen against his collar. "How, in God's name, can a creature made in His image find anything to laugh at in those nauseating witticisms? The least sensitive nose must be driven away in horror from such stale exhalations. It is really impossible to believe that any human being is incapable of understanding that, in allowing herself merely to smile at the expense of a fellow-creature who has loyally held out his hand to her, she is casting herself into a mire from which it will be impossible, with the best will in the world, ever to rescue her. I dwell so many miles above the puddles in which these filthy little vermin sprawl and crawl and bawl their cheap obscenities, that I cannot possibly be spattered by the witticisms of a Verdurin!" he cried, tossing up his head and arrogantly straightening his body. "God knows that I have honestly attempted to pull Odette out of that sewer, and to teach her to breathe a nobler and a purer air. But human patience has its limits, and mine is at an end," he concluded, as though this sacred mission to tear Odette away from an atmosphere of sarcasms dated from longer than a few minutes ago, as though he had not undertaken it only since it had occurred to him that those sarcasms might, perchance, be directed at himself, and might have the effect of detaching Odette from him.

He could see the pianist sitting down to play the Moonlight Sonata, and the grimaces of Mme. Verdurin, in terrified anticipation of the wrecking of her

nerves by Beethoven's music. "Idiot, liar!" he shouted, "and a creature like that imagines that she's fond of *Art*!" She would say to Odette, after deftly insinuating a few words of praise for Forcheville, as she had so often done for himself: "You can make room for M. de Forcheville there, can't you, Odette?"... '"In the dark!' Codfish! Pander!"... 'Pander' was the name he applied also to the music which would invite them to sit in silence, to dream together, to gaze in each other's eyes, to feel for each other's hands. He felt that there was much to be said, after all, for a sternly censorous attitude towards the arts, such as Plato adopted, and Bossuet, and the old school of education in France.

In a word, the life which they led at the Verdurins', which he had so often described as 'genuine,' seemed to him now the worst possible form of life, and their 'little nucleus' the most degraded class of society. "It really is," he repeated, "beneath the lowest rung of the social ladder, the nethermost circle of Dante. Beyond a doubt, the august words of the Florentine refer to the Verdurins! When one comes to think of it, surely people 'in society' (and, though one may find fault with them now and then, still, after all they are a very different matter from that gang of blackmailers) shew a profound sagacity in refusing to know them, or even to dirty the tips of their fingers with them. What a sound intuition there is in that '*Noli me tangere*' motto of the Faubourg Saint-Germain."

He had long since emerged from the paths and avenues of the Bois, he had almost reached his own house, and still, for he had not yet thrown off the intoxication of grief, or his whim of insincerity, but was ever more and more exhilarated by the false intonation, the artificial sonority of his own voice, he continued to perorate aloud in the silence of the night: "People 'in society' have their failings, as no one knows better than I; but, after all, they are people to whom some things, at least, are impossible. So-and-so" (a fashionable woman whom he had known) "was far from being perfect, but, after all, one did find in her a fundamental delicacy, a loyalty in her conduct which made her, whatever happened, incapable of a felony, which fixes a vast gulf between her and an old hag like Verdurin. Verdurin! What a name! Oh, there's something complete about them, something almost fine in their trueness to type; they're the most perfect specimens of their disgusting class! Thank God, it was high time that I stopped condescending to promiscuous intercourse with such infamy, such dung."

But, just as the virtues which he had still attributed, an hour or so earlier, to the Verdurins, would not have sufficed, even although the Verdurins had actually possessed them, if they had not also favoured and protected his love, to excite

Swann to that state of intoxication in which he waxed tender over their magnanimity, an intoxication which, even when disseminated through the medium of other persons, could have come to him from Odette alone; — so the immorality (had it really existed) which he now found in the Verdurins would have been powerless, if they had not invited Odette with Forcheville and without him, to unstop the vials of his wrath and to make him scarify their 'infamy.' Doubtless Swann's voice shewed a finer perspicacity than his own when it refused to utter those words full of disgust at the Verdurins and their circle, and of joy at his having shaken himself free of it, save in an artificial and rhetorical tone, and as though his words had been chosen rather to appease his anger than to express his thoughts. The latter, in fact, while he abandoned himself to invective, were probably, though he did not know it, occupied with a wholly different matter, for once he had reached his house, no sooner had he closed the front-door behind him than he suddenly struck his forehead, and, making his servant open the door again, dashed out into the street shouting, in a voice which, this time, was quite natural; "I believe I have found a way of getting invited to the dinner at Chatou to-morrow!" But it must have been a bad way, for M. Swann was not invited; Dr. Cottard, who, having been summoned to attend a serious case in the country, had not seen the Verdurins for some days, and had been prevented from appearing at Chatou, said, on the evening after this dinner, as he sat down to table at their house:

"Why, aren't we going to see M. Swann this evening? He is quite what you might call a personal friend..." "I sincerely trust that we sha'n't!" cried Mme. Verdurin. "Heaven preserve us from him; he's too deadly for words, a stupid, ill-bred boor."

On hearing these words Cottard exhibited an intense astonishment blended with entire submission, as though in the face of a scientific truth which contradicted everything that he had previously believed, but was supported by an irresistible weight of evidence; with timorous emotion he bowed his head over his plate, and merely replied: "Oh — oh — oh — oh — oh!" traversing, in an orderly retirement of his forces, into the depths of his being, along a descending scale, the whole compass of his voice. After which there was no more talk of Swann at the Verdurins'.

And so that drawing-room which had brought Swann and Odette together became an obstacle in the way of their meeting. She no longer said to him, as she had said in the early days of their love: "We shall meet, anyhow, to-morrow evening; there's a supper-party at the Verdurins'," but "We sha'n't be able to

meet to-morrow evening; there's a supper-party at the Verdurins'." Or else the Verdurins were taking her to the Opéra-Comique, to see *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre*, and Swann could read in her eyes that terror lest he should ask her not to go, which, but a little time before, he could not have refrained from greeting with a kiss as it flitted across the face of his mistress, but which now exasperated him. "Yet I'm not really angry," he assured himself, "when I see how she longs to run away and scratch from maggots in that dunghill of cacophony. I'm disappointed; not for myself, but for her; disappointed to find that, after living for more than six months in daily contact with myself, she has not been capable of improving her mind even to the point of spontaneously eradicating from it a taste for Victor Massé! More than that, to find that she has not arrived at the stage of understanding that there are evenings on which anyone with the least shade of refinement of feeling should be willing to forego an amusement when she is asked to do so. She ought to have the sense to say: 'I shall not go,' if it were only from policy, since it is by what she answers now that the quality of her soul will be determined once and for all." And having persuaded himself that it was solely, after all, in order that he might arrive at a favourable estimate of Odette's spiritual worth that he wished her to stay at home with him that evening instead of going to the Opéra-Comique, he adopted the same line of reasoning with her, with the same degree of insincerity as he had used with himself, or even with a degree more, for in her case he was yielding also to the desire to capture her by her own self-esteem.

"I swear to you," he told her, shortly before she was to leave for the theatre, "that, in asking you not to go, I should hope, were I a selfish man, for nothing so much as that you should refuse, for I have a thousand other things to do this evening, and I shall feel that I have been tricked and trapped myself, and shall be thoroughly annoyed, if, after all, you tell me that you are not going. But my occupations, my pleasures are not everything; I must think of you also. A day may come when, seeing me irrevocably sundered from you, you will be entitled to reproach me with not having warned you at the decisive hour in which I felt that I was going to pass judgment on you, one of those stern judgments which love cannot long resist. You see, your *Nuit de Cléopâtre* (what a title!) has no bearing on the point. What I must know is whether you are indeed one of those creatures in the lowest grade of mentality and even of charm, one of those contemptible creatures who are incapable of foregoing a pleasure. For if you are such, how could anyone love you, for you are not even a person, a definite, imperfect, but at least perceptible entity. You are a formless water that will

trickle down any slope that it may come upon, a fish devoid of memory, incapable of thought, which all its life long in its aquarium will continue to dash itself, a hundred times a day, against a wall of glass, always mistaking it for water. Do you realise that your answer will have the effect — I do not say of making me cease from that moment to love you, that goes without saying, but of making you less attractive to my eyes when I realise that you are not a person, that you are beneath everything in the world and have not the intelligence to raise yourself one inch higher? Obviously, I should have preferred to ask you, as though it had been a matter of little or no importance, to give up your *Nuit de Cléopâtre* (since you compel me to sully my lips with so abject a name), in the hope that you would go to it none the less. But, since I had resolved to weigh you in the balance, to make so grave an issue depend upon your answer, I considered it more honourable to give you due warning."

Meanwhile, Odette had shewn signs of increasing emotion and uncertainty. Although the meaning of his tirade was beyond her, she grasped that it was to be included among the scenes of reproach or supplication, scenes which her familiarity with the ways of men enabled her, without paying any heed to the words that were uttered, to conclude that men would not make unless they were in love; that, from the moment when they were in love, it was superfluous to obey them, since they would only be more in love later on. And so, she would have heard Swann out with the utmost tranquillity had she not noticed that it was growing late, and that if he went on speaking for any length of time she would "never" as she told him with a fond smile, obstinate but slightly abashed, "get there in time for the Overture."

On other occasions he had assured himself that the one thing which, more than anything else, would make him cease to love her, would be her refusal to abandon the habit of lying. "Even from the point of view of coquetry, pure and simple," he had told her, "can't you see how much of your attraction you throw away when you stoop to lying? By a frank admission — how many faults you might redeem! Really, you are far less intelligent than I supposed!" In vain, however, did Swann expound to her thus all the reasons that she had for not lying; they might have succeeded in overthrowing any universal system of mendacity, but Odette had no such system; she contented herself, merely, whenever she wished Swann to remain in ignorance of anything that she had done, with not telling him of it. So that a lie was, to her, something to be used only as a special expedient; and the one thing that could make her decide whether she should avail herself of a lie or not was a reason which, too, was of a

special and contingent order, namely the risk of Swann's discovering that she had not told him the truth.

Physically, she was passing through an unfortunate phase; she was growing stouter, and the expressive, sorrowful charm, the surprised, wistful expressions which she had formerly had, seemed to have vanished with her first youth, with the result that she became most precious to Swann at the very moment when he found her distinctly less good-looking. He would gaze at her for hours on end, trying to recapture the charm which he had once seen in her and could not find again. And yet the knowledge that, within this new and strange chrysalis, it was still Odette that lurked, still the same volatile temperament, artful and evasive, was enough to keep Swann seeking, with as much passion as ever, to captivate her. Then he would look at photographs of her, taken two years before, and would remember how exquisite she had been. And that would console him, a little, for all the sufferings that he voluntarily endured on her account.

When the Verdurins took her off to Saint-Germain, or to Chatou, or to Meulan, as often as not, if the weather was fine, they would propose to remain there for the night, and not go home until next day. Mme. Verdurin would endeavour to set at rest the scruples of the pianist, whose aunt had remained in Paris: "She will be only too glad to be rid of you for a day. How on earth could she be anxious, when she knows you're with us? Anyhow, I'll take you all under my wing; she can put the blame on me."

If this attempt failed, M. Verdurin would set off across country until he came to a telegraph office or some other kind of messenger, after first finding out which of the 'faithful' had anyone whom they must warn. But Odette would thank him, and assure him that she had no message for anyone, for she had told Swann, once and for all, that she could not possibly send messages to him, before all those people, without compromising herself. Sometimes she would be absent for several days on end, when the Verdurins took her to see the tombs at Dreux, or to Compiègne, on the painter's advice, to watch the sun setting through the forest — after which they went on to the Château of Pierrefonds.

"To think that she could visit really historic buildings with me, who have spent ten years in the study of architecture, who am constantly bombarded, by people who really count, to take them over Beauvais or Saint-Loup-de-Naud, and refuse to take anyone but her; and instead of that she trundles off with the lowest, the most brutally degraded of creatures, to go into ecstasies over the petrified excretions of Louis-Philippe and Viollet-le-Duc! One hardly needs much knowledge of art, I should say, to do that; though, surely, even without any

particularly refined sense of smell, one would not deliberately choose to spend a holiday in the latrines, so as to be within range of their fragrant exhalations."

But when she had set off for Dreux or Pierrefonds — alas, without allowing him to appear there, as though by accident, at her side, for, as she said, that would "create a dreadful impression," — he would plunge into the most intoxicating romance in the lover's library, the railway timetable, from which he learned the ways of joining her there in the afternoon, in the evening, even in the morning. The ways? More than that, the authority, the right to join her. For, after all, the time-table, and the trains themselves, were not meant for dogs. If the public were carefully informed, by means of printed advertisements, that at eight o'clock in the morning a train started for Pierrefonds which arrived there at ten, that could only be because going to Pierrefonds was a lawful act, for which permission from Odette would be superfluous; an act, moreover, which might be performed from a motive altogether different from the desire to see Odette, since persons who had never even heard of her performed it daily, and in such numbers as justified the labour and expense of stoking the engines.

So it came to this; that she could not prevent him from going to Pierrefonds if he chose to do so. Now that was precisely what he found that he did choose to do, and would at that moment be doing were he, like the travelling public, not acquainted with Odette. For a long time past he had wanted to form a more definite impression of Viollet-le-Duc's work as a restorer. And the weather being what it was, he felt an overwhelming desire to spend the day roaming in the forest of Compiègne.

It was, indeed, a piece of bad luck that she had forbidden him access to the one spot that tempted him to-day. To-day! Why, if he went down there, in defiance of her prohibition, he would be able to see her that very day! But then, whereas, if she had met, at Pierrefonds, some one who did not matter, she would have hailed him with obvious pleasure: "What, you here?" and would have invited him to come and see her at the hotel where she was staying with the Verdurins, if, on the other hand, it was himself, Swann, that she encountered there, she would be annoyed, would complain that she was being followed, would love him less in consequence, might even turn away in anger when she caught sight of him. "So, then, I am not to be allowed to go away for a day anywhere!" she would reproach him on her return, whereas in fact it was he himself who was not allowed to go.

He had had the sudden idea, so as to contrive to visit Compiègne and Pierrefonds without letting it be supposed that his object was to meet Odette, of

securing an invitation from one of his friends, the Marquis de Forestelle, who had a country house in that neighbourhood. This friend, to whom Swann suggested the plan without disclosing its ulterior purpose, was beside himself with joy; he did not conceal his astonishment at Swann's consenting at last, after fifteen years, to come down and visit his property, and since he did not (he told him) wish to stay there, promised to spend some days, at least, in taking him for walks and excursions in the district. Swann imagined himself down there already with M. de Forestelle. Even before he saw Odette, even if he did not succeed in seeing her there, what a joy it would be to set foot on that soil where, not knowing the exact spot in which, at any moment, she was to be found, he would feel all around him the thrilling possibility of her suddenly appearing: in the courtyard of the Château, now beautiful in his eyes since it was on her account that he had gone to visit it; in all the streets of the town, which struck him as romantic; down every ride of the forest, roseate with the deep and tender glow of sunset; — innumerable and alternative hiding-places, to which would fly simultaneously for refuge, in the uncertain ubiquity of his hopes, his happy, vagabond and divided heart. "We mustn't, on any account," he would warn M. de Forestelle, "run across Odette and the Verdurins. I have just heard that they are at Pierrefonds, of all places, to-day. One has plenty of time to see them in Paris; it would hardly be worth while coming down here if one couldn't go a yard without meeting them." And his host would fail to understand why, once they had reached the place, Swann would change his plans twenty times in an hour, inspect the dining-rooms of all the hotels in Compiègne without being able to make up his mind to settle down in any of them, although he had found no trace anywhere of the Verdurins, seeming to be in search of what he had claimed to be most anxious to avoid, and would in fact avoid, the moment he found it, for if he had come upon the little 'group,' he would have hastened away at once with studied indifference, satisfied that he had seen Odette and she him, especially that she had seen him when he was not, apparently, thinking about her. But no; she would guess at once that it was for her sake that he had come there. And when M. de Forestelle came to fetch him, and it was time to start, he excused himself: "No, I'm afraid not; I can't go to Pierrefonds to-day. You see, Odette is there." And Swann was happy in spite of everything in feeling that if he, alone among mortals, had not the right to go to Pierrefonds that day, it was because he was in fact, for Odette, some one who differed from all other mortals, her lover; and because that restriction which for him alone was set upon the universal right to travel freely where one would, was but one of the many forms of that slavery,

that love which was so dear to him. Decidedly, it was better not to risk a quarrel with her, to be patient, to wait for her return. He spent his days in poring over a map of the forest of Compiègne, as though it had been that of the 'Pays du Tendre'; he surrounded himself with photographs of the Château of Pierrefonds. When the day dawned on which it was possible that she might return, he opened the time-table again, calculated what train she must have taken, and, should she have postponed her departure, what trains were still left for her to take. He did not leave the house, for fear of missing a telegram, he did not go to bed, in case, having come by the last train, she decided to surprise him with a midnight visit. Yes! The front-door bell rang. There seemed some delay in opening the door, he wanted to awaken the porter, he leaned out of the window to shout to Odette, if it was Odette, for in spite of the orders which he had gone downstairs a dozen times to deliver in person, they were quite capable of telling her that he was not at home. It was only a servant coming in. He noticed the incessant rumble of passing carriages, to which he had never before paid any attention. He could hear them, one after another, a long way off, coming nearer, passing his door without stopping, and bearing away into the distance a message which was not for him. He waited all night, to no purpose, for the Verdurins had returned unexpectedly, and Odette had been in Paris since midday; it had not occurred to her to tell him; not knowing what to do with herself she had spent the evening alone at a theatre, had long since gone home to bed, and was peacefully asleep.

As a matter of fact, she had never given him a thought. And such moments as these, in which she forgot Swann's very existence, were of more value to Odette, did more to attach him to her, than all her infidelities. For in this way Swann was kept in that state of painful agitation which had once before been effective in making his interest blossom into love, on the night when he had failed to find Odette at the Verdurins' and had hunted for her all evening. And he did not have (as I had, afterwards, at Combray in my childhood) happy days in which to forget the sufferings that would return with the night. For his days, Swann must pass them without Odette; and as he told himself, now and then, to allow so pretty a woman to go out by herself in Paris was just as rash as to leave a case filled with jewels in the middle of the street. In this mood he would scowl furiously at the passers-by, as though they were so many pickpockets. But their faces — a collective and formless mass — escaped the grasp of his imagination, and so failed to feed the flame of his jealousy. The effort exhausted Swann's brain, until, passing his hand over his eyes, he cried out: "Heaven help me!" as people, after lashing themselves into an intellectual frenzy in their endeavours to

master the problem of the reality of the external world, or that of the immortality of the soul, afford relief to their weary brains by an unreasoning act of faith. But the thought of his absent mistress was incessantly, indissolubly blended with all the simplest actions of Swann's daily life — when he took his meals, opened his letters, went for a walk or to bed — by the fact of his regret at having to perform those actions without her; like those initials of Philibert the Fair which, in the church of Brou, because of her grief, her longing for him, Margaret of Austria intertwined everywhere with her own. On some days, instead of staying at home, he would go for luncheon to a restaurant not far off, to which he had been attracted, some time before, by the excellence of its cookery, but to which he now went only for one of those reasons, at once mystical and absurd, which people call 'romantic'; because this restaurant (which, by the way, still exists) bore the same name as the street in which Odette lived: the Lapérouse. Sometimes, when she had been away on a short visit somewhere, several days would elapse before she thought of letting him know that she had returned to Paris. And then she would say quite simply, without taking (as she would once have taken) the precaution of covering herself, at all costs, with a little fragment borrowed from the truth, that she had just, at that very moment, arrived by the morning train. What she said was a falsehood; at least for Odette it was a falsehood, inconsistent, lacking (what it would have had, if true) the support of her memory of her actual arrival at the station; she was even prevented from forming a mental picture of what she was saying, while she said it, by the contradictory picture, in her mind, of whatever quite different thing she had indeed been doing at the moment when she pretended to have been alighting from the train. In Swann's mind, however, these words, meeting no opposition, settled and hardened until they assumed the indestructibility of a truth so indubitable that, if some friend happened to tell him that he had come by the same train and had not seen Odette, Swann would have been convinced that it was his friend who had made a mistake as to the day or hour, since his version did not agree with the words uttered by Odette. These words had never appeared to him false except when, before hearing them, he had suspected that they were going to be. For him to believe that she was lying, an anticipatory suspicion was indispensable. It was also, however, sufficient. Given that, everything that Odette might say appeared to him suspect. Did she mention a name: it was obviously that of one of her lovers; once this supposition had taken shape, he would spend weeks in tormenting himself; on one occasion he even approached a firm of 'inquiry agents' to find out the address and the occupation of the

unknown rival who would give him no peace until he could be proved to have gone abroad, and who (he ultimately learned) was an uncle of Odette, and had been dead for twenty years.

Although she would not allow him, as a rule, to meet her at public gatherings, saying that people would talk, it happened occasionally that, at an evening party to which he and she had each been invited — at Forcheville's, at the painter's, or at a charity ball given in one of the Ministries — he found himself in the same room with her. He could see her, but dared not remain for fear of annoying her by seeming to be spying upon the pleasures which she tasted in other company, pleasures which — while he drove home in utter loneliness, and went to bed, as anxiously as I myself was to go to bed, some years later, on the evenings when he came to dine with us at Combray — seemed illimitable to him since he had not been able to see their end. And, once or twice, he derived from such evenings that kind of happiness which one would be inclined (did it not originate in so violent a reaction from an anxiety abruptly terminated) to call peaceful, since it consists in a pacifying of the mind: he had looked in for a moment at a revel in the painter's studio, and was getting ready to go home; he was leaving behind him Odette, transformed into a brilliant stranger, surrounded by men to whom her glances and her gaiety, which were not for him, seemed to hint at some voluptuous pleasure to be enjoyed there or elsewhere (possibly at the Bal des Incohérents, to which he trembled to think that she might be going on afterwards) which made Swann more jealous than the thought of their actual physical union, since it was more difficult to imagine; he was opening the door to go, when he heard himself called back in these words (which, by cutting off from the party that possible ending which had so appalled him, made the party itself seem innocent in retrospect, made Odette's return home a thing no longer inconceivable and terrible, but tender and familiar, a thing that kept close to his side, like a part of his own daily life, in his carriage; a thing that stripped Odette herself of the excess of brilliance and gaiety in her appearance, shewed that it was only a disguise which she had assumed for a moment, for his sake and not in view of any mysterious pleasures, a disguise of which she had already wearied) — in these words, which Odette flung out after him as he was crossing the threshold: "Can't you wait a minute for me? I'm just going; we'll drive back together and you can drop me." It was true that on one occasion Forcheville had asked to be driven home at the same time, but when, on reaching Odette's gate, he had begged to be allowed to come in too, she had replied, with a finger pointed at Swann: "Ah! That depends on this gentleman.

You must ask him. Very well, you may come in, just for a minute, if you insist, but you mustn't stay long, for, I warn you, he likes to sit and talk quietly with me, and he's not at all pleased if I have visitors when he's here. Oh, if you only knew the creature as I know him; isn't that so, my love, there's no one that really knows you, is there, except me?"

And Swann was, perhaps, even more touched by the spectacle of her addressing him thus, in front of Forcheville, not only in these tender words of predilection, but also with certain criticisms, such as: "I feel sure you haven't written yet to your friends, about dining with them on Sunday. You needn't go if you don't want to, but you might at least be polite," or "Now, have you left your essay on Vermeer here, so that you can do a little more to it to-morrow? What a lazy-bones! I'm going to make you work, I can tell you," which proved that Odette kept herself in touch with his social engagements and his literary work, that they had indeed a life in common. And as she spoke she bestowed on him a smile which he interpreted as meaning that she was entirely his.

And then, while she was making them some orangeade, suddenly, just as when the reflector of a lamp that is badly fitted begins by casting all round an object, on the wall beyond it, huge and fantastic shadows which, in time, contract and are lost in the shadow of the object itself, all the terrible and disturbing ideas which he had formed of Odette melted away and vanished in the charming creature who stood there before his eyes. He had the sudden suspicion that this hour spent in Odette's house, in the lamp-light, was, perhaps, after all, not an artificial hour, invented for his special use (with the object of concealing that frightening and delicious thing which was incessantly in his thoughts without his ever being able to form a satisfactory impression of it, an hour of Odette's real life, of her life when he was not there, looking on) with theatrical properties and pasteboard fruits, but was perhaps a genuine hour of Odette's life; that, if he himself had not been there, she would have pulled forward the same armchair for Forcheville, would have poured out for him, not any unknown brew, but precisely that orangeade which she was now offering to them both; that the world inhabited by Odette was not that other world, fearful and supernatural, in which he spent his time in placing her — and which existed, perhaps, only in his imagination, but the real universe, exhaling no special atmosphere of gloom, comprising that table at which he might sit down, presently, and write, and this drink which he was being permitted, now, to taste; all the objects which he contemplated with as much curiosity and admiration as gratitude, for if, in absorbing his dreams, they had delivered him from an

obsession, they themselves were, in turn, enriched by the absorption; they shewed him the palpable realisation of his fancies, and they interested his mind; they took shape and grew solid before-his eyes, and at the same time they soothed his troubled heart. Ah! had fate but allowed him to share a single dwelling with Odette, so that in her house he should be in his own; if, when asking his servant what there would be for luncheon, it had been Odette's bill of fare that he had learned from the reply; if, when Odette wished to go for a walk, in the morning, along the Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne, his duty as a good husband had obliged him, though he had no desire to go out, to accompany her, carrying her cloak when she was too warm; and in the evening, after dinner, if she wished to stay at home, and not to dress, if he had been forced to stay beside her, to do what she asked; then how completely would all the trivial details of Swann's life, which seemed to him now so gloomy, simply because they would, at the same time, have formed part of the life of Odette, have taken on — like that lamp, that orangeade, that armchair, which had absorbed so much of his dreams, which materialised so much of his longing, — a sort of superabundant sweetness and a mysterious solidity.

And yet he was inclined to suspect that the state for which he so much longed was a calm, a peace, which would not have created an atmosphere favourable to his love. When Odette ceased to be for him a creature always absent, regretted, imagined; when the feeling that he had for her was no longer the same mysterious disturbance that was wrought in him by the phrase from the sonata, but constant affection and gratitude, when those normal relations were established between them which would put an end to his melancholy madness; then, no doubt, the actions of Odette's daily life would appear to him as being of but little intrinsic interest — as he had several times, already, felt that they might be, on the day, for instance, when he had read, through its envelope, her letter to Forcheville. Examining his complaint with as much scientific detachment as if he had inoculated himself with it in order to study its effects, he told himself that, when he was cured of it, what Odette might or might not do would be indifferent to him. But in his morbid state, to tell the truth, he feared death itself no more than such a recovery, which would, in fact, amount to the death of all that he then was.

After these quiet evenings, Swann's suspicions would be temporarily lulled; he would bless the name of Odette, and next day, in the morning, would order the most attractive jewels to be sent to her, because her kindnesses to him overnight had excited either his gratitude, or the desire to see them repeated, or a

paroxysm of love for her which had need of some such outlet.

But at other times, grief would again take hold of him; he would imagine that Odette was Forcheville's mistress, and that, when they had both sat watching him from the depths of the Verdurins' landau, in the Bois, on the evening before the party at Chatou to which he had not been invited, while he implored her in vain, with that look of despair on his face which even his coachman had noticed, to come home with him, and then turned away, solitary, crushed, — she must have employed, to draw Forcheville's attention to him, while she murmured: "Do look at him, storming!" the same glance, brilliant, ma*icious, sidelong, cunning, as on the evening when Forcheville had driven Saniette from the Verdurins'*.

At such times Swann detested her. "But I've been a fool, too," he would argue. "I'm paying for other men's pleasures with my money. All the same, she'd better take care, and not pull the string too often, for I might very well stop giving her anything at all. At any rate, we'd better knock off supplementary favours for the time being. To think that, only yesterday, when she said she would like to go to Bayreuth for the season, I was such an ass as to offer to take one of those jolly little places the King of Bavaria has there, for the two of us. However she didn't seem particularly keen; she hasn't said yes or no yet. Let's hope that she'll refuse. Good God! Think of listening to Wagner for a fortnight on end with her, who takes about as much interest in music as a fish does in little apples; it will be fun!" And his hatred, like his love, needing to manifest itself in action, he amused himself with urging his evil imaginings further and further, because, thanks to the perfidies with which he charged Odette, he detested her still more, and would be able, if it turned out — as he tried to convince himself — that she was indeed guilty of them, to take the opportunity of punishing her, emptying upon her the overflowing vials of his wrath. In this way, he went so far as to suppose that he was going to receive a letter from her, in which she would ask him for money to take the house at Bayreuth, but with the warning that he was not to come there himself, as she had promised Forcheville and the Verdurins to invite them. Oh, how he would have loved it, had it been conceivable that she would have that audacity. What joy he would have in refusing, in drawing up that vindictive reply, the terms of which he amused himself by selecting and declaiming aloud, as though he had actually received her letter.

The very next day, her letter came. She wrote that the Verdurins and their friends had expressed a desire to be present at these performances of Wagner,

and that, if he would be so good as to send her the money, she would be able at last, after going so often to their house, to have the pleasure of entertaining the Verdurins in hers. Of him she said not a word; it was to be taken for granted that their presence at Bayreuth would be a bar to his.

Then that annihilating answer, every word of which he had carefully rehearsed overnight, without venturing to hope that it could ever be used, he had the satisfaction of having it conveyed to her. Alas! he felt only too certain that with the money which she had, or could easily procure, she would be able, all the same, to take a house at Bayreuth, since she wished to do so, she who was incapable of distinguishing between Bach and Clapisson. Let her take it, then; she would have to live in it more frugally, that was all. No means (as there would have been if he had replied by sending her several thousand-franc notes) of organising, each evening, in her hired castle, those exquisite little suppers, after which she might perhaps be seized by the whim (which, it was possible, had never yet seized her) of falling into the arms of Forcheville. At any rate, this loathsome expedition, it would not be Swann who had to pay for it. Ah! if he could only manage to prevent it, if she could sprain her ankle before starting, if the driver of the carriage which was to take her to the station would consent (no matter how great the bribe) to smuggle her to some place where she could be kept for a time in seclusion, that perfidious woman, her eyes tinselled with a smile of complicity for Forcheville, which was what Odette had become for Swann in the last forty-eight hours.

But she was never that for very long; after a few days the shining, crafty eyes lost their brightness and their duplicity, that picture of an execrable Odette saying to Forcheville: “Look at him storming!” began to grow pale and to dissolve. Then gradually reappeared and rose before him, softly radiant, the face of the other Odette, of that Odette who also turned with a smile to Forcheville, but with a smile in which there was nothing but affection for Swann, when she said: “You mustn’t stay long, for this gentleman doesn’t much like my having visitors when he’s here. Oh! if you only knew the creature as I know him!” that same smile with which she used to thank Swann for some instance of his courtesy which she prized so highly, for some advice for which she had asked him in one of those grave crises in her life, when she could turn to him alone.

Then, to this other Odette, he would ask himself what could have induced him to write that outrageous letter, of which, probably, until then, she had never supposed him capable, a letter which must have lowered him from the high, from the supreme place which, by his generosity, by his loyalty, he had won for

himself in her esteem. He would become less dear to her, since it was for those qualities, which she found neither in Forcheville nor in any other, that she loved him. It was for them that Odette so often shewed him a reciprocal kindness, which counted for less than nothing in his moments of jealousy, because it was not a sign of reciprocal desire, was indeed a proof rather of affection than of love, but the importance of which he began once more to feel in proportion as the spontaneous relaxation of his suspicions, often accelerated by the distraction brought to him by reading about art or by the conversation of a friend, rendered his passion less exacting of reciprocities.

Now that, after this swing of the pendulum, Odette had naturally returned to the place from which Swann's jealousy had for the moment driven her, in the angle in which he found her charming, he pictured her to himself as full of tenderness, with a look of consent in her eyes, and so beautiful that he could not refrain from moving his lips towards her, as though she had actually been in the room for him to kiss; and he preserved a sense of gratitude to her for that bewitching, kindly glance, as strong as though she had really looked thus at him, and it had not been merely his imagination that had portrayed it in order to satisfy his desire.

What distress he must have caused her! Certainly he found adequate reasons for his resentment, but they would not have been sufficient to make him feel that resentment, if he had not so passionately loved her. Had he not nourished grievances, just as serious, against other women, to whom he would, none the less, render willing service to-day, feeling no anger towards them because he no longer loved them? If the day ever came when he would find himself in the same state of indifference with regard to Odette, he would then understand that it was his jealousy alone which had led him to find something atrocious, unpardonable, in this desire (after all, so natural a desire, springing from a childlike ingenuousness and also from a certain delicacy in her nature) to be able, in her turn, when an occasion offered, to repay the Verdurins for their hospitality, and to play the hostess in a house of her own.

He returned to the other point of view — opposite to that of his love and of his jealousy, to which he resorted at times by a sort of mental equity, and in order to make allowance for different eventualities — from which he tried to form a fresh judgment of Odette, based on the supposition that he had never been in love with her, that she was to him just a woman like other women, that her life had not been (whenever he himself was not present) different, a texture woven in secret apart from him, and warped against him.

Wherefore believe that she would enjoy down there with Forcheville or with other men intoxicating pleasures which she had never known with him, and which his jealousy alone had fabricated in all their elements? At Bayreuth, as in Paris, if it should happen that Forcheville thought of him at all, it would only be as of some one who counted for a great deal in the life of Odette, some one for whom he was obliged to make way, when they met in her house. If Forcheville and she scored a triumph by being down there together in spite of him, it was he who had engineered that triumph by striving in vain to prevent her from going there, whereas if he had approved of her plan, which for that matter was quite defensible, she would have had the appearance of being there by his counsel, she would have felt herself sent there, housed there by him, and for the pleasure which she derived from entertaining those people who had so often entertained her, it was to him that she would have had to acknowledge her indebtedness.

And if — instead of letting her go off thus, at cross-purposes with him, without having seen him again — he were to send her this money, if he were to encourage her to take this journey, and to go out of his way to make it comfortable and pleasant for her, she would come running to him, happy, grateful, and he would have the joy — the sight of her face — which he had not known for nearly a week, a joy which none other could replace. For the moment that Swann was able to form a picture of her without revulsion, that he could see once again the friendliness in her smile, and that the desire to tear her away from every rival was no longer imposed by his jealousy upon his love, that love once again became, more than anything, a taste for the sensations which Odette's person gave him, for the pleasure which he found in admiring, as one might a spectacle, or in questioning, as one might a phenomenon, the birth of one of her glances, the formation of one of her smiles, the utterance of an intonation of her voice. And this pleasure, different from every other, had in the end created in him a need of her, which she alone, by her presence or by her letters, could assuage, almost as disinterested, almost as artistic, as perverse as another need which characterised this new period in Swann's life, when the sereness, the depression of the preceding years had been followed by a sort of spiritual superabundance, without his knowing to what he owed this unlooked-for enrichment of his life, any more than a person in delicate health who from a certain moment grows stronger, puts on flesh, and seems for a time to be on the road to a complete recovery:— this other need, which, too, developed in him independently of the visible, material world, was the need to listen to music and to learn to know it.

And so, by the chemical process of his malady, after he had created jealousy out of his love, he began again to generate tenderness, pity for Odette. She had become once more the old Odette, charming and kind. He was full of remorse for having treated her harshly. He wished her to come to him, and, before she came, he wished to have already procured for her some pleasure, so as to watch her gratitude taking shape in her face and moulding her smile.

So, too, Odette, certain of seeing him come to her in a few days, as tender and submissive as before, and plead with her for a reconciliation, became inured, was no longer afraid of displeasing him, or even of making him angry, and refused him, whenever it suited her, the favours by which he set most store.

Perhaps she did not realise how sincere he had been with her during their quarrel, when he had told her that he would not send her any money, but would do what he could to hurt her. Perhaps she did not realise, either, how sincere he still was, if not with her, at any rate with himself, on other occasions when, for the sake of their future relations, to shew Odette that he was capable of doing without her, that a rupture was still possible between them, he decided to wait some time before going to see her again.

Sometimes several days had elapsed, during which she had caused him no fresh anxiety; and as, from the next few visits which he would pay her, he knew that he was likely to derive not any great pleasure, but, more probably, some annoyance which would put an end to the state of calm in which he found himself, he wrote to her that he was very busy, and would not be able to see her on any of the days that he had suggested. Meanwhile, a letter from her, crossing his, asked him to postpone one of those very meetings. He asked himself, why; his suspicions, his grief, again took hold of him. He could no longer abide, in the new state of agitation into which he found himself plunged, by the arrangements which he had made in his preceding state of comparative calm; he would run to find her, and would insist upon seeing her on each of the following days. And even if she had not written first, if she merely acknowledged his letter, it was enough to make him unable to rest without seeing her. For, upsetting all Swann’s calculations, Odette’s acceptance had entirely changed his attitude. Like everyone who possesses something precious, so as to know what would happen if he ceased for a moment to possess it, he had detached the precious object from his mind, leaving, as he thought, everything else in the same state as when it was there. But the absence of one part from a whole is not only that, it is not simply a partial omission, it is a disturbance of all the other parts, a new state which it was impossible to foresee from the old.

But at other times — when Odette was on the point of going away for a holiday — it was after some trifling quarrel for which he had chosen the pretext, that he decided not to write to her and not to see her until her return, giving the appearance (and expecting the reward) of a serious rupture, which she would perhaps regard as final, to a separation, the greater part of which was inevitable, since she was going away, which, in fact, he was merely allowing to start a little sooner than it must. At once he could imagine Odette, puzzled, anxious, distressed at having received neither visit nor letter from him and this picture of her, by calming his jealousy, made it easy for him to break himself of the habit of seeing her. At odd moments, no doubt, in the furthest recesses of his brain, where his determination had thrust it away, and thanks to the length of the interval, the three weeks' separation to which he had agreed, it was with pleasure that he would consider the idea that he would see Odette again on her return; but it was also with so little impatience that he began to ask himself whether he would not readily consent to the doubling of the period of so easy an abstinence. It had lasted, so far, but three days, a much shorter time than he had often, before, passed without seeing Odette, and without having, as on this occasion he had, premeditated a separation. And yet, there and then, some tiny trace of contrariety in his mind, or of weakness in his body, — by inciting him to regard the present as an exceptional moment, one not to be governed by the rules, one in which prudence itself would allow him to take advantage of the soothing effects of a pleasure and to give his will (until the time should come when its efforts might serve any purpose) a holiday — suspended the action of his will, which ceased to exert its inhibitive control; or, without that even, the thought of some information for which he had forgotten to ask Odette, such as if she had decided in what colour she would have her carriage repainted, or, with regard to some investment, whether they were 'ordinary' or 'preference' shares that she wished him to buy (for it was all very well to shew her that he could live without seeing her, but if, after that, the carriage had to be painted over again, if the shares produced no dividend, a fine lot of good he would have done), — and suddenly, like a stretched piece of elastic which is let go, or the air in a pneumatic machine which is ripped open, the idea of seeing her again, from the remote point in time to which it had been attached, sprang back into the field of the present and of immediate possibilities.

It sprang back thus without meeting any further resistance, so irresistible, in fact, that Swann had been far less unhappy in watching the end gradually approaching, day by day, of the fortnight which he must spend apart from

Odette, than he was when kept waiting ten minutes while his coachman brought round the carriage which was to take him to her, minutes which he passed in transports of impatience and joy, in which he recaptured a thousand times over, to lavish on it all the wealth of his affection, that idea of his meeting with Odette, which, by so abrupt a repercussion, at a moment when he supposed it so remote, was once more present and on the very surface of his consciousness. The fact was that this idea no longer found, as an obstacle in its course, the desire to contrive without further delay to resist its coming, which had ceased to have any place in Swann's mind since, having proved to himself — or so, at least, he believed — that he was so easily capable of resisting it, he no longer saw any inconvenience in postponing a plan of separation which he was now certain of being able to put into operation whenever he would. Furthermore, this idea of seeing her again came back to him adorned with a novelty, a seductiveness, armed with a virulence, all of which long habit had enfeebled, but which had acquired new vigour during this privation, not of three days but of a fortnight (for a period of abstinence may be calculated, by anticipation, as having lasted already until the final date assigned to it), and had converted what had been, until then, a pleasure in store, which could easily be sacrificed, into an unlooked-for happiness which he was powerless to resist. Finally, the idea returned to him with its beauty enhanced by his own ignorance of what Odette might have thought, might, perhaps, have done on finding that he shewed no sign of life, with the result that he was going now to meet with the entrancing revelation of an Odette almost unknown.

But she, just as she had supposed that his refusal to send her money was only a feint, saw nothing but a pretext in the question which he came, now, to ask her, about the repainting of her carriage, or the purchase of stock. For she could not reconstruct the several phases of these crises through which he passed, and in the general idea which she formed of them she made no attempt to understand their mechanism, looking only to what she knew beforehand, their necessary, never-failing and always identical termination. An imperfect idea (though possibly all the more profound in consequence), if one were to judge it from the point of view of Swann, who would doubtless have considered that Odette failed to understand him, just as a morphinomaniac or a consumptive, each persuaded that he has been thrown back, one by some outside event, at the moment when he was just going to shake himself free from his inveterate habit, the other by an accidental indisposition at the moment when he was just going to be finally cured, feels himself to be misunderstood by the doctor who does not

attach the same importance to these pretended contingencies, mere disguises, according to him, assumed, so as to be perceptible by his patients, by the vice of one and the morbid state of the other, which in reality have never ceased to weigh heavily and incurably upon them while they were nursing their dreams of normality and health. And, as a matter of fact, Swann's love had reached that stage at which the physician and (in the case of certain affections) the boldest of surgeons ask themselves whether to deprive a patient of his vice or to rid him of his malady is still reasonable, or indeed possible.

Certainly, of the extent of this love Swann had no direct knowledge. When he sought to measure it, it happened sometimes that he found it diminished, shrunken almost to nothing; for instance, the very moderate liking, amounting almost to dislike, which, in the days before he was in love with Odette, he had felt for her expressive features, her faded complexion, returned on certain days. "Really, I am making distinct headway," he would tell himself on the morrow, "when I come to think it over carefully, I find out that I got hardly any pleasure, last night, out of being in bed with her; it's an odd thing, but I actually thought her ugly." And certainly he was sincere, but his love extended a long way beyond the province of physical desire. Odette's person, indeed, no longer held any great place in it. When his eyes fell upon the photograph of Odette on his table, or when she came to see him, he had difficulty in identifying her face, either in the flesh or on the pasteboard, with the painful and continuous anxiety which dwelt in his mind. He would say to himself, almost with astonishment, "It is she!" as when suddenly some one shews us in a detached, externalised form one of our own maladies, and we find in it no resemblance to what we are suffering. "She?" — he tried to ask himself what that meant; for it is something like love, like death (rather than like those vague conceptions of maladies), a thing which one repeatedly calls in question, in order to make oneself probe further into it, in the fear that the question will find no answer, that the substance will escape our grasp — the mystery of personality. And this malady, which was Swann's love, had so far multiplied, was so closely interwoven with all his habits, with all his actions, with his thoughts, his health, his sleep, his life, even with what he hoped for after his death, was so entirely one with him that it would have been impossible to wrest it away without almost entirely destroying him; as surgeons say, his case was past operation.

By this love Swann had been so far detached from all other interests that when by chance he reappeared in the world of fashion, reminding himself that his social relations, like a beautifully wrought setting (although she would not

have been able to form any very exact estimate of its worth), might, still, add a little to his own value in Odette's eyes (as indeed they might have done had they not been cheapened by his love itself, which for Odette depreciated everything that it touched by seeming to denounce such things as less precious than itself), he would feel there, simultaneously with his distress at being in places and among people that she did not know, the same detached sense of pleasure as he would have derived from a novel or a painting in which were depicted the amusements of a leisured class; just as, at home, he used to enjoy the thought of the smooth efficiency of his household, the smartness of his own wardrobe and of his servants' liveries, the soundness of his investments, with the same relish as when he read in Saint-Simon, who was one of his favourite authors, of the machinery of daily life at Versailles, what Mme. de Maintenon ate and drank, or the shrewd avarice and great pomp of Lulli. And in the small extent to which this detachment was not absolute, the reason for this new pleasure which Swann was tasting was that he could emigrate for a moment into those few and distant parts of himself which had remained almost foreign to his love and to his pain. In this respect the personality, with which my great-aunt endowed him, of 'young Swann,' as distinct from the more individual personality of Charles Swann, was that in which he now most delighted. Once when, because it was the birthday of the Princesse de Parme (and because she could often be of use, indirectly, to Odette, by letting her have seats for galas and jubilees and all that sort of thing), he had decided to send her a basket of fruit, and was not quite sure where or how to order it, he had entrusted the task to a cousin of his mother who, delighted to be doing a commission for him, had written to him, laying stress on the fact that she had not chosen all the fruit at the same place, but the grapes from Crapote, whose speciality they were, the straw berries from Jauret, the pears from Chevet, who always had the best, am soon, "every fruit visited and examined, one by one, by myself." And the sequel, by the cordiality with which the Princess thanked him, hi had been able to judge of the flavour of the strawberries and of the ripe ness of the pears. But, most of all, that "every fruit visited and examinee one by one, by myself" had brought balm to his sufferings by carrying hi mind off to a region which he rarely visited, although it was his by right, as the heir of a rich and respectable middle-class family in which had been handed down from generation to generation the knowledge of the 'right places' and the art of ordering things from shops.

Of a truth, he had too long forgotten that he was 'young Swann' not to feel, when he assumed that part again for a moment, a keener pleasure than he was

capable of feeling at other times — when, indeed, he was grown sick of pleasure; and if the friendliness of the middle-class people, for whom he had never been anything else than ‘young Swann,’ was less animated than that of the aristocrats (though more flattering, for all that, since in the middle-class mind friendship is inseparable from respect), no letter from a Royal Personage, offering him some princely entertainment, could ever be so attractive to Swann as the letter which asked him to be a witness, or merely to be present at a wedding in the family of some old friends of his parents; some of whom had ‘kept up’ with him, like my grandfather, who, the year before these events, had invited him to my mother’s wedding, while others barely knew him by sight, but were, they thought, in duty bound to shew civility to the son, to the worthy successor of the late M. Swann.

But, by virtue of his intimacy, already time-honoured, with so many of them, the people of fashion, in a certain sense, were also a part of his house, his service, and his family. He felt, when his mind dwelt upon his brilliant connections, the same external support, the same solid comfort as when he looked at the fine estate, the fine silver, the fine table-linen which had come down to him from his forebears. And the thought that, if he were seized by a sudden illness and confined to the house, the people whom his valet would instinctively run to find would be the Duc de Chartres, the Prince de Reuss, the Duc de Luxembourg and the Baron de Charlus, brought him the same consolation as our old Françoise derived from the knowledge that she would, one day, be buried in her own fine clothes, marked with her name, not darned at all (or so exquisitely darned that it merely enhanced one’s idea of the skill and patience of the seamstress), a shroud from the constant image of which in her mind’s eye she drew a certain satisfactory sense, if not actually of wealth and prosperity, at any rate of self-esteem. But most of all, — since in every one of his actions and thoughts which had reference to Odette, Swann was constantly subdued and swayed by the unconfessed feeling that he was, perhaps not less dear, but at least less welcome to her than anyone, even the most wearisome of the Verdurins’ ‘faithful,’ — when he betook himself to a world in which he was the paramount example of taste, a man whom no pains were spared to attract, whom people were genuinely sorry not to see, he began once again to believe in the existence of a happier life, almost to feel an appetite for it, as an invalid may feel who has been in bed for months and on a strict diet, when he picks up a newspaper and reads the account of an official banquet or the advertisement of a cruise round Sicily.

If he was obliged to make excuses to his fashionable friends for not paying them visits, it was precisely for the visits that he did pay her that he sought to excuse himself to Odette. He still paid them (asking himself at the end of each month whether, seeing that he had perhaps exhausted her patience, and had certainly gone rather often to see her, it would be enough if he sent her four thousand francs), and for each visit he found a pretext, a present that he had to bring her, some information which she required, M. de Charlus, whom he had met actually going to her house, and who had insisted upon Swann's accompanying him. And, failing any excuse, he would beg M. de Charlus to go to her at once, and to tell her, as though spontaneously, in the course of conversation, that he had just remembered something that he had to say to Swann, and would she please send a message to Swann's house asking him to come to her then and there; but as a rule Swann waited at home in vain, and M. de Charlus informed him, later in the evening, that his device had not proved successful. With the result that, if she was now frequently away from Paris, even when she was there he scarcely saw her; that she who, when she was in love with him, used to say, "I am always free" and "What can it matter to me, what other people think?" now, whenever he wanted to see her, appealed to the proprieties or pleaded some engagement. When he spoke of going to a charity entertainment, or a private view, or a first-night at which she was to be present, she would expostulate that he wished to advertise their relations in public, that he was treating her like a woman off the streets. Things came to such a pitch that, in an effort to save himself from being altogether forbidden to meet her anywhere, Swann, remembering that she knew and was deeply attached to my great-uncle Adolphe, whose friend he himself also had been, went one day to see him in his little flat in the Rue de Bellechasse, to ask him to use his influence with Odette. As it happened, she invariably adopted, when she spoke to Swann about my uncle, a poetical tone, saying: "Ah, he! He is not in the least like you; it is an exquisite thing, a great, a beautiful thing, his friendship for me. He's not the sort of man who would have so little consideration for me as to let himself be seen with me everywhere in public." This was embarrassing for Swann, who did not know quite to what rhetorical pitch he should screw himself up in speaking of Odette to my uncle. He began by alluding to her excellence, *a priori*, the axiom of her seraphic super-humanity, the revelation of her inexpressible virtues, no conception of which could possibly be formed. "I should like to speak to you about her," he went on, "you, who know what a woman supreme above all women, what an adorable being, what an angel Odette is. But you know, also,

what life is in Paris. Everyone doesn't see Odette in the light in which you and I have been Privileged to see her. And so there are people who think that I am behaving rather foolishly; she won't even allow me to meet her out of doors, at the theatre. Now you, in whom she has such enormous confidence, couldn't you say a few words for me to her, just to assure her that she exaggerate the harm which my bowing to her in the street might do her?"

My uncle advised Swann not to see Odette for some days, after which she would love him all the more; he advised Odette to let Swann meet he; everywhere, and as often as he pleased. A few days later Odette told Swann that she had just had a rude awakening; she had discovered that my uncle was the same as other men; he had tried to take her by assault. She calmed Swann, who, at first, was for rushing out to challenge my uncle to a duel, but he refused to shake hands with him when they met again. He regretted this rupture all the more because he had hoped, if he had met my uncle Adolphe again sometimes and had contrived to talk things over with him in strict confidence, to be able to get him to throw a light on certain rumours with regard to the life that Odette had led, in the old days, at Nice. For my uncle Adolphe used to spend the winter there, and Swann thought that it might indeed have been there, perhaps, that he had first known Odette. The few words which some one had let fall, in his hearing, about a man who, it appeared, had been Odette's lover, had left Swann dumbfounded. But the very things which he would, before knowing them, have regarded as the most terrible to learn and the most impossible to believe, were, once he knew them, incorporated for all time in the general mass of his sorrow; he admitted them, he could no longer have understood their not existing. Only, each one of them in its passage traced an indelible line, altering the picture that he had formed of his mistress. At one time indeed he felt that he could understand that this moral 'lightness,' of which he would never have suspected Odette, was perfectly well known, and that at Baden or Nice, when she had gone, in the past, to spend several months in one or the other place, she had enjoyed a sort of amorous notoriety. He attempted, in order to question them, to get into touch again with certain men of that stamp; but these were aware that he knew Odette, and, besides, he was afraid of putting the thought of her into their heads, of setting them once more upon her track. But he, to whom, up till then, nothing could have seemed so tedious as was all that pertained to the cosmopolitan life of Baden or of Nice, now that he learned that Odette had, perhaps, led a 'gay' life once in those pleasure-cities, although he could never find out whether it had been solely to satisfy a want of money which, thanks to

himself, she no longer felt, or from some capricious instinct which might, at any moment, revive in her, he would lean, in impotent anguish, blinded and dizzy, over the bottomless abyss into which had passed, in which had been engulfed those years of his own, early in MacMahon's*Septennat*, in which one spent the winter on the Promenade des Anglais, the summer beneath the limes of Baden, and would find in those years a sad but splendid profundity, such as a poet might have lent to them; and he would have devoted to the reconstruction of all the insignificant details that made up the daily round on the Côte d'Azur in those days, if it could have helped him to understand something that still baffled him in the smile or in the eyes of Odette, more enthusiasm than does the aesthete who ransacks the extant documents of fifteenth-century Florence, so as to try to penetrate further into the soul of the Primavera, the fair Vanna or the Venus of Botticelli. He would sit, often, without saying a word to her, only gazing at her and dreaming; and she would comment: "You do look sad!" It was not very long since, from the idea that she was an excellent creature, comparable to the best women that he had known, he had passed to that of her being 'kept'; and yet already, by an inverse process, he had returned from the Odette de Crécy, perhaps too well known to the holiday-makers, to the 'ladies' men' of Nice and Baden, to this face, the expression on which was so often gentle, to this nature so eminently human. He would ask himself: "What does it mean, after all, to say that everyone at Nice knows who Odette de Crécy is? Reputations of that sort, even when they're true, are always based upon other people's ideas"; he would reflect that this legend — even if it were authentic — was something external to Odette, was not inherent in her like a mischievous and ineradicable personality; that the creature who might have been led astray was a woman with frank eyes, a heart full of pity for the sufferings of others, a docile body which he had pressed tightly in his arms and explored with his fingers, a woman of whom he might one day come into absolute possession if he succeeded in making himself indispensable to her. There she was, often tired, her face left blank for the nonce by that eager, feverish preoccupation with the unknown things which made Swann suffer; she would push back her hair with both hands; her forehead, her whole face would seem to grow larger; then, suddenly, some ordinary human thought, some worthy sentiment such as is to be found in all creatures when, in a moment of rest or meditation, they are free to express themselves, would flash out from her eyes like a ray of gold. And immediately the whole of her face would light up like a grey landscape, swathed in clouds which, suddenly, are swept away and the dull scene transfigured, at the moment of the sun's setting.

The life which occupied Odette at such times, even the future which she seemed to be dreamily regarding, Swann could have shared with her. No evil disturbance seemed to have left any effect on them. Rare as they became, those moments did not occur in vain. By the process of memory, Swann joined the fragments together, abolished the intervals between them, cast, as in molten gold, the image of an Odette compact of kindness and tranquillity, for whom he was to make, later on (as we shall see in the second part of this story) sacrifices which the other Odette would never have won from him. But how rare those moments were, and how seldom he now saw her! Even in regard to their evening meetings, she would never tell him until the last minute whether she would be able to see him, for, reckoning on his being always free, she wished first to be certain that no one else would offer to come to her. She would plead that she was obliged to wait for an answer which was of the very greatest importance, and if, even after she had made Swann come to her house, any of her friends asked her, half-way through the evening, to join them at some theatre, or at supper afterwards, she would jump for joy and dress herself with all speed. As her toilet progressed, every movement that she made brought Swann nearer to the moment when he would have to part from her, when she would fly off with irresistible force; and when at length she was ready, and, Plunging into her mirror a last glance strained and brightened by her anxiety to look well, smeared a little salve on her lips, fixed a stray loci of hair over her brow, and called for her cloak of sky-blue silk with golde; tassels, Swann would be looking so wretched that she would be unable to restrain a gesture of impatience as she flung at him: “So that is how yo thank me for keeping you here till the last minute! And I thought I was being so nice to you. Well, I shall know better another time!” Sometime... at the risk of annoying her, he made up his mind that he would find out where she had gone, and even dreamed of a defensive alliance with Forcheville, who might perhaps have been able to tell him. But anyhow, when he knew with whom she was spending the evening, it was very seldom that he could not discover, among all his innumerable acquaintance, some one who knew — if only indirectly — the man with whom she had gone out, and could easily obtain this or that piece of information about him. And while he was writing to one of his friends, asking him to try to get a little light thrown upon some point or other, he would feel a sense of relief on ceasing to vex himself with questions to which there was no answer and transferring to some one else the strain of interrogation. It is true that Swann was little the wiser for such information as he did receive. To know a thing does not enable us, always, to prevent its happening, but after all the things

that we know we do hold, if not in our hands, at any rate in our minds, where we can dispose of them as we choose, which gives us the illusion of a sort of power to control them. He was quite happy whenever M. de Charlus was with Odette. He knew that between M. de Charlus and her nothing untoward could ever happen, that when M. de Charlus went anywhere with her, it was out of friendship for himself, and that he would make no difficulty about telling him everything that she had done. Sometimes she had declared so emphatically to Swann that it was impossible for him to see her on a particular evening, she seemed to be looking forward so keenly to some outing, that Swann attached a very real importance to the fact that M. de Charlus was free to accompany her. Next day, without daring to put many questions to M. de Charlus, he would force him, by appearing not quite to understand his first answers, to give him more, after each of which he would feel himself increasingly relieved, for he very soon learned that Odette had spent her evening in the most innocent of dissipations.

"But what do you mean, my dear Mémé, I don't quite understand.... You didn't go straight from her house to the Musée Grévin? Surely you went somewhere else first? No? That is very odd! You don't know how amusing you are, my dear Mémé. But what an odd idea of hers to go on to the Chat Noir afterwards; it was her idea, I suppose? No? Yours? That's strange. After all, it wasn't a bad idea; she must have known dozens of people there? No? She never spoke to a soul? How extraordinary! Then you sat there like that, just you and she, all by yourselves? I can picture you, sitting there! You are a worthy fellow, my dear Mémé; I'm exceedingly fond of you."

Swann was now quite at ease. To him, who had so often happened, when talking to friends who knew nothing of his love, friends to whom he hardly listened, to hear certain detached sentences (as, for instance, "I saw Mme. de Crécy yesterday; she was with a man I didn't know."), sentences which dropped into his heart and passed at once into a solid state, grew hard as stalagmites, and seared and tore him as they lay there irremovable, — how charming, by way of contrast, were the words: "She didn't know a soul; she never spoke to a soul." How freely they coursed through him, how fluid they were, how vaporous, how easy to breathe! And yet, a moment later, he was telling himself that Odette must find him very dull if those were the pleasures that she preferred to his company. And their very insignificance, though it reassured him, pained him as if her enjoyment of them had been an act of treachery.

Even when he could not discover where she had gone, it would have sufficed to alleviate the anguish that he then felt, for which Odette's presence,

the charm of her company, was the sole specific (a specific which in the long run served, like many other remedies, to aggravate the disease, but at least brought temporary relief to his sufferings), it would have sufficed, had Odette only permitted him to remain in her house while she was out, to wait there until that hour of her return, into whose stillness and peace would flow, to be mingled and lost there, all memory of those intervening hours which some sorcery, some cursed spell had made him imagine as, somehow, different from the rest. But she would not; he must return home; he forced himself, on the way, to form various plans, ceased to think of Odette; he even reached the stage, while he undressed, of turning over all sorts of happy ideas in his mind: it was with a light heart, buoyed with the anticipation of going to see some favourite work of art on the morrow, that he jumped into bed and turned out the light; but no sooner had he made himself ready to sleep, relaxing a self-control of which he was not even conscious, so habitual had it become, than an icy shudder convulsed his body and he burst into sobs. He did not wish to know why, but dried his eyes, saying with a smile: “This is delightful; I’m becoming neurasthenic.” After which he could not save himself from utter exhaustion at the thought that, next day, he must begin afresh his attempt to find out what Odette had been doing, must use all his influence to contrive to see her. This compulsion to an activity without respite, without variety, without result, was so cruel a scourge that one day, noticing a swelling over his stomach, he felt an actual joy in the idea that he had, perhaps, a tumour which would prove fatal, that he need not concern himself with anything further, that it was his malady which was going to govern his life, to make a plaything of him, until the not-distant end. If indeed, at this period, it often happened that, though without admitting it even to himself, he longed for death, it was in order to escape not so much from the keenness of his sufferings as from the monotony of his struggle.

And yet he would have wished to live until the time came when he no longer loved her, when she would have no reason for lying to him, when at length he might learn from her whether, on the day when he had gone to see her in the afternoon, she had or had not been in the arms of Forcheville. Often for several days on end the suspicion that she was in love with some one else would distract his mind from the question of Forcheville, making it almost immaterial to him, like those new developments of a continuous state of ill-health which seem for a little time to have delivered us from their predecessors. There were even days when he was not tormented by any suspicion. He fancied that he was cured. But next morning, when he awoke, he felt in the same place the same pain, a

sensation which, the day before, he had, as it were, diluted in the torrent of different impressions. But it had not stirred from its place. Indeed, it was the sharpness of this pain that had awakened him.

Since Odette never gave him any information as to those vastly important matters which took up so much of her time every day (albeit he had lived long enough in the world to know that such matters are never anything else than pleasures) he could not sustain for any length of time the effort to imagine them; his brain would become a void; then he would pass a finger over his tired eyelids, in the same way as he might have wiped his eyeglass, and would cease altogether to think. There emerged, however, from this unexplored tract, certain occupations which reappeared from time to time, vaguely connected by Odette with some obligation towards distant relatives or old friends who, inasmuch as they were the only people whom she was in the habit of mentioning as preventing her from seeing him, seemed to Swann to compose the necessary, unalterable setting of her life. Because of the tone in which she referred, from time to time, to "the day when I go with my friend to the Hippodrome," if, when he felt unwell and had thought, "Perhaps Odette would be kind and come to see me," he remembered, suddenly, that it was one of those very days, he would correct himself with an "Oh, no! It's not worth while asking her to come; I should have thought of it before, this is the day when she goes with her friend to the Hippodrome. We must confine ourselves to what is possible; no use wasting our time in proposing things that can't be accepted and are declined in advance." And this duty that was incumbent upon Odette, of going to the Hippodrome, to which Swann thus gave way, seemed to him to be not merely ineluctable in itself; but the mark of necessity which stamped it seemed to make plausible and legitimate everything that was even remotely connected with it. If, when Odette, in the street, had acknowledged the salute of a passer-by, which had aroused Swann's jealousy, she replied to his questions by associating the stranger with any of the two or three paramount duties of which she had often spoken to him; if, for instance, she said: "That's a gentleman who was in my friend's box the other day; the one I go to the Hippodrome with," that explanation would set Swann's suspicions at rest; it was, after all, inevitable that this friend should have other guests than Odette in her box at the Hippodrome, but he had never sought to form or succeeded in forming any coherent impression of them. Oh! how he would have loved to know her, that friend who went to the Hippodrome, how he would have loved her to invite him there with Odette. How readily he would have sacrified all his acquaintance for no matter what person who was in

the habit of seeing Odette, were she but a manicurist or a girl out of a shop. He would have taken more trouble, incurred more expense for them than for queens. Would they not have supplied him, out of what was contained in their knowledge of the life of Odette, with the one potent anodyne for his pain? With what joy would he have hastened to spend his days with one or other of those humble folk with whom Odette kept up friendly relations, either with some ulterior motive or from genuine simplicity of nature. How willingly would he have fixed his abode for ever in the attics of some sordid but enviable house, where Odette went but never took him, and where, if he had lived with the little retired dressmaker, whose lover he would readily have pretended to be, he would have been visited by. Odette almost daily. In those regions, that were almost slums, what a modest existence, abject, if you please, but delightful, nourished by tranquillity and happiness, he would have consented to lead indefinitely.

It sometimes happened, again, that, when, after meeting Swann, she saw some man approaching whom he did not know, he could distinguish upon Odette's face that look of sorrow which she had worn on the day when he had come to her while Forcheville was there. But this was rare; for, on the days when, in spite of all that she had to do, and of her dread of what people would think, she did actually manage to see Swann, the predominant quality in her attitude, now, was self-assurance; a striking contrast, perhaps an unconscious revenge for, perhaps a natural reaction from the timorous emotion which, in the early days of their friendship, she had felt in his presence, and even in his absence, when she began a letter to him with the words: "My dear, my hand trembles so that I can scarcely write." (So, at least, she pretended, and a little of that emotion must have been sincere, or she would not have been anxious to enlarge and emphasise it.) So Swann had been pleasing to her then. Our hands do not tremble except for ourselves, or for those whom we love. When they have ceased to control our happiness how peaceful, how easy, how bold do we become in their presence! In speaking to him, in writing to him now, she no longer employed those words by which she had sought to give herself the illusion that he belonged to her, creating opportunities for saying "my" and "mine" when she referred to him: "You are all that I have in the world; it is the perfume of our friendship, I shall keep it," nor spoke to him of the future, of death itself, as of a single adventure which they would have to share. In those early days, whatever he might say to her, she would answer admiringly: "You know, you will never be like other people!" — she would gaze at his long, slightly bald head, of which people who know only of his successes used to

think: “He’s not regularly good-looking, if you like, but he is smart; that tuft, that eyeglass, that smile!” and, with more curiosity perhaps to know him as he really was than desire to become his mistress, she would sigh:

“I do wish I could find out what there is in that head of yours!”

But, now, whatever he might say, she would answer, in a tone sometimes of irritation, sometimes indulgent: “Ah! so you never will be like other people!”

She would gaze at his head, which was hardly aged at all by his recent anxieties (though people now thought of it, by the same mental process which enables one to discover the meaning of a piece of symphonic music of which one has read the programme, or the ‘likenesses’ in a child whose family one has known: “He’s not positively ugly, if you like, but he is really rather absurd; that eyeglass, that tuft, that smile!” realising in their imagination, fed by suggestion, the invisible boundary which divides, at a few months’ interval, the head of an ardent lover from a cuckold’s), and would say:

“Oh, I do wish I could change you; put some sense into that head of yours.”

Always ready to believe in the truth of what he hoped, if it was only Odette’s way of behaving to him that left room for doubt, he would fling himself greedily upon her words: “You can if you like,” he would tell her.

And he tried to explain to her that to comfort him, to control him, to make him work would be a noble task, to which numbers of other women asked for nothing better than to be allowed to devote themselves, though it is only fair to add that in those other women’s hands the noble task would have seemed to Swann nothing more than an indiscreet and intolerable usurpation of his freedom of action. “If she didn’t love me, just a little,” he told himself, “she would not wish to have me altered. To alter me, she will have to see me more often.” And so he was able to trace, in these faults which she found in him, a proof at least of her interest, perhaps even of her love; and, in fact, she gave him so little, now, of the last, that he was obliged to regard as proofs of her interest in him the various things which, every now and then, she forbade him to do. One day she announced that she did not care for his coachman, who, she thought, was perhaps setting Swann against her, and, anyhow, did not shew that promptness and deference to Swann’s orders which she would have liked to see. She felt that he wanted to hear her say: “Don’t have him again when you come to me,” just as he might have wanted her to kiss him. So, being in a good temper, she said it; and he was deeply moved. That evening, when talking to M. de Charlus, with whom he had the satisfaction of being able to speak of her openly (for the most trivial remarks that he uttered now, even to people who had never heard of her,

had always some sort of reference to Odette), he said to him:

"I believe, all the same, that she loves me; she is so nice to me now, and she certainly takes an interest in what I do."

And if, when he was starting off for her house, getting into his carriage with a friend whom he was to drop somewhere on the way, his friend said: "Hullo! that isn't Loredan on the box?" with what melancholy joy would Swann answer him:

"Oh! Good heavens, no! I can tell you, I daren't take Loredan when I go to the Rue La Pérouse; Odette doesn't like me to have Loredan, she thinks he doesn't suit me. What on earth is one to do? Women, you know, women. My dear fellow, she would be furious. Oh, lord, yes; I've only to take Rémi there; I should never hear the last of it!"

These new manners, indifferent, listless, irritable, which Odette now adopted with Swann, undoubtedly made him suffer; but he did not realise how much he suffered; since it had been with a regular progression, day after day, that Odette had chilled towards him, it was only by directly contrasting what she was to-day with what she had been at first that he could have measured the extent of the change that had taken place. Now this change was his deep, his secret wound, which pained him day and night, and whenever he felt that his thoughts were straying too near it, he would quickly turn them into another channel for fear of being made to suffer too keenly. He might say to himself in a vague way: "There was a time when Odette loved me more," but he never formed any definite picture of that time. Just as he had in his study a cupboard at which he contrived never to look, which he turned aside to avoid passing whenever he entered or left the room, because in one of its drawers he had locked away the chrysanthemum which she had given him on one of those first evenings when he had taken her home in his carriage, and the letters in which she said: "Why did you not forget your heart also? I should never have let you have that back," and "At whatever hour of the day or night you may need me, just send me a word, and dispose of me as you please," so there was a place in his heart to which he would never allow his thoughts to trespass too near, forcing them, if need be, to evade it by a long course of reasoning so that they should not have to pass within reach of it; the place in which lingered his memories of happy days.

But his so meticulous prudence was defeated one evening when he had gone out to a party.

It was at the Marquise de Saint-Euverte's, on the last, for that season, of the

evenings on which she invited people to listen to the musicians who would serve, later on, for her charity concerts. Swann, who had intended to go to each of the previous evenings in turn, but had never been able to make up his mind, received, while he was dressing for this party, a visit from the Baron de Charlus, who came with an offer to go with him to the Marquise's, if his company could be of any use in helping Swann not to feel quite so bored when he got there, to be a little less unhappy. But Swann had thanked him with:

"You can't conceive how glad I should be of your company. But the greatest pleasure that you can give me will be if you will go instead to see Odette. You know what a splendid influence you have over her. I don't suppose she'll be going anywhere this evening, unless she goes to see her old dressmaker, and I'm sure she would be delighted if you went with her there. In any case, you'll find her at home before then. Try to keep her amused, and also to give her a little sound advice. If you could arrange something for to-morrow which would please her, something that we could all three do together. Try to put out a feeler, too, for the summer; see if there's anything she wants to do, a cruise that we might all three take; anything you can think of. I don't count upon seeing her to-night, myself; still if she would like me to come, or if you find a loophole, you've only to send me a line at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's up till midnight; after that I shall be here. Ever so many thanks for all you are doing for me — you know what I feel about you!"

His friend promised to go and do as Swann wished as soon as he had deposited him at the door of the Saint-Euverte house, where he arrived soothed by the thought that M. de Charlus would be spending the evening in the Rue La Pérouse, but in a state of melancholy indifference to everything that did not involve Odette, and in particular to the details of fashionable life, a state which invested them with the charm that is to be found in anything which, being no longer an object of our desire, appears to us in its own guise. On alighting from his carriage, in the foreground of that fictitious summary of their domestic existence which hostesses are pleased to offer to their guests on ceremonial occasions, and in which they shew a great regard for accuracy of costume and setting, Swann was amused to discover the heirs and successors of Balzac's 'tigers' — now 'grooms' — . who normally followed their mistress when she walked abroad, but now, hatted and booted, were posted out of doors, in front of the house on the gravelled drive, or outside the stables, as gardeners might be drawn up for inspection at the ends of their several flower-beds. The peculiar tendency which he had always had to look for analogies between living people

and the portraits in galleries reasserted itself here, but in a more positive and more general form; it was society as a whole, now that he was detached from it, which presented itself to him in a series of pictures. In the cloak-room, into which, in the old days, when he was still a man of fashion, he would have gone in his overcoat, to emerge from it in evening dress, but without any impression of what had occurred there, his mind having been, during the minute or two that he had spent in it, either still at the party which he had just left, or already at the party into which he was just about to be ushered, he now noticed, for the first time, roused by the unexpected arrival of so belated a guest, the scattered pack of splendid effortless animals, the enormous footmen who were drowsing here and there upon benches and chests, until, pointing their noble greyhound profiles, they towered upon their feet and gathered in a circle round about him.

One of them, of a particularly ferocious aspect, and not unlike the headsman in certain Renaissance pictures which represent executions, tortures, and the like, advanced upon him with an implacable air to take his ‘things.’ But the harshness of his steely glare was compensated by the softness of his cotton gloves, so effectively that, as he approached Swann, he seemed to be exhibiting at once an utter contempt for his person and the most tender regard for his hat. He took it with a care to which the precision of his movements imparted something that was almost over-fastidious, and with a delicacy that was rendered almost touching by the evidence of his splendid strength. Then he passed it to one of his satellites, a novice and timid, who was expressing the panic that overpowered him by casting furious glances in every direction, and displayed all the dumb agitation of a wild animal in the first hours of its captivity.

A few feet away, a strapping great lad in livery stood musing, motionless, statuesque, useless, like that purely decorative warrior whom one sees in the most tumultuous of Mantegna’s paintings, lost in dreams, leaning upon his shield, while all around him are fighting and bloodshed and death; detached from the group of his companions who were thronging about Swann, he seemed as determined to remain unconcerned in the scene, which he followed vaguely with his cruel, greenish eyes, as if it had been the Massacre of the Innocents or the Martyrdom of Saint James. He seemed precisely to have sprung from that vanished race — if, indeed, it ever existed, save in the reredos of San Zeno and the frescoes of the Eremitani, where Swann had come in contact with it, and where it still dreams — fruit of the impregnation of a classical statue by some one of the Master’s Paduan models, or of Albert Duerer’s Saxons. And the locks of his reddish hair, crinkled by nature, but glued to his head by brilliantine, were

treated broadly as they are in that Greek sculpture which the Man-tuan painter never ceased to study, and which, if in its creator's purpose it represents but man, manages at least to extract from man's simple outlines such a variety of richness, borrowed, as it were, from the whole of animated nature, that a head of hair, by the glossy undulation and beak-like points of its curls, or in the overlaying of the florid triple diadem of its brushed tresses, can suggest at once a bunch of seaweed, a brood of fledgling doves, a bed of hyacinths and a serpent's writhing back. Others again, no less colossal, were disposed upon the steps of a monumental staircase which, by their decorative presence and marmorean immobility, was made worthy to be named, like that god-crowned ascent in the Palace of the Doges, the 'Staircase of the Giants,' and on which Swann now set foot, saddened by the thought that Odette had never climbed it. Ah, with what joy would he, on the other hand, have raced up the dark, evil-smelling, breakneck flights to the little dressmaker's, in whose attic he would so gladly have paid the price of a weekly stage-box at the Opera for the right to spend the evening there when Odette came, and other days too, for the privilege of talking about her, of living among people whom she was in the habit of seeing when he was not there, and who, on that account, seemed to keep secret among themselves some part of the life of his mistress more real, more inaccessible and more mysterious than anything that he knew. Whereas upon that pestilential, enviable staircase to the old dressmaker's, since there was no other, no service stair in the building, one saw in the evening outside every door an empty, unwashed milk-can set out, in readiness for the morning round, upon the door-mat; on the despicable, enormous staircase which Swann was at that moment climbing, on either side of him, at different levels, before each anfractuosity made in its walls by the window of the porter's lodge or the entrance to a set of rooms, representing the departments of indoor service which they controlled, and doing homage for them to the guests, a gate-keeper, a major-domo, a steward (worthy men who spent the rest of the week in semi-independence in their own domains, dined there by themselves like small shopkeepers, and might to-morrow lapse to the plebeian service of some successful doctor or industrial magnate), scrupulous in carrying out to the letter all the instructions that had been heaped upon them before they were allowed to don the brilliant livery which they wore only at long intervals, and in which they did not feel altogether at their ease, stood each in the arcade of his doorway, their splendid pomp tempered by a democratic good-fellowship, like saints in their niches, and a gigantic usher, dressed Swiss Guard fashion, like the beadle in a church, struck

the pavement with his staff as each fresh arrival passed him. Coming to the top of the staircase, up which he had been followed by a servant with a pallid countenance and a small pigtail clubbed at the back of his head, like one of Goya's sacristans or a tabellion in an old play, Swann passed by an office in which the lackeys, seated like notaries before their massive registers, rose solemnly to their feet and inscribed his name. He next crossed a little hall which — just as certain rooms are arranged by their owners to serve as the setting for a single work of art (from which they take their name), and, in their studied bareness, contain nothing else besides — displayed to him as he entered it, like some priceless effigy by Ben-venuto Cellini of an armed watchman, a young footman, his body slightly bent forward, rearing above his crimson gorget an even more crimson face, from which seemed to burst forth torrents of fire, timidity and zeal, who, as he pierced the Aubusson tapestries that screened the door of the room in which the music was being given with his impetuous, vigilant, desperate gaze, appeared, with a soldierly impassibility or a supernatural faith — an allegory of alarums, incarnation of alertness, commemoration of a riot — to be looking out, angel or sentinel, from the tower of dungeon or cathedral, for the approach of the enemy or for the hour of Judgment. Swann had now only to enter the concert-room, the doors of which were thrown open to him by an usher loaded with chains, who bowed low before him as though tendering to him the keys of a conquered city. But he thought of the house in which at that very moment he might have been, if Odette had but permitted, and the remembered glimpse of an empty milk-can upon a door-mat wrung his heart.

He speedily recovered his sense of the general ugliness of the human male when, on the other side of the tapestry curtain, the spectacle of the servants gave place to that of the guests. But even this ugliness of faces, which of course were mostly familiar to him, seemed something new and uncanny, now that their features, — instead of being to him symbols of practical utility in the identification of this or that man, who until then had represented merely so many pleasures to be sought after, boredoms to be avoided, or courtesies to be acknowledged — were at rest, measurable by aesthetic co-ordinates alone, in the autonomy of their curves and angles. And in these men, in the thick of whom Swann now found himself packed, there was nothing (even to the monocle which many of them wore, and which, previously, would, at the most, have enabled Swann to say that so-and-so wore a monocle) which, no longer restricted to the general connotation of a habit, the same in all of them, did not

now strike him with a sense of individuality in each. Perhaps because he did not regard General de Froberville and the Marquis de Bréaute, who were talking together just inside the door, as anything more than two figures in a picture, whereas they were the old and useful friends who had put him up for the Jockey Club and had supported him in duels, the General's monocle, stuck like a shell-splinter in his common, scarred, victorious, overbearing face, in the middle of a forehead which it left half-blinded, like the single-eyed flashing front of the Cyclops, appeared to Swann as a monstrous wound which it might have been glorious to receive but which it was certainly not decent to expose, while that which M. de Bréaute wore, as a festive badge, with his pearl-grey gloves, his crush hat and white tie, substituting it for the familiar pair of glasses (as Swann himself did) when he went out to places, bore, glued to its other side, like a specimen prepared on a slide for the microscope, an infinitesimal gaze that swarmed with friendly feeling and never ceased to twinkle at the loftiness of ceilings, the delightfulness of parties, the interestingness of programmes and the excellence of refreshments.

"Hallo! you here! why, it's ages since I've seen you," the General greeted Swann and, noticing the look of strain on his face and concluding that it was perhaps a serious illness that had kept him away, went on, "You're looking well, old man!" while M. de Bréauté turned with, "My dear fellow, what on earth are you doing here?" to a 'society novelist' who had just fitted into the angle of eyebrow and cheek his own monocle, the sole instrument that he used in his psychological investigations and remorseless analyses of character, and who now replied, with an air of mystery and importance, rolling the 'r':— "I am observing!"

The Marquis de Forestelle's monocle was minute and rimless, and, by enforcing an incessant and painful contraction of the eye over which it was incrusted like a superfluous cartilage, the presence of which there was inexplicable and its substance unimaginable, it gave to his face a melancholy refinement, and led women to suppose him capable of suffering terribly when in love. But that of M. de Saint-Candé, girdled, like Saturn, with an enormous ring, was the centre of gravity of a face which composed itself afresh every moment in relation to the glass, while his thrusting red nose and swollen sarcastic lips endeavoured by their grimaces to rise to the level of the steady flame of wit that sparkled in the polished disk, and saw itself preferred to the most ravishing eyes in the world by the smart, depraved young women whom it set dreaming of artificial charms and a refinement of sensual bliss; and then, behind him, M. de

Palancy, who with his huge carp's head and goggling eyes moved slowly up and down the stream of festive gatherings, unlocking his great mandibles at every moment as though in search of his orientation, had the air of carrying about upon his person only an accidental and perhaps purely symbolical fragment of the glass wall of his aquarium, a part intended to suggest the whole which recalled to Swann, a fervent admirer of Giotto's Vices and Virtues at Padua, that Injustice by whose side a leafy bough evokes the idea of the forests that enshroud his secret lair.

Swann had gone forward into the room, under pressure from Mme. de Saint-Euverte and in order to listen to an aria from *Orfeo* which was being rendered on the flute, and had taken up a position in a corner from which, unfortunately, his horizon was bounded by two ladies of ‘uncertain’ age, seated side by side, the Marquise de Cambremer and the Vicomtesse de Franquetot, who, because they were cousins, used to spend their time at parties in wandering through the rooms, each clutching her bag and followed by her daughter, hunting for one another like people at a railway station, and could never be at rest until they had reserved, by marking them with their fans or handkerchiefs, two adjacent chairs; Mme. de Cambremer, since she knew scarcely anyone, being all the more glad of a companion, while Mme. de Franquetot, who, on the contrary, was extremely popular, thought it effective and original to shew all her fine friends that she preferred to their company that of an obscure country cousin with whom she had childish memories in common. Filled with ironical melancholy, Swann watched them as they listened to the pianoforte inter, mezzo (Liszt’s ‘Saint Francis preaching to the birds’) which came after the flute, and followed the virtuoso in his dizzy flight; Mme. de Franquetot anxiously, her eyes starting from her head, as though the keys over which his fingers skipped with such agility were a series of trapezes, from any one of which he might come crashing, a hundred feet, to the ground, stealing now and then a glance of astonishment and unbelief at her companion, as who should say: “It isn’t possible, I would never have believed that a human being could do all that!”; Mme. de Cambremer, as a woman who had received a sound musical education, beating time with her head — transformed for the nonce into the pendulum of a metronome, the sweep and rapidity of whose movements from one shoulder to the other (performed with that look of wild abandonment in her eye which a sufferer shews who is no longer able to analyse his pain, nor anxious to master it, and says merely “I can’t help it”) so increased that at every moment her diamond earrings caught in the trimming of her bodice, and she was obliged to put straight the bunch of black grapes which she had in her hair, though without any interruption of her constantly accelerated motion. On the other side (and a little way in front) of Mme. de Fran-quetot, was the Marquise de Gallardon, absorbed in her favourite meditation, namely upon her own kinship with the Guermantes family, from which she derived both publicly and in private a good deal of glory no unmingled with shame, the most brilliant ornaments of that house remaining somewhat aloof from her, perhaps because she was just a tiresome old woman,

or because she was a scandalous old woman, or because she came of an inferior branch of the family, or very possibly for no reason at all. When she found herself seated next to some one whom she did not know, as she was at this moment next to Mme. de Franquetot, she suffered acutely from the feeling that her own consciousness of her Guermantes connection could not be made externally manifest in visible characterer like those which, in the mosaics in Byzantine churches, placed one beneath another, inscribe in a vertical column by the side of some Sacred Personage the words which he is supposed to be uttering. At this moment she was pondering the fact that she had never received an invitation, or even call, from her young cousin the Princesse des Laumes, during the six years that had already elapsed since the latter's marriage. The thought filled her with anger — and with pride; for, by virtue of having told everyone who expressed surprise at never seeing her at Mme. des Laumes's, that it was because of the risk of meeting the Princesse Mathilde there — a degradation which her own family, the truest and bluest of Legitimists, would never have forgiven her, she had come gradually to believe that this actually was the reason for her not visiting her young cousin. She remembered, it is true, that she had several times inquired of Mme. des Laumes how they might contrive to meet, but she remembered it only in a confused way, and besides did more than neutralise this slightly humiliating reminiscence by murmuring, "After all, it isn't for me to take the first step; I am at least twenty years older than she is." And fortified by these unspoken words she flung her shoulders proudly back until they seemed to part company with her bust, while her head, which lay almost horizontally upon them, made one think of the 'stuck-on' head of a pheasant which is brought to the table regally adorned with its feathers. Not that she in the least degree resembled a pheasant, having been endowed by nature with a short and squat and masculine figure; but successive mortifications had given her a backward tilt, such as one may observe in trees which have taken root on the very edge of a precipice and are forced to grow backwards to preserve their balance. Since she was obliged, in order to console herself for not being quite on a level with the rest of the Guermantes, to repeat to herself incessantly that it was owing to the uncompromising rigidity of her principles and pride that she saw so little of them, the constant iteration had gradually remoulded her body, and had given her a sort of 'bearing' which was accepted by the plebeian as a sign of breeding, and even kindled, at times, a momentary spark in the jaded eyes of old gentlemen in clubs. Had anyone subjected Mme. de Gallardon's conversation to that form of analysis which by noting the relative

frequency of its several terms would furnish him with the key to a ciphered message, he would at once have remarked that no expression, not even the commonest forms of speech, occurred in it nearly so often as “at my cousins the Guermantes’s,” “at my aunt Guermantes’s,” “Elzéar de Guermantes’s health,” “my cousin Guermantes’s box.” If anyone spoke to her of a distinguished personage, she would reply that, although she was not personally acquainted with him, she had seen him hundreds of times at her aunt Guermantes’s, but she would utter this reply in so icy a tone, with such a hollow sound, that it was at once quite clear that if she did not know the celebrity personally that was because of all the obstinate, ineradicable principles against which her arching shoulders were stretched back to rest, as on one of those ladders on which gymnastic instructors make us ‘extend’ so as to develop the expansion of our chests.

At this moment the Princesse des Laumes, who had not been expected to appear at Mme. de Saint-Euverte’s that evening, did in fact arrive. To shew that she did not wish any special attention, in a house to which she had come by an act of condescension, to be paid to her superior rank, she had entered the room with her arms pressed close to her sides, even when there was no crowd to be squeezed through, no one attempting to get past her; staying purposely at the back, with the air of being in her proper place, like a king who stands in the waiting procession at the doors of a theatre where the management have not been warned of his coming; and strictly limiting her field of vision — so as not to seem to be advertising her presence and claiming the consideration that was her due — to the study of a pattern in the carpet or of her own skirt, she stood there on the spot which had struck her as the most modest (and from which, as she very well knew, a cry of rapture from Mme. de Saint-Euverte would extricate her as soon as her presence there was noticed), next to Mme. de Cambremer, whom, however, she did not know. She observed the dumb-show by which her neighbour was expressing her passion for music, but she refrained from copying it. This was not to say that, for once that she had consented to spend a few minutes in Mme. de Saint-Euverte’s house, the Princesse des Laumes would not have wished (so that the act of politeness to her hostess which she had performed by coming might, so to speak, ‘count double’) to shew herself as friendly and obliging as possible. But she had a natural horror of what she called ‘exaggerating,’ and always made a point of letting people see that she ‘simply must not’ indulge in any display of emotion that was not in keeping with the tone of the circle in which she moved, although such displays never failed to make an

impression upon her, by virtue of that spirit of imitation, akin to timidity, which is developed in the most self-confident persons, by contact with an unfamiliar environment, even though it be inferior to their own. She began to ask herself whether these gesticulations might not, perhaps, be a necessary concomitant of the piece of music that was being played, a piece which, it might be, was in a different category from all the music that she had ever heard before; and whether to abstain from them was not a sign of her own inability to understand the music, and of discourtesy towards the lady of the house; with the result that, in order to express by a compromise both of her contradictory inclinations in turn, at one moment she would merely straighten her shoulder-straps or feel in her golden hair for the little balls of coral or of pink enamel, frosted with tiny diamonds, which formed its simple but effective ornament, studying, with a cold interest, her impassioned neighbour, while at another she would beat time for a few bars with her fan, but, so as not to forfeit her independence, she would beat a different time from the pianist's. When he had finished the Liszt Intermezzo and had begun a Prelude by Chopin, Mme. de Cambremer turned to Mme. de Franquetot with a tender smile, full of intimate reminiscence, as well as of satisfaction (that of a competent judge) with the performance. She had been taught in her girlhood to fondle and cherish those long-necked, sinuous creatures, the phrases of Chopin, so free, so flexible, so tactile, which begin by seeking their ultimate resting-place somewhere beyond and far wide of the direction in which they started, the point which one might have expected them to reach, phrases which divert themselves in those fantastic bypaths only to return more deliberately — with a more premeditated reaction, with more precision, as on a crystal bowl which, if you strike it, will ring and throb until you cry aloud in anguish — to clutch at one's heart.

Brought up in a provincial household with few friends or visitors, hardly ever invited to a ball, she had fuddled her mind, in the solitude of her old manor-house, over setting the pace, now crawling-slow, now passionate, whirling, breathless, for all those imaginary waltzing couples, gathering them like flowers, leaving the ball-room for a moment to listen, where the wind sighed among the pine-trees, on the shore of the lake, and seeing of a sudden advancing towards her, more different from anything one had ever dreamed of than earthly lovers are, a slender young man, whose voice was resonant and strange and false, in white gloves. But nowadays the old-fashioned beauty of this music seemed to have become a trifle stale. Having forfeited, some years back, the esteem of 'really musical' people, it had lost its distinction and its charm, and even those

whose taste was frankly bad had ceased to find in it more than a moderate pleasure to which they hardly liked to confess. Mme. de Cambremer cast a furtive glance behind her. She knew that her young daughter-in-law (full of respect for her new and noble family, except in such matters as related to the intellect, upon which, having ‘got as far’ as Harmony and the Greek alphabet, she was specially enlightened) despised Chopin, and fell quite ill when she heard him played. But finding herself free from the scrutiny of this Wagnerian, who was sitting, at some distance, in a group of her own contemporaries, Mme. de Cambremer let herself drift upon a stream of exquisite memories and sensations. The Princesse des Laumes was touched also. Though without any natural gift for music, she had received, some fifteen years earlier, the instruction which a music-mistress of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, a woman of genius who had been, towards the end of her life, reduced to penury, had started, at seventy, to give to the daughters and granddaughters of her old pupils. This lady was now dead. But her method, an echo of her charming touch, came to life now and then in the fingers of her pupils, even of those who had been in other respects quite mediocre, had given up music, and hardly ever opened a piano. And so Mme. des Laumes could let her head sway to and fro, fully aware of the cause, with a perfect appreciation of the manner in which the pianist was rendering this Prelude, since she knew it by heart. The closing notes of the phrase that he had begun sounded already on her lips. And she murmured “How charming it is!” with a stress on the opening consonants of the adjective, a token of her refinement by which she felt her lips so romantically compressed, like the petals of a beautiful, budding flower, that she instinctively brought her eyes into harmony, illuminating them for a moment with a vague and sentimental gaze. Meanwhile Mme. de Gallardon had arrived at the point of saying to herself how annoying it was that she had so few opportunities of meeting the Princesse des Laumes, for she meant to teach her a lesson by not acknowledging her bow. She did not know that her cousin was in the room. A movement of Mme. Franquetot’s head disclosed the Princess. At once Mme. de Gallardon dashed towards her, upsetting all her neighbours; although determined to preserve a distant and glacial manner which should remind everyone present that she had no desire to remain on friendly terms with a person in whose house one might find oneself, any day, cheek by jowl with the Princesse Mathilde, and to whom it was not her duty to make advances since she was not ‘of her generation,’ she felt bound to modify this air of dignity and reserve by some non-committal remark which would justify her overture and would force the Princess to engage in

conversation; and so, when she reached her cousin, Mme. de Gallardon, with a stern countenance and one hand thrust out as though she were trying to ‘force’ a card, began with: “How is your husband?” in the same anxious tone that she would have used if the Prince had been seriously ill. The Princess, breaking into a laugh which was one of her characteristics, and was intended at once to shew the rest of an assembly that she was making fun of some one and also to enhance her own beauty by concentrating her features around her animated lips and sparkling eyes, answered: “Why; he’s never been better in his life!” And she went on laughing.

Mme. de Gallardon then drew herself up and, chilling her expression still further, perhaps because she was still uneasy about the Prince’s health, said to her cousin:

“Oriane,” (at once Mme. des Laumes looked with amused astonishment towards an invisible third, whom she seemed to call to witness that she had never authorised Mme. de Gallardon to use her Christian name) “I should be so pleased if you would look in, just for a minute, to-morrow evening, to hear a quintet, with the clarinet, by Mozart. I should like to have your opinion of it.”

She seemed not so much to be issuing an invitation as to be asking favour, and to want the Princess’s opinion of the Mozart quintet just though it had been a dish invented by a new cook, whose talent it was most important that an epicure should come to judge.

“But I know that quintet quite well. I can tell you now — that I adore it.”

“You know, my husband isn’t at all well; it’s his liver. He would like so much to see you,” Mme. de Gallardon resumed, making it now a corporal work of charity for the Princess to appear at her party.

The Princess never liked to tell people that she would not go to their houses. Every day she would write to express her regret at having been kept away — by the sudden arrival of her husband’s mother, by an invitation from his brother, by the Opera, by some excursion to the country — from some party to which she had never for a moment dreamed of going. In this way she gave many people the satisfaction of feeling that she was on intimate terms with them, that she would gladly have come to their houses, and that she had been prevented from doing so only by some princely occurrence which they were flattered to find competing with their own humble entertainment. And then, as she belonged to that witty ‘Guermantes set’ — in which there survived something of the alert mentality, stripped of all commonplace phrases and conventional sentiments, which dated from Mérimée, and found its final expression in the plays of Meilhac and Halévy

— she adapted its formula so as to suit even her social engagements, transposed it into the courtesy which was always struggling to be positive and precise, to approximate itself to the plain truth. She would never develop at any length to a hostess the expression of her anxiety to be present at her party; she found it more pleasant to disclose to her all the various little incidents on which it would depend whether it was or was not possible for her to come.

"Listen, and I'll explain," she began to Mme. de Gallardon. "To-morrow evening I must go to a friend of mine, who has been pestering me to fix a day for ages. If she takes us to the theatre afterwards, then I can't possibly come to you, much as I should love to; but if we just stay in the house, I know there won't be anyone else there, so I can slip away."

"Tell me, have you seen your friend M. Swann?"

"No! my precious Charles! I never knew he was here. Where is he? I must catch his eye."

"It's a funny thing that he should come to old Saint-Euverte's," Mme. de Gallardon went on. "Oh, I know he's very clever," meaning by that 'very cunning,' "but that makes no difference; fancy a Jew here, and she the sister and sister-in-law of two Archbishops."

"I am ashamed to confess that I am not in the least shocked," said the Princesse des Laumes.

"I know he's a converted Jew, and all that, and his parents and grandparents before him. But they do say that the converted ones are worse about their religion than the practising ones, that it's all just a pretence; is that true, d'you think?"

"I can throw no light at all on the matter."

The pianist, who was 'down' to play two pieces by Chopin, after finishing the Prelude had at once attacked a Polonaise. But once Mme. de Gallardon had informed her cousin that Swann was in the room, Chopin himself might have risen from the grave and played all his works in turn without Mme. des Laumes's paying him the slightest attention. She belonged to that one of the two divisions of the human race in which the untiring curiosity which the other half feels about the people whom it does not know is replaced by an unfailing interest in the people whom it does. As with many women of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the presence, in any room in which she might find herself, of another member of her set, even although she had nothing in particular to say to him, would occupy her mind to the exclusion of every other consideration. From that moment, in the hope that Swann would catch sight of her, the Princess could do

nothing but (like a tame white mouse when a lump of sugar is put down before its nose and then taken away) turn her face, in which were crowded a thousand signs of intimate connivance, none of them with the least relevance to the sentiment underlying Chopin's music, in the direction where Swann was, and, if he moved, divert accordingly the course of her magnetic smile.

"Oriane, don't be angry with me," resumed Mme. de Gallardon, who could never restrain herself from sacrificing her highest social ambitions, and the hope that she might one day emerge into a light that would dazzle the world, to the immediate and secret satisfaction of saying something disagreeable, "people do say about your M. Swann that he's the sort of man one can't have in the house; is that true?"

"Why, you, of all people, ought to know that it's true," replied the Princesse des Laumes, "for you must have asked him a hundred times, and he's never been to your house once."

And leaving her cousin mortified afresh, she broke out again into a laugh which scandalised everyone who was trying to listen to the music, but attracted the attention of Mme. de Saint-Euverte, who had stayed, out of politeness, near the piano, and caught sight of the Princess now for the first time. Mme. de Saint-Euverte was all the more delighted to see Mme. des Laumes, as she imagined her to be still at Guermantes, looking after her father-in-law, who was ill.

"My dear Princess, you here?"

"Yes, I tucked myself away in a corner, and I've been hearing such lovely things."

"What, you've been in the room quite a time?"

"Oh, yes, quite a long time, which seemed very short; it was only long because I couldn't see you."

Mme. de Saint-Euverte offered her own chair to the Princess, who declined it with:

"Oh, please, no! Why should you? It doesn't matter in the least where I sit." And deliberately picking out, so as the better to display the simplicity of a really great lady, a low seat without a back: "There now, that hassock, that's all I want. It will make me keep my back straight. Oh! Good heavens, I'm making a noise again; they'll be telling you to have me 'chucked out'."

Meanwhile, the pianist having doubled his speed, the emotion of the music-lovers was reaching its climax, a servant was handing refreshments about on a salver, and was making the spoons rattle, and, as on every other 'party-night', Mme. de Saint-Euverte was making signs to him, which he never saw, to leave

the room. A recent bride, who had been told that a young woman ought never to appear bored, was smiling vigorously, trying to catch her hostess's eye so as to flash a token of her gratitude for the other's having 'thought of her' in connection with so delightful an entertainment. And yet, although she remained more calm than Mme. de Franquetot, it was not without some uneasiness that she followed the flying fingers; what alarmed her being not the pianist's fate but the piano's, on which a lighted candle, jumping at each *fortissimo*, threatened, if not to set its shade on fire, at least to spill wax upon the ebony. At last she could contain herself no longer, and, running up the two steps of the platform on which the piano stood, flung herself on the candle to adjust its sconce. But scarcely had her hand come within reach of it when, on a final chord, the piece finished, and the pianist rose to his feet. Nevertheless the bold initiative shewn by this young woman and the moment of blushing confusion between her and the pianist which resulted from it, produced an impression that was favourable on the whole.

"Did you see what that girl did just now, Princess?" asked General de Froberville, who had come up to Mme. des Laumes as her hostess left her for a moment. "Odd, wasn't it? Is she one of the performers?"

"No, she's a little Mme. de Cambremer," replied the Princess carelessly, and then, with more animation: "I am only repeating what I heard just now, myself; I haven't the faintest notion who said it, it was some one behind me who said that they were neighbours of Mme. de Saint-Euverte in the country, but I don't believe anyone knows them, really. They must be 'country cousins'! By the way, I don't know whether you're particularly 'well-up' in the brilliant society which we see before us, because I've no idea who all these astonishing people can be. What do you suppose they do with themselves when they're not at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's parties? She must have ordered them in with the musicians and the chairs and the food. 'Universal providers,' you know. You must admit, they're rather splendid, General. But can she really have the courage to hire the same 'supers' every week? It isn't possible!"

"Oh, but Cambremer is quite a good name; old, too," protested the General.

"I see no objection to its being old," the Princess answered dryly, "but whatever else it is it's not euphonious," she went on, isolating the word euphonious as though between inverted commas, a little affectation to which the Guermantes set were addicted.

"You think not, eh! She's a regular little peach, though," said the General, whose eyes never strayed from Mme. de Cambremer. "Don't you agree with me, Princess?"

“She thrusts herself forward too much; I think, in so young a woman, that’s not very nice — for I don’t suppose she’s my generation,” replied Mme. des Laumes (the last word being common, it appeared, to Gallardon and Guermantes). And then, seeing that M. de Froberville was still gazing at Mme. de Cambremer, she added, half out of malice towards the lady, half wishing to oblige the General: “Not very nice... for her husband! I am sorry that I do not know her, since she seems to attract you so much; I might have introduced you to her,” said the Princess, who, if she had known the young woman, would most probably have done nothing of the sort. “And now I must say good night, because one of my friends is having a birthday party, and I must go and wish her many happy returns,” she explained, modestly and with truth, reducing the fashionable gathering to which she was going to the simple proportions of a ceremony which would be boring in the extreme, but at which she was obliged to be present, and there would be something touching about her appearance. “Besides, I must pick up Basin. While I’ve been here, he’s gone to see those friends of his — you know them too, I’m sure, — who are called after a bridge — oh, yes, the Iénas.”

“It was a battle before it was a bridge, Princess; it was a victory!” said the General. “I mean to say, to an old soldier like me,” he went on, wiping his monocle and replacing it, as though he were laying a fresh dressing on the raw wound underneath, while the Princess instinctively looked away, “that Empire nobility, well, of course, it’s not the same thing, but, after all, taking it as it is, it’s very fine of its kind; they were people who really did fight like heroes.”

“But I have the deepest respect for heroes,” the Princess assented, though with a faint trace of irony. “If I don’t go with Basin to see this Princesse d’Iéna, it isn’t for that, at all; it’s simply because I don’t know them. Basin knows them; he worships them. Oh, no, it’s not what you think; he’s not in love with her. I’ve nothing to set my face against! Besides, what good has it ever done when I have set my face against them?” she queried sadly, for the whole world knew that, ever since the day upon which the Prince des Laumes had married his fascinating cousin, he had been consistently unfaithful to her. “Anyhow, it isn’t that at all. They’re people he has known for ever so long, they do him very well, and that suits me down to the ground. But I must tell you what he’s told me about their house; it’s quite enough. Can you imagine it, all their furniture is ‘Empire’!”

“But, my dear Princess, that’s only natural; it belonged to their grandparents.”

“I don’t quite say it didn’t, but that doesn’t make it any less ugly. I quite understand that people can’t always have nice things, but at least they needn’t have things that are merely grotesque. What do you say? I can think of nothing more devastating, more utterly smug than that hideous style — cabinets covered all over with swans’ heads, like bath-taps!”

“But I believe, all the same, that they’ve got some lovely things; why, they must have that famous mosaic table on which the Treaty of...”

“Oh, I don’t deny, they may have things that are interesting enough from the historic point of view. But things like that can’t, ever, be beautiful... because they’re simply horrible! I’ve got things like that myself, that came to Basin from the Montesquious. Only, they’re up in the attics at Guermantes, where nobody ever sees them. But, after all, that’s not the point, I would fly to see them, with Basin; I would even go to see them among all their sphinxes and brasses, if I knew them, but — I don’t know them! D’you know, I was always taught, when I was a little girl, that it was not polite to call on people one didn’t know.” She assumed a tone of childish gravity. “And so I am just doing what I was taught to do. Can’t you see those good people, with a totally strange woman bursting into their house? Why, I might get a most hostile reception.”

And she coquettishly enhanced the charm of the smile which the idea had brought to her lips, by giving to her blue eyes, which were fixed on the General, a gentle, dreamy expression.

“My dear Princess, you know that they’d be simply wild with joy.”

“No, why?” she inquired, with the utmost vivacity, either so as to seem unaware that it would be because she was one of the first ladies in France, or so as to have the pleasure of hearing the General tell her so. “Why? How can you tell? Perhaps they would think it the most unpleasant thing that could possibly happen. I know nothing about them, but if they’re anything like me, I find it quite boring enough to see the people I do know; I’m sure if I had to see people I didn’t know as well, even if they had ‘fought like heroes,’ I should go stark mad. Besides, except when it’s an old friend like you, whom one knows quite apart from that, I’m not sure that ‘heroism’ takes one very far in society. It’s often quite boring enough to have to give a dinner-party, but if one had to offer one’s arm to Spartacus, to let him take one down... Really, no; it would never be Vercingetorix I should send for, to make a fourteenth. I feel sure, I should keep him for really big ‘crushes.’ And as I never give any...”

“Ah! Princess, it’s easy to see you’re not a Guermantes for nothing. You have your share of it, all right, the ‘wit of the Guermantes’!”

“But people always talk about the wit of the Guermantes; I never could make out why. Do you really know any others who have it?” she rallied him, with a rippling flow of laughter, her features concentrated, yoked to the service of her animation, her eyes sparkling, blazing with a radiant sunshine of gaiety which could be kindled only by such speeches — even if the Princess had to make them herself — as were in praise of h wit or of her beauty. “Look, there’s Swann talking to your Cambremer woman; over there, beside old Saint-Euverte, don’t you see him? Ask him to introduce you. But hurry up, he seems to be just going!”

“Did you notice how dreadfully ill he’s looking?” asked the General.

“My precious Charles? Ah, he’s coming at last; I was beginning to think he didn’t want to see me!”

Swann was extremely fond of the Princesse des Laumes, and the sight of her recalled to him Guermantes, a property close to Combray, and all that country which he so dearly loved and had ceased to visit, so as not to be separated from Odette. Slipping into the manner, half-artistic, half-amorous — with which he could always manage to amuse the Princess — a manner which came to him quite naturally whenever he dipped for a moment into the old social atmosphere, and wishing also to express in words, for his own satisfaction, the longing that he felt for the country:

“Ah!” he exclaimed, or rather intoned, in such a way as to be audible at once to Mme. de Saint-Euverte, to whom he spoke, and to Mme. des Laumes, for whom he was speaking, “Behold our charming Princess! See, she has come up on purpose from Guermantes to hear Saint Francis preach to the birds, and has only just had time, like a dear little tit-mouse, to go and pick a few little hips and haws and put them in her hair; there are even some drops of dew upon them still, a little of the hoar-frost which must be making the Duchess, down there, shiver. It is very pretty indeed, my dear Princess.”

“What! The Princess came up on purpose from Guermantes? But that’s too wonderful! I never knew; I’m quite bewildered,” Mme. de Saint-Euverte protested with quaint simplicity, being but little accustomed to Swann’s way of speaking. And then, examining the Princess’s headdress, “Why, you’re quite right; it is copied from... what shall I say, not chestnuts, no, — oh, it’s a delightful idea, but how can the Princess have known what was going to be on my programme? The musicians didn’t tell me, even.”

Swann, who was accustomed, when he was with a woman whom he had kept up the habit of addressing in terms of gallantry, to pay her delicate

compliments which most other people would not and need not understand, did not condescend to explain to Mme. de Saint-Euverte that he had been speaking metaphorically. As for the Princess, she was in fits of laughter, both because Swann's wit was highly appreciated by her set, and because she could never hear a compliment addressed to herself without finding it exquisitely subtle and irresistibly amusing.

"Indeed! I'm delighted, Charles, if my little hips and haws meet with your approval. But tell me, why did you bow to that Cambremer person, are you also her neighbour in the country?"

Mme. de Saint-Euverte, seeing that the Princess seemed quite happy talking to Swann, had drifted away.

"But you are, yourself, Princess!"

"I! Why, they must have 'countries' everywhere, those creatures! Don't I wish I had!"

"No, not the Cambremers; her own people. She was a Legrandin, and used to come to Combray. I don't know whether you are aware that you are Comtesse de Combray, and that the Chapter owes you a due."

"I don't know what the Chapter owes me, but I do know that I'm 'touched' for a hundred francs, every year, by the Curé, which is a due that I could very well do without. But surely these Cambremers have rather a startling name. It ends just in time, but it ends badly!" she said with a laugh.

"It begins no better." Swann took the point.

"Yes; that double abbreviation!"

"Some one very angry and very proper who didn't dare to finish the first word."

"But since he couldn't stop himself beginning the second, he'd have done better to finish the first and be done with it. We are indulging in the most refined form of humour, my dear Charles, in the very best of taste — but how tiresome it is that I never see you now," she went on in a coaxing tone, "I do so love talking to you. Just imagine, I could not make that idiot Froberville see that there was anything funny about the name Cam-bremer. Do agree that life is a dreadful business. It's only when I see you that I stop feeling bored."

Which was probably not true. But Swann and the Princess had the same way of looking at the little things of life — the effect, if not the cause of which was a close analogy between their modes of expression and even of pronunciation. This similarity was not striking because no two things could have been more unlike than their voices. But if one took the trouble to imagine Swann's

utterances divested of the sonority that enwrapped them, of the moustache from under which they emerged, one found that they were the same phrases, the same inflexions, that they had the ‘tone’ of the Guermantes set. On important matters, Swann and the Princess had not an idea in common. But since Swann had become so melancholy, and was always in that trembling condition which precedes a flood of tears, he had the same need to speak about his grief that a murderer has to tell some one about his crime. And when he heard the Princess say that life was a dreadful business, he felt as much comforted as if she had spoken to him of Odette.

“Yes, life is a dreadful business! We must meet more often, my dear friend. What is so nice about you is that you are not cheerful. We could spend a most pleasant evening together.”

“I’m sure we could; why not come down to Guermantes? My mother-in-law would be wild with joy. It’s supposed to be very ugly down there, but I must say, I find the neighborhood not at all unattractive; I have a horror of ‘picturesque spots’.”

“I know it well, it’s delightful!” replied Swann. “It’s almost too beautiful, too much alive for me just at present; it’s a country to be happy in. It’s perhaps because I have lived there, but things there speak to me so. As soon as a breath of wind gets up, and the cornfields begin to stir, I feel that some one is going to appear suddenly, that I am going to hear some news; and those little houses by the water’s edge... I should be quite wretched!”

“Oh! my dearest Charles, do take care; there’s that appalling Rampillon woman; she’s seen me; hide me somewhere, do tell me again, quickly, what it was that happened to her; I get so mixed up; she’s just married off her daughter, or her lover (I never can remember), — perhaps both — to each other! Oh, no, I remember now, she’s been dropped by her Prince... Pretend to be talking, so that the poor old Berenice sha’n’t come and invite me to dinner. Anyhow, I’m going. Listen, my dearest Charles, now that I have seen you, once in a blue moon, won’t you let me carry you off and take you to the Princesse de Parme’s, who would be so pleased to see you (you know), and Basin too, for that matter; he’s meeting me there. If one didn’t get news of you, sometimes, from Mémé... Remember, I never see you at all now!”

Swann declined. Having told M. de Charlus that, on leaving Mme. de Saint-Euverte’s, he would go straight home, he did not care to run the risk, by going on now to the Princesse de Parme’s, of missing a message which he had, all the time, been hoping to see brought in to him by one of the footmen, during the

party, and which he was perhaps going to find left with his own porter, at home.

"Poor Swann," said Mme. des Laumes that night to her husband; "he is always charming, but he does look so dreadfully unhappy. You will see for yourself, for he has promised to dine with us one of these days. I do feel that it's really absurd that a man of his intelligence should let himself be made to suffer by a creature of that kind, who isn't even interesting, for they tell me, she's an absolute idiot!" she concluded with the wisdom invariably shewn by people who, not being in love themselves, feel that a clever man ought to be unhappy only about such persons as are worth his while; which is rather like being astonished that anyone should condescend to die of cholera at the bidding of so insignificant a creature as the common bacillus.

Swann now wished to go home, but, just as he was making his escape, General de Froberville caught him and asked for an introduction to Mme. de Cambremer, and he was obliged to go back into the room to look for her.

"I say, Swann, I'd rather be married to that little woman than killed by savages, what do you say?"

The words 'killed by savages' pierced Swann's aching heart; and at once he felt the need of continuing the conversation. "Ah!" he began, "some fine lives have been lost in that way... There was, you remember, that explorer whose remains Dumont d'Urville brought back, La Pérouse..." (and he was at once happy again, as though he had named Odette). "He was a fine character, and interests me very much, does La Pérouse," he ended sadly.

"Oh, yes, of course, La Pérouse," said the General. "It's quite a well-known name. There's a street called that."

"Do you know anyone in the Rue La Pérouse?" asked Swann excitedly.

"Only Mme. de Chanlivault, the sister of that good fellow Chaussepierre. She gave a most amusing theatre-party the other evening. That's a house that will be really smart some day, you'll see!"

"Oh, so she lives in the Rue La Pérouse. It's attractive; I like that street; it's so sombre."

"Indeed it isn't. You can't have been in it for a long time; it's not at all sombre now; they're beginning to build all round there."

When Swann did finally introduce M. de Froberville to the young Mme. de Cambremer, since it was the first time that she had heard the General's name, she hastily outlined upon her lips the smile of joy and surprise with which she would have greeted him if she had never, in the whole of her life, heard anything else; for, as she did not yet know all the friends of her new family, whenever anyone

was presented to her, she assumed that he must be one of them, and thinking that she would shew her tact by appearing to have heard ‘such a lot about him’ since her marriage, she would hold out her hand with an air of hesitation which was meant as a proof at once of the inculcated reserve which she had to overcome and of the spontaneous friendliness which successfully overcame it. And so her parents-in-law, whom she still regarded as the most eminent pair in France, declared that she was an angel; all the more that they preferred to appear, in marrying her to their son, to have yielded to the attraction rather of her natural charm than of her considerable fortune.

“It’s easy to see that you’re a musician heart and soul, Madame,” said the General, alluding to the incident of the candle.

Meanwhile the concert had begun again, and Swann saw that he could not now go before the end of the new number. He suffered greatly from being shut up among all these people whose stupidity and absurdities wounded him all the more cruelly since, being ignorant of his love, incapable, had they known of it, of taking any interest, or of doing more than smile at it as at some childish joke, or deplore it as an act of insanity, they made it appear to him in the aspect of a subjective state which existed for himself alone, whose reality there was nothing external to confirm; he suffered overwhelmingly, to the point at which even the sound of the instruments made him want to cry, from having to prolong his exile in this place to which Odette would never come, in which no one, nothing was aware of her existence, from which she was entirely absent.

But suddenly it was as though she had entered, and this apparition tore him with such anguish that his hand rose impulsively to his heart. What had happened was that the violin had risen to a series of high notes, on which it rested as though expecting something, an expectancy which it prolonged without ceasing to hold on to the notes, in the exaltation with which it already saw the expected object approaching, and with a desperate effort to continue until its arrival, to welcome it before itself expired, to keep the way open for a moment longer, with all its remaining strength, that the stranger might enter in, as one holds a door open that would otherwise automatically close. And before Swann had had time to understand what was happening, to think: “It is the little phrase from Vinteuil’s sonata. I mustn’t listen!”, all his memories of the days when Odette had been in love with him, which he had succeeded, up till that evening, in keeping invisible in the depths of his being, deceived by this sudden reflection of a season of love, whose sun, they supposed, had dawned again, had awakened from their slumber, had taken wing and risen to sing maddeningly in his ears,

without pity for his present desolation, the forgotten strains of happiness.

In place of the abstract expressions “the time when I was happy,” “the time when I was loved,” which he had often used until then, and without much suffering, for his intelligence had not embodied in them anything of the past save fictitious extracts which preserved none of the reality, he now recovered everything that had fixed unalterably the peculiar, volatile essence of that lost happiness; he could see it all; the snowy, curled petals of the chrysanthemum which she had tossed after him into his carriage, which he had kept pressed to his lips, the address ‘Maison Dorée,’ embossed on the note-paper on which he had read “My hand trembles so as I write to you,” the frowning contraction of her eyebrows when she said pleadingly: “You won’t let it be very long before you send for me?”; he could smell the heated iron of the barber whom he used to have in to singe his hair while Loredan went to fetch the little working girl; could feel the torrents of rain which fell so often that spring, the ice-cold homeward drive in his victoria, by moonlight; all the network of mental habits, of seasonable impressions, of sensory reactions, which had extended over a series of weeks its uniform meshes, by which his body now found itself inextricably held. At that time he had been satisfying a sensual curiosity to know what were the pleasures of those people who lived for love alone. He had supposed that he could stop there, that he would not be obliged to learn their sorrows also; how small a thing the actual charm of Odette was now in comparison with that formidable terror which extended it like a cloudy halo all around her, that enormous anguish of not knowing at every hour of the day and night what she had been doing, of not possessing her wholly, at all times and in all places! Alas, he recalled the accents in which she had exclaimed: “But I can see you at any time; I am always free!” — she, who was never free now; the interest, the curiosity that she had shewn in his life, her passionate desire that he should do her the favour — of which it was he who, then, had felt suspicious, as of a possibly tedious waste of his time and disturbance of his arrangements — of granting her access to his study; how she had been obliged to beg that he would let her take him to the Verdurins’; and, when he did allow her to come to him once a month, how she had first, before he would let himself be swayed, had to repeat what a joy it would be to her, that custom of their seeing each other daily, for which she had longed at a time when to him it had seemed only a tiresome distraction, for which, since that time, she had conceived a distaste and had definitely broken herself of it, while it had become for him so insatiable, so dolorous a need. Little had he suspected how truly he spoke when, on their third

meeting, as she repeated: “But why don’t you let me come to you oftener?” he had told her, laughing, and in a vein of gallantry, that it was for fear of forming a hopeless passion. Now, alas, it still happened at times that she wrote to him from a restaurant or hotel, on paper which bore a printed address, but printed in letters of fire that seared his heart. “Written from the Hôtel Vouillemont. What on earth can she have gone there for? With whom? What happened there?” He remembered the gas-jets that were being extinguished along the Boulevard des Italiens when he had met her, when all hope was gone among the errant shades upon that night which had seemed to him almost supernatural and which now (that night of a period when he had not even to ask himself whether he would be annoying her by looking for her and by finding her, so certain was he that she knew no greater happiness than to see him and to let him take her home) belonged indeed to a mysterious world to which one never may return again once its doors are closed. And Swann could distinguish, standing, motionless, before that scene of happiness in which it lived again, a wretched figure which filled him with such pity, because he did not at first recognise who it was, that he must lower his head, lest anyone should observe that his eyes were filled with tears. It was himself.

When he had realised this, his pity ceased; he was jealous, now, of that other self whom she had loved, he was jealous of those men of whom he had so often said, without much suffering: “Perhaps she’s in love with them,” now that he had exchanged the vague idea of loving, in which there is no love, for the petals of the chrysanthemum and the ‘letter-heading’ of the Maison d’Or; for they were full of love. And then, his anguish becoming too keen, he passed his hand over his forehead, let the monocle drop from his eye, and wiped its glass. And doubtless, if he had caught sight of himself at that moment, he would have added to the collection of the monocles which he had already identified, this one which he removed, like an importunate, worrying thought, from his head, while from its misty surface, with his handkerchief, he sought to obliterate his cares.

There are in the music of the violin — if one does not see the instrument itself, and so cannot relate what one hears to its form, which modifies the fullness of the sound — accents which are so closely akin to those of certain contralto voices, that one has the illusion that a singer has taken her place amid the orchestra. One raises one’s eyes; one sees only the wooden case, magical as a Chinese box; but, at moments, one is still tricked by the deceiving appeal of the Siren; at times, too, one believes that one is listening to a captive spirit, struggling in the darkness of its masterful box, a box quivering with

enchantment, like a devil immersed in a stoup of holy water; sometimes, again, it is in the air, at large, like a pure and supernatural creature that reveals to the ear, as it passes, its invisible message.

As though the musicians were not nearly so much playing the little phrase as performing the rites on which it insisted before it would consent to appear, as proceeding to utter the incantations necessary to procure, and to prolong for a few moments, the miracle of its apparition, Swann, who was no more able now to see it than if it had belonged to a world of ultra-violet light, who experienced something like the refreshing sense of a metamorphosis in the momentary blindness with which he had been struck as he approached it, Swann felt that it was present, like a protective goddess, a confidant of his love, who, so as to be able to come to him through the crowd, and to draw him aside to speak to him, had disguised herself in this sweeping cloak of sound. And as she passed him, light, soothing, as softly murmured as the perfume of a flower, telling him what she had to say, every word of which he closely scanned, sorry to see them fly away so fast, he made involuntarily with his lips the motion of kissing, as it went by him, the harmonious, fleeting form.

He felt that he was no longer in exile and alone since she, who addressed herself to him, spoke to him in a whisper of Odette. For he had no longer, as of old, the impression that Odette and he were not known to the little phrase. Had it not often been the witness of their joys? True that, as often, it had warned him of their frailty. And indeed, whereas, in that distant time, he had divined an element of suffering in its smile, in its limpid and disillusioned intonation, to-night he found there rather the charm of a resignation that was almost gay. Of those sorrows, of which the little phrase had spoken to him then, which he had seen it — without his being touched by them himself — carry past him, smiling, on its sinuous and rapid course, of those sorrows which were now become his own, without his having any hope of being, ever, delivered from them, it seemed to say to him, as once it had said of his happiness: “What does all that matter; it is all nothing.” And Swann’s thoughts were borne for the first time on a wave of pity and tenderness towards that Vinteuil, towards that unknown, exalted brother who also must have suffered so greatly; what could his life have been? From the depths of what well of sorrow could he have drawn that god-like strength, that unlimited power of creation?

When it was the little phrase that spoke to him of the vanity of his sufferings, Swann found a sweetness in that very wisdom which, but a little while back, had seemed to him intolerable when he thought that he could read it

on the faces of indifferent strangers, who would regard his love as a digression that was without importance. ‘Twas because the little phrase, unlike them, whatever opinion it might hold on the short duration of these states of the soul, saw in them something not, as everyone else saw, less serious than the events of everyday life, but, on the contrary, so far superior to everyday life as to be alone worthy of the trouble of expressing it. Those graces of an intimate sorrow, ‘twas them that the phrase endeavoured to imitate, to create anew; and even their essence, for all that it consists in being incommunicable and in appearing trivial to everyone save him who has experience of them, the little phrase had captured, had rendered visible. So much so that it made their value be confessed, their divine sweetness be tasted by all those same onlookers — provided only that they were in any sense musical — who, the next moment, would ignore, would disown them in real life, in every individual love that came into being beneath their eyes. Doubtless the form in which it had codified those graces could not be analysed into any logical elements. But ever since, more than a year before, discovering to him many of the riches of his own soul, the love of music had been born, and for a time at least had dwelt in him, Swann had regarded musical *motifs* as actual ideas, of another world, of another order, ideas veiled in shadows, unknown, impenetrable by the human mind, which none the less were perfectly distinct one from another, unequal among themselves in value and in significance. When, after that first evening at the Verdurins’, he had had the little phrase played over to him again, and had sought to disentangle from his confused impressions how it was that, like a perfume or a caress, it swept over and enveloped him, he had observed that it was to the closeness of the intervals between the five notes which composed it and to the constant repetition of two of them that was due that impression of a frigid, a contracted sweetness; but in reality he knew that he was basing this conclusion not upon the phrase itself, but merely upon certain equivalents, substituted (for his mind’s convenience) for the mysterious entity of which he had become aware, before ever he knew the Verdurins, at that earlier party, when for the first time he had heard the sonata played. He knew that his memory of the piano falsified still further the perspective in which he saw the music, that the field open to the musician is not a miserable stave of seven notes, but an immeasurable keyboard (still, almost all of it, unknown), on which, here and there only, separated by the gross darkness of its unexplored tracts, some few among the millions of keys, keys of tenderness, of passion, of courage, of serenity, which compose it, each one differing from all the rest as one universe differs from another, have been

discovered by certain great artists who do us the service, when they awaken in us the emotion corresponding to the theme which they have found, of shewing us what richness, what variety lies hidden, unknown to us, in that great black impenetrable night, discouraging exploration, of our soul, which we have been content to regard as valueless and waste and void. Vinteuil had been one of those musicians. In his little phrase, albeit it presented to the mind's eye a clouded surface, there was contained, one felt, a matter so consistent, so explicit, to which the phrase gave so new, so original a force, that those who had once heard it preserved the memory of it in the treasure-chamber of their minds. Swann would repair to it as to a conception of love and happiness, of which at once he knew as well in what respects it was peculiar as he would know of the *Princesse de Clèves*, or of*René*, should either of those titles occur to him. Even when he was not thinking of the little phrase, it existed, latent, in his mind, in the same way as certain other conceptions without material equivalent, such as our notions of light, of sound, of perspective, of bodily desire, the rich possessions wherewith our inner temple is diversified and adorned. Perhaps we shall lose them, perhaps they will be obliterated, if we return to nothing in the dust. But so long as we are alive, we can no more bring ourselves to a state in which we shall not have known them than we can with regard to any material object, than we can, for example, doubt the luminosity of a lamp that has just been lighted, in view of the changed aspect of everything in the room, from which has vanished even the memory of the darkness. In that way Vinteuil's phrase, like some theme, say, in *Tristan*, which represents to us also a certain acquisition of sentiment, has espoused our mortal state, had endued a vesture of humanity that was affecting enough. Its destiny was linked, for the future, with that of the human soul, of which it was one of the special, the most distinctive ornaments. Perhaps it is not-being that is the true state, and all our dream of life is without existence; but, if so, we feel that it must be that these phrases of music, these conceptions which exist in relation to our dream, are nothing either. We shall perish, but we have for our hostages these divine captives who shall follow and share our fate. And death in their company is something less bitter, less inglorious, perhaps even less certain.

So Swann was not mistaken in believing that the phrase of the sonata did, really, exist. Human as it was from this point of view, it belonged, none the less, to an order of supernatural creatures whom we have never seen, but whom, in spite of that, we recognise and acclaim with rapture when some explorer of the unseen contrives to coax one forth, to bring it down from that divine world to

which he has access to shine for a brief moment in the firmament of ours. This was what Vinteuil had done for the little phrase. Swann felt that the composer had been content (with the musical instruments at his disposal) to draw aside its veil, to make it visible, following and respecting its outlines with a hand so loving, so prudent, so delicate and so sure, that the sound altered at every moment, blunting itself to indicate a shadow, springing back into life when it must follow the curve of some more bold projection. And one proof that Swann was not mistaken when he believed in the real existence of this phrase, was that anyone with an ear at all delicate for music would at once have detected the imposture had Vinteuil, endowed with less power to see and to render its forms, sought to dissemble (by adding a line, here and there, of his own invention) the dimness of his vision or the feebleness of his hand.

The phrase had disappeared. Swann knew that it would come again at the end of the last movement, after a long passage which Mme. Verdurin's pianist always 'skipped.' There were in this passage some admirable ideas which Swann had not distinguished on first hearing the sonata, and which he now perceived, as if they had, in the cloakroom of his memory, divested themselves of their uniform disguise of novelty. Swann listened to all the scattered themes which entered into the composition of the phrase, as its premises enter into the inevitable conclusion of a syllogism; he was assisting at the mystery of its birth. "Audacity," he exclaimed to himself, "as inspired, perhaps, as a Lavoisier's or an Ampere's, the audacity of a Vinteuil making experiment, discovering the secret laws that govern an unknown force, driving across a region unexplored towards the one possible goal the invisible team in which he has placed his trust and which he never may discern!" How charming the dialogue which Swann now heard between piano and violin, at the beginning of the last passage. The suppression of human speech, so far from letting fancy reign there uncontrolled (as one might have thought), had eliminated it altogether. Never was spoken language of such inflexible necessity, never had it known questions so pertinent, such obvious replies. At first the piano complained alone, like a bird deserted by its mate; the violin heard and answered it, as from a neighbouring tree. It was as at the first beginning of the world, as if there were not yet but these twain upon the earth, or rather in this world closed against all the rest, so fashioned by the logic of its creator that in it there should never be any but themselves; the world of this sonata. Was it a bird, was it the soul, not yet made perfect, of the little phrase, was it a fairy, invisibly somewhere lamenting, whose plaint the piano heard and tenderly repeated? Its cries were so sudden that the violinist must

snatch up his bow and race to catch them as they came. Marvellous bird! The violinist seemed to wish to charm, to tame, to woo, to win it. Already it had passed into his soul, already the little phrase which it evoked shook like a medium's the body of the violinist, 'possessed' indeed. Swann knew that the phrase was going to speak to him once again. And his personality was now so divided that the strain of waiting for the imminent moment when he would find himself face to face, once more, with the phrase, convulsed him in one of those sobs which a fine line of poetry or a piece of alarming news will wring from us, not when we are alone, but when we repeat one or the other to a friend, in whom we see ourselves reflected, like a third person, whose probable emotion softens him. It reappeared, but this time to remain poised in the air, and to sport there for a moment only, as though immobile, and shortly to expire. And so Swann lost nothing of the precious time for which it lingered. It was still there, like an iridescent bubble that floats for a while unbroken. As a rainbow, when its brightness fades, seems to subside, then soars again and, before it is extinguished, is glorified with greater splendour than it has ever shewn; so to the two colours which the phrase had hitherto allowed to appear it added others now, chords shot with every hue in the prism, and made them sing. Swann dared not move, and would have liked to compel all the other people in the room to remain still also, as if the slightest movement might embarrass the magic presence, supernatural, delicious, frail, that would so easily vanish. But no one, as it happened, dreamed of speaking. The ineffable utterance of one solitary man, absent, perhaps dead (Swann did not know whether Vinteuil were still alive), breathed out above the rites of those two hierophants, sufficed to arrest the attention of three hundred minds, and made of that stage on which a soul was thus called into being one of the noblest altars on which a supernatural ceremony could be performed. It followed that, when the phrase at last was finished, and only its fragmentary echoes floated among the subsequent themes which had already taken its place, if Swann at first was annoyed to see the Comtesse de Monteriender, famed for her imbecilities, lean over towards him to confide in him her impressions, before even the sonata had come to an end; he could not refrain from smiling, and perhaps also found an underlying sense, which she was incapable of perceiving, in the words that she used. Dazzled by the virtuosity of the performers, the Comtesse exclaimed to Swann: "It's astonishing! I have never seen anything to beat it..." But a scrupulous regard for accuracy making her correct her first assertion, she added the reservation: "anything to beat it... since the table-turning!"

From that evening, Swann understood that the feeling which Odette had once had for him would never revive, that his hopes of happiness would not be realised now. And the days on which, by a lucky chance, she had once more shewn herself kind and loving to him, or if she had paid him any attention, he recorded those apparent and misleading signs of a slight movement on her part towards him with the same tender and sceptical solicitude, the desperate joy that people reveal who, when they are nursing a friend in the last days of an incurable malady, relate, as significant facts of infinite value: “Yesterday he went through his accounts himself, and actually corrected a mistake that we had made in adding them up; he ate an egg to-day and seemed quite to enjoy it, if he digests it properly we shall try him with a cutlet to-morrow,” — although they themselves know that these things are meaningless on the eve of an inevitable death. No doubt Swann was assured that if he had now been living at a distance from Odette he would gradually have lost all interest in her, so that he would have been glad to learn that she was leaving Paris for ever; he would have had the courage to remain there; but he had not the courage to go.

He had often thought of going. Now that he was once again at work upon his essay on Vermeer, he wanted to return, for a few days at least, to The Hague, to Dresden, to Brunswick. He was certain that a ‘Toilet of Diana’ which had been acquired by the Mauritshuis at the Goldschmidt sale as a Nicholas Maes was in reality a Vermeer. And he would have liked to be able to examine the picture on the spot, so as to strengthen his conviction. But to leave Paris while Odette was there, and even when she was not there — for in strange places where our sensations have not been numbed by habit, we refresh, we revive an old pain — was for him so cruel a project that he felt himself to be capable of entertaining it incessantly in his mind only because he knew himself to be resolute in his determination never to put it into effect. But it would happen that, while he was asleep, the intention to travel would reawaken in him (without his remembering that this particular tour was impossible) and would be realised. One night he dreamed that he was going away for a year; leaning from the window of the train towards a young man on the platform who wept as he bade him farewell, he was seeking to persuade this young man to come away also. The train began to move; he awoke in alarm, and remembered that he was not going away, that he would see Odette that evening, and next day and almost every day. And then, being still deeply moved by his dream, he would thank heaven for those special circumstances which made him independent, thanks to which he could remain in Odette’s vicinity, and could even succeed in making her allow him to see her

sometimes; and, counting over the list of his advantages: his social position — his fortune, from which she stood too often in need of assistance not to shrink from the prospect of a definite rupture (having even, so people said, an ulterior plan of getting him to marry her) — his friendship with M. de Charlus, which, it must be confessed, had never won him any very great favour from Odette, but which gave him the pleasant feeling that she was always hearing complimentary things said about him by this common friend for whom she had so great an esteem — and even his own intelligence, the whole of which he employed in weaving, every day, a fresh plot which would make his presence, if not agreeable, at any rate necessary to Odette — he thought of what might have happened to him if all these advantages had been lacking, he thought that, if he had been, like so many other men, poor and humble, without resources, forced to undertake any task that might be offered to him, or tied down by parents or by a wife, he might have been obliged to part from Odette, that that dream, the terror of which was still so recent, might well have been true; and he said to himself: “People don’t know when they are happy. They’re never so unhappy as they think they are.” But he reflected that this existence had lasted already for several years, that all that he could now hope for was that it should last for ever, that he would sacrifice his work, his pleasures, his friends, in fact the whole of his life to the daily expectation of a meeting which, when it occurred, would bring him no happiness; and he asked himself whether he was not mistaken, whether the circumstances that had favoured their relations and had prevented a final rupture had not done a disservice to his career, whether the outcome to be desired was not that as to which he rejoiced that it happened only in dreams — his own departure; and he said to himself that people did not know when they were unhappy, that they were never so happy as they supposed.

Sometimes he hoped that she would die, painlessly, in some accident, she who was out of doors in the streets, crossing busy thoroughfares, from morning to night. And as she always returned safe and sound, he marvelled at the strength, at the suppleness of the human body, which was able continually to hold in check, to outwit all the perils that environed it (which to Swann seemed innumerable, since his own secret desire had strewn them in her path), and so allowed its occupant, the soul, to abandon itself, day after day, and almost with impunity, to its career of mendacity, to the pursuit of pleasure. And Swann felt a very cordial sympathy with that Mahomet II whose portrait by Bellini he admired, who, on finding that he had fallen madly in love with one of his wives, stabbed her, in order, as his Venetian biographer artlessly relates, to recover his

spiritual freedom. Then he would be ashamed of thinking thus only of himself, and his own sufferings would seem to deserve no pity now that he himself was disposing so cheaply of Odette's very life.

Since he was unable to separate himself from her without a subsequent return, if at least he had seen her continuously and without separations his grief would ultimately have been assuaged, and his love would, perhaps, have died. And from the moment when she did not wish to leave Paris for ever he had hoped that she would never go. As he knew that her one prolonged absence, every year, was in August and September, he had abundant opportunity, several months in advance, to dissociate from it the grim picture of her absence throughout Eternity which was lodged in him by anticipation, and which, consisting of days closely akin to the days through which he was then passing, floated in a cold transparency in his mind, which it saddened and depressed, though without causing him any intolerable pain. But that conception of the future, that flowing stream, colourless and unconfined, a single word from Odette sufficed to penetrate through all Swann's defences, and like a block of ice immobilised it, congealed its fluidity, made it freeze altogether; and Swann felt himself suddenly filled with an enormous and unbreakable mass which pressed on the inner walls of his consciousness until he was fain to burst asunder; for Odette had said casually, watching him with a malicious smile: "Forcheville is going for a fine trip at Whitsuntide. He's going to Egypt!" and Swann had at once understood that this meant: "I am going to Egypt at Whitsuntide with Forcheville." And, in fact, if, a few days later, Swann began: "About that trip that you told me you were going to take with Forcheville," she would answer carelessly: "Yes, my dear boy, we're starting on the l9th; we'll send you a 'view' of the Pyramids." Then he was determined to know whether she was Forcheville's mistress, to ask her point-blank, to insist upon her telling him. He knew that there were some perjuries which, being so superstitious, she would not commit, and besides, the fear, which had hitherto restrained his curiosity, of making Odette angry if he questioned her, of making himself odious, had ceased to exist now that he had lost all hope of ever being loved by her.

One day he received an anonymous letter which told him that Odette had been the mistress of countless men (several of whom it named, among them Forcheville, M. de Bréauté and the painter) and women, and that she frequented houses of ill-fame. He was tormented by the discovery that there was to be numbered among his friends a creature capable of sending him such a letter (for certain details betrayed in the writer a familiarity with his private life). He

wondered who it could be. But he had never had any suspicion with regard to the unknown actions of other people, those which had no visible connection with what they said. And when he wanted to know whether it was rather beneath the apparent character of M. de Charlus, or of M. des Laumes, or of M. d'Orsan that he must place the untravelled region in which this ignoble action might have had its birth; as none of these men had ever, in conversation with Swann, suggested that he approved of anonymous letters, and as everything that they had ever said to him implied that they strongly disapproved, he saw no further reason for associating this infamy with the character of any one of them more than with the rest. M. de Charlus was somewhat inclined to eccentricity, but he was fundamentally good and kind; M. des Laumes was a trifle dry, but wholesome and straight. As for M. d'Orsan, Swann had never met anyone who, even in the most depressing circumstances, would come to him with a more heartfelt utterance, would act more properly or with more discretion. So much so that he was unable to understand the rather indelicate part commonly attributed to M. d'Orsan in his relations with a certain wealthy woman, and that whenever he thought of him he was obliged to set that evil reputation on one side, as irreconcilable with so many unmistakable proofs of his genuine sincerity and refinement. For a moment Swann felt that his mind was becoming clouded, and he thought of something else so as to recover a little light; until he had the courage to return to those other reflections. But then, after not having been able to suspect anyone, he was forced to suspect everyone that he knew. After all, M. de Charlus might be most fond of him, might be most good-natured; but he was a neuropath; to-morrow, perhaps, he would burst into tears on hearing that Swann was ill; and to-day, from jealousy, or in anger, or carried away by some sudden idea, he might have wished to do him a deliberate injury. Really, that kind of man was the worst of all. The Prince des Laumes was, certainly, far less devoted to Swann than was M. de Charlus. But for that very reason he had not the same susceptibility with regard to him; and besides, his was a nature which, though, no doubt, it was cold, was as incapable of a base as of a magnanimous action. Swann regretted that he had formed no attachments in his life except to such people. Then he reflected that what prevents men from doing harm to their neighbours is fellow-feeling, that he could not, in the last resort, answer for any but men whose natures were analogous to his own, as was, so far as the heart went, that of M. de Charlus. The mere thought of causing Swann so much distress would have been revolting to him. But with a man who was insensible, of another order of humanity, as was the Prince des Laumes, how was one to

foresee the actions to which he might be led by the promptings of a different nature? To have a good heart was everything, and M. de Charlus had one. But M. d'Orsan was not lacking in that either, and his relations with Swann — cordial, but scarcely intimate, arising from the pleasure which, as they held the same views about everything, they found in talking together — were more quiescent than the enthusiastic affection of M. de Charlus, who was apt to be led into passionate activity, good or evil. If there was anyone by whom Swann felt that he had always been understood, and (with delicacy) loved, it was M. d'Orsan. Yes, but the life he led; it could hardly be called honourable. Swann regretted that he had never taken any notice of those rumours, that he himself had admitted, jestingly, that he had never felt so keen a sense of sympathy, or of respect, as when he was in thoroughly 'detrimental' society. "It is not for nothing," he now assured himself, "that when people pass judgment upon their neighbour, their finding is based upon his actions. It is those alone that are significant, and not at all what we say or what we think. Charlus and des Laumes may have this or that fault, but they are men of honour. Orsan, perhaps, has not the same faults, but he is not a man of honour. He may have acted dishonourably once again." Then he suspected Rémi, who, it was true, could only have inspired the letter, but he now felt himself, for a moment, to be on the right track. To begin with, Loredan had his own reasons for wishing harm to Odette. And then, how were we not to suppose that our servants, living in a situation inferior to our own, adding to our fortunes and to our frailties imaginary riches and vices for which they at once envied and despised us, should not find themselves led by fate to act in a manner abhorrent to people of our own class? He also suspected my grandfather. On every occasion when Swann had asked him to do him any service, had he not invariably declined? Besides, with his ideas of middle-class respectability, he might have thought that he was acting for Swann's good. He suspected, in turn, Bergotte, the painter, the Verdurins; paused for a moment to admire once again the wisdom of people in society, who refused to mix in the artistic circles in which such things were possible, were, perhaps, even openly avowed, as excellent jokes; but then he recalled the marks of honesty that were to be observed in those Bohemians, and contrasted them with the life of expedients, often bordering on fraudulence, to which the want of money, the craving for luxury, the corrupting influence of their pleasures often drove members of the aristocracy. In a word, this anonymous letter proved that he himself knew a human being capable of the most infamous conduct, but he could see no reason why that infamy should lurk in the depths — which no strange eye

might explore — of the warm heart rather than the cold, the artist's rather than the business-man's, the noble's rather than the flunkey's. What criterion ought one to adopt, in order to judge one's fellows? After all, there was not a single one of the people whom he knew who might not, in certain circumstances, prove capable of a shameful action. Must he then cease to see them all? His mind grew clouded; he passed his hands two or three times across his brow, wiped his glasses with his handkerchief, and remembering that, after all, men who were as good as himself frequented the society of M. de Charlus, the Prince des Laumes and the rest, he persuaded himself that this meant, if not that they were incapable of shameful actions, at least that it was a necessity in human life, to which everyone must submit, to frequent the society of people who were, perhaps, not incapable of such actions. And he continued to shake hands with all the friends whom he had suspected, with the purely formal reservation that each one of them had, possibly, been seeking to drive him to despair. As for the actual contents of the letter, they did not disturb him; for in not one of the charges which it formulated against Odette could he see the least vestige of fact. Like many other men, Swann had a naturally lazy mind, and was slow in invention. He knew quite well as a general truth, that human life is full of contrasts, but in the case of any one human being he imagined all that part of his or her life with which he was not familiar as being identical with the part with which he was. He imagined what was kept secret from him in the light of what was revealed. At such times as he spent with Odette, if their conversation turned upon an indelicate act committed, or an indelicate sentiment expressed by some third person, she would ruthlessly condemn the culprit by virtue of the same moral principles which Swann had always heard expressed by his own parents, and to which he himself had remained loyal; and then, she would arrange her flowers, would sip her tea, would shew an interest in his work. So Swann extended those habits to fill the rest of her life, he reconstructed those actions when he wished to form a picture of the moments in which he and she were apart. If anyone had portrayed her to him as she was, or rather as she had been for so long with himself, but had substituted some other man, he would have been distressed, for such a portrait would have struck him as lifelike. But to suppose that she went to bad houses, that she abandoned herself to orgies with other women, that she led the crapulous existence of the most abject, the most contemptible of mortals — would be an insane wandering of the mind, for the realisation of which, thank heaven, the chrysanthemums that he could imagine, the daily cups of tea, the virtuous indignation left neither time nor place. Only, now and again, he gave

Odette to understand that people maliciously kept him informed of everything that she did; and making opportune use of some detail — insignificant but true — which he had accidentally learned, as though it were the sole fragment which he would allow, in spite of himself, to pass his lips, out of the numberless other fragments of that complete reconstruction of her daily life which he carried secretly in his mind, he led her to suppose that he was perfectly informed upon matters, which, in reality, he neither knew nor suspected, for if he often adjured Odette never to swerve from or make alteration of the truth, that was only, whether he realised it or no, in order that Odette should tell him everything that she did. No doubt, as he used to assure Odette, he loved sincerity, but only as he might love a pander who could keep him in touch with the daily life of his mistress. Moreover, his love of sincerity, not being disinterested, had not improved his character. The truth which he cherished was that which Odette would tell him; but he himself, in order to extract that truth from her, was not afraid to have recourse to falsehood, that very falsehood which he never ceased to depict to Odette as leading every human creature down to utter degradation. In a word, he lied as much as did Odette, because, while more unhappy than she, he was no less egotistical. And she, when she heard him repeating thus to her the things that she had done, would stare at him with a look of distrust and, at all hazards, of indignation, so as not to appear to be humiliated, and to be blushing for her actions. One day, after the longest period of calm through which he had yet been able to exist without being overtaken by an attack of jealousy, he had accepted an invitation to spend the evening at the theatre with the Princesse des Laumes. Having opened his newspaper to find out what was being played, the sight of the title — *Les Filles de Marbre*, by Théodore Barrière, — struck him so cruel a blow that he recoiled instinctively from it and turned his head away. Illuminated, as though by a row of footlights, in the new surroundings in which it now appeared, that word ‘marble,’ which he had lost the power to distinguish, so often had it passed, in print, beneath his eyes, had suddenly become visible once again, and had at once brought back to his mind the story which Odette had told him, long ago, of a visit which she had paid to the Salon at the Palais d’Industrie with Mme. Verdurin, who had said to her, “Take care, now! I know how to melt you, all right. You’re not made of marble.” Odette had assured him that it was only a joke, and he had not attached any importance to it at the time. But he had had more confidence in her then than he had now. And the anonymous letter referred explicitly to relations of that sort. Without daring to lift his eyes to the newspaper, he opened it, turned the page so as not to see again

the words, *Filles de Marbre*, and began to read mechanically the news from the provinces. There had been a storm in the Channel, and damage was reported from Dieppe, Cabourg, Beuzeval.... Suddenly he recoiled again in horror.

The name of Beuzeval had suggested to him that of another place in the same district, Beuzeville, which carried also, bound to it by a hyphen, a second name, to wit Bréauté, which he had often seen on maps, but without ever previously remarking that it was the same name as that borne by his friend M. de Bréauté, whom the anonymous letter accused of having been Odette's lover. After all, when it came to M. de Bréauté, there was nothing improbable in the charge; but so far as Mme. Verdurin was concerned, it was a sheer impossibility. From the fact that Odette did occasionally tell a lie, it was not fair to conclude that she never, by any chance, told the truth, and in these bantering conversations with Mme. Verdurin which she herself had repeated to Swann, he could recognize those meaningless and dangerous pleasantries which, in their inexperience of life and ignorance of vice, women often utter (thereby certifying their own innocence), who — as, for instance, Odette, — would be the last people in the world to feel any undue affection for one another. Whereas, on the other hand, the indignation with which she had scattered the suspicions which she had unintentionally brought into being, for a moment, in his mind by her story, fitted in with everything that he knew of the tastes, the temperament of his mistress. But at that moment, by an inspiration of jealousy, analogous to the inspiration which reveals to a poet or a philosopher, who has nothing, so far, but an odd pair of rhymes or a detached observation, the idea or the natural law which will give power, mastery to his work, Swann recalled for the first time a remark which Odette had made to him, at least two years before: "Oh, Mme. Verdurin, she won't hear of anything just now but me. I'm a 'love,' if you please, and she kisses me, and wants me to go with her everywhere, and call her by her Christian name." So far from seeing in these expressions any connection with the absurd insinuations, intended to create an atmosphere of vice, which Odette had since repeated to him, he had welcomed them as a proof of Mme. Verdurin's warm-hearted and generous friendship. But now this old memory of her affection for Odette had coalesced suddenly with his more recent memory of her unseemly conversation. He could no longer separate them in his mind, and he saw them blended in reality, the affection imparting a certain seriousness and importance to the pleasantries which, in return, spoiled the affection of its innocence. He went to see Odette. He sat down, keeping at a distance from her. He did not dare to embrace her, not knowing whether in her, in himself, it would

be affection or anger that a kiss would provoke. He sat there silent, watching their love expire. Suddenly he made up his mind.

"Odette, my darling," he began, "I know, I am being simply odious, but I must ask you a few questions. You remember what I once thought about you and Mme. Verdurin? Tell me, was it true? Have you, with her or anyone else, ever?"

She shook her head, pursing her lips together; a sign which people commonly employ to signify that they are not going, because it would bore them to go, when some one has asked, "Are you coming to watch the procession go by?", or "Will you be at the review?". But this shake of the head, which is thus commonly used to decline participation in an event that has yet to come, imparts for that reason an element of uncertainty to the denial of participation in an event that is past. Furthermore, it suggests reasons of personal convenience, rather than any definite repudiation, any moral impossibility. When he saw Odette thus make him a sign that the insinuation was false, he realised that it was quite possibly true.

"I have told you, I never did; you know quite well," she added, seeming angry and uncomfortable.

"Yes, I know all that; but are you quite sure? Don't say to me, 'You know quite well'; say, 'I have never done anything of that sort with any woman.'"

She repeated his words like a lesson learned by rote, and as though she hoped, thereby, to be rid of him: "I have never done anything of that sort with any woman."

"Can you swear it to me on your Laghetto medal?"

Swann knew that Odette would never perjure herself on that.

"Oh, you do make me so miserable," she cried, with a jerk of her body as though to shake herself free of the constraint of his question. "Have you nearly done? What is the matter with you to-day? You seem to have made up your mind that I am to be forced to hate you, to curse you! Look, I was anxious to be friends with you again, for us to have a nice time together, like the old days; and this is all the thanks I get!"

However, he would not let her go, but sat there like a surgeon who waits for a spasm to subside that has interrupted his operation but need not make him abandon it.

"You are quite wrong in supposing that I bear you the least ill-will in the world, Odette," he began with a persuasive and deceitful gentleness. "I never speak to you except of what I already know, and I always know a great deal more than I say. But you alone can mollify by your confession what makes me

hate you so long as it has been reported to me only by other people. My anger with you is never due to your actions — I can and do forgive you everything because I love you — but to your untruthfulness, the ridiculous untruthfulness which makes you persist in denying things which I know to be true. How can you expect that I shall continue to love you, when I see you maintain, when I hear you swear to me a thing which I know to be false? Odette, do not prolong this moment which is torturing us both. If you are willing to end it at once, you shall be free of it for ever. Tell me, upon your medal, yes or no, whether you have ever done those things."

"How on earth can I tell?" she was furious. "Perhaps I have, ever so long ago, when I didn't know what I was doing, perhaps two or three times."

Swann had prepared himself for all possibilities. Reality must, therefore, be something which bears no relation to possibilities, any more than the stab of a knife in one's body bears to the gradual movement of the clouds overhead, since those words "two or three times" carved, as it were, a cross upon the living tissues of his heart. A strange thing, indeed, that those words, "two or three times," nothing more than a few words, words uttered in the air, at a distance, could so lacerate a man's heart, as if they had actually pierced it, could sicken a man, like a poison that he had drunk. Instinctively Swann thought of the remark that he had heard at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's: "I have never seen anything to beat it since the table-turning." The agony that he now suffered in no way resembled what he had supposed. Not only because, in the hours when he most entirely mistrusted her, he had rarely imagined such a culmination of evil, but because, even when he did imagine that offence, it remained vague, uncertain, was not clothed in the particular horror which had escaped with the words "perhaps two or three times," was not armed with that specific cruelty, as different from anything that he had known as a new malady by which one is attacked for the first time. And yet this Odette, from whom all this evil sprang, was no less dear to him, was, on the contrary, more precious, as if, in proportion as his sufferings increased, there increased at the same time the price of the sedative, of the antidote which this woman alone possessed. He wished to pay her more attention, as one attends to a disease which one discovers, suddenly, to have grown more serious. He wished that the horrible thing which, she had told him, she had done "two or three times" might be prevented from occurring again. To ensure that, he must watch over Odette. People often say that, by pointing out to a man the faults of his mistress, you succeed only in strengthening his attachment to her, because he does not believe you; yet how

much more so if he does! But, Swann asked himself, how could he manage to protect her? He might perhaps be able to preserve her from the contamination of any one woman, but there were hundreds of other women; and he realised how insane had been his ambition when he had begun (on the evening when he had failed to find Odette at the Verdurins') to desire the possession — as if that were ever possible — of another person. Happily for Swann, beneath the mass of suffering which had invaded his soul like a conquering horde of barbarians, there lay a natural foundation, older, more placid, and silently laborious, like the cells of an injured organ which at once set to work to repair the damaged tissues, or the muscles of a paralysed limb which tend to recover their former movements. These older, these autochthonous in-dwellers in his soul absorbed all Swann's strength, for a while, in that obscure task of reparation which gives one an illusory sense of repose during convalescence, or after an operation. This time it was not so much — as it ordinarily was — in Swann's brain that the slackening of tension due to exhaustion took effect, it was rather in his heart. But all the things in life that have once existed tend to recur, and, like a dying animal that is once more stirred by the throes of a convulsion which was, apparently, ended, upon Swann's heart, spared for a moment only, the same agony returned of its own accord to trace the same cross again. He remembered those moonlit evenings, when, leaning back in the victoria that was taking him to the Rue La Pérouse, he would cultivate with voluptuous enjoyment the emotions of a man in love, ignorant of the poisoned fruit that such emotions must inevitably bear. But all those thoughts lasted for no more than a second, the time that it took him to raise his hand to his heart, to draw breath again and to contrive to smile, so as to dissemble his torment. Already he had begun to put further questions. For his jealousy, which had taken an amount of trouble, such as no enemy would have incurred, to strike him this mortal blow, to make him forcibly acquainted with the most cruel pain that he had ever known, his jealousy was not satisfied that he had yet suffered enough, and sought to expose his bosom to an even deeper wound. Like an evil deity, his jealousy was inspiring Swann, was thrusting him on towards destruction. It was not his fault, but Odette's alone, if at first his punishment was not more severe.

"My darling," he began again, "it's all over now; was it with anyone I know?"

"No, I swear it wasn't; besides, I think I exaggerated, I never really went as far as that."

He smiled, and resumed with: "Just as you like. It doesn't really matter, but

it’s unfortunate that you can’t give me any name. If I were able to form an idea of the person that would prevent my ever thinking of her again. I say it for your own sake, because then I shouldn’t bother you any more about it. It’s so soothing to be able to form a clear picture of things ir one’s mind. What is really terrible is what one cannot imagine. But you’ve been so sweet to me; I don’t want to tire you. I do thank you, with all my heart, for all the good that you have done me. I’ve quite finished now. Only one word more: how many times?”

“Oh, Charles! can’t you see, you’re killing me? It’s all ever so long ago. I’ve never given it a thought. Anyone would say that you were positively trying to put those ideas into my head again. And then you’d be a lot better off!” she concluded, with unconscious stupidity but with intentional malice.

“I only wished to know whether it had been since I knew you. It’s only natural. Did it happen here, ever? You can’t give me any particular evening, so that I can remind myself what I was doing at the time? You understand, surely, that it’s not possible that you don’t remember with whom, Odette, my love.”

“But I don’t know; really, I don’t. I think it was in the Bois, one evening when you came to meet us on the Island. You had been dining with the Princesse des Laumes,” she added, happy to be able to furnish him with an exact detail, which testified to her veracity. “At the next table there was a woman whom I hadn’t seen for ever so long. She said to me, ‘Come along round behind the rock, there, and look at the moonlight on the water!’ At first I just yawned, and said, ‘No, I’m too tired, and I’m quite happy where I am, thank you.’ She swore there’d never been anything like it in the way of moonlight. ‘I’ve heard that tale before,’ I said to her; you see, I knew quite well what she was after.” Odette narrated this episode almost as if it were a joke, either because it appeared to her to be quite natural, or because she thought that she was thereby minimising its importance, or else so as not to appear ashamed. But, catching sight of Swann’s face, she changed her tone, and:

“You are a fiend!” she flung at him, “you enjoy tormenting me, making me tell you lies, just so that you’ll leave me in peace.”

This second blow struck at Swann was even more excruciating than the first. Never had he supposed it to have been so recent an affair, hidden from his eyes that had been too innocent to discern it, not in a past which he had never known, but in evenings which he so well remembered, which he had lived through with Odette, of which he had supposed himself to have such an intimate, such an exhaustive knowledge, and which now assumed, retrospectively, an aspect of cunning and deceit and cruelty. In the midst of them parted, suddenly, a gaping

chasm, that moment on the Island in the Bois de Boulogne. Without being intelligent, Odette had the charm of being natural. She had recounted, she had acted the little scene with so much simplicity that Swann, as he gasped for breath, could vividly see it: Odette yawning, the “rock there,”... He could hear her answer — alas, how lightheartedly — “I’ve heard that tale before!” He felt that she would tell him nothing more that evening, that no further revelation was to be expected for the present. He was silent for a time, then said to her:

“My poor darling, you must forgive me; I know, I am hurting you dreadfully, but it’s all over now; I shall never think of it again.”

But she saw that his eyes remained fixed upon the things that he did not know, and on that past era of their love, monotonous and soothing in his memory because it was vague, and now rent, as with a sword-wound, by the news of that minute on the Island in the Bois, by moonlight, while he was dining with the Princesse des Laumes. But he had so far acquired the habit of finding life interesting — of marvelling at the strange discoveries that there were to be made in it — that even while he was suffering so acutely that he did not believe it possible to endure such agony for any length of time, he was saying to himself: “Life is indeed astonishing, and holds some fine surprises; it appears that vice is far more common than one has been led to believe. Here is a woman in whom I had absolute confidence, who looks so simple, so honest, who, in any case, even allowing that her morals are not strict, seemed quite normal and healthy in her tastes and inclinations. I receive a most improbable accusation, I question her, and the little that she admits reveals far more than I could ever have suspected.” But he could not confine himself to these detached observations. He sought to form an exact estimate of the importance of what she had just told him, so as to know whether he might conclude that she had done these things often, and was likely to do them again. He repeated her words to himself: “I knew quite well what she was after.” “Two or three times.” “I’ve heard that tale before.” But they did not reappear in his memory unarmed; each of them held a knife with which it stabbed him afresh. For a long time, like a sick man who cannot restrain himself from attempting, every minute, to make the movement that, he knows, will hurt him, he kept on murmuring to himself: “I’m quite happy where I am, thank you,” “I’ve heard that tale before,” but the pain was so intense that he was obliged to stop. He was amazed to find that actions which he had always, hitherto, judged so lightly, had dismissed, indeed, with a laugh, should have become as serious to him as a disease which might easily prove fatal. He knew any number of women whom he could ask to keep an eye on Odette, but how

was he to expect them to adjust themselves to his new point of view, and not to remain at that which for so long had been his own, which had always guided him in his voluptuous existence; not to say to him with a smile: “You jealous monster, wanting to rob other people of their pleasure!” By what trap-door, suddenly lowered, had he (who had never found, in the old days, in his love for Odette, any but the most refined of pleasures) been precipitated into this new circle of hell from which he could not see how he was ever to escape. Poor Odette! He wished her no harm. She was but half to blame. Had he not been told that it was her own mother who had sold her, when she was still little more than a child, at Nice, to a wealthy Englishman? But what an agonising truth was now contained for him in those lines of Alfred de Vigny’s *Journal d’un Poète* which he had previously read without emotion: “When one feels oneself smitten by love for a woman, one ought to say to oneself, ‘What are ‘her surroundings? What has been her life?’ All one’s future happiness lies in the answer.” Swann was astonished that such simple phrases, spelt over in his mind as, “I’ve heard that tale before,” or “I knew quite well what she was after,” could cause him so much pain. But he realised that what he had mistaken for simple phrases were indeed parts of the panoply which held and could inflict on him the anguish that he had felt while Odette was telling her story. For it was the same anguish that he now was feeling afresh. It was no good, his knowing now, — indeed, it was no good, as time went on, his having partly forgotten and altogether forgiven the offence — whenever he repeated her words his old anguish refashioned him as he had been before Odette began to speak: ignorant, trustful; his merciless jealousy placed him once again, so that he might be effectively wounded by Odette’s admission, in the position of a man who does not yet know the truth; and after several months this old story would still dumbfounder him, like a sudden revelation. He marvelled at the terrible recreative power of his memory. It was only by the weakening of that generative force, whose fecundity diminishes as age creeps over one, that he could hope for a relaxation of his torments. But, as soon as the power that any one of Odette’s sentences had to make Swann suffer seemed to be nearly exhausted, lo and behold another, one of those to which he had hitherto paid least attention, almost a new sentence, came to relieve the first, and to strike at him with undiminished force. The memory of the evening on which he had dined with the Princesse des Laumes was painful to him, but it was no more than the centre, the core of his pain. That radiated vaguely round about it, overflowing into all the preceding and following days. And on whatever point in it he might intend his memory to rest, it was the whole

of that season, during which the Verdurins had so often gone to dine upon the Island in the Bois, that sprang back to hurt him. So violently, that by slow degrees the curiosity which his jealousy was ever exciting in him was neutralised by his fear of the fresh tortures which he would be inflicting upon himself were he to satisfy it. He recognised that all the period of Odette's life which had elapsed before she first met him, a period of which he had never sought to form any picture in his mind, was not the featureless abstraction which he could vaguely see, but had consisted of so many definite, dated years, each crowded with concrete incidents. But were he to learn more of them, he feared lest her past, now colourless, fluid and supportable, might assume a tangible, an obscene form, with individual and diabolical features. And he continued to refrain from seeking a conception of it, not any longer now from laziness of mind, but from fear of suffering. He hoped that, some day, he might be able to hear the Island in the Bois, or the Princesse des Laumes mentioned without feeling any twinge of that old rending pain; meanwhile he thought it imprudent to provoke Odette into furnishing him with fresh sentences, with the names of more places and people and of different events, which, when his malady was still scarcely healed, would make it break out again in another form.

But, often enough, the things that he did not know, that he dreaded, now, to learn, it was Odette herself who, spontaneously and without thought of what she did, revealed them to him; for the gap which her vices made between her actual life and the comparatively innocent life which Swann had believed, and often still believed his mistress to lead, was far wider than she knew. A vicious person, always affecting the same air of virtue before people whom he is anxious to keep from having any suspicion of his vices, has no register, no gauge at hand from which he may ascertain bow far those vices (their continuous growth being imperceptible by himself) have gradually segregated him from the normal ways of life. In the course of their cohabitation, in Odette's mind, with the memory of those of her actions which she concealed from Swann, her other, her innocuous actions were gradually coloured, infected by these, without her being able to detect anything strange in them, without their causing any explosion in the particular region of herself in which she made them live, but when she related them to Swann, he was overwhelmed by the revelation of the duplicity to which they pointed. One day, he was trying — without hurting Odette — to discover from her whether she had ever had any dealings with procuresses. He was, as a matter of fact, convinced that she had not; the anonymous letter had put the idea into his mind, but in a purely mechanical way; it had been received there with no

credulity, but it had, for all that, remained there, and Swann, wishing to be rid of the burden — a dead weight, but none the less disturbing — of this suspicion, hoped that Odette would now extirpate it for ever.

"Oh dear, no! Not that they don't simply persecute me to go to them," her smile revealed a gratified vanity which she no longer saw that it was impossible should appear legitimate to Swann. "There was one of them waited more than two hours for me yesterday, said she would give me any money I asked. It seems, there's an Ambassador who said to her, 'I'll kill myself if you don't bring her to me' — meaning me! They told her I'd gone out, but she waited and waited, and in the end I had to go myself and speak to her, before she'd go away. I do wish you could have seen the way I tackled her; my maid was in the next room, listening, and told me I shouted fit to bring the house down:— 'But when you hear me say that I don't want to! The idea of such a thing, I don't like it at all! I should hope I'm still free to do as I please and when I please and where I please! If I needed the money, I could understand... ' The porter has orders not to let her in again; he will tell her that I am out of town. Oh, I do wish I could have had you hidden somewhere in the room while I was talking to her. I know, you'd have been pleased, my dear. There's some good in your little Odette, you see, after all, though people do say such dreadful things about her."

Besides, her very admissions — when she made any — of faults which she supposed him to have discovered, rather served Swann as a starting-point for fresh doubts than they put an end to the old. For her admissions never exactly coincided with his doubts. In vain might Odette expurgate her confession of all its essential part, there would remain in the accessories something which Swann had never yet imagined, which crushed him anew, and was to enable him to alter the terms of the problem of his jealousy. And these admissions he could never forget. His spirit carried them along, cast them aside, then cradled them again in its bosom, like corpses in a river. And they poisoned it.

She spoke to him once of a visit that Forcheville had paid her on the day of the Paris-Murcie Fête. "What! you knew him as long ago as that? Oh, yes, of course you did," he corrected himself, so as not to shew that he had been ignorant of the fact. And suddenly he began to tremble at the thought that, on the day of the Paris-Murcie Fête, when he had received that letter which he had so carefully preserved, she had been having luncheon, perhaps, with Forcheville at the Maison d'Or. She swore that she had not. "Still, the Maison d'Or reminds me of something or other which, I knew at the time, wasn't true," he pursued, hoping to frighten her. "Yes that I hadn't been there at all that evening when I

told you I had just come from there, and you had been looking for me at Prévost's," she replied (judging by his manner that he knew) with a firmness that was based not so much upon cynicism as upon timidity, a fear of crossing Swann, which her own self-respect made her anxious to conceal, and a desire to shew him that she could be perfectly frank if she chose. And so she struck him with all the sharpness and force of a headsman wielding his axe, and yet could not be charged with cruelty, since she was quite unconscious of hurting him; she even began to laugh, though this may perhaps, it is true, have been chiefly to keep him from thinking that she was ashamed, at all, or confused. "It's quite true, I hadn't been to the Maison Dorée. I was coming away from Forcheville's. I had, really, been to Prévost's — that wasn't a story — and he met me there and asked me to come in and look at his prints. But some one else came to see him. I told you that I was coming from the Maison d'Or because I was afraid you might be angry with me. It was rather nice of me, really, don't you see? I admit, I did wrong, but at least I'm telling you all about it now, a'n't I? What have I to gain by not telling you, straight, that I lunched with him on the day of the Paris-Murcie Fête, if it were true? Especially as at that time we didn't know one another quite so well as we do now, did we, dear?"

He smiled back at her with the sudden, craven weakness of the utterly spiritless creature which these crushing words had made of him. And so, even in the months of which he had never dared to think again, because they had been too happy, in those months when she had loved him, she was already lying to him! Besides that moment (that first evening on which they had "done a cattleya") when she had told him that she was coming from the Maison Dorée, how many others must there have been, each of them covering a falsehood of which Swann had had no suspicion. He recalled how she had said to him once: "I need only tell Mme. Verdurin that my dress wasn't ready, or that my cab came late. There is always some excuse." From himself too, probably, many times when she had glibly uttered such words as explain a delay or justify an alteration of the hour fixed for a meeting, those moments must have hidden, without his having the least inkling of it at the time, an engagement that she had had with some other man, some man to whom she had said: "I need only tell Swann that my dress wasn't ready, or that my cab came late. There is always some excuse." And beneath all his most pleasant memories, beneath the simplest words that Odette had ever spoken to him in those old days, words which he had believed as though they were the words of a Gospel, beneath her daily actions which she had recounted to him, beneath the most ordinary places, her dressmaker's flat, the

Avenue du Bois, the Hippodrome, he could feel (dissembled there, by virtue of that temporal superfluity which, after the most detailed account of how a day has been spent, always leaves something over, that may serve as a hiding place for certain unconfessed actions), he could feel the insinuation of a possible undercurrent of falsehood which debased for him all that had remained most precious, his happiest evenings, the Rue La Pérouse itself, which Odette must constantly have been leaving at other hours than those of which she told him; extending the power of the dark horror that had gripped him when he had heard her admission with regard to the Maison Dorée, and, like the obscene creatures in the 'Desolation of Nineveh,' shattering, stone by stone, the whole edifice of his past.... If, now, he turned aside whenever his memory repeated the cruel name of the Maison Dorée it was because that name recalled to him, no longer, as, such a little time since, at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's party, the good fortune which he long had lost, but a misfortune of which he was now first aware. Then it befell the Maison Dorée, as it had befallen the Island in the Bois, that gradually its name ceased to trouble him. For what we suppose to be our love, our jealousy are, neither of them, single, continuous and individual passions. They are composed of an infinity of successive loves, of different jealousies, each of which is ephemeral, although by their uninterrupted multitude they give us the impression of continuity, the illusion of unity. The life of Swann's love, the fidelity of his jealousy, were formed out of death, of infidelity, of innumerable desires, innumerable doubts, all of which had Odette for their object. If he had remained for any length of time without seeing her, those that died would not have been replaced by others. But the presence of Odette continued to sow in Swann's heart alternate seeds of love and suspicion.

On certain evenings she would suddenly resume towards him a kindness of which she would warn him sternly that he must take immediate advantage, under penalty of not seeing it repeated for years to come; he must instantly accompany her home, to "do a cattleya," and the desire which she pretended to have for him was so sudden, so inexplicable, so imperious, the kisses which she lavished on him were so demonstrative and so unfamiliar, that this brutal and unnatural fondness made Swann just as unhappy as any lie or unkind action. One evening when he had thus, in obedience to her command, gone home with her, and while she was interspersing her kisses with passionate words, in strange contrast to her habitual coldness, he thought suddenly that he heard a sound; he rose, searched everywhere and found nobody, but he had not the courage to return to his place by her side; whereupon she, in a towering rage, broke a vase, with "I never can

do anything right with you, you impossible person!" And he was left uncertain whether she had not actually had some man concealed in the room, whose jealousy she had wished to wound, or else to inflame his senses.

Sometimes he repaired to 'gay' houses, hoping to learn something about Odette, although he dared not mention her name. "I have a little thing here, you're sure to like," the 'manageress' would greet him, and he would stay for an hour or so, talking dolefully to some poor girl who sat there astonished that he went no further. One of them, who was still quite young and attractive, said to him once, "Of course, what I should like would be to find a real friend, then he might be quite certain, I should never go with any other men again." "Indeed, do you think it possible for a woman really to be touched by a man's being in love with her, and never to be unfaithful to him?" asked Swann anxiously. "Why, surely! It all depends on their characters!" Swann could not help making the same remarks to these girls as would have delighted the Princesse des Laumes. To the one who was in search of a friend he said, with a smile: "But how nice of you, you've put on blue eyes, to go with your sash." "And you too, you've got blue cuffs on." "What a charming conversation we are having, for a place of this sort! I'm not boring you, am I; or keeping you?" "No, I've nothing to do, thank you. If you bored me I should say so. But I love hearing you talk." "I am highly flattered.... Aren't we behaving prettily?" he asked the 'manageress,' who had just looked in. "Why, yes, that's just what I was saying to myself, how sensibly they're behaving! But that's how it is! People come to my house now, just to talk. The Prince was telling me, only the other day, that he's far more comfortable here than with his wife. It seems that, nowadays, all the society ladies are like that; a perfect scandal, I call it. But I'll leave you in peace now, I know when I'm not wanted," she ended discreetly, and left Swann with the girl who had the blue eyes. But presently he rose and said good-bye to her. She had ceased to interest him. She did not know Odette.

The painter having been ill, Dr. Cottard recommended a sea-voyage; several of the 'faithful' spoke of accompanying him; the Verdurins could not face the prospect of being left alone in Paris, so first of all hired, and finally purchased a yacht; thus Odette was constantly going on a cruise. Whenever she had been away for any length of time, Swann would feel that he was beginning to detach himself from her, but, as though this moral distance were proportionate to the physical distance between them, whenever he heard that Odette had returned to Paris, he could not rest without seeing her. Once, when they had gone away, as everyone thought, for a month only, either they succumbed to a series of

temptations, or else M. Verdurin had cunningly arranged everything beforehand, to please his wife, and disclosed his plans to the ‘faithful’ only as time went on; anyhow, from Algiers they flitted to Tunis; then to Italy, Greece, Constantinople, Asia Minor. They had been absent for nearly a year, and Swann felt perfectly at ease and almost happy. Albeit M. Verdurin had endeavoured to persuade the pianist and Dr. Cottard that their respective aunt and patients had no need of them, and that, in any event, it was most rash to allow Mme. Cottard to return to Paris, where, Mme. Verdurin assured him, a revolution had just broken out, he was obliged to grant them their liberty at Constantinople. And the painter came home with them. One day, shortly after the return of these four travellers, Swann, seeing an omnibus approach him, labelled ‘Luxembourg,’ and having some business there, had jumped on to it and had found himself sitting opposite Mme. Cottard, who was paying a round of visits to people whose ‘day’ it was, in full review order, with a plume in her hat, a silk dress, a muff, an umbrella (which do for a parasol if the rain kept off), a card-case, and a pair of white gloves fresh from the cleaners. Wearing these badges of rank, she would, in fine weather, go on foot from one house to another in the same neighbourhood, but when she had to proceed to another district, would make use of a transfer-ticket on the omnibus. For the first minute or two, until the natural courtesy of the woman broke through the starched surface of the doctor’s-wife, not being certain, either, whether she ought to mention the Verdurins before Swann, she produced, quite naturally, in her slow and awkward, but not unattractive voice, which, every now and then, was completely drowned by the rattling of the omnibus, topics selected from those which she had picked up and would repeat in each of the score of houses up the stairs of which she clambered in the course of an afternoon.

“I needn’t ask you, M. Swann, whether a man so much in the movement as yourself has been to the Mirlitons, to see the portrait by Machard that the whole of Paris is running after. Well, and what do you think of it? Whose camp are you in, those who bless or those who curse? It’s the same in every house in Paris now, no one will speak of anything else but Machard’s portrait; you aren’t smart, you aren’t really cultured, you aren’t up-to-date unless you give an opinion on Machard’s portrait.”

Swann having replied that he had not seen this portrait, Mme. Cottard was afraid that she might have hurt his feelings by obliging him to confess the omission.

“Oh, that’s quite all right! At least you have the courage to be quite frank about it. You don’t consider yourself disgraced because you haven’t seen

Machard's portrait. I do think that so nice of you. Well now, I have seen it; opinion is divided, you know, there are some people who find it rather laboured, like whipped cream, they say; but I think it's just ideal. Of course, she's not a bit like the blue and yellow ladies that our friend Biche paints. That's quite clear. But I must tell you, perfectly frankly (you'll think me dreadfully old-fashioned, but I always say just what I think), that I don't understand his work. I can quite see the good points there are in his portrait of my husband; oh, dear me, yes; and it's certainly less odd than most of what he does, but even then he had to give the poor man a blue moustache! But Machard! Just listen to this now, the husband of my friend, I am on my way to see at this very moment (which has given me the very great pleasure of your company), has promised her that, if he is elected to the Academy (he is one of the Doctor's colleagues), he will get Machard to paint her portrait. So she's got something to look forward to! I have another friend who insists that she'd rather have Leloir. I'm only a wretched Philistine, and I've no doubt Leloir has perhaps more knowledge of painting even than Machard. But I do think that the most important thing about a portrait, especially when it's going to cost ten thousand francs, is that it should be like, and a pleasant likeness, if you know what I mean."

Having exhausted this topic, to which she had been inspired by the loftiness of her plume, the monogram on her card-case, the little number inked inside each of her gloves by the cleaner, and the difficulty of speaking to Swann about the Verdurins, Mme. Cottard, seeing that they had still a long way to go before they would reach the corner of the Rue Bonaparte, where the conductor was to set her down, listened to the promptings of her heart, which counselled other words than these.

"Your ears must have been burning," she ventured, "while we were on the yacht with Mme. Verdurin. We were talking about you all the time."

Swann was genuinely astonished, for he supposed that his name was never uttered in the Verdurins' presence.

"You see," Mme. Cottard went on, "Mme. de Crécy was there; need I say more? When Odette is anywhere it's never long before she begins talking about you. And you know quite well, it isn't nasty things she says. What! you don't believe me!" she went on, noticing that Svrann looked sceptical. And, carried away by the sincerity of her conviction, without putting any evil meaning into the word, which she used purely in the sense in which one employs it to speak of the affection that unites a pair of friends: "Why, she *adores* you! No, indeed; I'm sure it would never do to say anything against you when she was about; one

would soon be taught one's place! Whatever we might be doing, if we were looking at a picture, for instance, she would say, 'If only we had him here, he's the man who could tell us whether it's genuine or not. There's no one like him for that.' And all day long she would be saying, 'What can he be doing just now? I do hope, he's doing a little work! It's too dreadful that a fellow with such gifts as he has should be so lazy.' (Forgive me, won't you.) 'I can see him this very moment; he's thinking of us, he's wondering where we are.' Indeed, she used an expression which I thought very pretty at the time. M. Verdurin asked her, 'How in the world can you see what he's doing, when he's a thousand miles away?' And Odette answered, 'Nothing is impossible to the eye of a friend.'

"No, I assure you, I'm not saying it just to flatter you; you have a true friend in her, such as one doesn't often find. I can tell you, besides, in case you don't know it, that you're the only one. Mme. Verdurin told me as much herself on our last day with them (one talks more freely, don't you know, before a parting), 'I don't say that Odette isn't fond of us, but anything that we may say to her counts for very little beside what Swann might say.' Oh, mercy, there's the conductor stopping for me; here have I been chatting away to you, and would have gone right past the Rue Bonaparte, and never noticed... Will you be so very kind as to tell me whether my plume is straight?"

And Mme. Cottard withdrew from her muff, to offer it to Swann, a white-gloved hand from which there floated, with a transier-ticket, an atmosphere of fashionable life that pervaded the omnibus, blended with the harsher fragrance of newly cleaned kid. And Swann felt himself overflowing with gratitude to her, as well as to Mme. Verdurin (and almost to Odette, for the feeling that he now entertained for her was no longer tinged with pain, was scarcely even to be described, now, as love), while from the platform of the omnibus he followed her with loving eyes, as she gallantly threaded her way along the Rue Bonaparte, her plume erect, her skirt held up in one hand, while in the other she clasped her umbrella and her card-case, so that its monogram could be seen, her muff dancing in the air before her as she went.

To compete with and so to stimulate the moribund feelings that Swann had for Odette, Mme. Cottard, a wiser physician, in this case, than ever her husband would have been, had grafted among them others more normal, feelings of gratitude, of friendship, which in Swann's mind were to make Odette seem again more human (more like other women, since other women could inspire the same feelings in him), were to hasten her final transformation back into that Odette, loved with an undisturbed affection, who had taken him home one evening after

a revel at the painter's, to drink orangeade with Forcheville, that Odette with whom Swann had calculated that he might live in happiness.

In former times, having often thought with terror that a day must come when he would cease to be in love with Odette, he had determined to keep a sharp look-out, and as soon as he felt that love was beginning to escape him, to cling tightly to it and to hold it back. But now, to the faintness of his love there corresponded a simultaneous faintness in his desire to remain her lover. For a man cannot change, that is to say become another person, while he continues to obey the dictates of the self which he has ceased to be. Occasionally the name, if it caught his eye in a newspaper, of one of the men whom he supposed to have been Odette's lovers, reawakened his jealousy. But it was very slight, and, inasmuch as it proved to him that he had not completely emerged from that period in which he had so keenly suffered — though in it he had also known a way of feeling so intensely happy — and that the accidents of his course might still enable him to catch an occasional glimpse, stealthily and at a distance, of its beauties, this jealousy gave him, if anything, an agreeable thrill, as to the sad Parisian, when he has left Venice behind him and must return to France, a last mosquito proves that Italy and summer are still not too remote. But, as a rule, with this particular period of his life from which he was emerging, when he made an effort, if not to remain in it, at least to obtain, while still he might, an uninterrupted view of it, he discovered that already it was too late; he would have looked back to distinguish, as it might be a landscape that was about to disappear, that love from which he had departed, but it is so difficult to enter into a state of complete duality and to present to oneself the lifelike spectacle of a feeling which one has ceased to possess, that very soon, the clouds gathering in his brain, he could see nothing, he would abandon the attempt, would take the glasses from his nose and wipe them; and he told himself that he would do better to rest for a little, that there would be time enough later on, and settled back into his corner with as little curiosity, with as much torpor as the drowsy traveller who pulls his cap down over his eyes so as to get some sleep in the railway-carriage that is drawing him, he feels, faster and faster, out of the country in which he has lived for so long, and which he vowed that he would not allow to slip away from him without looking out to bid it a last farewell. Indeed, like the same traveller, if he does not awake until he has crossed the frontier and is again in France, when Swann happened to alight, close at hand, upon something which proved that Forcheville had been Odette's lover, he discovered that it caused him no pain, that love was now utterly remote, and he regretted that he had had no

warning of the moment in which he had emerged from it for ever. And just as, before kissing Odette for the first time, he had sought to imprint upon his memory the face that for so long had been familiar, before it was altered by the additional memory of their kiss, so he could have wished — in thought at least — to have been in a position to bid farewell, while she still existed, to that Odette who had inspired love in him and jealousy, to that Odette who had caused him so to suffer, and whom now he would never see again. He was mistaken. He was destined to see her once again, a few weeks later. It was while he was asleep, in the twilight of a dream. He was walking with Mme. Verdurin, Dr. Cottard, a young man in a fez whom he failed to identify, the painter, Odette, Napoleon III and my grandfather, along a path which followed the line of the coast, and overhung the sea, now at a great height, now by a few feet only, so that they were continually going up and down; those of the party who had reached the downward slope were no longer visible to those who were still climbing; what little daylight yet remained was failing, and it seemed as though a black night was immediately to fall on them. Now and then the waves dashed against the cliff, and Swann could feel on his cheek a shower of freezing spray. Odette told him to wipe this off, but he could not, and felt confused and helpless in her company, as well as because he was in his nightshirt. He hoped that, in the darkness, this might pass unnoticed; Mme. Verdurin, however, fixed her astonished gaze upon him for an endless moment, in which he saw her face change its shape, her nose grow longer, while beneath it there sprouted a heavy moustache. He turned away to examine Odette; her cheeks were pale, with little fiery spots, her features drawn and ringed with shadows; but she looked back at him with eyes welling with affection, ready to detach themselves like tears and to fall upon his face, and he felt that he loved her so much that he would have liked to carry her off with him at once. Suddenly Odette turned her wrist, glanced at a tiny watch, and said: “I must go.” She took leave of everyone, in the same formal manner, without taking Swann aside, without telling him where they were to meet that evening, or next day. He dared not ask, he would have liked to follow her, he was obliged, without turning back in her direction, to answer with a smile some question by Mme. Verdurin; but his heart was frantically beating, he felt that he now hated Odette, he would gladly have crushed those eyes which, a moment ago, he had loved so dearly, have torn the blood into those lifeless cheeks. He continued to climb with Mme. Verdurin, that is to say that each step took him farther from Odette, who was going downhill, and in the other direction. A second passed and it was many hours since she had

left him. The painter remarked to Swann that Napoleon III had eclipsed himself immediately after Odette. “They had obviously arranged it between them,” he added; “they must have agreed to meet at the foot of the cliff, but they wouldn’t say good-bye together; it might have looked odd. She is his mistress.” The strange young man burst into tears. Swann endeavoured to console him. “After all, she is quite right,” he said to the young man, drying his eyes for him and taking off the fez to make him feel more at ease. “I’ve advised her to do that, myself, a dozen times. Why be so distressed? He was obviously the man to understand her.” So Swann reasoned with himself, for the young man whom he had failed, at first, to identify, was himself also; like certain novelists, he had distributed his own personality between two characters, him who was the ‘first person’ in the dream, and another whom he saw before him, capped with a fez.

As for Napoleon III, it was to Forcheville that some vague association of ideas, then a certain modification of the Baron’s usual physiognomy, and lastly the broad ribbon of the Legion of Honour across his breast, had made Swann give that name; but actually, and in everything that the person who appeared in his dream represented and recalled to him, it was indeed Forcheville. For, from an incomplete and changing set of images, Swann in his sleep drew false deductions, enjoying, at the same time, such creative power that he was able to reproduce himself by a simple act of division, like certain lower organisms; with the warmth that he felt in his own palm he modelled the hollow of a strange hand which he thought that he was clasping, and out of feelings and impressions of which he was not yet conscious, he brought about sudden vicissitudes which, by a chain of logical sequences, would produce, at definite points in his dream, the person required to receive his love or to startle him awake. In an instant night grew black about him; an alarum rang, the inhabitants ran past him, escaping from their blazing houses; he could hear the thunder of the surging waves, and also of his own heart, which, with equal violence, was anxiously beating in his breast. Suddenly the speed of these palpitations redoubled, he felt a pain, a nausea that were inexplicable; a peasant, dreadfully burned, flung at him as he passed: “Come and ask Charlus where Odette spent the night with her friend. He used to go about with her, and she tells him everything. It was they that started the fire.” It was his valet, come to awaken him, and saying:— -

“Sir, it is eight o’clock, and the barber is here. I have told him to call again in an hour.”

But these words, as they dived down through the waves of sleep in which Swann was submerged, did not reach his consciousness without undergoing that

refraction which turns a ray of light, at the bottom of a bowl of water, into another sun; just as, a moment earlier, the sound of the door-bell, swelling in the depths of his abyss of sleep into the clangour of an alarum, had engendered the episode of the fire. Meanwhile the scenery of his dream-stage scattered in dust, he opened his eyes, heard for the last time the boom of a wave in the sea, grown very distant. He touched his cheek. It was dry. And yet he could feel the sting of the cold spray, and the taste of salt on his lips. He rose, and dressed himself. He had made the barber come early because he had written, the day before, to my grandfather, to say that he was going, that afternoon, to Combray, having learned that Mme. de Cambremer — Mlle. Legrandin that had been — was spending a few days there. The association in his memory of her young and charming face with a place in the country which he had not visited for so long, offered him a combined attraction which had made him decide at last to leave Paris for a while. As the different changes and chances that bring us into the company of certain other people in this life do not coincide with the periods in which we are in love with those people, but, overlapping them, may occur before love has begun, and may be repeated after love is ended, the earliest appearances, in our life, of a creature who is destined to afford us pleasure later on, assume retrospectively in our eyes a certain value as an indication, a warning, a presage. It was in this fashion that Swann had often carried back his mind to the image of Odette, encountered in the theatre, on that first evening when he had no thought of ever seeing her again — and that he now recalled the party at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, at which he had introduced General de Frober-ville to Mme. de Cambremer. So manifold are our interests in life that it is not uncommon that, on a single occasion, the foundations of a happiness which does not yet exist are laid down simultaneously with aggravations of a grief from which we are still suffering. And, no doubt, that might have occurred to Swann elsewhere than at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's. Who, indeed, can say whether, in the event of his having gone, that evening, somewhere else, other happinesses, other griefs would not have come to him, which, later, would have appeared to have been inevitable? But what did seem to him to have been inevitable was what had indeed taken place, and he was not far short of seeing something providential in the fact that he had at last decided to go to Mme. de Saint-Euverte's that evening, because his mind, anxious to admire the richness of invention that life shews, and incapable of facing a difficult problem for any length of time, such as to discover what, actually, had been most to be wished for, came to the conclusion that the sufferings through which he had passed that evening, and the

pleasures, at that time unsuspected, which were already being brought to birth, — the exact balance between which was too difficult to establish — were linked by a sort of concatenation of necessity.

But while, an hour after his awakening, he was giving instructions to the barber, so that his stiffly brushed hair should not become disarranged on the journey, he thought once again of his dream; he saw once again, as he had felt them close beside him, Odette's pallid complexion, her too thin cheeks, her drawn features, her tired eyes, all the things which — in the course of those successive bursts of affection which had made of his enduring love for Odette a long oblivion of the first impression that he had formed of her — he had ceased to observe after the first few days of their intimacy, days to which, doubtless, while he slept, his memory had returned to seek the exact sensation of those things. And with that old, intermittent fatuity, which reappeared in him now that he was no longer unhappy, and lowered, at the same time, the average level of his morality, he cried out in his heart: "To think that I have wasted years of my life, that I have longed for death, that the greatest love that I have ever known has been for a woman who did not please me, who was not in my style!"

Place-Names: The Name

Among the rooms which used most commonly to take shape in my mind during my long nights of sleeplessness, there was none that differed more utterly from the rooms at Combray, thickly powdered with the motes of an atmosphere granular, pollenous, edible and instinct with piety, than my room in the Grand Hôtel de la Plage, at Balbec, the walls of which, washed with ripolin, contained, like the polished sides of a basin in which the water glows with a blue, lurking fire, a finer air, pure, azure-tinted, saline. The Bavarian upholsterer who had been entrusted with the furnishing of this hotel had varied his scheme of decoration in different rooms, and in that which I found myself occupying had set against the walls, on three sides of it, a series of low book-cases with glass fronts, in which, according to where they stood, by a law of nature which he had, perhaps, forgotten to take into account, was reflected this or that section of the ever-changing view of the sea, so that the walls were lined with a frieze of sea-scapes, interrupted only by the polished mahogany of the actual shelves. And so effective was this that the whole room had the appearance of one of those model bedrooms which you see nowadays in Housing Exhibitions, decorated with works of art which are calculated by their designer to refresh the eyes of whoever may ultimately have to sleep in the rooms, the subjects being kept in some degree of harmony with the locality and surroundings of the houses for which the rooms are planned.

And yet nothing could have differed more utterly, either, from the real Balbec than that other Balbec of which I had often dreamed, on stormy days, when the wind was so strong that Françoise, as she took me to the Champs-Elysées, would warn me not to walk too near the side of the street, or I might have my head knocked off by a falling slate, and would recount to me, with many lamentations, the terrible disasters and shipwrecks that were reported in the newspaper. I longed for nothing more than to behold a storm at sea, less as a mighty spectacle than as a momentary revelation of the true life of nature; or rather there were for me no mighty spectacles save those which I knew to be not artificially composed for my entertainment, but necessary and unalterable, — the

beauty of landscapes or of great works of art. I was not curious, I did not thirst to know anything save what I believed to be more genuine than myself, what had for me the supreme merit of shewing me a fragment of the mind of a great genius, or of the force or the grace of nature as she appeared when left entirely to herself, without human interference. Just as the lovely sound of her voice, reproduced, all by itself, upon the phonograph, could never console a man for the loss of his mother, so a mechanical imitation of a storm would have left me as cold as did the illuminated fountains at the Exhibition. I required also, if the storm was to be absolutely genuine, that the shore from which I watched it should be a natural shore, not an embankment recently constructed by a municipality. Besides, nature, by all the feelings that she aroused in me, seemed to me the most opposite thing in the world to the mechanical inventions of mankind The less she bore their imprint, the more room she offered for the expansion of my heart. And, as it happened, I had preserved the name of Balbec, which Legrandin had cited to us, as that of a sea-side place in the very midst of "that funereal coast, famed for the number of its wrecks, swathed, for six months in the year, in a shroud of fog and flying foam from the waves.

"You feel, there, below your feet still," he had told me, "far more even than at Finistère (and even though hotels are now being superimposed upon it, without power, however, to modify that oldest bone in the earth's skeleton) you feel there that you are actually at the land's end of France, of Europe, of the Old World. And it is the ultimate encampment of the fishermen, precisely like the fishermen who have lived since the world's beginning, facing the everlasting kingdom of the sea-fogs and shadows of the night." One day when, at Combray, I had spoken of this coast, this Balbec, before M. Swann, hoping to learn from him whether it was the best point to select for seeing the most violent storms, he had replied: "I should think I did know Balbec! The church at Balbec, built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and still half romanesque, is perhaps the most curious example to be found of our Norman gothic, and so exceptional that one is tempted to describe it as Persian in its inspiration." And that region, which, until then, had seemed to me to be nothing else than a part of immemorial nature, that had remained contemporaneous with the great phenomena of geology — and as remote from human history as the Ocean itself, or the Great Bear, with its wild race of fishermen for whom, no more than for their whales, had there been any Middle Ages — it had been a great joy to me to see it suddenly take its place in the order of the centuries, with a stored consciousness of the romanesque epoch, and to know that the gothic trefoil had come to

diversify those wild rocks also, at the appointed hour, like those frail but hardy plants which, in the Polar regions, when the spring returns, scatter their stars about the eternal snows. And if gothic art brought to those places and people a classification which, otherwise, they lacked, they too conferred one upon it in return. I tried to form a picture in my mind of how those fishermen had lived, the timid and unsuspected essay towards social intercourse which they had attempted there, clustered upon a promontory of the shores of Hell, at the foot of the cliffs of death; and gothic art seemed to me a more living thing now that, detaching it from the towns in which, until then, I had always imagined it, I could see how, in a particular instance, upon a reef of savage rocks, it had taken root and grown until it flowered in a tapering spire. I was taken to see reproductions of the most famous of the statues at Balbec, — shaggy, blunt-faced Apostles, the Virgin from the porch, — and I could scarcely breathe for joy at the thought that I might myself, one day, see them take a solid form against their eternal background of salt fog. Thereafter, on dear, tempestuous February nights, the wind —— breathing into my heart, which it shook no less violently than the chimney of my bedroom, the project of a visit to Balbec — blended in me the desire for gothic architecture with that for a storm upon the sea.

I should have liked to take, the very next day, the good, the generous train at one twenty-two, of which never without a palpitating heart could I read, in the railway company’s bills or in advertisements of circular tours, the hour of departure: it seemed to me to cut, at a precise point in every afternoon, a most fascinating groove, a mysterious mark, from which the diverted hours still led one on, of course, towards evening, towards to-morrow morning, but to an evening and morning which one would behold, not in Paris but in one of those towns through which the train passed and among which it allowed one to choose; for it stopped at Bayeux, at Coutances, at Vitré, at Questambert, at Pontorson, at Balbec, at Lannion, at Lamballe, at Benodet, at Pont-Aven, at Quimperle, and progressed magnificently surcharged with names which it offered me, so that, among them all, I did not know which to choose, so impossible was it to sacrifice any. But even without waiting for the train next day, I could, by rising and dressing myself with all speed, leave Paris that very evening, should my parents permit, and arrive at Balbec as dawn spread westward over the raging sea, from whose driven foam I would seek shelter in that church in the Persian manner. But at the approach of the Easter holidays, when my parents bad promised to let me spend them, for once, in the North of

Italy, lo! in place of those dreams of tempests, by which I had been entirely possessed, not wishing to see anything but waves dashing in from all sides, mounting always higher, upon the wildest of coasts, beside churches as rugged and precipitous as cliffs, in whose towers the sea-birds would be wailing; suddenly, effacing them, taking away all their charm, excluding them because they were its opposite and could only have weakened its effect, was substituted in me the converse dream of the most variegated of springs, not the spring of Combray, still pricking with all the needle-points of the winter's frost, but that which already covered with lilies and anemones the meadows of Fiesole, and gave Florence a dazzling golden background, like those in Fra Angelico's pictures. From that moment, only sunlight, perfumes, colours, seemed to me to have any value; for this alternation of images had effected a change of front in my desire, and — as abrupt as those that occur sometimes in music, — a complete change of tone in my sensibility. Thus it came about that a mere atmospheric variation would be sufficient to provoke in me that modulation, without there being any need for me to await the return of a season. For often we find a day, in one, that has strayed from another season, and makes us live in that other, summons at once into our presence and makes us long for its peculiar pleasures, and interrupts the dreams that we were in process of weaving, by inserting, out of its turn, too early or too late, this leaf, torn from another chapter, in the interpolated calendar of Happiness. But soon it happened that, like those natural phenomena from which our comfort or our health can derive but an accidental and all too modest benefit, until the day when science takes control of them, and, producing them at will, places in our hands the power to order their appearance, withdrawn from the tutelage and independent of the consent of chance; similarly the production of these dreams of the Atlantic and of Italy ceased to depend entirely upon the changes of the seasons and of the weather. I need only, to make them reappear, pronounce the names: Balbec, Venice, Florence, within whose syllables had gradually accumulated all the longing inspired in me by the places for which they stood. Even in spring, to come in a book upon the name of Balbec sufficed to awaken in me the desire for storms at sea and for the Norman gothic; even on a stormy day the name of Florence or of Venice would awaken the desire for sunshine, for lilies, for the Palace of the Doges and for Santa Maria del Fiore.

But if their names thus permanently absorbed the image that I had formed of these towns, it was only by transforming that image, by subordinating its reappearance in me to their own special laws; and in consequence of this they

made it more beautiful, but at the same time more different from anything that the towns of Normandy or Tuscany could in reality be, and, by increasing the arbitrary delights of my imagination, aggravated the disenchantment that was in store for me when I set out upon my travels. They magnified the idea that I formed of certain points on the earth's surface, making them more special, and in consequence more real. I did not then represent to myself towns, landscapes, historic buildings, as pictures more or less attractive, cut out here and there of a substance that was common to them all, but looked on each of them as on an unknown thing, different from all the rest, a thing for which my soul was athirst, by the knowledge of which it would benefit. How much more individual still was the character that they assumed from being designated by names, names that were only for themselves, proper names such as people have. Words present to us little pictures of things, lucid and normal, like the pictures that are hung on the walls of schoolrooms to give children an illustration of what is meant by a carpenter's bench, a bird, an ant-hill; things chosen as typical of everything else of the same sort. But names present to us — of persons and of towns which they accustom us to regard as individual, as unique, like persons — a confused picture, which draws from the names, from the brightness or darkness of their sound, the colour in which it is uniformly painted, like one of those posters, entirely blue or entirely red, in which, on account of the limitations imposed by the process used in their reproduction, or by a whim on the designer's part, are blue or red not only the sky and the sea, but the ships and the church and the people in the streets. The name of Parma, one of the towns that I most longed to visit, after reading the*Chartreuse*, seeming to me compact and glossy, violet-tinted, soft, if anyone were to speak of such or such a house in Parma, in which I should be lodged, he would give me the pleasure of thinking that I was to inhabit a dwelling that was compact and glossy, violet-tinted, soft, and that bore no relation to the houses in any other town in Italy, since I could imagine it only by the aid of that heavy syllable of the name of Parma, in which no breath of air stirred, and of all that I had made it assume of Stendhalian sweetness and the reflected hue of violets. And when I thought of Florence, it was of a town miraculously embalmed, and flower-like, since it was called the City of the Lilies, and its Cathedral, Our Lady of the Flower. As for Balbec, it was one of those names in which, as on an old piece of Norman pottery that still keeps the colour of the earth from which it was fashioned, one sees depicted still the representation of some long-abolished custom, of some feudal right, of the former condition of some place, of an obsolete way of pronouncing the

language, which had shaped and wedded its incongruous syllables and which I never doubted that I should find spoken there at once, even by the inn-keeper who would pour me out coffee and milk on my arrival, taking me down to watch the turbulent sea, unchained, before the church; to whom I lent the aspect, disputatious, solemn and mediaeval, of some character in one of the old romances.

Had my health definitely improved, had my parents allowed me, if not actually to go down to stay at Balbec, at least to take, just once, so as to become acquainted with the architecture and landscapes of Normandy or of Brittany, that one twenty-two train into which I had so often clambered in imagination, I should have preferred to stop, and to alight from it, at the most beautiful of its towns; but in vain might I compare and contrast them; how was one to choose, any more than between individual people, who are not interchangeable, between Bayeux, so lofty in its noble coronet of rusty lace, whose highest point caught the light of the old gold of its second syllable; Vitré, whose acute accent barred its ancient glass with wooden lozenges; gentle Lamballe, whose whiteness ranged from egg-shell yellow to a pearly grey; Coutances, a Norman Cathedral, which its final consonants, rich and yellowing, crowned with a tower of butter; Lannion with the rumble and buzz, in the silence of its village street, of the fly on the wheel of the coach; Questambert, Pontorson, ridiculously silly and simple, white feathers and yellow beaks strewn along the road to those well-watered and poetic spots; Benodet, a name scarcely moored that seemed to be striving to draw the river down into the tangle of its seaweeds; Pont-Aven, the snowy, rosy flight of the wing of a lightly poised coif, tremulously reflected in the greenish waters of a canal; Quimperlé, more firmly attached, this, and since the Middle Ages, among the rivulets with which it babbled, threading their pearls upon a grey background, like the pattern made, through the cobwebs upon a window, by rays of sunlight changed into blunt points of tarnished silver?

These images were false for another reason also; namely, that they were necessarily much simplified; doubtless the object to which my imagination aspired, which my senses took in but incompletely and without any immediate pleasure, I had committed to the safe custody of names; doubtless because I had accumulated there a store of dreams, those names now magnetised my desires; but names themselves are not very comprehensive; the most that I could do was to include in each of them two or three of the principal curiosities of the town, which would lie there side by side, without interval or partition; in the name of Balbec, as in the magnifying glasses set in those penholders which one buys at

sea-side places, I could distinguish waves surging round a church built in the Persian manner. Perhaps, indeed, the enforced simplicity of these images was one of the reasons for the hold that they had over me. When my father had decided, one year, that we should go for the Easter holidays to Florence and Venice, not finding room to introduce into the name of Florence the elements that ordinarily constitute a town, I was obliged to let a supernatural city emerge from the impregnation by certain vernal scenes of what I supposed to be, in its essentials, the genius of Giotto. All the more — and because one cannot make a name extend much further in time than in space — like some of Giotto's paintings themselves which shew us at two separate moments the same person engaged in different actions, here lying on his bed, there just about to mount his horse, the name of Florence was divided into two compartments. In one, beneath an architectural dais, I gazed upon a fresco over which was partly drawn a curtain of morning sunlight, dusty, aslant, and gradually spreading; in the other (for, since I thought of names not as an inaccessible ideal but as a real and enveloping substance into which I was about to plunge, the life not yet lived, the life intact and pure which I enclosed in them, gave to the most material pleasures, to the simplest scenes, the same attraction that they have in the works of the Primitives), I moved swiftly — so as to arrive, as soon as might be, at the table that was spread for me, with fruit and a flask of Chianti — across a Ponte Vecchio heaped with jonquils, narcissi and anemones. That (for all that I was still in Paris) was what I saw, and not what was actually round about me. Even from the simplest, the most realistic point of view, the countries for which we long occupy, at any given moment, a far larger place in our true life than the country in which we may happen to be. Doubtless, if, at that time, I had paid more attention to what was in my mind when I pronounced the words "going to Florence, to Parma, to Pisa, to Venice," I should have realised that what I saw was in no sense a town, but something as different from anything that I knew, something as delicious as might be for a human race whose whole existence had passed in a series of late winter afternoons, that inconceivable marvel, a morning in spring. These images, unreal, fixed, always alike, filling all my nights and days, differentiated this period in my life from those which had gone before it (and might easily have been confused with it by an observer who saw things only from without, that is to say, who saw nothing), as in an opera a fresh melody introduces a novel atmosphere which one could never have suspected if one had done no more than read the libretto, still less if one had remained outside the theatre, counting only the minutes as they passed. And besides, even

from the point of view of mere quantity, in our life the days are not all equal. To reach the end of a day, natures that are slightly nervous, as mine was, make use, like motor-cars, of different ‘speeds.’ There are mountainous, uncomfortable days, up which one takes an infinite time to pass, and days downward sloping, through which one can go at full tilt, singing as one goes. During this month — in which I went laboriously over, as over a tune, though never to my satisfaction, these visions of Florence, Venice, Pisa, from which the desire that they excited in me drew and kept something as profoundly personal as if it had been love, love for another person — I never ceased to believe that they corresponded to a reality independent of myself, and they made me conscious of as glorious a hope as could have been cherished by a Christian in the primitive age of faith, on the eve of his entry into Paradise. Moreover, without my paying any heed to the contradiction that there was in my wishing to look at and to touch with my organs of sense what had been elaborated by the spell of my dreams and not perceived by my senses at all — though all the more tempting to them, in consequence, more different from anything that they knew — it was that which recalled to me the reality of these visions, which inflamed my desire all the more by seeming to hint a promise that my desire should be satisfied. And for all that the motive force of my exaltation was a longing for aesthetic enjoyments, the guide-books ministered even more to it than books on aesthetics, and, more again than the guide-books, the railway time-tables. What moved me was the thought that this Florence which I could see, so near and yet inaccessible, in my imagination, if the tract which separated it from me, in myself, was not one that I might cross, could yet be reached by a circuit, by a digression, were I to take the plain, terrestrial path. When I repeated to myself, giving thus a special value to what I was going to see, that Venice was the “School of Giorgione, the home of Titian, the most complete museum of the domestic architecture of the Middle Ages,” I felt happy indeed. As I was even more when, on one of my walks, as I stepped out briskly on account of the weather, which, after several days of a precocious spring, had relapsed into winter (like the weather that we had invariably found awaiting us at Combray, in Holy Week), — seeing upon the boulevards that the chestnut-trees, though plunged in a glacial atmosphere that soaked through them like a stream of water, were none the less beginning, punctual guests, arrayed already for the party, and admitting no discouragement, to shape and chisel and curve in its frozen lumps the irrepressible verdure whose steady growth the abortive power of the cold might hinder but could not succeed in restraining — I reflected that already the Ponte Vecchio was heaped high with

an abundance of hyacinths and anemones, and that the spring sunshine was already tinging the waves of the Grand Canal with so dusky an azure, with emeralds so splendid that when they washed and were broken against the foot of one of Titian's paintings they could vie with it in the richness of their colouring. I could no longer contain my joy when my father, in the intervals of tapping the barometer and complaining of the cold, began to look out which were the best trains, and when I understood that by making one's way, after luncheon, into the coal-grimed laboratory, the wizard's cell that undertook to contrive a complete transmutation of its surroundings, one could awaken, next morning, in the city of marble and gold, in which "the building of the wall was of jasper and the foundation of the wall an emerald." So that it and the City of the Lilies were not just artificial scenes which I could set up at my pleasure in front of my imagination, but did actually exist at a certain distance from Paris which must inevitably be traversed if I wished to see them, at their appointed place on the earth's surface, and at no other; in a word they were entirely real. They became even more real to me when my father, by saying: "Well, you can stay in Venice from the 20th to the 29th, and reach Florence on Easter morning," made them both emerge, no longer only from the abstraction of Space, but from that imaginary Time in which we place not one, merely, but several of our travels at once, which do not greatly tax us since they are but possibilities, — that Time which reconstructs itself so effectively that one can spend it again in one town after one has already spent it in another — and consecrated to them some of those actual, calendar days which are certificates of the genuineness of what one does on them, for those unique days are consumed by being used, they do not return, one cannot live them again here when one has lived them elsewhere; I felt that it was towards the week that would begin with the Monday on which the laundress was to bring back the white waistcoat that I had stained with ink, that they were hastening to busy themselves with the duty of emerging from that ideal Time in which they did not, as yet, exist, those two Queen Cities of which I was soon to be able, by the most absorbing kind of geometry, to inscribe the domes and towers on a page of my own life. But I was still on the way, only, to the supreme pinnacle of happiness; I reached it finally (for not until then did the revelation burst upon me that on the clattering streets, reddened by the light reflected from Giorgione's frescoes, it was not, as I had, despite so many promptings, continued to imagine, the men "majestic and terrible as the sea, bearing armour that gleamed with bronze beneath the folds of their blood-red cloaks," who would be walking in Venice next week, on the Easter vigil; but that

I myself might be the minute personage whom, in an enlarged photograph of St. Mark's that had been lent to me, the operator had portrayed, in a bowler hat, in front of the portico), when I heard my father say: "It must be pretty cold, still, on the Grand Canal; whatever you do, don't forget to pack your winter greatcoat and your thick suit." At these words I was raised to a sort of ecstasy; a thing that I had until then deemed impossible, I felt myself to be penetrating indeed between those "rocks of amethyst, like a reef in the Indian Ocean"; by a supreme muscular effort, a long way in excess of my real strength, stripping myself, as of a shell that served no purpose, of the air in my own room which surrounded me, I replaced it by an equal quantity of Venetian air, that marine atmosphere, indescribable and peculiar as the atmosphere of the dreams which my imagination had secreted in the name of Venice; I could feel at work within me a miraculous disincarnation; it was at once accompanied by that vague desire to vomit which one feels when one has a very sore throat; and they had to put me to bed with a fever so persistent that the doctor not only assured my parents that a visit, that spring, to Florence and Venice was absolutely out of the question, but warned their that, even when I should have completely recovered, I must, for at least a year, give up all idea of travelling, and be kept from anything that wa; liable to excite me.

And, alas, he forbade also, most categorically, my being allowed to go to the theatre, to hear Berma; the sublime artist, whose genius Bergotte had proclaimed, might, by introducing me to something else that was, perhaps, as important and as beautiful, have consoled me for not having been to Florence and Venice, for not going to Balbec. My parents had to be content with sending me, every day, to the Champs-Elysées, in the custody of a person who would see that I did not tire myself; this person was none other than Françoise, who had entered our service after the death of my aunt Léonie. Going to the Champs-Elysées I found unendurable. If only Bergotte had described the place in one of his books, I should, no doubt, have longed to see and to know it, like so many things else of which a simulacrum had first found its way into my imagination. That kept things warm, made them live, gave them personality, and I sought then to find their counterpart in reality, but in this public garden there was nothing that attached itself to my dreams.

***

One day, as I was weary of our usual place, beside the wooden horses,

Françoise had taken me for an excursion — across the frontier guarded at regular intervals by the little bastions of the barley-sugar women — into those neighbouring but foreign regions, where the faces of the passers-by were strange, where the goat-carriage went past; then she had gone away to lay down her things on a chair that stood with its back to a shrubbery of laurels; while I waited for her I was pacing the broad lawn, of meagre close-cropped grass already faded by the sun, dominated, at its far end, by a statue rising from a fountain, in front of which a little girl with reddish hair was playing with a shuttlecock; when, from the path, another little girl, who was putting on her cloak and covering up her battledore, called out sharply: “Good-bye, Gilberte, I’m going home now; don’t forget, we’re coming to you this evening, after dinner.” The name Gilberte passed close by me, evoking all the more forcibly her whom it labelled in that it did not merely refer to her, as one speaks of a man in his absence, but was directly addressed to her; it passed thus close by me, in action, so to speak, with a force that increased with the curve of its trajectory and as it drew near to its target; — carrying in its wake, I could feel, the knowledge, the impression of her to whom it was addressed that belonged not to me but to the friend who called to her, everything that, while she uttered the words, she more or less vividly reviewed, possessed in her memory, of their daily intimacy, of the visits that they paid to each other, of that unknown existence which was all the more inaccessible, all the more painful to me from being, conversely, so familiar, so tractable to this happy girl who let her message brush past me without my being able to penetrate its surface, who flung it on the air with a light-hearted cry: letting float in the atmosphere the delicious attar which that message had distilled, by touching them with precision, from certain invisible points in Mlle. Swann’s life, from the evening to come, as it would be, after dinner, at her home, — forming, on its celestial passage through the midst of the children and their nursemaids, a little cloud, exquisitely coloured, like the cloud that, curling over one of Poussin’s gardens, reflects minutely, like a cloud in the opera, teeming with chariots and horses, some apparition of the life of the gods; casting, finally, on that ragged grass, at the spot on which she stood (at once a scrap of withered lawn and a moment in the afternoon of the fair player, who continued to beat up and catch her shuttlecock until a governess, with a blue feather in her hat, had called her away) a marvellous little band of light, of the colour of heliotrope, spread over the lawn like a carpet on which I could not tire of treading to and fro with lingering feet, nostalgic and profane, while Françoise shouted: “Come on, button up your coat, look, and let’s get away!” and I

remarked for the first time how common her speech was, and that she had, alas, no blue feather in her hat.

Only, would *she* come again to the Champs-Elysées? Next day she was not there; but I saw her on the following days; I spent all my time revolving round the spot where she was at play with her friends, to such effect that once, when, they found, they were not enough to make up a prisoner's base, she sent one of them to ask me if I cared to complete their side, and from that day I played with her whenever she came. But this did not happen every day; there were days when she had been prevented from coming by her lessons, by her catechism, by a luncheon-party, by the whole of that life, separated from my own, which twice only, condensed into the name of Gilberte, I had felt pass so painfully close to me, in the hawthorn lane near Combray and on the grass of the Champs-Elysées. On such days she would have told us beforehand that we should not see her; if it were because of her lessons, she would say: "It is too tiresome, I sha'n't be able to come to-morrow; you will all be enjoying yourselves here without me," with an air of regret which to some extent consoled me; if, on the other hand, she had been invited to a party, and I, not knowing this, asked her whether she was coming to play with us, she would reply: "Indeed I hope not! Indeed I hope Mamma will let me go to my friend's." But on these days I did at least know that I should not see her, whereas on others, without any warning, her mother would take her for a drive, or some such thing, and next day she would say: "Oh, yes! I went out with Mamma," as though it had been the most natural thing in the world, and not the greatest possible misfortune for some one else. There were also the days of bad weather on which her governess, afraid, on her own account, of the rain, would not bring Gilberte to the Champs-Elysées.

And so, if the heavens were doubtful, from early morning I would not cease to interrogate them, observing all the omens. If I saw the lady opposite, just inside her window, putting on her hat, I would say to myself: "That lady is going out; it must, therefore, be weather in which one can go out. Why should not Gilberte do the same as that lady?" But the day grew dark. My mother said that it might clear again, that one burst of sunshine would be enough, but that more probably it would rain; and if it rained, of what use would it be to go to the Champs-Elysées? And so, from breakfast-time, my anxious eyes never left the uncertain, clouded sky. It remained dark: Outside the window, the balcony was grey. Suddenly, on its sullen stone, I did not indeed see a less negative colour, but I felt as it were an effort towards a less negative colour, the pulsation of a hesitating ray that struggled to discharge its light. A moment later the balcony

was as pale and luminous as a standing water at dawn, and a thousand shadows from the iron-work of its balustrade had come to rest on it. A breath of wind dispersed them; the stone grew dark again, but, like tamed creatures, they returned; they began, imperceptibly, to grow lighter, and by one of those continuous crescendos, such as, in music, at the end of an overture, carry a single note to the extreme fortissimo, making it pass rapidly through all the intermediate stages, I saw it attain to that fixed, unalterable gold of fine days, on which the sharply cut shadows of the wrought iron of the balustrade were outlined in black like a capricious vegetation, with a fineness in the delineation of their smallest details which seemed to indicate a deliberate application, an artist's satisfaction, and with so much relief, so velvety a bloom in the restfulness of their sombre and happy mass that in truth those large and leafy shadows which lay reflected on that lake of sunshine seemed aware that they were pledges of happiness and peace of mind.

Brief, fading ivy, climbing, fugitive flora, the most colourless, the most depressing, to many minds, of all that creep on walls or decorate windows; to me the dearest of them all, from the day when it appeared upon our balcony, like the very shadow of the presence of Gilberte, who was perhaps already in the Champs-Elysées, and as soon as I arrived there would greet me with: "Let's begin at once. You are on my side." Frail, swept away by a breath, but at the same time in harmony, not with the season, with the hour; a promise of that immediate pleasure which the day will deny or fulfil, and thereby of the one paramount immediate pleasure, the pleasure of loving and of being loved; more soft, more warm upon tie stone than even moss is; alive, a ray of sunshine sufficing for its birth, and for the birth of joy, even in the heart of winter.

And on those days when all other vegetation had disappeared, when the fine jerkins of green leather which covered the trunks of the old trees were hidden beneath the snow; after the snow had ceased to fall, but when the sky was still too much overcast for me to hope that Gilberte would venture out, then suddenly — inspiring my mother to say: "Look, it's quite fine now; I think you might perhaps try going to the Champs-Elysées after all." — On the mantle of snow that swathed the balcony, the sun had appeared and was stitching seams of gold, with embroidered patches of dark shadow. That day we found no one there, or else a solitary girl, on the point of departure, who assured me that Gilberte was not coming. The chairs, deserted by the imposing but uninspiring company of governesses, stood empty. Only, near the grass, was sitting a lady of uncertain age who came in all weathers, dressed always in an identical style, splendid and

sombre, to make whose acquaintance I would have, at that period, sacrificed, had it lain in my power, all the greatest opportunities in my life to come. For Gilberte went up every day to speak to her; she used to ask Gilberte for news of her "dearest mother" and it struck me that, if I had known her, I should have been for Gilberte some one wholly different, some one who knew people in her parents' world. While her grandchildren played together at a little distance, she would sit and read the Débats, which she called "My old *Débats*!" as, with an aristocratic familiarity, she would say, speaking of the police-sergeant or the woman who let the chairs, "My old friend the police-sergeant," or "The chair-keeper and I, who are old friends."

Françoise found it too cold to stand about, so we walked to the Pont de la Concorde to see the Seine frozen over, on to which everyone, even children, walked fearlessly, as though upon an enormous whale, stranded, defenceless, and about to be cut up. We returned to the Champs-Elysées; I was growing sick with misery between the motionless wooden horses and the white lawn, caught in a net of black paths from which the snow had been cleared, while the statue that surmounted it held in its hand a long pendent icicle which seemed to explain its gesture. The old lady herself, having folded up her *Débats*, asked a passing nursemaid the time, thanking her with "How very good of you!" then begged the road-sweeper to tell her grandchildren to come, as she felt cold, adding "A thousand thanks. I am sorry to give you so much trouble!" Suddenly the sky was rent in two: between the punch-and-judy and the horses, against the opening horizon, I had just seen, like a miraculous sign, Mademoiselle's blue feather. And now Gilberte was running at full speed towards me, sparkling and rosy beneath a cap trimmed with fur, enlivened by the cold, by being late, by her anxiety for a game; shortly before she reached me, she slipped on a piece of ice and, either to regain her balance, or because it appeared to her graceful, or else pretending that she was on skates, it was with outstretched arms that she smilingly advanced, as though to embrace me. "Bravo! bravo! that's splendid; 'topping,' I should say, like you — 'sporting,' I suppose I ought to say, only I'm a hundred-and-one, a woman of the old school," exclaimed the lady, uttering, on behalf of the voiceless Champs-Elysées, their thanks to Gilberte for having come, without letting herself be frightened away by the weather. "You are like me, faithful at all costs to our old Champs-Elysées; we are two brave souls! You wouldn't believe me, I dare say, if I told you that I love them, even like this. This snow (I know, you'll laugh at me), it makes me think of ermine!" And the old lady began to laugh herself.

The first of these days — to which the snow, a symbol of the powers that were able to deprive me of the sight of Gilberte, imparted the sadness of a day of separation, almost the aspect of a day of departure, because it changed the outward form and almost forbade the use of the customary scene of our only encounters, now altered, covered, as it were, in dust-sheets — that day, none the less, marked a stage in the progress of my love, for it was, in a sense, the first sorrow that she was to share with me. There were only our two selves of our little company, and to be thus alone with her was not merely like a beginning of intimacy, but also on her part — as though she had come there solely to please me, and in such weather — it seemed to me as touching as if, on one of those days on which she had been invited to a party, she had given it up in order to come to me in the Champs-Elysées; I acquired more confidence in the vitality, in the future of a friendship which could remain so much alive amid the torpor, the solitude, the decay of our surroundings; and while she dropped pellets of snow down my neck, I smiled lovingly at what seemed to me at once a predilection that she shewed for me in thus tolerating me as her travelling companion in this new, this wintry land, and a sort of loyalty to me which she preserved through evil times. Presently, one after another, like shyly bopping sparrows, her friends arrived, black against the snow. We got ready to play and, since this day which had begun so sadly was destined to end in joy, as I went up, before the game started, to the friend with the sharp voice whom I had heard, that first day, calling Gilberte by name, she said to me: “No, no, I’m sure you’d much rather be in Gilberte’s camp; besides, look, she’s signalling to you.” She was in fact summoning me to cross the snowy lawn to her camp, to ‘take the field,’ which the sun, by casting over it a rosy gleam, the metallic lustre of old and worn brocades, had turned into a Field of the Cloth of Gold.

This day, which I had begun with so many misgivings, was, as it happened, one of the few on which I was not unduly wretched.

For, although I no longer thought, now, of anything save not to let a single day pass without seeing Gilberte (so much so that once, when my grandmother had not come home by dinner-time, I could not resist the instinctive reflection that, if she had been run over in the street and killed, I should not for some time be allowed to play in the Champs-Elysées; when one is in love one has no love left for anyone), yet those moments which I spent in her company, for which I had waited with so much impatience all night and morning, for which I had quivered with excitement, to which I would have sacrificed everything else in the world, were by no means happy moments; well did I know it, for they were

the only moments in my life on which I concentrated a scrupulous, undistracted attention, and yet I could not discover in them one atom of pleasure. All the time that I was away from Gilberte, I wanted to see her, because, having incessantly sought to form a mental picture of her, I was unable, in the end, to do so, and did not know exactly to what my love corresponded. Besides, she had never yet told me that she loved me. Far from it, she had often boasted that she knew other little boys whom she preferred to myself, that I was a good companion, with whom she was always willing to play, although I was too absent-minded, not attentive enough to the game. Moreover, she had often shewn signs of apparent coldness towards me, which might have shaken my faith that I was for her a creature different from the rest, had that faith been founded upon a love that Gilberte had felt for me, and not, as was the case, upon the love that I felt for her, which strengthened its resistance to the assaults of doubt by making it depend entirely upon the manner in which I was obliged, by an internal compulsion, to think of Gilberte. But my feelings with regard to her I had never yet ventured to express to her in words. Of course, on every page of my exercise-books, I wrote out, in endless repetition, her name and address, but at the sight of those vague lines which I might trace, without her having to think, on that account, of me, I felt discouraged, because they spoke to me, not of Gilberte, who would never so much as see them, but of my own desire, which they seemed to shew me in its true colours, as something purely personal, unreal, tedious and ineffective. The most important thing was that we should see each other, Gilberte and I, and should have an opportunity of making a mutual confession of our love which, until then, would not officially (so to speak) have begun. Doubtless the various reasons which made me so impatient to see her would have appeared less urgent to a grown man. As life goes on, we acquire such adroitness in the culture of our pleasures, that we content ourselves with that which we derive from thinking of a woman, as I was thinking of Gilberte, without troubling ourselves to ascertain whether the image corresponds to the reality, — and with the pleasure of loving her, without needing to be sure, also, that she loves us; or again that we renounce the pleasure of confessing our passion for her, so as to preserve and enhance the passion that she has for us, like those Japanese gardeners who, to obtain one perfect blossom, will sacrifice the rest. But at the period when I was in love with Gilberte, I still believed that Love did really exist, apart from ourselves; that, allowing us, at the most, to surmount the obstacles in our way, it offered us its blessings in an order in which we were not free to make the least alteration; it seemed to me that if I had, on my own initiative, substituted for the sweetness of

a confession a pretence of indifference, I should not only have been depriving myself of one of the joys of which I had most often dreamed, I should have been fabricating, of my own free will, a love that was artificial and without value, that bore no relation to the truth, whose mysterious and foreordained ways I should thus have been declining to follow.

But when I arrived at the Champs-Elysées, — and, as at first sight it appeared, was in a position to confront my love, so as to make it undergo the necessary modifications, with its living and independent cause — as soon as I was in the presence of that Gilberte Swann on the sight of whom I had counted to revive the images that my tired memory had lost and could not find again, of that Gilberte Swann with whom I had been playing the day before, and whom I had just been prompted to greet, and then to recognise, by a blind instinct like that which, when we are walking, sets one foot before the other, without giving us time to think what we are doing, then at once it became as though she and the little girl who had inspired my dreams had been two different people. If, for instance, I had retained in my memory overnight two fiery eyes above plump and rosy cheeks, Gilberte's face would now offer me (and with emphasis) something that I distinctly had not remembered, a certain sharpening and prolongation of the nose which, instantaneously associating itself with certain others of her features, assumed the importance of those characteristics which, in natural history, are used to define a species, and transformed her into a little girl of the kind that have sharpened profiles. While I was making myself ready to take advantage of this long expected moment, and to surrender myself to the impression of Gilberte which I had prepared beforehand but could no longer find in my head, to an extent which would enable me, during the long hours which I must spend alone, to be certain that it was indeed herself whom I had in mind, that it was indeed my love for her that I was gradually making grow, as a book grows when one is writing it, she threw me a ball; and, like the idealist philosopher whose body takes account of the external world in the reality of which his intellect declines to believe, the same self which had made me salute her before I had identified her now urged me to catch the ball that she tossed to me (as though she had been a companion, with whom I had come to play, and not a sister-soul with whom my soul had come to be limited), made me, out of politeness, until the time came when she had to I go, address a thousand polite and trivial remarks to her, and so prevented me both from keeping a silence in which I might at last have laid my hand upon the indispensable, escaped idea, and from uttering the words which might have made that definite progress in the

course of our love on which I was always obliged to count only for the following afternoon. There was, however, an occasional development. One day, we had gone with Gilberte to the stall of our own special vendor, who was always particularly nice to us, since it was to her that M. Swann used to send for his gingerbread, of which, for reasons of health (he suffered from a racial eczema, and from the constipation of the prophets), he consumed a great quantity, — Gilberte pointed out to me with a laugh two little boys who were like the little artist and the little naturalist in the children's storybooks. For one of them would not have a red stick of rock because he preferred the purple, while the other, with tears in his eyes, refused a plum which his nurse was buying for him, because, as he finally explained in passionate tones: "I want the other plum; it's got a worm in it!" I purchased two ha'penny marbles. With admiring eyes I saw, luminous and imprisoned in a bowl by themselves, the agate marbles which seemed precious to me because they were as fair and smiling as little girls, and because they cost five-pence each. Gilberte, who was given a great deal more pocket money than I ever had, asked me which I thought the prettiest. They were as transparent, as liquid-seeming as life itself. I would not have had her sacrifice a single one of them. I should have liked her to be able to buy them, to liberate them all. Still, I pointed out one that had the same colour as her eyes. Gilberte took it, turned it about until it shone with a ray of gold, fondled it, paid its ransom, but at once handed me her captive, saying: "Take it; it is for you, I give it to you, keep it to remind yourself of me."

Another time, being still obsessed by the desire to hear Berma in classic drama, I had asked her whether she had not a copy of a pamphlet in which Bergotte spoke of Racine, and which was now out of print. She had told me to let her know the exact title of it, and that evening I had sent her a little telegram, writing on its envelope the name, Gilberte Swann, which I had so often, traced in my exercise-books. Next day she brought me in a parcel tied with pink bows and sealed with white wax, the pamphlet, a copy of which she had managed to find. "You see, it is what you asked me for," she said, taking from her muff the telegram that I had sent her. But in the address on the pneumatic message — which, only yesterday, was nothing, was merely a 'little blue' that I had written, and, after a messenger had delivered it to Gilberte's porter and a servant had taken it to her in her room, had become a thing without value or distinction, one of the 'little blues' that she had received in the course of the day — I had difficulty in recognising the futile, straggling lines of my own handwriting beneath the circles stamped on it at the post-office, the inscriptions added in

pencil by a postman, signs of effectual realisation, seals of the external world, violet bands symbolical of life itself, which for the first time came to espouse, to maintain, to raise, to rejoice my dream.

And there was another day on which she said to me: "You know, you may call me 'Gilberte'; in any case, I'm going to call you by your first name. It's too silly not to." Yet she continued for a while to address me by the more formal '*vous*,' and, when I drew her attention to this, smiled, and composing, constructing a phrase like those that are put into the grammar-books of foreign languages with no other object than to teach us to make use of a new word, ended it with my Christian name. And when I recalled, later, what I had felt at the time, I could distinguish the impression of having been held, for a moment, in her mouth, myself, naked, without, any longer, any of the social qualifications which belonged equally to her other companions and, when she used my surname, to my parents, accessories of which her lips — by the effort that she made, a little after her father's manner, to articulate the words to which she wished to give a special value — had the air of stripping, of divesting me, as one peels the skin from a fruit of which one is going to put only the pulp into one's mouth, while her glance, adapting itself to the same new degree of intimacy as her speech, fell on me also more directly, not without testifying to the consciousness, the pleasure, even the gratitude that it felt, accompanying itself with a smile.

But at that actual moment, I was not able to appreciate the worth of these new pleasures. They were given, not by the little girl whom I loved, to me who loved her, but by the other, her with whom I used to play, to my other self, who possessed neither the memory of the true Gilberte, nor the fixed heart which alone could have known the value of a happiness for which it alone had longed. Even after I had returned home I did not taste them, since, every day, the necessity which made me hope that on the morrow I should arrive at the clear, calm, happy contemplation of Gilberte, that she would at last confess her love for me, explaining to me the reasons by which she had been obliged, hitherto, to conceal it, that same necessity forced me to regard the past as of no account, to look ahead of me only, to consider the little advantages that she had given me not in themselves and as if they were self-sufficient, but like fresh rungs of the ladder on which I might set my feet, which were going to allow me to advance a step further and finally to attain the happiness which I had not yet encountered.

If, at times, she shewed me these marks of her affection, she troubled me also by seeming not to be pleased to see me, and this happened often on the very

days on which I had most counted for the realisation of my hopes. I was sure that Gilberte was coming to the Champs-Elysées, and I felt an elation which seemed merely the anticipation of a great happiness when — going into the drawing-room in the morning to kiss Mamma, who was already dressed to go out, the coils of her black hair elaborately built up, and her beautiful hands, plump and white, fragrant still with soap — I had been apprised, by seeing a column of dust standing by itself in the air above the piano, and by hearing a barrel-organ playing, beneath the window, *En revenant de la revue*, that the winter had received, until nightfall, an unexpected, radiant visit from a day of spring. While we sat at luncheon, by opening her window, the lady opposite had sent packing, in the twinkling of an eye, from beside my chair — to sweep in a single stride over the whole width of our dining-room — a sunbeam which had lain down there for its midday rest and returned to continue it there a moment later. At school, during the one o'clock lesson, the sun made me sick with impatience and boredom as it let fall a golden stream that crept to the edge of my desk, like an invitation to the feast at which I could not myself arrive before three o'clock, until the moment when Françoise came to fetch me at the school-gate, and we made our way towards the Champs-Elysées through streets decorated with sunlight, dense with people, over which the balconies, detached by the sun and made vaporous, seemed to float in front of the houses like clouds of gold. Alas! in the Champs-Elysées I found no Gilberte; she had not yet arrived. Motionless, on the lawn nurtured by the invisible sun which, here and there, kindled to a flame the point of a blade of grass, while the pigeons that had alighted upon it had the appearance of ancient sculptures which the gardener's pick had heaved to the surface of a hallowed soil, I stood with my eyes fixed on the horizon, expecting at every moment to see appear the form of Gilberte following that of her governess, behind the statue that seemed to be holding out the child, which it had in its arms, and which glistened in the stream of light, to receive benediction from the sun. The old lady who read the Débats was sitting on her chair, in her invariable place, and had just accosted a park-keeper, with a friendly wave of her hands towards him as she exclaimed "What a lovely day!" And when the chair-woman came up to collect her penny, with an infinity of smirks and affectations she folded the ticket away inside her glove, as though it had been a posy of flowers, for which she had sought, in gratitude to the donor, the most becoming place upon her person. When she had found it, she performed a circular movement with her neck, straightened her boa, and fastened upon the collector, as she shewed her the end of yellow paper that stuck out over her bare wrist, the

bewitching smile with which a woman says to a young man, pointing to her bosom: “You see, I’m wearing your roses!”

I dragged Françoise, on the way towards Gilberte, as far as the Arc de Triomphe; we did not meet her, and I was returning towards the lawn convinced, now, that she was not coming, when, in front of the wooden horses, the little girl with the sharp voice flung herself upon me: “Quick, quick, Gilberte’s been here a quarter of an hour. She’s just going. We’ve been waiting for you, to make up a prisoner’s base.”

While I had been going up the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, Gilberte had arrived by the Rue Boissy-d’Anglas, Mademoiselle having taken advantage of the fine weather to go on some errand of her own; and M. Swann was coming to fetch his daughter. And so it was my fault; I ought not to have strayed from the lawn; for one never knew for certain from what direction Gilberte would appear, whether she would be early or late, and this perpetual tension succeeded in making more impressive not only the Champs-Elysées in their entirety, and the whole span of the afternoon, like a vast expanse of space and time, on every point and at every moment of which it was possible that the form of Gilberte might appear, but also that form itself, since behind its appearance I felt that there lay concealed the reason for which it had shot its arrow into my heart at four o’clock instead of at half-past two; crowned with a smart hat, for paying calls, instead of the plain cap, for games; in front of the Ambassadeurs and not between the two puppet-shows; I divined one of those occupations in which I might not follow Gilberte, occupations that forced her to go out or to stay at home, I was in contact with the mystery of her unknown life. It was this mystery, too, which troubled me when, running at the sharp-voiced girl’s bidding, so as to begin our game without more delay, I saw Gilberte, so quick and informal with us, make a ceremonious bow to the old lady with the *Débats* (who acknowledged it with “What a lovely sun! You’d think there was a fire burning.”) speaking to her with a shy smile, with an air of constraint which called to my mind the other little girl that Gilberte must be when at home with her parents, or with friends of her parents, paying visits, in all the rest, that escaped me, of her existence. But of that existence no one gave me so strong an impression as did M. Swann, who came a little later to fetch his daughter. That was because he and Mme. Swann — inasmuch as their daughter lived with them, as her lessons, her games, her friendships depended upon them — contained for me, like Gilberte, perhaps even more than Gilberte, as befitted subjects that had an all-powerful control over her in whom it must have had its source, an undefined, an inaccessible

quality of melancholy charm. Everything that concerned them was on my part the object of so constant a preoccupation that the days on which, as on this day, M. Swann (whom I had seen so often, long ago, without his having aroused my curiosity, when he was still on good terms with my parents) came for Gilberte to the Champs-Elysées, once the pulsations to which my heart had been excited by the appearance of his grey hat and hooded cape had subsided, the sight of him still impressed me as might that of an historic personage, upon whom one had just been studying a series of books, and the smallest details of whose life one learned with enthusiasm. His relations with the Comte de Paris, which, when I heard them discussed at Combray, seemed to me unimportant, became now in my eyes something marvellous, as if no one else had ever known the House of Orleans; they set him in vivid detachment against the vulgar background of pedestrians of different classes, who encumbered that particular path in the Champs-Elysées, in the midst of whom I admired his condescending to figure without claiming any special deference, which as it happened none of them dreamed of paying him, so profound was the incognito in which he was wrapped.

He responded politely to the salutations of Gilberte's companions, even to mine, for all that he was no longer on good terms with my family, but without appearing to know who I was. (This reminded me that he had constantly seen me in the country; a memory which I had retained, but kept out of sight, because, since I had seen Gilberte again, Swann had become to me pre-eminently her father, and no longer the Combray Swann; as the ideas which, nowadays, I made his name connote were different from the ideas in the system of which it was formerly comprised, which I utilised not at all now when I had occasion to think of him, he had become a new, another person; still I attached him by an artificial thread, secondary and transversal, to our former guest; and as nothing had any longer any value for me save in the extent to which my love might profit by it, it was with a spasm of shame and of regret at not being able to erase them from my memory that I recaptured the years in which, in the eyes of this same Swann who was at this moment before me in the Champs-Elysées, and to whom, fortunately, Gilberte had perhaps not mentioned my name, I had so often, in the evenings, made myself ridiculous by sending to ask Mamma to come upstairs to my room to say good-night to me, while she was drinking coffee with him and my father and my grandparents at the table in the garden.) He told Gilberte that she might play one game; he could wait for a quarter of an hour; and, sitting down, just like anyone else, on an iron chair, paid for his ticket with that hand which Philippe

VII had so often held in his own, while we began our game upon the lawn, scattering the pigeons, whose beautiful, iridescent bodies (shaped like hearts and, surely, the lilacs of the feathered kingdom) took refuge as in so many sanctuaries, one on the great basin of stone, on which its beak, as it disappeared below the rim, conferred the part, assigned the purpose of offering to the bird in abundance the fruit or grain at which it appeared to be pecking, another on the head of the statue, which it seemed to crown with one of those enamelled objects whose polychrome varies in certain classical works the monotony of the stone, and with an attribute which, when the goddess bears it, entitles her to a particular epithet and makes of her, as a different Christian name makes of a mortal, a fresh divinity.

On one of these sunny days which had not realised my hopes, I had not the courage to conceal my disappointment from Gilberte.

"I had ever so many things to ask you," I said to her; "I thought that to-day was going to mean so much in our friendship. And no sooner have you come than you go away! Try to come early to-morrow, so that I can talk to you."

Her face lighted up and she jumped for joy as she answered: "Tomorrow, you may make up your mind, my dear friend, I sha'n't come!

"First of all I've a big luncheon-party; then in the afternoon I am going to a friend's house to see King Theodosius arrive from her windows; won't that be splendid? — and then, next day, I'm going to *Michel Strogoff*, and after that it will soon be Christmas, and the New Year holidays! Perhaps they'll take me south, to the Riviera; won't that be nice? Though I should miss the Christmas-tree here; anyhow, if I do stay in Paris, I sha'n't be coming here, because I shall be out paying calls with Mamma. Good-bye — there's Papa calling me."

I returned home with Françoise through streets that were still gay with sunshine, as on the evening of a holiday when the merriment is over. I could scarcely drag my legs along.

"I'm not surprised;" said Françoise, "it's not the right weather for the time of year; it's much too warm. Oh dear, oh dear, to think of all the poor sick people there must be everywhere; you would think that up there, too, everything's got out of order."

I repeated to myself, stifling my sobs, the words in which Gilberte had given utterance to her joy at the prospect of not coming back, for a long time, to the Champs-Elysées. But already the charm with which, by the mere act of thinking, my mind was filled as soon as it thought of her, the privileged position, unique even if it were painful, in which I was inevitably placed in relation to Gilberte by

the contraction of a scar in my mind, had begun to add to that very mark of her indifference something romantic, and in the midst of my tears my lips would shape themselves in a smile which was indeed the timid outline of a kiss. And when the time came for the postman I said to myself, that evening as on every other: “I am going to have a letter from Gilberte, she is going to tell me, at last, that she has never ceased to love me, and to explain to me the mysterious reason by which she has been forced to conceal her love from me until now, to put on the appearance of being able to be happy without seeing me; the reason for which she has assumed the form of the other Gilberte, who is simply a companion.”

Every evening I would beguile myself into imagining this letter, believing that I was actually reading it, reciting each of its sentences in turn. Suddenly I would stop, in alarm. I had realised that, if I was to receive a letter from Gilberte, it could not, in any case, be this letter, since it was I myself who had just composed it. And from that moment I would strive to keep my thoughts clear of the words which I should have liked her to write to me, from fear lest, by first selecting them myself, I should be excluding just those identical words, — the dearest, the most desired — from the field of possible events. Even if, by an almost impossible coincidence, it had been precisely the letter of my invention that Gilberte had addressed to me of her own accord, recognising my own work in it I should not have had the impression that I was receiving something that had not originated in myself, something real, something new, a happiness external to my mind, independent of my will, a gift indeed from love.

While I waited I read over again a page which, although it had not been written to me by Gilberte, came to me, none the less, from her, that page by Bergotte upon the beauty of the old myths from which Racine drew his inspiration, which (with the agate marble) I always kept within reach. I was touched by my friend’s kindness in having procured the book for me; and as everyone is obliged to find some reason for his passion, so much so that he is glad to find in the creature whom he loves qualities which (he has learned by reading or in conversation) are worthy to excite a man’s love, that he assimilates them by imitation and makes out of them fresh reasons for his love, even although these qualities be diametrically opposed to those for which his love would have sought, so long as it was spontaneous — as Swann, before my day, had sought to establish the aesthetic basis of Odette’s beauty — I, who had at first loved Gilberte, in Combray days, on account of all the unknown element in her life into which I would fain have plunged headlong, have undergone

reincarnation, discarding my own separate existence as a thing that no longer mattered, I thought now, as of an inestimable advantage, that of this, my own, my too familiar, my contemptible existence Gilberte might one day become the humble servant, the kindly, the comforting collaborator, who in the evenings, helping me in my work, would collate for me the texts of rare pamphlets. As for Bergotte, that infinitely wise, almost divine old man, because of whom I had first, before I had even seen her, loved Gilberte, now it was for Gilberte's sake, chiefly, that I loved him. With as much pleasure as the pages that he had written about Racine, I studied the wrapper, folded under great seals of white wax and tied with billows of pink ribbon, in which she had brought those pages to me. I kissed the agate marble, which was the better part of my love's heart, the part that was not frivolous but faithful, and, for all that it was adorned with the mysterious charm of Gilberte's life, dwelt close beside me, inhabited my chamber, shared my bed. But the beauty of that stone, and the beauty also of those pages of Bergotte which I was glad to associate with the idea of my love for Gilberte, as if, in the moments when my love seemed no longer to have any existence, they gave it a kind of consistency, were, I perceived, anterior to that love, which they in no way resembled; their elements had been determined by the writer's talent, or by geological laws, before ever Gilberte had known me, nothing in book or stone would have been different if Gilberte had not loved me, and there was nothing, consequently, that authorised me to read in them a message of happiness. And while my love, incessantly waiting for the morrow to bring a confession of Gilberte's love for me, destroyed, unravelled every evening, the ill-done work of the day, in some shadowed part of my being was an unknown weaver who would not leave where they lay the severed threads, but collected and rearranged them, without any thought of pleasing me, or of toiling for my advantage, in the different order which she gave to all her handiwork. Without any special interest in my love, not beginning by deciding that I was loved, she placed, side by side, those of Gilberte's actions that had seemed to me inexplicable and her faults which I had excused. Then, one with another, they took on a meaning. It seemed to tell me, this new arrangement, that when I saw Gilberte, instead of coming to me in the Champs-Elysées, going to a party, or on errands with her governess, when I saw her prepared for an absence that would extend over the New Year holidays, I was wrong in thinking, in saying: "It is because she is frivolous," or "easily lead." For she would have ceased to be either if she had loved me, and if she had been forced to obey it would have been with the same despair in her heart that I felt on the days when I did not see her. It

shewed me further, this new arrangement, that I ought, after all, to know what it was to love, since I loved Gilberte; it drew my attention to the constant anxiety that I had to ‘shew off’ before her, by reason of which I tried to persuade my mother to get for Françoise a waterproof coat and a hat with a blue feather, or, better still, to stop sending with me to the Champs-Elysées an attendant with whom I blushed to be seen (to all of which my mother replied that I was not fair to Françoise, that she was an excellent woman and devoted to us all) and also that sole, exclusive need to see Gilberte, the result of which was that, months in advance, I could think of nothing but how to find out at what date she would be leaving Paris and where she was going, feeling that the most attractive country in the world would be but a place of exile if she were not to be there, and asking only to be allowed to stay for ever in Paris, so long as I might see her in the Champs-Elysées; and it had little difficulty in making me see that neither my anxiety nor my need could be justified by anything in Gilberte’s conduct. She, on the contrary, was genuinely fond of her governess, without troubling herself over what I might choose to think about it. It seemed quite natural to her not to come to the Champs-Elysées if she had to go shopping with Mademoiselle, delightful if she had to go out somewhere with her mother. And even supposing that she would ever have allowed me to spend my holidays in the same place as herself, when it came to choosing that place she considered her parents’ wishes, a thousand different amusements of which she had been told, and not at all that it should be the place to which my family were proposing to send me. When she assured me (as sometimes happened) that she liked me less than some other of her friends, less than she had liked me the day before, because by my clumsiness I had made her side lose a game, I would beg her pardon, I would beg her to tell me what I must do in order that she should begin again to like me as much as, or more than the rest; I hoped to hear her say that that was already my position; I besought her; as though she had been able to modify her affection for me as she or I chose, to give me pleasure, merely by the words that she would utter, as my good or bad conduct should deserve. Was I, then, not yet aware that what I felt, myself, for her, depended neither upon her actions nor upon my desires?

It shewed me finally, the new arrangement planned by my unseen weaver, that, if we find ourselves hoping that the actions of a person who has hitherto caused us anxiety may prove not to have been sincere, they shed in their wake a light which our hopes are powerless to extinguish, a light to which, rather than to our hopes, we must put the question, what will be that person’s actions on the morrow.

These new counsels, my love listened and heard them; they persuaded it that the morrow would not be different from all the days that had gone before; that Gilberte's feeling for me, too long established now to be capable of alteration, was indifference; that hi my friendship with Gilberte, it was I alone who loved. "That is true," my love responded, "there is nothing more to be made of that friendship. It will not alter now." And so the very next day (unless I were to wait for a public holiday, if there was one approaching, some anniversary, the New Year, perhaps, one of those days which are not like other days, on which time starts afresh, casting aside the heritage of the past, declining its legacy of sorrows) I would appeal to Gilberte to terminate our old and to join me in laying the foundations of a new friendship.

***

I had always, within reach, a plan of Paris, which, because I could see drawn on it the street in which M. and Mme. Swann lived, seemed to me to contain a secret treasure. And to please myself, as well as by a sort of chivalrous loyalty, in any connection or with no relevance at all, I would repeat the name of that street until my father, not being, like my mother and grandmother, in the secret of my love, would ask: "But why are you always talking about that street? There's nothing wonderful about it. It is an admirable street to live in because it's only a few minutes' walk from the Bois, but there are a dozen other streets just the same."

I made every effort to introduce the name of Swann into my conversation with my parents; in my own mind, of course, I never ceased to murmur it; but I needed also to hear its exquisite sound, and to make myself play that chord, the voiceless rendering of which did not suffice me. Moreover, that name of Swann, with which I had for so long been familiar, was to me now (as happens at times to people suffering from aphasia, in the case of the most ordinary words) the name of something new. It was for ever present in my mind, which could not, however, grow accustomed to it. I analysed it, I spelt it; its orthography came to me as a surprise. And with its familiarity it had simultaneously lost its innocence. The pleasure that I derived from the sound of it I felt to be so guilty, that it seemed to me as though the others must read my thoughts, and would change the conversation if I endeavoured to guide it in that direction. I fell back upon subjects which still brought me into touch with Gilberte, I eternally repeated the same words, and it was no use my knowing that they were but

words — words uttered in her absence, which she could not hear, words without virtue in themselves, repeating what were, indeed, facts, but powerless to modify them — for still it seemed to me that by dint of handling, of stirring in this way everything that had reference to Gilberte, I might perhaps make emerge from it something that would bring me happiness. I told my parents again that Gilberte was very fond of her governess, as if the statement, when repeated for the hundredth time, would at last have the effect of making Gilberte suddenly burst into the room, come to live with us for ever. I had already sung the praises of the old lady who read the *Débats* (I had hinted to my parents that she must at least be an Ambassador's widow, if not actually a Highness) and I continued to descant on her beauty, her splendour, her nobility, until the day on which I mentioned that, by what I had heard Gilberte call her, she appeared to be a Mme. Blatin.

"Oh, now I know whom you mean," cried my mother, while I felt myself grow red all over with shame. "On guard! on guard! — as your grandfather says. And so it's she that you think so wonderful? Why, she's perfectly horrible, and always has been. She's the widow of a bailiff. You can't remember, when you were little, all the trouble I used to have to avoid her at your gymnastic lessons, where she was always trying to get hold of me — I didn't know the woman, of course — to tell me that you were 'much too nice-looking for a boy.' She has always had an insane desire to get to know people, and she must be quite insane, as I have always thought, if she really does know Mme. Swann. For even if she does come of very common people, I have never heard anything said against her character. But she must always be forcing herself upon strangers. She is, really, a horrible woman, frightfully vulgar, and besides, she is always creating awkward situations."

As for Swann, in my attempts to resemble him, I spent the whole time, when I was at table, in drawing my finger along my nose and in rubbing my eyes. My father would exclaim: "The child's a perfect idiot, he's becoming quite impossible." More than all else I should have liked to be as bald as Swann. He appeared to me to be a creature so extraordinary that I found it impossible to believe that people whom I knew and often saw knew him also, and that in the course of the day anyone might run against him. And once my mother, while she was telling us, as she did every evening at dinner, where she had been and what she had done that afternoon, merely by the words: "By the way, guess whom I saw at the Trois Quartiers — at the umbrella counter — Swann!" caused to burst open in the midst of her narrative (an arid desert to me) a mystic blossom. What

a melancholy satisfaction to learn that, that very afternoon, threading through the crowd his supernatural form, Swann had gone to buy an umbrella. Among the events of the day, great and small, but all equally unimportant, that one alone aroused in me those peculiar vibrations by which my love for Gilberte was invariably stirred. My father complained that I took no interest in anything, because I did not listen while he was speaking of the political developments that might follow the visit of King Theo-dosius, at that moment in France as the nation's guest and (it was hinted) ally. And yet how intensely interested I was to know whether Swann had been wearing his hooded cape!

"Did you speak to him?" I asked.

"Why, of course I did," answered my mother, who always seemed afraid lest, were she to admit that we were not on the warmest of terms with Swann, people would seek to reconcile us more than she cared for, in view of the existence of Mme. Swann, whom she did not wish to know. "It was he who came up and spoke to me. I hadn't seen him."

"Then you haven't quarrelled?"

"Quarrelled? What on earth made you think that we had quarrelled?" she briskly parried, as though I had cast doubt on the fiction of her friendly relations with Swann, and was planning an attempt to 'bring them together.'

"He might be cross with you for never asking him here."

"One isn't obliged to ask everyone to one's house, you know; has he ever asked me to his? I don't know his wife."

"But he used often to come, at Combray."

"I should think he did! He used to come at Combray, and now, in Paris, he has something better to do, and so have I. But I can promise you, we didn't look in the least like people who had quarrelled. We were kept waiting there for some time, while they brought him his parcel. He asked after you; he told me you had been playing with his daughter — " my mother went on, amazing me with the portentous revelation of my own existence in Swann's mind; far more than that, of my existence in so complete, so material a form that when I stood before him, trembling with love, in the Champs-Elysées, he had known my name, and who my mother was, and had been able to blend with my quality as his daughter's playmate certain facts with regard to my grandparents and their connections, the place in which we lived, certain details of our past life, all of which I myself perhaps did not know. But my mother did not seem to have noticed anything particularly attractive in that counter at the Trois Quartiers where she had represented to Swann, at the moment in which he caught sight of her, a definite

person with whom he had sufficient memories in common to impel him to come up to her and to speak.

Nor did either she or my father seem to find any occasion now to mention Swann's family, the grandparents of Gilberte, nor to use the title of stockbroker, topics than which nothing else gave me so keen a pleasure. My imagination had isolated and consecrated in the social Paris a certain family, just as it had set apart in the structural Paris a certain house, on whose porch it had fashioned sculptures and made its windows precious. But these ornaments I alone had eyes to see. Just as my father and mother looked upon the house in which Swann lived as one that closely resembled the other houses built at the same period in the neighbourhood of the Bois, so Swann's family seemed to them to be in the same category as many other families of stockbrokers. Their judgment was more or less favourable according to the extent to which the family in question shared in merits that were common to the rest of the universe, and there was about it nothing that they could call unique. What, on the other hand, they did appreciate in the Swanns they found in equal, if not in greater measure elsewhere. And so, after admitting that the house was in a good position, they would go on to speak of some other house that was in a better, but had nothing to do with Gilberte, or of financiers on a larger scale than her grandfather had been; and if they had appeared, for a moment, to be of my opinion, that was a mistake which was very soon corrected. For in order to distinguish in all Gilberte's surroundings an indefinable quality analogous, in the scale of emotions, to what in the scale of colours is called infra-red, a supplementary sense of perception was required, with which love, for the time being, had endowed me; and this my parents lacked.

On the days when Gilberte had warned me that she would not be coming to the Champs-Elysées, I would try to arrange my walks so that I should be brought into some kind of contact with her. Sometimes I would lead Françoise on a pilgrimage to the house in which the Swanns lived, making her repeat to me unendingly all that she had learned from the governess with regard to Mme. Swann. "It seems, she puts great faith in medals. She would never think of starting on a journey if she had heard an owl hoot, or the death-watch in the wall, or if she had seen a cat at midnight, or if the furniture had creaked. Oh yes! she's a most religious lady, she is!" I was so madly in love with Gilberte that if, on our way, I caught sight of their old butler taking the dog out, my emotion would bring me to a standstill, I would fasten on his white whiskers eyes that melted with passion. And Françoise would rouse me with: "What's wrong with you

now, child?" and we would continue on our way until we reached their gate, where a porter, different from every other porter in the world, and saturated, even to the braid on his livery, with the same melancholy charm that I had felt to be latent in the name of Gilberte, looked at me as though he knew that I was one of those whose natural unworthiness would for ever prevent them from penetrating into the mysteries of the life inside, which it was his duty to guard, and over which the ground-floor windows appeared conscious of being protectingly closed, with far less resemblance, between the nobly sweeping arches of their muslin curtains, to any other windows in the world than to Gilberte's glancing eyes. On other days we would go along the boulevards, and I would post myself at the corner of the Rue Duphot; I had heard that Swann was often to be seen passing there, on his way to the dentist's; and my imagination so far differentiated Gilberte's father from the rest of humanity, his presence in the midst of a crowd of real people introduced among them so miraculous an element, that even before we reached the Madeleine I would be trembling with emotion at the thought that I was approaching a street from which that supernatural apparition might at any moment burst upon me unawares.

But most often of all, on days when I was not to see Gilberte, as I had heard that Mme. Swann walked almost every day along the Allée des Acacias, round the big lake, and in the Allée de la Reine Marguerite, I would guide Françoise in thé direction of the Bois de Boulogne. It was to me like one of those zoological gardens in which one sees assembled together a variety of flora, and contrasted effects in landscape; where from a hill one passes to a grotto, a meadow, rocks, a stream, a trench, another hill, a marsh, but knows that they are there only to enable the hippopotamus, zebra, crocodile, rabbit, bear and heron to disport themselves in a natural or a picturesque setting; this, the Bois, equally complex, uniting a multitude of little worlds, distinct and separate — placing a stage set with red trees, American oaks, like an experimental forest in Virginia, next to a fir-wood by the edge of the lake, or to a forest grove from which would suddenly emerge, in her lissom covering of furs, with the large, appealing eyes of a dumb animal, a hastening walker — was the Garden of Woman; and like the myrtle-alley in the Aeneid, planted for their delight with trees of one kind only, the Allée des Acacias was thronged by the famous Beauties of the day. As, from a long way off, the sight of the jutting crag from which it dives into the pool thrills with joy the children who know that they are going to behold the seal, long before I reached the acacia-alley, their fragrance, scattered abroad, would make me feel that I was approaching the incomparable presence of a vegetable

personality, strong and tender; then, as I drew near, the sight of their topmost branches, their lightly tossing foliage, in its easy grace, its coquettish outline, its delicate fabric, over which hundreds of flowers were laid, like winged and throbbing colonies of precious insects; and finally their name itself, feminine, indolent and seductive, made my heart beat, but with a social longing, like those waltzes which remind us only of the names of the fair dancers, called aloud as they entered the ball-room. I had been told that I should see in the alley certain women of fashion, who, in spite of their not all having husbands, were constantly mentioned in conjunction with Mme. Swann, but most often by their professional names; — their new names, when they had any, being but a sort of incognito, a veil which those who would speak of them were careful to draw aside, so as to make themselves understood. Thinking that Beauty — in the order of feminine elegance — was governed by occult laws into the knowledge of which they had been initiated, and that they had the power to realise it, I accepted before seeing them, like the truth of a coming revelation, the appearance of their clothes, of their carriages and horses, of a thousand details among which I placed my faith as in an inner soul which gave the cohesion of a work of art to that ephemeral and changing pageant. But it was Mme. Swann whom I wished to see, and I waited for her to go past, as deeply moved as though she were Gilberte, whose parents, saturated, like everything in her environment, with her own special charm, excited in me as keen a passion as she did herself, indeed a still more painful disturbance (since their point of contact with her was that intimate, that internal part of her life which was hidden from me), and furthermore, for I very soon learned, as we shall see in due course, that they did not like my playing with her, that feeling of veneration which we always have for those who hold, and exercise without restraint, the power to do us an injury.

I assigned the first place, in the order of aesthetic merit and of social grandeur, to simplicity, when I saw Mme. Swann on foot, in a ‘polonaise’ of plain cloth, a little toque on her head trimmed with a pheasant’s wing, a bunch of violets in her bosom, hastening along the Allée des Acacias as if it had been merely the shortest way back to her own house, and acknowledging with a rapid glance the courtesy of the gentlemen in carriages, who, recognising her figure at a distance, were raising their hats to her and saying to one another that there was never anyone so well turned out as she. But instead of simplicity it was to ostentation that I must assign the first place if, after I had compelled Françoise, who could hold out no longer, and complained that her legs were ‘giving’

beneath her, to stroll up and down with me for another hour, I saw at length, emerging from the Porte Dauphine, figuring for me a royal dignity, the passage of a sovereign, an impression such as no real Queen has ever since been able to give me, because my notion of their power has been less vague, and more founded upon experience — borne along by the flight of a pair of fiery horses, slender and shapely as one sees them in the drawings of Constantin Guys, carrying on its box an enormous coachman, furred like a cossack, and by his side a diminutive groom, like Toby, "the late Beaudenord's tiger," I saw — or rather I felt its outlines engraved upon my heart by a clean and killing stab — a matchless victoria, built rather high, and hinting, through the extreme modernity of its appointments, at the forms of an earlier day, deep down in which lay negligently back Mme. Swann, her hair, now quite pale with one grey lock, girt with a narrow band of flowers, usually violets, from which floated down long veils, a lilac parasol in her hand, on her lips an ambiguous smile in which I read only the benign condescension of Majesty, though it was pre-eminently the enticing smile of the courtesan, which she graciously bestowed upon the men who bowed to her. That smile was, in reality, saying to one: "Oh yes, I do remember, quite well; it was wonderful!" to another: "How I should have loved to! We were unfortunate!", to a third: "Yes, if you like! I must just keep in the line for a minute, then as soon as I can I will break away." When strangers passed she still allowed to linger about her lips a lazy smile, as though she expected or remembered some friend, which made them say: "What a lovely woman!". And for certain men only she had a sour, strained, shy, cold smile which meant: "Yes, you old goat, I know that you've got a tongue like a viper, that you can't keep quiet for a moment. But do you suppose that I care what you say?" Coquelin passed, talking, in a group of listening friends, and with a sweeping wave of his hand bade a theatrical good day to the people in the carriages. But I thought only of Mme. Swann, and pretended to have not yet seen her, for I knew that, when she reached the pigeon-shooting ground, she would tell her coachman to 'break away' and to stop the carriage, so that she might come back on foot. And on days when I felt that I had the courage to pass close by her I would drag Françoise off in that direction; until the moment came when I saw Mme. Swann, letting trail behind her the long train of her lilac skirt, dressed, as the populace imagine queens to be dressed, in rich attire such as no other woman might wear, lowering her eyes now and then to study the handle of her parasol, paying scant attention to the passers-by, as though the important thing for her, her one object in being there, was to take exercise, without

thinking that she was seen, and that every head was turned towards her. Sometimes, however, when she had looked back to call her dog to her, she would cast, almost imperceptibly, a sweeping glance round about.

Those even who did not know her were warned by something exceptional, something beyond the normal in her — or perhaps by a telepathic suggestion such as would move an ignorant audience to a frenzy of applause when Berma was ‘sublime’ — that she must be some one well-known. They would ask one another, “Who is she?”, or sometimes would interrogate a passing stranger, or would make a mental note of how she was dressed so as to fix her identity, later, in the mind of a friend better informed than themselves, who would at once enlighten them. Another pair, half-stopping in their walk, would exchange:

“You know who that is? Mme. Swann! That conveys nothing to you? Odette de Crécy, then?”

“Odette de Crécy! Why, I thought as much. Those great, sad eyes... But I say, you know, she can’t be as young as she was once, eh? I remember, I had her on the day that MacMahon went.”

“I shouldn’t remind her of it, if I were you. She is now Mme. Swann, the wife of a gentleman in the Jockey Club, a friend of the Prince of Wales. Apart from that, though, she is wonderful still.”

“Oh, but you ought to have known her then; Gad, she was lovely! She lived in a very odd little house with a lot of Chinese stuff. I remember, we were bothered all the time by the newsboys, shouting outside; in the end she made me get up and go.”

Without listening to these memories, I could feel all about her the indistinct murmur of fame. My heart leaped with impatience when I thought that a few seconds must still elapse before all these people, among whom I was dismayed not to find a certain mulatto banker who (or so I felt) had a contempt for me, were to see the unknown youth, to whom they had not, so far, been paying the slightest attention, salute (without knowing her, it was true, but I thought that I had sufficient authority since my parents knew her husband and I was her daughter’s playmate) this woman whose reputation for beauty, for misconduct, and for elegance was universal. But I was now close to Mme. Swann; I pulled off my hat with so lavish, so prolonged a gesture that she could not repress a smile. People laughed. As for her, she had never seen me with Gilberte, she did not know my name, but I was for her — like one of the keepers in the Bois, like the boatman, or the ducks on the lake, to which she threw scraps of bread — one of the minor personages, familiar, nameless, as devoid of individual character as

a stage-hand in a theatre, of her daily walks abroad.

On certain days when I had missed her in the Allée des Acacias I would be so fortunate as to meet her in the Allée de la Reine Marguerite, where women went who wished to be alone, or to appear to be wishing to be alone; she would not be alone for long, being soon overtaken by some man or other, often in a grey ‘tile’ hat, whom I did not know, and who would talk to her for some time, while their two carriages crawled behind.

***

That sense of the complexity of the Bois de Boulogne which made it an artificial place and, in the zoological or mythological sense of the word, a Garden, I captured again, this year, as I crossed it on my way to Trianon, on one of those mornings, early in November, when in Paris, if we stay indoors, being so near and yet prevented from witnessing the transformation scene of autumn, which is drawing so rapidly to a close without our assistance, we feel a regret for the fallen leaves that becomes a fever, and may even keep us awake at night. Into my closed room they had been drifting already for a month, summoned there by my desire to see them, slipping between my thoughts and the object, whatever it might be, upon which I was trying to concentrate them, whirling in front of me like those brown spots that sometimes, whatever we may be looking at, will seem to be dancing or swimming before our eyes. And on that morning, not hearing the splash of the rain as on the previous days, seeing the smile of fine weather at the corners of my drawn curtains, as from the corners of closed lips may escape the secret of their happiness, I had felt that I could actually see those yellow leaves, with the light shining through them, in their supreme beauty; and being no more able to restrain myself from going to look at the trees than, in my childhood’s days, when the wind howled in the chimney, I had been able to resist the longing to visit the sea, I had risen and left the house to go to Trianon, passing through the Bois de Boulogne. It was the hour and the season in which the Bois seems, perhaps, most multiform, not only because it is then most divided, but because it is divided in a different way. Even in the unwooded parts, where the horizon is large, here and there against the background of a dark and distant mass of trees, now leafless or still keeping their summer foliage unchanged, a double row of orange-red chestnuts seemed, as in a picture just begun, to be the only thing painted, so far, by an artist who had not yet laid any colour on the rest, and to be offering their cloister, in full daylight, for the casual

exercise of the human figures that would be added to the picture later on.

Farther off, at a place where the trees were still all green, one alone, small, stunted, lopped, but stubborn in its resistance, was tossing in the breeze an ugly mane of red. Elsewhere, again, might be seen the first awakening of this Maytime of the leaves, and those of an ampelopsis, a smiling miracle, like a red hawthorn flowering in winter, had that very morning all ‘come out,’ so to speak, in blossom. And the Bois had the temporary, unfinished, artificial look of a nursery garden or a park in which, either for some botanic purpose or in preparation for a festival, there have been embedded among the trees of commoner growth, which have not yet been uprooted and transplanted elsewhere, a few rare specimens, with fantastic foliage, which seem to be clearing all round themselves an empty space, making room, giving air, diffusing light. Thus it was the time of year at which the Bois de Boulogne displays more separate characteristics, assembles more distinct elements in a composite whole than at any other. It was also the time of day. In places where the trees still kept their leaves, they seemed to have undergone an alteration of their substance from the point at which they were touched by the sun’s light, still, at this hour in the morning, almost horizontal, as it would be again, a few hours later, at the moment when, just as dusk began, it would flame up like a lamp, project afar over the leaves a warm and artificial glow, and set ablaze the few topmost boughs of a tree that would itself remain unchanged, a sombre incombustible candelabrum beneath its flaming crest. At one spot the light grew solid as a brick wall, and like a piece of yellow Persian masonry, patterned in blue, daubed coarsely upon the sky the leaves of the chestnuts; at another, it cut them off from the sky towards which they stretched out their curling, golden fingers. Half-way up the trunk of a tree draped with wild vine, the light had grafted and brought to blossom, too dazzling to be clearly distinguished, an enormous posy, of red flowers apparently, perhaps of a new variety of carnation. The diffèrent parts of the Bois, so easily confounded in summer in the density and monotony of their universal green, were now clearly divided. A patch of brightness indicated the approach to almost every one of them, or else a splendid mass of foliage stood out before it like an oriflamme. I could make out, as on a coloured map, Armenonville, the Pré Catalan, Madrid, the Race Course and the shore of the lake. Here and there would appear some meaningless erection, a sham grotto, a mill, for which the trees made room by drawing away from it, or which was borne upon the soft green platform of a grassy lawn. I could feel that the Bois was not really a wood, that it existed for a purpose alien to the life of its trees;

my sense of exaltation was due not only to admiration of the autumn tints but to a bodily desire. Ample source of a joy which the heart feels at first without being conscious of its cause, without understanding that it results from no external impulse! Thus I gazed at the trees with an unsatisfied longing which went beyond them and, without my knowledge, directed itself towards that masterpiece of beautiful strolling women which the trees enframed for a few hours every day. I walked towards the Allée des Acacias. I passed through forest groves in which the morning light, breaking them into new sections, lopped and trimmed the trees, united different trunks in marriage, made nosegays of their branches. It would skilfully draw towards it a pair of trees; making deft use of the sharp chisel of light and shade, it would cut away from each of them half of its trunk and branches, and, weaving together the two halves that remained, would make of them either a single pillar of shade, defined by the surrounding light, or a single luminous phantom whose artificial, quivering contour was encompassed in a network of inky shadows. When a ray of sunshine gilded the highest branches, they seemed, soaked and still dripping with a sparkling moisture, to have emerged alone from the liquid, emerald-green atmosphere in which the whole grove was plunged as though beneath the sea. For the trees continued to live by their own vitality, and when they had no longer any leaves, that vitality gleamed more brightly still from the nap of green velvet that carpeted their trunks, or in the white enamel of the globes of mistletoe that were scattered all the way up to the topmost branches of the poplars, rounded as are the sun and moon in Michelangelo’s ‘Creation.’ But, forced for so many years now, by a sort of grafting process, to share the life of feminine humanity, they called to my mind the figure of the dryad, the fair worldling, swiftly walk-ing, brightly coloured, whom they sheltered with their branches as she passed beneath them, and obliged to acknowledge, as they themselves acknowledged, the power of the season; they recalled to me the happy days when I was young and had faith, when I would hasten eagerly to the spots where masterpieces of female elegance would be incarnate for a few moments beneath the unconscious, accommodating boughs. But the beauty for which the firs and acacias of the Bois de Boulogne made me long, more disquieting in that respect than the chestnuts and lilacs of Trianon which I was going to see, was not fixed somewhere outside myself in the relics of an historical period, in works of art, in a little temple of love at whose door was piled an oblation of autumn leaves ribbed with gold. I reached the shore of the lake; I walked on as far as the pigeon-shooting ground. The idea of perfection which I had within me I had bestowed, in that other time,

upon the height of a victoria, upon the raking thinness of those horses, frenzied and light as wasps upon the wing, with bloodshot eyes like the cruel steeds of Diomed, which now, smitten by a desire to sea again what I had once loved, as ardent as the desire that had driven me, many years before, along the same paths, I wished to see renewed before my eyes at the moment when Mme. Swann's enormous coachman, supervised by a groom no bigger than his fist, and as infantile as Saint George in the picture, endeavoured to curb the ardour of the flying, steel-tipped pinions with which they thundered along the ground. Alas! there was nothing now but motor-cars driven each by a moustached mechanic, with a tall footman towering by his side. I wished to hold before my bodily eyes, that I might know whether they were indeed as charming as they appeared to the eyes of memory, little hats, so low-crowned as to seem no more than garlands about the brows of women. All the hats now were immense; covered with fruits and flowers and all manner of birds. In place of the lovely gowns in which Mme. Swann walked like a Queen, appeared Greco-Saxon tunics, with Tanagra folds, or sometimes, in the Directoire style, 'Liberty chiffons' sprinkled with flowers like sheets of wallpaper. On the heads of the gentlemen who might have been eligible to stroll with Mme. Swann in the Allée de la Reine Marguerite, I found not the grey 'tile' hats of old, nor any other kind. They walked the Bois bare-headed. And seeing all these new elements of the spectacle, I had no longer the faith which, applied to them, would have given them consistency, unity, life; they passed in a scattered sequence before me, at random, without reality, containing in themselves no beauty that my eyes might have endeavoured as in the old days, to extract from them and to compose in a picture. They were just women, in whose elegance I had no belief, and whose clothes seemed to me unimportant. But when a belief vanishes, there survives it — more and more ardently, so as to cloak the absence of the power, now lost to us, of imparting reality to new phenomena — an idolatrous attachment to the old things which our belief in them did once animate, as if il was in that belief and not in ourselves that the divine spark resided, and as if our present incredulity had a contingent cause — the death of the gods.

"Oh, horrible!" I exclaimed to myself: "Does anyone really imagine that these motor-cars are as smart as the old carriage-and-pair? I dare say. I am too old now — but I was not intended for a world in which women shackle themselves in garments that are not even made of cloth. To what purpose shall I walk among these trees if there is nothing left now of the assembly that used to meet beneath the delicate tracery of reddening leaves, if vulgarity and fatuity

have supplanted the exquisite thing that once their branches framed? Oh, horrible! My consolation is to think of the women whom I have known, in the past, now that there is no standard left of elegance. But how can the people who watch these dreadful creatures hobble by, beneath hats on which have been heaped the spoils of aviary or garden-bed, — how can they imagine the charm that there was in the sight of Mme. Swann, crowned with a close-fitting lilac bonnet, or with a tiny hat from which rose stiffly above her head a single iris?" Could I ever have made them understand the emotion that I used to feel on winter mornings, when I met Mme. Swann on foot, in an otter-skin coat, with a woollen cap from which stuck out two blade-like partridge-feathers, but enveloped also in the deliberate, artificial warmth of her own house, which was suggested by nothing more than the bunch of violets crushed into her bosom, whose flowering, vivid and blue against the grey sky, the freezing air, the naked boughs, had the same charming effect of using the season and the weather merely as a setting, and of living actually in a human atmosphere, in the atmosphere of this woman, as had in the vases and beaupots of her drawing-room, beside the blazing fire, in front of the silk-covered sofa, the flowers that looked out through closed windows at the falling snow? But it would not have sufficed me that the costumes alone should still have been the same as in those distant years. Because of the solidarity that binds together the different parts of a general impression, parts that our memory keeps in a balanced whole, of which we are not permitted to subtract or to decline any fraction, I should have liked to be able to pass the rest of the day with one of those women, over a cup of tea, in a little house with dark-painted walls (as Mme. Swann's were still in the year after that in which the first part of this story ends) against which would glow the orange flame, the red combustion, the pink and white flickering of her chrysanthemums in the twilight of a November evening, in moments similar to those in which (as we shall see) I had not managed to discover the pleasures for which I longed. But now, albeit they had led to nothing, those moments struck me as having been charming enough in themselves. I sought to find them again as I remembered them. Alas! there was nothing now but flats decorated in the Louis XVI style, all white paint, with hortensias in blue enamel. Moreover, people did not return to Paris, now, until much later. Mme. Swann would have written to me, from a country house, that she would not be in town before February, had I asked her to reconstruct for me the elements of that memory which I felt to belong to a distant era, to a date in time towards which it was forbidden me to ascend again the fatal slope, the elements of that longing which

had become, itself, as inaccessible as the pleasure that it had once vainly pursued. And I should have required also that they be the same women, those whose costume interested me because, at a time when I still had faith, my imagination had individualised them and had provided each of them with a legend. Alas! in the acacia-avenue — the myrtle-alley — I did see some of them again, grown old, no more now than grim spectres of what once they had been, wandering to and fro, in desperate search of heaven knew what, through the Virgilian groves. They had long fled, and still I stood vainly questioning the deserted paths. The sun's face was hidden. Nature began again to reign over the Bois, from which had vanished all trace of the idea that it was the Elysian Garden of Woman; above the gimcrack windmill the real sky was grey; the wind wrinkled the surface of the Grand Lac in little wavelets, like a real lake; large birds passed swiftly over the Bois, as over a real wood, and with shrill cries perched, one after another, on the great oaks which, beneath their Druidical crown, and with Dodonaic majesty, seemed to proclaim the unpeopled vacancy of this estranged forest, and helped me to understand how paradoxical it is to seek in reality for the pictures that are stored in one's memory, which must inevitably lose the charm that comes to them from memory itself and from their not being apprehended by the senses. The reality that I had known no longer existed. It sufficed that Mme. Swann did not appear, in the same attire and at the same moment, for the whole avenue to be altered. The places that we have known belong now only to the little world of space on which we map them for our own convenience. None of them was ever more than a thin slice, held between the contiguous impressions that composed our life at that time; remembrance of a particular form is but regret for a particular moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fugitive, alas, as the years.

Within A Budding Grove [Volume 2]

À l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs (1924)
Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (1889-1930)

Madame Swann at Home

My mother, when it was a question of our having M. de Norpois to dinner for the first time, having expressed her regret that Professor Cottard was away from home, and that she herself had quite ceased to see anything of Swann, since either of these might have helped to entertain the old Ambassador, my father replied that so eminent a guest, so distinguished a man of science as Cottard could never be out of place at a dinner-table, but that Swann, with his ostentation, his habit of crying aloud from the housetops the name of everyone that he knew, however slightly, was an impossible vulgarian whom the Marquis de Norpois would be sure to dismiss as — to use his own epithet — a 'pestilent' fellow. Now, this attitude on my father's part may be felt to require a few words of explanation, inasmuch as some of us, no doubt, remember a Cottard of distinct mediocrity and a Swann by whom modesty and discretion, in all his social relations, were carried to the utmost refinement of delicacy. But in his case, what had happened was that, to the original 'young Swann' and also to the Swann of the Jockey Club, our old friend had added a fresh personality (which was not to be his last), that of Odette's husband. Adapting to the humble ambitions of that lady the instinct, the desire, the industry which he had always had, he had laboriously constructed for himself, a long way beneath the old, a new position more appropriate to the companion who was to share it with him. In this he shewed himself another man. Since (while he continued to go, by himself, to the houses of his own friends, on whom he did not care to inflict Odette unless they had expressly asked that she should be introduced to them) it was a new life that he had begun to lead, in common with his wife, among a new set of people, it was quite intelligible that, in order to estimate the importance of these new friends and thereby the pleasure, the self-esteem that were to be derived from entertaining them, he should have made use, as a standard of comparison, not of the brilliant society in which he himself had moved before his marriage but of the earlier environment of Odette. And yet, even when one knew that it was with unfashionable officials and their faded wives, the wallflowers of ministerial ball-rooms, that he was now anxious to associate, it

was still astonishing to hear him, who in the old days, and even still, would so gracefully refrain from mentioning an invitation to Twickenham or to Marlborough House, proclaim with quite unnecessary emphasis that the wife of some Assistant Under-Secretary for Something had returned Mme. Swann's call. It will perhaps be objected here that what this really implied was that the simplicity of the fashionable Swann had been nothing more than a supreme refinement of vanity, and that, like certain other Israelites, my parents' old friend had contrived to illustrate in turn all the stages through which his race had passed, from the crudest and coarsest form of snobbishness up to the highest pitch of good manners. But the chief reason — and one which is applicable to humanity as a whole — was that our virtues themselves are not free and floating qualities over which we retain a permanent control and power of disposal; they come to be so closely linked in our minds with the actions in conjunction with which we make it our duty to practise them, that, if we are suddenly called upon to perform some action of a different order, it takes us by surprise, and without our supposing for a moment that it might involve the bringing of those very same virtues into play. Swann, in his intense consciousness of his new social surroundings, and in the pride with which he referred to them, was like those great artists — modest or generous by nature — who, if at the end of their career they take to cooking or to gardening, display a childlike gratification at the compliments that are paid to their dishes or their borders, and will not listen to any of the criticism which they heard unmoved when it was applied to their real achievements; or who, after giving away a canvas, cannot conceal their annoyance if they lose a couple of francs at dominoes.

As for Professor Cottard, we shall meet him again and can study him at our leisure, much later in the course of our story, with the 'Mistress,' Mme. Verdurin, in her country house La Raspelière. For the present, the following observations must suffice; first of all, in the case of Swann the alteration might indeed be surprising, since it had been accomplished and yet was not suspected by me when I used to see Gilberte's father in the Champs-Elysées, where, moreover, as he never spoke to me, he could not very well have made any display of his political relations. It is true that, if he had done so, I might not at once have discerned his vanity, for the idea that one has long held of a person is apt to stop one's eyes and ears; my mother, for three whole years, had no more noticed the salve with which one of her nieces used to paint her lips than if it had been wholly and invisibly dissolved in some clear liquid; until one day a streak too much, or possibly something else, brought about the phenomenon known as

super-saturation; all the paint that had hitherto passed unperceived was now crystallised, and my mother, in the face of this sudden riot of colour, declared, in the best Combray manner, that it was a perfect scandal, and almost severed relations with her niece. With Cottard, on the contrary, the epoch in which we have seen him assisting at the first introduction of Swann to the Verdurins was now buried in the past; whereas honours, offices and titles come with the passage of years; moreover, a man may be illiterate, and make stupid puns, and yet have a special gift, which no amount of general culture can replace — such as the gift of a great strategist or physician. And so it was not merely as an obscure practitioner, who had attained in course of time to European celebrity, that the rest of his profession regarded Cottard. The most intelligent of the younger doctors used to assert — for a year or two, that is to say, for fashions, being themselves begotten of the desire for change, are quick to change also — that if they themselves ever fell ill Cottard was the only one of the leading men to whom they would entrust their lives. No doubt they preferred, socially, to meet certain others who were better read, more artistic, with whom they could discuss Nietzsche and Wagner. When there was a musical party at Mme. Cottard's, on the evenings when she entertained — in the hope that it might one day make him Dean of the Faculty — the colleagues and pupils of her husband, he, instead of listening, preferred to play cards in another room. Yet everybody praised the quickness, the penetration, the unerring confidence with which, at a glance, he could diagnose disease. Thirdly, in considering the general impression which Professor Cottard must have made on a man like my father, we must bear in mind that the character which a man exhibits in the latter half of his life is not always, even if it is often his original character developed or withered, attenuated or enlarged; it is sometimes the exact opposite, like a garment that has been turned. Except from the Verdurins, who were infatuated with him, Cottard's hesitating manner, his excessive timidity and affability had, in his young days, called down upon him endless taunts and sneers. What charitable friend counselled that glacial air? The importance of his professional standing made it all the more easy to adopt. Wherever he went, save at the Verdurins', where he instinctively became himself again, he would assume a repellent coldness, remain silent as long as possible, be peremptory when he was obliged to speak, and not forget to say the most cutting things. He had every opportunity of rehearsing this new attitude before his patients, who, seeing him for the first time, were not in a position to make comparisons, and would have been greatly surprised to learn that he was not at all a rude man by nature. Complete

impassivity was what he strove to attain, and even while visiting his hospital wards, when he allowed himself to utter one of those puns which left everyone, from the house physician to the junior student, helpless with laughter, he would always make it without moving a muscle of his face, while even that was no longer recognisable now that he had shaved off his beard and moustache.

But who, the reader has been asking, was the Marquis de Norpois? Well, he had been Minister Plenipotentiary before the War, and was actually an Ambassador on the Sixteenth of May; in spite of which, and to the general astonishment, he had since been several times chosen to represent France on Extraordinary Missions,— even as Controller of the Public Debt in Egypt, where, thanks to his great capability as a financier, he had rendered important services — by Radical Cabinets under which a reactionary of the middle classes would have declined to serve, and in whose eyes M. de Norpois, in view of his past, his connexions and his opinions, ought presumably to have been suspect. But these advanced Ministers seemed to consider that, in making such an appointment, they were shewing how broad their own minds were, when the supreme interests of France were at stake, were raising themselves above the general run of politicians, were meriting, from the *Journal des Débats* itself, the title of 'Statesmen,' and were reaping direct advantage from the weight that attaches to an aristocratic name and the dramatic interest always aroused by an unexpected appointment. And they knew also that they could reap these advantages by making an appeal to M. de Norpois, without having to fear any want of political loyalty on his part, a fault against which his noble birth not only need not put them on their guard but offered a positive guarantee. And in this calculation the Government of the Republic were not mistaken. In the first place, because an aristocrat of a certain type, brought up from his cradle to regard his name as an integral part of himself of which no accident can deprive him (an asset of whose value his peers, or persons of even higher rank, can form a fairly exact estimate), knows that he can dispense with the efforts (since they can in no way enhance his position) in which, without any appreciable result, so many public men of the middle class spend themselves,— to profess only the 'right' opinions, to frequent only the 'sound' people. Anxious, on the other hand, to increase his own importance in the eyes of the princely or ducal families which take immediate precedence of his own, he knows that he can do so by giving his name that complement which hitherto it has lacked, which will give it priority over other names heraldically its equals: such as political power, a literary or an artistic reputation, or a large fortune. And so what he saves by avoiding the

society of the ineffective country squires, after whom all the professional families run helter-skelter, but of his intimacy with whom, were he to profess it, a prince would think nothing, he will lavish on the politicians who (free-masons, or worse, though they be) can advance him in Diplomacy or ‘back’ him in an election, and on the artists or scientists whose patronage can help him to ‘arrive’ in those departments in which they excel, on everyone, in fact, who is in a position to confer a fresh distinction or to ‘bring off’ a rich marriage.

But in the character of M. de Norpois there was this predominant feature, that, in the course of a long career of diplomacy, he had become imbued with that negative, methodical, conservative spirit, called ‘governmental,’ which is common to all Governments and, under every Government, particularly inspires its Foreign Office. He had imbibed, during that career, an aversion, a dread, a contempt for the methods of procedure, more or less revolutionary and in any event quite incorrect, which are those of an Opposition. Save in the case of a few illiterates — high or low, it makes no matter — by whom no difference in quality is perceptible, what attracts men one to another is not a common point of view but a consanguinity of spirit. An Academician of the kind of Legouvé, and therefore an upholder of the classics, would applaud Maxime Ducamp’s or Mezière’s eulogy of Victor Hugo with more fervour than that of Boileau by Claudel. A common Nationalism suffices to endear Barrés to his electors, who scarcely distinguish between him and M. Georges Berry, but does not endear him to those of his brother Academicians who, with a similar outlook on politics but a different type of mind, will prefer to him even such open adversaries as M. Ribot and M. Deschanel, with whom, in turn, the most loyal Monarchists feel themselves more closely allied than with Maurras or Léon Daudet, although these also are living in the hope of a glorious Restoration. Miserly in the use of words, not only from a professional scruple of prudence and reserve, but because words themselves have more value, present more subtleties of definition to men whose efforts, protracted over a decade, to bring two countries to an understanding, are condensed, translated — in a speech or in a protocol — into a single adjective, colourless in all appearance, but to them pregnant with a world of meaning, M. de Norpois was considered very stiff, at the Commission, where he sat next to my father, whom everyone else congratulated on the astonishing way in which the old Ambassador unbent to him. My father was himself more astonished than anyone. For not being, as a rule, very affable, his company was little sought outside his own intimate circle, a limitation which he used modestly and frankly to avow. He realised that these overtures were an outcome, in the

diplomat, of that point of view which everyone adopts for himself in making his choice of friends, from which all a man's intellectual qualities, his refinement, his affection are a far less potent recommendation of him, when at the same time he bores or irritates one, than are the mere straightforwardness and good-humour of another man whom most people would regard as frivolous or even fatuous. "De Norpois has asked me to dinner again; it's quite extraordinary; everyone on the Commission is amazed, as he never has any personal relations with any of us. I am sure he's going to tell me something thrilling, again, about the 'Seventy war." My father knew that M. de Norpois had warned, had perhaps been alone in warning the Emperor of the growing strength and bellicose designs of Prussia, and that Bismarck rated his intelligence most highly. Only the other day, at the Opera, during the gala performance given for King Theodosius, the newspapers had all drawn attention to the long conversation which that Monarch had held with M. de Norpois. "I must ask him whether the King's visit had any real significance," my father went on, for he was keenly interested in foreign politics. "I know old Norpois keeps very close as a rule, but when he's with me he opens out quite charmingly."

As for my mother, perhaps the Ambassador had not the type of mind towards which she felt herself most attracted. I should add that his conversation furnished so exhaustive a glossary of the superannuated forms of speech peculiar to a certain profession, class and period — a period which, for that profession and that class, might be said not to have altogether passed away — that I sometimes regret that I have not kept any literal record simply of the things that I have heard him say. I should thus have obtained an effect of old-fashioned courtesy by the same process and at as little expense as that actor at the Palais-Royal who, when asked where on earth he managed to find his astounding hats, answered, "I do not find my hats. I keep them." In a word, I suppose that my mother considered M. de Norpois a trifle 'out-of-date,' which was by no means a fault in her eyes, so far as manners were concerned, but attracted her less in the region — not, in this instance, of ideas, for those of M. de Norpois were extremely modern — but of idiom. She felt, however, that she was paying a delicate compliment to her husband when she spoke admiringly of the diplomat who had shewn so remarkable a predilection for him. By confirming in my father's mind the good opinion that he already had of M. de Norpois, and so inducing him to form a good opinion of himself also, she knew that she was carrying out that one of her wifely duties which consisted in making life pleasant and comfortable for her husband, just as when she saw to it that his dinner was

perfectly cooked and served in silence. And as she was incapable of deceiving my father, she compelled herself to admire the old Ambassador, so as to be able to praise him with sincerity. Incidentally she could naturally, and did, appreciate his kindness, his somewhat antiquated courtesy (so ceremonious that when, as he was walking along the street, his tall figure rigidly erect, he caught sight of my mother driving past, before raising his hat to her he would fling away the cigar that he had just lighted); his conversation, so elaborately circumspect, in which he referred as seldom as possible to himself and always considered what might interest the person to whom he was speaking; his promptness in answering a letter, which was so astonishing that whenever my father, just after posting one himself to M. de Norpois, saw his handwriting upon an envelope, his first thought was always one of annoyance that their letters must, unfortunately, have crossed in the post; which, one was led to suppose, bestowed upon him the special and luxurious privilege of extraordinary deliveries and collections at all hours of the day and night. My mother marvelled at his being so punctilious although so busy, so friendly although so much in demand, never realising that ‘although,’ with such people, is invariably an unrecognised ‘because,’ and that (just as old men are always wonderful for their age, and kings extraordinarily simple, and country cousins astonishingly well-informed) it was the same system of habits that enabled M. de Norpois to undertake so many duties and to be so methodical in answering letters, to go everywhere and to be so friendly when he came to us. Moreover she made the mistake which everyone makes who is unduly modest; she rated everything that concerned herself below, and consequently outside the range of, other people’s duties and engagements. The letter which it seemed to her so meritorious in my father’s friend to have written us promptly, since in the course of the day he must have had ever so many letters to write, she excepted from that great number of letters, of which actually it was a unit; in the same way she did not consider that dining with us was, for M. de Norpois, merely one of the innumerable activities of his social life; she never guessed that the Ambassador had trained himself, long ago, to look upon dining-out as one of his diplomatic functions, and to display, at table, an inveterate charm which it would have been too much to have expected him specially to discard when he came to dine with us.

The evening on which M. de Norpois first appeared at our table, in a year when I still went to play in the Champs-Elysées, has remained fixed in my memory because the afternoon of the same day was that upon which I at last went to hear Berma, at a *matinée*, in *Phèdre*, and also because in talking to M. de

Norpois I realised suddenly, and in a new and different way, how completely the feelings aroused in me by all that concerned Gilberte Swann and her parents differed from any that the same family could inspire in anyone else.

It was no doubt the sight of the depression in which I was plunged by the approach of the New Year holidays, in which, as she herself had informed me, I was to see nothing of Gilberte, that prompted my mother one day, in the hope of distracting my mind, to suggest, “If you are still so anxious to hear Berma, I think that your father would allow you perhaps to go; your grandmother can take you.”

But it was because M. de Norpois had told him that he ought to let me hear Berma, that it was an experience for a young man to remember in later life, that my father, who had hitherto been so resolutely opposed to my going and wasting my time, with the added risk of my falling ill again, on what he used to shock my grandmother by calling ‘futilities,’ was now not far from regarding this manner of spending an afternoon as included, in some vague way, in the list of precious formulae for success in a brilliant career. My grandmother, who, in renouncing on my behalf the profit which, according to her, I should have derived from hearing Berma, had made a considerable sacrifice in the interests of my health, was surprised to find that this last had become of no account at a mere word from M. de Norpois. Reposing the unconquerable hopes of her rationalist spirit in the strict course of fresh air and early hours which had been prescribed for me, she now deplored, as something disastrous, this infringement that I was to make of my rules, and in a tone of despair protested, “How easily led you are!” to my father, who replied angrily “What! So it’s you that are not for letting him go, now. That is really too much, after your telling us all day and every day that it would be so good for him.”

M. de Norpois had also brought about a change in my father’s plans in a matter of far greater importance to myself. My father had always meant me to become a diplomat, and I could not endure the thought that, even if I did have to stay for some years, first, at the Ministry, I should run the risk of being sent, later on, as Ambassador, to capitals in which no Gilberte dwelt. I should have preferred to return to the literary career that I had planned for myself, and had been abandoned, years before, in my wanderings along the Guermantes way. But my father had steadily opposed my devoting myself to literature, which he regarded as vastly inferior to diplomacy, refusing even to dignify it with the title of career, until the day when M. de Norpois, who had little love for the more recent generations of diplomatic agents, assured him that it was quite possible,

by writing, to attract as much attention, to receive as much consideration, to exercise as much influence, and at the same time to preserve more independence than in the Embassies.

"Well, well, I should never have believed it. Old Norpois doesn't at all disapprove of your idea of taking up writing," my father had reported. And as he had a certain amount of influence himself, he imagined that there was nothing that could not be 'arranged,' no problem for which a happy solution might not be found in the conversation of people who 'counted.' "I shall bring him back to dinner, one of these days, from the Commission. You must talk to him a little, and let him see what he thinks of you. Write something good that you can shew him; he is an intimate friend of the editor of the *Deux-Mondes*; he will get you in there; he will arrange it all, the cunning old fox; and, upon my soul, he seems to think that diplomacy, nowadays ——!"

My happiness in the prospect of not being separated from Gilberte made me desirous, but not capable, of writing something good which could be shewn to M. de Norpois. After a few laboured pages, weariness made the pen drop from my fingers; I cried with anger at the thought that I should never have any talent, that I was not 'gifted,' that I could not even take advantage of the chance that M. de Norpois's coming visit was to offer me of spending the rest of my life in Paris. The recollection that I was to be taken to hear Berma alone distracted me from my grief. But just as I did not wish to see any storms except on those coasts where they raged with most violence, so I should not have cared to hear the great actress except in one of those classic parts in which Swann had told me that she touched the sublime. For when it is in the hope of making a priceless discovery that we desire to receive certain impressions from nature or from works of art, we have certain scruples about allowing our soul to gather, instead of these, other, inferior, impressions, which are liable to make us form a false estimate of the value of Beauty. Berma in *Andromaque*, in *Les Caprices de Marianne*, in *Phèdre*, was one of those famous spectacles which my imagination had so long desired. I should enjoy the same rapture as on the day when in a gondola I glided to the foot of the Titian of the Frari or the Carpaccios of San Giorgio dei Schiavoni, were I ever to hear Berma repeat the lines beginning,

"On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous, Seigneur,——"

I was familiar with them from the simple reproduction in black and white which was given of them upon the printed page; but my heart beat furiously at the thought — as of the realisation of a long-planned voyage — that I should at length behold them, bathed and brought to life in the atmosphere and sunshine of

the voice of gold. A Carpaccio in Venice, Berma in *Phèdre*, masterpieces of pictorial or dramatic art which the glamour, the dignity attaching to them made so living to me, that is to say so indivisible, that if I had been taken to see Carpaccios in one of the galleries of the Louvre, or Berma in some piece of which I had never heard, I should not have experienced the same delicious amazement at finding myself at length, with wide-open eyes, before the unique and inconceivable object of so many thousand dreams. Then, while I waited, expecting to derive from Berma's playing the revelation of certain aspects of nobility and tragic grief, it would seem to me that whatever greatness, whatever truth there might be in her playing must be enhanced if the actress imposed it upon a work of real value, instead of what would, after all, be but embroidering a pattern of truth and beauty upon a commonplace and vulgar web.

Finally, if I went to hear Berma in a new piece, it would not be easy for me to judge of her art, of her diction, since I should not be able to differentiate between a text which was not already familiar and what she added to it by her intonations and gestures, an addition which would seem to me to be embodied in the play itself; whereas the old plays, the classics which I knew by heart, presented themselves to me as vast and empty walls, reserved and made ready for my inspection, on which I should be able to appreciate without restriction the devices by which Berma would cover them, as with frescoes, with the perpetually fresh treasures of her inspiration. Unfortunately, for some years now, since she had retired from the great theatres, to make the fortune of one on the boulevards where she was the 'star,' she had ceased to appear in classic parts; and in vain did I scan the hoardings; they never advertised any but the newest pieces, written specially for her by authors in fashion at the moment. When, one morning, as I stood searching the column of announcements to find the afternoon performances for the week of the New Year holidays, I saw there for the first time — at the foot of the bill, after some probably insignificant curtain-raiser, whose title was opaque to me because it had latent in it all the details of an action of which I was ignorant — two acts of *Phèdre* with Mme. Berma, and, on the following afternoons, *Le Demi-Monde*, *Les Caprices de Marianne*, names which, like that of *Phèdre*, were for me transparent, filled with light only, so familiar were those works to me, illuminated to their very depths by the revealing smile of art. They seemed to me to invest with a fresh nobility Mme. Berma herself when I read in the newspapers, after the programme of these performances, that it was she who had decided to shew herself once more to the public in some of her early creations. She was conscious, then, that certain stage-

parts have an interest which survives the novelty of their first production or the success of a revival; she regarded them, when interpreted by herself, as museum pieces which it might be instructive to set before the eyes of the generation which had admired her in them long ago, or of that which had never yet seen her in them. In thus advertising, in the middle of a column of plays intended only to while away an evening, this *Phèdre*, a title no longer than any of the rest, nor set in different type, she added something indescribable, as though a hostess, introducing you, before you all go in to dinner, to her other guests, were to mention, casually, amid the string of names which are the names of guests and nothing more, and without any change of tone:—"M. Anatole France."

The doctor who was attending me — the same who had forbidden me to travel — advised my parents not to let me go to the theatre; I should only be ill again afterwards, perhaps for weeks, and should in the long run derive more pain than pleasure from the experience. The fear of this might have availed to stop me, if what I had anticipated from such a spectacle had been only a pleasure for which a subsequent pain could so compensate as to cancel it. But what I demanded from this performance — just as from the visit to Balbec, the visit to Venice for which I had so intensely longed — was something quite different from pleasure; a series of verities pertaining to a world more real than that in which I lived, which, once acquired, could never be taken from me again by any of the trivial incidents — even though it were the cause of bodily suffering — of my otiose existence. At best, the pleasure which I was to feel during the performance appeared to me as the perhaps inevitable form of the perception of these truths; and I hoped only that the illness which had been forecast for me would not begin until the play was finished, so that my pleasure should not be in any way compromised or spoiled. I implored my parents, who, after the doctor's visit, were no longer inclined to let me go to *Phèdre*. I repeated, all day long, to myself, the speech beginning,

"On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous,——"

seeking out every intonation that could be put into it, so as to be able better to measure my surprise at the way which Berma would have found of uttering the lines. Concealed, like the Holy of Holies, beneath the veil that screened her from my gaze, behind which I invested her, every moment, with a fresh aspect, according to which of the words of Bergotte — in the pamphlet that Gilberte had found for me — was passing through my mind; "plastic nobility," "Christian austerity" or "Jansenist pallor," "Princess of Troezen and of Cleves" or "Mycenean drama," "Delphic symbol," "Solar myth"; that divine Beauty, whom

Berma's acting was to reveal to me, night and day, upon an altar perpetually illumined, sat enthroned hi the sanctuary of my mind, my mind for which not itself but my stern, my fickle parents were to decide whether or not it was to enshrine, and for all time, the perfections of the Deity unveiled, in the same spot where was now her invisible form. And with my eyes fixed upon that inconceivable image, I strove from morning to night to overcome the barriers which my family were putting in my way. But when those had at last fallen, when my mother — albeit this matinée was actually to coincide with the meeting of the Commission from which my father had promised to bring M. de Norpois home to dinner — had said to me, "Very well, we don't wish you to be unhappy; — if you think that you will enjoy it so very much, you must go; that's all;" when this day of theatre-going, hitherto forbidden and unattainable, depended now only upon myself, then for the first time, being no longer troubled by the wish that it might cease to be impossible, I asked myself if it were desirable, if there were not other reasons than my parents' prohibition which should make me abandon my design. In the first place, whereas I had been detesting them for their cruelty, their consent made them now so dear to me that the thought of causing them pain stabbed me also with a pain through which the purpose of life shewed itself as the pursuit not of truth but of loving-kindness, and life itself seemed good or evil only as my parents were happy or sad. "I would rather not go, if it hurts you," I told my mother, who, on the contrary, strove hard to expel from my mind any lurking fear that she might regret my going, since that, she said, would spoil the pleasure that I should otherwise derive from*Phèdre*, and it was the thought of my pleasure that had induced my father and her to reverse their earlier decision. But then this sort of obligation to find a pleasure in the performance seemed to me very burdensome. Besides, if I returned home ill, should I be well again in time to be able to go to the Champs-Elysées as soon as the holidays were over and Gilberte returned? Against all these arguments I set, so as to decide which course I should take, the idea, invisible there behind its veil, of the perfections of Berma. I cast into one pan of the scales "Making Mamma unhappy," "risking not being able to go on the Champs-Elysées," and the other, "Jansenist pallor," "Solar myth," until the words themselves grew dark and clouded in my mind's vision, ceased to say anything to me, lost all their force; and gradually my hesitations became so painful that if I had now decided upon the theatre it would have been only that I might bring them to an end, and be delivered from them once and for all. It would have been to fix a term to my sufferings, and no longer in the expectation of an intellectual benediction,

yielding to the attractions of perfection, that I would let myself be taken, not now to the Wise Goddess, but to the stern, implacable Divinity, featureless and unnamed, who had been secretly substituted for her behind the veil. But suddenly everything was altered. My desire to go and hear Berma received a fresh stimulus which enabled me to await the coming of the matinée with impatience and with joy; having gone to take up, in front of the column on which the playbills were, my daily station, as excruciating, of late, as that of a stylite saint, I had seen there, still moist and wrinkled, the complete bill of *Phèdre*, which had just been pasted up for the first time (and on which, I must confess, the rest of the cast furnished no additional attraction which could help me to decide). But it gave to one of the points between which my indecision wavered a form at once more concrete and — inasmuch as the bill was dated not from the day on which I read it but from that on which the performance would take place, and from the very hour at which the curtain would rise — almost imminent, well on the way, already, to its realisation, so that I jumped for joy before the column at the thought that on that day, and at that hour precisely, I should be sitting there in my place, ready to hear the voice of Berma; and for fear lest my parents might not now be in time to secure two good seats for my grandmother and myself, I raced back to the house, whipped on by the magic words which had now taken the place, in my mind, of "Jansenist pallor" and "Solar myth";—"Ladies will not be admitted to the stalls in hats. The doors will be closed at two o'clock."

Alas! that first *matinée* was to prove a bitter disappointment. My father offered to drop my grandmother and me at the theatre, on his way to the Commission. Before leaving the house he said to my mother: "See that you have a good dinner for us to-night; you remember, I'm bringing de Norpois back with me." My mother had not forgotten. And all that day, and overnight, Françoise, rejoicing in the opportunity to devote herself to that art of the kitchen,— of which she was indeed a past-master, stimulated, moreover, by the prospect of having a new guest to feed, the consciousness that she would have to compose, by methods known to her alone, a dish of beef in jelly,— had been living in the effervescence of creation; since she attached the utmost importance to the intrinsic quality of the materials which were to enter into the fabric of her work, she had gone herself to the Halles to procure the best cuts of rump-steak, shin of beef, calves'-feet, as Michelangelo passed eight months in the mountains of Carrara choosing the most perfect blocks of marble for the monument of Julius II— Françoise expended on these comings and goings so much ardour that Mamma, at the sight of her flaming cheeks, was alarmed lest our old servant

should make herself ill with overwork, like the sculptor of the Tombs of the Medici in the quarries of Pietrasanta. And overnight Françoise had sent to be cooked in the baker's oven, shielded with breadcrumbs, like a block of pink marble packed in sawdust, what she called a "Nev'-York ham." Believing the language to be less rich than it actually was in words, and her own ears less trustworthy, the first time that she heard anyone mention York ham she had thought, no doubt,— feeling it to be hardly conceivable that the dictionary could be so prodigal as to include at once a 'York' and a 'New York'— that she had misheard what was said, and that the ham was really called by the name already familiar to her. And so, ever since, the word York was preceded in her ears, or before her eyes when she read it in an advertisement, by the affix 'New' which she pronounced 'Nev'.' And it was with the most perfect faith that she would say to her kitchen-maid: "Go and fetch me a ham from Olida's. Madame told me especially to get a Nev'-York." On that particular day, if Françoise was consumed by the burning certainty of creative genius, my lot was the cruel anxiety of the seeker after truth. No doubt, so long as I had not yet heard Berma speak, I still felt some pleasure. I felt it in the little square that lay in front of the theatre, in which, in two hours' time, the bare boughs of the chestnut trees would gleam with a metallic lustre as the lighted gas-lamps shewed up every detail of their structure; before the attendants in the box-office, the selection of whom, their promotion, all their destiny depended upon the great artist — for she alone held power in the theatre, where ephemeral managers followed one after the other in an obscure succession — who took our tickets without even glancing at us, so preoccupied were they with their anxiety lest any of Mme. Berma's instructions had not been duly transmitted to the new members of the staff, lest it was not clearly, everywhere, understood that the hired applause must never sound for her, that the windows must all be kept open so long as she was not on the stage, and every door closed tight, the moment that she appeared; that a bowl of hot water must be concealed somewhere close to her, to make the dust settle: and, for that matter, at any moment now her carriage, drawn by a pair of horses with flowing manes, would be stopping outside the theatre, she would alight from it muffled in furs, and, crossly acknowledging everyone's salute, would send one of her attendants to find out whether a stage box had been kept for her friends, what the temperature was 'in front,' who were in the other boxes, if the programme sellers were looking smart; theatre and public being to her no more than a second, an outermost cloak which she would put on, and the medium, the more or less 'good' conductor through which her talent would have to pass. I

was happy, too, in the theatre itself; since I had made the discovery that — in contradiction of the picture so long entertained by my childish imagination — there was but one stage for everybody, I had supposed that I should be prevented from seeing it properly by the presence of the other spectators, as one is when in the thick of a crowd; now I registered the fact that, on the contrary, thanks to an arrangement which is, so to speak, symbolical of all spectatorship, everyone feels himself to be the centre of the theatre; which explained to me why, when Françoise had been sent once to see some melodrama from the top gallery, she had assured us on her return that her seat had been the best in the house, and that instead of finding herself too far from the stage she had been positively frightened by the mysterious and living proximity of the curtain. My pleasure increased further when I began to distinguish behind the said lowered curtain such confused rappings as one hears through the shell of an egg before the chicken emerges, sounds which speedily grew louder and suddenly, from that world which, impenetrable by our eyes, yet scrutinised us with its own, addressed themselves, and to us indubitably, in the imperious form of three consecutive hammer-blows as moving as any signals from the planet Mars. And — once this curtain had risen,— when on the stage a writing-table and a fireplace, in no way out of the ordinary, had indicated that the persons who were about to enter would be, not actors come to recite, as I had seen them once and heard them at an evening party, but real people, just living their lives at home, on whom I was thus able to spy without their seeing me — my pleasure still endured; it was broken by a momentary uneasiness; just as I was straining my ears in readiness before the piece began, two men entered the theatre from the side of the stage, who must have been very angry with each other, for they were talking so loud that in the auditorium, where there were at least a thousand people, we could hear every word, whereas in quite a small *café* one is obliged to call the waiter and ask what it is that two men, who appear to be quarrelling, are saying; but at that moment, while I sat astonished to find that the audience was listening to them without protest, drowned as it was in a universal silence upon which broke, presently, a laugh here and there, I understood that these insolent fellows were the actors and that the short piece known as the ‘curtain-raiser’ had now begun. It was followed by an interval so long that the audience, who had returned to their places, grew impatient and began to stamp their feet. I was terrified at this; for just as in the report of a criminal trial, when I read that some noble-minded person was coming, against his own interests, to testify on behalf of an innocent prisoner, I was always afraid that they would not be nice

enough to him, would not shew enough gratitude, would not recompense him lavishly, and that he, in disgust, would then range himself on the side of injustice; so now attributing to genius, in this respect, the same qualities as to virtue, I was afraid lest Berma, annoyed by the bad behaviour of so ill-bred an audience — in which, on the other hand, I should have liked her to recognise, with satisfaction, a few celebrities to whose judgment she would be bound to attach importance — should express her discontent and disdain by acting badly. And I gazed appealingly round me at these stamping brutes who were about to shatter, in their insensate rage, the rare and fragile impression which I had come to seek. The last moments of my pleasure were during the opening scenes of *Phèdre*. The heroine herself does not appear in these first scenes of the second act; and yet, as soon as the curtain rose, and another curtain, of red velvet this time, was parted in the middle (a curtain which was used to halve the depth of the stage in all the plays in which the 'star' appeared), an actress entered from the back who had the face and voice which, I had been told, were those of Berma. The cast must therefore have been changed; all the trouble that I had taken in studying the part of the wife of Theseus was wasted. But a second actress now responded to the first. I must, then, have been mistaken in supposing that the first was Berma, for the second even more closely resembled her, and, more than the other, had her diction. Both of them, moreover, enriched their parts with noble gestures — which I could vividly distinguish, and could appreciate in their relation to the text, while they raised and let fall the lovely folds of their tunics — and also with skilful changes of tone, now passionate, now ironical, which made me realise the significance of lines that I had read to myself at home without paying sufficient attention to what they really meant. But all of a sudden, in the cleft of the red curtain that veiled her sanctuary, as in a frame, appeared a woman, and simultaneously with the fear that seized me, far more vexing than Berma's fear could be, lest someone should upset her by opening a window, or drown one of her lines by rustling a programme, or annoy her by applauding the others and by not applauding her enough;— in my own fashion, still more absolute than Berma's, of considering from that moment theatre, audience, play and my own body only as an acoustic medium of no importance, save in the degree to which it was favourable to the inflexions of that voice,— I realised that the two actresses whom I had been for some minutes admiring bore not the least resemblance to her whom I had come to hear. But at the same time all my pleasure had ceased; in vain might I strain towards Berma's eyes, ears, mind, so as not to let one morsel escape me of the reasons which she

would furnish for my admiring her, I did not succeed in gathering a single one. I could not even, as I could with her companions, distinguish in her diction and in her playing intelligent intonations, beautiful gestures. I listened to her as though I were reading*Phèdre*, or as though Phaedra herself had at that moment uttered the words that I was hearing, without its appearing that Berma's talent had added anything at all to them. I could have wished, so as to be able to explore them fully, so as to attempt to discover what it was in them that was beautiful, to arrest, to immobilise for a time before my senses every intonation of the artist's voice, every expression of her features; at least I did attempt, by dint of my mental agility in having, before a line came, my attention ready and tuned to catch it, not to waste upon preparations any morsel of the precious time that each word, each gesture occupied, and, thanks to the intensity of my observation, to manage to penetrate as far into them as if I had had whole hours to spend upon them, by myself. But how short their duration was! Scarcely had a sound been received by my ear than it was displaced there by another. In one scene, where Berma stands motionless for a moment, her arm raised to the level of a face bathed, by some piece of stagecraft, in a greenish light, before a back-cloth painted to represent the sea, the whole house broke out in applause; but already the actress had moved, and the picture that I should have liked to study existed no longer. I told my grandmother that I could not see very well; she handed me her glasses. Only, when one believes in the reality of a thing, making it visible by artificial means is not quite the same as feeling that it is close at hand. I thought now that it was no longer Berma at whom I was looking, but her image in a magnifying glass. I put the glasses down, but then possibly the image that my eye received of her, diminished by distance, was no more exact; which of the two Bermas was the real? As for her speech to Hippolyte, I had counted enormously upon that, since, to judge by the ingenious significance which her companions were disclosing to me at every moment in less beautiful parts, she would certainly render it with intonations more surprising than any which, when reading the play at home, I had contrived to imagine; but she did not attain to the heights which Œnone or Aricie would naturally have reached, she planed down into a uniform flow of melody the whole of a passage in which there were mingled together contradictions so striking that the least intelligent of tragic actresses, even the pupils of an academy, could not have missed their effect; besides which, she ran through the speech so rapidly that it was only when she had come to the last line that my mind became aware of the deliberate monotony which she had imposed on it throughout.

Then, at last, a sense of admiration did possess me, provoked by the frenzied applause of the audience. I mingled my own with theirs, endeavouring to prolong the general sound so that Berma, in her gratitude, should surpass herself, and I be certain of having heard her on one of her great days. A curious thing, by the way, was that the moment when this storm of public enthusiasm broke loose was, as I afterwards learned, that in which Berma reveals one of her richest treasures. It would appear that certain transcendent realities emit all around them a radiance to which the crowd is sensitive. So it is that when any great event occurs, when on a distant frontier an army is in jeopardy, or defeated, or victorious, the vague and conflicting reports which we receive, from which an educated man can derive little enlightenment, stimulate in the crowd an emotion by which that man is surprised, and in which, once expert criticism has informed him of the actual military situation, he recognises the popular perception of that 'aura' which surrounds momentous happenings, and which may be visible hundreds of miles away. One learns of a victory either after the war is over, or at once, from the hilarious joy of one's hall porter. One discovers the touch of genius in Berma's acting a week after one has heard her, in the criticism of some review, or else on the spot, from the thundering acclamation of the stalls. But this immediate recognition by the crowd was mingled with a hundred others, all quite erroneous; the applause came, most often, at wrong moments, apart from the fact that it was mechanically produced by the effect of the applause that had gone before, just as in a storm, once the sea is sufficiently disturbed, it will continue to swell, even after the wind has begun to subside. No matter; the more I applauded, the better, it seemed to me, did Berma act. "I say," came from a woman sitting near me, of no great social pretensions, "she fairly gives it you, she does; you'd think she'd do herself an injury, the way she runs about. I call that acting, don't you?" And happy to find these reasons for Berma's superiority, though not without a suspicion that they no more accounted for it than would for that of the Gioconda or of Benvenuto's Perseus a peasant's gaping "That's a good bit of work. It's all gold, look! Fine, ain't it?", I greedily imbibed the strong wine of this popular enthusiasm. I felt, all the same, when the curtain had fallen fer the last time, disappointed that the pleasure for which I had so longed had been no greater, but at the same time I felt the need to prolong it, not to depart for ever, when I left the theatre, from this strange life of the stage which had, for a few hours, been my own, from which I should be tearing myself away, as though I were going into exile, when I returned to my; own home, had I not hoped there to learn a great deal more about Berma from her admirer, to whom I

was indebted already for the permission to go to *Phèdre*, M. de Norpois. I was introduced to him before dinner by my father, who summoned me into his study for the purpose. As I entered, the Ambassador rose, held out his hand, bowed his tall figure and fixed his blue eyes attentively on my face. As the foreign visitors who used to be presented to him, in the days when he still represented France abroad, were all more or less (even the famous singers) persons of note, with regard to whom he could tell, when he met them, that he would be able to say, later on, when he heard then — names mentioned in Paris or in Petersburg, that he remembered perfectly the evening he had spent with them at Munich or Sofia, he had formed the habit of impressing upon them, by his affability, the pleasure with which he was making their acquaintance; but in addition to this, being convinced that in the life of European capitals, in contact at once with all the interesting personalities that passed through them and with the manners and customs of the native populations, one acquired a deeper insight than could be gained from books into the intellectual movement throughout Europe, he would exercise upon each newcomer his keen power of observation, so as to decide at once with what manner of man he had to deal. The Government had not for some time now entrusted to him a post abroad, but still, as soon as anyone was introduced to him, his eyes, as though they had not yet been informed of their master's retirement, began their fruitful observation, while by his whole attitude he endeavoured to convey that the stranger's name was not unknown to him. And so, all the time, while he spoke to me kindly and with the air of importance of a man who is conscious of the vastness of his own experience, he never ceased to examine me with a sagacious curiosity, and to his own profit, as though I had been some exotic custom, some historic and instruct tive building or some 'star' upon his course. And in this way he gave proof at once, in his attitude towards me, of the majestic benevolence of the sage Mentor and of the zealous curiosity of the young Anacharsis.

He offered me absolutely no opening to the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, but put a number of questions to me on what I had been doing and reading; asked what were my own inclinations, which I heard thus spoken of for the first time as though it might be a quite reasonable thing to obey their promptings, whereas hitherto I had always supposed it to be my duty to suppress them. Since they attracted me towards Literature, he did not dissuade me from that course; on the contrary, he spoke of it with deference, as of some venerable personage whose select circle, in Rome or at Dresden, one remembers with pleasure, and regrets only that one's multifarious duties in life enable one to revisit it so seldom. He

appeared to be envying me, with an almost jovial smile, the delightful hours which, more fortunate than himself and more free, I should be able to spend with such a Mistress. But the very terms that he employed shewed me Literature as something entirely different from the image that I had formed of it at Combray, and I realised that I had been doubly right in abandoning my intention. Until now, I had reckoned only that I had not the 'gift' for writing; now M. de Norpois took from me the ambition also. I wanted to express to him what had been my dreams; trembling with emotion, I was painfully apprehensive that all the words which I could utter would not be the sincerest possible equivalent of what I had felt, what I had never yet attempted to formulate; that is to say that my words had no clear significance. Perhaps by a professional habit, perhaps by virtue of the calm that is acquired by every important personage whose advice is commonly sought, and who, knowing that he will keep the control of the conversation in his own hands, allows the other party to fret, to struggle, to take his time; perhaps also to emphasize the dignity of his head (Greek, according to himself, despite his sweeping whiskers), M. de Norpois, while anything was being explained to him, would preserve a facial immobility as absolute as if you had been addressing some ancient and unhearing bust in a museum. Until suddenly, falling upon you like an auctioneer's hammer, or a Delphic oracle, the Ambassador's voice, as he replied to you, would be all the more impressive, in that nothing in his face had allowed you to guess what sort of impression you had made on him, or what opinion he was about to express.

"Precisely;" he suddenly began, as though the case were now heard and judged, and after allowing me to writhe in increasing helplessness beneath those motionless eyes which never for an instant left my face. "There is the case of the son of one of my friends, which, *mutatis mutandis*, is very much like yours." He adopted in speaking of our common tendency the same reassuring tone as if it had been a tendency not to literature but to rheumatics, and he had wished to assure me that it would not necessarily prove fatal. "He too has chosen to leave the Quai d'Orsay, although the way had been paved for him there by his father, and without caring what people might say, he has settled down to write. And certainly, he's had no reason to regret it. He published two years ago — of course, he's much older than you, you understand — a book dealing with the Sense of the Infinite on the Western Shore of Victoria Nyanza, and this year he has brought out a little thing, not so important as the other, but very brightly, in places perhaps almost too pointedly written, on the Repeating Rifle in the Bulgarian Army; and these have put him quite in a class by himself. He's gone

pretty far already, and he's not the sort of man to stop half way; I happen to know that (without any suggestion, of course, of his standing for election) his name has been mentioned several times, in conversation, and not at all unfavourably, at the Academy of Moral Sciences. And so, one can't say yet, of course, that he has reached the pinnacle of fame, still he has made his way, by sheer industry, to a very fine position indeed, and success — which doesn't always come only to agitators and mischief-makers and men who make trouble which is usually more than they are prepared to take — success has crowned his efforts."

My father, seeing me already, in a few years' time, an Academician, was tasting a contentment which M. de Norpois raised to the supreme pitch when, after a momentary hesitation in which he appeared to be calculating the possible consequences of so rash an act, he handed me his card and said: "Why not go and see him yourself? Tell him I sent you. He may be able to give you some good advice," plunging me by his words into as painful a state of anxiety as if he had told me that, next morning, I was to embark as cabin-boy on board a sailing ship, and to go round the world.

My Aunt Léonie had bequeathed to me, together with all sorts of other things and much of her furniture, with which it was difficult to know what to do, almost all her unsettled estate — revealing thus after her death an affection for me which I had hardly suspected in her lifetime. My father, who was trustee of this estate until I came of age, now consulted M. de Norpois with regard to several of the investments. He recommended certain stocks bearing a low rate of interest, which he considered particularly sound, notably English consols and Russian four per cents. "With absolutely first class securities such as those," said M. de Norpois, "even if your income from them is nothing very great, you may be certain of never losing any of your capital." My father then told him, roughly, what else he had bought. M. de Norpois gave a just perceptible smile of congratulation; like all capitalists, he regarded wealth as an enviable thing, but thought it more delicate to compliment people upon their possessions only by a half-indicated sign of intelligent sympathy; on the other hand, as he was himself immensely rich, he felt that he shewed his good taste by seeming to regard as considerable the meagre revenues of his friends, with a happy and comforting resilience to the superiority of his own. He made amends for this by congratulating my father, without hesitation, on the "composition" of his list of investments, selected "with so sure, so delicate, so fine a taste." You would have supposed, to hear him, that he attributed to the relative values of investments,

and even to investments themselves, something akin to aesthetic merit. Of one, comparatively recent and still little known, which my father mentioned, M. de Norpois, like the people who have always read the books of which, you imagine, you yourself alone have ever heard, said at once, “Ah, yes, I used to amuse myself for some time with watching it in the papers; it was quite interesting,” with the retrospective smile of a regular subscriber who has read the latest novel already, in monthly instalments, in his magazine. “It would not be at all a bad idea to apply for some of this new issue. It is distinctly attractive; they are offering it at a most tempting discount.” But when he came to some of the older investments, my father, who could not remember their exact names, which it was easy to confuse with others of the same kind, opened a drawer and shewed the securities themselves to the Ambassador. The sight of them enchanted me. They were ornamented with cathedral spires and allegorical figures, like the old, romantic editions that I had pored over as a child. All the products of one period have something in common; the artists who illustrate the poetry of their generation are the same artists who are employed by the big financial houses. And nothing reminds me so much of the monthly parts of Notre-Dame de Paris, and of various books by Gérard de Nerval, that used to hang outside the grocer’s door at Combray, than does, in its rectangular and flowery border, supported by recumbent river-gods, a ‘personal share’ in the Water Company.

The contempt which my father had for my kind of intelligence was so far tempered by his natural affection for me that, in practice, his attitude towards anything that I might do was one of blind indulgence. And so he had no qualm about telling me to fetch a little ‘prose poem’ which I had made up, years before, at Combray, while coming home from a walk. I had written it down in a state of exaltation which must, I felt certain, infect everyone who read it. But it was not destined to captivate M. de Norpois, for he handed it back to me without a word.

My mother, who had the most profound respect for all my father’s occupations, came in now, timidly, to ask whether dinner might be served. She was afraid to interrupt a conversation in which she herself could have no part. And indeed my father was continually reminding the Marquis of some useful suggestion which they had decided to make at the next meeting of the Commission; speaking in the peculiar tone always adopted, when in a strange environment by a pair of colleagues — as exclusive, in this respect, as two young men from the same college — whose professional routine has furnished them with a common fund of memories to which the others present have no access, and to which they are unwilling to refer before an audience.

But the absolute control over his facial muscles to which M. de Norpois had attained allowed him to listen without seeming to hear a word. At last my father became uneasy. “I had thought,” he ventured, after an endless preamble, “of asking the advice of the Commission...” Then from the face of the noble virtuoso, who had been sitting inert as a player in an orchestra sits until the moment comes for him to begin his part, were uttered, with an even delivery, on a sharp note, and as though they were no more than the completion (but scored for a different voice) of the phrase that my father had begun, the words: “of which you will not hesitate, of course, to call a meeting; more especially as the present members are all known to you personally, and there may be a change any day.” This was not in itself a very remarkable ending. But the immobility that had preceded it made it detach itself with the crystal clarity, the almost malicious unexpectedness of those phrases in which the piano, silent until then,’takes up at a given moment, the violoncello to which one has just been listening, in a Mozart concerto.

“Well, did you enjoy your *matinée*?” asked my father, as we moved to the dining-room; meaning me to ‘shew off,’ and with the idea that my enthusiasm would give M. de Norpois a good opinion of me. “He has just been to hear Berma. You remember, we were talking about it the other day,” he went on, turning towards the diplomat, in the same tone of retrospective, technical, mysterious allusiveness as if he had been referring to a meeting of the Commission.

“You must have been enchanted, especially if you had never heard her before. Your father was alarmed at the effect that the little jaunt might have upon your health, which is none too good, I am told, none too robust. But I soon set his mind at rest. Theatres to-day are not what they were even twenty years ago. You have more or less comfortable seats now, and a certain amount of ventilation, although we have still a long way to go before we come up to Germany or England, which in that respect as in many others are immeasurably ahead of us. I have never seen Mme. Berma in *Phèdre*, but I have always heard that she is excellent in the part. You were charmed with her, of course?”

M. de Norpois, a man a thousand times more intelligent than myself, must know that hidden truth which I had failed to extract from Berma’s playing; he knew, and would reveal it to me; in answering his question I would implore him to let me know in what that truth consisted; and he would tell me, and so justify me in the longing that I had felt to see and hear the actress. I had only a moment, I must make what use I could of it and bring my cross-examination to bear upon

the essential points. But what were they? Fastening my whole attention upon my own so confused impressions, with no thought of making M. de Norpois admire me, but only that of learning from him the truth that I had still to discover, I made no attempt to substitute ready-made phrases for the words that failed me — I stood there stammering, until finally, in the hope of provoking him into declaring what there was in Berma that was admirable, I confessed that I had been disappointed.

"What's that?" cried my father, annoyed at the bad impression which this admission of my failure to appreciate the performance must make on M. de Norpois, "What on earth do you mean; you didn't enjoy it? Why, your grandmother has been telling us that you sat there hanging on every word that Berma uttered, with your eyes starting out of your head; that everyone else in the theatre seemed quite bored, beside you."

"Oh, yes, I was listening as hard as I could, trying to find out what it was that was supposed to be so wonderful about her. Of course, she's frightfully good, and all that..."

"If she is 'frightfully good,' what more do you want?"

"One of the things that have undoubtedly contributed to the success of Mme. Berma," resumed M. de Norpois, turning with elaborate courtesy towards my mother, so as not to let her be left out of the conversation, and in conscientious fulfilment of his duty of politeness to the lady of the house, "is the perfect taste that she shews in selecting her parts; thus she can always be assured of success, and success of the right sort. She hardly ever appears in anything trivial. Look how she has thrown herself into the part of Phèdre. And then, she brings the same good taste to the choice of her costumes, and to her acting. In spite of her frequent and lucrative tours in England and America, the vulgarity — I will not say of John Bull; that would be unjust, at any rate to the England of the Victorian era — but of Uncle Sam has not infected her. No loud colours, no rant. And then that admirable voice, which has been of such service to her, with which she plays so delightfully — I should almost be tempted to describe it as a musical instrument!"

My interest in Berma's acting had continued to grow ever since the fall of the curtain, because it was then no longer compressed within the limits of reality; but I felt the need to find explanations for it; moreover it had been fixed with the same intensity, while Berma was on the stage, upon everything that she offered, in the indivisibility of a living whole, to my eyes and ears; there was nothing separate or distinct; it welcomed, accordingly, the discovery of a reasonable

cause in these tributes paid to the simplicity, to the good taste of the actress, it attracted them to itself by its power of absorption, seized hold of them, as the optimism of a drunken man seizes hold of the actions of his neighbour, in each of which he finds an excuse for emotion. “He is right!” I told myself. “What a charming voice, what an absence of shrillness, what simple costumes, what intelligence to have chosen *Phèdre*. No; I have not been disappointed!”

The cold beef, spiced with carrots, made its appearance, couched by the Michelangelo of our kitchen upon enormous crystals of jelly, like transparent blocks of quartz.

“You have a chef of the first order, Madame,” said M. de Norpois, “and that is no small matter. I myself, who have had, when abroad, to maintain a certain style in housekeeping, I know how difficult it often is to find a perfect master-cook. But this is a positive banquet that you have set before us!”

And indeed Françoise, in the excitement of her ambition to make a success, for so distinguished a guest, of a dinner the preparation of which had been obstructed by difficulties worthy of her powers, had given herself such trouble as she no longer took when we were alone, and had recaptured her incomparable Combray manner.

“That is a thing you can’t get in a chophouse,— in the best of them, I mean; a spiced beef in which the jelly does not taste of glue and the beef has caught the flavour of the carrots; it is admirable! Allow me to come again,” he went on, making a sign to shew that he wanted more of the jelly. “I should be interested to see how your Vatel managed a dish of quite a different kind; I should like, for instance, to see him tackle a *boeuf Stroganoff*.”

M. de Norpois, so as to add his own contribution to the gaiety of the repast, entertained us with a number of the stories with which he was in the habit of regaling his colleagues in “the career,” quoting now some ludicrous sentence uttered by a politician, an old offender, whose sentences were always long and packed with incoherent images, now some monumental epigram of a diplomat, sparkling with attic salt. But, to tell the truth, the criterion which for him set apart these two kinds of phrase in no way resembled that which I was in the habit of applying to literature.. Most of the finer shades escaped me; the words which he repeated with derision seemed to me not to differ very greatly from those which he found remarkable. He belonged to the class of men who, had we come to discuss the books that I liked, would have said: “So you understand that, do you? I must confess that I do not understand, I am not initiated;” but I could have matched his attitude, for I did not grasp the wit or folly, the eloquence or

pomposity which he found in a statement or a speech, and the absence of any perceptible reason for one's being badly and the other's well expressed made that sort of literature seem more mysterious, more obscure to me than any other. I could distinguish only that to repeat what everybody else was thinking was, in politics, the mark not of an inferior but of a superior mind. When M. de Norpois made use of certain expressions which were 'common form' in the newspapers, and uttered them with emphasis, one felt that they became an official pronouncement by the mere fact of his having employed them, and a pronouncement which would provoke a string of comment.

My mother was counting greatly upon the pineapple and truffle salad. But the Ambassador, after fastening for a moment on the confection the penetrating gaze of a trained observer, ate it with the inscrutable discretion of a diplomat, and without disclosing to us what he thought of it. My mother insisted upon his taking some more, which he did, but saying only, in place of the compliment for which she was hoping: "I obey, Madame, for I can see that it is, on your part, a positive ukase!"

"We saw in the 'papers that you had a long talk with King Theodosius," my father ventured.

"Why, yes; the King, who has a wonderful memory for faces, was kind enough to remember, when he noticed me in the stalls, that I had had the honour to meet him on several occasions at the Court of Bavaria, at a time when he had never dreamed of his oriental throne — to which, as you know, he was summoned by a European Congress, and indeed had grave doubts about accepting the invitation, regarding that particular sovereignty as unworthy of his race, the noblest, heraldically speaking, in the whole of Europe. An aide-de-camp came down to bid me pay my respects to his Majesty, whose command I hastened, naturally, to obey."

"And I trust, you are satisfied with the results of his visit?"

"Enchanted! One was justified in feeling some apprehension as to the manner in which a Sovereign who is still so young would handle a situation requiring tact, particularly at this highly delicate juncture. For my own part, I reposed entire confidence in the King's political sense. But I must confess that he far surpassed my expectations. The speech that he made at the Elysée, which, according to information that has come to me from a most authoritative source, was composed, from beginning to end, by himself, was fully deserving of the interest that it has aroused in all quarters. It was simply masterly; a trifle daring, I quite admit, but with an audacity which, after all, has been fully justified by the

event. Traditional diplomacy is all very well in its way, but in practice it has made his country and ours live in an hermetically sealed atmosphere in which it was no longer possible to breathe. Very well! There is one method of letting in fresh air, obviously not one of the methods which one could officially recommend, but one which King Theodosius might allow himself to adopt — and that is to break the windows. Which he accordingly did, with a spontaneous good humour that delighted everybody, and also with an aptness in his choice of words in which one could at once detect the race of scholarly princes from whom he is descended through his mother. There can be no question that when he spoke of the 'affinities' that bound his country to France, the expression, rarely as it may occur in the vocabulary of the Chancellories, was a singularly happy one. You see that literary ability is no drawback, even in diplomacy, even upon a throne," he went on, turning for a moment to myself. "The community of interests had long been apparent, I quite admit, and the relations of the two Powers were excellent. Still, it needed putting into words. The word was what we were all waiting for, it was chosen with marvellous aptitude; you have seen the effect it had. For my part, I must confess I applauded openly."

"Your friend M. de Vaugoubert will be pleased, after preparing for the agreement all these years."

"All the more so that his Majesty, who is quite incorrigible, really, in some ways, had taken care to spring it on him as a surprise. And it did come as a complete surprise, incidentally, to everyone concerned, beginning with the Foreign Minister himself, who — I have heard — did not find it at all to his liking. It appears that someone spoke to him about it and that he replied, pretty sharply, and loud enough to be overheard by the people on either side of them: 'I have been neither consulted nor informed!' indicating clearly by that that he declined to accept any responsibility for the consequences. I must own that the incident has given rise to a great deal of comment, and I should not go so far as to deny," he went on with a malicious smile, "that certain of my colleagues, for whom the supreme law appears to be that of inertia, may have been shaken from their habitual repose. As for Vaugoubert, you are aware that he has been bitterly attacked for his policy of bringing that country into closer relations with France, which must have been more than ordinarily painful to him, he is so sensitive, such an exquisite nature. I can amply testify to that, since, for all that he is considerably my junior, I have had many dealings with him, we are friends of long standing and I know him intimately. Besides, who could help knowing him? His is a heart of crystal. Indeed, that is the one fault that there is to be found with

him; it is not necessary for the heart of a diplomat to be as transparent as all that. Still, that does not prevent their talking of sending him to Rome, which would be a fine rise for him, but a pretty big plum to swallow. Between ourselves, I fancy that Vaugoubert, utterly devoid of ambition as he is, would be very well pleased, and would by no means ask for that cup to pass from him. For all we know, he may do wonders down there; he is the chosen candidate of the Consulta, and for my part I can see him very well placed, with his artistic leanings, in the setting of the Farnese Palace and the Caracci Gallery. At least you would suppose that it was impossible for any one to hate him; but there is a whole camarilla collected round King Theodosius which is more or less held in fief by the Wilhelmstrasse, whose inspiration its members dutifully absorb, and these men have done everything in their power to checkmate him. Not only has Vaugoubert had to face these backstairs intrigues, he has had to endure also the insults of a gang of hireling pamphleteers who later on, being like every subsidised journalist the most arrant cowards, have been the first to cry quits, but in the interval had not shrunk from hurling at our Representative the most fatuous accusations that the wit of irresponsible fools could invent. For a month and more Vaugoubert's enemies had been dancing round him, howling for his scalp," M. de Norpois detached this word with shacp emphasis. "But forewarned is forearmed; as for their insults, he spurned them with his foot!" he went on with even more determination, and with so fierce a glare in his eye that for a moment we forgot our food. "In the words of a fine Arab proverb, 'The dogs may bark; the caravan goes on!'" After launching this quotation M. de Norpois paused and examined our faces, to see what effect it had had upon us. Its effect was great, the proverb being familiar to us already. It had taken the place, that year, among people who 'really counted,' of "He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind," which was sorely in need of a rest, not having the perennial freshness of "Working for the King of Prussia." For the culture of these eminent men was an alternate, if not a tripartite and triennial culture. Of course, the use of quotations such as these, with which M. de Norpois excelled in jewelling his articles in the Revue, was in no way essential to their appearing solid and well-informed. Even without the ornament which the quotations supplied, it sufficed that M. de Norpois should write at a given point (as he never failed to write): "The Court of St. James's was not the last to be sensible of the peril," or "Feeling ran high on the Singers' Bridge, which with anxious eyes was following the selfish but skilful policy of the Dual Monarchy," or "A cry of alarm sounded from Montecitorio," or yet again, "That everlasting double-dealing which is so characteristic of the

Ballplatz.” By these expressions the profane reader had at once recognised and had paid deference to the diplomat *de carrière*. But what had made people say that he was something more than that, that he was endowed with a superior culture, had been his careful use of quotations, the perfect example of which, at that date, was still: “Give me a good policy and I will give you good finances, *to quote the favourite words of Baron Louis*”: for we had not yet imported from the Far East: “Victory is on the side that can hold out a quarter of an hour longer than the other,*as the Japanese say*.” This reputation for immense literary gifts, combined with a positive genius for intrigue which he kept concealed beneath a mask of indifference, had secured the election of M. de Norpois to the Académie des Sciences Morales. And there were some who even thought that he would riot be out of place in the Académie Française, on the famous day when, wishing to indicate that it was only by drawing the Russian Alliance closer that we could hope to arrive at an understanding with Great Britain, he had not hesitated to write: “Be it clearly understood in the Quai d’Orsay, be it taught henceforward in all the manuals of geography, which appear to be incomplete in this respect, be his certificate of graduation remorselessly withheld from every candidate who has not learned to say, ‘If all roads lead to Rome, nevertheless the way from Paris to London runs of necessity through St. Petersburg.’”

“In short,” M. de Norpois went on, addressing my father, “Vaugoubert has won himself considerable distinction from this affair, quite beyond anything on which he can have reckoned. He expected, you understand, a correctly worded speech (which, after the storm-clouds of recent years, would have been something to the good) but nothing more. Several persons who had the honour to be present have assured me that it is impossible, when one merely reads the speech, to form any conception of the effect that it produced when uttered — when articulated with marvellous clearness of diction by the King, who is a master of the art of public speaking and in that passage underlined every possible shade of meaning. I allowed myself, in this connexion, to listen to a little anecdote which brings into prominence once again that frank, boyish charm by which King Theo-dosius has won so many hearts. I am assured that, just as he uttered that word ‘affinities,’ which was, of course, the startling innovation of the speech, and one that, as you will see, will provoke discussion in the Chancellories for years to come, his Majesty, anticipating the delight of our Ambassador, who was to find in that word the seal, the crown set upon all his labours, on his dreams, one might almost say, and, in a word, his marshal’s baton, made a half turn towards Vaugoubert and fixing upon him his arresting

gaze, so characteristic of the Oettingens, fired at him that admirably chosen word ‘affinities,’ a positive treasure-trove, uttering it in a tone which made it plain to all his hearers that it was employed of set purpose and with full knowledge of the circumstances. It appears that Vaugoubert found some difficulty in mastering his emotion, and I must confess that, to a certain extent, I can well understand it. Indeed, a person who is entirely to be believed has told me, in confidence, that the King came up to Vaugoubert after the dinner, when His Majesty was holding an informal court, and was heard to say, ‘Well, are you satisfied with your pupil, my dear Marquis?’

“One thing, however,” M. de Norpois concluded, “is certain; and that is that a speech like that has done more than twenty years of negotiation towards bringing the two countries together, uniting their ‘affinities,’ to borrow the picturesque expression of Theodosius II. It is no more than a word, if you like, but look what success it has had, how the whole of the European press is repeating it, what interest it has aroused, what a new note it has struck. Besides it is distinctly in the young Sovereign’s manner. I will not go so far as to say that he lights upon a diamond of that water every day. But it is very seldom that, in his prepared speeches, or better still in the impulsive flow of his conversation, he does not reveal his character — I was on the point of saying ‘does not affix his signature’— by the use of some incisive word. I myself am quite free from any suspicion of partiality in this respect, for I am stoutly opposed to all innovations in terminology. Nine times out of ten they are most dangerous.”

“Yes, I was thinking, only the other day, that the German Emperor’s telegram could not be much to your liking,” said my father.

M. de Norpois raised his eyes to heaven, as who should say, “Oh, that fellow!” before he replied: “In the first place, it is an act of ingratitude. It is more than a crime; it is a blunder, and one of a crassness which I can describe only as pyramidal! Indeed, unless some one puts a check on his activities, the man who has got rid of Bismarck is quite capable of repudiating by degrees the whole of the Bismarckian policy; after which it will be a leap in the dark.”

“My husband tells me, sir, that you are perhaps going to take him to Spain one summer; that will be nice for him; I am so glad.”

“Why, yes; it is an idea that greatly attracts me; I amuse myself, planning a tour. I should like to go there with you, my dear fellow. But what about you, Madame; have you decided yet how you are going to spend your holidays?”

“I shall perhaps go with my son to Balbec, but I am not certain.”

“Oh, but Balbec is quite charming, I was down that way a few years ago.

They are beginning to build some very pretty little-villas there; I think you'll like the place. But may I ask what has made you choose Balbec?"

"My son is very anxious to visit some of the churches in that neighbourhood, and Balbec church in particular. I was a little afraid that the tiring journey there, and the discomfort of staying in the place might be too much for him. But I hear that they have just opened an excellent hotel, in which he will be able to get all the comfort that he requires."

"Indeed! I must make a note of that, for a certain person who will not turn up her nose at a comfortable hotel."

"The church at Balbec is very beautiful, sir, is it not?" I inquired, repressing my sorrow at learning that one of the attractions of Balbec consisted in its pretty little villas.

"No, it is not bad; but it cannot be compared for a moment with such positive jewels in stone as the Cathedrals of Rheims and Chartres, or with what is to my mind the pearl among them all, the Sainte-Chapelle here in Paris."

"But, surely, Balbec church is partly romanesque, is it not?"

"Why, yes, it is in the romanesque style, which is to say very cold and lifeless, with no hint in it anywhere of the grace, the fantasy of the later gothic builders, who worked their stone as if it had been so much lace. Balbec church is well worth a visit, if you are in those parts; it is decidedly quaint; on a wet day, when you have nothing better to do, you might look inside; you will see the tomb of Tourville."

"Tell me, were you at the Foreign Ministry dinner last night?" asked my father. "I couldn't go."

"No," M. de Norpois smiled, "I must confess that I renounced it for a party of a very different sort. I was dining with a lady whose name you may possibly have heard, the beautiful Mme. Swann." My mother checked an impulsive movement, for, being more rapid in perception than my father, she used to alarm herself on his account over things which only began to upset him a moment later. Anything unpleasant that might occur to him was discovered first by her, just as bad news from France is always known abroad sooner than among ourselves. But she was curious to know what sort of people the Swanns managed to entertain, and so inquired of M. de Norpois as to whom he had met there.

"Why, my dear lady, it is a house which (or so it struck me) is especially attractive to gentlemen. There were several married men there last night, but their wives were all, as it happened, unwell, and so had not come with them," replied the Ambassador with a mordancy sheathed in good-humour, casting on

each of us a glance the gentleness and discretion of which appeared to be tempering while in reality they deftly intensified its malice.

"In all fairness," he went on, "I must add that women do go to the house, but women who belong rather — what shall I say — to the Republican world than to Swann's" (he pronounced it "Svann's") "circle. Still, you can never tell. Perhaps it will turn into a political or a literary salon some day. Anyhow, they appear to be quite happy as they are. Indeed, I feel that Swann advertises his happiness just a trifle too blatantly. He told us the names of all the people who had asked him and his wife out for the next week, people with whom there was no particular reason to be proud of being intimate, with a want of reserve, of taste, almost of tact which I was astonished to remark in so refined a man. He kept on repeating, 'We haven't a free evening!' as though that had been a thing to boast of, positively like a *parvenu*, and he is certainly not that. For Swann had always plenty of friends, women as well as men, and without seeming over-bold, without the least wish to appear indiscreet, I think I may safely say that not all of them, of course, nor even the majority of them, but one at least, who is a lady of the very highest rank, would perhaps not have shewn herself inexorably averse from the idea of entering upon relations with Mme. Swann, in which case it is safe to assume that more than one sheep of the social flock would have followed her lead. But it seems that there has been no indication on Swann's part of any movement in that direction.

"What do I see? A Nesselrode pudding! As well! I declare, I shall need a course at Carlsbad after such a Lucullus-feast as this.

"Possibly Swann felt that there would be too much resistance to overcome. The marriage — so much is certain — was not well received. There has been some talk of his wife's having money, but that is all humbug. Anyhow, the whole affair has been looked upon with disfavour. And then, Swann has an aunt who is excessively rich and in an admirable position socially, married to a man who, financially speaking, is a power. Not only has she refused to meet Mme. Swann, she has actually started a campaign to force her friends and acquaintances to do the same. I do not mean to say that anyone who moves in a good circle in Paris has shewn any actual incivility to Mme. Swann.... No! A hundred times no! Quite apart from her husband's being eminently a man to take up the challenge. Anyhow, there is one curious thing about it, to see the immense importance that Swann, who knows so many and such exclusive people, attaches to a society of which the best that can be said is that it is extremely mixed. I myself, who knew him in the old days, must admit that I felt more astonished than amused at seeing

a man so well-bred as he is, so much at home in the best houses, effusively thanking the Chief Secretary to the Minister of Posts for having come to them, and asking him whether Mme. Swann might *take the liberty* of calling upon his wife. He must feel something of an exile, don't you know; evidently, it's quite a different world. I don't think, all the same, that Swann is unhappy. It is true that for some years before the marriage she was always trying to blackmail him in a rather disgraceful way; she would take the child away whenever Swann refused her anything. Poor Swann, who is as unsophisticated as he is, for all that, sharp, believed every time that the child's disappearance was a coincidence, and declined to face the facts. Apart from that, she made such continual scenes that everyone expected that, from the day she attained her object and was safely married, nothing could possibly restrain her and that their life would be a hell on earth. Instead of which, just the opposite has happened. People are inclined to laugh at the way in which Swann speaks of his wife; it's become a standing joke. Of course, one could hardly expect that, conscious, more or less of being a — (you remember Molière's line) he would go and proclaim it *urbi et orbi*; still that does not prevent one from finding a tendency in him to exaggerate when he declares that she makes an excellent wife. And yet that is not so far from the truth as people imagine. In her own way — which is not, perhaps, what all husbands would prefer, but then, between you and me, I find it difficult to believe that Swann, who has known her for ever so long and is far from being an utter fool, did not know what to expect — there can be no denying that she does seem to have a certain regard for him. I do not say that she is not flighty, and Swann himself has no fault to find with her for that, if one is to believe the charitable tongues which, as you may suppose, continue to wag. But she is distinctly grateful to him for what he has done for her, and, despite the fears that were everywhere expressed of the contrary, her temper seems to have become angelic."

This alteration was perhaps not so extraordinary as M. de Norpois professed to find it. Odette had not believed that Swann would ever consent to marry her; each time that she made the suggestive announcement that some man about town had just married his mistress she had seen him stiffen into a glacial silence, or at the most, if she were directly to challenge him, asking: "Don't you think it very nice, a very fine thing that he has done, for a woman who sacrificed all her youth to him?" had heard him answer dryly: "But I don't say that there's anything wrong in it. Everyone does what he himself thinks right." She came very near, indeed, to believing that (as he used to threaten in moments of anger) he was

going to leave her altogether, for she had heard it said, not long since, by a woman sculptor, that “You cannot be surprised at anything men do, they’re such brutes,” and impressed by the profundity of this maxim of pessimism she had appropriated it for herself, and repeated it on every possible occasion with an air of disappointment which seemed to imply: “After all, it’s not impossible in any way; it would be just my luck.” Meanwhile all the virtue had gone from the optimistic maxim which had hitherto guided Odette through life: “You can do anything with men when they’re in love with you, they’re such idiots!” a doctrine which was expressed on her face by the same tremor of an eyelid that might have accompanied such words as: “Don’t be frightened; he won’t break anything.” While she waited, Odette was tormented by the thought of what one of her friends, who had been married by a man who had not lived with her for nearly so long as Odette herself had lived with Swann, and had had no child by him, and who was now in a definitely respectable position, invited to the balls at the Elysée and so forth, must think of Swann’s behaviour. A consultant more discerning than M. de Norpois would doubtless have been able to diagnose that it was this feeling of shame and humiliation that had embittered Odette, that the devilish characteristics which she displayed were no essential part of her, no irremediable evil, and so would easily have foretold what had indeed come to pass, namely that a new rule of life, the matrimonial, would put an end, with almost magic swiftness, to these painful incidents, of daily occurrence but in no sense organic. Practically everyone was surprised at the marriage, and this, in itself, is surprising. No doubt very few people understand the purely subjective nature of the phenomenon that we call love, or how it creates, so to speak, a fresh, a third, a supplementary person, distinct from the person whom the world knows by the same name, a person most of whose constituent elements are derived from ourself, the lover. And so there are very few who can regard as natural the enormous proportions that a creature comes to assume in our eyes who is not the same as the creature that they see. It would appear, none the less, that so far as Odette was concerned people might have taken into account the fact that if, indeed, she had never entirely understood Swann’s mentality, at least she was acquainted with the titles, and with all the details of his studies, so much so that the name of Vermeer was as familiar to her as that of her own dressmaker; while as for Swann himself she knew intimately those traits of character of which the rest of the world must remain ignorant or merely laugh at them, and only a mistress or a sister may gain possession of the revealing, cherished image; and so strongly are we attached to such eccentricities, even to

those of them which we are most anxious to correct, that it is because a woman comes in time to acquire an indulgent, an affectionately mocking familiarity, such as we ourselves have with them, or our relatives have, that amours of long standing have something of the sweetness and strength of family affection. The bonds that unite us to another creature receive their consecration when that creature adopts the same point of view as ourself in judging one of our imperfections. And among these special traits there were others, besides, which belonged as much to his intellect as to his character, which, all the same, because they had their roots in the latter, Odette had been able more easily to discern. She complained that when Swann turned author, when he published his essays, these characteristics were not to be found in them as they were in his letters, or in his conversation, where they abounded. She urged him to give them a more prominent place. She would have liked that because it was these things that she herself preferred in him, but since she preferred them because they were the things most typical of himself, she was perhaps not wrong in wishing that they might be found in his writings. Perhaps also she thought that his work, if endowed with more vitality, so that it ultimately brought him success, might enable her also to form what at the Verdurins' she had been taught to value above everything else in the world — a salon.

Among the people to whom this sort of marriage appeared ridiculous, people who in their own case would ask themselves, "What will M. de Guermantes think, what will Bréauté say when I marry Mlle, de Montmorency?", among the people who cherished that sort of social ideal would have figured, twenty years earlier, Swann himself, the Swarm who had taken endless pains to get himself elected to the Jockey Club, and had reckoned at that time on making a brilliant marriage which, by consolidating his position, would have made him one of the most conspicuous figures in Paris. Only, the visions which a marriage like that suggests to the mind of the interested party need, like all visions, if they are not to fade away and be altogether lost, to receive sustenance from without. Your most ardent longing is to humiliate the man who has insulted you. But if you never hear of him again, having removed to some other place, your enemy will come to have no longer the slightest importance for you. If one has lost sight for a score of years of all the people on whose account one would have liked to be elected to the Jockey Club or the Institute, the prospect of becoming a member of one or other of those corporations will have ceased to tempt one. Now fully as much as retirement, ill-health or religious conversion, protracted relations with a woman will substitute fresh visions for

the old. There was not on Swann's part, when he married Odette, any renunciation of his social ambitions, for from these ambitions Odette had long ago, in the spiritual sense of the word, detached him. Besides, had he not been so detached, his marriage would have been all the more creditable. It is because they imply the sacrifice of a more or less advantageous position to a purely private happiness that, as a general rule, 'impossible' marriages are the happiest of all. (One cannot very well include among the 'impossible' marriages those that are made for money, there being no instance on record of a couple, of whom the wife or even the husband has thus sold himself, who have not sooner or later been admitted into society, if only by tradition, and on the strength of so many precedents, and so as not to have two conflicting standards.) Perhaps, on the other hand, the artistic, if not the perverse side of Swann's nature would in any event have derived a certain amount of pleasure from coupling with himself, in one of those crossings of species such as Mendelians practise and mythology records, a creature of a different race, archduchess or prostitute, from contracting a royal alliance or from marrying beneath him. There had been but one person in all the world whose opinion he took into consideration whenever he thought of his possible marriage with Odette; that was, and from no snobbish motive, the Duchesse de Guermantes. With whom Odette, on the contrary, was but little concerned, thinking only of those people whose position was immediately above her own, rather than in so vague an empyrean. But when Swann in his daydreams saw Odette as already his wife he invariably formed a picture of the moment in which he would take her — her, and above all her daughter — to call upon the Princesse des Laumes (who was shortly, on the death of her father-in-law, to become Duchesse de Guermantes). He had no desire to introduce them anywhere else, but his heart would soften as he invented — uttering their actual words to himself — all the things that the Duchess would say of him to Odette, and Odette to the Duchess, the affection that she would shew for Gilberte, spoiling her, making him proud of his child. He enacted to himself the scene of this introduction with the same precision in each of its imaginary details that people shew when they consider how they would spend, supposing they were to win it, a lottery prize the amount of which they have arbitrarily determined. In so far as a mental picture which accompanies one of our resolutions may be said to be its motive, so it might be said that if Swann married Odette it was in order to present her and Gilberte, without anyone's else being present, without, if need be, anyone's else ever coming to know of it, to the Duchesse de Guermantes. We shall see how this sole social ambition that he had entertained for his wife and

daughter was precisely that one the realisation of which proved to be forbidden him by a veto so absolute that Swann died in the belief that the Duchess would never possibly come to know them. We shall see also that, on the contrary, the Duchesse de Guermantes did associate with Odette and Gilberte after the death of Swann. And doubtless he would have been wiser — seeing that he could attach so much importance to so small a matter — not to have formed too dark a picture of tie future, in this connexion, but to have consoled himself with the hope that the meeting of the ladies might indeed take place when he was no longer there to enjoy it. The laborious process of causation which sooner or later will bring about every possible effect, including (consequently) those which one had believed to be most nearly impossible, naturally slow at times, is rendered slower still by our impatience (which in seeking to accelerate only obstructs it) and by our very existence, and comes to fruition only when we have ceased to desire it — have ceased, possibly, to live. Was not Swann conscious of this from his own experience, had there not been already, in his life, as it were a préfiguration of what was to happen after his death, a posthumous happiness in this marriage with this Odette whom he had passionately loved — even if she had not been pleasing to him at first sight — whom he had married when he no longer loved her, when the creature that, in Swann, had so longed to live, had so despaired of living all its life in company with Odette, when that creature was extinct?

I began next to speak of the Comte de Paris, to ask whether he was not one of Swann's friends, for I was afraid lest the conversation should drift away from him. "Why, yes!" replied M. de Norpois, turning towards me and fixing upon my modest person the azure gaze in which floated, as in their vital element, his immense capacity for work and his power of assimilation. And "Upon my word," he added, once more addressing my father, "I do not think that I shall be overstepping the bounds of the respect which I have always professed for the Prince (although without, you understand, maintaining any personal relations with him, which would inevitably compromise my position, unofficial as that may be), if I tell you of a little episode which is not without point; no more than four years ago, at a small railway station in one of the countries of Central Europe, the Prince happened to set eyes on Mme. Swann. Naturally, none of his circle ventured to ask his Royal Highness what he thought of her. That would not have been seemly. But when her name came up by chance in conversation, by certain signs — imperceptible, if you like, but quite unmistakable — the Prince appeared willing enough to let it be understood that his impression of her had, in

a word, been far from unfavourable."

"But there could have been no possibility, surely, of her being presented to the Comte de Paris?" inquired my father.

"Well, we don't know; with Princes one never does know," replied M. de Norpois. "The most exalted, those who know best how to secure what is due to them, are as often as not the last to let themselves be embarrassed by the decrees of popular opinion, even by those for which there is most justification, especially when it is a question of their rewarding a personal attachment to themselves. Now it is certain that the Comte de Paris has always most graciously recognised the devotion of Swann, who is, for that matter, a man of character, in spite of it all."

"And what was your own impression, your Excellency? Do tell us!" my mother asked, from politeness as well as from curiosity.

All the energy of the old connoisseur broke through the habitual moderation of his speech as he answered: "Quite excellent!"

And knowing that the admission that a strong impression has been made on one by a woman takes its place, provided that one makes it in a playful tone, in a certain category of the art of conversation that is highly appreciated, he broke into a little laugh that lasted for several seconds, moistening the old diplomat's blue eyes and making his nostrils, with their network of tiny scarlet veins, quiver. "She is altogether charming!"

"Was there a writer of the name of Bergotte at this dinner, sir?" I asked timidly, still trying to keep the conversation to the subject of the Swanns.

"Yes, Bergotte was there," replied M. de Norpois, inclining his head courteously towards me, as though in his desire to be pleasant to my father he attached to everything connected with him a real importance, even to the questions of a boy of my age who was not accustomed to see such politeness shewn to him by persons of his. "Do you know him?" he went on, fastening on me that clear gaze, the penetration of which had won the praise of Bismarck.

"My son does not know him, but he admires his work immensely," my mother explained.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed M. de Norpois, inspiring me with doubts of my own intelligence far more serious than those that ordinarily distracted me, when I saw that what I valued a thousand thousand times more than myself, what I regarded as the most exalted thing in the world, was for him at the very foot of the scale of admiration. "I do not share your son's point of view. Bergotte is what I call a flute-player: one must admit that he plays on it very agreeably, although

with a great deal of mannerism, of affectation. But when all is said, it is no more than that, and that is nothing very great. Nowhere does one find in his enervated writings anything that could be called construction. No action — or very little — but above all no range. His books fail at the foundation, or rather they have no foundation at all. At a time like the present, when the ever-increasing complexity of life leaves one scarcely a moment for reading, when the map of Europe has undergone radical alterations, and is on the eve, very probably, of undergoing others more drastic still, when so many new and threatening problems are arising on every side, you will allow me to suggest that one is entitled to ask that a writer should be something else than a fine intellect which makes us forget, amid otiose and byzantine discussions of the merits of pure form, that we may be overwhelmed at any moment by a double tide of barbarians, those from without and those from within our borders. I am aware that this is a blasphemy against the sacrosanct school of what these gentlemen term ‘Art for Art’s sake,’ but at this period of history there are tasks more urgent than the manipulation of words in a harmonious manner. Not that Bergotte’s manner is not now and then quite attractive. I have no fault to find with that, but taken as a whole, it is all very precious, very thin, and has very little virility. I can now understand more easily, when I bear in mind your altogether excessive regard for Bergotte, the few lines that you shewed me just now, which it would have been unfair to you not to overlook, since you yourself told me, in all simplicity, that they were merely a childish scribbling.” (I had, indeed, said so, but I did not think anything of the sort.) “For every sin there is forgiveness, and especially for the sins of youth. After all, others as well as yourself have such sins upon their conscience, and you are not the only one who has believed himself to be a poet in his day. But one can see in what you have shewn me the evil influence of Bergotte. You will not, of course, be surprised when I say that there was in it none of his good qualities, since he is a past-master in the art — incidentally quite superficial — of handling a certain style of which, at your age, you cannot have acquired even the rudiments. But already there is the same fault, that paradox of stringing together fine-sounding words and only afterwards troubling about what they mean. That is putting the cart before the horse, even in Bergotte’s books. All those Chinese puzzles of form, all these deliquescent mandarin subtleties seem to me to be quite futile. Given a few fireworks, let off prettily enough by an author, and up goes the shout of genius. Works of genius are not so common as all that! Bergotte cannot place to his credit — does not carry in his baggage, if I may use the expression — a single novel that is at all lofty in its conception, any

of those books which one keeps in a special corner of one's library. I do not discover one such in the whole of his work. But that does not exclude the fact that, with him, the work is infinitely superior to the author. Ah! there is a man who justifies the wit who insisted that one ought never to know an author except through his books. It would be impossible to imagine an individual who corresponded less to his — more pretentious, more pompous, less fitted for human society. Vulgar at some moments, at others talking like a book, and not even like one of his own, but like a boring book, which his, to do them justice, are not — such is your Bergotte. He has the most confused mind, alembicated, what our ancestors called a *diseur de phébus*, and he makes the things that he says even more unpleasant by the manner in which he says them. I forget for the moment whether it is Loménie or Sainte-Beuve who tells us that Vigny repelled people by the same eccentricity. But Bergotte has never given us a *Cinq-Mars*, or a *Cachet Rouge*, certain pages of which are regular anthology pieces."

Paralysed by what M. de Norpois had just said to me with regard to the fragment which I had submitted to him, and remembering at the same time the difficulties that I experienced when I attempted to write an essay or merely to devote myself to serious thought, I felt conscious once again of my intellectual nullity and that I was not born for a literary life. Doubtless in the old days at Combray certain impressions of a very humble order, or a few pages of Bergotte used to plunge me into a state of musing which had appeared to me to be of great value. But this state was what my poem in prose reflected; there could be no doubt that M. de Norpois had at once grasped and had seen through the fallacy of what I had discovered to be beautiful simply by a mirage that must be entirely false since the Ambassador had not been taken in by it. He had shewn me, on the other hand, what an infinitely unimportant place was mine when I was judged from outside, objectively, by the best-disposed and most intelligent of experts. I felt myself to be struck speechless, overwhelmed; and my mind, like a fluid which is without dimensions save those of the vessel that is provided for it, just as it had been expanded a moment ago so as to fill all the vast capacity of genius, contracted now, was entirely contained in the straitened mediocrity in which M. de Norpois had of a sudden enclosed and sealed it.

"Our first introduction — I speak of Bergotte and myself ——" he resumed, turning to my father, "was somewhat beset with thorns (which is, after all, only another way of saying that it was not lacking in points). Bergotte — some years ago, now — paid a visit to Vienna while I was Ambassador there; he was presented to me by the Princess Metternich, came and wrote his name, and

expected to be asked to the Embassy. Now, being in a foreign country as the Representative of France, to which he has after all done some honour by his writings, to a certain extent (let us say, to be quite accurate, to a very slight extent), I was prepared to set aside the unfavourable opinion that I hold of his private life. But he was not travelling alone, and he actually let it be understood that he was not to be invited without his companion. I trust that I am no more of a prude than most men, and, being a bachelor, I was perhaps in a position to throw open the doors of the Embassy a little wider than if I had been married and the father of a family. Nevertheless, I must admit that there are depths of degradation to which I should hesitate to descend, while these are rendered more repulsive still by the tone, not moral, merely — let us be quite frank and say moralising,— that Bergotte takes up in his books, where one finds nothing but perpetual and, between ourselves, somewhat wearisome analyses, torturing scruples, morbid remorse, and all for the merest peccadilloes, the most trivial naughtinesses (as one knows from one's own experience), while all the time he is shewing such an utter lack of conscience and so much cynicism in his private life. To cut a long story short, I evaded the responsibility, the Princess returned to the charge, but without success. So that I do not suppose that I appear exactly in the odour of sanctity to the gentleman, and I am not sure how far he appreciated Swann's kindness in inviting him and myself on the same evening. Unless of course it was he who asked for the invitation. One can never tell, for really he is not normal. Indeed that is his sole excuse."

"And was Mme. Swann's daughter at the dinner?" I asked M. de Norpois, taking advantage, to put this question, of a moment in which, as we all moved towards the drawing-room, I could more easily conceal my emotion than would have been possible at table, where I was held fast in the glare of the lamplight.

M. de Norpois appeared to be trying for a moment to remember; then: "Yes, you mean a young person of fourteen or fifteen? Yes, of course, I remember now that she was introduced to me before dinner as the daughter of our Amphitryon. I may tell you that I saw but little of her; she retired to bed early. Or else she went out to see a friend — I forget. But I can see that you are very intimate with the Swann household."

"I play with Mlle. Swann in the Champs-Elysées, and she is delightful."

"Oh! so that is it, is it? But I assure you, I thought her charming. I must confess to you, however, that I do not believe that she will ever be anything like her mother, if I may say as much without wounding you in a vital spot."

"I prefer Mlle. Swann's face, but I admire her mother, too, enormously; I go

for walks in the Bois simply in the hope of seeing her pass."

"Ah! But I must tell them that; they will be highly flattered."

While he was uttering these words, and for a few seconds after he had uttered them, M. de Norpois was still in the same position as anyone else who, hearing me speak of Swann as an intelligent man, of his family as respectable stockbrokers, of his house as a fine house, imagined that I would speak just as readily of another man equally intelligent, of other stockbrokers equally respectable, of another house equally fine; it was the moment in which a sane man who is talking to a lunatic has not yet perceived that his companion is mad. M. de Norpois knew that there was nothing unnatural in the pleasure which one derived from looking at pretty women, that it was a social convention, when anyone spoke to you of a pretty woman with any fervour, to pretend to think that he was in love with her, and to promise to further his designs. But in saying that he would speak of me to Gilberte and her mother (which would enable me, like an Olympian deity who has taken on the fluidity of a breath of wind, or rather the aspect of the old greybeard whose form Minerva borrows, to penetrate, myself, unseen, into Mme. Swann's drawing-room, to attract her attention, to occupy her thoughts, to arouse her gratitude for my admiration, to appear before her as the friend of an important person, to seem to her worthy to be invited by her in the future and to enter into the intimate life of her family), this important person who was going to make use, in my interests, of the great influence which he must have with Mme. Swann inspired in me suddenly an affection so compelling that I had difficulty in restraining myself from kissing his gentle hands, white and crumpled, which looked as though they had been left lying too long in water. I even sketched in the air an outline of that impulsive movement, but this I supposed that I alone had observed. For it is difficult for any of us to calculate exactly on what scale his words or his gestures are apparent to others. Partly from the fear of exaggerating our own importance, and also because we enlarge to enormous proportions the field over which the impressions formed by other people in the course of their lives are obliged to extend, we imagine that the accessories of our speech and attitudes scarcely penetrate the consciousness, still less remain in the memory of those with whom we converse, It is, we may suppose, to a prompting of this sort that criminals yield when they 'touch up' the wording of a statement already made, thinking that the new variant cannot be confronted with any existing version. But it is quite possible that, even in what concerns the millennial existence of the human race, the philosophy of the journalist, according to which everything is destined to oblivion, is less true than

a contrary philosophy which would predict the conservation of everything. In the same newspaper in which the moralist of the 'Paris column' says to us of an event, of a work of art, all the more forcibly of a singer who has enjoyed her 'crowded hour': "Who will remember this in ten years' time?" overleaf does not the report of the Académie des Inscriptions speak often of a fact, in itself of smaller importance, of a poem of little merit, which dates from the epoch of the Pharaohs and is now known again in its entirety? Is it not, perhaps, just the same in our brief life on earth? And yet, some years later, in a house in which M. de Norpois, who was also calling there, had seemed to me the most solid support that I could hope to find, because he was the friend of my father, indulgent, inclined to wish us all well, and besides, by his profession and upbringing, trained to discretion, when, after the Ambassador had gone, I was told that he had alluded to an evening long ago when he had seen the moment in which I was just going to kiss his hands, not only did I colour up to the roots of my hair but I was stupefied to learn how different from all that I had believed were not only the manner in which M. de Norpois spoke of me but also the constituents of his memory: this tittle-tattle enlightened me as to the incalculable proportions of absence and presence of mind, of recollection and forgetfulness which go to form the human intelligence; and I was as marvellously surprised as on the day on which I read for the first time, in one of Maspero's books, that we had an exact list of the sportsmen whom Assurbanipal used to invite to his hunts, a thousand years before the Birth of Christ.

"Oh, sir," I assured M. de Norpois, when he told me that he would inform Gilberte and her mother how much I admired them, "if you would do that, if you would speak of me to Mme. Swann, my whole life would not be long enough for me to prove my gratitude, and that life would be all at your service. But I feel bound to point out to you that I do not know Mme. Swann, and that I have never been introduced to her."

I had added these last words from a scruple of conscience, and so as not to appear to be boasting of an acquaintance which I did not possess. But while I was uttering them I felt that they were already superfluous, for from the beginning of my speech of thanks, with its chilling ardour, I had seen flitting across the face of the Ambassador an expression of hesitation and dissatisfaction, and in his eyes that vertical, narrow, slanting look (like, in the drawing of a solid body in perspective, the receding line of one of its surfaces), that look which one addresses to the invisible audience whom one has within oneself at the moment when one is saying something that one's other audience,

the person whom one has been addressing — myself, in this instance — is not meant to hear. I realised in a flash that these phrases which I had pronounced, which, feeble as they were when measured against the flood of gratitude that was coursing through me, had seemed to me bound to touch M. de Norpois and to confirm his decision upon an intervention which would have given him so little trouble and me so much joy, were perhaps (out of all those that could have been chosen, with diabolical malice, by persons anxious to do me harm) the only ones that could result in making him abandon his intention. Indeed, when he heard me speak, just as at the moment when a stranger with whom we have been exchanging — quite pleasantly — our impressions, which we might suppose to be similar to his, of the passers-by, whom we have agreed in regarding as vulgar, reveals suddenly the pathological abyss that divides him from us by adding carelessly, as he runs his hand over his pocket: “What a pity, I haven’t got my revolver here; I could have picked off the lot!” M. de Norpois, who knew that nothing was less costly or more easy than to be commended to Mme. Swann and taken to her house, and saw that to me, on the contrary, such favours bore so high a price and were consequently, no doubt, of great difficulty, thought that the desire, apparently normal, which I had expressed must cloak some different thought, some suspect intention, some pre-existent fault, on account of which, in the certainty of displeasing Mme. Swann, no one hitherto had been willing to undertake the responsibility for conveying a message to her from me. And I understood that this office was one which he would never discharge, that he might see Mme. Swann daily, for years to come, without ever mentioning my name. He did indeed ask her, a few days later, for some information which I required, and charged my father to convey it to me. But he had not thought it his duty to tell her at whose instance he was inquiring. So she would never discover that I knew M. de Norpois and that I hoped so greatly to be asked to her house; and this was perhaps a less misfortune than I supposed. For the second of these discoveries would probably not have added much to the efficacy, in any event uncertain, of the first. In Odette the idea of her own life and of her home awakened no mysterious disturbance; a person who knew her, who came to see her, did not seem to her a fabulous creature such as he seemed to me who would have flung a stone through Swann’s windows if I could have written upon it that I knew M. de Norpois; I was convinced that such a message, even when transmitted in so brutal a fashion, would have done far more to exalt me in the eyes of the lady of the house than it would have prejudiced her against me. But even if I had been capable of understanding that the mission which M. de

Norpois did not perform must have remained futile, nay, more than that, might even have damaged my credit with the Swanns, I should not have had the courage, had he shewn himself consenting, to release the Ambassador from it, and to renounce the pleasure — however fatal its consequences might prove — of feeling that my name and my person were thus brought for a moment into Gilberte's presence, in her unknown life and home.

After M. de Norpois had gone my father cast an eye over the evening paper; I dreamed once more of Berma. The pleasure which I had found in listening to her required to be made complete, all the more because it had fallen far short of what I had promised myself; and so it at once assimilated everything that was capable of giving it nourishment, those merits, for uir stance, which M. de Norpois had admitted that Berma possessed, and which my mind had absorbed at one draught, like a dry lawn when water is poured on it. Then my father handed me the newspaper, pointing me out a paragraph which ran more or less as follows:—

The performance of *Phèdre*, given this afternoon before an enthusiastic audience, which included the foremost representatives of society and the arts, as well as the principal critics, was for Mme. Berma, who played the heroine, the occasion of a triumph as brilliant as any that she has known in the course of her phenomenal career. We shall discuss more fully in a later issue this performance, which is indeed an event in the history of the stage; for the present we need only add that the best qualified judges are unanimous in the pronouncement that such an interpretation sheds an entirely new light on the part of Phèdre, which is one of the finest and most studied of Racine's creations, and that it constitutes the purest and most exalted manifestation of dramatic art which it has been the privilege of our generation to witness.

Immediately my mind had conceived this new idea of "the purest and most exalted manifestation of dramatic art," it, the idea, sped to join the imperfect pleasure which I had felt in the theatre, added to it a little of what was lacking, and their combination formed something so exalting that I cried out within myself: "What a great artist!" It may doubtless be argued that I was not absolutely sincere. But let us bear in mind, rather, the numberless writers who, dissatisfied with the page which they have just written, if they read some eulogy of the genius of Chateaubriand, or evoke the spirit of some great artist whose equal they aspire to be, by humming to themselves, for instance, a phrase of Beethoven, the melancholy of which they compare with what they have been trying to express in prose, are so filled with that idea of genius that they add it to

their own productions, when they think of them once again, see them no longer in the light in which at first they appeared, and, hazarding an act of faith in the value of their work, say to themselves: “After all!” without taking into account that, into the total which determines their ultimate satisfaction, they have introduced the memory of marvellous pages of Chateaubriand which they assimilate to their own, but of which, in cold fact, they are not the authors; let us bear in mind the numberless men who believe in the love of a mistress on the evidence only of her betrayals; all those, too, who are sustained by the alternative hopes, either of an incomprehensible survival of death, when they think, inconsolable husbands, of the wives whom they have lost but have not ceased to love, or, artists, of the posthumous glory which they may thus enjoy; or else the hope of complete extinction which comforts them when their thoughts turn to the misdeeds that otherwise they must expiate after death; let us bear in mind also the travellers who come home enraptured by the general beauty of a tour of which, from day to day, they have felt nothing but the tedious incidents; and let us then declare whether, in the communal life that is led by our ideas in the enclosure of our minds, there is a single one of those that make us most happy which has not first sought, a very parasite, and won from an alien but neighbouring idea the greater part of the strength that it originally lacked.

My mother appeared none too well pleased that my father no longer thought of ‘the career’ for myself. I fancy that, anxious before all things that a definite rule of life should discipline the eccentricity of my nervous system, what she regretted was not so much seeing me abandon diplomacy as the prospect of my devoting myself to literature. But “Let him alone!” my father protested; “the main thing is that a man should find pleasure in his work. He is no longer a child. He knows pretty well now what he likes, it is not at all probable that he will change, and he is quite capable of deciding for himself what will make him happy in life.” That evening, as I waited for the time to arrive when, thanks to the freedom of choice which they allowed me, I should or should not begin to be happy in life, my father’s words caused me great uneasiness. At all times his unexpected kindnesses had, when they were manifested, prompted in me so keen a desire to kiss, above where his beard began, his glowing cheeks, that if I did not yield to that desire, it was simply because I was afraid of annoying him. And on that day, as an author becomes alarmed when he sees the fruits of his own meditation, which do not appear to him to be of great value since he does not separate them from himself, oblige a publisher to choose a kind of paper, to employ a fount of type finer, perhaps, than they deserve, I asked myself whether

my desire to write was of sufficient importance to justify my father in dispensing so much generosity. But apart from that, when he spoke of my inclinations as no longer liable to change, he awakened in me two terrible suspicions. The first was that (at a time when, every day, I regarded myself as standing upon the threshold of a life which was still intact and would not enter upon its course until the following morning) my existence was already begun, and that, furthermore, what was yet to follow would not differ to any extent from what had already elapsed. The second suspicion, which was nothing more, really, than a variant of the first, was that I was not situated somewhere outside the realm of Time, but was subject to its laws, just like the people in novels who, for that reason, used to plunge me in such depression when I read of their lives, down at Combray, in the fastness of my wicker sentry-box. In theory one is aware that the earth revolves, but in practice one does not perceive it, the ground upon which one treads seems not to move, and one can live undisturbed. So it is with Time in one's life. And to make its flight perceptible novelists are obliged, by wildly accelerating the beat of the pendulum, to transport the reader in a couple of minutes over ten, or twenty, or even thirty years. At the top of one page we have left a lover full of hope; at the foot of the next we meet him again, a bowed old man of eighty, painfully dragging himself on his daily walk about the courtyard of an almshouse, scarcely replying to what is said to him, oblivious of the past. In saying of me, "He is no longer a child," "His tastes will not change now," and so forth, my father had suddenly made me apparent to myself in my position in Time, and caused me the same kind of depression as if I had baen, not yet the enfeebled old pensioner, but one of those heroes of whom the author, in a tone of indifference which is particularly galling, says to us at the end of a book: "He very seldom comes up now from the country. He has finally decided to end his days there."

Meanwhile my father, so as to forestall any criticism that we might feel tempted to make of our guest, said to my mother: "Upon my word, old Norpois was rather 'typical,' as you call it, this evening, wasn't he? When he said that it would not have been 'seemly' to ask the Comte de Paris a question, I was quite afraid you would burst out laughing."

"Not at all!" answered my mother. "I was delighted to see a man of his standing, and age too, keep that sort of simplicity, which is really a sign of straightforwardness and good-breeding."

"I should think so, indeed! That does not prevent his having a shrewd and discerning mind; I know him well, I see him at the Commission, remember,

where he is very different from what he was here," exclaimed my father, who was glad to see that Mamma appreciated M. de Norpois, and anxious to persucde her that he was even superior to what she supposed, because a cordial nature exaggerates a friend's qualities with as much pleasure as a mischievous one finds in depreciating them. "What was it that he said, again — 'With Princes one never does know.'...?"

"Yes, that was it. I noticed it at the time; it was very neat. You can see that he has a vast experience of life."

"The astonishing thing is that he should have been dining with the Swanns, and that he seems to have found quite respectable people there, officials even. How on earth can Mme. Swann have managed to catch them?"

"Did you notice the malicious way he said: 'It is a house which is especially attractive to gentlemen!'?"

And each of them attempted to reproduce the manner in which M. de Norpois had uttered these words, as they might have attempted to capture some intonation of Bressant's voice or of Thiron's in *L'Aventurière* or in the*Gendre de M. Poirier*. But of all his sayings there was none so keenly relished as one was by Françoise, who, years afterwards, even, could not 'keep a straight face' if we reminded her that she had been qualified by the Ambassador as 'a chef of the first order,' a compliment which my mother had gone in person to transmit to her, as a War Minister publishes the congratulations addressed to him by a visiting Sovereign after the grand review. I, as it happened, had preceded my mother to the kitchen. For I had extorted from Françoise, who though opposed to war was cruel, that she would cause no undue suffering to the rabbit which she had to kill, and I had had no report yet of its death. Françoise assured me that it had passed away as peacefully as could be desired, and very swiftly. "I have never seen a beast like it; it died without uttering a word; you would have thought it was dumb." Being but little versed in the language of beasts I suggested that the rabbit had not, perhaps, a cry like the chicken's. "Just wait till you see," said Françoise, filled with contempt for my ignorance, "if rabbits don't cry every bit as much as chickens. Why, they are far noisier." She received the compliments of M. de Norpois with the proud simplicity, the joyful and (if but for the moment) intelligent expression of an artist when someone speaks to him of his art. My mother had sent her when she first came to us to several of the big restaurants to see how the cooking there was done. I had the same pleasure, that evening, in hearing her dismiss the most famous of them as mere cookshops that I had had long ago, when I learned with regard to theatrical artists that the

hierarchy of their merits did not at all correspond to that of their reputations. “The Ambassador,” my mother told her, “assured me that he knows no place where he can get cold beef and *soufflés* as good as yours.” Françoise, with an air of modesty and of paying just homage to the truth, agreed, but seemed not at all impressed by the title ‘Ambassador’; she said of M. de Norpois, with the friendliness due to a man who had taken her for a chef: “He’s a good old soul, like me.” She had indeed hoped to catch sight of him as he arrived, but knowing that Mamma hated their standing about behind doors and in windows, and thinking that Mamma would get to know from the other servants or from the porter that she had been keeping watch (for Françoise saw everywhere nothing but ‘jealousies’ and ‘tale-bearings,’ which played the same grim and unending part in her imagination as do for others of us the intrigues of the Jesuits or the Jews), she had contented herself with a peep from the kitchen window, ‘so as not to have words with Madame,’ and beneath the momentary aspect of M. de Norpois had ‘thought it was Monsieur Legrand,’ because of what she called his ‘agelity’ and in spite of their having not a single point in common. “Well,” inquired my mother, “and how do you explain that nobody else can make a jelly as well as you — when you choose?” “I really couldn’t say how that becomes about,” replied Françoise, who had established no very clear line of demarcation between the verb ‘to come,’ in certain of its meanings at least, and the verb ‘to become.’ She was speaking the truth, if not the whole truth, being scarcely more capable — or desirous — of revealing the mystery which ensured the superiority of her jellies or her creams than a leader of fashion the secrets of her toilet or a great singer those of her song. Their explanations tell us little; it was the same with the recipes furnished by our cook. “They do it in too much of a hurry,” she went on, alluding to the great restaurants, “and then it’s not all done together. You want the beef to become like a sponge, then it will drink up all the juice to the last drop. Still, there was one of those Cafés where I thought they did know a little bit about cooking. I don’t say it was altogether my jelly, but it was very nicely done, and the *soufflés* had plenty of cream.” “Do you mean Henry’s?” asked my father (who had now joined us), for he greatly enjoyed that restaurant in the Place Gaillon where he went regularly to club dinners. “Oh, dear no!” said Françoise, with a mildness which cloaked her profound contempt. “I meant a little restaurant. At that Henry’s it’s all very good, sure enough, but it’s not a restaurant, it’s more like a — soup-kitchen.” “Weber’s, then?” “Oh, no, sir, I meant a good restaurant. Weber’s, that’s in the Rue Royale; that’s not a restaurant, it’s a drinking-shop. I don’t know that the food they give you there is

even served. I think they don't have any tablecloths; they just shove it down in front of you like that, with a take it or leave it." "Giro's?" "Oh! there I should say they have the cooking done by ladies of the world." ('World' meant for Françoise the under-world.) "Lord! They need that to fetch the boys in." We could see that, with all her air of simplicity, Françoise was for the celebrities of her profession a more disastrous 'comrade' than the most jealous, the most infatuated of actresses. We felt, all the same, that she had a proper feeling for her art and a respect for tradition; for she went on: "No, I mean a restaurant where they looked as if they kept a very good little family table. It's a place of some consequence, too. Plenty of custom there. Oh, they raked in the coppers there, all right." Françoise, being an economist, reckoned in coppers, where your plunger would reckon in gold. "Madame knows the place well enough, down there to the right along the main boulevards, a little way back." The restaurant of which she spoke with this blend of pride and good-humoured tolerance was, it turned out, the Café Anglais.

When New Year's Day came, I first of all paid a round of family visits with Mamma who, so as not to tire me, had planned them beforehand (with the aid of an itinerary drawn up by my father) according to districts rather than to degrees of kinship. But no sooner had we entered the drawing-room of the distant cousin whose claim to being visited first was that her house was at no distance from ours, than my mother was horrified to see standing there, his present of *marrons glacés* or *déguisés* in his hand, the bosom friend of the most sensitive of all my uncles, to whom he would at once go and report that we had not begun our round with him. And this uncle would certainly be hurt; he would have thought it quite natural that we should go from the Madeleine to the Jardin des Plantes, where he lived, before stopping at Saint-Augustin, on our way to the Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine.

Our visits ended (my grandmother had dispensed us from the duty of calling on her, since we were to dine there that evening), I ran all the way to the Champs-Elysées to give to our own special stall-keeper, with instructions to hand it over to the person who came to her several times a week from the Swanns to buy gingerbread, the letter which, on the day when my friend had caused me so much anxiety, I had decided to send her at the New Year, and in which I told her that our old friendship was vanishing with the old year, that I would forget, now, my old sorrows and disappointments, and that, from this first day of January, it was a new friendship that we were going to cement, one so solid that nothing could destroy it, so wonderful that I hoped that Gilberte would

go out of her way to preserve it in all its beauty, and to warn me in time, as I promised to warn her, should either of us detect the least sign of a peril that might endanger it. On our way home Françoise made me stop at the corner of the Rue Royale, before an open-air stall from which she selected for her own stock of presents photographs of Pius IX and Raspail, while for myself I purchased one of Berma. The innumerable admiration which that artist excited gave an air almost of poverty to this one face that she had to respond with, unalterable and precarious as are the garments of people who have not a 'change,' this face on which she must continually expose to view only the tiny dimple upon her upper lip, the arch of her eyebrows, a few other physical peculiarities always the same, which, when it came to that, were at the mercy of a burn or a blow. This face, moreover, could not in itself have seemed to me beautiful, but it gave me the idea, and consequently the desire to kiss it by reason of all the kisses that it must have received, for which, from its page in the album, it seemed still to be appealing with that coquettishly tender gaze, that artificially ingenuous smile. For our Berma must indeed have felt for many young men those longings which she confessed under cover of the personality of Phaedra, longings of which everything, even the glamour of her name which enhanced her beauty and prolonged her youth, must render the gratification so easy to her. Night was falling; I stopped before a column of playbills, on which was posted that of the piece in which she was to appear on January 1. A moist and gentle breeze was blowing. It was a time of day and year that I knew; I suddenly felt a presentiment that New Year's Day was not a day different from, the rest, that it was not the first day of a new world, in which, I might, by a chance that had never yet occurred, that was still intact, make Gilberte's acquaintance afresh, as at the Creation of the World, as though the past had no longer any existence, as though there had been obliterated, with the indications which I might have preserved for my future guidance, the disappointments which she had sometimes brought me; a new world in which nothing should subsist from the old — save one thing, my desire that Gilberte should love me. I realised that if my heart hoped for such a reconstruction, round about it, of a universe that had not satisfied it before, it was because my heart had not altered, and I told myself that there was no reason why Gilberte's should have altered either; I felt that this new friendship was the same, just as there is no boundary ditch between their forerunners and those new years which our desire for them, without being able to reach and so to modify them, invests, unknown to themselves, with distinctive names. I might dedicate this new year, if I chose, to Gilberte, and as one bases a

religious system upon the blind laws of nature, endeavour to stamp New Year's Day with the particular image that I had formed of it; but in vain, I felt that it was not aware that people called it New Year's Day, that it was passing in a wintry dusk in a manner that was not novel to me; in the gentle breeze that floated about the column of playbills I had recognised, I had felt reappear the eternal, the universal substance, the familiar moisture, the unheeding fluidity of the old days and years.

I returned to the house. I had spent the New Year's Day of old men, who differ on that day from their juniors, not because people have ceased to give them presents but because they themselves have ceased to believe in the New Year. Presents I had indeed received, but not that present which alone could bring me pleasure, namely a line from Gilberte. I was young still, none the less, since I had been able to write her one, by means of which I hoped, in telling her of my solitary dreams of love and longing, to arouse similar dreams in her. The sadness of men who have grown old lies in their no longer even thinking of writing such letters, the futility of which their experience has shewn.

After I was in bed, the noises of the street, unduly prolonged upon this festive evening, kept me awake. I thought of all the people who were ending the night in pleasure, of the lover, the troop, it might be, of debauchees who would be going to meet Berma at the stage-door after the play that I had seen announced for this evening. I was not even able, so as to calm the agitation which that idea engendered in me during my sleepless night, to assure myself that Berma was not, perhaps, thinking about love, since the lines that she was reciting, which she had long and carefully rehearsed, reminded her at every moment that love is an exquisite thing, as of course she already knew, and knew so well that she displayed its familiar pangs — only enriched with a new violence and an unsuspected sweetness — to her astonished audience; and yet each of them had felt those pangs himself. I lighted my candle again, to look once more upon her face. At the thought that it was, no doubt, at that very moment being caressed by those men whom I could not prevent from giving to Berma and receiving from her joys superhuman but vague, I felt an emotion more cruel than voluptuous, a longing that was aggravated presently by the sound of a horn, as one hears it on the nights of the Lenten carnival and often of other public holidays, which, because it then lacks all poetry, is more saddening, coming from a toy squeaker, than "at evening, in the depth of the woods." At that moment, a message from Gilberte would perhaps not have been what I wanted. Our desires cut across one another's paths, and in this confused

existence it is but rarely that a piece of good fortune coincides with the desire that clamoured for it.

I continued to go to the Champs-Elysées on fine days, along streets whose stylish pink houses seemed to be washed (because exhibitions of water-colours were then at the height of fashion) in a lightly floating atmosphere. It would be untrue to say that in those days the palaces of Gabriel struck me as being of greater beauty, or even of another epoch than the adjoining houses. I found more style, and should have supposed more antiquity if not in the Palais de l'Industrie at any rate in the Troca-déro. Plunged in a restless sleep, my adolescence embodied in one uniform vision the whole of the quarter through which it might be strolling, and I had never dreamed that there could be an eighteenth century building in the Rue Royale, just as I should have been astonished to learn that the Porte-Saint-Martin and the Porte-Saint-Denis, those glories of the age of Louis XIV, were not contemporary with the most recently built tenements in the sordid regions that bore their names. Once only one of Gabriel's palaces made me stop for more than a moment; that was because, night having fallen, its columns, dematerialised by the moonlight, had the appearance of having been cut out in pasteboard, and by recalling to me a scene in the operetta *Orphée aux Enfers* gave me for the first time an impression of beauty.

Meanwhile Gilberte never came to the Champs-Elysées. And yet it was imperative that I should see her, for I could not so much as remember what she was like. The questing, anxious, exacting way that we have of looking at the person we love, our eagerness for the word which shall give us or take from us the hope of an appointment for the morrow, and, until that word is uttered, our alternative if not simultaneous imaginings of joy and of despair, all these make our observation, in the beloved object's presence, too tremulous to be able to carry away a clear impression of her. Perhaps, also, that activity of all the senses at once which endeavours to learn from the visible aspect alone what lies behind it is over-indulgent to the thousand forms, to the changing fragrance, to the movements of the living person whom as a rule, when we are not in love, we regard as fixed in one permanent position. Whereas the beloved model does not stay still; and our mental photographs of her are always blurred. I did not rightly know how Gilberte's features were composed, save in the heavenly moments when she disclosed them to me; I could remember nothing but her smile. And not being able to see again that beloved face, despite every effort that I might make to recapture it, I would be disgusted to find, outlined in my memory with a maddening precision of detail, the meaningless, emphatic faces of the man with

the wooden horses and of the barley-sugar woman; just as those who have lost a dear friend whom they never see even while they are asleep, are exasperated at meeting incessantly in their dreams any number of insupportable creatures whom it is quite enough to have known in the waking world. In their inability to form any image of the object of their grief they are almost led to assert that they feel no grief. And I was not far from believing that, since I could not recall the features of Gilberte, I had forgotten Gilberte herself, and no longer loved her. At length she returned to play there almost every day, setting before me fresh pleasures to desire, to demand of her for the morrow, indeed making my love for her every day, in this sense, a new love. But an incident was to change once again, and abruptly, the manner in which, at about two o'clock every afternoon, the problem of my love confronted me. Had M. Swann intercepted the letter that I had written to his daughter, or was Gilberte merely confessing to me long after the event, and so that I should be more prudent in future, a state of things already long established? As I was telling her how greatly I admired her father and mother, she assumed that vague air, full of reticence and kept secrets, which she invariably wore when anyone spoke to her of what she was going to do, her walks, drives, visits — then suddenly expressed it with: "You know, they can't abide you!" and, slipping from me like the Undine that she was, burst out laughing. Often her laughter, out of harmony with her words, seemed, as music seems, to be tracing an invisible surface on another plane. M. and Mme. Swann did not require Gilberte to give up playing with me, but they would have been just as well pleased, she thought, if we had never begun. They did not look upon our relations with a kindly eye; they believed me to be a young person of low moral standard and imagined that my influence over their daughter must be evil. This type of unscrupulous young man whom the Swanns thought that I resembled, I pictured him to myself as detesting the parents of the girl he loved, flattering them to their faces but, when he was alone with her, making fun of them, urging her on to disobey them and, when once he had completed his conquest, not allowing them even to set eyes on her again. With these characteristics (though they are never those under which the basest of scoundrels recognises himself) how vehemently did my heart contrast the sentiments that did indeed animate it with regard to Swann, so passionate, on the contrary, that I never doubted that, were he to have the least suspicion of them, he must repent of his condemnation of me as of a judicial error. All that I felt about him I made bold to express to him in a long letter which I entrusted to Gilberte, with the request that she would deliver it. She consented. Alas! so he saw in me an even

greater impostor than I had feared; those sentiments which I had supposed myself to be portraying, in sixteen pages, with such amplitude of truth, so he had suspected them; in short, the letter that I had written him, as ardent and as sincere as the words that I had uttered to M. de Norpois, met with no more success. Gilberte told me next day, after taking me aside behind a clump of laurels, along a little path by which we sat down on a couple of chairs, that as he read my letter, which she had now brought back to me, her father had shrugged his shoulders, with: “All this means nothing; it only goes to prove how right I was.” I, who knew the purity of my intentions, the goodness of my soul, was furious that my words should not even have impinged upon the surface of Swann’s ridiculous error. For it was an error; of that I had then no doubt. I felt that I had described with such accuracy certain irrefutable characteristics of my generous sentiments that, if Swann had not at once reconstructed these from my indications, had not come to ask my forgiveness and to admit that he had been mistaken, it must be because these noble sentiments he had never himself experienced, which would make him incapable of understanding the existence of them in other people.

Well, perhaps it was simply that Swann knew that generosity is often no more than the inner aspect which our egotistical feelings assume when we have not yet named and classified them. Perhaps he had recognised in the sympathy that I expressed for him simply an effect — and the strongest possible proof — of my love for Gilberte, by which, and not by any subordinate veneration of himself, my subsequent actions would be irresistibly controlled. I was unable to share his point of view, since I had not succeeded in abstracting my love from myself, in forcing it back into the common experience of humanity, and thus suffering, experimentally, its consequences; I was in despair. I was obliged to leave Gilberte for a moment; Françoise had called me. I must accompany her into a little pavilion covered in a green trellis, not unlike one of the disused toll-houses of old Paris, in which had recently been installed what in England they call a lavatory but in France, by an ill-informed piece of anglomania, ‘water-closets.’ The old, damp walls at the entrance, where I stood waiting for Françoise, emitted a chill and fusty smell which, relieving me at once of the anxieties that Swann’s words, as reported by Gilberte, had just awakened in me, pervaded me with a pleasure not at all of the same character as other pleasures, which leave one more unstable than before, incapable of retaining them, of possessing them, but, on the contrary, with a consistent pleasure on which I could lean for support, delicious, soothing, rich with a truth that was lasting,

unexplained and certain. I should have liked, as long ago in my walks along the Guermantes way, to endeavour to penetrate the charm of this impression which had seized hold of me, and, remaining there motionless, to interrogate this antiquated emanation which invited me not to enjoy the pleasure which it was offering me only as an ‘extra,’ but to descend into the underlying reality which it had not yet disclosed to me. But the tenant of the establishment, an elderly dame with painted cheeks and an auburn wig, was speaking to me. Françoise thought her ‘very well-to-do indeed.’ Her ‘missy’ had married what Françoise called ‘a young man of family,’ which meant that he differed more, in her eyes, from a workman than, in Saint-Simon’s, a duke did from a man ‘risen from the dregs of the people.’ No doubt the tenant, before entering upon her tenancy, had met with reverses. But Françoise was positive that she was a ‘marquise,’ and belonged to the Saint-Ferréol family. This ‘marquise’ warned me not to stand outside in the cold, and even opened one of her doors for me, saying: “Won’t you go inside for a minute? Look, here’s a nice, clean one, and I shan’t charge you anything.” Perhaps she just made this offer in the spirit in which the young ladies at Gouache’s, when we went in there to order something, used to offer me one of the sweets which they kept on the counter under glass bells, and which, alas, Mamma would never allow me to take; perhaps with less innocence, like an old florist whom Mamma used to have in to replenish her flower-stands, who rolled languishing eyes at me as she handed me a rose. In any event, if the ‘marquise’ had a weakness for little boys, when she threw open to them the hypogean doors of those cubicles of stone in which men crouch like sphinxes, she must have been moved to that generosity less by the hope of corrupting them than by the pleasure which all of us feel in displaying a needless prodigality to those whom we love, for I have never seen her with any other visitor except an old park-keeper.

A moment later I said good-bye to the ‘marquise,’ and went out accompanied by Françoise, whom I left to return to Gilberte. I caught sight of her at once, on a chair, behind the clump of laurels. She was there so as not to be seen by her friends: they were playing at hide-and-seek. I went and sat down by her side. She had on a flat cap which drooped forwards over her eyes, giving her the same ‘underhand,’ brooding, crafty look which I had remarked in her that first time at Comb ray. I asked her if there was not some way for me to have it out with her father, face to face. Gilberte said that she had suggested that to him, but that he had not thought it of any use. “Look,” she went on, “don’t go away without your letter; I must run along to the others, as they haven’t caught me.”

Had Swann appeared on the scene then before I had recovered it, this letter, by the sincerity of which I felt that he had been so unreasonable in not letting himself be convinced, perhaps he would have seen that it was he who had been in the right. For as I approached Gilberte, who, leaning back in her chair, told me to take the letter but did not hold it out to me, I felt myself so irresistibly attracted by her body that I said to her: “Look! You try to stop me from getting it; we’ll see which is the stronger.”

She thrust it behind her back; I put my arms round her neck, raising the plaits of hair which she wore over her shoulders, either because she was still of an age for that or because her mother chose to make her look a child for a little longer so that she herself might still seem young; and we wrestled, locked together. I tried to pull her towards me, she resisted; her cheeks, inflamed by the effort, were as red and round as two cherries; she laughed as though I were tickling her; I held her gripped between my legs like a young tree which I was trying to climb; and, in the middle of my gymnastics, when I was already out of breath with the muscular exercise and the heat of the game, I felt, as it were a few drops of sweat wrung from me by the effort, my pleasure express itself in a form which I could not even pause for a moment to analyse; immediately I snatched the letter from her. Whereupon Gilberte said, good-naturedly:

“You know, if you like, we might go on wrestling for a little.”

Perhaps she was dimly conscious that my game had had another object than that which I had avowed, but too dimly to have been able to see that I had attained it. And I, who was afraid that she had seen (and a slight recoil, as though of offended modesty which she made and checked a moment later made me think that my fear had not been unfounded), agreed to go on wrestling, lest she should suppose that I had indeed no other object than that, after which I wished only to sit quietly by her side.

On my way home I perceived, I suddenly recollected the impression, concealed from me until then, towards which, without letting me distinguish or recognise it, the cold, almost sooty smell of the trellised pavilion had borne me. It was that of my uncle Adolphe’s little sitting-room at Combray, which had indeed exhaled the same odour of humidity. But I could not understand, and I postponed the attempt to discover why the recollection of so trivial an impression had given me so keen a happiness. It struck me, however, that I did indeed deserve the contempt of M. de Norpois; I had preferred, hitherto, to all other writers, one whom he styled a mere ‘flute-player’ and a positive rapture had been conveyed to me, not by any important idea, but by a mouldy smell.

For some time past, in certain households, the name of the Champs-Elysées, if a visitor mentioned it, would be greeted by the mother of the family with that air of contempt which mothers keep for a physician of established reputation whom they have (or so they make out) seen make too many false diagnoses to have any faith left in him; people insisted that these gardens were not good for children, that they knew of more than one sore throat, more than one case of measles and any number of feverish chills for which the Champs must be held responsible. Without venturing openly to doubt the maternal affection of Mamma, who continued to let me play there, several of her friends deplored her inability to see what was as plain as daylight.

Neurotic subjects are perhaps less addicted than any, despite the time-honoured phrase, to ‘listening to their insides’: they can hear so many things going on inside themselves, by which they realise later that they did wrong to let themselves be alarmed, that they end by paying no attention to any of them. Their nervous systems have so often cried out to them for help, as though from some serious malady, when it was merely because snow was coming, or because they had to change their rooms, that they have acquired the habit of paying no more heed to these warnings than a soldier who in the heat of battle perceives them so little that he is capable, although dying, of carrying on for some days still the life of a man in perfect health. One morning, bearing arranged within me all my regular disabilities, from whose constant, internal circulation I kept my mind turned as resolutely away as from the circulation of my blood, I had come running into the dining-room where my parents were already at table, and — having assured myself, as usual, that to feel cold may mean not that one ought to warm oneself but that, for instance, one has received a scolding, and not to feel hungry that it is going to rain, and not that one ought not to eat anything — had taken my place between them when, in the act of swallowing the first mouthful of a particularly tempting cutlet, a nausea, a giddiness stopped me, the feverish reaction of a malady that had already begun, the symptoms of which had been masked, retarded by the ice of my indifference, but which obstinately refused the nourishment that I was not in a fit state to absorb. Then, at the same moment, the thought that they would stop me from going out if they saw that I was unwell gave me, as the instinct of self-preservation gives a wounded man, the strength to crawl to my own room, where I found that I had a temperature of 104, and then to get ready to go to the Champs-Elysées. Through the languid and vulnerable shell which encased them, my eager thoughts were urging me towards, were clamouring for the soothing delight of a game of prisoner’s base

with Gilberte, and an hour later, barely able to keep on my feet, but happy in being by her side, I had still the strength to enjoy it.

Françoise, on our return, declared that I had been ‘taken bad,’ that I must have caught a ‘hot and cold,’ while the doctor, who was called in at once, declared that he ‘preferred’ the ‘severity,’ the ‘virulence’ of the rush of fever which accompanied my congestion of the lungs, and would be no more than ‘a fire of straw,’ to other forms, more ‘insidious’ and ‘septic.’ For some time now I had been liable to choking fits, and our doctor, braving the disapproval of my grandmother, who could see me already dying a drunkard’s death, had recommended me to take, as well as the caffeine which had been prescribed to help me to breathe, beer, champagne or brandy when I felt an attack coming. These attacks would subside, he told me, in the ‘euphoria’ brought about by the alcohol. I was often obliged, so that my grandmother should allow them to give it to me, instead of dissembling, almost to make a display of my state of suffocation. On the other hand, as soon as I felt an attack coming, never being quite certain what proportions it would assume, I would grow distressed at the thought of my grandmother’s anxiety, of which I was far more afraid than of my own sufferings. But at the same time my body, either because it was too weak to keep those sufferings secret, or because it feared lest, in their ignorance of the imminent disaster, people might demand of me some exertion which it would have found impossible or dangerous, gave me the need to warn my grandmother of my attacks with a punctiliousness into which I finally put a sort of physiological scruple. Did I perceive in myself a disturbing symptom which I had not previously observed, my body was in distress so long as I had not communicated it to my grandmother. Did she pretend to pay no attention, it made me insist. Sometimes I went too far; and that dear face, which was no longer able always to control its emotion as in the past, would allow an expression of pity to appear, a painful contraction. Then my heart was wrung by the sight of her grief; as if my kisses had had power to expel that grief, as if my affection could give my grandmother as much joy as my recovery, I flung myself into her arms. And its scruples being at the same time calmed by the certainty that she now knew the discomfort that I felt, my body offered no opposition to my reassuring her. I protested that this discomfort had been nothing, that I was in no sense to be pitied, that she might be quite sure that I was now happy; my body had wished to secure exactly the amount of pity that it deserved, and, provided that someone knew that it ‘had a pain’ in its right side, it could see no harm in my declaring that this pain was of no consequence and was not an

obstacle to my happiness; for my body did not pride itself on its philosophy; that was outside its province. Almost every day during my convalescence I passed through these crises of suffocation. One evening, after my grandmother had left me comparatively well, she returned to my room very late and, seeing me struggling for breath, “Oh, my poor boy,” she exclaimed, her face quivering with sympathy, “you are in dreadful pain.” She left me at once; I heard the outer gate open, and in a little while she came back with some brandy which she had gone out to buy, since there was none in the house. Presently I began to feel better. My grandmother, who was rather flushed, seemed ‘put out’ about something, and her eyes had a look of weariness and dejection.

“I shall leave you alone now, and let you get the good of this improvement,” she said, rising suddenly to go. I detained her, however, for a kiss, and could feel on her cold cheek something moist, but did not know whether it was the dampness of the night air through which she had just passed. Next day, she did not come to my room until the evening, having had, she told me, to go out. I considered that this shewed a surprising indifference to my welfare, and I had to restrain myself so as not to reproach her with it.

As my chokings had persisted long after any congestion remained that could account for them, my parents asked for a consultation with Professor Cottard. It is not enough that a physician who is called in to treat cases of this sort should be learned. Brought face to face with symptoms which may or may not be those of three or four different complaints, it is in the long run his instinct, his eye that must decide with which, despite the more or less similar appearance of them all, he has to deal. This mysterious gift does not imply any superiority in the other departments of the intellect, and a creature of the utmost vulgarity, who admires the worst pictures, the worst music, in whose mind there is nothing out of the common, may perfectly well possess it. In my case, what was physically evident might equally well have been due to nervous spasms, to the first stages of tuberculosis, to asthma, to a toxi-alimentary dyspnoea with renal insufficiency, to chronic bronchitis, or to a complex state into which more than one of these factors entered. Now, nervous spasms required to be treated firmly, and discouraged, tuberculosis with infinite care and with a ‘feeding-up’ process which would have been bad for an arthritic condition such as asthma, and might indeed have been dangerous in a case of toxi-alimentary dyspnoea, this last calling for a strict diet which, in return, would be fatal to a tuberculous patient. But Cottard’s hesitations were brief and his prescriptions imperious. “Purges; violent and drastic purges; milk for some days, nothing but milk. No meat. No

alcohol." My mother murmured that I needed, all the same, to be 'built up,' that my nerves were already weak, that drenching me like a horse and restricting my diet would make me worse. I could see in Cottard's eyes, as uneasy as though he were afraid of missing a train, that he was asking himself whether he had not allowed his natural good-humour to appear. He was trying to think whether he had remembered to put on his mask of coldness, as one looks for a mirror to see whether one has not forgotten to tie one's tie. In his uncertainty, and, so as, whatever he had done, to put things right, he replied brutally: "I am not in the habit of repeating my instructions. Give me a pen. Now remember, milk! Later on, when we have got the crises and the agrypnia by the throat, I should like you to take a little clear soup, and then a little broth, but always with milk; *au lait*! You'll enjoy that, since Spain is all the rage just now; *ollé*, *ollé*!" His pupils knew this joke well, for he made it at the hospital whenever he had to put a heart or liver case on a milk diet. "After that, you will gradually return to your normal life. But whenever there is any coughing or choking — purges, injections, bed, milk!" He listened with icy calm, and without uttering a word, to my mother's final objections, and as he left us without having condescended to explain the reasons for this course of treatment, my parents concluded that it had no bearing on my case, and would weaken me to no purpose, and so they did not make me try it. Naturally they sought to conceal their disobedience from the Professor, and to succeed in this avoided all the houses in which he was likely to be found. Then, as my health became worse, they decided to make me follow out Cottard's prescriptions to the letter; in three days my 'rattle' and cough had ceased, I could breathe freely. Whereupon we realised that Cottard, while finding, as he told us later on, that I was distinctly asthmatic, and still more inclined to 'imagine things,' had seen that what was really the matter with me at the moment was intoxication, and that by loosening my liver and washing out my kidneys he would get rid of the congestion of my bronchial tubes and thus give me back my breath, my sleep and my strength. And we realised that this imbecile was a clinical genius. At last I was able to get up. But they spoke of not letting me go any more to the Champs-Elysées. They said that it was because the air there was bad; but I felt sure that this was only a pretext so that I should not see Mlle. Swann, and I forced myself to repeat the name of Gilberte all the time, like the native tongue which peoples in captivity endeavour to preserve among themselves so as not to forget the land that they will never see again. Sometimes my mother would stroke my forehead with her hand, saying: "So little boys don't tell Mamma their troubles any more?" And Françoise used to come up to

me every day with: “What a face, to be sure! If you could just see yourself I Anyone would think there was a corpse in the house.” It is true that, if I had simply had a cold in the head, Françoise would have assumed the same funereal air. These lamentations pertained rather to her ‘class’ than to the state of my health. I could not at the time discover whether this pessimism was due to sorrow or to satisfaction. I decided provisionally that it was social and professional.

One day, after the postman had called, my mother laid a letter upon my bed. I opened it carelessly, since it could not bear the one signature that would have made me happy, the name of Gilberte, with whom I had no relations outside the Champs-Elysées. And lo, at the foot of the page, embossed with a silver seal representing a man’s head in a helmet, and under him a scroll with the device *Per viam rectam*, beneath a letter written in a large and flowing hand, in which almost every word appeared to be underlined, simply because the crosses of the ‘t’s’ ran not across but over them, and so drew a line beneath the corresponding letters of the word above, it was indeed Gilberte’s signature and nothing else that I saw. But because I knew that to be impossible upon a letter addressed to myself, the sight of it, unaccompanied by any belief in it, gave me no pleasure. For a moment it merely struck an impression of unreality on everything round about me. With lightning rapidity the impossible signature danced about my bed, the fireplace, the four walls. I saw everything sway, as one does when one falls from a horse, and I asked myself whether there was not an existence altogether different from the one I knew, in direct contradiction of it, but itself the true existence, which, being suddenly revealed to me, filled me with that hesitation which sculptors, in representing the Last Judgment, have given to the awakening dead who find themselves at the gates of the next world. “My dear Friend,” said the letter, “I hear that you have been very ill and have given up going to the Champs-Eîysées. I hardly ever go there either because there has been such an enormous lot of illness. But I’m having my friends to tea here every Monday and Friday. Mamma asks me to tell you that it will be a great pleasure to us all if you will come too, as soon as you are well again, and we can have some more nice talks here, just like the Champs-Elysées. Good-bye, dear friend; I hope that your parents will allow you to come to tea very often. With all my kindest regards. GILBERTE.”

While I was reading these words, my nervous system was receiving, with admirable promptitude, the news that a piece of great good fortune had befallen me. But my mind, that is to say myself, and in fact the party principally

concerned, was still in ignorance. Such good fortune, coming from Gilberte, was a thing of which I had never ceased to dream; a thing wholly in my mind, it was, as Leonardo says of painting, *cosa mentale*. Now, a sheet of paper covered with writing is not a thing that the mind assimilates at once. But as soon as I had finished reading the letter, I thought of it, it became an object of my dreams, became, it also, *cosa mentale*, and I loved it so much already that every few minutes I must read it, kiss it again. Then at last I was conscious of my happiness.

Life is strewn with these miracles, for which people who are in love can always hope. It is possible that this one had been artificially brought about by my mother who, seeing that for some time past I had lost all interest in life, may have suggested to Gilberte to write to me, just as, when I was little and went first to the sea-side, so as to give me some pleasure in bathing, which I detested because it took away my breath, she used secretly to hand to the man who was to 'dip' me marvellous boxes made of shells, and branches of coral, which I believed that I myself had discovered lying at the bottom of the sea. However, with every occurrence which, in our life and among its contrasted situations, bears any relation to love, it is best to make no attempt to understand it, since in so far as these are inexorable, as they are unlooked-for, they appear to be governed by magic rather than by rational laws. When a multi-millionaire — who for all his millions is quite a charming person — sent packing by a poor and unattractive woman with whom he has been living, calls to his aid, in his desperation, all the resources of wealth, and brings every worldly influence to bear without succeeding in making her take him back, it is wiser for him, in the face of the implacable obstinacy of his mistress, to suppose that Fate intends to crush him, and to make him die of an affection of the heart, than to seek any logical explanation. These obstacles, against which lovers have to contend, and which their imagination, over-excited by suffering, seeks in vain to analyse, are contained, as often as not, in some peculiar characteristic of the woman whom they cannot bring back to themselves, in her stupidity, in the influence acquired over her, the fears suggested to her by people whom the lover does not know, in the kind of pleasures which, at the moment, she is demanding of life, pleasures which neither her lover nor her lover's wealth can procure for her. In any event, the lover is scarcely in a position to discover the nature of these obstacles, which her woman'y cunning hides from him and his own judgment, falsified by love, prevents him from estimating exactly. They may be compared with those tumours which the doctor succeeds in reducing, but without having traced them

to their source. Like them these obstacles remain mysterious but are temporary. Only they last, as a rule, longer than love itself. And as that is not a disinterested passion, the lover who is no longer in love does not seek to know why the woman, neither rich nor virtuous, with whom he was in love refused obstinately for years to let him continue to keep her.

Now the same mystery which often veils from our eyes the reason for a catastrophe, when love is in question, envelops just as frequently the suddenness of certain happy solutions, such as had come to me with Gilberte's letter. Happy, or at least seemingly happy, for there are few solutions that can really be happy when we are dealing with a sentiment of such a kind that every satisfaction which we can bring to it does no more, as a rule, than dislodge some pain. And yet sometimes a respite is granted us, and we have for a little while the illusion that we are healed.

So far as concerns this letter, at the foot of which Françoise declined to recognise Gilberte's name, because the elaborate capital 'G' leaning against the undotted 'i' looked more like an 'A,' while the final syllable was indefinitely prolonged by a waving flourish, if we persist in looking for a rational explanation of the sudden reversal of her attitude towards me which it indicated, and which made me so radiantly happy, we may perhaps find that I was to some extent indebted for it to an incident which I should have supposed, on the contrary, to be calculated to ruin me for ever in the sight of the Swann family. A short while back, Bloch had come to see me at a time when Professor Cottard, whom, now that I was following his instructions, we were again calling in, happened to be in my room. As his examination of me was over, and he was sitting with me simply as a visitor because my parents had invited him to stay to dinner, Bloch was allowed to come in. While we were all talking, Bloch having mentioned that he had heard it said that Mme. Swann was very fond of me, by a lady with whom he had been dining the day before, who was herself very intimate with Mme. Swann, I should have liked to reply that he was most certainly mistaken, and to establish the fact (from the same scruple of conscience that had made me proclaim it to M. de Norpois, and for fear of Mme. Swann's taking me for a liar) that I did not know her and had never spoken to her. But I had not the courage to correct Bloch's mistake, because I could see quite well that it was deliberate, and that, if he invented something that Mme. Swann could not possibly have said, it was simply to let us know (what he considered flattering to himself, and was not true either) that he had been dining with one of that lady's friends. And so it fell out that, whereas M. de Norpois, on learning

that I did not know but would very much like to know Mme. Swann, had taken great care to avoid speaking to her about me, Cottard, who was her doctor also, having gathered from what he had heard Bloch say that she knew me quite well and thought highly of me, concluded that to remark, when next he saw her, that I was a charming young fellow and a great friend of his could not be of the smallest use to me and would be of advantage to himself, two reasons which made him decide to speak of me to Odette whenever an opportunity arose.

Thus at length I found my way into that abode from which was wafted even on to the staircase the scent that Mme. Swann used, though it was embalmed far more sweetly still by the peculiar, disturbing charm that emanated from the life of Gilberte. The implacable porter, transformed into a benevolent Eumenid, adopted the custom, when I asked him if I might go upstairs, of indicating to me, by raising his cap with a propitious hand, that he gave ear to my prayer. Those windows which, seen from outside, used to interpose between me and the treasures within, which were not intended for me, a polished, distant and superficial stare, which seemed to me the very stare of the Swanns themselves, it fell to my lot, when in the warm weather I had spent a whole afternoon with Gilberte in her room, to open them myself, so as to let in a little air, and even to lean over the sill of one of them by her side, if it was her mother's 'at home' day, to watch the visitors arrive who would often, raising their heads as they stepped out of their carriages, greet me with a wave of the hand, taking me for some nephew of their hostess. At such moments Gilberte's plaits used to brush my cheek. They seemed to me, in the fineness of their grain, at once natural and supernatural, and in the strength of their constructed tracery, a matchless work of art, in the composition of which had been used the very grass of Paradise. To a section of them, even infinitely minute, what celestial herbary would I not have given as a reliquary. But since I never hoped to obtain an actual fragment of those plaits, if at least I had been able to have their photograph, how far more precious than one of a sheet of flowers traced by Vinci's pencil! To acquire one of these, I stooped — with friends of the Swanns, and even with photographers — to servilities which did not procure for me what I wanted, but tied me for life to a number of extremely tiresome people.

Gilberte's parents, who for so long had prevented me from seeing her, now — when I entered the dark hall in which hovered perpetually, more formidable and more to be desired than, at Versailles of old, the apparition of the King, the possibility of my encountering them, in which too, invariably, after butting into an enormous hat-stand with seven branches, like the Candlestick in Holy Writ, I

would begin bowing confusedly before a footman, seated among the skirts of his long grey coat upon the wood-box, whom in the dim light I had mistaken for Mme. Swann — Gilberte's parents, if one of them happened to be passing at the moment of my arrival, so far from seeming annoyed would come and shake hands with a smile, and say:

"How d'e do?" (They both pronounced it in the same clipped way, which, you may well imagine, once I was back at home, I made an incessant and delightful practice of copying.) "Does Gilberte know you're here? She does? Then I'll leave you to her."

Better still, the tea-parties themselves to which Gilberte invited her friends, parties which for so long had seemed to me the most insurmountable of the barriers heaped up between her and myself, became now an opportunity for uniting us of which she would inform me in a few lines, written (because I was still a comparative stranger) upon sheets that were always different. One was adorned with a poodle embossed in blue, above a fantastic inscription in English with an exclamation mark after it; another was stamped with an anchor, or with the monogram G. S. preposterously elongated in a rectangle which ran from top to bottom of the page, or else with the name Gilberte, now traced across one corner in letters of gold which imitated my friend's signature and ended in a flourish, beneath an open umbrella printed in black, now enclosed in a monogram in the shape of a Chinaman's hat, which contained all the letters of the word in capitals without its being possible to make out a single one of them. At last, as the series of different writing-papers which Gilberte possessed, numerous as it might be, was not unlimited, after a certain number of weeks I saw reappear the sheet that bore (like the first letter she had written me) the motto *Per vaim rectam*, and over it the man's head in a helmet, set in a medallion of tarnished silver. And each of them was chosen, on one day rather than another, by virtue of a certain ritual, as I then supposed, but more probably, as I now think, because she tried to remember which of them she had already used, so as never to send the same one twice to any of her correspondents, of those at least whom she took special pains to please, save at the longest possible intervals. As, on account of the different times of their lessons, some of the friends whom Gilberte used to invite to her parties were obliged to leave just as the rest were arriving, while I was still on the stairs I could hear escaping from the hall a murmur of voices which, such was the emotion aroused in me by the imposing ceremony in which I was to take part, long before I had reached the landing, broke all the bonds that still held me to my past life, so that I did not

even remember that I was to take off my muffler as soon as I felt too hot, and to keep an eye on the clock so as not to be late in getting home. That staircase, besides, aîl of wood, as they were built about that time in certain houses, in keeping with that Henri II style which had for so long been Odette's ideal though she was shortly to lose interest in it, and furnished with a placard, to which there was no equivalent at home, on which one read the words: "NOTICE. The lift must not be taken downstairs," seemed to me a thing so marvellous that I told my parents that it was an ancient staircase brought from ever so far away by M. Swann. My regard for the truth was so great that I should not have hesitated to give them this information even if I had known it to be false, for it alone could enable them to feel for the dignity of the Swanns' staircase the same respect that I felt myself. It was just as, when one is talking to some ignorant person who cannot understand in what the genius of a great physician consists, it is as well not to admit that he does not know how to cure a cold in the head. But since I had no power of observation, since, as a general rule, I never knew either the name or the nature of things that were before my eyes, and could understand only that when they were connected with the Swanns they must be extraordinary, I was by no means certain that in notifying my parents of the artistic value and remote origin of the staircase I was guilty of falsehood. It did not seem certain; but it must have seemed probable, for I felt myself turn very red when my father interrupted me with: "I know those houses; I have been in one; they are all alike; Swann just has several floors in one; it was Berlier built them all." He added that he had thought of taking a flat in one of them, but that he had changed his mind, finding that they were not conveniently arranged, and that the landings were too dark. So he said; but I felt instinctively that my mind must make the sacrifices necessary to the glory of the Swanns and to my own happiness, and by a stroke of internal authority, in spite of what I had just heard, I banished for ever from my memory, as a good Catholic banishes Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, the destroying thought that their house was just an ordinary flat in which we ourselves might have been living.

Meanwhile on those tea-party days, pulling myself up the staircase step by step, reason and memory already cast off like outer garments, and myself no more now than the sport of the basest reflexes, I would arrive in the zone in which the scent of Mme. Swann greeted my nostrils. I felt that I could already behold the majesty of the chocolate cake, encircled by plates heaped with little cakes, and by tiny napkins of grey damask with figures on them, as required by convention but peculiar to the Swanns. But this unalterable and governed whole

seemed, like Kant's necessary universe, to depend on a supreme act of free will. For when we were all together in Gilberte's little sitting-room, suddenly she would look at the clock and exclaim:

"I say! It's getting a long time since luncheon, and we aren't having dinner till eight. I feel as if I could eat something. What do you say?"

And she would make us go into the dining-room, as sombre as the interior of an Asiatic Temple painted by Rembrandt, in which an architectural cake, as gracious and sociable as it was imposing, seemed to be enthroned there in any event, in case the fancy seized Gilberte to discrown it of its chocolate battlements and to hew down the steep brown slopes of its ramparts, baked in the oven like the bastions of the palace of Darius. Better still, in proceeding to the demolition of that Babylonitish pastry, Gilberte did not consider only her own hunger; she inquired also after mine, while she extracted for me from the crumbling monument a whole glazed slab jewelled with scarlet fruits, in the oriental styje. She asked me even at what o'clock my parents were dining, as if I still knew, as if the disturbance that governed me had allowed to persist the sensation of satiety or of hunger, the notion of dinner or the picture of my family in my empty memory and paralysed stomach. Alas, its paralysis was but momentary. The cakes that I took without noticing them, a time would come when I should have to digest them. But that time was still remote. Meanwhile Gilberte was making 'my' tea. I went on drinking it indefinitely, whereas a single cup would keep me awake for twenty-four hours. Which explains why my mother used always to say: "What a nuisance it is; he can never go to the Swarms' without coming home ill." But was I aware even, when I was at the Swanns', that it was tea that I was drinking? Had I known, I should have taken it just the same, for even supposing that I had recovered for a moment the sense of the present, that would not have restored to me the memory of the past or the apprehension of the future. My imagination was incapable of reaching to the distant tune in which I might have the idea of going to bed, and the need to sleep.

Gilberte's girl friends were not all plunged in that state of intoxication in which it is impossible to make up one's mind. Some of them refused tea! Then Gilberte would say, using a phrase highly fashionable that year: "I can see I'm not having much of a success with my tea!" And to destroy more completely any idea of ceremony, she would disarrange the chairs that were drawn up round the table, with: "We look just like a wedding breakfast. Good lord, what fools servants are!"

She nibbled her cake, perched sideways upon a cross-legged seat placed at an angle to the table. And then, just as though she could have had all those cakes at her disposal without having first asked leave of her mother, when Mme. Swann, whose ‘day’ coincided as a rule with Gilberte’s tea-parties, had shewn one of her visitors to the door, and came sweeping in, a moment later, dressed sometimes in blue velvet, more often in a black satin gown draped with white lace, she would say with an air of astonishment: “I say, that looks good, what you’ve got there. It makes me quite hungry to see you all eating cake.”

“But, Mamma, do! We invite you!” Gilberte would answer.

####

“Thank you, no, my precious; what would my visitors say? I’ve still got Mme. Trombert and Mme. Cottard and Mme. Bontemps; you know dear Mme. Bontemps never pays very short visits, and she has only just come. What would all those good people say if I never went back to them? If no one else calls, I’ll come in again and have a chat with you (which will be far more amusing) after they’ve all gone. I really think I’ve earned a little rest; I have had forty-five different people to-day, and forty-two of them told me about Gérôme’s picture! But you must come alone one of these days,” she turned to me, “and take ‘your’ tea with Gilberte. She will make it for you just as you like it, as you have it in your own little ‘studio,’” she went on, flying off to her visitors, as if it had been something as familiar to me as my own habits (such as the habit that I should have had of taking tea, had I ever taken it; as for my ‘studio,’ I was uncertain whether I had one or not) that I had come to seek in this mysterious world. “When can you come? To-morrow? We will make you ‘toast’ every bit as good as you get at Colombin’s. No? You are horrid!”— for, since she also had begun to form a salon, she had borrowed Mme. Verdurin’s mannerisms, and notably her tone of petulant autocracy. ‘Toast’ being as incomprehensible to me as ‘Colombin’s,’ this further promise could not add to my temptation. It will appear stranger still, now that everyone uses such expressions — and perhaps even at Combray they are creeping in — that I had not at first understood of whom Mme. Swann was speaking when I heard her sing the praises of our old ‘nurse.’ I did not know any English; I gathered, however, as she went on that the word was intended to denote Françoise. I who, in the Champs-Elysées, had been so terrified of the bad impression that she must make, I now learned from Mme. Swann that it was all the things that Gilberte had told them about my ‘nurse’ that had attracted her husband and her to me. “One feels that she is so devoted to you; she must be nice!” (At once my opinion of Françoise was diametrically

changed. By the same token, to have a governess equipped with a waterproof and a feather in her hat no longer appeared quite so essential.) Finally I learned from some words which Mme. Swann let fall with regard to Mme. Blatin (whose good nature she recognised but dreaded her visits) that personal relations with that lady would have been of less value to me than I had supposed, and would not in any way have improved my standing with the Swanns.

If I had now begun to explore, with tremors of reverence and joy the faery domain which, against all probability, had opened to me its hitherto locked approaches, this was still only in my capacity as a friend of Gilberte. The kingdom into which I was received was itself contained within another, more mysterious still, in which Swann and his wife led their supernatural existence and towards which they made their way, after taking my hand in theirs, when they crossed the hall at the same moment as myself but in the other direction. But soon I was to penetrate also to the heart of the Sanctuary. For instance, Gilberte might be out when I called, but M. or Mme. Swann was at home. They would ask who had rung, and on being told that it was myself would send out to ask me to come in for a moment and talk to them, desiring me to use in one way or another, and with this or that object in view, my influence over their daughter. I reminded myself of that letter, so complete, so convincing, which I had written to Swann only the other day, and which he had not deigned even to acknowledge. I marvelled at the impotence of the mind, the reason and the heart to effect the least conversion, to solve a single one of those difficulties which, in the sequel, life, without one's so much as knowing what steps it has taken, so easily unravels. My new position as the friend of Gilberte, endowed with an excellent influence over her, entitling me now to enjoy the same favours as if, having had as a companion at some school where they had always put me at the head of my class the son of a king, I had owed to that accident the right of informal entry into the palace and to audiences in the throne-room, Swann, with an infinite benevolence and as though he were not over-burdened with glorious occupations, would make me go into his library and there let me for an hour on end respond in stammered monosyllables, timid silences broken by brief and incoherent bursts of courage, to utterances of which my emotion prevented me from understanding a single word; would shew me works of art and books which he thought likely to interest me, things as to which I had no doubt, before seeing them, that they infinitely surpassed in beauty anything that the Louvre possessed or the National Library, but at which I found it impossible to look. At such moments I should have been grateful to Swann's butler, had he demanded from

me my watch, my tie-pin, my boots, and made me sign a deed acknowledging him as my heir: in the admirable words of a popular expression of which, as of the most famous epics, we do not know who was the author, although, like those epics, and with all deference to Wolff and his theory, it most certainly had an author, one of those inventive, modest souls such as we come across every year, who light upon such gems as ‘putting a name to a face,’ though their own names they never let us learn, I did not know what I was doing. All the greater was my astonishment, when my visit was prolonged, at finding to what a zero of realisation, to what an absence of happy ending those hours spent in the enchanted dwelling led me. But my disappointment arose neither from the inadequacy of the works of art that were shewn to me nor from the impossibility of fixing upon them my distracted gaze. For it was not the intrinsic beauty of the objects themselves that made it miraculous for me to be sitting in Swann’s library, it was the attachment to those objects — which might have been the ugliest in the world — of the particular feeling, melancholy and voluptuous, which I had for so many years localised in that room and which still impregnated it; similarly the multitude of mirrors, of silver-backed brushes, of altars to Saint Anthony of Padua, carved and painted by the most eminent artists, her friends, counted for nothing in the feeling of my own unworthiness and of her regal benevolence which was aroused in me when Mme. Swann received me for a moment in her own room, in which three beautiful and impressive creatures, her principal and second and third maids, smilingly prepared for her the most marvellous toilets, and towards which, on the order conveyed to me by the footman in knee-breeches that Madame wished to say a few words to me, I would make my way along the tortuous path of a corridor all embalmed, far and near, by the precious essences which exhaled without ceasing from her dressing-room a fragrance exquisitely sweet.

When Mme. Swann had returned to her visitors, we could still hear her talking and laughing, for even with only two people in the room, and as though she had to cope with all the ‘good friends’ at once, she would raise her voice, ejaculate her words, as she had so often in the ‘little clan’ heard its ‘Mistress’ do, at the moments when she ‘led the conversation.’ The expressions which we have borrowed from other people being those which, for a time at least, we are fondest of using, Mme. Swann used to select at one time those which she had learned from distinguished psople whom her husband had not managed to prevent her from getting to know (it was from them that she derived the mannerism which consists in suppressing the article or demonstrative pronoun,

in French, before an adjective qualifying a person's name), at another time others more plebeian (such as "It's a mere nothing!" the favourite expression of one of her friends), and used to make room for them in all the stories which, by a habit formed among the 'little clan,' she loved to tell about people. She would follow these up automatically with, "I do love that story!" or "Do admit, it's a very*good story*!" which came to her, through her husband, from the Guermantes, whom she did not know.

Mme. Swann had left the dining-room, but her husband, who had just returned home, made his appearance among us in turn.' "Do you know if your mother is alone, Gilberte?" "No, Papa, she has still some people." "What, still? At seven o'clock! It's appalling! The poor woman must be absolutely dead. It's odious." (At home I had always heard the first syllable of this word pronounced with a long 'o,' like 'ode,' but M. and Mme. Swann made it short, as in 'odd.') "Just think of it; ever since two o'clock this afternoon!" he went on, turning to me. "And Camille tells me that between four and five he let in at least a dozen people. Did I say a dozen? I believe he told me fourteen. No, a dozen; I don't remember. When I came home I had quite forgotten it was her 'day,' and when I saw all those carriages outside the door I thought there must be a wedding in the house. And just now, while I've been in the library for a minute, the bell has never stopped ringing; upon my word, it's given me quite a headache. And are there a lot of them in there still?" "No; only two." "Who are they, do you know?" "Mme. Cottard and Mme. Bontemps." "Oh! the wife of the Chief Secretary to the Minister of Posts." "I know her husband's a clerk in some Ministry or other, but I don't know what he does." Gilberte assumed a babyish manner.

"What's that? You silly child, you talk as if you were two years old. What do you mean; 'a clerk in some Ministry or other' indeed! He is nothing less than Chief Secretary, chief of the whole show, and what's more — what on earth am I thinking of? Upon my word, I'm getting as stupid as yourself; he is not the Chief Secretary, he's the Permanent Secretary."

"I don't know, I'm sure; does that mean a lot, being Permanent Secretary?" answered Gilberte, who never let slip an opportunity of displaying her own indifference to anything that gave her parents cause for vanity. (She may, of course, have considered that she only enhanced the brilliance of such an acquaintance by not seeming to attach any undue importance to it.)

"I should think it did 'mean a lot'!" exclaimed Swann, who preferred to this modesty, which might have left me in doubt, a more explicit mode of speech.

“Why it means simply that he’s the first man after the Minister. In fact, he’s more important than the Minister, because it is he that does all the work. Besides, it appears that he has immense capacity, a man quite of the first rank, a most distinguished individual. He’s an Officer of the Legion of Honour. A delightful man, he is, and very good-looking too.”

(This man’s wife, incidentally, had married him against everyone’s wishes and advica because he was a ‘charming creature.’ He had, what may be sufficient to constitute a rare and delicate whole, a fair, silky beard, good features, a nasal voice, powerful lungs and a glass eye.)

“I may tell you,” he added, turning again to me, “that I am greatly amused to see that lot serving in the present Government, because they are Bontemps of the Bontemps-Chenut family, typical old-fashioned middle-class people, reactionary, clerical, tremendously strait-laced. Your grandfather knew quite well — at least by name and by sight he must have known old Chenut, the father, who never tipped the cabmen more than a ha’penny, though he was a rich enough man for those days, and the Baron Bréau-Chenut. All their money went in the Union Générale smash — you’re too young to remember that, of course — and, gad! they’ve had to get it back as best they could.”

“He’s the uncle of a little girl who used to come to my lessons, in a class a long way below mine, the famous ‘Albertine.’ She’s certain to be dreadfully ‘fast’ when she’s older, but just now she’s the quaintest spectacle.”

“She is amazing, this daughter of mine. She knows everyone.”

“I don’t know her. I only used to see her going about, and hear them calling ‘Albertine’ here, and ‘Albertine’ there. But I do know Mme. Bontemps, and I don’t like her much either.”

“You are quite wrong; she is charming, pretty, intelligent. In fact, she’s quite clever. I shall go in and say how d’e do to her, and ask her if her husband thinks we’re going to have war, and whether we can rely on King Theodosius. He’s bound to know, don’t you think, since he’s in the counsels of the gods.”

It was not thus that Swann used to talk in days gone by; but which of us cannot call to mind some royal princess of limited intelligence who let herself be carried off by a footman, and then, ten years later, tried to get back into society, and found that people were not very willing to call upon her; have we not found her spontaneously adopting the language of all the old bores, and, when we referred to some duchess who was at the height of fashion, heard her say: “She came to see me only yesterday,” or “I live a very quiet life.” So that it is superfluous to make a study of manners, since we can deduce them all from

psychological laws.

The Swanns shared this eccentricity of people who have not many friends; a visit, an invitation, a mere friendly word from some one ever so little prominent were for them events to which they aspired to give full publicity. If bad luck would have it that the Verdurins were in London when Odette gave a rather smart dinner-party, arrangements were made by which some common friend was to ‘cable’ a report to them across the Channel. Even the complimentary letters and telegrams received by Odette the Swanns were incapable of keeping to themselves. They spoke of them to their friends, passed them from hand to hand. Thus the Swanns’ drawing-room reminded one of a seaside hotel where telegrams containing the latest news are posted up on a board.

Still, people who had known the old Swann not merely outside society, as I had known him, but in society, in that Guermantes set which, with certain concessions to Highnesses and Duchesses, was almost infinitely exacting in the matter of wit and charm, from which banishment was sternly decreed for men of real eminence whom its members found boring or vulgar,— such people might have been astonished to observe that their old Swann had ceased to be not only discreet when he spoke of his acquaintance, but difficult when he was called upon to enlarge it. How was it that Mme. Bontemps, so common, so ill-natured, failed to exasperate him? How could he possibly describe her as attractive? The memory of the Guermantes set must, one would suppose, have prevented him; as a matter of fact it encouraged him. There was certainly among the Guermantes, as compared with the great majority of groups in society, taste, indeed a refined taste, but also a snobbishness from which there arose the possibility of a momentary interruption in the exercise of that taste. If it were a question of some one who was not indispensable to their circle, of a Minister for Foreign Affairs, a Republican and inclined to be pompous, or of an Academician who talked too much, their taste would be brought to bear heavily against him, Swann would condole with Mme. de Guermantes on having had to sit next to such people at dinner at one of the Embassies, and they would a thousand times rather have a man of fashion, that is to say a man of the Guermantes kind, good for nothing, but endowed with the wit of the Guermantes, some one who was ‘of the same chapel’ as themselves. Only, a Grand Duchess, a Princess of the Blood, should she dine often with Mme. de Guermantes, would soon find herself enrolled in that chapel also, without having any right to be there, without being at all so endowed. But with the simplicity of people in society, from the moment they had her in their houses they went out of their way to find her attractive, since they

were unable to say that it was because she was attractive that they invited her. Swann, coming to the rescue of Mme. de Guermantes, would say to her after the Highness had gone: “After all, she’s not such a bad woman; really, she has quite a sense of the comic. I don’t suppose for a moment that she has mastered the *Critique of Pure Reason*; still, she is not unattractive.” “Oh, I do so entirely agree with you!” the Duchess would respond. “Besides, she was a little frightened of us all; you will see that she can be charming.” “She is certainly a great deal less devastating than Mme. X——” (the wife of the talkative Academician, and herself a remarkable woman) “who quotes twenty volumes at you.” “Oh, but there isn’t any comparison between them.” The faculty of saying such things as these, and of saying them sincerely, Swann had acquired from the Duchess, and had never lost. He made use of it now with reference to the people who came to his house. He forced himself to distinguish, and to admire in them the qualities that every human being will display if we examine him with a prejudice in his favour, and not with the distaste of the nice-minded; he extolled the merits of Mme. Bon-temps, as he had once extolled those of the Princesse de Parme, who must have been excluded from the Guermantes set if there had not been privileged terms of admission for certain Highnesses, and if, when they presented themselves for election, no consideration had indeed been paid except to wit and charm. We have seen already, moreover, that Swann had always an inclination (which he was now putting into practice, only in a more lasting fashion) to exchange his social position for another which, in certain circumstances, might suit him better. It is only people incapable of analysing, in their perception, what at first sight appears indivisible who believe that one’s position is consolidated with one’s person. One and the same man, taken at successive points in his life, will be found to breathe, at different stages on the social ladder, in atmospheres that do not of necessity become more and more refined; whenever, in any period of our existence, we form or re-form associations with a certain environment, and feel that we can move at ease in it and are made comfortable, we begin quite naturally to make ourselves fast to it by putting out roots and tendrils.

In so far as Mme. Bontemps was concerned, I believe also that Swann, in speaking of her with so much emphasis, was not sorry to think that my parents would hear that she had been to see his wife. To tell the truth, in our house the names of the people whom Mme. Swann was gradually getting to know pricked our curiosity more than they aroused our admiration. At the name of Mme. Trombert, my mother exclaimed: “Ah! That’s a new recruit, and one who will bring in others.” And as though she found a similarity between the somewhat summary, rapid and violent manner in which Mme. Swann acquired her friends, as it were by conquest, and a Colonial expedition, Mamma went on to observe: “Now that the Tromberts have surrendered, the neighbouring tribes will not be long in coming in.” If she had passed Mme. Swann in the street, she would tell us when she came home: “I saw Mme. Swann in all her war-paint; she must have been embarking on some triumphant offensive against the Massachutoes, or the Cingalese, or the Tromberts.” And so with all the new people whom I told her that I had seen in that somewhat composite and artificial society, to which they had often been brought with great difficulty and from widely different surroundings, Mamma would at once divine their origin, and, speaking of them as of trophies dearly bought, would say: “Brought back from an Expedition against the so-and-so!”

As for Mme. Cottard, my father was astonished that Mme. Swann could find anything to be gained by getting so utterly undistinguished a woman to come to her house, and said: “In spite of the Professor’s position, I must say that I cannot understand it.” Mamma, on the other hand, understood quite well; she knew that a great deal of the pleasure which a woman finds in entering a class of society different from that in which she has previously lived would be lacking if she had no means of keeping her old associates informed of those others, relatively more brilliant, with whom she has replaced them. Therefore, she requires an eye-witness who may be allowed to penetrate this new, delicious world (as a buzzing, browsing insect bores its way into a flower) and will then, as the course of her visits may carry her, spread abroad, or so at least one hopes, with the tidings, a latent germ of envy and of wonder. Mme. Cottard, who might have been created on purpose to fill this part, belonged to that special category in a visiting list which Mamma (who inherited certain facets of her father’s turn of mind) used to call the ‘Tell Sparta’ people. Besides — apart from another reason which did not come to our knowledge until many years later — Mme. Swann, in inviting this good-natured, reserved and modest friend, had no need to fear lest she might be

introducing into her drawing-room, on her brilliant ‘days,’ a traitor or a rival. She knew what a vast number of homely blossoms that busy worker, armed with her plume and card-case, could visit in a single afternoon. She knew the creature’s power of dissemination, and, basing her calculations upon the law of probability, was led to believe that almost certainly some intimate of the Verdurins would be bound to hear, within two or three days, how the Governor of Paris had left cards upon her, or that M. Verdurin himself would be told how M. Le Hault de Pressagny, the President of the Horse Show, had taken them, Swann and herself, to the King Theodosius gala; she imagined the Verdurins as informed of these two events, both so flattering to herself and of these alone, because the particular materialisations in which we embody and pursue fame are but few in number, by the default of our own minds which are incapable of imagining at one time all the forms which, none the less, we hope — in a general way — that fame will not fail simultaneously to assume for our benefit.

Mme. Swann had, however, met with no success outside what was called the ‘official world.’ Smart women did not go to her house. It was not the presence there of Republican ‘notables’ that frightened them away. In the days of my early childhood, conservative society was to the last degree worldly, and no ‘good’ house would ever have opened its doors to a Republican. The people who lived in such an atmosphere imagined that the impossibility of ever inviting an ‘opportunist’— still more, a ‘horrid radical’— to their parties was something that would endure for ever, like oil-lamps and horse-drawn omnibuses. But, like a kaleidoscope which is every now and then given a turn, society arranges successively in different orders elements which one would have supposed to be immovable, and composes a fresh pattern. Before I had made my first Communion, ladies on the ‘right side’ in politics had had the stupefaction of meeting, while paying calls, a smart Jewess. These new arrangements of the kaleidoscope are produced by what a philosopher would call a ‘change of criterion.’ The Dreyfus case brought about another, at a period rather later than that in which I began to go to Mme. Swann’s, and the kaleidoscope scattered once again its little scraps of colour. Everything Jewish, even the smart lady herself, fell out of the pattern, and various obscure nationalities appeared in its place. The most brilliant drawing-room in Paris was that of a Prince who was an Austrian and ultra-Catholic. If instead of the Dreyfus case there had come a war with Germany, the base of the kaleidoscope would have been turned in the other direction, and its pattern reversed. The Jews having shewn, to the general astonishment, that they were patriots also, would have kept their position, and no

one would have cared to go any more, or even to admit that he had ever gone to the Austrian Prince's. All this does not, however, prevent the people who move in it from imagining, whenever society is stationary for the moment, that no further change will occur, just as in spite of having witnessed the birth of the telephone they decline to believe in the aeroplane. Meanwhile the philosophers of journalism are at work, castigating the preceding epoch, and not only the kind of pleasures in which it indulged, which seem to them to be the last word in corruption, but even the work of its artists and philosophers, which have no longer the least value in their eyes, as though they were indissolubly linked to the successive moods of fashionable frivolity. The one thing that does not change is that at any and every time it appears that there have been 'great changes.' At the time when I went to Mme. Swann's the Dreyfus storm had not yet broken, and some of the more prominent Jews were extremely powerful. None more so than Sir Rufus Israels, whose wife, Lady Israels, was Swann's aunt. She had not herself any intimate acquaintance so distinguished as her nephew's, while he, since he did not care for her, had never much cultivated her society, although he was, so far as was known, her heir. But she was the only one of Swann's relatives who had any idea of his social position, the others having always remained in the state of ignorance, in that respect, which had long been our own. When, from a family circle, one of its members emigrates into 'high society'—which to him appears a feat without parallel until after the lapse of a decade he observes that it has been performed in other ways and for different reasons by more than one of the men whom he knew as boys — he draws round about himself a zone of shadow, a *terra incognita*, which is clearly visible in its minutest details to all those who inhabit it with him, but is darkest night and nothingness to those who may not penetrate it but touch its fringe without the least suspicion of its existence in their midst. There being no news agency to furnish Swann's lady cousins with intelligence of the people with whom he consorted, it was (before his appalling marriage, of course) with a smile of condescension that they would tell one another, over family dinner-tables, that they had spent a 'virtuous' Sunday in going to see 'cousin Charles,' whom (regarding him as a 'poor relation' who was inclined to envy their prosperity,) they used wittily to name, playing upon the title of Balzac's story, *Le Cousin Bête*. Lady Israels, however, was letter-perfect in the names and quality of the people who lavished upon Swann a friendship of which she was frankly jealous. Her husband's family, which almost equalled the Rothschilds in importance, had for several generations managed the affairs of the Orleans Princes. Lady Israels,

being immensely rich, exercised a wide influence, and had employed it so as to ensure that no one whom she knew should be ‘at home’ to Odette. One only had disobeyed her, in secret, the Comtesse de Marsantes. And then, as ill luck would have it, Odette having gone to call upon Mme. de Marsantes, Lady Israels had entered the room almost at her heels. Mme. de Marsantes was on tenter-hooks. With the craven impotence of those who are at liberty to act as they choose, she did not address a single word to Odette, who thus found little encouragement to press further the invasion of a world which, moreover, was not at all that into which she would have liked to be welcomed. In this complete detachment of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Odette continued to be regarded as the illiterate ‘light woman,’ utterly different from the respectable ladies, ‘well up’ in all the minutest points of genealogy, who endeavoured to quench by reading biographies and memoirs their thirst for the aristocratic relations with which real life had omitted to provide them. And Swann, for his part, continued no doubt to be the lover in whose eyes all these peculiarities of an old mistress would appear lovable or at least inoffensive, for I have often heard his wife profess what were really social heresies, without his attempting (whether from lingering affection for her, loss of regard for society or weariness of the effort to make her perfect) to correct them. It was perhaps also another form of the simplicity which for so long had misled us at Combray, and which now had the effect that, while he continued to know, on his own account at least, many highly distinguished people, he did not make a point, in conversation in his wife’s drawing-room, of our seeming to feel that they were of the smallest importance. They had, indeed, less than ever for Swann, the centre of gravity of his life having been displaced. In any case, Odette’s ignorance of social distinctions was so dense that if the name of the Princesse de Guermantes were mentioned in conversation after that of the Duchess, her cousin, “So those ones are Princes, are they?” she would exclaim; “Why, they’ve gone up a step.” Were anyone to say “the Prince,” in speaking of the Duc de Chartres, she would put him right with, “The Duke, you mean; he is Duc de Chartres, not Prince.” As for the Duc d’Orléans, son of the Comte de Paris: “That’s funny; the son is higher than the father!” she would remark, adding, for she was afflicted with anglomania, “Those*Royalties* are so dreadfully confusing!”— while to someone who asked her from what province the Guermantes family came she replied, “From the Aisne.”

But, so far as Odette was concerned, Swann was quite blind, not merely to these deficiencies in her education but to the general mediocrity of her intelligence. More than that; whenever Odette repeated a silly story Swann

would sit listening to his wife with a complacency, a merriment, almost an admiration into which some survival of his desire for her must have entered; while in the same conversation, anything subtle, anything deep even that he himself might say would be listened to by Odette with an habitual lack of interest, rather curtly, with impatience, and would at times be sharply contradicted. And we must conclude that this enslavement of refinement by vulgarity is the rule in many households, when we think, conversely, of all the superior women who yield to the blandishments of a boor, merciless in his censure of their most delicate utterances, while they go into ecstasies, with the infinite indulgence of love, over the feeblest of his witticisms. To return to the reasons which prevented Odette, at this period, from making her way into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, it must be observed that the latest turn of the social kaleidoscope had been actuated by a series of scandals. Women to whose houses one had been going with entire confidence had been discovered to be common prostitutes, if not British spies. One would, therefore, for some time to come expect people (so, at least, one supposed) to be, before anything else, in a sound position, regular, settled, accountable. Odette represented simply everything with which one had just severed relations, and was incidentally to renew them at once (for men, their natures not altering from day to day, seek in every new order a continuance of the old) but to renew them by seeking it under another form which would allow one to be innocently taken in, and to believe that it was no longer the same society as before the disaster. However, the scapegoats of that society and Odette were too closely alike. People who move in society are very short-sighted; at the moment in which they cease to have any relations with the Israelite ladies whom they have known, while they are asking themselves how they are to fill the gap thus made in their lives, they perceive, thrust into it as by the windfall of a night of storm, a new lady, an Israelite also; but by virtue of her novelty she is not associated in their minds with her predecessors, with what they are convinced that they must abjure. She does not ask that they shall respect her God. They take her up. There was no question of anti-semitism at the time when I used first to visit Odette. But she was like enough to it to remind people of what they wished, for a while, to avoid.

As for Swann himself, he was still a frequent visitor of several of his former acquaintance, who, of course, were all of the very highest rank. And yet when he spoke to us of the people whom he had just been to see I noticed that, among those whom he had known in the old days, the choice that he made was dictated by the same kind of taste, partly artistic, partly historic, that inspired him as a

collector. And remarking that it was often some great lady or other of waning reputation, who interested him because she had been the mistress of Liszt or because one of Balzac's novels was dedicated to her grandmother (as he would purchase a drawing if Chateaubriand had written about it) I conceived a suspicion that we had, at Combray, replaced one error, that of regarding Swann as a mere stockbroker, who did not go into society, by another, when we supposed him to be one of the smartest men in Paris. To be a friend of the Comte de Paris meant nothing at all. Is not the world full of such 'friends of Princes,' who would not be received in any house that was at all 'exclusive'? Princes know themselves to be princes, and are not snobs; besides, they believe themselves to be so far above everything that is not of their blood royal that great nobles and 'business men' appear, in the depths beneath them, to be practically on a level.

But Swann went farther than this; not content with seeking in society, such as it was, when he fastened upon the names which, inscribed upon its roll by the past, were still to be read there, a simple artistic and literary pleasure, he indulged in the slightly vulgar diversion of arranging as it were social nosegays by grouping heterogeneous elements, bringing together people taken at hazard, here, there and everywhere. These experiments in the lighter side (or what was to Swann the lighter side) of sociology did not stimulate an identical reaction, with any regularity, that is to say, in each of his wife's friends. "I'm thinking of asking the Cottards to meet the Duchesse de Vendôme," he would laughingly say to Mme. Bontemps, in the appetised tone of an epicure who has thought of, and intends to try the substitution, in a sauce, of cayenne pepper for cloves. But this plan, which was, in fact, to appear quite humorous, in an archaic sense of the word, to the Cottards, had also the power of infuriating Mme. Bontemps. She herself had recently been presented by the Swanns to the Duchesse de Vendôme, and had found this as agreeable as it seemed to her natural. The thought of winning renown from it at the Cottards', when she related to them what had happened, had been by no means the least savoury ingredient of her pleasure. But like those persons recently decorated who, their investiture once accomplished, would like to see the fountain of honour turned off at the main, Mme. Bontemps would have preferred that, after herself, no one else in her own circle of friends should be made known to the Princess. She denounced (to herself, of course) the licentious taste of Swann who, in order to gratify a wretched aesthetic whim, was obliging her to scatter to the winds, at one swoop, all the dust that she would have thrown in the eyes of the Cottards when she told

them about the Duchesse de Vendôme. How was she even to dare to announce to her husband that the Professor and his wife were in their turn to partake of this pleasure, of which she had boasted to him as though it were unique. And yet, if the Cottards could only be made to know that they were being invited not seriously but for the amusement of their host! It is true that the Bontemps had been invited for the same reason, but Swann, having acquired from the aristocracy that eternal 'Don Juan' spirit which, in treating with two women of no importance, makes each of them believe that it is she alone who is seriously loved, had spoken to Mme. Bontemps of the Duchesse de Vendôme as of a person whom it was clearly laid down that she must meet at dinner. "Yes, we're determined to have the Princess here with the Cottards," said Mme. Swann a few weeks later; "My husband thinks that we might get something quite amusing out of that conjunction." For if she had retained from the 'little nucleus' certain habits dear to Mme. Verdurin, such as that of shouting things aloud so as to be heard by all the faithful, she made use, at the same time, of certain expressions, such as 'conjunction,' which were dear to the Guermantes circle, of which she thus felt unconsciously and at a distance, as the sea is swayed by the moon, the attraction, though without being drawn perceptibly closer to it. "Yes, the Cottards and the Duchesse de Vendôme. Don't you think that might be rather fun?" asked Swann. "I think they'll be exceedingly ill-assorted, and it can only lead to a lot of bother; people oughtn't to play with fire, is what I say!" snapped Mme. Bontemps, furious. She and her husband were, all the same, invited, as was the Prince d'Agrigente, to this dinner, which Mme. Bontemps and Cottard had each two alternative ways of describing, according to whom they were telling about it. To one set Mme. Bontemps for her part, and Cottard for his would say casually, when asked who else had been of the party: "Only the Prince d'Agrigente; it was all quite intimate." But there were others who might, alas, be better informed (once, indeed, some one had challenged Cottard with: "But weren't the Bontemps there too?" "Oh, I forgot them," Cottard had blushingly admitted to the tactless questioner whom he ever afterwards classified among slanderers and speakers of evil). For these the Bontemps and Cottards had each adopted, without any mutual arrangement, a version the framework of which was identical for both parties, their own names alone changing places. "Let me see;" Cottard would say, "there were our host and hostess, the Due and Duchesse de Vendôme —" (with a satisfied smile) "Professor and Mme. Cottard, and, upon my soul, heaven only knows how they got there, for they were about as much in keeping as hairs in the soup, M. and Mme. Bontemps!" Mme.

Bontemps would recite an exactly similar ‘piece,’ only it was M. and Mme. Bontemps who were named with a satisfied emphasis between the Duchesse de Vendôme and the Prince d’Agrigente, while the ‘also ran,’ whom finally she used to accuse of having invited themselves, and who completely spoiled the party, were the Cottards.

When he had been paying calls Swann would often come home with little time to spare before dinner. At that point in the evening, six o’clock, when in the old days he had felt so wretched, he no longer asked himself what Odette might be about, and was hardly at all concerned to hear that she had people still with her, or had gone out. He recalled at times that he had once, years ago, tried to read through its envelope a letter addressed by Odette to Forcheville. But this memory was not pleasing to him, and rather than plumb the depth of shame that he felt in it he preferred to indulge in a little grimace, twisting up the corners of his mouth and adding, if need be, a shake of the head which signified “What does it all matter?” In truth, he considered now that the hypothesis by which he had often been brought to a standstill in days gone by, according to which it was his jealous imagination alone that blackened what was in reality the innocent life of Odette — that this hypothesis (which after all was beneficent, since, so long as his amorous malady had lasted, it had diminished his sufferings by making them seem imaginary) was not the truth, that it was his jealousy that had seen things in the right light, and that if Odette had loved him better than he supposed, she had deceived him more as well. Formerly, while his sufferings were still keen, he had vowed that, as soon as he should have ceased to love Odette, and so to be afraid either of vexing her or of making her believe that he loved her more than he did, he would afford himself the satisfaction of elucidating with her, simply from his love of truth and as a historical point, whether or not she had had Forcheville in her room that day when he had rung her bell and rapped on her window without being let in, and she had written to Forcheville that it was an uncle of hers who had called. But this so interesting problem, of which he was waiting to attempt the solution only until his jealousy should have subsided, had precisely lost all interest in Swann’s eyes when he had ceased to be jealous. Not immediately, however. He felt no other jealousy now with regard to Odette than what the memory of that day, that afternoon spent in knocking vainly at the little house in the Rue La Pérouse, had continued to excite in him; as though his jealousy, not dissimilar in that respect from those maladies which appear to have their seat, their centre of contagion less in certain persons than in certain places, in certain houses, had had for its object not so much

Odette herself as that day, that hour in the irrevocable past when Swann had beaten at every entrance to her house in turn. You would have said that that day, that hour alone had caught and preserved a few last fragments of the amorous personality which had once been Swann's, and that there alone could he now recapture them. For a long time now it had made no matter to him that Odette had been false to him, and was false still. And yet he had continued for some years to seek out old servants of Odette, so strongly in him persisted the painful curiosity to know whether on that day, so long ago, at six o'clock, Odette had been in bed with Forcheville. Then that curiosity itself had disappeared, without, however, his abandoning his investigations. He continued the attempt to discover what no longer interested him, because his old ego though it had shrivelled to the extreme of decrepitude still acted mechanically, following the course of preoccupations so utterly abandoned that Swann could not now succeed even in forming an idea of that anguish — so compelling once that he had been unable to foresee his ever being delivered from it, that only the death of her whom he loved (death which, as will be shewn later on in this story, by a cruel example, in no way diminishes the sufferings caused by jealousy) seemed to him capable of making smooth the road, then insurmountably barred to him, of his life.

But to bring to light, some day, those passages in the life of Odette to which he owed his sufferings had not been Swann's only ambition; he had in reserve that also of wreaking vengeance for his sufferings when, being no longer in love with Odette, he should no longer be afraid of her; and the opportunity of gratifying this second ambition had just occurred, for Swann was in love with another woman, a woman who gave him — grounds for jealousy, no, but who did all the same make him jealous, because he was not capable, now, of altering his way of making love, and it was the way he had used with Odette that must serve him now for another. To make Swann's jealousy revive it was not essential that this woman should be unfaithful, it sufficed that for any reason she was separated from him, at a party for instance, where she was presumably enjoying herself. That was enough to reawaken in him the old anguish, that lamentable and inconsistent excrescence of his love, which held Swann ever at a distance from what she really was, like a yearning to attain the impossible (what this young woman really felt for him, the hidden longing that absorbed her days, the secret places of her heart), for between Swann and her whom he loved this anguish piled up an unyielding mass of already existing suspicions, having their cause in Odette, or in some other perhaps who had preceded Odette, allowing this now ageing lover to know his mistress of the moment only in the traditional

and collective phantasm of the ‘woman who made him jealous,’ in which he had arbitrarily incarnated his new love. Often, however, Swann would charge his jealousy with the offence of making him believe in imaginary infidelities; but then he would remember that he had given Odette the benefit of the same argument and had in that been wrong. And so everything that the young woman whom he loved did in those hours when he was not with her appeared spoiled of its innocence in his eyes. But whereas at that other time he had made a vow that if ever he ceased to love her whom he did not then imagine to be his future wife, he would implacably exhibit to her an indifference that would at length be sincere, so as to avenge his pride that had so long been trampled upon by her — of those reprisals which he might now enforce without risk to himself (for what harm could it do him to be taken at his word and deprived of those intimate moments with Odette that had been so necessary to him once), of those reprisals he took no more thought; with his love had vanished the desire to shew that he was in love no longer. And he who, when he was suffering at the hands of Odette, would have looked forward so keenly to letting her see one day that he had fallen to a rival, now that he was in a position to do so took infinite precautions lest his wife should suspect the existence of this new love.

***

It was not only in those tea-parties, on account of which I had formerly had the sorrow of seeing Gilberte leave me and go home earlier than usual, that I was henceforth to take part, but the engagements that she had with her mother, to go for a walk or to some afternoon party, which by preventing her from coming to the Champs-Elysées had deprived me of her, on those days when I loitered alone upon the lawn or stood before the wooden horses,— to these outings M. and Mme. Swann henceforth admitted me, I had a seat in their landau, and indeed it was me that they asked if I would rather go to the theatre, to a dancing lesson at the house of one of Gilberte’s friends, to some social gathering given by friends of her parents (what Odette called ‘a little meeting’) or to visit the tombs at Saint-Denis.

On days when I was going anywhere with the Swanns I would arrive at the house in time for *déjeuner*, which Mme. Swann called ‘le lunch’; as one was not expected before half-past twelve, while my parents in those days had their meal at a quarter past eleven, it was not until they had risen from the table that I made my way towards that sumptuous quarter, deserted enough at any hour, but more

particularly just then, when everyone had gone indoors. Even on winter days of frost, if the weather held, tightening every few minutes the knot of a gorgeous necktie from Charvet's and looking to see that my varnished boots were not getting dirty, I would roam to and fro among the avenues, waiting until twenty-seven minutes past the hour. I could see from afar in the Swanns' little garden-plot the sunlight glittering like hoar frost from the bare-boughed trees. It is true that the garden boasted but a pair of them. The unusual hour presented the scene in a new light. Into these pleasures of nature (intensified by the suppression of habit and indeed by my physical hunger) the thrilling prospect of sitting down to luncheon with Mme. Swann was infused; it did not diminish them, but taking command of them trained them to its service; so that if, at this hour when ordinarily I did not perceive them, I seemed now to be discovering the fine weather, the cold, the wintry sunlight, it was all as a sort of preface to the creamed eggs, as a patina, a cool and coloured glaze applied to the decoration of that mystic chapel which was the habitation of Mme. Swann, and in the heart of which there were, by contrast, so much warmth, so many scents and flowers.

At half-past twelve I would finally make up my mind to enter that house which, like an immense Christmas stocking, seemed ready to bestow upon me supernatural delights. (The French name 'Noël' was, by the way, unknown to Mme. Swann and Gilberte, who had substituted for it the English 'Christmas,' and would speak of nothing but 'Christmas pudding,' what people had given them as 'Christmas presents' and of going away — the thought of which maddened me with grief —'for Christmas.' At home even, I should have thought it degrading to use the word 'Noël,' and always said 'Christmas,' which my father considered extremely silly.)

I encountered no one at first but a footman who after leading me through several large drawing-rooms shewed me into one that was quite small, empty, its windows beginning to dream already in the blue light of afternoon; I was left alone there in the company of orchids, roses and violets, which, like people who are kept waiting in a room beside you but do not know you, preserved a silence which their individuality as living things made all the more impressive, and received coldly the warmth of a glowing fire of coals, preciously displayed behind a screen of crystal, in a basin of white marble over which it spilled, now and again, its perilous rubies.

I had sat down, but I rose hurriedly on hearing the door opened; it was only another footman, and then a third, and the minute result chat their vainly alarming entrances and exits achieved was to put a little more coal on the fire or

water in the vases. They departed, I found myself alone, once that door was shut which Mme. Swann was surely soon going to open. Of a truth, I should have been less ill at ease in a magician's cave than in this little waiting-room where the fire appeared to me to be performing alchemical transmutations as in Klingsor's laboratory. Footsteps sounded afresh, I did not rise, it was sure to be just another footman; it was M. Swann. "What! All by yourself? What is one to do; that poor wife of mine has never been able to remember what time means! Ten minutes to one. She gets later every day. And you'll see, she will come sailing in without the least hurry, and imagine she's in heaps of time." And as he was still subject to neuritis, and as he was becoming a trifle ridiculous, the fact of possessing so unpunctual a wife, who came in so late from the Bois, forgot everything at her dressmaker's and was never in time for luncheon made Swann anxious for his digestion but flattered his self-esteem.

He shewed me his latest acquisitions and explained their interest to me, but my emotion, added to the unfamiliarity of being still without food at this hour, sweeping through my mind left it void, so that while able to speak I was incapable of hearing. Anyhow, so far as the works of art in Swann's possession were concerned, it was enough for me that they were contained in his house, formed a part there of the delicious hour that preceded luncheon. The Gioconda herself might have appeared there without giving me any more pleasure than one of Mme. Swann's indoor gowns, or her scent bottles.

I continued to wait, alone or with Swann, and often with Gilberte, come in to keep us company. The arrival of Mme. Swann, prepared for me by all those majestic apparitions, must (so it seemed to me) be something truly immense. I strained my ears to catch the slightest sound. But one never finds quite as high as one has been expecting a cathedral, a wave in a storm, a dancer's leap in the air; after those liveried footmen, suggesting the chorus whose processional entry upon the stage leads up to and at the same time diminishes the final appearance of the queen, Mme. Swann, creeping furtively in, with a little otter-skin coat, her veil lowered to cover a nose pink-tipped by the cold, did not fulfil the promises lavished, while I had been waiting, upon my imagination.

But if she had stayed at home all morning, when she arrived in the drawing-room she would be clad in a wrapper of *crêpe-de-Chine*, brightly coloured, which seemed to me more exquisite than any of her dresses.

Sometimes the Swanns decided to remain in the house all afternoon, and then, as we had had luncheon so late, very soon I must watch setting, beyond the garden-wall, the sun of that day which had seemed to me bound to be different

from other days; then in vain might the servants bring in lamps of every size and shape, burning each upon the consecrated altar of a console, a card-table, a corner-cupboard, a bracket, as though for the celebration of some strange and secret rite; nothing extraordinary transpired in the conversation, and I went home disappointed, as one often is in one's childhood after the midnight mass.

But my disappointment was scarcely more than mental. I was radiant with happiness in this house where Gilberte, when she was still not with us, was about to appear and would bestow on me in a moment, and for hours to come, her speech, her smiling and attentive gaze, just as I had caught it, that first time, at Combray. At the most I was a trifle jealous when I saw her so often disappear into vast rooms above, reached by a private staircase. Obliged myself to remain in the drawing-room, like a man in love with an actress who is confined to his stall 'in front' and wonders anxiously what is going on behind the scenes, in the green-room, I put to Swann, with regard to this other part of the house questions artfully veiled, but in a tone from which I could not quite succeed in banishing the note of uneasiness. He explained to me that the place to which Gilberte had gone was the linen-room, offered himself to shew it to me, and promised me that whenever Gilberte Had occasion to go there again he would insist upon her taking me with her. By these last words and the relief which they brought me Swann at once annihilated for me one of those terrifying interior perspectives at the end of which a woman with whom we are in love appears so remote. At that moment I felt for him an affection which I believed to be deeper than my affection for Gilberte. For he, being the master over his daughter, was giving her to me, whereas she, she withheld herself now and then, I had not the same direct control over her as I had indirectly through Swann. Besides, it was she whom I loved and could not, therefore look upon without that disturbance, without that desire for something more which destroys in us, in the presence of one whom we love, the sensation of loving.

As a rule, however, we did not stay indoors, we went out. Sometimes, before going to dress, Mme. Swann would sit down at the piano. Her lovely hands, escaping from the pink, or white, or, often, vividly coloured sleeves of her *crêpe-de-Chine* wrapper, drooped over the keys with that same melancholy which was in her eyes but was not in her heart. It was on one of those days that she happened to play me the part of Vinteuil's sonata that contained the little phrase of which Swann had been so fond. But often one listens and hears nothing, if it is a piece of music at all complicated to which one is listening for the first time. And yet when, later on, this sonata had been played over to me two or three

times I found that I knew it quite well. And so it is not wrong to speak of hearing a thing for the first time. If one had indeed, as one supposes, received no impression from the first hearing, the second, the third would be equally ‘first hearings’ and there would be no reason why one should understand it any better after the tenth. Probably what is wanting, the first time, is not comprehension but memory. For our memory, compared to the complexity of the impressions which it has to face while we are listening, is infinitesimal, as brief as the memory of a man who in his sleep thinks of a thousand things and at once forgets them, or as that of a man in his second childhood who cannot recall, a minute afterwards, what one has just been saying to him. Of these multiple impressions our memory is not capable of furnishing us with an immediate picture. But that picture gradually takes shape, and, with regard to works which we have heard more than once, we are like the schoolboy who has read several times over before going to sleep a lesson which he supposed himself not to know, and finds that he can repeat it by heart next morning. It was only that I had not, until then, heard a note of the sonata, whereas Swann and his wife could make out a distinct phrase that was as far beyond the range of my perception as a name which one endeavours to recall and in place of which one discovers only a void, a void from which, an hour later, when one is not thinking about them, will spring of their own accord, in one continuous flight, the syllables that one has solicited in vain. And not only does one not seize at once and retain an impression of works that are really great, but even in the content of any such work (as befell me in the case of Vinteuil’s sonata) it is the least valuable parts that one at first perceives. Thus it was that I was mistaken not only in thinking that this work held nothing further in store for me (so that for a long time I made no effort to hear it again) from the moment in which Mme. Swann had played over to me its most famous passage; I was in this respect as stupid as people are who expect to feel no astonishment when they stand in Venice before the front of Saint Mark’s, because photography has already acquainted them with the outline of its domes. Far more than that, even when I had heard the sonata played from beginning to end, it remained almost wholly invisible to me, like a monument of which its distance or a haze in the atmosphere allows us to catch but a faint and fragmentary glimpse. Hence the depression inseparable from one’s knowledge of such works, as of everything that acquires reality in time. When the least obvious beauties of Vinteuil’s sonata were revealed to me, already, borne by the force of habit beyond the reach of my sensibility, those that I had from the first distinguished and preferred in it were beginning to escape, to avoid me. Since I

was able only in successive moments to enjoy all the pleasures that this sonata gave me, I never possessed it in its entirety: it was like life itself. But, less disappointing than life is, great works of art do not begin by giving us all their best. In Vinteuil's sonata the beauties that one discovers at once are those also of which one most soon grows tired, and for the same reason, no doubt, namely that they are less different from what one already knows. But when those first apparitions have withdrawn, there is left for our enjoyment some passage which its composition, too new and strange to offer anything but confusion to our mind, had made indistinguishable and so preserved intact; and this, which we have been meeting every day and have not guessed it, which has thus been held in reserve for us, which by the sheer force of its beauty has become invisible and has remained unknown, this comes to us last of all. But this also must be the last that we shall relinquish. And we shall love it longer than the rest because we have taken longer to get to love it. The time, moreover, that a person requires — as I required in the matter of this sonata — to penetrate a work of any depth is merely an epitome, a symbol, one might say, of the years, the centuries even that must elapse before the public can begin to cherish a masterpiece that is really new. So that the man of genius, to shelter himself from the ignorant contempt of the world, may say to himself that, since one's contemporaries are incapable of the necessary detachment, works written for posterity should be read by posterity alone, like certain pictures which one cannot appreciate when one stands too close to them. But, as it happens, any such cowardly precaution to avoid false judgments is doomed to failure; they are inevitable. The reason for which a work of genius is not easily admired from the first is that the man who has created it is extraordinary, that few other men resemble him. It was Beethoven's Quartets themselves (the Twelfth, Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth) that devoted half a century to forming, fashioning and enlarging a public for Beethoven's Quartets, marking in this way, like every great work of art, an advance if not in artistic merit at least in intellectual society, largely composed to-day of what was not to be found when the work first appeared, that is to say of persons capable of enjoying it. What artists call posterity is the posterity of the work of art. It is essential that the work (leaving out of account, for brevity's sake, the contingency that several men of genius may at the same time be working along parallel lines to create a more instructed public in the future, a public from which other men of genius shall reap the benefit) shall create its own posterity. For if the work were held in reserve, were revealed only to posterity, that audience, for that particular work, would be not posterity but a group of contemporaries who

were merely living half-a-century later in time. And so it is essential that the artist (and this is what Vinteuil had done), if he wishes his work to be free to follow its own course, shall launch it, wherever he may find sufficient depth, confidently outward bound towards the future. And yet this interval of time, the true perspective in which to behold a work of art, if leaving it out of account is the mistake made by bad judges, taking it into account is at times a dangerous precaution of the good. No doubt one can easily imagine, by an illusion similar to that which makes everything on the horizon appear equidistant, that all the revolutions which have hitherto occurred in painting or in music did at least shew respect for certain rules, whereas that which immediately confronts us, be it impressionism, a striving after discord, an exclusive use of the Chinese scale, cubism, futurism or what you will, differs outrageously from all that have occurred before. Simply because those that have occurred before we are apt to regard as a whole, forgetting that a long process of assimilation has melted them into a continuous substance, varied of course but, taking it as a whole, homogeneous, in which Hugo blends with Molière. Let us try to imagine the shocking incoherence that we should find, if we did not take into account the future, and the changes that it must bring about, in a horoscope of our own riper years, drawn and presented to us in our youth. Only horoscopes are not always accurate, and the necessity, when judging a work of art, of including the temporal factor in the sum total of its beauty introduces, to our way of thinking, something as hazardous, and consequently as barren of interest, as every prophecy the non-fulfilment of which will not at all imply any inadequacy on the prophet's part, for the power to summon possibilities into existence or to exclude them from it is not necessarily within the competence of genius; one may have had genius and yet not have believed in the future of railways or of flight, or, although a brilliant psychologist, in the infidelity of a mistress or of a friend whose treachery persons far less gifted would have foreseen.

If I did not understand the sonata, it enchanted me to hear Mme. Swann play. Her touch appeared to me (like her wrappers, like the scent of her staircase, her cloaks, her chrysanthemums) to form part of an individual and mysterious whole, in a world infinitely superior to that in which the mind is capable of analysing talent. "Attractive, isn't it, that Vinteuil sonata?" Swann asked me. "The moment when night is darkening among the trees, when the arpeggios of the violin call down a cooling dew upon the earth. You must admit that it is rather charming; it shews all the static side of moonlight, which is the essential part. It is not surprising that a course of radiant heat such as my wife is taking,

should act on the muscles, since moonlight can prevent the leaves from stirring. That is what he expresses so well in that little phrase, the Bois de Boulogne plunged in a cataleptic trance. By the sea it is even more striking, because you have there the faint response of the waves, which, of course, you can hear quite distinctly, since nothing else dares to move. In Paris it is the other way; at the most, you may notice unfamiliar lights among the old buildings, the sky brightened as though by a colourless and harmless conflagration, that sort of vast variety show of which you get a hint here and there. But in Vinteuil's little phrase, and in the whole sonata for that matter, it is not like that; the scene is laid in the Bois; in the gruppetto you can distinctly hear a voice saying: 'I can almost see to read the paper!'" These words from Swann might have falsified, later on, my impression of the sonata, music being too little exclusive to inhibit absolutely what other people suggest that we should find in it. But I understood from other words which he let fall that this nocturnal foliage was simply that beneath whose shade in many a restaurant on the outskirts of Paris he had listened on many an evening to the little phrase. In place of the profound significance that he had so often sought in it, what it recalled now to Swann were the leafy boughs, arranged, wreathed, painted round about it (which it gave him the desire to see again because it seemed to him to be their inner, their hidden self, as it were their soul); was the whole of one spring season which he had not been able to enjoy before, not having had — feverish and moody as he then was — enough strength of body and mind for its enjoyment, which, as one puts by for an invalid the dainties that he has not been able to eat, it had kept in store for him. The charm that he had been made to feel by certain evenings in the Bois, a charm of which Vinteuil's sonata served to remind him, he could not have recaptured by questioning Odette, although she, as well as the little phrase, had been his companion there. But Odette had been merely his companion, by his side, not (as the phrase had been) within him, and so had seen nothing — nor would she, had she been a thousand times as comprehending, have seen anything of that vision which for no one among us (or at least I was long under the impression that this rule admitted no exception) can be made externally visible. "It is rather charming, don't you think," Swann continued, "that sound can give a reflection, like water, or glass. It is curious, too, that Vinteuil's phrase now shews me only the things to which I paid no attention then. Of my troubles, my loves of those days it recalls nothing, it has altered all my values." "Charles, I don't think that's very polite to me, what you're saying." "Not polite? Really, you women are superb! I was simply trying to explain to this young man that what the music

shews — to me, at least — is not for a moment ‘Free-will’ or ‘In Tune with the Infinite,’ but shall we say old Verdurin in his frock coat in the palm-house at the Jardin d’Acclimatation. Hundreds of times, without my leaving this room, the little phrase has carried me off to dine with it at Armenonville. Gad, it is less boring, anyhow, than having to go there with Mme. de Cambremer.” Mme. Swann laughed. “That is a lady who is supposed to have been violently in love with Charles,” she explained, in the same tone in which, shortly before, when we were speaking of Vermeer of Delft, of whose existence I had been surprised to find her conscious, she had answered me with: “I ought to explain that M. Swann was very much taken up with that painter at the time he was courting me. Isn’t that so, Charles dear?” “You’re not to start saying things about Mme. de Cambremer!” Swann checked her, secretly flattered. “But I’m only repeating what I’ve been told. Besides, it seems that she’s an extremely clever woman; I don’t know her myself. I believe she’s very pushing, which surprises me rather in a clever woman. But everyone says that she was quite mad about you; there’s no harm in repeating that.” Swann remained silent as a deaf-mute which was in a way a confirmation of what she had said, and a proof of his own fatuity. “Since what I’m playing reminds you of the Jardin d’Acclimatation,” his wife went on, with a playful semblance of being offended, “we might take him there some day in the carriage, if it would amuse him. It’s lovely there just now, and you can recapture your fond impressions! Which reminds me, talking of the Jardin d’Acclimatation, do you know, this young man thought that we were devotedly attached to a person whom I cut, as a matter of fact, whenever I possibly can, Mme. Blatin! I think it is rather crushing for us, that she should be taken for a friend of ours. Just fancy, dear Dr. Cottard, who never says a harsh word about anyone, declares that she’s positively contagious.” “A frightful woman! The one thing to be said for her is that she is exactly like Savonarola. She is the very image of that portrait of Savonarola, by Fra Bartolomeo.” This mania which Swann had for finding likenesses to people in pictures was defensible, for even what we call individual expression is — as we so painfully discover when we are in love and would fain believe in the unique reality of the beloved — something diffused and general, which can be found existing at different periods. But if one had listened to Swann, the processions of the Kings of the East, already so anachronistic when Benozzo Gozzoli introduced in their midst various Medici, would have been even more so, since they would have included the portraits of a whole crowd of men, contemporaries not of Gozzoli but of Swann, subsequent, that is to say not only by fifteen centuries to the Nativity but by four more to the

painter himself. There was not missing from those trains, according to Swann, a single living Parisian of any note, any more than there was from that act in one of Sardou's plays, in which, out of friendship for the author and for the leading lady, and also because it was the fashion, all the best known men in Paris, famous doctors, politicians, barristers, amused themselves, each on a different evening, by 'walking on.' "But what has she got to do with the Jardin d'Acclimatation?" "Everything!" "What? You don't suggest that she's got a sky-blue behind, like the monkeys?" "Charles, you really are too dreadful! I was thinking of what the Cingalese said to her. Do tell him, Charles; it really is a gem." "Oh, it's too silly. You know, Mme. Blatin loves asking people questions, in a tone which she thinks friendly, but which is really overpowering." "What our good friends on the Thames call 'patronising,'" interrupted Odette. "Exactly. Well, she went the other day to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, where they have some blackamoors — Cingalese, I think I heard my wife say; she is much 'better up' in ethnology than I am." "Now, Charles, you're not to make fun of poor me."

"I've no intention of making fun, I assure you. Well, to continue, she went up to one of these black fellows with 'Good morning, nigger!'..." "Oh, it's too absurd!" "Anyhow, this classification seems to have displeased the black. 'Me nigger,' he shouted (quite furious, don't you know), to Mme. Blatin, 'me nigger; you, old cow!'" "I do think that's so delightful! I adore that story. Do say it's a good one. Can't you see old Blatin standing there, and hearing him: 'Me nigger; you, old cow'?" I expressed an intense desire to go there and see these Cingalese, one of whom had called Mme. Blatin an old cow. They did not interest me in the least. But I reflected that in going to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, and again on our way home, we should pass along that Allée des Acacias in which I had loved so, once, to gaze on Mme. Swann, and that perhaps Coquelin's mulatto friend, to whom I had never managed to exhibit myself in the act of saluting her, would see me there, seated at her side, as the victoria swept by.

During those minutes in which Gilberte, having gone to 'get ready,' was not in the room with us, M. and Mme. Swann would take delight in revealing to me all the rare virtues of their child. And everything that I myself observed seemed to prove the truth of what they said. I remarked that, as her mother had told me, she had not only for her friends but for the servants, for the poor, the most delicate attentions carefully thought out, a desire to give pleasure, a fear of causing annoyance, translated into all sorts of trifling actions which must often have meant great inconvenience to her. She had done some 'work' for our stall-

keeper in the Champs-Elysées, and went out in the snow to give it to her with her own hands, so as not to lose a day. “You have no idea how kind-hearted she is, she won’t let it be seen,” her father assured me. Young as she was, she appeared far more sensible already than her parents. When Swann boasted of his wife’s grand friends Gilberte would turn away, and remain silent, but without any air of reproaching him, for it seemed inconceivable to her that her father could be subjected to the slightest criticism. One day, when I had spoken to her of Mlle. Vinteuil, she said to me:

“I shall never know her, for a very good reason, and that is that she was not nice to her father, by what one hears, she gave him a lot of trouble. You can’t understand that any more than I, can you; I’m sure you could no more live without your papa than I could, which is quite natural after all. How can one ever forget a person one has loved all one’s life?”

And once when she was making herself particularly endearing to Swann, as I mentioned this to her when he was out of the room:

“Yes, poor Papa, it is the anniversary of his father’s death, just now. You can understand what he must be feeling; you do understand, don’t you; you and I feel the same about things like that. So I just try to be a little less naughty than usual.” “But he doesn’t ever think you naughty. He thinks you’re quite perfect.” “Poor Papa, that’s because he’s far too good himself.”

But her parents were not content with singing the praises of Gilberte — that same Gilberte, who, even, before I had set eyes on her, used to appear to me standing before a church, in a landscape of the He de France, and later, awakening in me not dreams now but memories, was embowered always in a hedge of pink hawthorn, in the little lane that I took when I was going the Méséglise way. Once when I had asked Mme. Swann (and had made an effort to assume the indifferent tone of a friend of the family, curious to know the preferences of a child), which among all her playmates Gilberte liked the best, Mme. Swann replied: “But you ought to know a great deal better than I do. You are in her confidence, her great favourite, her ‘chum,’ as the English say.”

It appears that in a coincidence as perfect as this was, when reality is folded over to cover the ideal of which we have so long been dreaming, it completely hides that ideal, absorbing it in itself, as when two geometrical figures that are congruent are made to coincide, so that there is but one, whereas we would rather, so as to give its full significance to our enjoyment, preserve for all those separate points of our desire, at the very moment in which we succeed in touching them, and so as to be quite certain that they are indeed themselves, the

distinction of being intangible. And our thought cannot even reconstruct the old state so as to confront the new with it, for it has no longer a clear field: the acquaintance that we have made, the memory of those first, unhoped-for moments, the talk to which we have listened are there now to block the passage of our consciousness, and as they control the outlets of our memory far more than those of our imagination, they react more forcibly upon our past, which we are no longer able to visualise without taking them into account, than upon the form, still unshaped, of our future. I had been able to believe, year after year, that the right to visit Mme. Swann was a vague and fantastic privilege to which I should never attain; after I had spent a quarter of an hour in her drawing-room, it was the period in which I did not yet know her that was become fantastic and vague like a possibility which the realisation of an alternative possibility has made impossible. How was I ever to dream again of her dining-room as of an inconceivable place, when I could not make the least movement in my mind without crossing the path of that inextinguishable ray cast backwards to infinity, even in**o my own most distant past, by the lobster** à l'Américaine which I had just been eating? And Swann must have observed in his own case a similar phenomenon; for this house in which he entertained me might be regarded as the place into which had flowed, to coincide and be lost in one another, not only the ideal dwelling that my imagination had constructed, but another still, that which his jealous love, as inventive as any fantasy of mine, had so often depicted to him, that dwelling common to Odette and himself which had appeared so inaccessible once, on evenings when Odette had taken him home with Forcheville to drink orangeade with her; and what had flowed in to be absorbed, for him, in the walls and furniture of the dining-room in which we now sat down to luncheon was that unhoped-for paradise in which, in the old days, he could not without a pang imagine that he would one day be saying to *their* butler those very words, "Is Madame ready yet?" which I now heard him utter with a touch of impatience mingled with self-satisfaction. No more than, probably, Swann himself could I succeed in knowing my own happiness, and when Gilberte once broke out: "Who would ever have said that the little girl you watched playing prisoners' base, without daring to speak to her, would one day be your greatest friend, and you would go to her house whenever you liked?" she spoke of a change the occurrence of which I could verify only by observing it from without, finding no trace of it within myself, for it was composed of two separate states on both of which I could not, without their ceasing to be distinct from one another, succeed in keeping my thoughts fixed at one and the same time.

And yet this house, because it had been so passionately desired by Swann, must have kept for him some of its attraction, if I was to judge by myself for whom it had not lost all its mystery. That singular charm in which I had for so long supposed the life of the Swanns to be bathed I had not completely exorcised from their house on making my own way into it; I had made it, that charm, recoil, overpowered as it must be by the sight of the stranger, the pariah that I had been, to whom now Mme. Swann pushed forward graciously for him to sit in it an armchair exquisite, hostile, scandalised; but all round me that charm, in my memory, I can still distinguish. Is it because, on those days on which M. and Mme. Swann invited me to luncheon, to go out afterwards with them and Gilberte, I imprinted with my gaze,— while I sat waiting for them there alone — on the carpet, the sofas, the tables, the screens, the pictures, the idea engraved upon my mind that Mme. Swann, or her husband, or Gilberte was about to enter the room? Is it because those objects have dwelt ever since in my memory side by side with the Swanns, and have gradually acquired something of their personal character? Is it because, knowing that the Swanns passed their existence among all those things, I made of all of them as it were emblems of the private lives, of those habits of the Swanns from which I had too long been excluded for them not to continue to appear strange to me, even when I was allowed the privilege of sharing in them? However it may be, always when I think of that drawing-room which Swann (not that the criticism implied on his part any intention to find fault with his wife’s taste) found so incongruous — because, while it was still planned and carried out in the style, half conservatory, half studio, which had been that of the rooms in which he had first known Odette, she had, none the less, begun to replace in its medley a quantity of the Chinese ornaments, which she now felt to be rather gimcrack, a trifle dowdy, by a swarm of little chairs and stools and things upholstered in old Louis XIV silks; not to mention the works of art brought by Swann himself from his house on the Quai d’Orléans — it has kept in my memory, on the contrary, that composite, heterogeneous room, a cohesion, a unity, an individual charm never possessed even by the most complete, the least spoiled of such collections that the past has bequeathed to us, or the most modern, alive and stamped with the imprint of a living personality; for we alone can, by our belief that they have an existence of their own, give to certain of the things that we see a soul which they afterwards keep, which they develop in our minds. All the ideas that I had formed of the hours, different from those that exist for other men, passed by the Swanns in that house which was to their life what the body is to the soul, and must give

expression to its singularity, all those ideas were rearranged, amalgamated — equally disturbing and indefinite throughout — in the arrangement of the furniture, the thickness of the carpets, the position of the windows, the ministrations of the servants. When, after luncheon, we went in the sunshine to drink our coffee in the great bay window of the drawing-room, while Mme. Swann was asking me how many lumps of sugar I took, it was not only the silk-covered stool which she pushed towards me that emitted, with the agonising charm that I had long ago felt — first among the pink hawthorn and then beside the clump of laurels — in the name of Gilberte, the hostility that her parents had shewn to me, which this little piece of furniture seemed to have so well understood, to have so completely shared that I felt myself unworthy, and found myself almost reluctant to set my feet on its defenceless cushion; a personality, a soul was latent there which linked it secretly to the light of two o'clock in the afternoon, so different from any other light, in the gulf in which there played about our feet its sparkling tide of gold out of which the bluish crags of sofas and vaporous carpet beaches emerged like enchanted islands; and there was nothing, even to the painting by Rubens hung above the chimney-piece, that was not endowed with the same quality and almost the same intensity of charm as the laced boots of M. Swann, and that hooded cape, the like of which I had so dearly longed to wear, whereas now Odette would beg her husband to go and put on another, so as to appear more smart, whenever I did them the honour of driving out with them. She too went away to change her dress — not heeding my protestations that no 'outdoor' clothes could be nearly so becoming as the marvellous garment of *crêpe-de-Chine* or silk, old rose, cherry-coloured, Tiepolo pink, white, mauve, green, red or yellow, plain or patterned, in which Mme. Swann had sat down to luncheon and which she was now going to take off. When I assured her that she ought to go out in that costume, she laughed, either in scorn of my ignorance or from delight in my compliment. She apologised for having so many wrappers, explaining that they were the only kind of dress in which she felt comfortable, and left us, to go and array herself in one of those regal toilets which imposed their majesty on all beholders, and yet among which I was sometimes summoned to decide which of them I preferred that she should put on.

In the Jardin d'Acclimatation, how proud I was when we had left the carriage to be walking by the side of Mme. Swann! While she strolled carelessly on, letting her cloak stream on the air behind her, I kept eyeing her with an admiring gaze to which she coquettishly responded in a lingering smile. And

now, were we to meet one or other of Gilberte's friends, boy or girl, who saluted us from afar, I would in my turn be looked upon by them as one of those happy creatures whose lot I had envied, one of those friends of Gilberte who knew her family and had a share in that other part of her life, the part which was not spent in the Champs-Elysées.

Often upon the paths of the Bois or the Jardin we passed, we were greeted by some great lady who was Swann's friend, whom he perchance did not see, so that his wife must rally him with a "Charles! Don't you see Mme. de Montmorency?" And Swann, with that amicable smile, bred of a long and intimate friendship, bared his head, but with a slow sweeping gesture, with a grace peculiarly his own. Sometimes the lady would stop, glad of an opportunity to shew Mme. Swann a courtesy which would involve no tiresome consequences, by which they all knew that she would never seek to profit, so thoroughly had Swann trained her in reserve. She had none the less acquired all the manners of polite society, and however smart, however stately the lady might be, Mme. Swann was invariably a match for her; halting for a moment before the friend whom her husband had recognised and was addressing, she would introduce us, Gilberte and myself, with so much ease of manner, would remain so free, so tranquil in her exercise of courtesy, that it would have been hard to say, looking at them both, which of the two was the aristocrat. The day on which we went to inspect the Cingalese, on our way home we saw coming in our direction, and followed by two others who seemed to be acting as her escort, an elderly but still attractive woman cloaked in a dark mantle and capped with a little bonnet tied beneath her chin with a pair of ribbons. "Ah! Here is someone who will interest you!" said Swann. The old lady, who had come within a few yards of us, now smiled at us with a caressing sweetness. Swann doffed his hat. Mme. Swann swept to the ground in a curtsey and made as if to kiss the hand of the lady, who, standing there like a Winterhalter portrait, drew her up again and kissed her cheek. "There, there; will you put your hat on, you!" she scolded Swann in a thick and almost growling voice, speaking like an old and familiar friend. "I am going to present you to Her Imperial Highness," Mme. Swann whispered. Swann drew me aside for a moment while his wife talked of the weather and of the animals recently added to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, with the Princess. "That is the Princesse Mathilde," he told me; "you know who' I mean, the friend of Flaubert, Sainte-Beuve, Dumas. Just fancy, she's the niece of Napoleon I. She had offers of marriage from Napoleon III and the Emperor of Russia. Isn't that interesting? Talk to her a little. But I hope she won't keep us

standing here for an hour!... I met Taine the other day," he went on, addressing the Princess, "and he told me that your Highness was vexed with him." "He's behaved like a perfect peeg!" she said gruffly, pronouncing the word *cochon* as though she referred to Joan of Arc's contemporary, Bishop Cauchon. "After his article on the Emperor I left my card on him with p. p. c. on it." I felt the surprise that one feels on opening the Correspondence of that Duchesse d'Orléans who was by birth a Princess Palatine. And indeed Princesse Mathilde, animated by sentiments so entirely French, expressed them with a straightforward bluntness that recalled the Germany of an older generation, and was inherited, doubtless, from her Wuerttemberg mother. This somewhat rude and almost masculine frankness she softened, as soon as she began to smile, with an Italian languor. And the whole person was clothed in a dress so typically 'Second Empire' that — for all that the Princess wore it simply and solely, no doubt, from attachment to the fashions that she had loved when she was young — she seemed to have deliberately planned to avoid the slightest discrepancy in historic colour, and to be satisfying the expectations of those who looked to her to evoke the memory of another age. I whispered to Swann to ask her whether she had known Musset. "Very slightly, sir," was the answer, given in a tone which seemed to feign annoyance at the question, and of course it was by way of a joke that she called Swann 'Sir,' since they were intimate friends. "I had him to dine once. I had invited him for seven o'clock. At half-past seven, as he had not appeared, we sat down to dinner. He arrived at eight, bowed to me, took his seat, never opened his lips, went off after dinner without letting me hear the sound of his voice. Of course, he was dead drunk. That hardly encouraged me to make another attempt." We were standing a little way off, Swann and I. "I hope this little audience is not going to last much longer," he muttered, "the soles of my feet are hurting. I cannot think why my wife keeps on making conversation. When we get home it will be she that complains of being tired, and she knows I simply cannot go on standing like this." For Mme. Swann, who had had the news from Mme. Bontemps, was in the course of telling the Princess that the Government, having at last begun to realise the depth of its depravity, had decided to send her an invitation to be present on the platform in a few days' time, when the Tsar Nicholas was to visit the Invalides. But the Princess who, in spite of appearances, in spite of the character of her circle, which consisted mainly of artists and literary people, had remained at heart and shewed herself, whenever she had to take action, the niece of Napoleon, replied: "Yes, Madame, I received it this morning, and I sent it back to the Minister, who must have had it by now. I

told him that I had no need of an invitation to go to the Invalides. If the Government desires my presence there, it will not be on the platform, it will be in our vault, where the Emperor's tomb is. I have no need of a card to admit me there. I have my keys. I go in and out when I choose. The Government has only to let me know whether it wishes me to be present or not. But if I do go to the Invalides, it will be down below there or nowhere at all." At that moment we were saluted, Mme. Swann and I, by a young man who greeted her without stopping, and whom I was not aware that she knew; it was Bloch. I inquired about him, and was told that he had been introduced to her by Mme. Bontemps, and that he was employed in the Minister's secretariat, which was news to me. Anyhow, she could not have seen him often — or perhaps she had not cared to utter the name, hardly 'smart' enough for her liking, of Bloch, for she told me that he was called M. Moreul. I assured her that she was mistaken, that his name was Bloch. The Princess gathered up the train that flowed out behind her, while Mme. Swann gazed at it with admiring eyes. "It is only a fur that the Emperor of Russia sent me," she explained, "and as I have just been to see him I put it on, so as to shew him that I'd managed to have it made up as a mantle." "I hear that Prince Louis has joined the Russian Army; the Princess will be very sad at losing him," went on Mme. Swann, not noticing her husband's signals of distress. "That was a fine thing to do. As I said to him, 'Just because there's been a soldier, before, in the family, that's no reason!'" replied the Princess, alluding with this abrupt simplicity to Napoleon the Great. But Swann could hold out no longer. "Ma'am, it is I that am going to play the Prince, and ask your permission to retire; but, you see, my wife has not been so well, and I do not like her to stand still for any time." Mme. Swann curtseyed again, and the Princess conferred upon us all a celestial smile, which she seemed to have summoned out of the past, from among the graces of her girlhood, from the evenings at Compiègne, a smile which glided, sweet and unbroken, over her hitherto so sullen face; then she went on her way, followed by the two ladies in waiting, who had confined themselves, in the manner of interpreters, of children's or invalids' nurses, to punctuating our conversation with insignificant sentences and superfluous explanations. "You should go and write your name in her book, one day this week," Mme. Swann counselled me. "One doesn't leave cards upon these 'Royalties,' as the English call them, but she will invite you to her house if you put your name down."

Sometimes in those last days of winter we would go, before proceeding on our expedition, into one of the small picture-shows that were being given at that

time, where Swann, as a collector of mark, was greeted with special deference by the dealers in whose galleries they were held. And in that still wintry weather the old longing to set out for the South of France and Venice would be reawakened in me by those rooms in which a springtime, already well advanced, and a blazing sun cast violet shadows upon the roseate Alpilles and gave the intense transparency of emeralds to the Grand Canal. If the weather were inclement, we would go to a concert or a theatre, and afterwards to one of the fashionable tearooms. There, whenever Mme. Swann had anything to say to me which she did not wish the people at the next table, or even the waiters who brought our tea, to understand, she would say it in English, as though that had been a secret language known to our two selves alone. As it happened everyone in the place knew English — I only had not yet learned the language, and was obliged to say so to Mme. Swann in order that she might cease to make, on the people who were drinking tea or were serving us with it, remarks which I guessed to be uncomplimentary without either my understanding or the person referred to losing a single word.

Once, in the matter of an afternoon at the theatre, Gilberte gave me a great surprise. It was precisely the day of which she had spoken to me some time back, on which fell the anniversary of her grandfather's death. We were to go, she and I, with her governess, to hear selections from an opera, and Gilberte had dressed with a view to attending this performance, and wore the air of indifference with which she was in the habit of treating whatever we might be going to do, with the comment that it might be anything in the world, no matter what, provided that it amused me and had her parents' approval. Before luncheon, her mother drew us aside to tell us that her father was vexed at the thought of our going to a theatre on that day. This seemed to me only natural. Gilberte remained impassive, but grew pale with an anger which she was unable to conceal; still she uttered not a word. When M. Swann joined us his wife took him to the other end of the room and said something in his ear. He called Gilberte, and they went together into the next room. We could hear their raised voices. And yet I could not bring myself to believe that Gilberte, so submissive, so loving, so thoughtful, would resist her father's appeal, on such a day and for so trifling a matter. At length Swann reappeared with her, saying: "You heard what I said. Now you may do as you like."

Gilberte's features remained compressed in a frown throughout luncheon, after which we retired to her room. Then suddenly, without hesitating and as though she had never at any point hesitated over her course of action: "Two

o’clock!” she exclaimed. “You know the concert begins at half past.” And she told her governess to make haste.

“But,” I reminded her, “won’t your father be cross with you?”

“Not the least little bit!”

“Surely, he was afraid it would look odd, because of the anniversary.”

“What difference can it make to me what people think? I think it’s perfectly absurd to worry about other people in matters of sentiment. We feel things for ourselves, not for the public. Mademoiselle has very few pleasures; she’s been looking forward to going to this concert. I am not going to deprive her of it just to satisfy public opinion.”

“But, Gilberte,” I protested, taking her by the arm, “it is not to satisfy public opinion, it is to please your father.”

“You are not going to pass remarks upon my conduct, I hope,” she said sharply, plucking her arm away.

***

A favour still more precious than their taking me with them to the Jardin d’Acclimatation, the Swanns did not exclude me even from their friendship with Bergotte, which had been at the root of the attraction that I had found in them when, before I had even seen Gilberte, I reflected that her intimacy with that godlike elder would have made her, for me, the most passionately enthralling of friends, had not the disdain that I was bound to inspire in her forbidden me to hope that she would ever take me, in his company, to visit the towns that he loved. And lo, one day, came an invitation from Mme. Swann to a big luncheon-party. I did not know who else were to be the guests. On my arrival I was disconcerted, as I crossed the hall, by an alarming incident. Mme. Swann seldom missed an opportunity of adopting any of those customs which pass as fashionable for a season, and then, failing to find support, are speedily abandoned (as, for instance, many years before, she had had her ‘private hansom,’ or now had, printed in English upon a card inviting you to luncheon, the words, ‘To meet,’ followed by the name of some more or less important personage). Often enough these usages implied nothing mysterious and required no initiation. Take, for instance, a minute innovation of those days, imported from England; Odette had made her husband have some visiting cards printed on which the name Charles Swann was preceded by ‘Mr.’. After the first visit that I paid her, Mme. Swann had left at my door one of these ‘pasteboards,’ as she

called them. No one had ever left a card on me before; I felt at once so much pride, emotion, gratitude that, scraping together all the money I possessed, I ordered a superb basket of camellias and had it sent to Mme. Swann. I implored my father to go and leave a card on her, but first, quickly, to have some printed on which his name should bear the prefix 'Mr.'. He vouchsafed neither of my prayers; I was in despair for some days, and then asked myself whether he might not after all have been right. But this use of 'Mr.,' if it meant nothing, was at least intelligible. Not so with another that was revealed to me on the occasion of this luncheon-party, but revealed without any indication of its purport. At the moment when I was about to step from the hall into the drawing-room the butler handed me a thin, oblong envelope upon which my name was inscribed. In my surprise I thanked him; but I eyed the envelope with misgivings. I no more knew what I was expected to do with it than a foreigner knows what to do with one of those little utensils that they lay by his place at a Chinese banquet. I noticed that it was gummed down; I was afraid of appearing indiscreet, were I to open it then and there; and so I thrust it into my pocket with an air of knowing all about it. Mme. Swann had written to me a few days before, asking me to come to luncheon with 'just a few people.' There were, however, sixteen of us, among whom I never suspected for a moment that I was to find Bergotte. Mme. Swann, who had already 'named' me, as she called it, to several of her guests, suddenly, after my name, in the same tone that she had used in uttering it (in fact, as though we were merely two of the guests at her party, who ought each to feel equally flattered on meeting the other), pronounced that of the sweet Singer with the snowy locks. The name Bergotte made me jump like the sound of a revolver fired at me point blank, but instinctively, for appearance's sake, I bowed; there, straight in front of me, as by one of those conjurers whom we see standing whole and unharmed, in their frock coats, in the smoke of a pistol shot out of which a pigeon has just fluttered, my salute was returned by a young common little thick-set peering person, with a red nose curled like a snail-shell and a black tuft on his chin. I was cruelly disappointed, for what had just vanished in the dust of the explosion was not only the feeble old man, of whom no vestige now remained; there was also the beauty of an immense work which I had contrived to enshrine in the frail and hallowed organism that I had constructed, like a temple, expressly for itself, but for which no room was to be found in the squat figure, packed tight with blood-vessels, bones, muscles, sinews, of the little man with the snub nose and black beard who stood before me. All the Bergotte whom I had slowly and delicately elaborated for myself, drop by drop, like a stalactite,

out of the transparent beauty of his books, ceased (I could see at once) to be of any use, the moment I was obliged to include in him the snail-shell nose and to utilise the little black beard; just as we must reject as worthless the solution of a problem the terms of which we have not read in full, having failed to observe that the total must amount to a specified figure. The nose and beard were elements similarly ineluctable, and all the more aggravating in that, while forcing me to reconstruct entirely the personage of Bergotte, they seemed further to imply, to produce, to secrete incessantly a certain quality of mind, alert and self-satisfied, which was not in the picture, for such a mind had no connexion whatever with the sort of intelligence that was diffused throughout those books, so intimately familiar to me, which were permeated by a gentle and godlike wisdom. Starting from them, I should never have arrived at that snail-shell nose; but starting from the nose, which did not appear to be in the slightest degree ashamed of itself, but stood out alone there like a grotesque ornament fastened on his face, I must proceed in a diametrically opposite direction from the work of Bergotte, I must arrive, it would seem, at the mentality of a busy and preoccupied engineer, of the sort who when you accost him in the street thinks it correct to say: “Thanks, and you?” before you have actually inquired of them how they are, or else, if you assure them that you have been charmed to make their acquaintance, respond with an abbreviation which they imagine to be effective, intelligent and up-to-date, inasmuch as it avoids any waste of precious time on vain formalities: “Same here!” Names are, no doubt, but whimsical draughtsmen, giving us of people as well as of places sketches so little like the reality that we often experience a kind of stupor when we have before our eyes, in place of the imagined, the visible world (which, for that matter, is not the true world, our senses being little more endowed than our imagination with the art of portraiture, so little, indeed, that the final and approximately lifelike pictures which we manage to obtain of reality are at least as different from the visible world as that was from the imagined). But in Bergotte’s case, my preconceived idea of him from his name troubled me far less than my familiarity with his work, to which I was obliged to attach, as to the cord of a balloon, the man with the little beard, without knowing whether it would still have the strength to raise him from the ground. It seemed quite clear, however, that it really was he who had written the books that I had so greatly enjoyed, for Mme. Swann having thought it incumbent upon her to tell him of my admiration for one of these, he shewed no surprise that she should have mentioned this to him rather than to any other of the party, nor did he seem to regard her action as due to a

misapprehension, but, swelling out the frock coat which he had put on in honour of all these distinguished guests with a body distended in anticipation of the coming meal, while his mind was completely occupied by other, more real and more important considerations, it was only as at some finished episode in his early life, as though one had made an illusion to a costume of the Duc de Guise which he had worn, one season, at a fancy dress ball, that he smiled as he bore his mind back to the idea of his books; which at once began to fall in my estimation (dragging down with them the whole value of Beauty, of the world, of life itself), until they seemed to have been merely the casual amusement of a man with a little beard. I told myself that he must have taken great pains over them, but that, if he had lived upon an island surrounded by beds of pearl-oysters, he would instead have devoted himself to, and would have made a fortune out of, the pearling trade. His work no longer appeared to me so inevitable. And then I asked myself whether originality did indeed prove that great writers were gods, ruling each one over a kingdom that was his alone, or whether all that was not rather make-believe, whether the differences between one man's book and another's were not the result of their respective labours rather than the expression of a radical and essential difference between two contrasted personalities.

Meanwhile we had taken our places at the table. By the side of my plate I found a carnation, the stalk of which was wrapped in silver paper. It embarrassed me less than the envelope that had been handed to me in the hall, which, however, I had completely forgotten. This custom, strange as it was to me, became more intelligible when I saw all the male guests take up the similar carnations that were lying by their plates and slip them into the buttonholes of their coats. I did as they had done, with the air of spontaneity that a free-thinker assumes in church, who is not familiar with the order of service but rises when everyone else rises and kneels a moment after everyone else is on his knees. Another usage, equally strange to me but less ephemeral, disquieted me more. On the other side of my plate was a smaller plate, on which was heaped a blackish substance which I did not then know to be caviare. I was ignorant of what was to be done with it but firmly determined not to let it enter my mouth.

Bergotte was sitting not far from me and I could hear quite well everything that he said. I understood then the impression that M. de Norpois had formed of him. He had indeed a peculiar 'organ'; there is nothing that so much alters the material qualities of the voice as the presence of thought behind what one is saying; the resonance of one's diphthongs, the energy of one's labials are

profoundly affected — in fact, one's whole way of speaking. His seemed to me to differ entirely from his way of writing, and even the things that he said from those with which he filled his books. But the voice issues from behind a mask through which it is not powerful enough to make us recognise, at first sight, a face which we have seen uncovered in the speaker's literary style. At certain pobts in the conversation, when Bergotte, by force of habit, began to talk in a way which no one but M. de Norpois would have thought affected or unpleasant, it was a long time before I discovered an exact correspondence with the parts of his books in which his form became so poetic and so musical. At those points I could see in what he was saying a plastic beauty independent of whatever his sentences might mean, and as human speech reflects the human soul, though without expressing it as does literary style, Bergotte appeared almost to be talking nonsense, intoning certain words and, if he were secretly pursuing, beneath them, a single image, stringing them together uninterruptedly on one continuous note, with a wearisome monotony. So that a pretentious, emphatic and monotonous opening was a sign of the rare aesthetic value of what he was saying, and an effect, in his conversation, of the same power which, in his books, produced that harmonious flow of imagery. I had had all the more difficulty in discovering this at first since what he said at such moments, precisely because it was the authentic utterance of Bergotte, had not the appearance of being Bergotte's. It was an abundant crop of clearly defined ideas, not included in that 'Bergotte manner' which so many story-tellers had appropriated to themselves; and this dissimilarity was probably but another aspect — made out with difficulty through the stream of conversation, as an eclipse is seen through a smoked glass — of the fact that when one read a page of Bergotte it was never just what would have been written by any of those lifeless imitators who, nevertheless, in newspapers and in books, adorned their prose with so many 'Bergottish' images and ideas. This difference in style arose from the fact that what was meant by 'Bergottism' was, first and foremost, a priceless element of truth hidden in the heart of everything, whence it was extracted by that great writer, by virtue of his genius, and that this extraction, and not simply the perpetration of 'Bergottisms,' was my sweet Singer's aim in writing. Though, it must be added, he continued to perpetrate them in spite of himself, and because he was Bergotte, so that, in one sense, every fresh beauty in his work was the little drop of Bergotte buried at the heart of a thing which he had distilled from it. But if, for that reason, each of those beauties was related to all the rest, and had a 'family likeness,' yet each remained separate and individual, as was the act

of discovery that had brought it to the light of day; new, and consequently different from what was called the Bergotte manner, which was a loose synthesis of all the ‘Bergottisms’ already invented and set forth by him in writing, with no indication by which men who lacked genius might forecast what would be his next discovery. So it is with all great writers, the beauty of their language is as incalculable as that of a woman whom we have never seen; it is creative, because it is applied to an external object of which, and not of their language or its beauty, they are thinking, to which they have not yet given expression. An author of memorials of our time, wishing to write without too obviously seeming to be writing like Saint-Simon, might, on occasion, give us the first line of his portrait of Villars: “He was a rather tall man, dark... with an alert, open, expressive physiognomy,” but what law of determinism could bring him to the discovery of Saint-Simon’s next line, which begins with “and, to tell the truth, a trifle mad”? The true variety is in this abundance of real and unexpected elements, in the branch loaded with blue flowers which thrusts itself forward, against all reason, from the spring hedgerow that seemed already overcharged with blossoms, whereas the purely formal imitation of variety (and one might advance the same argument for all the other qualities of style) is but a barren uniformity, that is to say the very antithesis of variety, and cannot, in the work of imitators, give the illusion or recall other examples of variety save to a reader who has not acquired the sense of it from the masters themselves.

And so — just as Bergotte’s way of speaking would no doubt have been charming if he himself had been merely an amateur repeating imitations of Bergotte, whereas it was attached to the mind of Bergotte, at work and in action, by essential ties which the ear did not at once distinguish — so it was because Bergotte applied that mind with precision to the reality which pleased him that his language had in it something positive, something over-rich, disappointing those who expected to hear him speak only of the ‘eternal torrent of forms,’ and of the ‘mystic thrills of beauty.’ Moreover the quality, always rare and new, of what he wrote was expressed in his conversation by so subtle a manner of approaching a question, ignoring every aspect of it that was already familiar, that he appeared to be seizing hold of an unimportant detail, to be quite wrong about it, to be speaking in paradox, so that his ideas seemed as often as not to be in confusion, for each of us finds lucidity only in those ideas which are in the same state of confusion as his own. Besides, as all novelty depends upon the elimination, first, of the stereotyped attitude to which we have grown accustomed, and which has seemed to us to be reality itself, every new

conversation, as well as all original painting and music, must always appear laboured and tedious. It is founded upon figures of speech with which we are not familiar, the speaker appears to us to be talking entirely in metaphors; and this wearies us, and gives us the impression of a want of truth. (After all, the old forms of speech must in their time have been images difficult to follow when the listener was not yet cognisant of the universe which they depicted. But he has long since decided that this must be the real universe, and so relies confidently upon it.) So when Bergotte — and his figures appear simple enough to-day — said of Cottard that he was a mannikin in a bottle, always trying to rise to the surface, and of Brichot that "to him even more than to Mme. Swann the arrangement of his hair was a matter for anxious deliberation, because, in his twofold preoccupation over his profile and his reputation, he had always to make sure that it was so brushed as to give him the air at once of a lion and of a philosopher," one immediately felt the strain, and sought a foothold upon something which one called more concrete, meaning by that more ordinary. These unintelligible words, issuing from the mask that I had before my eyes, it was indeed to the writer whom I admired that they must be attributed, and yet they could not have been inserted among his books, in the form of a puzzle set in a series of different puzzles, they occupied another plane and required a transposition by means of which, one day, when I was repeating to myself certain phrases that I had heard Bergotte use, I discovered in them the whole machinery of his literary style, the different elements of which I was able to recognise and to name in this spoken discourse which had struck me as being so different.

From a less immediate point of view the special way, a little too meticulous, too intense, that he had of pronouncing certain words, certain adjectives which were constantly recurring in his conversation, and which he never uttered without a certain emphasis, giving to each of their syllables a separate force and intoning the last syllable (as for instance the word *visage*, which he always used in preference to *figure*, and enriched with a number of superfluous v's and s's and g's, which seemed all to explode from his outstretched palm at such moments) corresponded exactly to the fine passages in which, in his prose, he brought those favourite words into the light, preceded by a sort of margin and composed in such a way in the metrical whole of the phrase that the reader was obliged, if he were not to make a false quantity, to give to each of them its full value. And yet one did not find in the speech of Bergotte a certain luminosity which in his books, as in those of some other writers, often modified in the

written phrase the appearance of its words. This was doubtless because that light issues from so profound a depth that its rays do not penetrate to our spoken words in the hours in which, thrown open to others by the act of conversation, we are to a certain extent closed against ourselves. In this respect, there were more intonations, there was more accent in his books than in his talk; an accent independent of the beauty of style, which the author himself has possibly not perceived, for it is not separable from his most intimate personality. It was this accent which, at the moments when, in his books, Bergotte was entirely natural, gave a rhythm to the words — often at such times quite insignificant — that he wrote. This accent is not marked on the printed page, there is nothing there to indicate it, and yet it comes of its own accord to his phrases, one cannot pronounce them in any other way, it is what was most ephemeral and at the same time most profound in the writer, and it is what will bear witness to his true nature, what will say whether, despite all the austerity that he has expressed he was gentle, despite all his sensuality sentimental.

Certain peculiarities of elocution, faint traces of which were to be found in Bergotte's conversation, were not exclusively his own; for when, later on, I came to know his brothers and sisters, I found those peculiarities much more accentuated in their speech. There was something abrupt and harsh in the closing words of a light and spirited utterance, something faint and dying at the end of a sad one. Swann, who had known the Master as a boy, told me that in those days one used to hear on his lips, just as much as on his brothers' and sisters', those inflexions, almost a family type, shouts of violent merriment interspersed with murmurings of a long-drawn melancholy, and that in the room in which they all played together he used to perform his part, better than any of them, in their symphonies, alternately deafening and subdued. However characteristic it may be, the sound that escapes from human lips is fugitive and does not survive the speaker. But it was not so with the pronunciation of the Bergotte family. For if it is difficult ever to understand, even in the Meistersinger, how an artist can invent music by listening to the twittering of birds, yet Bergotte had transposed and fixed in his written language that manner of dwelling on words which repeat themselves in shouts of joy, or fall, drop by drop, in melancholy sighs. There are in his books just such closing phrases where the accumulated sounds are prolonged (as in the last chords of the overture of an opera which cannot come to an end, and repeats several times over its supreme cadence before the conductor finally lays down his baton), in which, later on, I was to find a musical equivalent for those phonetic 'brasses' of the Bergotte family. But in his own

case, from the moment in which he transferred them to his books, he ceased instinctively to make use of them in his speech. From the day on which he had begun to write — all the more markedly, therefore, in the later years in which I first knew him — his voice had lost this orchestration for ever.

These young Bergottes — the future writer and his brothers and sisters — were doubtless in no way superior, far from it, to other young people, more refined, more intellectual than themselves, who found the Bergottes rather ‘loud that is to say a trifle vulgar, irritating one by the witticisms which characterised the tone, at once pretentious and puerile, of their household. But genius, and even what is only great talent, springs less from seeds of intellect and social refinement superior to those of other people than from the faculty of transposing, and so transforming them. To heat a liquid over an electric lamp one requires to have not the strongest lamp possible, but one of which the current can cease to illuminate, can be diverted so as instead of light to give heat. To mount the skies it is not necessary to have the most powerful of motors, one must have a motor which, instead of continuing to run along the earth’s surface, intersecting with a vertical line the horizontal which it began by following, is capable of converting its speed into ascending force. Similarly the men who produce works of genius are not those who live in the most delicate atmosphere, whose conversation is most brilliant or their culture broadest, but those who have had the power, ceasing in a moment to live only for themselves, to make use of their personality as of a mirror, m such a way that their life, however unimportant it may be socially, and even, in a sense, intellectually speaking, is reflected by it, genius consisting in the reflective power of the writer and not in the intrinsic quality of the scene reflected. The day on which young Bergotte succeeded in shewing to the world of his readers the tasteless household in which he had passed his childhood, and the not very amusing conversations between himself and his brothers, on that day he climbed far above the friends of his family, more intellectual and more distinguished than himself; they in their fine Rolls Royces might return home expressing due contempt for the vulgarity of the Bergottes; but he, with his modest engine which had at last left the ground, he soared above their heads.

But there were other characteristics of his elocution which it was not with the members of his family, but with certain contemporary writers, that he must share. Younger men, who were beginning to repudiate him as a master and disclaimed any intellectual affinity to him in themselves, displayed their affinity without knowing it when they made use of the same adverbs, the same

prepositions that he incessantly repeated, when they constructed their sentences in the same way, spoke in the same quiescent, lingering tone, by a reaction from the eloquent, easy language of an earlier generation. Perhaps these young men — we shall come across some of whom this may be said — had never known Bergotte. But his way of thinking, inoculated into them, had led them to those alterations of syntax and of accent which bear a necessary relation to originality of mind. A relation which, incidentally, requires to be traced. Thus Bergotte, if he owed nothing to any man for his manner of writing, derived his manner of speaking from one of his early associates, a marvellous talker to whose ascendancy he had succumbed, whom he imitated, unconsciously, in his conversation, but who himself, being less gifted, had never written any really outstanding book. So that if one had been in quest of originality in speech, Bergotte must have been labelled a disciple, a writer at second-hand, whereas, influenced by his friend only so far as talk went, he had been original and creative in his writings. Doubtless again, so as to distinguish himself from the previous generation, too fond as it had been of abstractions, of weighty commonplaces, when Bergotte wished to speak favourably of a book, what he would bring into prominence, what he would quote with approval would always be some scene that furnished the reader with an image, some picture that had no rational significance. “Ah, yes!” he would exclaim, “it is quite admirable! There is a little girl in an orange shawl. It is excellent!” or again, “Oh, yes, there is a passage in which there is a regiment marching along the street; yes, it is excellent!” As for style, he was not altogether of his time (though he remained quite exclusively of his race, abominating Tolstoy, George Eliot, Ibsen and Dostoievsky), for the word that always came to his lips when he wished to praise the style of any writer was ‘mild.’ “Yes, you know I like Chateaubriand better in *Atala*than in *René*; he seems to me to be ‘milder.’” He said the word like a doctor who, when his patient assures him that milk will give him indigestion, answers, “But, you know, it’s very ‘mild’.” And it is true that there was in Bergotte’s style a kind of harmony similar to that for which the ancients used to praise certain of their orators in terms which we now find it hard to understand, accustomed as we are to our own modern tongues in which effects of that kind are not sought.

He would say also, with a shy smile, of pages of his own for which some one had expressed admiration: “I think it is more or less true, more or less accurate; it may be of some value perhaps,” but he would say this simply from modesty, as a woman to whom one has said that her dress, or her daughter, is

charming replies, “It is comfortable,” or “She is a good girl.” But the constructive instinct was too deeply implanted in Bergotte for him not to be aware that the sole proof that he had built usefully and on the lines of truth lay in the pleasure that his work had given, to himself first of all and afterwards to his readers. Only many years later, when he no longer had any talent, whenever he wrote anything with which he was not satisfied, so as not to have to suppress it, as he ought to have done, so as to be able to publish it with a clear conscience he would repeat, but to himself this time: “After all, it is more or less accurate, it must be of some value to the country.” So that the phrase murmured long ago among his admirers by the insincere voice of modesty came in the end to be whispered in the secrecy of his heart by the uneasy tongue of pride. And the same words which had served Bergotte as an unwanted excuse for the excellence of his earliest works became as it were an ineffective consolation to him for the hopeless mediocrity of the latest.

A kind of austerity of taste which he had, a kind of determination to write nothing of which he could not say that it was ‘mild,’ which had made people for so many years regard him as a sterile and precious artist, a chiseller of exquisite trifles, was on the contrary the secret of his strength, for habit forms the style of the writer just as much as the character of the man, and the author who has more than once been patient to attain, in the expression of his thoughts, to a certain kind of attractiveness, in so doing lays down unalterably the boundaries of his talent, just as if he yields too often to pleasure, to laziness, to the fear of being put to trouble, he will find himself describing in terms which no amount of revision can modify, the forms of his own vices and the limits of his virtue.

If, however, despite all the analogies which I was to perceive later on between the writer and the man, I had not at first sight, in Mme. Swann’s drawing-room, believed that this could be Bergotte, the author of so many divine books, who stood before me, perhaps I was not altogether wrong, for he himself did not, in the strict sense of the word, ‘believe’ it either. He did not believe it because he shewed a great assiduity in the presence of fashionable people (and yet he was not a snob), of literary men and journalists who were vastly inferior to himself. Of course he had long since learned, from the suffrage of his readers, that he had genius, compared to which social position and official rank were as nothing. He had learned that he had genius, but he did not believe it because he continued to simulate deference towards mediocre writers in order to succeed, shortly, in becoming an Academician, whereas the Academy and the Faubourg Saint-Germain have no more to do with that part of the Eternal Mind which is

the author of the works of Bergotte than with the law of causality or the idea of God. That also he knew, but as a kleptomaniac knows, without profiting by the knowledge, that it is wrong to steal. And the man with the little beard and snail-shell nose knew and used all the tricks of the gentleman who pockets your spoons, in his efforts to reach the coveted academic chair, or some duchess or other who could dispose of several votes at the election, but while on his way to them he would endeavour to make sure that no one who would consider the pursuit of such an object a vice in him should see what he was doing. He was only half-successful; one could hear, alternating with the speech of the true Bergotte, that of the other Bergotte, ambitious, utterly selfish, who thought it not worth his while to speak of any but his powerful, rich or noble friends, so as to enhance his own position, he who in his books, when he was really himself, had so well portrayed the charm, pure as a mountain spring, of poverty.

As for those other vices to which M. de Norpois had alluded, that almost incestuous love, which was made still worse, people said, by a want of delicacy in the matter of money, if they contradicted, in a shocking manner, the tendency of his latest novels, in which he shewed everywhere a regard for what was right and proper so painfully rigid that the most innocent pleasures of their heroes were poisoned by it, and that even the reader found himself turning their pages with a sense of acute discomfort, and asked himself whether it was possible to go on living even the quietest of lives, those vices did not at all prove, supposing that they were fairly imputed to Bergotte, that his literature was a lie and all his sensitiveness mere play-acting. Just as in pathology certain conditions similar in appearance are due, some to an excess, others to an insufficiency of tension, of secretion and so forth, so there may be vice arising from supersensitiveness just as much as from the lack of it. Perhaps it is only in really vicious lives that the moral problem can arise in all its disquieting strength. And of this problem the artist finds a solution in the terms not of his own personal life but of what is for him the true life, a general, a literary solution. As the great Doctors of the Church began often, without losing their virtue, by acquainting themselves with the sins of all mankind, out of which they extracted their own personal sanctity, so great artists often, while being thoroughly wicked, make use of their vices in order to arrive at a conception of the moral law that is binding upon us all. It is the vices (or merely the weaknesses and follies) of the circle in which they live, the meaningless conversation, the frivolous or shocking lives of their daughters, the infidelity of their wives, or their own misdeeds that writers have most often castigated in their books, without, however, thinking it necessary to alter their

domestic economy or to improve the tone of their households. And this contrast had never before been so striking as it was in Bergotte's time, because, on the one hand, in proportion as society grew more corrupt, our notions of morality were increasingly exalted, while on the other hand the public were now told far more than they had ever hitherto known about the private lives of literary men; and on certain evenings in the theatre people would point out the author whom I had so greatly admired at Combray, sitting at the back of a box the mere composition of which seemed an oddly humorous, or perhaps keenly ironical commentary upon — a brazen-faced denial of — the thesis which he had just been maintaining in his latest book. Not that anything which this or that casual informant could tell me was of much use in helping me to settle the question of the goodness or wickedness of Bergotte. An intimate friend would furnish proofs of his hardheartedness; then a stranger would cite some instance (touching, since he had evidently wished it to remain hidden) of his real depth of feeling. He had behaved cruelly to his wife. But in a village inn, where he had gone to spend the night, he had stayed on to watch over a poor woman who had tried to drown herself, and when he was obliged to continue his journey had left a large sum of money with the landlord, so that he should not turn the poor creature out, but see that she got proper attention. Perhaps the more the great writer was developed in Bergotte at the expense of the little man with the beard, so much the more his own personal life was drowned in the flood of all the lives that he imagined, until he no longer felt himself obliged to perform certain practical duties, for which he had substituted the duty of imagining those other lives. But at the same time, because he imagined the feelings of others as completely as if they had been his own, whenever he was obliged, for any reason, to talk to some person who had been unfortunate (that is to say in a casual encounter) he would, in doing so, take up not his own personal standpoint but that of the sufferer himself, a standpoint in which he would have been horrified by the speech of those who continued to think of their own petty concerns in the presence of another's grief. With the result that he gave rise everywhere to justifiable rancour and to undying gratitude.

Above all, he was a man who in his heart of hearts loved nothing really except certain images and (like a miniature set in the floor of a casket) the composing and painting of them in words. For a trifle that some one had sent him, if that trifle gave him the opportunity of introducing one or two of these images, he would be prodigal in the expression of his gratitude, while shewing none whatever for an expensive present. And if he had had to plead before a

tribunal, he would inevitably have chosen his words not for the effect that they might have on the judge but with an eye to certain images which the judge would certainly never have perceived.

That first day on which I met him with Gilberte's parents, I mentioned to Bergotte that I had recently been to hear Berma in *Phèdre*; and he told me that in the scene in which she stood with her arm raised to the level of her shoulder — one of those very scenes that had been greeted with such applause — she had managed to suggest with great nobility of art certain classical figures which, quite possibly, she had never even seen, a Hesperid carved in the same attitude upon a metope at Olympia, and also the beautiful primitive virgins on the Erechtheum.

"It may be sheer divination, and yet I fancy that she visits the museums. It would be interesting to 'establish' that." ('Establish' was one of those regular Bergotte expressions, and one which various young men who had never met him had caught from him, speaking like him by some sort of telepathic suggestion.)

"Do you mean the Cariatides?" asked Swann.

"No, no," said Bergotte, "except in the scene where she confesses her passion to Oenone, where she moves her hand exactly like Hegeso on the stele in the Ceramic, it is a far more primitive art that she revives. I was referring to the Korai of the old Erechtheum, and I admit that there is perhaps nothing quite so remote from the art of Racine, but there are so many things already in *Phèdre*... that one more... Oh, and then, yes, she is really charming, that little sixth century Phaedra, the rigidity of the arm, the lock of hair 'frozen into marble,' yes, you know, it is wonderful of her to have discovered all that. There is a great deal more antiquity in it than in most of the books they are labelling 'antique' this year."

As Bergotte had in one of his volumes addressed a famous invocation to these archaic statues, the words that he was now uttering were quite intelligible to me and gave me a fresh reason for taking an interest in Berma's acting. I tried to picture her again in my mind, as she had looked in that scene in which I remembered that she had raised her arm to the level of her shoulder. And I said to myself, "There we have the Hesperid of Olympia; there we have the sister of those adorable suppliants on the Acropolis; there is indeed nobility in art!" But if these considerations were to enhance for me the beauty of Berma's gesture, Bergotte should have put them into my head before the performance. Then, while that attitude of the actress was actually existing in flesh and blood before my eyes, at that moment in which the thing that was happening had still the

substance of reality, I might have tried to extract from it the idea of archaic sculpture. But of Berma in that scene all that I retained was a memory which was no longer liable to modification, slender as a picture which lacks that abundant perspective of the present tense where one is free to delve and can always discover something new, a picture to which one cannot retrospectively give a meaning that is not subject to verification and correction from without. At this point Mme. Swann joined in the conversation, asking me whether Gilberte had remembered to give me what Bergotte had written about *Phèdre*, and adding, "My daughter is such a scatter-brain!" Bergotte smiled modestly and protested that they were only a few pages, of no importance. "But it is perfectly charming, that little pamphlet, that little 'tract' of yours!" Mme. Swann assured him, to shew that she was a good hostess, to make the rest of us think that she had read Bergotte's essay, and also because she liked not merely to flatter Bergotte, but to make a selection for herself out of what he wrote, to control his writing. And it must be admitted that she did inspire him, though not in the way that she supposed. But when all is said there is, between what constituted the smartness of Mme. Swann's drawing-room and a whole side of Bergotte's work, so close a correspondence that either of them might serve among elderly men to-day, as a commentary upon the other.

I let myself go in telling him what my impressions had been. Often Bergotte disagreed, but he allowed me to go on talking. I told him that I had liked the green light which was turned on when Phaedra raised her arm. "Ah! The designer will be glad to hear that; he is a real artist. I shall tell him you liked it, because he is very proud of that effect. I must say, myself, that I do not care for it very much, it drowns everything in a sort of aqueous vapour, little Phaedra standing there looks too like a branch of coral on the floor of an aquarium. You will tell me, of course, that it brings out the cosmic aspect of the play. That is quite true. All the same, it would be more appropriate if the scene were laid in the Court of Neptune. Oh yes, of course, I know the Vengeance of Neptune does come into the play. I don't suggest for a moment that we should think only of Port-Royal, but after all the story that Racine tells us is not the 'Loves of the Sea-Urchins.' Still, it is what my friend wished to have, and it is very well done, right or wrong, and it's really quite pretty when you come to look at it. Yes, so you liked that, did you; you understood what it meant, of course; we feel the same about it, don't we, really; it is a trifle unbalanced, what he's done, you agree with me, but on the whole it is very clever of him." And so, when Bergotte had to express an opinion which was the opposite of my own, he in no way

reduced me to silence, to the impossibility of framing any reply, as M. de Norpois would have done. This does not prove that Bergotte's opinions were of less value than the Ambassador's; far from it. A powerful idea communicates some of its strength to him who challenges it. Being itself a part of the riches of the universal Mind, it makes its way into, grafts itself upon the mind of him whom it is employed to refute, slips in among the ideas already there, with the help of which, gaining a little ground, he completes and corrects it; so that the final utterance is always to some extent the work of both parties to a discussion. It is to ideas which are not, properly speaking, ideas at all, to ideas which, founded upon nothing, can find no support, no kindred spirit among the ideas of the adversary, that he, grappling with something which is not there, can find no word to say in answer. The arguments of M. de Norpois (in the matter of art) were unanswerable simply because they were without reality.

Since Bergotte did not sweep aside my objections, I confessed to him that they had won the scorn of M. de Norpois. "But he's an old parrot!" was the answer. "He keeps on pecking you because he imagines all the time that you're a piece of cake, or a slice of cuttle-fish." "What's that?" asked Swann. "Are you a friend of Norpois?" "He's as dull as a wet Sunday," interrupted his wife, who had great faith in Bergotte's judgment, and was no doubt afraid that M. de Norpois might have spoken ill of her to us. "I tried to make him talk after dinner; I don't know if it's his age or his indigestion, but I found him too sticky for words. I really thought I should have to 'dope' him." "Yes, isn't he?" Bergotte chimed in. "You see, he has to keep his mouth shut half the time so as not to use up all the stock of inanities that hold his shirt-front down and his white waistcoat up." "I think that Bergotte and my wife are both very hard on him," came from Swann, who took the 'line,' in his own house, of a plain, sensible man. "I quite see that Norpois cannot interest you very much, but from another point of view," (for Swann made a hobby of collecting scraps of 'real life') "he is quite remarkable, quite a remarkable instance of a lover. When he was Secretary at Rome," he went on, after making sure that Gilberte could not hear him, "he had, here in Paris, a mistress with whom he was madly in love, and he found time to make the double journey every week, so as to see her for a couple of hours. She was, as it happens, a most intelligent woman, and is quite attractive to this day; she is a dowager now. And he has had any number of others since then. I'm sure I should have gone stark mad if the woman I was in love with lived in Paris and I was kept shut up in Rome. Nervous men ought always to love, as the lower orders say, 'beneath' them, so that their women have a material inducement to do

what they tell them." As he spoke, Swann realised that I might be applying this maxim to himself and Odette, and as, even among superior beings, at the moment when you and they seem to be soaring together above the plane of life, their personal pride is still basely human, he was seized by a violent ill-will towards me. But this was made manifest only in the uneasiness of his glance. He said nothing more to me at the time. Not that this need surprise us. When Racine (according to a story the truth of which has been exploded, though the theme of it may be found recurring every day in Parisian life) made an illusion to Scarron in front of Louis XIV, the most powerful monarch on earth said nothing to the poet that evening. It was on the following day, only, that he fell.

But as a theory requires to be stated as a whole, Swann, after this momentary irritation, and after wiping his eyeglass, finished saying what was in his mind in these words, words which were to assume later on in my memory the importance of a prophetic warning, which I had not had the sense to take: "The danger of that kind of love, however, is that the woman's subjection calms the man's jealousy for a time but also makes it more exacting. After a little he will force his mistress to live like one of those prisoners whose cells they keep lighted day and night, to prevent their escaping. And that generally ends in trouble."

I reverted to M. de Norpois. "You must never trust him; he has the most wicked tongue!" said Mme. Swann in an accent which seemed to me to indicate that M. de Norpois had been 'saying things' about her, especially as Swann looked across at his wife with an air of rebuke, as though to stop her before she went too far.

Meanwhile Gilberte, who had been told to go and get ready for our drive, stayed to listen to the conversation, and hovered between her mother and her father, leaning affectionately against his shoulder. Nothing, at first sight, could be in greater contrast to Mme. Swann, who was dark, than this child with her red hair and golden skin. But after looking at them both for a moment one saw in Gilberte many of the features — for instance, the nose cut short with a sharp, unfaltering decision by the unseen sculptor whose chisel repeats its work upon successive generations — the expression, the movements of her mother; to take an illustration from another form of art, she made one think of a portrait that was not a good likeness of Mme. Swann, whom the painter, to carry out some whim of colouring, had posed in a partial disguise, dressed to go out to a party in Venetian 'character.' And as not merely was she wearing a fair wig, but every atom of a swarthier complexion had been discharged from her flesh which,

stripped of its veil of brownness, seemed more naked, covered simply in rays of light shed by an internal sun, this ‘make-up’ was not just superficial but was incarnate in her; Gilberte had the appearance of embodying some fabulous animal or of having assumed a mythological disguise. This reddish skin was so exactly that of her father that nature seemed to have had, when Gilberte was being created, to solve the problem of how to reconstruct Mme. Swann piecemeal, without any material at her disposal save the skin of M. Swann. And nature had utilised this to perfection, like a master carver who makes a point of leaving the grain, the knots of his wood in evidence. On Gilberte’s face, at the corner of a perfect reproduction of Odette’s nose, the skin was raised so as to preserve intact the two beauty spots of M. Swann. It was a new variety ot Mme. Swann that was thus obtained, growing there by her side like a white lilac-tree beside a purple. At the same time it did not do to imagine the boundary line between these two likenesses as definitely fixed. Now and then, when Gilberte smiled, one could distinguish the oval of her father’s cheek upon her mother’s face, as though some one had mixed them together to see what would result from the blend; this oval grew distinct, as an embryo grows into a living shape, it lengthened obliquely, expanded, and a moment later had disappeared. In Gilberte’s eyes there was the frank and honest gaze of her father; this was how she had looked at me when she gave me the agate marble and said, “Keep it, to remind yourself of our friendship.” But were one to put a question to Gilberte, to ask her what she had been doing, then one saw in those same eyes the embarrassment, the uncertainty, the prevarication, the misery that Odette used in the old days to shew, when Swann asked her where she had been and she gave him one of those lying answers which, in those days, drove the lover to despair and now made him abruptly change the conversation, as an incurious and prudent husband. Often in the Champs-Elysées I was disturbed by seeing this look on Gilberte’s face. But as a rule my fears were unfounded. For in her, a purely physical survival of her mother, this look (if nothing else) had ceased to have any meaning. It was when she had been to her classes, when she must go home for some lesson, that Gilberte’s pupils executed that movement which, in time past, in the eyes of Odette, had been caused by the fear of disclosing that she had, during the day, opened the door to one of her lovers, or was — at that moment in a hurry to be at some trysting-place. So one could see the two natures of M. and Mme. Swann ebb and flow, encroaching alternately one upon the other in the body of this Mélusine.

It is, of course, common knowledge that a child takes after both its-father

and its mother. And yet the distribution of the merits and defects which it inherits is so oddly planned that, of two good qualities which seemed inseparable in one of the parents you will find but one in the child, and allied to that very fault in the other parent which seemed most irreconcilable with it. Indeed, the incarnation of a good moral quality in an incompatible physical blemish is often one of the laws of filial resemblance. Of two sisters, one will combine with the proud bearing of her father the mean little soul of her mother; the other, abundantly endowed with the paternal intelligence, will present it to the world in the aspect which her mother has made familiar; her mother's shapeless nose and scraggy bosom are become the bodily covering of talents which you had learned to distinguish beneath a superb presence. With the result that of each of the sisters one can say with equal justification that it is she who takes more after one or other of her parents. It is true that Gilberte was an only child, but there were, at the least, two Gilbertes. The two natures, her father's and her mother's, did more than just blend themselves in her; they disputed the possession of her — and yet one cannot exactly say that, which would let it be thought that a third Gilberte was in the meantime suffering by being the prey of the two others. Whereas Gilberte was alternately one and the other, and at any given moment no more than one of the two, that is to say incapable, when she was not being good, of suffering accordingly, the better Gilberte not being able at the time, on account of her momentary absence, to detect the other's lapse from virtue. And so the less good of the two was free to enjoy pleasures of an ignoble kind. When the other spoke to you from the heart of her father, she held broad views, you would have liked to engage with her upon a fine and beneficent enterprise; you told her so, but, just as your arrangements were being completed, her mother's heart would already have resumed its control; hers was the voice that answered; and you were disappointed and vexed — almost baffled, as in the face of a substitution of one person for another — by an unworthy thought, an insincere laugh, in which Gilberte saw no harm, for they sprang from what she herself at that moment was. Indeed, the disparity was at times so great between these two Gilbertes that you asked yourself, though without finding an answer, what on earth you could have said or done to her, last time, to find her now so different. When she herself had arranged to meet you somewhere, not only did she fail to appear, and offer no excuse afterwards, but, whatever the influence might have been that had made her change her mind, she shewed herself in so different a character when you did meet her that you might well have supposed that, taken in by a likeness such as forms the plot of the*Menaechmi*, you were now talking

to some one not the person who had so politely expressed her desire to see you, had she not shewn signs of an ill-humour which revealed that she felt herself to be in the wrong, and wished to avoid the necessity of an explanation.

"Now then, run along and get ready; you're keeping us waiting," her mother reminded her.

"I'm so happy here with my little Papa; I want to stay just for a minute," replied Gilberte, burying her head beneath the arm of her father, who passed his fingers lovingly through her bright hair.

Swann was one of those men who, having lived for a long time amid the illusions of love, have seen the prosperity that they themselves brought to numberless women increase the happiness of those women without exciting in them any gratitude, any tenderness towards their benefactors; but in their child they believe that they can feel an affection which, being incarnate in their own name, will enable them to remain in the world after their death. When there should no longer be any Charles Swann, there would still be a Mlle. Swann, or a Mme. something-else, *née*Swann, who would continue to love the vanished father. Indeed, to love him too well, perhaps, Swann may have been thinking, for he acknowledged Gilberte's caress with a "Good girl!" in that tone, made tender by our apprehension, to which, when we think of the future, we are prompted by the too passionate affection of a creature who is destined to survive us. To conceal his emotion, he joined in our talk about Berma. He pointed out to me, but in a detached, a listless tone, as though he wished to remain to some extent unconcerned in what he was saying, with what intelligence, with what an astonishing fitness the actress said to Oenone, "You knew it!" He was right. That intonation at least had a value that was really intelligible, and might therefore have satisfied my desire to find incontestable reasons for admiring Berma. But it was by the very fact of its clarity that it did not at all content me. Her intonation was so ingenious, so definite in intention and in its meaning, that it seemed to exist by itself, so that any intelligent actress might have learned to use it. It was a fine idea; but whoever else should conceive it as fully must possess it equally. It remained to Berma's credit that she had discovered it, but is one entitled to use the word 'discover' when the object in question is something that would not be different if one had been given it, something that does not belong essentially to one's own nature seeing that some one else may afterwards reproduce it?

"Upon my soul, your presence among us does raise the tone of the conversation!" Swann observed to me, as though to excuse himself to Bergotte; for he had formed the habit, in the Guermantes set, of entertaining great artists as

if they were just ordinary friends whom one seeks only to make eat the dishes that they like, play the games, or, in the country, indulge in whatever form of sport they please. “It seems to me that we’re talking a great deal of art,” he went on. “But it’s so nice, I do love it!” said Mme. Swann, throwing me a look of gratitude, as well from good nature as because she had not abandoned her old aspirations towards a more intellectual form of conversation. After this it was to others of the party, and principally to Gilberte, that Bergotte addressed himself. I had told him everything that I felt with a freedom which had astonished me, and was due to the fact that, having acquired with him, years before (in the course of all those hours of solitary reading, in which he was to me merely the better part of myself), the habit of sincerity, of frankness, of confidence, I was less frightened by him than by a person with whom I should have been talking for the first time. And yet, for the same reason, I was greatly disturbed by the thought of the impression that I must have been making on him, the contempt that I had supposed he would feel for my ideas dating not from that afternoon but from the already distant time in which I had begun to read his books in our garden at Combray. And yet I ought perhaps to have reminded myself that, since it was in all sincerity, abandoning myself to the train of my thoughts, that I had felt, on the one hand, so intensely in sympathy with the work of Bergotte and on the other hand, in the theatre, a disappointment the reason of which I did not know, those two instinctive movements which had both carried me away could not be so very different from one another, but must be obedient to the same laws; and that that mind of Bergotte which I had loved in his books could not be anything entirely foreign and hostile to my disappointment and to my inability to express it. For my intelligence must be a uniform thing, perhaps indeed there exists but a single intelligence, in which everyone in the world participates, towards which each of us from the position of his own separate body turns his eyes, as in a theatre where, if everyone has his own separate seat, there is on the other hand but a single stage. Of course, the ideas which I was tempted to seek to disentangle were probably not those whose depths Bergotte usually sounded in his books. But if it were one and the same intelligence which we had, he and I, at our disposal, he must, when he heard me express those ideas, be reminded of them, cherish them, smile upon them, keeping probably, in spite of what I supposed, before his mind’s eye a whole world of intelligence other than that an excerpt of which had passed into his books, an excerpt upon which I had based my imagination of his whole mental universe. Just as priests, having the widest experience of the human heart, are best able to pardon the sins which they do not

themselves commit, so genius, having the widest experience of the human intelligence, can best understand the ideas most directly in opposition to those which form the foundation of its own writings. I ought to have told myself all this (though, for that matter, it was none too consoling a thought, for the benevolent condescension of great minds has as a corollary the incomprehension and hostility of small; and one derives far less happiness from the friendliness of a great writer, which one finds expressed, failing a more intimate association, in his books, than suffering from the hostility of a woman whom one did not choose for her intelligence but cannot help loving). I ought to have told myself all this, but I did not; I was convinced that I had appeared a fool to Bergotte, when Gilberte whispered in my ear:

"You can't think how delighted I am, because you have made a conquest of my great friend Bergotte. He's been telling Mamma that he found you extremely intelligent."

"Where are we going?" I asked her. "Oh, wherever you like; you know, it's all the same to me." But since the incident that had occurred on the anniversary of her grandfather's death I had begun to ask myself whether Gilberte's character was not other than I had supposed, whether that indifference to what was to be done, that wisdom, that calm, that gentle and constant submission did not indeed conceal passionate longings which her self-esteem would not allow to be visible and which she disclosed only by her sudden resistance whenever by any chance they were frustrated. As Bergotte lived in the same neighbourhood as my parents, we left the house together; in the carriage he spoke to me of my health. "Our friends were telling me that you had been ill. I am very sorry. And yet, after all, I am not too sorry, because I can see quite well that you are able to enjoy the pleasures of the mind, and they are probably what mean most to you, as to everyone who has known them."

Alas, what he was saying, how little, I felt, did it apply to myself, whom all reasoning, however exalted it might be, left cold, who was happy only in moments of pure idleness, when I was comfortable and well; I felt how purely material was everything that I desired in life, and how easily I could dispense with the intellect. As I made no distinction among my pleasures between those that came to me from different sources, of varying depth and permanence, I was thinking, when the moment came to answer him, that I should have liked an existence in which I was on intimate terms with the Duchesse de Guermantes, and often came across, as in the old toll-house in the Champs-Elysées, a chilly smell that would remind me of Combray. But in this ideal existence which I

dared not confide to him the pleasures of the mind found no place.

"No, sir, the pleasures of the mind count for very little with me; it is not them that I seek after; indeed I don't even know that I have ever tasted them."

“You really think not?” he replied. “Well, it may be, no, wait a minute now, yes, after all that must be what you like best, I can see it now clearly, I am certain of it.”

As certainly, he did not succeed in convincing me; and yet I was already feeling happier, less restricted. After what M. de Norpois had said to me, I had regarded my moments of dreaming, of enthusiasm, of self-confidence as purely subjective and barren of truth. But according to Bergotte, who appeared to understand my case, it seemed that it was quite the contrary, that the symptom I ought to disregard was, in fact, my doubts, my disgust with myself. Moreover, what he had said about M. de Norpois took most of the sting out of a sentence from which I had supposed that no appeal was possible.

“Are you being properly looked after?” Bergotte asked me. “Who is treating you?” I told him that I had seen, and should probably go on seeing, Cottard. “But that’s not at all the sort of man you want!” he told me. “I know nothing about him as a doctor. But I’ve met him at Mme. Swann’s. The man’s an imbecile. Even supposing that that doesn’t prevent his being a good doctor, which I hesitate to believe, it does prevent his being a good doctor for artists, for men of intelligence. People like you must have suitable doctors, I would almost go so far as to say treatment and medicines specially adapted to themselves. Cottard will bore you, and that alone will prevent his treatment from having any effect. Besides, the proper course of treatment cannot possibly be the same for you as for any Tom, Dick or Harry. Nine tenths of the ills from which intelligent people suffer spring from their intellect. They need at least a doctor who understands their disease. How do you expect that Cottard should be able to treat you, he has made allowances for the difficulty of digesting sauces, for gastric trouble, but he has made no allowance for the effect of reading Shakespeare. So that his calculations are inaccurate in your case, the balance is upset; you see, always the little bottle-imp bobbing up again. He will find that you have a dilated stomach; he has no need to examine you for it, since he has it already in his eye. You can see it there, reflected in his glasses.” This manner of speaking tired me greatly; I said to myself, with the stupidity of common sense: “There is no more any dilated stomach reflected in Professor Cottard’s glasses than there are inanities stored behind the white waistcoat of M. de Norpois.” “I should recommend you, instead,” went on Bergotte, “to consult Dr. du Boulbon, who is quite an intelligent man.” “He is a great admirer of your books,” I replied. I saw that Bergotte knew this, and I decided that kindred spirits soon come together, that

one has few really ‘unknown friends.’ What Bergotte had said to me with respect to Cottard impressed me, while running contrary to everything that I myself believed. I was in no way disturbed by finding my doctor a bore; I expected of him that, thanks to an art the laws of which were beyond me, he should pronounce on the subject of my health an infallible oracle, after consultation of my entrails. And I did not at all require that, with the aid of an intellect, in which I easily outstripped him, he should seek to understand my intellect, which I pictured to myself merely as a means, of no importance in itself, of trying to attain to certain external verities. I doubted greatly whether intellectual people required a different form of hygiene from imbeciles, and I was quite prepared to submit myself to the latter kind. “I’ll tell you who does need a good doctor, and that is our friend Swann,” said Bergotte. And on my asking whether he was ill, “Well, don’t you see, he’s typical of the man who has married a whore, and has to swallow a hundred serpents every day, from women who refuse to meet his wife, or men who were there before him. You can see them in his mouth, writhing. Just look, any day you’re there, at the way he lifts his eyebrows when he comes in, to see who’s in the room.” The malice with which Bergotte spoke thus to a stranger of the friends in whose house he had so long been received as a welcome guest was as new to me as the almost amorous tone which, in that house, he had constantly been adopting to speak to them. Certainly a person like my great-aunt, for instance, would have been incapable of treating any of us with that politeness which I had heard Bergotte lavishing upon Swann. Even to the people whom she liked, she enjoyed saying disagreeable things. But behind their backs she would never have uttered a word to which they might not have listened. There was nothing less like the social ‘world’ than our society at Combray. The Swanns’ house marked a stage on the way towards it, towards its inconstant tide. If they had not yet reached the open sea, they were certainly in the lagoon. “This is all between ourselves,” said Bergotte as he left me outside my own door. A few years later I should have answered: “I never repeat things.” That is the ritual phrase of society, from which the slanderer always derives a false reassurance. It is what I should have said then and there to Bergotte, for one does not invent all one’s speeches, especially when one is acting merely as a card in the social pack. But I did not yet know the formula. What my great-aunt, on the other hand, would have said on a similar occasion was: “If you don’t wish it to be repeated, why do you say it?” That is the answer of the unsociable, of the quarrelsome. I was nothing of that sort: I bowed my head in silence.

Men of letters who were in my eyes persons of considerable importance had

had to plot for years before they succeeded in forming with Bergotte relations which continued to the end to be but dimly literary, and never emerged beyond the four walls of his study, whereas I, I had now been installed among the friends of the great writer, at the first attempt and without any effort, like a man who, instead of standing outside in a crowd for hours in order to secure a bad seat in a theatre, is shewn in at once to the best, having entered by a door that is closed to the public. If Swann had thus opened such a door to me, it was doubtless because, just as a king finds himself naturally inviting his children's friends into the royal box, or on board the royal yacht, so Gilberte's parents received their daughter's friends among all the precious things that they had in their house, and the even more precious intimacies that were enshrined there. But at that time I thought, and perhaps was right in thinking, that this friendliness on Swann's part was aimed indirectly at my parents. I seemed to remember having heard once at Combray that he had suggested to them that, in view of my admiration for Bergotte, he should take me to dine with him, and that my parents had declined, saying that I was too young, and too easily excited to 'go out' yet. My parents, no doubt, represented to certain other people (precisely those who seemed to me the most marvellous) something quite different from what they were to me, so that, just as when the lady in pink had paid my father a tribute of which he had shewn himself so unworthy, I should have wished them to understand what an inestimable present I had just received, and to testify their gratitude to that generous and courteous Swann who had offered it to me, or to them rather, without seeming any more to be conscious of its value than is, in Luini's fresco, the charming Mage with the arched nose and fair hair, to whom, it appeared, Swann had at one time been thought to bear a striking resemblance.

Unfortunately, this favour that Swann had done me, which, as I entered the house, before I had even taken off my greatcoat, I reported to my parents, in the hope that it would awaken in their hearts an emotion equal to my own, and would determine them upon some immense and decisive act of politeness towards the Swanns, did not appear to be greatly appreciated by them. "Swann introduced you to Bergotte? An excellent friend for you, charming society!" cried my father, ironically. "It only wanted that!" Alas, when I had gone on to say that Bergotte was by no means inclined to admire M. de Norpois:

"I dare say!" retorted my father. "That simply proves that he's a foolish and evil-minded fellow. My poor boy, you never had much common sense, still, I'm sorry to see you fall among a set that will finish you off altogether."

Already the mere fact of my frequenting the Swanns had been far from

delighting my parents. This introduction to Bergotte seemed to them a fatal but natural consequence of an original mistake, namely their own weakness in controlling me, which my grandfather would have called a ‘want of circumspection.’ I felt that I had only, in order to complete their ill humour, to tell them that this perverse fellow who did not appreciate M. de Norpois had found me extremely intelligent. For I had observed that whenever my father decided that anyone, one of my school friends for instance, was going astray — as I was at that moment — if that person had the approval of somebody whom my father did not rate high, he would see in this testimony the confirmation of his own stern judgment. The evil merely seemed to him more pronounced. I could hear him already exclaiming, “Of course, it all hangs together,” an expression that terrified me by the vagueness and vastness of the reforms the introduction of which into my quiet life it seemed to threaten. But since, were I not to tell them what Bergotte had said of me, even then nothing could efface the impression my parents had formed, that this should be made slightly worse mattered little. Besides, they seemed to me so unfair, so completely mistaken, that not only had I not any hope, I had scarcely any desire to bring them to a more equitable point of view. At the same time, feeling, as the words came from my lips, how alarmed they would be by the thought that I had found favour in the sight of a person who dismissed clever men as fools and had earned the contempt of all decent people, praise from whom, since it seemed to me a thing to be desired, would only encourage me in wrongdoing, it was in faltering tones and with a slightly shamefaced air that, coming to the end of my story, I flung them the bouquet of: “He told the Swanns that he had found me extremely intelligent.” Just as a poisoned dog, in a field, rushes, without knowing why, straight to the grass which is the precise antidote to the toxin that he has swallowed, so I, without in the least suspecting it, had said the one thing in the world that was capable of overcoming in my parents this prejudice with respect to Bergotte, a prejudice which all the best reasons that I could have urged, all the tributes that I could have paid him, must have proved powerless to defeat. Instantly the situation changed.

“Oh! He said that he found you intelligent,” repeated my mother. “I am glad to hear that, because he is a man of talent.”

“What! He said that, did he?” my father joined in. “I don’t for a moment deny his literary distinction, before which the whole world bows; only it is a pity that he should lead that scarcely reputable existence to which old Norpois made a guarded allusion, when he was here,” he went on, not seeing that against the

sovran virtue of the magic words which I had just repeated the depravity of Bergotte's morals was little more able to contend than the falsity of his judgment.

"But, my dear," Mamma interrupted, "we've no proof that it's true. People say all sorts of things. Besides M. de Norpois may have the most perfect manners in the world, but he's not always very good-natured, especially about people who are not exactly his sort."

"That's quite true; I've noticed it myself," my father admitted.

"And then, too, a great deal ought to be forgiven Bergotte, since he thinks well of my little son," Mamma went on, stroking my hair with her fingers and fastening upon me a long and pensive gaze.

My mother had not, indeed, awaited this verdict from Bergotte before telling me that I might ask Gilberte to tea whenever I had friends coming. But I dared not do so for two reasons. The first was that at Gilberte's there was never anything else to drink but tea. Whereas at home Mamma insisted on there being a pot of chocolate as well. I was afraid that Gilberte might regard this as 'common'; and so conceive a great contempt for us. The other reason was a formal difficulty, a question of procedure which I could never succeed in settling. When I arrived at Mme. Swann's she used to ask me: "And how is your mother?" I had made several overtures to Mamma to find out whether she would do the same when Gilberte came to us, a point which seemed to me more serious than, at the Court of Louis XIV, the use of 'Monseigneur.' But Mamma would not hear of it for a moment.

"Certainly not. I do not know Mme. Swann."

"But neither does she know you."

"I never said she did, but we are not obliged to behave in exactly the same way about everything. I shall find other ways of being civil to Gilberte than Mme. Swann has with you."

But I was unconvinced, and preferred not to invite Gilberte.

Leaving my parents, I went upstairs to change my clothes and on emptying my pockets came suddenly upon the envelope which the Swanns' butler had handed me before shewing me into the drawing-room. I was now alone. I opened it; inside was a card on which I was told the name of the lady whom I ought to have 'taken in' to luncheon.

It was about this period that Bloch overthrew my conception of the world and opened for me fresh possibilities of happiness (which, for that matter, were to change later on into possibilities of suffering), by assuring me that, in

contradiction of all that I had believed at the time of my walks along the Méséglise way, women never asked for anything better than to make love. He added to this service a second, the value of which I was not to appreciate until much later; it was he who took me for the first time into a disorderly house. He had indeed told me that there were any number of pretty women whom one might enjoy. But I could see them only in a vague outline for which those houses were to enable me to substitute actual human features. So that if I owed to Bloch — for his 'good tidings' that beauty and the enjoyment of beauty were not inaccessible things, and that we have acted foolishly in renouncing them for all time — a debt of gratitude of the same kind that we owe to an optimistic physician or philosopher who has given us reason to hope for length of days in this world and not to be entirely cut off from it when we shall have passed beyond the veil, the houses of assignation which I began to frequent some years later — by furnishing me with specimens of beauty, by allowing me to add to the beauty of women that element which we are powerless to invent, which is something more than a mere summary of former beauties, that present indeed divine, the one present that we cannot bestow upon ourselves, before which faint and fail all the logical creations of our intellect, and which we can seek from reality alone: an individual charm — deserved to be ranked by me with those other benefactors more recent in origin but of comparable utility (before finding which we used to imagine without any warmth the seductive charms of Mantegna, of Wagner, of Siena, by studying other painters, hearing other composers, visiting other cities): namely illustrated editions of the history of painting, symphonic concerts and handbooks to 'Mediaeval Towns.' But the house to which Bloch led me (and which he himself, for that matter, had long ceased to visit), was of too humble a grade, its denizens were too inconspicuous and too little varied to be able to satisfy my old or to stimulate new curiosities. The mistress of this house knew none of the women with whom one asked her to negotiate, and was always suggesting others whom one did not want. She boasted to me of one in particular, one of whom, with a smile full of promise (as though this had been a great rarity and a special treat) she would whisper: "She is a Jewess! Doesn't that make you want to?" (That, by the way, was probably why the girl's name was Rachel.) And with a silly and affected excitement which, she hoped, would prove contagious, and which ended in a hoarse gurgle, almost of sensual satisfaction: "Think of that, my boy, a Jewess! Wouldn't that be lovely? Rrrr!" This Rachel, of whom I caught a glimpse without her seeing me, was dark and not good looking, but had an air of intelligence, and would

pass the tip of her tongue over her lips as she smiled, with a look of boundless impertinence, at the ‘boys’ who were introduced to her and whom I could hear making conversation. Her small and narrow face was framed in short curls of black hair, irregular as though they were outlined in pen-strokes upon a wash-drawing in Indian ink. Every evening I promised the old woman who offered her to me with a special insistence, boasting of her superior intelligence and her education, that I would not fail to come some day on purpose to make the acquaintance of Rachel, whom I had nicknamed “Rachel when from the Lord.” But the first evening I had heard her, as she was leaving the house, say to the mistress: “That’s settled then; I shall be free to-morrow, if you have anyone you won’t forget to send for me.”

And these words had prevented me from recognising her as a person because they had made me classify her at once in a general category of women whose habit, common to all of them, was to come there in the evening to see whether there might not be a louis or two to be earned. She would simply vary her formula, saying indifferently: “If you want me” or “If you want anybody.”

The mistress, who was not familiar with Halévy’s opera, did not know why I always called the girl “Rachel when from the Lord.” But failure to understand a joke has never yet made anyone find it less amusing, and it was always with a whole-hearted laugh that she would say to me:

“Then there’s nothing doing to-night? When am I going to fix you up with ‘Rachel when from the Lord’? Why do you always say that, ‘Rachel when from the Lord’? Oh, that’s very smart, that is. I’m going to make a match of you two. You won’t be sorry for it, you’ll see.”

Once I was just making up my mind, but she was ‘in the press,’ another time in the hands of the hairdresser, an elderly gentleman who never did anything for the women except pour oil on their loosened hair and then comb it. And I grew tired of waiting, even though several of the humbler frequenters of the place (working girls, they called themselves, but they always seemed to be out of work), had come to mix drinks for me and to hold long conversations to which, despite the gravity of the subjects discussed, the partial or total nudity of the speakers gave an attractive simplicity. I ceased moreover to go to this house because, anxious to present a token of my good-will to the woman who kept it and was in need of furniture, I had given her several pieces, notably a big sofa, which I had inherited from my aunt Léonie. I used never to see them, for want of space had prevented my parents from taking them in at home, and they were stored in a warehouse. But as soon as I discovered them again in the house

where these women were putting them to their own uses, all the virtues that one had imbibed in the air of my aunt's room at Combray became apparent to me, tortured by the cruel contact to which I had abandoned them in their helplessness! Had I outraged the dead, I should not have suffered such remorse. I returned no more to visit their new mistress, for they seemed to me to be alive, and to be appealing to me, like those objects, apparently inanimate, in a Persian fairy-tale, in which are embodied human souls that are undergoing martyrdom and plead for deliverance. Besides, as our memory presents things to us, as a rule, not in their chronological sequence but as it were by a reflexion in which the order of the parts is reversed, I remembered only long afterwards that it was upon that same sofa that, many years before, I had tasted for the first time the sweets of love with one of my girl cousins, with whom I had not known where to go until she somewhat rashly suggested our taking advantage of a moment in which aunt Léonie had left her room.

A whole lot more of my aunt Léonie's things, and notably a magnificent set of old silver plate, I sold, in spite of my parents' warnings, so as to have more money to spend, and to be able to send more flowers to Mme. Swann who would greet me, after receiving an immense basket of orchids, with: "If I were your father, I should have you up before the magistrate for this." How was I to suppose that one day I might regret more than anything the loss of my silver plate, and rank certain other pleasures more highly than that (which would have shrunk perhaps into none at all) of bestowing favours upon Gilberte's parents. Similarly, it was with Gilberte in my mind, and so as not to be separated from her, that I had decided not to enter a career of diplomacy abroad. It is always thus, impelled by a state of mind which is destined not to last, that we make our irrevocable decisions. I could scarcely imagine that that strange substance which was housed in Gilberte, and from her permeated her parents and her home, leaving me indifferent to all things else, could be liberated from her, could migrate into another person. The same substance, unquestionable, and yet one that would have a wholly different effect on me. For a single malady goes through various evolutions, and a delicious poison can no longer be taken with the same impunity when, with the passing of the years, the heart's power of resistance has diminished.

My parents meanwhile would have liked to see the intelligence that Bergotte had discerned in me made manifest in some remarkable achievement. When I still did not know the Swanns I thought that I was prevented from working by the state of agitation into which I was thrown by the impossibility of seeing

Gilberte when I chose. But, now that their door stood open to me, scarcely had I sat down at my desk than I would rise and run to them. And after I had left them and was at home again, my isolation was only apparent, my mind was powerless to swim against the stream of words on which I had allowed myself mechanically to be borne for hours on end. Sitting alone, I continued to fashion remarks such as might have pleased or amused the Swanns, and to make this pastime more entertaining I myself took the parts of those absent players, I put to myself imagined questions, so chosen that my brilliant epigrams served merely as happy answers to them. Though conducted in silence, this exercise was none the less a conversation and not a meditation, my solitude a mental society in which it was not I myself but other imaginary speakers who controlled my choice of words, and in which I felt as I formulated, in place of the thoughts that I believed to be true, those that came easily to my mind, and involved no introspection from without, that kind of pleasure, entirely passive, which sitting still affords to anyone who is burdened with a sluggish digestion.

Had I been less firmly resolved upon setting myself definitely to work, I should perhaps have made an effort to begin at once. But since my resolution was explicit, since within twenty-four hours, in the empty frame of that long morrow in which everything was so well arranged because I myself had not yet entered it, my good intentions would be realised without difficulty, it was better not to select an evening on which I was ill-disposed for a beginning for which the following days were not, alas, to shew themselves any more propitious. But I was reasonable. It would have been puerile, on the part of one who had waited now for years, not to put up with a postponement of two or three days. Confident that by the day after next I should have written several pages, I said not a word more to my parents of my decision; I preferred to remain patient for a few hours and then to bring to a convinced and comforted grandmother a sample of work that was already under way. Unfortunately the morrow was not that vast, external day to which I in my fever had looked forward. When it drew to a close, my laziness and my painful struggle to overcome certain internal obstacles had simply lasted twenty-four hours longer. And at the end of several days, my plans not having matured, I had no longer the same hope that they would be realised at once, no longer the courage, therefore, to subordinate everything else to their realisation: I began again to keep late hours, having no longer, to oblige me to go to bed early on any evening, the certain hope of seeing my work begun next morning. I needed, before I could recover my creative energy, several days of relaxation, and the only time that my grandmother ventured, in a gentle and

disillusioned tone, to frame the reproach: “Well, and that work of yours; aren’t we even to speak of it now?” I resented her intrusion, convinced that in her inability to see that my mind was irrevocably made up, she had further and perhaps for a long time postponed the execution of my task, by the shock which her denial of justice to me had given my nerves, since until I had recovered from that shock I should not feel inclined to begin my work. She felt that her scepticism had charged blindly into my intention. She apologised, kissing me: “I am sorry; I shall not say anything again,” and, so that I should not be discouraged, assured me that, from the day on which I should be quite well again, the work would come of its own accord from my superfluity of strength.

Besides, I said to myself, in spending all my time with the Swanns, am I not doing exactly what Bergotte does? To my parents it seemed almost as though, idle as I was, I was leading, since it was spent in the same drawing-room with a great writer, the life most favourable to the growth of talent. And yet the assumption that anyone can be dispensed from having to create that talent for himself, from within himself, and can acquire it from some one else, is as impossible as it would be to suppose that a man can keep himself in good health, in spite of neglecting all the rules of hygiene and of indulging in the worst excesses, merely by dining out often in the company of a physician. The person, by the way, who was most completely taken in by this illusion, which misled me as well as my parents, was Mme. Swann. When I explained to her that I was unable to come, that I must stay at home and work, she looked as though she were thinking that I made a great fuss about nothing, that there was something foolish as well as ostentatious in what I had said.

“But Bergotte is coming, isn’t he? Do you mean that you don’t think it good, what he writes? It will be better still, very soon,” she went on, “for he is more pointed, he concentrates more in newspaper articles than in his books, where he is apt to spread out too much. I’ve arranged that in future he’s to do the leading articles in the Figaro. He’ll be distinctly the ‘right man in the right place’ there.” And, finally, “Come! He will tell you, better than anyone, what you ought to do.”

And so, just as one invites a gentleman ranker to meet his colonel, it was in the interests of my career, and as though masterpieces of literature arose out of ‘getting to know” people, that she told me not to fail to come to dinner with her next day, to meet Bergotte.

And so there was not from the Swanns any more than from my parents, that is to say from those who, at different times, had seemed bound to place obstacles in my way, any further opposition to that pleasant existence in which I might see

Gilberte as often as I chose, with enjoyment if not with peace of mind. There can be no peace of mind in love, since the advantage one has secured is never anything but a fresh starting-point for further desires. So long as I had not been free to go to her, having my eyes fixed upon that inaccessible goal of happiness, I could not so much as imagine the fresh grounds for anxiety that lay in wait for me there. Once the resistance of her parents was broken, and the problem solved at last, it began to set itself anew, and always in different terms. Each evening, on arriving home, I reminded myself that I had things to say to Gilberte of prime importance, things upon which our whole friendship hung, and these things were never the same. But at least I was happy, and no further menace arose to threaten my happiness. One was to appear, alas, from a quarter in which I had never detected any peril, namely from Gilberte and myself. And yet I ought to have been tormented by what, on the contrary, reassured me, by what I mistook for happiness. We are, when we love, in an abnormal state, capable of giving at once to an accident, the most simple to all appearance and one that may at any moment occur, a serious-aspect which that accident by itself would not bear. What makes us so happy is the presence in our heart of an unstable element which we are perpetually arranging to keep in position, and of which we cease almost to be aware so long as it is not displaced. Actually, there is in love a permanent strain of suffering which happiness neutralises, makes conditional only, procrastinates, but which may at any moment become what it would long since have been had we not obtained what we were seeking, sheer agony.

On several occasions I felt that Gilberte was anxious to put off my visits. It is true that when I was at all anxious to see her I had only to get myself invited by her parents who were increasingly persuaded of my excellent influence over her. “Thanks to them,” I used to think, “my love is running no risk; the moment I have them on my side, I can set my mind at rest; they have full authority over Gilberte.” Until, alas, I detected certain signs of impatience which she allowed to escape her when her father made me come to the house, almost against her will, and asked myself whether what I had regarded as a protection for my happiness was not in fact the secret reason why that happiness could not endure.

The last time that I called to see Gilberte, it was raining; she had been asked to a dancing lesson in the house of some people whom she knew too slightly to be able to take me there with her. In view of the dampness of the air I had taken rather more caffeine than usual. Perhaps on account of the weather, or because she had some objection to the house in which this party was being given, Mme. Swann, as her daughter was leaving the room, called her back in the sharpest of

tones: “Gilberte!” and pointed to me, to indicate that I had come there to see her and that she ought to stay with me. This ‘Gilberte!’ had been uttered, or shouted rather, with the best of intentions towards myself, but from the way in which Gilberte shrugged her shoulders as she took off her outdoor clothes I divined that her mother had unwittingly hastened the gradual evolution, which until then it had perhaps been possible to arrest, which was gradually drawing away from me my friend. “You don’t need to go out dancing every day,” Odette told her daughter, with a sagacity acquired, no doubt, in earlier days, from Swann. Then, becoming once more Odette, she began speaking to her daughter in English. At once it was as though a wall had sprung up to hide from me a part of the life of Gilberte, as though an evil genius had spirited my friend far away. In a language that we know, we have substituted for the opacity of sounds, the perspicuity of ideas. But a language which we do not know is a fortress sealed, within whose walls she whom we love is free to play us false, while we, standing without, desperately alert in our impotence, can see, can prevent nothing. So this conversation in English, at which, a month earlier, I should merely have smiled, interspersed with a few proper names in French which did not fail to accentuate, to give a point to my uneasiness, had, when conducted within a few feet of me by two motionless persons, the same degree of cruelty, left me as much abandoned and alone as the forcible abduction of my companion. At length Mme. Swann left us. That day, perhaps from resentment against myself, the unwilling cause of her not going out to enjoy herself, perhaps also because, guessing her to be angry with me, I was precautionally colder than usual with her, the face of Gilberte, divested of every sign of joy, bleak, bare, pillaged, seemed all afternoon to be devoting a melancholy regret to the pas-de-quatre in which my arrival had prevented her from going to take part, and to be defying every living creature, beginning with myself, to understand the subtle reasons that had determined in her a sentimental attachment to the boston. She confined herself to exchanging with me, now and again, on the weather, the increasing violence of the rain, the fastness of the clock, a conversation punctuated with silences and monosyllables, in which I lashed myself on, with a sort of desperate rage, to the destruction of those moments which we might have devoted to friendship and happiness. And on each of our remarks was stamped, as it were, a supreme harshness, by the paroxysm of their stupefying unimportance, which at the same time consoled me, for it prevented Gilberte from being taken in by the banality of my observations and the indifference of my tone. In vain was my polite: “I thought, the other day, that the clock was slow, if anything”; she

evidently understood me to mean: “How tiresome you are being!” Obstinately as I might protract, over the whole length of that rain-sodden afternoon, the dull cloud of words through which no fitful ray shone, I knew that my coldness was not so unalterably fixed as I pretended, and that Gilberte must be fully aware that if, after already saying it to her three times, I had hazarded a fourth repetition of the statement that the evenings were drawing in, I should have had difficulty in restraining myself from bursting into tears. When she was like that, when no smile filled her eyes or unveiled her face, I cannot describe the devastating monotony that stamped her melancholy eyes and sullen features. Her face, grown almost livid, reminded me then of those dreary beaches where the sea, ebbing far out, wearies one with its faint shimmering, everywhere the same, fixed in an immutable and low horizon. At length, as I saw no sign in Gilberte of the happy change for which I had been waiting now for some hours, I told her that she was not being nice. “It is you that are not being nice,” was her answer. “Oh, but surely ——!” I asked myself what I could have done, and, finding no answer, put the question to her. “Naturally, you think yourself nice!” she said to me with a laugh, and went on laughing. Whereupon I felt all the anguish that there was for me in not being able to attain to that other, less perceptible, plane of her mind which her laughter indicated. It seemed, that laughter, to mean: “No, no, I’m not going to let myself be moved by anything that you say, I know you’re madly in love with me, but that leaves me neither hot nor cold, for I don’t care a rap for you.” But I told myself that, after all, laughter was not a language so well defined that I could be certain of understanding what this laugh really meant. And Gilberte’s words were affectionate. “But how am I not being nice?” I asked her. “Tell me; I will do anything you want.” “No; that wouldn’t be any good. I can’t explain.” For a moment I was afraid that she thought that I did not love her, and this was for me a fresh agony, no less keen, but one that required treatment by a different conversational method. “If you knew how much you were hurting me you would tell me.” But this pain which, had she doubted my love for her, must have rejoiced her, seemed instead to make her more angry. Then, realising my mistake, making up my mind to pay no more attention to what she said, letting her (without bothering to believe her) assure me: “I do love you, indeed I do; you will see one day,” (that day on which the guilty are convinced that their innocence will be made clear, and which, for some mysterious reason, never happens to be the day on which their evidence is taken), I had the courage to make a sudden resolution not to see her again, and without telling her of it yet since she would not have believed me.

Grief that is caused one by a person with whom one is in love can be bitter, even when it is interpolated among preoccupations, occupations, pleasures in which that person is not directly involved and from which our attention is diverted only now and again to return to it. But when such a grief has its birth — as was now happening — at a moment when the happiness of seeing that person fills us to the exclusion of all else, the sharp depression that then affects our spirits, sunny hitherto, sustained and calm, lets loose in us a raging tempest against which we know not whether we are capable of struggling to the end. The tempest that was blowing in my heart was so violent that I made my way home baffled, battered, feeling that I could recover my breath only by retracing my steps, by returning, upon whatever pretext, into Gilberte's presence. But she would have said to herself: "Back again! Evidently I can go to any length with him; he will come back every time, and the more wretched he is when he leaves me the more docile he'll be." Besides, I was irresistibly drawn towards her in thought, and those alternative orientations, that mad careering between them of the compass-needle within me, persisted after I had reached home, and expressed themselves in the mutually contradictory letters to Gilberte which I began to draft.

I was about to pass through one of those difficult crises which we generally find that we have to face at various stages in life, and which, for all that there has been no change in our character, in our nature (that nature which itself creates our loves, and almost creates the women whom we love, even to their faults), we do not face in the same way on each occasion, that is to say at every age. At such moments our life is divided, and so to speak distributed over a pair of scales, in two counterpoised pans which between them contain it all. In one there is our desire not to displease, not to appear too humble to the creature whom we love without managing to understand her, but whom we find it more convenient at times to appear almost to disregard, so that she shall not have that sense of her own indispensability which may turn her from us; in the other scale there is a feeling of pain — and one that is not localised and partial only — which cannot be set at rest unless, abandoning every thought of pleasing the woman and of making her believe that we can dispense with her, we go at once to find her. When we withdraw from the pan in which our pride lies a small quantity of the will-power which we have weakly allowed to exhaust itself with increasing age, when we add to the pan that holds our suffering a physical pain which we have acquired and have let grow, then, instead of the courageous solution that would have carried the day at one-and-twenty, it is the other, grown too heavy and

insufficiently balanced, that crushes us down at fifty. All the more because situations, while repeating them-.selves, tend to alter, and there is every likelihood that, in middle life or in old age, we shall have had the grim satisfaction of complicating our love by an intrusion of habit which adolescence, repressed by other demands upon it, less master of itself, has never known.

I had just written Gilberte a letter in which I allowed the tempest of my wrath to thunder, not however without throwing her the lifebuoy of a few words disposed as though by accident on the page, by clinging to which my friend might be brought to a reconciliation; a moment later, the wind having changed, they were phrases full of love that I addressed to her, chosen for the sweetness of certain forlorn expressions, those ‘nevermores’ so touching to those who pen them, so wearisome to her who will have to read them, whether she believe them to be false and translate ‘nevermore’ by ‘this very evening, if you want me,’ or believe them to be true and so to be breaking the news to her of one of those final separations which make so little difference to our lives when the other person is one with whom we are not in love. But since we are incapable, while we are in love, of acting as fit predecessors of the next persons whom we shall presently have become, and who will then be in love no longer, how are we to imagine the actual state of mind of a woman whom, even when we are conscious that we are of no account to her, we have perpetually represented in our musings as uttering, so as to lull us into a happy dream or to console us for a great sorrow, the same speeches that she would make if she loved us. When we come to examine the thoughts, the actions of a woman whom we love, we are as completely at a loss as must have been, face to face with the phenomena of nature, the world’s first natural philosophers, before their science had been elaborated and had cast a ray of light over the unknown. Or, worse still, we are like a person in whose mind the law of causality barely exists, a person who would be incapable, therefore, of establishing any connexion between one phenomenon and another, to whose eyes the spectacle of the world would appear unstable as a dream. Of course I made efforts to emerge from this incoherence, to find reasons for things. I tried even to be ‘objective’ and, to that end, to bear well in mind the disproportion that existed between the importance which Gilberte had in my eyes and that, not only which I had in hers, but which she herself had in the eyes of other people, a disproportion which, had I failed to remark it, would have involved my mistaking mere friendliness on my friend’s part for a passionate avowal, and a grotesque and debasing display on my own for the simple and graceful movement with which we are attracted towards a

pretty face. But I was afraid also of falling into the contrary error, in which I should have seen in Gilberte's unpunctuality in keeping an appointment an irremediable hostility. I tried to discover between these two perspectives, equally distorting, a third which would enable me to see things as they really were; the calculations I was obliged to make with that object helped to take my mind off my sufferings; and whether in obedience to the laws of arithmetic or because I had made them give me the answer that I desired, I made up my mind that next day I would go to the Swanns', happy, but happy in the same way as people who, having long been tormented by the thought of a journey which they have not wished to make, go no farther than to the station and return home to unpack their boxes. And since, while one is hesitating, the bare idea of a possible resolution (unless one has rendered that idea sterile by deciding that one will make no resolution) develops, like a seed in the ground, the lineaments, every detail of the emotions that will be born from the performance of the action, I told myself that it had been quite absurd of me to be as much hurt by the suggestion that I should not see Gilberte again as if I had really been about to put that suggestion into practice, and that since, on the contrary, I was to end by returning to her side, I might have saved myself the expense of all those vain longings and painful acceptances. But this resumption of friendly relations lasted only so long as it took me to reach the Swanns'; not because their butler, who was really fond of me, told me that Gilberte had gone out (a statement the truth of which was confirmed, as it happened, the same evening, by people who had seen her somewhere), but because of the manner in which he said it. "Sir, the young lady is not at home; I can assure you, sir, that I am speaking the truth. If you wish to make any inquiries I can fetch the young lady's maid. You know very well, sir, that I would do everything in my power to oblige you, and that if the young lady was at home I would take you to her at once." These words being of the only kind that is really important, that is to say spontaneous, the kind that gives us a radiograph shewing the main points, at any rate, of the unimaginable reality which would be wholly concealed beneath a prepared speech, proved that in Gilberte's household there was an impression that I bothered her with my visits; and so, scarcely had the man uttered them before they had aroused in me a hatred of which I preferred to make him rather than Gilberte the victim; he drew upon his own head all the angry feelings that I might have had for my friend; freed from these complications, thanks to his words, my love subsisted alone; but his words had, at the same time, shewn me that I must cease for the present to attempt to see Gilberte. She would be certain to write to me, to apologise. In

spite of which, I should not return at once to see her, so as to prove to her that I was capable of living without her. Besides, once I had received her letter, Gilberte's society was a thing with which I should be more easily able to dispense for a time, since I should be certain of finding her ready to receive me whenever I chose. All that I needed in order to support with less pain the burden of a voluntary separation was to feel that my heart was rid of the terrible uncertainty whether we were not irreconcilably sundered, whether she had not promised herself to another, left Paris, been taken away by force. The days that followed resembled the first week of that old New Year which I had had to spend alone, without Gilberte. But when that week had dragged to its end, then for one thing my friend would be coming again to the Champs-Elysées, I should be seeing her as before; I had been sure of that; for another thing, I had known with no less certainty that so long as the New Year holidays lasted it would not be worth my while to go to the Champs-Elysées, which meant that during that miserable week, which was already ancient history, I had endured my wretchedness with a quiet mind because there was blended in it neither fear nor hope. Now, on the other hand, it was the latter of these which, almost as much as my fear of what might happen, rendered intolerable the burden of my grief. Not having had any letter from Gilberte that evening, I had attributed this to her carelessness, to her other occupations, I did not doubt that I should find something from her in the morning's post. This I awaited, every day, with a beating heart which subsided, leaving me utterly prostrate, when I had found in it only letters from people who were not Gilberte, or else nothing at all, which was no worse, the proofs of another's friendship making all the more cruel those of her indifference. I transferred my hopes to the afternoon post. Even between the times at which letters were delivered I dared not leave the house, for she might be sending hers by a messenger. Then, the time coming at last when neither the postman nor a footman from the Swanns' could possibly appear that night, I must procrastinate my hope of being set at rest, and thus, because I believed that my sufferings were not destined to last, I was obliged, so to speak, incessantly to renew them. My disappointment was perhaps the same, but instead of just uniformly prolonging, as in the old days, an initial emotion, it began again several times daily, starting each time with an emotion so frequently renewed that it ended — it, so purely physical, so instantaneous a state — by becoming stabilised, so consistently that the strain of waiting having hardly time to relax before a fresh reason for waiting supervened, there was no longer a single minute in the day in which I was not in that state of anxiety which it is so

difficult to bear even for an hour. So my punishment was infinitely more cruel than in those New Year holidays long ago, because this time there was in me, instead of the acceptance, pure and simple, of that punishment, the hope, at every moment, of seeing it come to an end. And yet at this state of acceptance I ultimately arrived; then I understood that it must be final, and I renounced Gilberte for ever, in the interests of my love itself and because I hoped above all that she would not retain any contemptuous memory of me. Indeed, from that moment, so that she should not be led to suppose any sort of lover's spite on my part, when she made appointments for me to see her I used often to accept them and then, at the last moment, write to her that I was prevented from coming, but with the same protestations of my disappointment that I should have made to anyone whom I had not wished to see. These expressions of regret, which we keep as a rule for people who do not matter, would do more, I imagined, to persuade Gilberte of my indifference than would the tone of indifference which we affect only to those whom we love. When, better than by mere words, by a course of action indefinitely repeated, I should have proved to her that I had no appetite for seeing her, perhaps she would discover once again an appetite for seeing me. Alas! I was doomed to failure; to attempt, by ceasing to see her, to reawaken in her that inclination to see me was to lose her for ever; first of all, because, when it began to revive, if I wished it to last I must not give way to it at once; besides, the most agonising hours would then have passed; it was at this very moment that she was indispensable to me, and I should have liked to be able to warn her that what presently she would have to assuage, by the act of seeing me again, would be a grief so far diminished as to be no longer (what a moment ago it would still have been), nor the thought of putting an end to it, a motive towards surrender, reconciliation, further meetings. And then again, later on, when I should at last be able safely to confess to Gilberte (so far would her liking for me have regained its strength) my liking for her, the latter, not having been able to resist the strain of so long a separation, would have ceased to exist; Gilberte would have become immaterial to me. I knew this, but I could not explain it to her; she would have assumed that if I was pretending that I should cease to love her if I remained for too long without seeing her, that was solely in order that she might summon me back to her at once. In the meantime, what made it easier for me to sentence myself to this separation was the fact that (in order to make it quite clear to her that despite my protestations to the contrary it was my own free will and not any conflicting engagement, not the state of my health that prevented me from seeing her), whenever I knew beforehand that

Gilberte would not be in the house, was going out somewhere with a friend and would not be home for dinner, I went to see Mme. Swann who had once more become to me what she had been at the time when I had such difficulty in seeing her daughter and (on days when the latter was not coming to the Champs-Elysées) used to repair to the Allée des Acacias. In this way I should be hearing about Gilberte, and could be certain that she would in due course hear about me, and in terms which would shew her that I was not interested in her. And I found, as all those who suffer find, that my melancholy condition might have been worse. For being free at any time to enter the habitation in which Gilberte dwelt, I constantly reminded myself, for all that I was firmly resolved to make no use of that privilege, that if ever my pain grew too sharp there was a way of making it cease. I was not unhappy, save only from day to day. And even that is an exaggeration. How many times in an hour (but now without that anxious expectancy which had strained every nerve of me in the first weeks after our quarrel, before I had gone again to the Swanns') did I not repeat to myself the words of the letter which, one day soon, Gilberte would surely send, would perhaps even bring to me herself. The perpetual vision of that imagined happiness helped me to endure the desolation of my real happiness. With women who do not love Us, as with the 'missing,' the knowledge that there is no hope left does not prevent our continuing to wait for news. We live on tenterhooks, starting at the slightest sound; the mother whose son has gone to sea on some perilous voyage of discovery sees him in imagination every moment, long after the fact of his having perished has been established, striding into the room, saved by a miracle and in the best of health. And this strain of waiting, according to the strength of her memory and the resistance of her bodily organs, either helps her on her journey through the years, at the end of which she will be able to endure the knowledge that her son is no more, to forget gradually and to survive his loss, or else it kills her.

On the other hand, my grief found consolation in the idea that my love must profit by it. Each visit that I paid to Mme. Swann without seeing Gilberte was a cruel punishment, but I felt that it correspondingly enhanced the idea that Gilberte had of me.

Besides, if I always took care, before going to see Mme. Swann, that there should be no risk of her daughter's appearing, that arose, it is true, from my determination to break with her, but no less perhaps from that hope of reconciliation which overlay my intention to renounce her (very few of such intentions are absolute, at least in a continuous form, in this human soul of ours,

one of whose laws, confirmed by the unlooked-for wealth of illustration that memory supplies, is intermittence), and hid from me all that in it was unbearably cruel. As for that hope, I saw clearly how far it was chimerical. I was like a pauper who moistens his dry crust with fewer tears if he assures himself that, at any moment, a total stranger is perhaps going to leave him the whole of his fortune. We are all of us obliged, if we are to make reality endurable, to nurse a few little follies in ourselves. Now my hope remained more intact — while at the same time our separation became more effectual — if I refrained from meeting Gilberte. If I had found myself face to face with her in her mother's drawing-room, we might perhaps have uttered irrevocable words which would have rendered our breach final, killed my hope and, on the other hand, by creating a fresh anxiety, reawakened my love and made resignation harder.

Ever so long ago, before I had even thought of breaking with her daughter, Mme. Swann had said to me: "It is all very well your coming to see Gilberte; I should like you to come sometimes for my sake, not to my 'kettledrums,' which would bore you because there is such a crowd, but on the other days, when you will always find me at home if you come fairly late." So that I might be thought, when I came to see her, to be yielding only after a long resistance to a desire which she had expressed in the past. And very late in the afternoon, when it was quite dark, almost at the hour at which my parents would be sitting down to dinner, I would set out to pay Mme. Swann a visit, in the course of which I knew that I should not see Gilberte, and yet should be thinking only of her. In that quarter, then looked upon as remote, of a Paris darker than Paris is to-day, where even in the centre there was no electric light in the public thoroughfares and very little in private houses, the lamps of a drawing-room situated on the ground level, or but slightly raised above it, as were the rooms in which Mme. Swann generally received her visitors, were enough to lighten the street, and to make the passer-by raise his eyes, connecting with their glow, as with its apparent though hidden cause, the presence outside the door of a string of smart broughams. This passer-by was led to believe, not without a certain emotion, that a modification had been effected in this mysterious cause, when he saw one of the carriages begin to move; but it was merely a coachman who, afraid of his horses' catching cold, started them now and again on a brisk walk, all the more impressive because the rubber-tired wheels gave the sound of their hooves a background of silence from which it stood out more distinct and more explicit.

The 'winter-garden,' of which in those days the passer-by generally caught a glimpse, in whatever street he might be walking, if the drawing-room did not

stand too high above the pavement, is to be seen to-day only in photogravures in the gift-books of P. J. Stahl, where, in contrast to the infrequent floral decorations of the Louis XVI drawing-rooms now in fashion — a single rose or a Japanese iris in a long-necked vase of crystal into which it would be impossible to squeeze a second — it seems, because of the profusion of indoor plants which people had then, and of the absolute want of style in their arrangement, as though it must have responded in the ladies whose houses it adorned to some living and delicious passion for botany rather than to any cold concern for lifeless decoration. It suggested to one, only on a larger scale, in the houses of those days, those tiny, portable hothouses laid out on New Year's morning beneath the lighted lamp — for the children were always too impatient to wait for daylight — among all the other New Year's presents but the loveliest of them all, consoling them with its real plants which they could tend as they grew for the bareness of the winter soil; and even more than those little houses themselves, those winter-gardens were like the hothouse that the children could see there at the same time, portrayed in a delightful book, another of their presents, and one which, for all that it was given not to them but to Mlle. Lili, the heroine of the story, enchanted them to such a pitch that even now, when they are almost old men and women, they ask themselves whether, in those fortunate years, winter was not the loveliest of the seasons. And inside there, beyond the winter-garden, through the various kinds of arborescence which from the street made the lighted window appear like the glass front of one of those children's playthings, pictured or real, the passer-by, drawing himself up on tiptoe, would generally observe a man in a frock coat, a gardenia or a carnation in his buttonhole, standing before a seated lady, both vaguely outlined, like two intaglios cut in a topaz, in the depths of the drawing-room atmosphere clouted by the samovar — then a recent importation — with steam which may very possibly be escaping from it still to-day, but to which, if it does, we are grown so accustomed now that no one notices it. Mme. Swann attached great importance to her 'tea'; she thought that she shewed her originality and expressed her charm when she said to a man, "You will find me at home any day, fairly late; come to tea!" so that she allowed a sweet and delicate smile to accompany the words which she pronounced with a fleeting trace of English accent, and which her listener duly noted, bowing solemnly in acceptance, as though the invitation had been something important and uncommon which commanded deference and required attention. There was another reason, apart from those given already, for the flowers' having more than a merely ornamental part in Mme. Swann's

drawing-room, and this reason pertained not to the period, but, in some degree, to the former life of Odette. A great courtesan, such as she had been, lives largely for her lovers, that is to say at home, which means that she comes in time to live for her home. The things that one sees in the house of a 'respectable' woman, things which may of course appear to her also to be of importance, are those which are in any event of the utmost importance to the courtesan. The culminating point of her day is not the moment in which she dresses herself for all the world to see, but that in which she undresses herself for a man. She must be as smart in her wrapper, in her nightgown, as in her outdoor attire. Other women display their jewels, but as for her, she lives in the intimacy of her pearls. This kind of existence imposes on her as an obligation and ends by giving her a fondness for luxury which is secret, that is to say which comes near to being disinterested. Mme. Swann extended this to include her flowers. There was always beside her chair an immense bowl of crystal filled to the brim with Parma violets or with long white daisy-petals scattered upon the water, which seemed to be testifying, in the eyes of the arriving guest, to some favourite and interrupted occupation, such as the cup of tea which Mme. Swann would, for her own amusement, have been drinking there by herself; an occupation more intimate still and more mysterious, so much so that one felt oneself impelled to apologise on seeing the flowers exposed there by her side, as one would have apologised for looking at the title of the still open book which would have revealed to one what had just been read by — and so, perhaps, what was still in the mind of Odette. And unlike the book the flowers were living things; it was annoying, when one entered the room to pay Mme. Swann a visit, to discover that she was not alone, or if one came home with her not to find the room empty, so prominent a place in it, enigmatic and intimately associated with hours in the life of their mistress of which one knew nothing, did those flowers assume which had not been made ready for Odette's visitors but, as it were, forgotten there by her, had held and would hold with her again private conversations which one was afraid of disturbing, the secret of which one tried in vain to read, fastening one's eyes on the moist purple, the still liquid water-colour of the Parma violets. By the end of October Odette would begin to come home with the utmost punctuality for tea, which was still known, at that time, as 'five-o'clock tea,' having once heard it said, and being fond of repeating that if Mme. Verdurin had been able to form a salon it was because people were always certain of finding her at home at the same hour. She imagined that she herself had one also, of the same kind, but freer, *senza rigore* as she used to say. She saw herself figuring

thus as a sort of Lespinasse, and believed that she had founded a rival salon by taking from the du Defiant of the little group several of her most attractive men, notably Swann himself, who had followed her in her secession and into her retirement, according-to a version for which one can understand that she had succeeded in gaining credit among her more recent friends, ignorant of what had passed, though without convincing herself. But certain favourite parts are played by us so often before the public and rehearsed so carefully when we are alone that we find it easier to refer to their fictitious testimony than to that of a reality which we have almost entirely forgotten. On days on which Mme. Swann had not left the house, one found her in a wrapper of *crêpe-de-Chine*, white as the first snows of winter, or, it might be, in one of those long pleated garments of moussettne-de-soie, which seemed nothing more than a shower of white or rosy petals, and would be regarded to-day as hardly suitable for winter, though quite wrongly. For these light fabrics and soft colours gave to a woman — in the stifling warmth of the drawing-rooms of those days, with their heavily curtained doors, rooms of which the most effective thing that the society novelists of the time could find to say was that they were ‘exquisitely cushioned’— the same air of coolness that they gave to the roses which were able to stay in the room there by her side, despite the winter, in the glowing flesh tints of their nudity, as though it were already spring. By reason of the muffling of all sound in the carpets, and of the remoteness of her cosy retreat, the lady of the house, not being apprised of your entry as she is to-day, would continue to read almost until you were standing before her chair, which enhanced still further that sense of the romantic, that charm of a sort of secret discovery, which we find to-day in the memory of those gowns, already out of fashion even then, which Mme. Swann was perhaps alone in not having discarded, and which give us the feeling that the woman who wore them must have been the heroine of a novel because most of us have scarcely set eyes on them outside the pages of certain of Henry Gréville’s tales. Odette had, at this time, in her drawing-room, when winter began, chrysanthemums of enormous size and a variety of colours such as Swann, in the old days, certainly never saw in her drawing-room in the Rue La Pérouse. My admiration for them — when I went to pay Mme. Swann one of those melancholy visits during which, prompted by my sorrow, I discovered in her all the mystical poetry of her character as the mother of that Gilberte to whom she would say on the morrow: “Your friend came to see me yesterday,”— sprang, no doubt, from my sense that, rose-pale like the Louis XIV silk that covered her chairs, snow-white like her *crêpe-de-Chine* wrapper, or of a metallic

red like her samovar, they superimposed upon the decoration of the room another, a supplementary scheme of decoration, as rich, as delicate in its colouring, but one which was alive and would last for a few days only. But I was touched to find that these chrysanthemums appeared less ephemeral than, one might almost say, lasting, when I compared them with the tones, as pink, as coppery, which the setting sun so gorgeously displays amid the mists of a November afternoon, and which, after seeing them, before I had entered the house, fade from the sky, I found again inside, prolonged, transposed on to the flaming palette of the flowers. Like the fires caught and fixed by a great colourist from the impermanence of the atmosphere and the sun, so that they should enter and adorn a human dwelling, they invited me, those chrysanthemums, to put away all my sorrows and to taste with a greedy rapture during that 'tea-time' the too fleeting joys of November, of which they set ablaze all around me the intimate and mystical glory. Alas, it was not in the conversations to which I must listen that I could hope to attain to that glory; they had but little in common with it. Even with Mme. Cottard, and although it was growing late, Mme. Swann would assume her most caressing manner to say: "Oh, no, it's not late, really; you mustn't look at the clock; that's not the right time; it's stopped; you can't possibly have anything else to do now, why be in such a hurry?" as she pressed a final tartlet upon the Professor's wife, who was gripping her card-case in readiness for flight.

"One simply can't tear oneself away from this house!" observed Mme. Bontemps to Mme. Swann, while Mme. Cottard, in her astonishment at hearing her own thought put into words, exclaimed: "Why, that's just what I always say myself, what I tell my own little judge, in the court of conscience!" winning the applause of the gentlemen from the Jockey Club, who had been profuse in their salutations, as though confounded at such an honour's being done them, when Mme. Swann had introduced them to this common and by no means attractive little woman, who kept herself, when confronted with Odette's brilliant friends, in reserve, if not on what she herself called 'the defensive,' for she always used stately language to describe the simplest happenings. "I should never have suspected it," was Mme. Swann's comment, "three Wednesdays running you've played me false." "That's quite true, Odette; it's simply ages, it's an eternity since I saw you last. You see, I plead guilty; but I must tell you," she went on with a vague suggestion of outraged modesty, for although a doctor's wife she would never have dared to speak without periphrasis of rheumatism or of a chill on the kidneys," that I have had a lot of little troubles. As we all have, I dare say.

And besides that I've had a crisis among my masculine domestics. I'm sure, I'm no more imbued with a sense of my own authority than most ladies; still I've been obliged, just to make an example you know, to give my Vatel notice; I believe he was looking out anyhow for a more remunerative place. But his departure nearly brought about the resignation of my entire ministry. My own maid refused to stay in the house a moment longer; oh, we have had some Homeric scenes. However I held fast to the reins through thick and thin; the whole affair's been a perfect lesson, which won't be lost on me, I can tell you. I'm afraid I'm boring you with all these stories about servants, but you know as well as I do what a business it is when one is obliged to set about rearranging one's household.

"Aren't we to see anything of your delicious child?" she wound up. "No, my delicious child is dining with a friend," replied Mme. Swann, and then, turning to me: "I believe she's written to you, asking you to come and see her to-morrow. And your babies?" she went on to Mme. Cottard. I breathed a sigh of relief. These words by which Mme. Swann proved to me that I could see Gilberte whenever I chose gave me precisely the comfort which I had come to seek, and which at that time made my visits to Mme. Swann so necessary. "No, I'm afraid not; I shall write to her, anyhow, this evening. Gilberte and I never seem to see one another now," I added, pretending to attribute our separation to some mysterious agency, which gave me a further illusion of being in love, supported as well by the affectionate way in which I spoke of Gilberte and she of me. "You know, she's simply devoted to you," said Mme. Swann. "Really, you won't come to-morrow?" Suddenly my heart rose on wings; the thought had just struck me —"After all, why shouldn't I, since it's her own mother who suggests it?" But with the thought I fell back into my old depression. I was afraid now lest, when she saw me again, Gilberte might think that my indifference of late had been feigned, and it seemed wiser to prolong our separation. During these asides Mme. Bontemps had been complaining of the insufferable dulness of politicians' wives, for she pretended to find everyone too deadly or too stupid for words, and to deplore her husband's official position. "Do you mean to say you can shake hands with fifty doctors' wives, like that, one after the other?" she exclaimed to Mme. Cottard, who, unlike her, was full of the kindest feelings for everybody and of determination to do her duty in every respect. "Ah! you're a law-abiding woman! You see, in my case', at the Ministry, don't you know, I simply have to keep it up, of course. It's too much for me, I can tell you; you know what those officials' wives are like, it's all I can do not to put my tongue

out at them. And my niece Albertine is just like me. You really wouldn't believe the impudence that girl has. Last week, on my 'day,' I had the wife of the Under Secretary of State for Finance, who told us that she knew nothing at all about cooking. 'But surely, ma'am,' my niece chipped in with her most winning smile, 'you ought to know everything about it, after all the dishes your father had to wash.'" "Oh, I do love that story; I think it's simply exquisite!" cried Mme. Swann. "But certainly on the Doctor's consultation days you should make a point of being 'at home,' among your flowers and books and all your pretty things," she urged Mme. Cottard. "Straight out like that! Bang! Right in the face; bang! She made no bones about it, I can tell you! And she'd never said a word to me about it, the little wretch; she's as cunning as a monkey. You are lucky to be able to control yourself; I do envy people who can hide what is in their minds." "But I've no need to do that, Mme. Bontemps, I'm not so hard to please," Mme. Cottard gently expostulated. "For one thing, I'm not in such a privileged position," she went on, slightly raising her voice as was her custom, as though she were underlining the point of her remark, whenever she slipped into the conversation any of those delicate courtesies, those skilful flatteries which won her the admiration and assisted the career of her husband. "And besides I'm only too glad to do anything that can be of use to the Professor."

"But, my dear, it isn't what one's glad to do; it's what one is able to do! I expect you're not nervous. Do you know, whenever I see the War Minister's wife making faces, I start copying her at once. It's a dreadful thing to have a temperament like mine."

"To be sure, yes," said Mme. Cottard, "I've heard people say that she had a twitch; my husband knows someone else who occupies a very high position, and it's only natural, when gentlemen get talking together..."

"And then, don't you know, it's just the same with the Chief of the Registry; he's a hunchback. Whenever he comes to see me, before he's been in the room five minutes my fingers are itching to stroke his hump. My husband says I'll cost him his place. What if I do! A fig for the Ministry! Yes, a fig for the Ministry! I should like to have that printed as a motto on my notepaper. I can see I am shocking you; you're so frightfully proper, but I must say there's nothing amuses me like a little devilry now and then. Life would be dreadfully monotonous without it." And she went on talking about the Ministry all the time, as though it had been Mount Olympus. To change the conversation, Mme. Swann turned to Mme. Cottard: "But you're looking very smart to-day. Redfern *fecit*?"

"No, you know, I always swear by Rauthnitz. Besides, it's only an old thing

I've had done up." "Not really! It's charming!"

"Guess how much.... No, change the first figure!"

"You don't say so! Why, that's nothing; it's given away! Three times that at least, I should have said." "You see how history comes to be written," apostrophised the doctor's wife. And pointing to a neck-ribbon which had been a present from Mme. Swann: "Look, Odette! Do you recognise this?"

Through the gap between a pair of curtains a head peeped with ceremonious deference, making a playful pretence of being afraid of disturbing the party; it was Swann. "Odette, the Prince d'Agrigente is with me in the study. He wants to know if he may pay his respects to you. What am I to tell him?" "Why, that I shall be delighted," Odette would reply, secretly flattered, but without losing anything of the composure which came to her all the more easily since she had always, even in her 'fast' days, been accustomed to entertain men of fashion. Swann disappeared to deliver the message, and would presently return with the Prince, unless in the meantime Mme. Verdurin had arrived. When he married Odette Swann had insisted on her ceasing to frequent the little clan. (He had several good reasons for this stipulation, though, had he had none, he would have made it just the same in obedience to a law of ingratitude which admits no exception, and proves that every 'go-between' is either lacking in foresight or else singularly disinterested.) He had conceded only that Odette and Mme. Verdurin might exchange visits once a year, and even this seemed excessive to some of the 'faithful,' indignant at the insult offered to the 'Mistress' who for so many years had treated Odette and even Swann himself as the spoiled children of her house. For if it contained false brethren who 'failed' upon certain evenings in order that they might secretly accept an invitation from Odette, ready, in the event of discovery, with the excuse that they were anxious to meet Bergotte (although the Mistress assured them that he never went to the Swanns', and even if he did, had no vestige of talent, really — in spite of which she was making the most strenuous efforts, to quote one of her favourite expressions, to 'attract' him), the little group had its 'die-hards' also. And these, though ignorant of those conventional refinements which often dissuade people from the extreme attitude one would have liked to see them adopt in order to annoy some one else, would have wished Mme. Verdurin, but had never managed to prevail upon her, to sever all connection with Odette, and thus deprive Odette of the satisfaction of saying, with a mocking laugh: "We go to the Mistress's very seldom now, since the Schism. It was all very well while my husband was still a bachelor, but when one is married, you know, it isn't always so easy.... If you must know, M. Swann

can’t abide old Ma Verdurin, and he wouldn’t much like the idea of my going there regularly, as I used to. And I, as a dutiful spouse, don’t you see...?” Swann would accompany his wife to their annual evening there but would take care not to be in the room when Mme. Verdurin came to call. And so, if the ‘Mistress’ was in the drawing-room, the Prince d’Agrigente would enter it alone. Alone, too, he was presented to her by Odette, who preferred that Mme. Verdurin should be left in ignorance of the names of her humbler guests, and so might, seeing more than one strange face in the room, be led to believe that she was mixing with the cream of the aristocracy, a device which proved so far successful that Mme. Verdurin said to her husband, that evening, with profound contempt: “Charming people, her friends! I met all the fine flower of the Reaction!” Odette was living, with respect to Mme. Verdurin, under a converse illusion. Not that the latter’s salon had ever begun, at that time, to develop into what we shail one day see it to have become. Mme. Verdurin had not yet reached the period of incubation in which one dispenses with one’s big parties, where the few brilliant specimens recently acquired would be lost in too numerous a crowd, and prefers to wait until the generative force of the ten righteous whom one has succeeded in attracting shall have multiplied those ten seventyfold. As Odette was not to be long now in doing, Mme. Verdurin did indeed entertain the idea of ‘Society’ as her final objective, but her zone of attack was as yet so restricted, and moreover so remote from that in which Odette had some chance of arriving at an identical goal, of breaking the line of defence, that the latter remained absolutely ignorant of the strategic plans which the ‘Mistress’ was elaborating. And it was with the most perfect sincerity that Odette, when anyone spoke to her of Mme. Verdurin as a snob, would answer, laughing, “Oh, no, quite the opposite! For one thing, she never gets a chance of being a snob; she doesn’t know anyone. And then, to do her justice, I must say that she seems quite pleased not to know anyone. No, what she likes are her Wednesdays, and people who talk well.” And in her heart of hearts she envied Mme. Verdurin (for all that she did not despair of having herself, in so eminent a school, succeeded in acquiring them) those arts to which the ‘Mistress’ attached such paramount importance, albeit they did but discriminate, between shades of the Non-existent, sculpture the void, and were, properly speaking, the Arts of Nonentity: to wit those, in the lady of a house, of knowing how to ‘bring people together,’ how to ‘group,’ to ‘draw out,’ to ‘keep in the background,’ to act as a ‘connecting link.’

In any case, Mme. Swann’s friends were impressed when they saw in her house a lady of whom they were accustomed to think only as in her own, in an

inseparable setting of her guests, amid the whole of her little group which they were astonished to behold thus suggested, summarised, assembled, packed into a single armchair in the bodily form of the ‘Mistress,’ the hostess turned visitor, muffled in her cloak with its grebe trimming, as shaggy as the white skins that carpeted that drawing-room embowered in which Mme. Verdurin was a drawing-room in herself. The more timid among the women thought it prudent to retire, and using the plural, as people do when they mean to hint to the rest of the room that it is wiser not to tire a convalescent who is out of bed for the first time: “Odette,” they murmured, “we are going to leave you.” They envied Mme. Cottard, whom the ‘Mistress’ called by her Christian name. “Can I drop you anywhere?” Mme. Verdurin asked her, unable to bear the thought that one of the faithful was going to remain behind instead of following her from the room. “Oh, but this lady has been so very kind as to say, she’ll take me,” replied Mme. Cottard, not wishing to appear to be forgetting, when approached by a more illustrious personage, that she had accepted the offer which Mme. Bontémps had made of driving her home behind her cockaded coachman. “I must say that I am always specially grateful to the friends who are so kind as to take me with them in their vehicles. It is a regular godsend to me, who have no Automedon.” “Especially,” broke in the ‘Mistress,’ who felt that she must say something, since she knew Mme. Bontémps slightly and had just invited her to her Wednesdays, “as at Mme. de Crécy’s house you’re not very near home. Oh, good gracious, I shall never get into the way of saying Mme. Swann!” It was a recognised pleasantry in the little clan, among those who were not overendowed with wit, to pretend that they could never grow used to saying ‘Mme. Swann.’ “I have been so accustomed to saying Mme. de Crécy that I nearly went wrong again!” Only Mme. Verdurin, when she spoke to Odette, was not content with the nearly, but went wrong on purpose. “Don’t you feel afraid, Odette, living out in the wilds like this? I’m sure I shouldn’t feel at all comfortable, coming home after dark. Besides, it’s so damp. It can’t be at all good for your husband’s eczema. You haven’t rats in the house, I hope!” “Oh, dear no. What a horrid idea!” “That’s a good thing; I was told you had. I’m glad to know it’s not true, because I have a perfect horror of the creatures, and I should never have come to see you again. Goodbye, my dear child, we shall meet again soon; you know what a pleasure it is to me to see you. You don’t know how to put your chrysanthemums in water,” she went on, as she prepared to leave the room, Mme. Swann having risen to escort her. “They are Japanese flowers; you must arrange them the same way as the Japanese.” “I do not agree with Mme. Verdurin, although she is the Law and

the Prophets to me in all things! There's no one like you, Odette, for finding such lovely chrysanthemums, or chrysanthema rather, for it seems that's what we ought to call them now," declared Mme. Cottard as soon as the 'Mistress' had shut the door behind her. "Dear Mme. Verdurin is not always very kind about other people's flowers," said Odette sweetly. "Whom do you go to, Odette," asked Mme. Cottard, to forestall any further criticism of the 'Mistress.' "Lemaître? I must confess, the other day in Lemaître's window I saw a huge, great pink bush which made me do something quite mad." But modesty forbade her to give any more precise details as to the price of the bush, and she said merely that the Professor, "and you know, he's not at all a quicktempered man," had 'waved his sword in the air' and told her that she "didn't know what money meant." "No, no, I've no regular florist except Debac." "Nor have I," said Mme. Cottard, "but I confess that I am unfaithful to him now and then with Lachaume." "Oh, you forsake him for Lachaume, do you; I must tell Debac that," retorted Odette, always anxious to shew her wit, and to lead the conversation in her own house, where she felt more at her ease than in the little clan. "Besides, Lachaume is really becoming too dear; his prices are quite excessive, don't you know; I find his prices impossible!" she added, laughing.

Meanwhile Mme. Bontemps, who had been heard a hundred times to declare that nothing would induce her to go to the Verdurins', delighted at being asked to the famous Wednesdays, was planning in her own mind how she could manage to attend as many of them as possible. She was not' aware that Mme. Verdurin liked people not to miss a single one; also she was one of those people whose company is but little sought, who, when a hostess invites them to a series of parties, do not accept and go to them without more ado, like those who know that it is always a pleasure to see them, whenever they have a moment to spare and feel inclined to go out; people of her type deny themselves it may be the first evening and the third, imagining that their absence will be noticed, and save themselves up for the second and fourth, unless it should happen that, having heard from a trustworthy source that the third is to be a particularly brilliant party, they reverse the original order, assuring their hostess that "most unfortunately, we had another engagement last week." So Mme. Bontemps was calculating how many Wednesdays there could still be left before Easter, and by what means she might manage to secure one extra, and yet not appear to be thrusting herself upon her hostess. She relied upon Mme. Cottard, whom she would have with her in the carriage going home, to give her a few hints. "Oh, Mme. Bontemps, I see you getting up to go; it is very bad of you to give the

signal for flight like that! You owe me some compensation for not turning up last Thursday.... Come, sit down again, just for a minute. You can't possibly be going anywhere else before dinner. Really, you won't let yourself be tempted?" went on Mme. Swann, and, as she held out a plate of cakes, "You know, they're not at all bad, these little horrors. They don't look nice, but just taste one, I know you'll like it." "On the contrary, they look quite delicious," broke in Mme. Cottard. "In your house, Odette, one is never short of victuals. I have no need to ask to see the trade-mark; I know you get everything from Rebattet. I must say that I am more eclectic. For sweet biscuits and everything of that sort I repair, as often as not, to Bourbonneux. But I agree that they simply don't know what an ice means. Rebattet for everything iced, and syrups and sorbets; they're past masters. As my husband would say, they're the *ne plus ultra*." "Oh, but we just make these in the house. You won't, really?" "I shan't be able to eat a scrap of dinner," pleaded Mme. Bontemps, "but I will just sit down again for a moment; you know, I adore talking to a clever woman like you." "You will think me highly indiscreet, Odette, but I should so like to know what you thought of the hat Mme. Trombert had on. I know, of course, that big hats are the fashion just now. All the same, wasn't it just the least little bit exaggerated? And compared to the hat she came to see me in the other day, the one she had on just now was microscopic!" "Oh no, I am not at all clever," said Odette, thinking that this sounded well. "I am a perfect simpleton, I believe everything people say, and worry myself to death over the least thing." And she insinuated that she had, just at first, suffered terribly from the thought of having married a man like Swann, who had a separate life of his own and was unfaithful to her. Meanwhile the Prince d'Agrigente, having caught the words "I am not at all clever," thought it incumbent on him to protest; unfortunately he had not the knack of repartee. "Tut, tut, tut, tut!" cried Mme. Bontemps, "Not clever; you!" "That's just what I was saying to myself —'What do I hear?'," the Prince clutched at this straw, "My ears must have played me false!" "No, I assure you," went on Odette, "I am really just an ordinary woman, very easily shocked, full of prejudices, living in my own little groove and dreadfully ignorant." And then, in case he had any news of the Baron de Charlus, "Have you seen our dear Baronet?" she asked him. "You, ignorant!" cried Mme. Bontemps. "Then I wonder what you'd say of the official world, all those wives of Excellencies who can talk of nothing but their frocks.... Listen to this, my friend; not more than a week ago I happened to mention Lohengrin to the Education Minister's wife. She stared at me, and said 'Lohengrin? Oh, yes, the new review at the Folies-Bergères. I hear it's a perfect

scream!’ What do you say to that, eh? You can’t help yourself; when people say things like that it makes your blood boil. I could have struck her. Because I have a bit of a temper of my own. What do you say, sir;” she turned to me, “was I not right?” “Listen,” said Mme. Cottard, “people can’t help answering a little off the mark when they’re asked a thing like that point blank, without any warning. I know something about it, because Mme. Verdurin also has a habit of putting a pistol to your head.” “Speaking of Mme. Verdurin,” Mme. Bontemps asked Mme. Cottard, “do you know who will be there on Wednesday? Oh, I’ve just remembered that we’ve accepted an invitation for next Wednesday. You wouldn’t care to dine with us on Wednesday week? We could go on together to Mme. Verdurin’s. I should never dare to go there by myself; I don’t know why it is, that great lady always terrifies me.” “I’ll tell you what it is,” replied Mme. Cottard, “what frightens you about Mme. Verdurin is her organ. But you see everyone can’t have such a charming organ as Mme. Swann. Once you’ve found your tongue, as the ‘Mistress’ says, the ice will soon be broken. For she’s a very easy person, really, to get on with. But I can quite understand what you feel; it’s never pleasant to find oneself for the first time in a strange country.” “Won’t you dine with us, too?” said Mme. Bontemps to Mme. Swann. “After dinner we could all go to the Verdurins’ together, ‘do a Verdurin’; and even if it means that the ‘Mistress’ will stare me out of countenance and never ask me to the house again, once we are there we’ll just sit by ourselves and have a quiet talk, I’m sure that’s what I should like best.” But this assertion can hardly have been quite truthful, for Mme. Bontemps went on to ask: “Who do you think will be there on Wednesday week? What will they be doing? There won’t be too big a crowd, I hope!” “I certainly shan’t be there,” said Odette. “We shall just look in for a minute on the last Wednesday of all. If you don’t mind waiting till then ——” But Mme. Bontemps did not appear to be tempted by the proposal.

Granted that the intellectual distinction of a house and its smartness are generally in inverse rather than direct ratio, one must suppose, since Swann found Mme. Bontemps attractive, that any forfeiture of position once accepted has the consequence of making us less particular with regard to the people among whom we have resigned ourselves to finding entertainment, less particular with regard to their intelligence as to everything else about them. And if this be true, men, like nations, must see their culture and even their language disappear with their independence. One of the effects of this indulgence is to aggravate the tendency which after a certain age we have towards finding pleasure in speeches that are a homage to our own turn of mind, to our

weaknesses, an encouragement to us to yield to them; that is the age at which a great artist prefers to the company of original minds that of pupils who have nothing in common with him save the letter of his doctrine, who listen to him and offer incense; at which a man or woman of mark, who is living entirely for love, will find that the most intelligent person in a gathering is one perhaps of no distinction, but one who has shewn by some utterance that he can understand and approve what is meant by an existence devoted to gallantry, and has thus pleasantly excited the voluptuous instincts of the lover or mistress; it was the age, too, at which Swann, in so far as he had become the husband of Odette, enjoyed hearing Mme. Bontemps say how silly it was to have nobody in one's house but duchesses (concluding from that, quite the contrary of what he would have decided in the old days at the Verdurins', that she was a good creature, extremely sensible and not at all a snob) and telling her stories which made her 'die laughing' because she had not heard them before, although she always 'saw the point' at once, liked flattering her for his own amusement. "Then the Doctor is not mad about flowers, like you?" Mme. Swann asked Mme. Cottard. "Oh, well, you know, my husband is a sage; be practises moderation in all things. Yet, I must admit, he has a passion." Her eye aflame with malice, joy, curiosity, "And what is that, pray?" inquired Mme. Bontemps. Quite simply Mme. Cottard answered her, "Reading." "Oh, that's a very restful passion in a husband!" cried Mme. Bontemps suppressing an impish laugh. "When the Doctor gets a book in his hands, you know!" "Well, that needn't alarm you much..." "But it does, for his eyesight. I must go now and look after him, Odette, and I shall come back on the very first opportunity and knock at your door. Talking of eyesight, have you heard that the new house Mme. Verdurin has just bought is to be lighted by electricity? I didn't get that from my own little secret service, you know, but from quite a different source; it was the electrician himself, Mildé, who told me. You see, I quote my authorities! Even the bedrooms, he says, are to have electric lamps with shades which will filter the light. It is evidently a charming luxury, for those who can afford it. But it seems that our contemporaries must absolutely have the newest thing if it's the only one of its kind in the world. Just fancy, the sister-in-law of a friend of mine has had the telephone installed in her house! She can order things from her tradesmen without having to go out of doors! I confess that I've made the most bare-faced stratagems to get permission to go there one day, just to speak into the instrument. It's very tempting, but more in a friend's house than at home. I don't think I should like to have the telephone in my establishment. Once the first excitement is over, it must be a perfect racket going

on all the time. Now, Odette, I must be off; you're not to keep Mme. Bontemps any longer, she's looking after me. I must absolutely tear myself away; you're making me behave in a nice way, I shall be getting home after my husband!"

And for myself also it was time to return home, before I had tasted those wintry delights of which the chrysanthemums had seemed to me to be the brilliant envelope. These pleasures had not appeared, and yet Mme. Swann did not look as though she expected anything more. She allowed the servants to carry away the tea-things, as who should say "Time, please, gentlemen!" And at last she did say to me: "Really, must you go? Very well; good-bye!" I felt that I might have stayed there without encountering those unknown pleasures, and that my unhappiness was not the cause of my having to forego them. Were they to be found, then, situated not upon that beaten track of hours which leads one always to the moment of departure, but rather upon some cross-road unknown to me along which I ought to have digressed? At least, the object of my visit had been attained; Gilberte would know that I had come to see her parents when she was not at home, and that I had, as Mme. Cottard had incessantly assured me, "made a complete conquest, first shot, of Mme. Verdurin," whom, she added, she had never seen 'make so much' of anyone. ("You and she must have hooked atoms.") She would know that I had spoken of her as was fitting, with affection, but that I had not that incapacity for living without our seeing one another which I believed to be at the root of the boredom that she had shewn at our last meetings. I had told Mme. Swann that I should not be able to see Gilberte again. I had said this as though I had finally decided not to see her any more. And the letter which I was going to send Gilberte would be framed on those lines. Only to myself, to fortify my courage, I proposed no more than a supreme and concentrated effort, lasting a few days only. I said to myself: "This is the last time that I shall refuse to meet her; I shall accept the next invitation." To make our separation less difficult to realise, I did not picture it to myself as final. But I knew very well that it would be.

The first of January was exceptionally painful to me that winter. So, no doubt, is everything that marks a date and an anniversary when we are unhappy. But if our unhappiness is due to the loss of some dear friend, our suffering consists merely in an unusually vivid comparison of the present with the past. There was added to this, in my case, the unexpressed hope that Gilberte, having intended to leave me to take the first steps towards a reconciliation, and discovering that I had not taken them, had been waiting only for the excuse of New Year's Day to write to me, saying: "What is the matter? I am madly in love

with you; come, and let us explain things properly; I cannot live without seeing you." As the last days of the old year went by, such a letter began to seem probable. It was, perhaps, nothing of the sort, but to make us believe that such a thing is probable the desire, the need that we have for it suffices. The soldier is convinced that a certain interval of time, capable of being indefinitely prolonged, will be allowed him before the bullet finds him, the thief before he is taken, men in general before they have to die. That is the amulet which preserves people — and sometimes peoples — not from danger but from the fear of danger, in reality from the belief in danger, which in certain cases allows them to brave it without their actually needing to be brave. It is confidence of this sort, and with as little foundation, that sustains the lover who is counting upon a reconciliation, upon a letter. For me to cease to expect a letter it would have sufficed that I should have ceased to wish for one. However unimportant one may know that one is in the eyes of her whom one still loves, one attributes to her a series of thoughts (though their sum-total be indifference) the intention to express those thoughts, a complication of her inner life in which one is the constant object possibly of her antipathy but certainly of her attention. But to imagine what was going on in Gilberte's mind I should have required simply the power to anticipate on that New Year's Day what I should feel on the first day of any of the years to come, when the attention or the silence or the affection or the coldness of Gilberte would pass almost unnoticed by me and I should not dream, should not even be able to dream of seeking a solution of problems which would have ceased to perplex me. When we are in love, our love is too big a thing for us to be able altogether to contain it within us. It radiates towards the beloved object, finds in her a surface which arrests it, forcing it to return to its starting-point, and it is this shock of the repercussion of our own affection which we call the other's regard for ourselves, and which pleases us more then than on its outward journey because we do not recognise it as having originated in ourselves. New Year's Day rang out all its hours without there coming to me that letter from Gilberte. And as I received a few others containing greetings tardy or retarded by the overburdening of the mails at that season, on the third and fourth of January I hoped still, but my hope grew hourly more faint. Upon the days that followed I gazed through a mist of tears. This undoubtedly meant that, having been less sincere than I thought in my renunciation of Gilberte, I had kept the hope of a letter from her for the New Year. And seeing that hope exhausted before I had had time to shelter myself behind another, I suffered as would an invalid who had emptied his phial of morphia without having another within his reach. But

perhaps also in my case — and these two explanations are not mutually exclusive, for a single feeling is often made up of contrary elements — the hope that I entertained of ultimately receiving a letter had brought to my mind's eye once again the image of Gilberte, had reawakened the emotions which the expectation of finding myself in her presence, the sight of her, her way of treating me had aroused in me before. The immediate possibility of a reconciliation had suppressed in me that faculty the immense importance of which we are apt to overlook: the faculty of resignation. Neurasthenics find it impossible to believe the friends who assure them that they will gradually recover their peace of mind if they will stay in bed and receive no letters, read no newspapers. They imagine that such a course will only exasperate their twitching nerves. And similarly lovers, who look upon it from their enclosure in a contrary state of mind, who have not begun yet to make trial of it, are unable to believe in the healing power of renunciation.

In consequence of the violence of my palpitations, my doses of caffeine were reduced; the palpitations ceased. Whereupon I asked myself whether it was not to some extent the drug that had been responsible for the anguish that I had felt when I came near to quarrelling with Gilberte, an anguish which I had attributed, on every recurrence of it, to the distressing prospect of never seeing my friend again or of running the risk of seeing her only when she was a prey to the same ill-humour. But if this medicine had been at the root of the sufferings which my imagination must in that case have interpreted wrongly (not that there would be anything extraordinary in that, seeing that, among lovers, the most acute mental suffering assumes often the physical identity of the woman with whom they are living), it had been, in that sense, like the philtre which, long after they have drunk of it, continues to bind Tristan to Isolde. For the physical improvement which the reduction of my caffeine effected almost at once did not arrest the evolution of that grief which my absorption of the toxin had perhaps — if it had not created it — at any rate contrived to render more acute.

Only, as the middle of the month of January approached, once my hopes of a letter on New Year's Day had been disappointed, once the additional disturbance that had come with their disappointment had grown calm, it was my old sorrow, that of 'before the holidays,' which began again. What was perhaps the most cruel thing about it was that I myself was its architect, unconscious, wilful, merciless and patient. The one thing that mattered, my relations with Gilberte, it was I who was labouring to make them impossible by gradually creating out of this prolonged separation from my friend, not indeed her indifference, but what

would come to the same thing in the end, my own. It was to a slow and painful suicide of that part of me which was Gilberte's lover that I was goading myself with untiring energy, with a clear sense not only of what I was presently doing but of what must result from it in the future; I knew not only that after a certain time I should cease to love Gilberte, but also that she herself would regret it and that the attempts which she would then make to see me would be as vain as those that she was making now, no longer because I loved her too well but because I should certainly be in love with some other woman whom I should continue to desire, to wait for, through hours of which I should not dare to divert any particle of a second to Gilberte who would be nothing to me then. And no doubt at that very moment in which (since I was determined not to see her again, unless after a formal request for an explanation or a full confession of love on her part, neither of which was in the least degree likely to come to me now) I had already lost Gilberte, and loved her more than ever, and could feel all that she was to me better than in the previous year when, spending all my afternoons in her company, or as many as I chose, I believed that no peril threatened our friendship,— no doubt at that moment the idea that I should one day entertain identical feelings for another was odious to me, for that idea carried me away beyond the range of Gilberte, my love and my sufferings. My love, my sufferings in which through my tears I attempted to discern precisely what Gilberte was, and was obliged to recognise that they did not pertain exclusively to her but would, sooner or later, be some other woman's portion. So that — or such, at least, was my way of thinking then — we are always detached from our fellow-creatures; when a man loves one of them he feels that his love is not labelled with their two names, but may be born again in the future, may have been born already in the past for another and not for her. And in the time when he is not in love, if he makes up his mind philosophically as to what it is that is inconsistent in love, he will find that the love of which he can speak unmoved he did not, at the moment of speaking, feel, and therefore did not know, knowledge in these matters being intermittent and not outlasting the actual presence of the sentiment. That future in which I should not love Gilberte, which my sufferings helped me to divine although my imagination was not yet able to form a clear picture of it, certainly there would still have been time to warn Gilberte that it was gradually taking shape, that its coming was, if not imminent, at least inevitable, if she herself, Gilberte, did not come to my rescue and destroy in the germ my nascent indifference. How often was I not on the point of writing, or of going to Gilberte to tell her: "Take care. My mind is made up. What I am doing

now is my supreme effort. I am seeing you now for the last time. Very soon I shall have ceased to love you." But to what end? By what authority should I have reproached Gilberte for an indifference which, not that I considered myself guilty on that count, I too manifested towards everything that was not herself? The last time! To me, that appeared as something of immense significance, because I was in love with Gilberte. On her it would doubtless have made just as much impression as those letters in which our friends ask whether they may pay us a visit before they finally leave the country, an offer which, like those made by tiresome women who are in love with us, we decline because we have pleasures of our own in prospect. The time which we have at our disposal every day is elastic; the passions that we feel expand it, those that we inspire contract it; and habit fills up what remains.

Besides, what good would it have done if I had spoken to Gilberte; she would not have understood me. We imagine always when we speak that it is our own ears, our own mind that are listening. My words would have come to her only in a distorted form, as though they had had to pass through the moving curtain of a waterfall before they reached my friend, unrecognisable, giving a foolish sound, having no longer any kind of meaning. The truth which one puts into one's words does not make a direct path for itself, is not supported by irresistible evidence. A considerable time must elapse before a truth of the same order can take shape in the words themselves. Then the political opponent who, despite all argument, every proof that he has advanced to damn the votary of the rival doctrine as a traitor, will himself have come to share the hated conviction by which he who once sought in vain to disseminate it is no longer bound. Then the masterpiece of literature whidi for the admirers who read it aloud seemed to make self-evident the proofs of its excellence, while to those who listened it presented only a senseless or commonplace image, will by these too be proclaimed a masterpiece, but too late for the author to learn of their discovery. Similarly in love the barriers, do what one may, cannot be broken down from without by him whom they maddeningly exclude; it is when he is no longer concerned with them that suddenly, as the result of aft effort directed from elsewhere, accomplished within the heart of her who did not love him, those barriers which he has charged without success will fall to no advantage. If I had come to Gilberte to tell her of my future indifference and the means of preventing it, she would have assumed from my action that my love for her, the need that I had of her, were even greater than I had supposed, and her distaste for the sight of me would thereby have been increased. And incidentally it is quite

true that it was that love for her which helped me, by means of the incongruous states of mind which it successively produced in me, to foresee, more clearly than she herself could, the end of that love. And yet some such warning I might perhaps have addressed, by letter or with my own lips, to Gilberte, after a long enough interval, which would render her, it is true, less indispensable to me, but would also have proved to her that she was not so indispensable. Unfortunately certain persons — of good or evil intent — spoke of me to her in a fashion which must have led her to think that they were doing so at my request. Whenever I thus learned that Cottard, my own mother, even M. de Norpois had by a few ill-chosen words rendered useless all the sacrifice that I had just been making, wasted all the advantage of my reserve by giving me, wrongly, the appearance of having emerged from it, I was doubly angry. In the first place I could no longer reckon from any date but the present my laborious and fruitful abstention which these tiresome people had, unknown to me, interrupted and so brought to nothing. And not only that; I should have less pleasure in seeing Gilberte, who would think of me now no longer as containing myself in dignified resignation, but as plotting in the dark for an interview which she had scorned to grant me. I cursed all the idle chatter of people who so often, without any intention of hurting us or of doing us a service, for no reason, for talking's sake, often because we ourselves have not been able to refrain from talking in their presence, and because they are indiscreet (as we ourselves are), do us, at a crucial moment, so much harm. It is true that in the grim operation performed for the eradication of our love they are far from playing a part equal to that played by two persons who are in the habit, from excess of good nature in one and of malice in the Other, of undoing everything at the moment when everything is on the point of being settled. But against these two persons we bear no such grudge as against the inopportune Cottards of this world, for the latter of them is the person whom we love and the former is ourself.

Meanwhile, since on almost every occasion of my going to see her Mme. Swann would invite me to come to tea another day, with her daughter, and tell me to reply directly to her, I was constantly writing to Gilberte, and in this correspondence I did not choose the expressions which might, I felt, have won her over, sought only to carve out the easiest channel for the torrent of my tears. For, like desire, regret seeks not to be analysed but to be satisfied. When one begins to love, one spends one's time, not in getting to know what one's love really is, but in making it possible to meet next day. When one abandons love one seeks not to know one's grief but to offer to her who is causing it that

expression of it which seems to one the most moving. One says the things which one feels the need of saying, and which the other will not understand, one speaks for oneself alone. I wrote: “I had thought that it would not be possible. Alas, I see now that it is not so difficult.” I said also: “I shall probably not see you again;” I said it while I continued to avoid shewing a coldness which she might think affected, and the words, as I wrote them, made me weep because I felt that they expressed not what I should have liked to believe but what was probably going to happen. For at the next request for a meeting which she would convey to me I should have again, as I had now, the courage not to yield, and, what with one refusal and another, I should gradually come to the moment when, by virtue of not having seen her again, I should not wish to see her. I wept, but I found courage enough to sacrifice, I tasted the sweets of sacrificing the happiness of being with her to the probability of seeming attractive to her one day, a day when, alas, my seeming attractive to her would be immaterial to me. Even the supposition, albeit so far from likely, that at this moment, as she had pretended during the last visit that I had paid her, she loved me, that what I took for the boredom which one feels in the company of a person of whom one has grown tired had been due only to a jealous susceptibility, to a feint of indifference analogous to my own, only rendered my decision less painful. It seemed to me that in years to come, when we had forgotten one another, when I should be able to look back and tell her that this letter which I was now in course of writing had not been for one moment sincere, she would answer, “What, you really did love me, did you? If you had only known how I waited for that letter, how I hoped that you were coming to see me, how I cried when I read it.” The thought, while I was writing it, immediately on my return from her mother’s house, that I was perhaps helping to bring about that very misunderstanding, that thought, by the sadness in which it plunged me, by the pleasure of imagining that I was loved by Gilberte, gave me the impulse to continue my letter.

If, at the moment of leaving Mme. Swann, when her tea-party ended, I was thinking of what I was going to write to her daughter, Mme. Cottard, as she departed, had been filled with thoughts of a wholly different order. On her little ‘tour of inspection’ she had not failed to congratulate Mme. Swann on the new ‘pieces,’ the recent ‘acquisitions’ which caught the eye in her drawing-room. She could see among them some, though only a very few, of the things that Odette had had in the old days in the Rue La Pérouse, for instance her animals carved in precious stones, her fetishes.

For since Mme. Swann had picked up from a friend whose opinion she

valued the word ‘dowdy’— which had opened to her a new horizon because it denoted precisely those things which a few years earlier she had considered ‘smart’— all those things had, one after another, followed into retirement the gilded trellis that had served as background to her chrysanthemums, innumerable boxes of sweets from Giroux’s, and the coroneted note-paper (not to mention the coins of gilt pasteboard littered about on the mantelpieces, which, even before she had come to know Swann, a man of taste had advised her to sacrifice). Moreover in the artistic disorder, the studio-like confusion of the rooms, whose walls were still painted in sombre colours which made them as different as possible from the white-enamelled drawing-rooms in which, a little later, you were to find Mme. Swann installed, the Far East recoiled more and more before the invading forces of the eighteenth century; and the cushions which, to make me ‘comfortable,’ Mme. Swann heaped up and buffeted into position behind my back were sprinkled with Louis XV garlands and not, as of old, with Chinese dragons. In the room in which she was usually to be found, and of which she would say, “Yes, I like this room; I use it a great deal. I couldn’t live with a lot of horrid vulgar things swearing at me all the time; this is where I do my work ——” though she never stated precisely at what she was working. Was it a picture? A book, perhaps, for the hobby of writing was beginning to become common among women who liked to ‘do something,’ not to be quite useless. She was surrounded by Dresden pieces (having a fancy for that sort of porcelain, which she would name with an English accent, saying in any connexion: “How pretty that is; it reminds me of Dresden flowers,”), and dreaded for them even more than in the old days for her grotesque figures and her flower-pots the ignorant handling of her servants who must expiate, every now and then, the anxiety that they had caused her by submitting to outbursts of rage at which Swann, the most courteous and considerate of masters, looked on without being shocked. Not that the clear perception of certain weaknesses in those whom we love in any way diminishes our affection for them; rather that affection makes us find those weaknesses charming. Rarely nowadays was it in one of those Japanese wrappers that Odette received her familiars, but rather in the bright and billowing silk of a Watteau gown whose flowering foam she made as though to caress where it covered her bosom, and in which she immersed herself, looked solemn, splashed and sported, with such an air of comfort, of a cool skin and long-drawn breath, that she seemed to look on these garments not as something decorative, a mere setting for herself, but as necessary, in the same way as her ‘tub’ or her daily ‘outing,’ to satisfy the requirements of her style of beauty and

the niceties of hygiene. She used often to say that she would go without bread rather than give up ‘art’ and ‘having nice things about her,’ and that the burning of the ‘Gioconda’ would distress her infinitely more than the destruction, by the same element, of ‘millions’ of the people she knew. Theories which seemed paradoxical to her friends, but made her pass among them as a superior woman, and qualified her to receive a visit once a week from the Belgian Minister, so that in the little world whose sun she was everyone would have been greatly astonished to learn that elsewhere — at the Verdurins’, for instance — she was reckoned a fool. It was this vivacity of expression that made Mme. Swann prefer men’s society to women’s. But when she criticised the latter it was always from the courtesan’s standpoint, singling out the blemishes that might lower them in the esteem of men, a lumpy figure, a bad complexion, inability to spell, hairy legs, foul breath, pencilled eyebrows. But towards a woman who had shewn her kindness or indulgence in the past she was more lenient, especially if this woman were now in trouble. She would defend her warmly, saying: “People are not fair to her. I assure you, she’s quite a nice woman really.”

It was not only the furniture of Odette’s drawing-room, it was Odette herself that Mme. Cottard and all those who had frequented the society of Mme. de Crécy would have found it difficult, if they had not seen her for some little time, to recognise. She seemed to be so much younger. No doubt this was partly because she had grown stouter, was in better condition, seemed at once calmer, more cool, more restful, and also because the new way in which she braided her hair gave more breadth to a face which was animated by an application of pink powder, and into which her eyes and profile, formerly too prominent, seemed now to have been reabsorbed. But another reason for this change lay in the fact that, having reached the turning-point of life, Odette had at length discovered, or invented, a physiognomy of her own, an unalterable ‘character,’ a ‘style of beauty’ and on her incoherent features — which for so long, exposed to every hazard, every weakness of the flesh, borrowing for a moment, at the slightest fatigue, from the years to come, a sort of flickering shadow of anility, had furnished her, well or ill, according to how she was feeling, how she was looking, with a countenance dishevelled, inconstant, formless and attractive — had now set this fixed type, as it were an immortal youthfulness.

Swann had in his room, instead of the handsome photographs that were now taken of his wife, in all of which the same cryptic, victorious expression enabled one to recognise, in whatever dress and hat, her triumphant face and figure, a little old daguerreotype of her, quite plain, taken long before the appearance of

this new type, so that the youth and beauty of Odette, which she had not yet discovered when it was taken, appeared to be missing from it. But it is probable that Swann, having remained constant, or having reverted to a different conception of her, enjoyed in the slender young woman with pensive eyes and tired features, caught in a pose between rest and motion, a more Botticellian charm. For he still liked to recognise in his wife one of Botticelli's figures. Odette, who on the other hand sought not to bring out but to make up for, to cover and conceal the points in herself that did not please her, what might perhaps to an artist express her 'character' but in her woman's eyes were merely blemishes, would not have that painter mentioned in her presence. Swann had a wonderful scarf of oriental silk, blue and pink, which he had bought because it was exactly that worn by Our Lady in the *Magnificat*. But Mme. Swann refused to wear it. Once only she allowed her husband to order her a dress covered all over with daisies, cornflowers, forget-me-nots and campanulas, like that of the Primavera. And sometimes in the evening, when she was tired, he would quietly draw my attention to the way in which she was giving, quite unconsciously, to her pensive hands the uncontrolled, almost distraught movement of the Virgin who dips her pen into the inkpot that the angel holds out to her, before writing upon the sacred page on which is already traced the word 'Magnificat.' But he added, "Whatever you do, don't say anything about it to her; if she knew she was doing it, she would change her pose at once."

Save at these moments of involuntary relaxation, in which Swann essayed to recapture the melancholy cadence of Botticelli, Odette seemed now to be cut out in a single figure, wholly confined within a line which, following the contours of the woman, had abandoned the winding paths, the capricious re-entrants and salients, the radial points, the elaborate dispersions of the fashions of former days, but also, where it was her anatomy that went wrong by making unnecessary digressions within or without the ideal circumference traced for it, was able to rectify, by a bold stroke, the errors of nature, to make up, along a whole section of its course, for the failure as well of the human as of the textile element. The pads, the preposterous 'bustle' had disappeared, as well as those tailed corsets which, projecting under the skirt and stiffened by rods of whalebone, had so long amplified Odette with an artificial stomach and had given her the appearance of being composed of several incongruous pieces which there was no individuality to bind together. The vertical fall of fringes, the curve of trimmings had made way for the inflexion of a body which made silk palpitate as a siren stirs the waves, gave to cambric a human expression now that

it had been liberated, like a creature that had taken shape and drawn breath, from the long chaos and nebulous envelopment of fashions at length dethroned. But Mme. Swann had chosen, had contrived to preserve some vestiges of certain of these, in the very thick of the more recent fashions that had supplanted them. When in the evening, finding myself unable to work and feeling certain that Gilberte had gone to the theatre with friends, I paid a surprise visit to her parents, I used often to find Mme. Swann in an elegant dishabille the skirt of which, of one of those rich dark colours, blood-red or orange, which seemed always as though they meant something very special, because they were no longer the fashion, was crossed diagonally, though not concealed, by a broad band of black lace which recalled the flounces of an earlier day. When on a still chilly afternoon in Spring she had taken me (before my rupture with her daughter) to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, under her coat, which she opened or buttoned up according as the exercise made her feel warm, the dog-toothed border of her blouse suggested a glimpse of the lapel of some non-existent waistcoat such as she had been accustomed to wear, some years earlier, when she had liked their edges to have the same slight indentations; and her scarf — of that same 'Scotch tartan' to which she had remained faithful, but whose tones she had so far softened, red becoming pink and blue lilac, that one might almost have taken it for one of those pigeon's-breast taffetas which were the latest novelty — was knotted in such a way under her chin, without one's being able to make out where it was fastened, that one could not help being reminded of those bonnet-strings which were — now no longer worn. She need only 'hold out' like this for a little longer and young men attempting to understand her theory of dress would say: "Mme. Swann is quite a period in herself, isn't she?" As in a fine literary style which overlays with its different forms and so strengthens a tradition which lies concealed among them, so in Mme. Swann's attire those half-hinted memories of waistcoats or of ringlets, sometimes a tendency, at once repressed, towards the 'all aboard,' or even a distant and vague allusion to the 'chase me' kept alive beneath the concrete form the unfinished likeness of other, older forms which you would not have succeeded, now, in making a tailor or a dressmaker reproduce, but about which your thoughts incessantly hovered, and enwrapped Mme. Swann in a cloak of nobility — perhaps because the sheer uselessness of these fripperies made them seem meant to serve some more than utilitarian purpose, perhaps because of the traces they preserved of vanished years, or else because there was a sort of personality permeating this lady's wardrobe, which gave to the most dissimilar of her costumes a distinct family

likeness. One felt that she did not dress simply for the comfort or the adornment of her body; she was surrounded by her garments as by the delicate and spiritualised machinery of a whole form of civilisation.

When Gilberte, who, as a rule, gave her tea-parties on the days when her mother was ‘at home,’ had for some reason to go out, and I was therefore free to attend Mme. Swann’s ‘kettledrum,’ I would find her dressed in one of her lovely gowns, some of which were of taffeta, others of gros-grain, or of velvet, or of *crêpe-de-Chine*, or satin or silk, gowns which, not being loose like those that she generally wore in the house but buttoned up tight as though she were just going out in them, gave to her stay-at-home laziness on those afternoons something alert and energetic. And no doubt the daring simplicity of their cut was singularly appropriate to her figure and to her movements, which her sleeves appeared to be symbolising in colours that varied from day to day: one would have said that there was a sudden determination in the blue velvet, an easy-going good humour in the white taffeta, and that a sort of supreme discretion full of dignity in her way of holding out her arm had, in order to become visible, put on the appearance, dazzling with the smile of one who had made great sacrifices, of the black *crêpe-de-Chine*. But at the same time these animated gowns took from the complication of their trimmings, none of which had any practical value or served any conceivable purpose, something detached, pensive, secret, in harmony with the melancholy which Mme. Swann never failed to shew, at least in the shadows under her eyes and the drooping arches of her hands. Beneath the profusion of sapphire charms, enamelled four-leaf clovers, silver medals, gold medallions, turquoise amulets, ruby chains and topaz chestnuts there would be, on the dress itself, some design carried out in colour which pursued across the surface of an inserted panel a preconceived existence of its own, some row of little satin buttons, which buttoned nothing and could not be unbuttoned, a strip of braid that sought to please the eye with the minuteness, the discretion of a delicate reminder; and these, as well as the trinkets, had the effect — for otherwise there would have been no possible justification of their presence — of disclosing a secret intention, being a pledge of affection, keeping a secret, ministering to a superstition, commemorating a recovery from sickness, a granted wish, a love affair or a ‘philippine.’ And now and then in the blue velvet of the bodice a hint of ‘slashes,’ in the Henri II style, in the gown of black satin a slight swelling which, if it was in the sleeves, just below the shoulders, made one think of the ‘leg of mutton’ sleeves of 1830, or if, on the other hand, it was beneath the skirt, with its Louis XV paniers, gave the dress a just perceptible air

of being ‘fancy dress’ and at all events, by insinuating beneath the life of the present day a vague reminiscence of the past, blended with the person of Mme. Swann the charm of certain heroines of history or romance. And if I were to draw her attention to this: “I don’t play golf,” she would answer, “like so many of my friends. So I should have no excuse for going about, as they do, in sweaters.”

In the confusion of her drawing-room, on her way from shewing out one visitor, or with a plateful of cakes to ‘tempt’ another, Mme. Swann as she passed by me would take me aside for a moment: “I have special instructions from Gilberte that you are to come to luncheon the day after to-morrow. As I wasn’t sure of seeing you here, I was going to write to you if you hadn’t come.” I continued to resist. And this resistance was costing me steadily less and less, because, however much one may love the poison that is destroying one, when one has compulsorily to do without it, and has had to do without it for some time past, one cannot help attaching a certain value to the peace of mind which one had ceased to know, to the absence of emotion and suffering. If one is not altogether sincere in assuring oneself that one does not wish ever to see again her whom one loves, one would not be a whit more sincere in saying that one would like to see her. For no doubt one can endure her absence only when one promises oneself that it shall not be for long, and thinks of the day on which one shall see her again, but at the same time one feels how much less painful are those daily recurring dreams of a meeting immediate and incessantly postponed than would be an interview which might be followed by a spasm of jealousy, with the result that the news that one is shortly to see her whom one loves would cause a disturbance which would be none too pleasant. What one procrastinates now from day to day is no longer the end of the intolerable anxiety caused by separation, it is the dreaded renewal of emotions which can lead to nothing. How infinitely one prefers to any such interview the docile memory which one can supplement at one’s pleasure with dreams, in which she who in reality does not love one seems, far from that, to be making protestations of her love for one, when one is by oneself; that memory which one can contrive, by blending gradually with it a portion of what one desires, to render as pleasing as one may choose, how infinitely one prefers it to the avoided interview in which one would have to deal with a creature to whom one could no longer dictate at one’s pleasure the words that one would like to hear on her lips, but from whom one would meet with fresh coldness, unlooked-for violence. We know, all of us, when we no longer love, that forgetfulness, that even a vague memory do not

cause us so much suffering as an ill-starred love. It was of such forgetfulness that in anticipation I preferred, without acknowledging it to myself, the reposeful tranquillity.

Moreover, whatever discomfort there may be in such a course of psychical detachment and isolation grows steadily less for another reason, namely that it weakens while it is in process of healing that fixed obsession which is a state of love. Mine was still strong enough for me to be able to count upon recapturing my old position in Gilberte's estimation, which in view of my deliberate abstention must, it seemed to me, be steadily increasing; in other words each of those calm and melancholy days on which I did not see her, coming one after the other without interruption, continuing too without prescription (unless some busy-body were to meddle in my affairs), was a day not lost but gained. Gained to no purpose, it might be, for presently they would be able to pronounce that I was healed. Resignation, modulating our habits, allows certain elements of our strength to be indefinitely increased. Those — so wretchedly inadequate — that I had had to support my grief, on the first evening of my rupture with Gilberte, had since multiplied to an incalculable power. Only, the tendency which everything that exists has to prolong its own existence is sometimes interrupted by sudden impulses to which we give way with all the fewer scruples over letting ourselves go since we know for how many days, for how many months even we have been able, and might still be able to abstain. And often it is when the purse in which we hoard our savings is nearly full that we undo and empty it, it is without waiting for the result of our medical treatment and when we have succeeded in growing accustomed to it that we abandon it. So, one day, when Mme. Swann was repeating her familiar statement of what a pleasure it would be to Gilberte to see me, thus putting the happiness of which I had now for so long been depriving myself, as it were within arm's length, I was stupefied by the realisation that it was still possible for me to enjoy that pleasure, and I could hardly wait until next day, when I had made up my mind to take Gilberte by surprise, in the evening, before dinner.

What helped me to remain patient throughout the long day that followed was another plan that I had made. From the moment in which everything was forgotten, in which I was reconciled to Gilberte, I no longer wished to visit her save as a lover. Every day she should receive from me the finest flowers that grew. And if Mme. Swann, albeit she had no right to be too severe a mother, should forbid my making a daily offering of flowers, I should find other gifts, more precious and less frequent. My parents did not give me enough money for

me to be able to buy expensive things. I thought of a big bowl of old Chinese porcelain which had been left to me by aunt Léonie, and of which Mamma prophesied daily that Françoise would come running to her with an “Oh, it’s all come to pieces!” and that that would be the end of it. Would it not be wiser, in that case, to part with it, to sell it so as to be able to give Gilberte all the pleasure I could. I felt sure that I could easily get a thousand francs for it. I had it tied up in paper; I had grown so used to it that I had ceased altogether to notice it; parting with it had at least the advantage of making me realise what it was like. I took it with me as I started for the Swanns’, and, giving the driver their address, told him to go by the Champs-Elysées, at one end of which was the shop of a big dealer in oriental things, who knew my father. Greatly to my surprise he offered me there and then not one thousand but ten thousand francs for the bowl. I took the notes with rapture. Every day, for a whole year, I could smother Gilberte in roses and lilac. When I left the shop and got into my cab again the driver (naturally enough, since the Swanns lived out by the Bois) instead of taking the ordinary way began to drive me along the Avenue des Champs-Elysées. He had just passed the end of the Rue de Berri when, in the failing light, I thought I saw, close to the Swanns’ house but going in the other direction, going away from it, Gilberte, who was walking slowly, though with a firm step, by the side of a young man with whom she was conversing, but whose face I could not distinguish. I stood up in the cab, meaning to tell the driver to stop; then hesitated. The strolling couple were already some way away, and the parallel lines which their leisurely progress was quietly drawing were on the verge of disappearing in the Elysian gloom. A moment later, I had reached Gilberte’s door. I was received by Mme. Swann. “Oh! she will be sorry!” was my greeting, “I can’t think why she isn’t in. She came home just now from a lesson, complaining of the heat, and said she was going out for a little fresh air with another girl.” “I fancy I passed her in the Avenue des Champs-Elysées.” “Oh, I don’t think it can have been. Anyhow, don’t mention it to her father; he doesn’t approve of her going out at this time of night. Must you go? Good-bye.” I left her, told my driver to go home the same way, but found no trace of the two walking figures. Where had they been? What were they saying to one another in the darkness so confidentially?

I returned home, desperately clutching my windfall of ten thousand francs, which would have enabled me to arrange so many pleasant surprises for that Gilberte whom now I had made up my mind never to see again. No doubt my call at the dealer’s had brought me happiness by allowing me to expect that in

future, whenever I saw my friend, she would be pleased with me and grateful. But if I had not called there, if my cabman had not taken the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, I should not have seen Gilberte with that young man. Thus a single action may have two contradictory effects, and the misfortune that it engenders cancel the good fortune that it has already brought one. There had befallen me the opposite of what so frequently happens. We desire some pleasure, and the material means of obtaining it are lacking. “It is a mistake,” Labruyère tells us, “to be in love without an ample fortune.” There is nothing for it but to attempt a gradual elimination of our desire for that pleasure. In my case, however, the material means had been forthcoming, but at the same moment, if not by a logical effect, at any rate as a fortuitous consequence of that initial success, my pleasure had been snatched from me.

As, for that matter, it seems as though it must always be. As a rule, however, not on the same evening on which we have acquired what makes it possible. Usually, we continue to struggle and to hope for a little longer. But the pleasure can never be realised. If we succeed in overcoming the force of circumstances, nature at once shifts the battle-ground, placing it within ourselves, and effects a gradual change in our heart until it desires something other than what it is going to obtain. And if this transposition has been so rapid that our heart has not had time to change, nature does not, on that account, despair of conquering us, in a manner more gradual, it is true, more subtle, but no less efficacious. It is then, at the last moment, that the possession of our happiness is wrested from us, or rather it is that very possession which nature, with diabolical cleverness, uses to destroy our happiness. After failure in every quarter of the domain of life and action, it is a final incapacity, the mental incapacity for happiness, that nature creates in us. The phenomenon, of happiness either fails to appear, or at once gives way to the bitterest of reactions.

I put my ten thousand francs in a drawer. But they were no longer of any use to me. I ran through them, as it happened, even sooner than if I had sent flowers every day to Gilberte, for when evening came I was always too wretched to stay in the house and used to go and pour out my sorrows upon the bosoms of women whom I did not love. As for seeking to give any sort of pleasure to Gilberte, I no longer thought of that; to visit her house again now could only have added to my sufferings. Even the sight of Gilberte, which would have been so exquisite a pleasure only yesterday, would no longer have sufficed me. For I should have been miserable all the time that I was not actually with her. That is how a woman, by every fresh torture that she inflicts on us, increases, often quite

unconsciously, her power over us and at the same time our demands upon her. With each injury that she does us, she encircles us more and more completely, doubles our chains — but halves the strength of those which hitherto we had thought adequate to bind her in order that we might retain our own peace of mind. Only yesterday, had I not been afraid of annoying Gilberte, I should have been content to ask for no more than occasional meetings, which now would no longer have contented me and for which I should now have substituted quite different terms. For in this respect love is not like war; after the battle is ended we renew the fight with keener ardour, which we never cease to intensify the more thoroughly we are defeated, provided always that we are still in a position to give battle. This was not my position with regard to Gilberte. Also I preferred, at first, not to see her mother again. I continued, it is true, to assure myself that Gilberte did not love me, that I had known this for ever so long, that I could see her again if I chose, and, if I did not choose, forget her in course of time. But these ideas, like a remedy which has no effect upon certain complaints, had no power whatsoever to obliterate those two parallel lines which I kept on seeing, traced by Gilberte and the young man as they slowly disappeared along the Avenue des Champs-Elysées. This was a fresh misfortune, which like the rest would gradually lose its force, a fresh image which would one day present itself to my mind's eye completely purged of every noxious element that it now contained, like those deadly poisons which one can handle without danger, or like a crumb of dynamite which one can use to light one's cigarette without fear of an explosion. Meanwhile there was in me another force which was striving with all its might to overpower that unwholesome force which still shewed me, without alteration, the figure of Gilberte walking in the dusk: to meet and to break the shock of the renewed assaults of memory, I had, toiling effectively on the other side, imagination. The former force did indeed continue to shew me that couple walking in the Champs-Elysées, and offered me other disagreeable pictures drawn from the past, as for instance Gilberte shrugging her shoulders when her mother asked her to stay and entertain me. But the other force, working upon the canvas of my hopes, outlined a future far more attractively developed than this poor past which, after all, was so restricted. For one minute in which I saw Gilberte's sullen face, how many were there in which I planned to my own satisfaction all the steps that she was to take towards our reconciliation, perhaps even towards our betrothal. It is true that this force, which my imagination was concentrating upon the future, it was drawing, for all that, from the past. I was still in love with her whom, it is true, I believed that I detested. But whenever

anyone told me that I was looking well, or was nicely dressed, I wished that she could have been there to see me. I was irritated by the desire that many people shewed about this time to ask me to their houses, and refused all their invitations. There was a scene at home because I did not accompany my father to an official dinner at which the Bontemps were to be present with their niece Albertine, a young girl still hardly more than a child. So it is that the different periods of our life overlap one another. We scornfully decline, because of one whom we love and who will some day be of so little account, to see another who is of no account to-day, with whom we shall be in love to-morrow, with whom we might, perhaps, had we consented to see her now, have fallen in love a little earlier and who would thus have put a term to our present sufferings, bringing others, it is true, in their place. Mine were steadily growing less. I had the surprise of discovering in my own heart one sentiment one day, another the next, generally inspired by some hope or some fear relative to Gilberte. To the Gilberte whom I kept within me. I ought to have reminded myself that the other, the real Gilberte, was perhaps entirely different from mine, knew nothing of the regrets that I ascribed to her, was thinking probably less about me, not merely than I was thinking about her but that I made her be thinking about me when I was closeted alone with my fictitious Gilberte, wondering what really were her feelings with regard to me and so imagining her attention as constantly directed towards myself.

During those periods in which our bitterness of spirit, though steadily diminishing, still persists, a distinction must be drawn between the bitterness which comes to us from our constantly thinking of the person herself and that which is revived by certain memories, some cutting speech, some word in a letter that we have had from her. The various forms which that bitterness can assume we shall examine when we come to deal with another and later love affair; for the present it must suffice to say that, of these two kinds, the former is infinitely the less cruel. That is because our conception of the person, since it dwells always within ourselves, is there adorned with the halo with which we are bound before long to invest her, and bears the marks if not of the frequent solace of hope, at any rate of the tranquillity of a permanent sorrow. (It must also be observed that the image of a person who makes us suffer counts for little if anything in those complications which aggravate the unhappiness of love, prolong it and prevent our recovery, just as in certain maladies the cause is insignificant beyond comparison with the fever which follows it and the time that must elapse before our convalescence.) But if the idea of the person whom

we love catches and reflects a ray of light from a mind which is on the whole optimistic, it is not so with those special memories, those cutting words, that inimical letter (I received only one that could be so described from Gilberte); you would say that the person herself dwelt in those fragments, few and scattered as they were, and dwelt there multiplied to a power of which she falls ever so far short in the idea which we are accustomed to form of her as a whole. Because the letter has not — as the image of the beloved creature has — been contemplated by us in the melancholy calm of regret; we have read it, devoured it in the fearful anguish with which we were wrung by an unforeseen misfortune. Sorrows of this sort come to us in another way; from without; and it is along the road of the most cruel suffering that they have penetrated to our heart. The picture of our friend in our mind, which we believe to be old, original, authentic, has in reality been refashioned by her many times over. The cruel memory is not itself contemporary with the restored picture, it is of another age, it is one of the rare witnesses to a monstrous past. But inasmuch as this past continues to exist, save in ourselves, who have been pleased to substitute for it a miraculous age of gold, a paradise in which all mankind shall be reconciled, those memories, those letters carry us back to reality, and cannot but make us feel, by the sudden pang they give us, what a long way we have been borne from that reality by the baseless hopes engendered daily while we waited for something to happen. Not that the said reality is bound always to remain the same, though that does indeed happen at times. There are in our life any number of women whom we have never wished to see again, and who have quite naturally responded to our in no way calculated silence with a silence as profound. Only in their case as we never loved them, we have never counted the years spent apart from them, and this instance, which would invalidate our whole argument, we are inclined to forget when we are considering the healing effect of isolation, just as people who believe in presentiments forget all the occasions on which their own have not ‘come true.’

But, after a time, absence may prove efficacious. The desire, the appetite for seeing us again may after all be reborn in the heart which at present contemns us. Only, we must allow time. Now the demands which we ourselves make upon time are no less exorbitant than those of a heart in process of changing. For one thing, time is the very thing that we are least willing to allow, for our own suffering is keen and we are anxious to see it brought to an end. And then, too, the interval of time which the other heart needs to effect its change our own heart will have spent in changing itself also, so that when the goal which we had set

ourselves becomes attainable it will have ceased to count as a goal, or to seem worth attaining. This idea, however, that it will be attainable, that what, when it no longer spells any good fortune to us, we shall ultimately secure is not good fortune, this idea embodies a part, but a part only of the truth. Our good fortune accrues to us when we have grown indifferent to it. But the very fact of our indifference will have made us less exacting, and allow us in retrospect to feel convinced that we should have been in raptures over our good fortune had it come at a time when, very probably, it would have seemed to us miserably inadequate. People are not very hard to satisfy nor are they very good judges of matters in which they take no interest. The friendly overtures of a person whom we no longer love, overtures which strike us, in our indifference to her, as excessive, would perhaps have fallen a long way short of satisfying our love. Those tender speeches, that invitation or acceptance, we think only of the pleasure which they would have given us, and not of all those other speeches and meetings by which we should have wished to see them immediately followed, which we should, as likely as not, simply by our avidity for them, have precluded from ever happening. So that we can never be certain that the good fortune which comes to us too late, when we are no longer in love, is altogether the same as that good fortune the want of which made us, at one time, so unhappy. There is only one person who could decide that; our ego of those days; he is no longer with us, and were he to reappear, no doubt that would be quite enough to make our good fortune — whether identical or not — vanish.

Pending these posthumous fulfilments of a dream in which I should not, when the time came, be greatly interested, by dint of my having to invent, as in the days when I still hardly knew Gilberte, speeches, letters in which she implored my forgiveness, swore that she had never loved anyone but myself and besought me to marry her, a series of pleasant images incessantly renewed came by degrees to hold a larger place in my mind than the vision of Gilberte and the young man, which had nothing now to feed upon. At this point I should perhaps have resumed my visits to Mme. Swann but for a dream that came to me, in which one of my friends, who was not, however, one that I could identify, behaved with the utmost treachery towards me and appeared to believe that I had been treacherous to him. Abruptly awakened by the nain which this dream had given me, and finding that it persisted after I was awake, I turned my thoughts back to the dream, racked my brains to discover who could have been the friend whom I had seen in my sleep, the sound of whose name — a Spanish name — was no longer distinct in my ears. Combining Joseph’s part with Pharaoh’s, I set

to work to interpret my dream. I knew that, when one is interpreting a dream, it is often a mistake to pay too much attention to the appearance of the people one saw in it, who may perhaps have been disguised or have exchanged faces, like those mutilated saints on the walls of cathedrals which ignorant archaeologists have restored, fitting the body of one to the head of another and confusing all their attributes and names. Those that people bear in a dream are apt to mislead us. The person with whom we are in love is to be recognised only by the intensity of the pain that we suffer. From mine I learned that, though transformed while I was asleep into a young man, the person whose recent betrayal still hurt me was Gilberte. I remembered then that, the last time I had seen her, on the day when her mother had forbidden her to go out to a dancing-lesson, she had, whether in sincerity or in make-believe, declined, laughing in a strange manner, to believe in the genuineness of my feeling for her. And by association this memory brought back to me another. Long before that, it had been Swann who would not believe in my sincerity, nor that I was a suitable friend for Gilberte. In vain had I written to him, Gilberte had brought back my letter and had returned it to me with the same incomprehensible laugh. She had not returned it to me at once: I remembered now the whole of that scene behind the clump of laurels. As soon as one is unhappy one becomes moral. Gilberte's recent antipathy for me seemed to me a judgment delivered on me by life for my conduct that afternoon. Such judgments one imagines one can escape because one looks out for carriages when one is crossing the street, and avoids obvious dangers. But there are others that take effect within us. The accident comes from the side to which one has not been looking, from inside, from the heart. Gilberte's words: "If you like, we might go on wrestling," made me shudder. I imagined her behaving like that, at home perhaps, in the linen-room, with the young man whom I had seen escorting her along the Avenue des Champs-Elysées. And so, just as when, a little time back, I had believed myself to be calmly established in a state of happiness, it had been fatuous in me, now that I had abandoned all thought of happiness, to take for granted that at least I had grown and was going to remain calm. For, so long as our heart keeps enshrined with any permanence the image of another person, it is not only our happiness that may at any moment be destroyed; when that happiness has vanished, when we have suffered, and, later, when we have succeeded in lulling our sufferings to sleep, the thing then that is as elusive, as precarious as ever our happiness was, is our calm. Mine returned to me in the end, for the cloud which, lowering our resistance, tempering our desires, has penetrated, in the train of a dream, the enclosure of our mind, is

bound, in course of time, to dissolve, permanence and stability being assured to nothing in this world, not even to grief. Besides, those whose suffering is due to love are, as we say of certain invalids, their own physicians. As consolation can come to them only from the person who is the cause of their grief, and as their grief is an emanation from that person, it is there, in their grief itself, that they must in the end find a remedy: which it will disclose to them at a given moment, for as long as they turn it over in their minds this grief will continue to shew them fresh aspects of the loved, the regretted creature, at one moment so intensely hateful that one has no longer the slightest desire to see her, since before finding enjoyment in her company one would have first to make her suffer, at another so pleasant that the pleasantness in which one has invested her one adds to her own stock of good qualities and finds in it a fresh reason for hope. But even although the anguish that had reawakened in me did at length grow calm, I no longer wished — except just occasionally — to visit Mme. Swann. In the first place because, among those who love and have been forsaken, the state of incessant — even if unconfessed — expectancy in which they live undergoes a spontaneous transformation, and, while to all appearance unchanged, substitutes for its original elements others that are precisely the opposite. The first were the consequences of — a reaction from — the painful incidents which had upset us. The tension of waiting for what is yet to come is mingled with fear, all the more since we desire at such moments, should no message come to us from her whom we love, to act for ourselves, and are none too confident of the success of a step which, once we have taken it, we may find it impossible to follow up. But presently, without our having noticed any change, this tension, which still endures, is sustained, we discover, no longer by our recollection of the past but by anticipation of an imaginary future. From that moment it is almost pleasant. Besides, the first state, by continuing for some time, has accustomed us to living in expectation. The suffering that we felt during those last meetings survives in us still, but is already lulled to sleep. We are in no haste to arouse it, especially as we do not see very clearly what to ask for now. The possession of a little more of the woman whom we love would only make more essential to us the part that we did not yet possess, which is bound to remain, whatever happens, since our requirements are begotten of our satisfactions, an irreducible quantity.

Another, final reason came later on to reinforce this, and to make me discontinue altogether my visits to Mme. Swann. This reason, slow in revealing itself, was not that I had now forgotten Gilberte but that I must make every effort

to forget her as speedily as possible. No doubt, now that the keen edge of my suffering was dulled, my visits to Mme. Swann had become once again, for what sorrow remained in me, the sedative and distraction which had been so precious to me at first. But what made the sedative efficacious made the distraction impossible, namely that with these visits the memory of Gilberte was intimately blended. The distraction would be of no avail to me unless it was employed to combat a sentiment which the presence of Gilberte no longer nourished, thoughts, interests, passions in which Gilberte should have no part. These states of consciousness, to which the person whom we love remains a stranger, then occupy a place which, however small it may be at first, is always so much reconquered from the love that has been in unchallenged possession of our whole soul. We must seek to encourage these thoughts, to make them grow, while the sentiment which is no more now than a memory dwindles, so that the new elements introduced into our mind contest with that sentiment, wrest from it an ever increasing part of our soul, until at last the victory is complete. I decided that this was the only way in which my love could be killed, and I was still young enough, still courageous enough to undertake the attempt, to subject myself to that most cruel grief which springs from the certainty that, whatever time one may devote to the effort, it will prove successful in the end. The reason I now gave in my letters to Gilberte for refusing to see her was an allusion to some mysterious misunderstanding, wholly fictitious, which was supposed to have arisen between her and myself, and as to which I had hoped at first that Gilberte would insist upon my furnishing her with an explanation. But, as a matter of fact, never, even in the most insignificant relations in life, does a request for enlightenment come from a correspondent who knows that an obscure, untruthful, incriminating sentence has been written on purpose, so that he shall protest against it, and is only too glad to feel, when he reads it, that he possesses — and to keep in his own hands — the initiative in the coming operations. For all the more reason is this so in our more tender relations, in which love is endowed with so much eloquence, indifference with so little curiosity. Gilberte having never appeared to doubt nor sought to learn more about this misunderstanding, it became for me a real entity, to which I referred anew in every letter. And there is in these baseless situations, in the affectation of coldness, a sort of fascination which tempts one to persevere in them. By dint of writing: “Now that our hearts are sundered,” so that Gilberte might answer: “But they are not. Do explain what you mean,” I had gradually come to believe that they were. By constantly repeating, “Life may have changed for us, it will

never destroy the feeling that we had for one another," in the hope of hearing myself, one day, say: "But there has been no change, the feeling is stronger now than ever it was," I was living with the idea that life had indeed changed, that we should keep only the memory of a feeling which no longer existed, as certain neurotics, from having at first pretended to be ill, end by becoming chronic invalids. Now, whenever I had to write to Gilberte, I brought my mind back to this imagined change, which, being now tacitly admitted by the silence which she preserved with regard to it in her replies, would in future subsist between us. Then Gilberte ceased to make a point of ignoring it. She too adopted my point of view; and, as in the speeches at official banquets, when the foreign Sovereign who is being entertained adopts practically the same expressions as have just been used by the Sovereign who is entertaining him, whenever I wrote to Gilberte: "Life may have parted us; the memory of the days when we knew one another will endure," she never failed to respond: "Life may have parted us; it cannot make us forget those happy hours which will always be dear to us both," (though we should have found it hard to say why or how 'Life'-had parted us, or what change had occurred). My sufferings were no longer excessive. And yet, one day when I was telling her in a letter that I had heard of the death of our old barley-sugar woman in the Champs-Elysées, as I wrote the words: "I felt at once that this would distress you, in me it awakened a host of memories," I could not restrain myself from bursting into tears when I saw that I was speaking in the past tense, as though it were of some dead friend, now almost forgotten, of this love of which in spite of myself I had never ceased to think as of a thing still alive, or one that at least might be born again. Nothing can be more affectionate than this sort of correspondence between friends who do not wish to see one another any more. Gilberte's letters to me had all the delicate refinement of those which I used to write to people who did not matter, and shewed me the same apparent marks of affection, which it was so pleasant for me to receive from her.

But, as time went on, every refusal to see her disturbed me less. And as she became less dear to me, my painful memories were no longer strong enough to destroy by their incessant return the growing pleasure which I found in thinking of Florence, or of Venice. I regretted, at such moments, that I had abandoned the idea of diplomacy, and had condemned myself to a sedentary existence, in order not to be separated from a girl whom I should not see again and had already almost forgotten. We construct our house of life to suit another person, and when at length it is ready to receive her that person does not come; presently she is dead to us, and we live on, a prisoner within the walls which were intended only

for her. If Venice seemed to my parents to be a long way off, and its climate treacherous, it was at least quite easy for me to gov without tiring myself, and settle down at Balbec. But to do that I should have had to leave Paris, to forego those visits thanks to which, infrequent as they were, I might sometimes hear Mme. Swann telling me about her daughter. Besides, I was beginning to find in them various pleasures in which Gilberte had no part.

When spring drew round, and with it the cold weather, during an icy Lent and the hailstorms of Holy Week, as Mme. Swann began to find it cold in the house, I used often to see her entertaining her guests in her furs, her shivering hands and shoulders hidden beneath the gleaming white carpet of an immense rectangular muff and a cape, both of ermine, which she had not taken off on coming in from her drive, and which suggested the last patches of the snows of winter, more persistent than the rest, which neither the heat of the fire nor the advancing season had succeeded in melting. And the whole truth about these glacial but already flowering weeks was suggested to me in this drawing-room, which soon I should be entering no more, by other more intoxicating forms of whiteness, that for example of the guelder-roses clustering, at the summits of their tall bare stalks, like the rectilinear trees in pre-Raphaelite paintings, their balls of blossom, divided yet composite, white as annunciating angels and breathing a fragrance as of lemons. For the mistress of Tansonville knew that April, even an ice-bound April, was not barren of flowers, that winter, spring, summer are not held apart by barriers as hermetic as might be supposed by the town-dweller who, until the first hot day, imagines the world as containing nothing but houses that stand naked in the rain. That Mme. Swann was content with the consignments furnished by her Combray gardener, that she did not, by the intervention of her own ‘special’ florist, fill up the gaps left by an insufficiently powerful magic with subsidies borrowed from a precocious Mediterranean shore, I do not for a moment suggest, nor did it worry me at the time. It was enough to fill me with longing for country scenes that, overhanging the loose snowdrifts of the muff in which Mme. Swann kept her hands, the guelder-rose snow-balls (which served very possibly in the mind of my hostess no other purpose than to compose, on the advice of Bergotte, a ‘Symphony in White’ with her furniture and her garments) reminded me that what the Good Friday music in Parsifal symbolised was a natural miracle which one could see performed every year, if one had the sense to look for it, and, assisted by the acid and heady perfume of the other kinds of blossom, which, although their names were unknown to me, had brought me so often to a standstill to gaze at them on

my walks round Combray, made Mme. Swann's drawing-room as virginal, as candidly 'in bloom,' without the least vestige of greenery, as overladen with genuine scents of flowers as was the little lane by Tansonville.

But it was still more than I could endure that these memories should be recalled to me. There was a risk of their reviving what little remained of my love for Gilberte. Besides, albeit I no longer felt the least distress during these visits to Mme. Swann, I extended the intervals between them and endeavoured to see as little of her as possible. At most, since I continued not to go out of Paris, I allowed myself an occasional walk with her. Fine weather had come at last, and the sun was hot. As I knew that before luncheon Mme. Swann used to go out every day for an hour, and would stroll for a little in the Avenue du Bois, near the Etoile — a spot which, at that time, because of the people who used to collect there to gaze at the 'swells' whom they knew only by name, was known as the 'Shabby-Genteel Club'— I persuaded my parents, on Sundays (for on weekdays I was busy all morning), to let me postpone my luncheon until long after theirs, until a quarter past one, and go for a walk before it. During May, that year, I never missed a Sunday, for Gilberte had gone to stay with friends in the country. I used to reach the Arc de Triomphe about noon. I kept watch at the entrance to the Avenue, never taking my eyes off the corner of the side-street along which Mme. Swann, who had only a few yards to walk, would come from her house. As by this time many of the people who had been strolling there were going home to luncheon, those who remained were few in number and, for the most part, fashionably dressed. Suddenly, on the gravelled path, unhurrying, cool, luxuriant, Mme. Swann appeared, displaying around her a toilet which was never twice the same, but which I remember as being typically mauve; then she hoisted and unfurled at the end of its long stalk, just at the moment when her radiance was most complete, the silken banner of a wide parasol of a shade that matched the showering petals of her gown. A whole troop of people escorted her; Swann himself, four or five fellows from the Club, who had been to call upon her that morning or whom she had met in the street: and their black or grey agglomeration, obedient to her every gesture, performing the almost mechanical movements of a lifeless setting in which Odette was framed, gave to this woman, in whose eyes alone was there any intensity, the air of looking out in front of her, from among all those men, as from a window behind which she had taken her stand, and made her emerge there, frail but fearless, in the nudity of her delicate colours, like the apparition of a creature of a different species, of an unknown race, and of almost martial strength, by virtue of which she seemed by herself a

match for all her multiple escort. Smiling, rejoicing in the fine weather, in the sunshine which had not yet become trying, with the air of calm assurance of a creator who has accomplished his task and takes no thought for anything besides; certain that her clothes — even though the vulgar herd should fail to appreciate them — were the smartest anywhere to be seen, she wore them for herself and for her friends, naturally, without exaggerated attention to them but also without absolute detachment; not preventing the little bows of ribbon upon her bodice and skirt from floating buoyantly upon the air before her, like separate creatures of whose presence there she was not unconscious, but was indulgent enough to let them play if they chose, keeping their own rhythm, provided that they accompanied her where she led the way; and even upon her mauve parasol, which, as often as not, she had not yet 'put up' when she appeared on the scene, she let fall now and then, as though upon a bunch of Parma violets, a gaze happy and so kindly that, when it was fastened no longer upon her friends but on some inanimate object, her eyes still seemed to smile. She thus kept open, she made her garments occupy that interval of smartness, of which the men with whom she was on the most familiar terms respected both the existence and its necessity, not without shewing a certain deference, as of profane visitors to a shrine, an admission of their own ignorance, an interval over which they recognised that their friend had (as we recognise that a sick man has over the special precautions that he has to take, or a mother over her children's education) a competent jurisdiction. No less than by the court which encircled her and seemed not to observe' the passers-by, Mme. Swann by the lateness of her appearance there at once suggested those rooms in which she had spent so long, so leisurely a morning and to which she must presently return for luncheon; she seemed to indicate their proximity by the unhurrying ease of her progress, like the turn that one takes up and down one's own garden; of those rooms one would have said that she was carrying about her still the cool, the indoor shade. But for that very reason the sight of her gave me only a stronger sensation of open air and warmth. All the more because, being assured in my own mind that, in accordance with the liturgy, with the ritual in which Mme. Swann was so profoundly versed, her clothes were connected with the time of year and of day by a bond both inevitable and unique, I felt that the flowers upon the stiff straw brim of her hat, the baby-ribbons upon her dress, had been even more naturally born of the month of May than the flowers in gardens and in woods; and to learn what latest change there was in weather or season I had not to raise my eyes higher than to her parasol, open and outstretched like another, a

nearer sky, round, clement, mobile, blue. For these rites, if they were of sovereign importance, subjugated their glory (and, consequently, Mme. Swann her own) in condescending obedience to the day, the spring, the sun, none of which struck me as being sufficiently flattered that so elegant a woman had been graciously pleased not to ignore their existence, and had chosen on their account a gown of a brighter, of a thinner fabric, suggesting to me, by the opening of its collar and sleeves, the moist warmness of the throat and wrists that they exposed,— in a word, had taken for them all the pains that a great personage takes who, having gaily condescended to pay a visit to common folk in the country, whom everyone, even the most plebeian, knows, yet makes a point of donning, for the occasion, suitable attire. On her arrival I would greet Mme. Swann, she stop me and say (in English) 'Good morning,' and smile. We would walk a little way together. And I learned then that these canons according to which she dressed, it was for her own satisfaction that she obeyed them, as though yielding to a Superior Wisdom of which she herself was High Priestess: for if it should happen that, feeling too warm, she threw open or even took off altogether and gave me to carry the jacket which she had intended to keep buttoned up, I would discover in the blouse beneath it a thousand details of execution which had had every chance of remaining there unperceived, like those parts of an orchestral score to which the composer has devoted infinite labour albeit they may never reach the ears of the public: or in the sleeves of the jacket that lay folded across my arm I would see, I would drink in slowly, for my own pleasure or from affection for its wearer, some exquisite detail, a deliciously tinted strip, a lining of mauve satinette which, ordinarily concealed from every eye, was yet just as delicately fashioned as the outer parts, like those gothic carvings on a cathedral, hidden on the inside of a balustrade eighty feet from the ground, as perfect as are the bas-reliefs over the main porch, and yet never seen by any living man until, happening to pass that way upon his travels, an artist obtains leave to climb up there among them, to stroll in the open air, sweeping the whole town with a comprehensive gaze, between the soaring towers.

What enhanced this impression that Mme. Swann was walking in the Avenue as though along the paths of her own garden, was — for people ignorant of her habit of 'taking exercise'— that she had come there on foot, without any carriage following, she whom, once May had begun, they were accustomed to see, behind the most brilliant 'turn-out,' the smartest liveries in Paris, gently and majestically seated, like a goddess, in the balmy air of an immense victoria on eight springs. On foot Mme. Swann had the appearance — especially as her pace

began to slacken in the heat of the sun — of having yielded to curiosity, of committing an ‘exclusive’ breach of all the rules of her code, like those Crowned Heads who, without consulting anyone, accompanied by the slightly scandalised admiration of a suite which dares not venture any criticism, step out of their boxes during a gala performance and visit the lobby of the theatre, mingling for a moment or two with the rest of the audience. So between Mme. Swann and themselves the crowd felt that there existed those barriers of a certain kind of opulence which seem to them the most insurmountable that there are. The Faubourg Saint-Germain may have its barriers also, but these are less ‘telling’ to the eyes and imagination of the ‘shabby-genteel.’ These latter, when in the presence of a real personage, more simple, more easily mistaken for the wife of a small professional or business man, less remote from the people, will not feel the same sense of their own inequality, almost of their unworthiness, as dismays them when they encounter Mme. Swann. Of course women of that sort are not themselves dazzled, as the crowd are, by the brilliance of their apparel, they have ceased to pay any attention to it, but only because they have grown used to it, that is to say have come to look upon it more and more as natural and necessary, to judge their fellow creatures according as they are more or less initiated into these luxurious ways: so that (the grandeur which they allow themselves to display or discover in others being wholly material, easily verified, slowly acquired, the lack of it hard to compensate) if such women place a passer-by in the lowest rank of society, it is by the same instinctive process that has made them appear to him as in the highest, that is to say instinctively, at first sight, and without possibility of appeal. Perhaps that special class of society which included in those days women like Lady Israels, who mixed with the women of the aristocracy, and Mme. Swann, who was to get to know them later on, that intermediate class, inferior to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, since it ‘ran after’ the denizens of that quarter, but superior to everything that was not of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, possessing this peculiarity that, while already detached from the world of the merely rich, it was riches still that it represented, but riches that had been canalised, serving a purpose, swayed by an idea that was artistic, malleable gold, chased with a poetic design, taught to smile; perhaps that class — in the same form, at least, and with the same charm — exists no longer. In any event, the women who were its members would not satisfy to-day what was the primary condition on which they reigned, since with advancing age they have lost — almost all of them — their beauty. Whereas it was (just as much as from the pinnacle of her noble fortune) from the glorious zenith of her ripe and still so

fragrant summer that Mme. Swann, majestic, smiling, kind, as she advanced along the Avenue du Bois, saw like Hypatia, beneath the slow tread of her feet, worlds revolving. Various young men as they passed looked at her anxiously, not knowing whether their vague acquaintance with her (especially since, having been introduced only once, at the most, to Swann, they were afraid that he might not remember them) was sufficient excuse for their venturing to take off their hats. And they trembled to think of the consequences as they made up their minds, asking themselves whether the gesture, so bold, so sacrilegious a tempting of providence, would not let loose the catastrophic forces of nature or bring down, upon them the vengeance of a jealous god. It provoked only, like the winding of a piece of clockwork, a series of gesticulations from little, responsive bowing figures, who were none other than Odette's escort, beginning with Swann himself, who raised his tall hat lined in green leather with an exquisite courtesy, which he had acquired in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but to which was no longer wedded the indifference that he would at one time have shewn. Its place was now taken (as though he had been to some extent permeated by Odette's prejudices) at once by irritation at having to acknowledge the salute of a person who was none too well dressed and by satisfaction at his wife's knowing so many people, a mixed sensation to which he gave expression by saying to the smart friends who walked by his side: "Whatl another! Upon my word, I can't imagine where my wife picks all these fellows up!" Meanwhile, having greeted with a slight movement of her head the terrified youth, who had already passed out of sight though his heart was still beating furiously, Mme. Swann turned to me: "Then it's all over?" she put it to me, "You aren't ever coming to see Gilberte again? I'm glad you make an exception of me, and are not going to 'drop' me straight away. I like seeing you, but I used to like also the influence you had over my daughter. I'm sure she's very sorry about it, too. However, I mustn't bully you, or you'll make up your mind at once that you never want to set eyes on me again." "Odette, Sagan's trying to speak to you!" Swann called his wife's attention. And there, indeed, was the Prince, as in some transformation scene at the close of a play, or in a circus, or an old painting, wheeling his horse round so as to face her, in a magnificent heroic pose, and doffing his hat with a sweeping theatrical and, so to speak, allegorical flourish in which he displayed all the chivalrous courtesy of a great noble bowing in token of his respect for Woman, were she incarnate in a woman whom it was impossible for his mother or his sister to know. And at every moment, recognised in the depths of the liquid transparency and of the luminous glaze of the shadow which her parasol

cast over her, Mme. Swann was receiving the salutations of the last belated horsemen, who passed as though in a cinematograph taken as they galloped in the blinding glare of the Avenue, men from the clubs, the names of whom, which meant only celebrities to the public, Antoine de Castellane, Adalbert de Montmorency and the rest — were for Mme. Swann the familiar names of friends. And as the average span of life, the relative longevity of our memories of poetical sensations is much greater than that of our memories of what the heart has suffered, long after the sorrows that I once felt on Gilberte's account have faded and vanished, there has survived them the pleasure that I still derive — whenever I close my eyes and read, as it were upon the face of a sundial, the minutes that are recorded between a quarter past twelve and one o'clock in the month of May — from seeing myself once again strolling and talking thus with Mme. Swann beneath her parasol, as though in the coloured shade of a wistaria bower.

Place-Names: The Place

I had arrived at a state almost of complete indifference to Gilberte when, two years later, I went with my grandmother to Balbec. When I succumbed to the attraction of a strange face, when it was with the help of some other girl that I hoped to discover gothic cathedrals, the palaces and gardens of Italy, I said to myself sadly that this love of ours, in so far as it is love for one particular creature, is not perhaps a very real thing, since if the association of pleasant or unpleasant trains of thought can attach it for a time to a woman so as to make us believe that it has been inspired by her, in a necessary sequence of effect to cause, yet when we detach ourselves, deliberately or unconsciously, from those associations, this love, as though it were indeed a spontaneous thing and sprang from ourselves alone, will revive in order to bestow itself on another woman. At the time, however, of my departure for Balbec, and during the earlier part of my stay there, my indifference was still only intermittent. Often, our life being so careless of chronology, interpolating so many anachronisms in the sequence of our days, I lived still among those — far older days than yesterday or last week — in which I loved Gilberte. And at once not seeing her became as exquisite a torture to me as it had been then. The self that had loved her, which another self had already almost entirely supplanted, rose again in me, stimulated far more often by a trivial than by an important event. For instance, if I may anticipate for a moment my arrival in Normandy, I heard some one who passed me on the sea-front at Balbec refer to the ‘Secretary to the Ministry of Posts and his family.’ Now, seeing that as yet I knew nothing of the influence which that family was to exercise over my life, this remark ought to have passed unheeded; instead, it gave me at once an acute twinge, which a self that had for the most part long since been outgrown in me felt at being parted from Gilberte. Because I had never given another thought to a conversation which Gilberte had had with her father in my hearing, in which allusion was made to the Secretary to the Ministry of Posts and to his family. Now our love memories present no exception to the general rules of memory, which in turn are governed by the still more general rules of Habit. And as Habit weakens every impression, what a person recalls to

us most vividly is precisely what we had forgotten, because it was of no importance, and had therefore left in full possession of its strength. That is why the better part of our memory exists outside ourselves, in a blatter of rain, in the smell of an unaired room or of the first crackling brushwood fire in a cold grate: wherever, in short, we happen upon what our mind, having no use for it, had rejected, the last treasure that the past has in store, the richest, that which when all our flow of tears seems to have dried at the source can make us weep again. Outside ourselves, did I say; rather within ourselves, but hidden from our eyes in an oblivion more or less prolonged. It is thanks to this oblivion alone that we can from time to time recover the creature that we were, range ourselves face to face with past events as that creature had to face them, suffer afresh because we are no longer ourselves but he, and because he loved what leaves us now indifferent. In the broad daylight of our ordinary memory the images of the past turn gradually pale and fade out of sight, nothing remains of them, we shall never find them again. Or rather we should never find them again had not a few words (such as this 'Secretary to the Ministry of Posts') been carefully locked away in oblivion, just as an author deposits in the National Library a copy of a book which might otherwise become unobtainable.

But this suffering and this recrudescence of my love for Gilberte lasted no longer than such things last in a dream, and this time, on the contrary, because at Balbec the old Habit was no longer there to keep them alive. And if these two effects of Habit appear to be incompatible, that is because Habit is bound by a diversity of laws. In Paris I had grown more and more indifferent to Gilberte, thanks to Habit. The change of habit, that is to say the temporary cessation of Habit, completed Habit's task when I started for Balbec. It weakens, but it stabilises; it leads to disintegration but it makes the scattered elements last indefinitely. Day after day, for years past, I had begun by modelling my state of mind, more or less effectively, upon that of the day before. At Balbec, a strange bed, to the side of which a tray was brought in the morning that differed from my Paris breakfast tray, could not, obviously, sustain the fancies upon which my love for Gilberte had fed: there are cases (though not, I admit, commonly) in which, one's days being paralysed by a sedentary life, the best way to save time is to change one's place of residence. My journey to Balbec was like the first outing of a convalescent who needed only that to convince him that he was cured.

The journey was one that would now be made, probably, in a motorcar, which would be supposed to render it more interesting. We shall see too that,

accomplished in such a way, it would even be in a sense more genuine, since one would be following more nearly, in a closer intimacy, the various contours by which the surface of the earth is wrinkled. But after all the special attraction of the journey lies not in our being able to alight at places on the way and to stop altogether as soon as we grow tired, but in its making the difference between departure and arrival not as imperceptible but as intense as possible, so that we are conscious of it in its totality, intact, as it existed in our mind when imagination bore us from the place in which we were living right to the very heart of a place we longed to see, in a single sweep which seemed miraculous to us not so much because it covered a certain distance as because it united two distinct individualities of the world, took us from one name to another name; and this difference is accentuated (more than in a form of locomotion in which, since one can stop and alight where one chooses, there can scarcely be said to be any point of arrival) by the mysterious operation that is performed in those peculiar places, railway stations, which do not constitute, so to speak, a part of the surrounding town but contain the essence of its personality just as upon their sign-boards they bear its painted name.

But in this respect as in every other, our age is infected with a mania for shewing things only in the environment that properly belongs to them, thereby suppressing the essential thing, the act of the mind which isolated them from that environment. A picture is nowadays ‘presented’ in the midst of furniture, ornaments, hangings of the same period, a secondhand scheme of decoration in the composition of which in the houses of to-day excels that same hostess who but yesterday was so crassly ignorant, but now spends her time poring over records and in libraries; and among these the masterpiece at which we glance up from the table while we dine does not give us that exhilarating delight which we can expect from it only in a public gallery, which symbolises far better by its bareness, by the absence of all irritating detail, those innermost spaces into which the artist withdrew to create it.

Unhappily those marvellous places which are railway stations, from which one sets out for a remote destination, are tragic places also, for if in them the miracle is accomplished whereby scenes which hitherto have had no existence save in our minds are to become the scenes among which we shall be living, for that very reason we must, as we emerge from the waiting-room, abandon any thought of finding ourself once again within the familiar walls which, but a moment ago, were still enclosing us. We must lay aside all hope of going home to sleep in our own bed, once we have made up our mind to penetrate into the

pestiferous cavern through which we may have access to the mystery, into one of those vast, glass-roofed sheds, like that of Saint-Lazare into which I must go to find the train for Balbec, and which extended over the rent bowels of the city one of those bleak and boundless skies, heavy with an accumulation of dramatic menaces, like certain skies painted with an almost Parisian modernity by Mantegna or Veronese, beneath which could be accomplished only some solemn and tremendous act, such as a departure by train or the Elevation of the Cross.

So long as I had been content to look out from the warmth of my own bed in Paris at the Persian church of Balbec, shrouded in driving sleet, no sort of objection to this journey had been offered by my body. Its objections began only when it had gathered that it would have itself to take part in the journey, and that on the evening of my arrival I should be shewn to ‘my’ room which to my body would be unknown. Its revolt was all the more deep-rooted in that on the very eve of my departure I learned that my mother would not be coming with us, my father, who would be kept busy at the Ministry until it was time for him to start for Spain with M. de Norpois, having preferred to take a house in the neighbourhood of Paris. On the other hand, the spectacle of Balbec seemed to me none the less desirable because I must purchase it at the price of a discomfort which, on the contrary, I felt to indicate and to guarantee the reality of the impression which I was going there to seek, an impression the place of which no spectacle of professedly equal value, no ‘panorama’ which I might have gone to see without being thereby precluded from returning home to sleep in my own bed, could possibly have filled. It was not for the first time that I felt that those who love and those who find pleasure are not always the same. I believed myself to be longing fully as much for Balbec as the doctor who was treating me, when he said to me, surprised, on the morning of our departure, to see me look so unhappy, “I don’t mind telling you that if I could only manage a week to go down and get a blow by the sea, I shouldn’t wait to be asked twice. You’ll be having races, regattas; you don’t know what all!” But I had already learned the lesson — long before I was taken to hear Berma — that, whatever it might be that I loved, it would never be attained save at the end of a long and heart-rending pursuit, in the course of which I should have first to sacrifice my own pleasure to that paramount good instead of seeking it there.

My grandmother, naturally enough, looked upon our exodus from a somewhat different point of view, and (for she was still as anxious as ever that the presents which were made me should take some artistic form) had planned, so that she might be offering me, of this journey, a ‘print’ that was, at least, in

parts ‘old,’ that we should repeat, partly by rail and partly by road, the itinerary that Mme. de Sévigné followed when she went from Paris to ‘L’Orient’ by way of Chaulnes and ‘the Pont-Audemer.’ But my grandmother had been obliged to abandon this project, at the instance of my father who knew, whenever she organised any expedition with a view to extracting from it the utmost intellectual benefit that it was capable of yielding, what a tale there would be to tell of missed trains, lost luggage, sore throats and broken rules. She was free at least to rejoice in the thought that never, when the time came for us to sally forth to the beach, should we be exposed to the risk of being kept indoors by the sudden appearance of what her beloved Sévigné calls a ‘beast of a coachload,’ since we should know not a soul at Balbec, Legrandin having refrained from offering us a letter of introduction to his sister. (This abstention had not been so well appreciated by my aunts Céline and Flora, who, having known as a child that lady, of whom they had always spoken until then, to commemorate this early intimacy, as ‘Renée de Cambremer,’ and having had from her and still possessing a number of those little presents which continue to ornament a room or a conversation but to which the feeling between the parties no longer corresponds, imagined that they were avenging the insult offered to us by never uttering again, when they called upon Mme. Legrandin, the name of her daughter, confining themselves to a mutual congratulation, once they were safely out of the house: “I made no reference to you know whom!” “I think that went home!”)

And so we were simply to leave Paris by that one twenty-two train which I had too often beguiled myself by looking out in the railway timetable, where its itinerary never failed to give me the emotion, almost the illusion of starting by it, not to feel that I already knew it. As the delineation in our mind of the features of any form of happiness depends more on the nature of the longings that it inspires in us than on the accuracy of the information which we have about it, I felt that I knew this train in all its details, nor did I doubt that I should feel, sitting in one of its compartments, a special delight as the day began to cool, should be contemplating this or that view as the train approached one or another station; so much so that this train, which always brought to my mind’s eye the images of the same towns, which I bathed in the sunlight of those post-meridian hours through which it sped, seemed to me to be different from every other train; and I had ended — as we are apt to do with a person whom we have never seen but of whom we like to believe that we have won his friendship — by giving a distinct and unalterable cast of countenance to the traveller, artistic, golden-

haired, who would thus have taken me with him upon his journey, and to whom I should bid farewell beneath the Cathedral of Saint-Lo, before he hastened to overtake the setting sun.

As my grandmother could not bring herself to do anything so ‘stupid’ as to go straight to Balbec, she was to break the journey half-way, staying the night with one of her friends, from whose house I was to proceed the same evening, so as not to be in the way there and also in order that I might arrive by daylight and see Balbec Church, which, we had learned, was at some distance from Balbec-Plage, so that I might not have a chance to visit it later on, when I had begun my course of baths. And perhaps it was less painful for me to feel that the desirable goal of my journey stood between me and that cruel first night on which I should have to enter a new habitation, and consent to dwell there. But I had had first to leave the old; my mother had arranged to ‘move in,’ that afternoon, at Saint-Cloud, and had made, or pretended to make, all the arrangements for going there directly after she had seen us off at the station, without needing to call again at our own house to which she was afraid that I might otherwise feel impelled at the last moment, instead of going to Balbec, to return with her. In fact, on the pretext of having so much to see to in the house which she had just taken and of being pressed for time, but in reality so as to spare me the cruel ordeal of a long-drawn parting, she had decided not to wait with us until that moment of the signal to start at which, concealed hitherto among ineffective comings and goings and preparations that lead to nothing definite, separation is made suddenly manifest, impossible to endure when it is no longer possibly to be avoided, concentrated in its entirety in one enormous instant of impotent and supreme lucidity.

For the first time I began to feel that it was possible that my mother might live without me, otherwise than for me, a separate life. She was going to stay with my father, whose existence it may have seemed to her that my feeble health, my nervous excitability complicated somewhat and saddened. This separation made me all the more wretched because I told myself that it probably marked for my mother an end of the successive disappointments which I had caused her, of which she had never said a word to me but which had made her realise the difficulty of our taking our holidays together; and perhaps also the first trial of a form of existence to which she was beginning, now, to resign herself for the future, as the years crept on for my father and herself, an existence in which I should see less of her, in which (a thing that not even in my nightmares had yet been revealed to me) she would already have become something of a stranger, a

lady who might be seen going home by herself to a house in which I should not be, asking the porter whether there was not a letter for her from me.

I could scarcely answer the man in the station who offered to take my bag. My mother, to comfort me, tried the methods which seemed to her most efficacious. Thinking it to be useless to appear not to notice my unhappiness, she gently teased me about it:

"Well, and what would Balbec church say if it knew that people pulled long faces like that when they were going to see it? Surely this is not the enraptured tourist Ruskin speaks of. Besides, I shall know if you rise to the occasion, even when we are miles apart I shall still be with my little man. You shall have a letter to-morrow from Mamma."

"My dear," said my grandmother, "I picture you like Mme. de Sévigné, your eyes glued to the map, and never losing sight of us for an instant."

Then Mamma sought to distract my mind, asked me what I thought of having for dinner, drew my attention to Françoise, complimented her on a hat and cloak which she did not recognise, in spite of their having horrified her long ago when she first saw them, new, upon my great-aunt, one with an immense bird towering over it, the other decorated with a hideous pattern and jet beads. But the cloak having grown too shabby to wear, Françoise had had it turned, exposing an 'inside' of plain cloth and quite a good colour. As for the bird, it had long since come to grief and been thrown away. And just as it is disturbing, sometimes, to find the effects which the most conscious artists attain only by an effort occurring in a folk-song, on the wall of some peasant's cottage where above the door, at the precisely right spot in the composition, blooms a white or yellow rose — so the velvet band, the loop of ribbon which would have delighted one in a portrait by Chardin or Whistler, Françoise had set with a simple but unerring taste upon the hat, which was now charming.

To take a parallel from an earlier age, the modesty and integrity which often gave an air of nobility to the face of our old servant having spread also to the garments which, as a woman reserved but not humbled, who knew how to hold her own and to keep her place, she had put on for the journey so as to be fit to be seen in our company without at the same time seeming or wishing to make herself conspicuous,— Françoise in the cherry-coloured cloth, now faded, of her cloak, and the discreet nap of her fur collar, brought to mind one of those miniatures of Anne of Brittany painted in Books of Hours by an old master, in which everything is so exactly in the right place, the sense of the whole is so evenly distributed throughout the parts that the rich and obsolete singularity of

the costume expresses the same pious gravity as the eyes, lips and hands.

Of thought, in relation to Françoise, one could hardly speak. She knew nothing, in that absolute sense in which to know nothing means to understand nothing, save the rare truths to which the heart is capable of directly attaining. The vast world of ideas existed not for her. But when one studied the clearness of her gaze, the lines of nose and lips, all those signs lacking from so many people of culture in whom they would else have signified a supreme distinction, the noble detachment of a chosen spirit, one was disquieted, as one is by the frank, intelligent eyes of a dog, to which, nevertheless, one knows that all our human concepts must be alien, and was led to ask oneself whether there might not be, among those other humble brethren, our peasant countrymen, creatures who were, like the great ones of the earth, of simple mind, or rather, doomed by a harsh fate to live among the simple-minded, deprived of heavenly light, were yet more naturally, more instinctively akin to the chosen spirits than most educated people, were, so to speak, all members, though scattered, straying, robbed of their heritage of reason, of the celestial family, kinsfolk, that have been lost in infancy, of the loftiest minds to whom — as is apparent from the unmistakable light in their eyes, although they can concentrate that light on nothing — there has been lacking, to endow them with talent, knowledge only.

My mother, seeing that I had difficulty in keeping back my tears, said to me: "'Regulus was in the habit, when things looked grave.... ' Besides, it isn't nice for Mamma! What does Mme. de Sévigné say? Your grandmother will tell you: 'I shall be obliged to draw upon all the courage that you lack.'" And remembering that affection for another distracts one's selfish griefs, she endeavoured to beguile me by telling me that she expected the removal to Saint-Cloud to go without a hitch, that she liked the cab, which she had kept waiting, that the driver seemed civil and the seats comfortable. I made an effort to smile at these trifles, and bowed my head with an air of acquiescence and satisfaction. But they helped me only to depict to myself with more accuracy Mamma's imminent departure, and it was with an agonised heart that I gazed at her as though she were already torn from me, beneath that wide-brimmed straw hat which she had bought to wear in the country, in a flimsy dress which she had put on in view of the long drive through the sweltering midday heat; hat and dress making her some one else, some one who belonged already to the Villa Montretout, in which I should not see her.

To prevent the choking fits which the journey might otherwise give me the doctor had advised me to take, as we started, a good stiff dose of beer or brandy,

so as to begin the journey in a state of what he called ‘euphoria,’ in which the nervous system is for a time less vulnerable. I had not yet made up my mind whether I should do this, but I wished at least that my grandmother should admit that, if I did so decide, I should have wisdom and authority on my side. I spoke therefore as if my hesitation were concerned only with where I should go for my drink, to the bar on the platform or to the restaurant-car on the train. But immediately, at the air of reproach which my grandmother’s face assumed, an air of not wishing even to entertain such an idea for a moment, “What!” I said to myself, suddenly determining upon this action of going out to drink, the performance of which became necessary as a proof of my independence since the verbal announcement of it had not succeeded in passing unchallenged, “What! You know how ill I am, you know what the doctor ordered, and you treat me like this!”

When I had explained to my grandmother how unwell I felt, her distress, her kindness were so apparent as she replied, “Run along then, quickly; get yourself some beer or a liqueur if it will do you any good,” that I flung myself upon her, almost smothering her in kisses. And if after that I went and drank a great deal too much in the restaurant-car of the train, that was because I felt that otherwise I should have a more violent attack than usual, which was just what would vex her most. When at the first stop I clambered back into our compartment I told my grandmother how pleased I was to be going to Balbec, that I felt that everything would go off splendidly, that after all I should soon grow used to being without Mamma, that the train was most comfortable, the steward and attendants in the bar so friendly that I should like to make the journey often so as to have opportunities of seeing them again. My grandmother, however, did not appear to feel the same joy as myself at all these good tidings. She answered, without looking me in the face:

“Why don’t you try to get a little sleep?” and turned her gaze to the window, the blind of which, though we had drawn it, did not completely cover the glass, so that the sun could and did slip in over the polished oak of the door and the cloth of the seat (like an advertisement of a life shared with nature far more persuasive than those posted higher upon the walls of the compartment, by the railway company, representing places in the country the names of which I could not make out from where I sat) the same warm and slumberous light which lies along a forest glade.

But when my grandmother thought that my eyes were shut I could see her, now and again, from among the large black spots on her veil, steal a glance at

me, then withdraw it, and steal back again, like a person trying to make himself, so as to get into the habit, perform some exercise that hurts him.

Thereupon I spoke to her, but that seemed not to please her either. And yet to myself the sound of my own voice was pleasant, as were the most imperceptible, the most internal movements of my body. And so I endeavoured to prolong it. I allowed each of my inflexions to hang lazily upon its word, I felt each glance from my eyes arrive just at the spot to which it was directed and stay there beyond the normal period. “Now, now, sit still and rest,” said my grandmother. “If you can’t manage to sleep, read something.” And she handed me a volume of Madame de Sévigné which I opened, while she buried herself in the *Mémoires de Madame de Beausergent*. She never travelled anywhere without a volume of each. They were her two favourite authors. With no conscious movement of my head, feeling a keen pleasure in maintaining a posture after I had adopted it, I lay back holding in my hands the volume of Madame de Sévigné which I had allowed to close, without lowering my eyes to it, or indeed letting them see anything but the blue window-blind. But the contemplation of this blind appeared to me an admirable thing, and I should not have troubled to answer anyone who might have sought to distract me from contemplating it. The blue colour of this blind seemed to me, not perhaps by its beauty but by its intense vivacity, to efface so completely all the colours that had passed before my eyes from the day of my birth up to the moment in which I had gulped down the last of my drink and it had begun to take effect, that when compared with this blue they were as drab, as void as must be retrospectively the darkness in which he has lived to a man born blind whom a subsequent operation has at length enabled to see and to distinguish colours. An old ticket-collector came to ask for our tickets. The silvery gleam that shone from the metal buttons of his jacket charmed me in spite of my absorption. I wanted to ask him to sit down beside us. But he passed on to the next carriage, and I thought with longing of the life led by railwaymen for whom, since they spent all their time on the line, hardly a day could pass without their seeing this’ old collector. The pleasure that I found in staring at the blind, and in feeling that my mouth was half-open, began at length to diminish. I became more mobile; I even moved in my seat; I opened the book that my grandmother had given me and turned its pages casually, reading whatever caught my eye. And as I read I felt my admiration for Madame de Sévigné grow.

It is a mistake to let oneself be taken in by the purely formal details, idioms of the period or social conventions, the effect of which is that certain people

believe that they have caught the Sévigné manner when they have said: “Tell me, my dear,” or “That Count struck me as being a man of parts,” or “Haymaking is the sweetest thing in the world.” Mme. de Simiane imagines already that she is being like her grandmother because she can write: “M. de la Boulie is bearing wonderfully, Sir, and is in excellent condition to hear the news of his death,” or “Oh, my dear Marquis, how your letter enchanted me! What can I do but answer it?” or “Meseems, Sir, that you owe me a letter, and I owe you some boxes of bergamot. I discharge my debt to the number of eight; others shall follow.... Never has the soil borne so many. Apparently for your gratification.” And she writes in this style also her letter on bleeding, on lemons and so forth, supposing it to be typical of the letters of Madame de Sévigné. But my grandmother who had approached that lady from within, attracted to her by her own love of kinsfolk and of nature, had taught me to enjoy the real beauties of her correspondence, which are altogether different. They were presently to strike me all the more forcibly inasmuch as Madame de Sévigné is a great artist of the same school as a painter whom I was to meet at Balbec, where his influence on my way of seeing things was immense. I realised at Balbec that it was in the same way as he that she presented things to her readers, in the order of our perception of them, instead of first having to explain them in relation to their several causes. But already that afternoon in the railway carriage, as I read over again that letter in which the moonlight comes: “I cannot resist the temptation: I put on all my bonnets and veils, though there is no need of them, I walk along this mall, where the air is as sweet as in my chamber; I find a thousand phantasms, monks white and black, sisters grey and white, linen cast here and there on the ground, men enshrouded upright against the tree-trunks,” I was enraptured by what, a little later, I should have described (for does not she draw landscapes in the same way as he draws characters?) as the Dostoievsky side of Madame de Sévigné’s Letters.

When, that evening, after having accompanied my grandmother to her destination and spent some hours in her friend’s house, I had returned by myself to the train, at any rate I found nothing to distress me in the night which followed; this was because I had not to spend it in a room the somnolence of which would have kept me awake; I was surrounded by the soothing activity of all those movements of the train which kept me company, offered to stay and converse with me if I could not sleep, lulled me with their sounds which I wedded — as I had often wedded the chime of the Combray bells — now to one rhythm, now to another (hearing as the whim took me first four level and

equivalent semi-quavers, then one semi-quaver furiously dashing against a crotchet); they neutralised the centrifugal force of my insomnia by exercising upon it a contrary pressure which kept me in equilibrium and on which my immobility and presently my drowsiness felt themselves to be borne with the same sense of refreshment that I should have had, had I been resting under the protecting vigilance of powerful forces, on the breast of nature and of life, had I been able for a moment to incarnate myself in a fish that sleeps in the sea, driven unheeding by the currents and the tides, or in an eagle outstretched upon the air, with no support but the storm.

Sunrise is a necessary concomitant of long railway journeys, just as are hard-boiled eggs, illustrated papers, packs of cards, rivers upon which boats strain but make no progress. At a certain moment,— when I was counting over the thoughts that had filled my mind, in the preceding minutes, so as to discover whether I had just been asleep or not (and when the very uncertainty which made me ask myself the question was to furnish me with an affirmative answer), in the pale square of the window, over a small black wood I saw some ragged clouds whose fleecy edges were of a fixed, dead pink, not liable to change, like the colour that dyes the wing which has grown to wear it, or the sketch upon which the artist's fancy has washed it. But I felt that, unlike them, this colour was due neither to inertia nor to caprice but to necessity and life. Presently there gathered behind it reserves of light. It brightened; the sky turned to a crimson which I strove, gluing my eyes to the window, to see more clearly, for I felt that it was related somehow to the most intimate life of Nature, but, the course of the line altering, the train turned, the morning scene gave place in the frame of the window to a nocturnal village, its roofs still blue with moonlight, its pond encrusted with the opalescent nacre of night, beneath a firmament still powdered with all its stars, and I was lamenting the loss of my strip of pink sky when I caught sight of it afresh, but red this time, in the opposite window which it left at a second bend in the line, so that I spent my time running from one window to the other to reassemble, to collect on a single canvas the intermittent, antipodean fragments of my fine, scarlet, ever-changing morning, and to obtain a comprehensive view of it and a continuous picture.

The scenery became broken, abrupt, the train stopped at a little station between two mountains. Far down the gorge, on the edge of a hurrying Stream, one could see only a solitary watch-house, deep-planted in the water which ran past on a level with its windows. If a person can be the product of a soil the peculiar charm of which one distinguishes in that person, more even than the

peasant girl whom I had so desperately longed to see appear when I wandered by myself along the Méséglise way, in the woods of Roussainville, such a person must be the big girl whom I now saw emerge from the house and, climbing a path lighted by the first slanting rays of the sun, come towards the station carrying a jar of milk. In her valley from which its congregated summits hid the rest of the world, she could never see anyone save in these trains which stopped for a moment only. She passed down the line of windows, offering coffee and milk to a few awakened passengers. Purpled with the glow of morning, her face was rosier than the sky. I felt in her presence that desire to live which is reborn in us whenever we become conscious anew of beauty and of happiness. We invariably forget that these are individual qualities, and, substituting for them in our mind a conventional type at which we arrive by striking a sort of mean amongst the different faces that have taken our fancy, the pleasures we have known, we are left with mere abstract images which are lifeless and dull because they are lacking in precisely that element of novelty, different from anything we have known, that element which is proper to beauty and to happiness. And we deliver on life a pessimistic judgment which we suppose to be fair, for we believed that we were taking into account when we formed it happiness and beauty, whereas in fact we left them out and replaced them by syntheses in which there is not a single atom of either. So it is that a well-read man will at once begin to yawn with boredom when anyone speaks to him of a new ‘good book,’ because he imagines a sort of composite of all the good books that he has read and knows already, whereas a good book is something special, something incalculable, and is made up not of the sum of all previous masterpieces but of something which the most thorough assimilation of every one of them would not enable him to discover, since it exists not in their sum but beyond it. Once he has become acquainted with this new work, the well-read man, till then apathetic, feels his interest awaken in the reality which it depicts. So, alien to the models of beauty which my fancy was wont to sketch when I was by myself, this strapping girl gave me at once the sensation of a certain happiness (the sole form, always different, in which we may learn the sensation of happiness), of a happiness that would be realised by my staying and living there by her side. But in this again the temporary cessation of Habit played a great part. I was giving the milk-girl the benefit of what was really my own entire being, ready to taste the keenest joys, which now confronted her. As a rule it is with our being reduced to a minimum that we live, most of our faculties lie dormant because they can rely upon Habit, which knows what there is to be done and has no need of their

services. But on this morning of travel, the interruption of the routine of my existence, the change of place and time, had made their presence indispensable. My habits, which were sedentary and not matutinal, played me false, and all my faculties came hurrying to take their place, vying with one another in their zeal, rising, each of them, like waves in a storm, to the same unaccustomed level, from the basest to the most exalted, from breath, appetite, the circulation of my blood to receptivity and imagination. I cannot say whether, so as to make me believe that this girl was unlike the rest of women, the rugged charm of these barren tracts had been added to her own, but if so she gave it back to them. Life would have seemed an exquisite thing to me if only I had been free to spend it, hour after hour, with her, to go with her to the stream, to the cow, to the train, to be always at her side, to feel that I was known to her, had my place in her thoughts. She would have initiated me into the delights of country life and of the first hours of the day. I signalled to her to give me some of her coffee. I felt that I must be noticed by her. She did not see me; I called to her. Above her body, which was of massive build, the complexion of her face was so burnished and so ruddy that she appeared almost as though I were looking at her through a lighted window. She had turned and was coming towards me; I could not take my eyes from her face which grew larger as she approached, like a sun which it was somehow possible to arrest in its course and draw towards one, letting itself be seen at close quarters, blinding the eyes with its blaze of red and gold. She fastened on me her penetrating stare, but while the porters ran along the platform shutting doors the train had begun to move. I saw her leave the station and go down the hill to her home; it was broad daylight now; I was speeding away from the dawn. Whether my exaltation had been produced by this girl or had on the other hand been responsible for most of the pleasure that I had found in the sight of her, in the sense of her presence, in either event she was so closely associated with it that my desire to see her again was really not so much a physical as a mental desire, not to allow this state of enthusiasm to perish utterly, not to be separated for ever from the person who, although quite unconsciously, had participated in it. It was not only because this state was a pleasant one. It was principally because (just as increased tension upon a cord or accelerated vibration of a nerve produces a different sound or colour) it gave another tonality to all that I saw, introduced me as an actor upon the stage of an unknown and infinitely more interesting universe; that handsome girl whom I still could see, while the train gathered speed, was like part of a life other than the life that I knew, separated from it by a clear boundary, in which the sensations that things

produced in me were no longer the same, from which to return now to my old life would be almost suicide. To procure myself the pleasure of feeling that I had at least an attachment to this new life, it would suffice that I should live near enough to the little station to be able to come to it every morning for a cup of coffee from the girl. But alas, she must be for ever absent from the other life towards which I was being borne with ever increasing swiftness, a life to the prospect of which I resigned myself only by weaving plans that would enable me to take the same train again some day and to stop at the same station, a project which would have the further advantage of providing with subject matter the selfish, active, practical, mechanical, indolent, centrifugal tendency which is that of the human mind; for our mind turns readily aside from the effort which is required if it is to analyse in itself, in a general and disinterested manner, a pleasant impression which we have received. And as, on the other hand, we wish to continue to think of that impression, the mind prefers to imagine it in the future tense, which while it gives us no clue as to the real nature of the thing, saves us the trouble of recreating it in our own consciousness and allows us to hope that we may receive it afresh from without.

Certain names of towns, Vezelay or Chartres, Bourses or Beauvais, serve to indicate, by abbreviation, the principal church in those towns. This partial acceptation, in which we are so accustomed to take the word, comes at length — if the names in question are those of places that we do not yet know — to fashion for us a mould of the name as a solid whole, which from that time onwards, whenever we wish it to convey the idea of the town — of that town which we have never seen — will impose on it, as on a cast, the same carved outlines, in the same style of art, will make of the town a sort of vast cathedral. It was, nevertheless, in a railway-station, above the door of a refreshment-room, that I read the name — almost Persian in style — of Balbec. I strode buoyantly through the station and across the avenue that led past it, I asked my way to the beach so as to see nothing in the place but its church and the sea; people seemed not to understand what I meant. Old Balbec, Balbec-en-Terre, at which I had arrived, had neither beach nor harbour. It was, most certainly, in the sea that the fishermen had found, according to the legend, the miraculous Christ, of which a window in the church that stood a few yards from where I now was recorded the discovery; it was indeed from cliffs battered by the waves that had been quarried the stone of its navfc and towers. But this sea, which for those reasons I had imagined as flowing up to die at the foot of the window, was twelve miles away and more, at Balbec-Plage, and, rising beside its cupola, that steeple, which,

because I had read that it was itself a rugged Norman cliff on which seeds were blown and sprouted, round which the sea-birds wheeled, I had always pictured to myself as receiving at its base the last drying foam of the uplifted waves, stood on a Square from which two lines of tramway diverged, opposite a Café which bore, written in letters of gold, the word ‘Billiards’; it stood out against a background of houses with the roofs of which no upstanding mast was blended. And the church — entering my mind with the Café, with the passing stranger of whom I had had to ask my way, with the station to which presently I should have to return — made part of the general whole, seemed an accident, a by-product of this summer afternoon, in which its mellow and distended dome against the sky was like a fruit of which the same light that bathed the chimneys of the houses was ripening the skin, pink, glowing, melting-soft. But I wished only to consider the eternal significance of the carvings when I recognised the Apostles, which I had seen in casts in the Trocadéro museum, and which on either side of the Virgin, before the deep bay of the porch, were awaiting me as though to do me reverence. With their benign, blunt, mild faces and bowed shoulders they seemed to be advancing upon me with an air of welcome, singing the Alleluia of a fine day. But it was evident that their expression was unchanging as that on a dead man’s face, and could be modified only by my turning about to look at them in different aspects. I said to myself: “Here I am: this is the Church of Balbec. This square, which looks as though it were conscious of its glory, is the only place in the world that possesses Balbec Church. All that I have seen so far have been photographs of this church — and of these famous Apostles, this Virgin of the Porch, mere casts only. Now it is the church itself, the statue itself; these are they; they, the unique things — this is something far greater.”

It was something less, perhaps, also. As a young man on the day of an examination or of a duel feels the question that he has been asked, the shot that he has fired, to be a very little thing when he thinks of the reserves of knowledge and of valour that he possesses and would like to have displayed, so my mind, which had exalted the Virgin of the Porch far above the reproductions that I had had before my eyes, inaccessible by the vicissitudes which had power to threaten them, intact although they were destroyed, ideal, endowed with universal value, was astonished to see the statue which it had carved a thousand times, reduced now to its own apparent form in stone, occupying, on the radius of my outstretched arm, a place in which it had for rivals an election placard and the point of my stick, fettered to the Square, inseparable from the head of the main street, powerless to hide from the gaze of the Café and of the omnibus office,

receiving on its face half of that ray of the setting sun (half, presently, in a few hours' time, of the light of the street lamp) of which the Bank building received the other half, tainted simultaneously with that branch office of a money-lending establishment by the smells from the pastry-cook's oven, subjected to the tyranny of the Individual to such a point that, if I had chosen to scribble my name upon that stone, it was she, the illustrious Virgin whom until then I had endowed with a general existence and an intangible beauty, the Virgin of Balbec, the unique (which meant, alas, the only one) who, on her body coated with the same soot as defiled the neighbouring houses, would have displayed — powerless to rid herself of them — to all the admiring strangers come there to gaze upon her, the marks of my piece of chalk and the letters of my name; it was she, indeed, the immortal work of art, so long desired, whom I found, transformed, as was the church itself, into a little old woman in stone whose height I could measure and count her wrinkles. But time was passing; I must return to the station, where I was to wait for my grandmother and Françoise, so that we should all arrive at Balbec-Plage together. I reminded myself of what I had read about Balbec, of Swann's saying: "It is exquisite; as fine as Siena." And casting the blame for my disappointment upon various accidental causes, such as the state of my health, my exhaustion after the journey, my incapacity for looking at things properly, I endeavoured to console myself with the thought that other towns remained still intact for me, that I might soon, perhaps, be making my way, as into a shower of pearls, into the cool pattering sound that dripped from Quimperlé, cross that green water lit by a rosy glow in which Pont-Aven was bathed; but as for Balbec, no sooner had I set foot in it than it was as though I had broken open a name which ought to have been kept hermetically closed, and into which, seizing at once the opportunity that I had imprudently given them when I expelled all the images that had been living in it until then, a tramway, a Café, people crossing the square, the local branch of a Bank, irresistibly propelled by some external pressure, by a pneumatic force, had come crowding into the interior of those two syllables which, closing over them, let them now serve as a border to the porch of the Persian church, and would never henceforward cease to contain them.

In the little train of the local railway company which was to take us to Balbec-Plage I found my grandmother, but found her alone — for, imagining that she was sending Françoise on ahead of her, so as to have everything ready before we arrived, but having mixed up her instructions, she had succeeded only in packing off Françoise in the wrong direction, who at that moment was being

carried down all unsuspectingly, at full speed, to Nantes, and would probably wake up next morning at Bordeaux. No sooner had I taken my seat in the carriage, filled with the fleeting light of sunset and with the lingering heat of the afternoon (the former enabling me, alas, to see written clearly upon my grandmother's face how much the latter had tired her), than she began: "Well, and Balbec?" with a smile so brightly illuminated by her expectation of the great pleasure which she supposed me to have been enjoying that I dared not at once confess to her my disappointment. Besides, the impression which my mind had been seeking occupied it steadily less as the place drew nearer to which my body would have to become accustomed. At the end — still more than an hour away — of this journey I was trying to form a picture of the manager of the hotel at Balbec, to whom I, at that moment, did not exist, and I should have liked to be going to present myself to him in more impressive company than that of my grandmother, who would be certain to ask for a reduction of his terms. The only thing positive about him was his haughty condescension; his lineaments were still vague.

Every few minutes the little train brought us to a standstill in one of the stations which came before Balbec-Plage, stations the mere names of which (Incarville, Marcouville, Doville, Pont-a-Couleuvre, Arambouville, Saint-Mars-le-Vieux, Hermonville, Maineville) seemed to me outlandish, whereas if I had come upon them in a book I should at once have been struck by their affinity to the names of certain places in the neighbourhood of Combray. But to the trained ear two musical airs, consisting each of so many notes, several of which are common to them both, will present no similarity whatever if they differ in the colour of their harmony and orchestration. So it was that nothing could have reminded me less than these dreary names, made up of sand, of space too airy and empty and of salt, out of which the termination 'ville' always escaped, as the 'fly' seems to spring out from the end of the word 'butterfly'— nothing could have reminded me less of those other names, Roussainville or Martinville, which, because I had heard them pronounced so often by my great-aunt at table, in the dining-room, had acquired a certain sombre charm in which were blended perhaps extracts of the flavour of 'preserves,' the smell of the fire of logs and of the pages of one of Bergotte's books, the colour of the stony front of the house opposite, all of which things still to-day when they rise like a gaseous bubble from the depths of my memory preserve their own specific virtue through all the successive layers of rival interests which must be traversed before they reach the surface.

These were — commanding the distant sea from the crests of their several dunes or folding themselves already for the night beneath hills of a crude green colour and uncomfortable shape, like that of the sofa in one's bedroom in an hotel at which one has just arrived, each composed of a cluster of villas whose line was extended to include a lawn-tennis court and now and then a casino, over which a flag would be snapping in the freshening breeze, like a hollow cough — a series of watering-places which now let me see for the first time their regular visitors, but let me see only the external features of those visitors — lawn-tennis players in white hats, the station-master spending all his life there on the spot among his tamarisks and roses, a lady in a straw 'boater' who, following the everyday routine of an existence which I should never know, was calling to her dog which had stopped to examine something in the road before going in to her bungalow where the lamp was already lighted for her return — which with these strangely usual and slightingly familiar sights stung my un-greeted eyes and stabbed my exiled heart. But how much were my sufferings increased when we had finally landed in the hall of the Grand Hotel at Balbec, and I stood there in front of the monumental staircase that looked like marble, while my grandmother, regardless of the growing hostility of the strangers among whom we should have to live, discussed 'terms' with the manager, a sort of nodding mandarin whose face and voice were alike covered with scars (left by the excision of countless pustules from one and from the other of the divers accents acquired from an alien ancestry and in a cosmopolitan upbringing) who stood there in a smart dinner-jacket, with the air of an expert psychologist, classifying, whenever the 'omnibus' discharged a fresh load, the 'nobility and gentry' as 'geesers' and the 'hotel crooks' as nobility and gentry. Forgetting, probably, that he himself was not drawing five hundred francs a month, he had a profound contempt for people to whom five hundred francs — or, as he preferred ta put it,'twenty-five louis' was 'a lot of money,' and regarded them as belonging to a race of pariahs for whom the Grand Hotel was certainly not intended. It is true that even within its walls there were people who did not pay very much and yet had not forfeited the manager's esteem, provided that he was assured that they were watching their expenditure not from poverty so much as from avarice. For this could in no way lower their standing since it is a vice and may consequently be found at every grade of social position. Social position was the one thing by which the manager was impressed, social position, or rather the signs which seemed to him to imply that it was exalted, such as not taking one's hat off when one came into the hall, wearing knickerbockers, or an overcoat with a waist, and

taking a cigar with a band of purple and gold out of a crushed morocco case — to none of which advantages could I, alas, lay claim. He would also adorn his business conversation with choice expressions, to which, as a rule, he gave a wrong meaning.

While I heard my grandmother, who shewed no sign of annoyance at his listening to her with his hat on his head and whistling through his teeth at her, ask him in an artificial voice, “And what are... your charges?... Oh! far too high for my little budget,” waiting upon a bench, I sought refuge in the innermost depths of my own consciousness, strove to migrate to a plane of eternal thoughts — to leave nothing of myself, nothing that lived and felt on the surface of my body, anaesthetised as are those of animals which by inhibition feign death when they are attacked — so as not to suffer too keenly in this place, with which my total unfamiliarity was made all the more evident to me when I saw the familiarity that seemed at the same moment to be enjoyed by a smartly dressed lady for whom the manager shewed his respect by taking liberties with the little dog that followed her across the hall, the young ‘blood’ with a feather in his hat who asked, as he came in, ‘Any letters?’— all these people to whom it was an act of home-coming to mount those stairs of imitation marble. And at the same time the triple frown of Minos, *Æ*acus and Rhadamanthus (beneath which I plunged my naked soul as into an unknown element where there was nothing now to protect it) was bent sternly upon me by a group of gentlemen who, though little versed perhaps in the art of receiving, yet bore the title ‘Reception Clerks,’ while beyond them again, through a closed wall of glass, were people sitting in a reading-room for the description of which I should have had to borrow from Dante alternately the colours in which he paints Paradise and Hell, according as I was thinking of the happiness of the elect who had the right to sit and read there undisturbed, or of the terror which my grandmother would have inspired in me if, in her insensibility to this sort of impression, she had asked me to go in there and wait for her by myself.

My sense of loneliness was further increased a moment later: when I had confessed to my grandmother that I did not feel well, that I thought that we should be obliged to return to Paris, she had offered no protest, saying merely that she was going out to buy a few things which would be equally useful whether we left or stayed (and which, I afterwards learned, were all for my benefit, Françoise having gone off with certain articles which I might need); while I waited for her I had taken a turn through the streets, packed with a crowd of people who imparted to them a sort of indoor warmth, streets in which were

still open the hairdresser's shop and the pastry-cook's, the latter filled with customers eating ices, opposite the statue of Duguay-Trouin. This crowd gave me just about as much pleasure as a photograph of it in one of the 'illustrateds' might give a patient who was turning its pages in the surgeon's waiting-room. I was astonished to find that there were people so different from myself that this stroll through the town had actually been recommended to me by the manager as a distraction, and also that the torture chamber which a new place of residence is could appear to some people a 'continuous amusement,' to quote the hotel prospectus, which might, it was true, exaggerate, but was, for all that, addressed to a whole army of clients to whose tastes it must appeal. True, it invoked, to make them come to the Grand Hotel, Balbec, not only the 'exquisite fare' and the 'fairy-like view across the Casino gardens,' but also the 'ordinances of her Majesty Queen Fashion, which no one may break with impunity, or without being taken for a Boeotian, a charge that no well-bred man would willingly incur.' The need that I now had of my grandmother was enhanced by my fear that I had shattered another of her illusions. She must be feeling discouraged, feeling that if I could not stand the fatigue of this journey there was no hope that any change of air could ever do me good. I decided to return to the hotel and to wait for her there: the manager himself came forward and pressed a button, and a person whose acquaintance I had not yet made, labelled 'LIFT' (who at that highest point in the building, which corresponded to the lantern in a Norman church, was installed like a photographer in his darkroom or an organist in his loft) came rushing down towards me with the agility of a squirrel, tamed, active, caged. Then, sliding upwards again along a steel pillar, he bore me aloft in his train towards the dome of this temple of Mammon. On each floor, on either side of a narrow communicating stair, opened out fanwise a range of shadowy galleries, along one of which, carrying a bolster, a chambermaid came past. I lent to her face, which the gathering dusk made featureless, the mask of my most impassioned dreams of beauty, but read in her eyes as they turned towards me the horror of my own nonentity. Meanwhile, to dissipate, in the course of this interminable assent, the mortal anguish which I felt in penetrating thus in silence the mystery of this chiaroscuro so devoid of poetry, lighted by a single vertical line of little windows which were those of the solitary water-closet on each landing, I addressed a few words to the young organist, artificer of my journey and my partner in captivity, who continued to manipulate the registers of his instrument and to finger the stops. I apologised for taking up so much room, for giving him so much trouble, and asked whether I was not obstructing him in the

practice of an art to which, so as to flatter the performer, I did more than display curiosity, I confessed my strong attachment. But he vouchsafed no answer, whether from astonishment at my words, preoccupation with what he was doing, regard for convention, hardness of hearing, respect for holy ground, fear of danger, slowness of understanding, or by the manager's orders.

There is perhaps nothing that gives us so strong an impression of the reality of the external world as the difference in the positions, relative to ourselves, of even a quite unimportant person before we have met him and after. I was the same man who had taken, that afternoon, the little train from Balbec to the coast, I carried in my body the same consciousness But on that consciousness, in the place where, at six o'clock, there had been, with the impossibility of forming any idea of the manager, the Grand Hotel or its occupants, a vague and timorous impatience for the moment at which I should reach my destination, were to be found now the pustules excised from the face of the cosmopolitan manager (he was, as a matter of fact, a naturalised Monégasque, although — as he himself put it, for he was always using expressions which he thought distinguished without noticing that they were incorrect —'of Rumanian originality'), his action in ringing for the lift, the lift-boy himself, a whole frieze of puppet-show characters issuing from that Pandora's box which was the Grand Hotel, undeniable, irremovable, and, like everything that is realised, sterilising. But at least this change, which I had done nothing to bring about, proved to me that something had happened which was external to myself — however devoid of interest that thing might be — and I was like a traveller who, having had the sun in his face when he started, concludes that he has been for so many hours on the road when he finds the sun behind him. I was half dead with exhaustion, I was burning with fever; I would gladly have gone to bed, but I had no night-things. I should have liked at least to lie down for a little while on the bed, but what good would that have done me, seeing that I should not have been able to find any rest there for that mass of sensations which is for each of us his sentient if not his material body, and that the unfamiliar objects which encircled that body, forcing it to set its perceptions on the permanent footing of a vigilant and defensive guard, would have kept my sight, my hearing, all my senses in a position as cramped and comfortless (even if I had stretched out my legs) as that of Cardinal La Balue in the cage in which he could neither stand nor sit. It is our noticing them that puts things in a room, our growing used to them that takes them away again and clears a space for us. Space there was none for me in my bedroom (mine in name only) at Balbec; it was full of things which did not know me, which flung

back at me the distrustful look that I had cast at them, and, without taking any heed of my existence, shewed that I was interrupting the course of theirs. The clock — whereas at home I heard my clock tick only a few seconds in a week, when I was coming out of some profound meditation — continued without a moment's interruption to utter, in an unknown tongue, a series of observations which must have been most uncomplimentary to myself, for the violet curtains listened to them without replying, but in an attitude such as people adopt who shrug their shoulders to indicate that the sight of a third person irritates them. They gave to this room with its lofty ceiling a semi-historical character which might have made it a suitable place for the assassination of the Duc de Guise, and afterwards for parties of tourists personally conducted by one of Messrs. Thomas Cook and Son's guides, but for me to sleep in — no. I was tormented by the presence of some little bookcases with glass fronts which ran along the walls, but especially by a large mirror with feet which stood across one corner, for I felt that until it had left the room there would be no possibility of rest for me there. I kept raising my eyes — which the things in my room in Paris disturbed no more than did my eyelids themselves, for they were merely extensions of my organs, an enlargement of myself — towards the fantastically high ceiling of this belvedere planted upon the summit of the hotel which my grandmother had chosen for me; and in that region more intimate than those in which we see and hear, that region in which we test the quality of odours, almost in the very heart of my inmost self, the smell of flowering grasses next launched its offensive against my last feeble line of trenches, where I stood up to it, not without tiring myself still further, with the futile incessant defence of an anxious sniffing. Having no world, no room, no body now that was not menaced by the enemies thronging round me, invaded to the very bones by fever, I was utterly alone; I longed to die. Then my grandmother came in, and to the expansion of my ebbing heart there opened at once an infinity of space.

She was wearing a loose cambric gown which she put on at home whenever any of us was ill (because she felt more comfortable in it, she used to say, for she always ascribed to her actions a selfish motive), and which was, for tending us, for watching by our beds, her servant's livery, her nurse's uniform, her religious habit. But whereas the trouble that servants, nurses, religious take, their kindness to us, the merits that we discover in them and the gratitude that we owe them all go to increase the impression that we have of being, in their eyes, some one different, of feeling that we are alone, keeping in our own hands the control over our thoughts, our will to live, I knew, when I was with my grandmother, that,

however great the misery that there was in me, it would be received by her with a pity still more vast; that everything that was mine, my cares, my wishes, would be, in my grandmother, supported upon a desire to save and prolong my life stronger than was my own; and my thoughts were continued in her without having to undergo any deflection, since they passed from my mind into hers without change of atmosphere or of personality. And — like a man who tries to fasten his necktie in front of a glass and forgets that the end which he sees reflected is not on the side to which he raises his hand, or like a dog that chases along the ground the dancing shadow of an insect in the air — misled by her appearance in the body as we are apt to be in this world where we have no direct perception of people's souls, I threw myself into the arms of my grandmother and clung with my lips to her face as though I had access thus to that immense heart which she opened to me. And when I felt my mouth glued to her cheeks, to her brow, I drew from them something so beneficial, so nourishing that I lay in her arms as motionless, as solemn, as calmly gluttonous as a babe at the breast.

At last I let go, and lay and gazed, and could not tire of gazing at her large face, as clear in its outline as a fine cloud, glowing and serene, behind which I could discern the radiance of her tender love. And everything that received, in however slight a degree, any share of her sensations, everything that could be said to belong in any way to her was at once so spiritualised, so sanctified, that with outstretched hands I smoothed her dear hair, still hardly grey, with as much respect, precaution, comfort as if I had actually been touching her goodness. She found a similar pleasure in taking any trouble that saved me one, and in a moment of immobility and rest for my weary limbs something so delicious that when, having seen that she wished to help me with my undressing and to take my boots off, I made as though to stop her and began to undress myself, with an imploring gaze she arrested my hands as they fumbled with the top buttons of my coat and boots.

"Oh, do let me!" she begged. "It is such a joy for your Granny. And be sure you knock on the wall if you want anything in the night. My bed is just on the other side, and the partition is, quite thin. Just give a knock now, as soon as you are ready, so that we shall know where we are."

And, sure enough, that evening I gave three knocks — a signal which, the week after, when I was ill, I repeated every morning for several days, because my grandmother wanted me to have some milk early. Then, when I thought that I could hear her stirring, so that she should not be kept waiting but might, the moment she had brought me the milk, go to sleep again, I ventured on three little

taps, timidly, faintly, but for all that distinctly, for if I was afraid of disturbing her, supposing that I had been mistaken and that she was still asleep, I should not have wished her either to lie awake listening for a summons which she had not at once caught and which I should not have the courage to repeat. And scarcely had I given my taps than I heard three others, in a different intonation from mine, stamped with a calm authority, repeated twice over so that there should be no mistake, and saying to me plainly: “Don’t get excited; I heard you; I shall be with you in a minute!” and shortly afterwards my grandmother appeared. I explained to her that I had been afraid that she would not hear me, or might think that it was some one in the room beyond who was lapping; at which she smiled:

“Mistake my poor chick’s knocking for anyone else! Why, Granny could tell it among a thousand! Do you suppose there’s anyone else in the world who’s such a silly-billy, with such feverish little knuckles, so afraid of waking me up and of not making me understand? Even if he just gave the least scratch, Granny could tell her mouse’s sound at once, especially such a poor miserable little mouse as mine is. I could hear it just now, trying to make up its mind, and rustling the bedclothes, and going through all its tricks.”

She pushed open the shutters; where a wing of the hotel jutted out at right angles to my window, the sun was already installed upon the roof, like a slater who is up betimes, and starts early and works quietly so as not to rouse the sleeping town, whose stillness seems to enhance his activity. She told me what o’clock, what sort of day it was; that it was not worth while my getting up and coming to the window, that there was a mist over the sea; if the baker’s shop had opened yet; what the vehicle was that I could hear passing. All that brief, trivial curtain-raiser, that negligible *introit* of a new day, performed without any spectator, a little scrap of life which was only for our two selves, which I should have no hesitation in repeating, later on, to Françoise or even to strangers, speaking of the fog ‘which you could have cut with a knife at six o’clock that morning, with the ostentation of one who was boasting not of a piece of knowledge that he had acquired but of a mark of affection shewn to himself alone; dear morning moment, opened like a symphony by the rhythmical dialogue of my three taps, to which the thin wall of my bedroom, steeped in love and joy, grown melodious, immaterial, singing like the angelic choir, responded with three other taps, eagerly awaited, repeated once and again, in which it contrived to waft to me the soul of my grandmother, whole and perfect, and the promise of her coming, with a swiftness of annunciation and melodic accuracy. But on this first night after our arrival, when my grandmqther had left me, I

began again to feel as I had felt, the day before, in Paris, at the moment of leaving home. Perhaps this fear that I had — and shared with so many of my fellow-men — of sleeping in a strange room, perhaps this fear is only the most humble, obscure, organic, almost unconscious form of that great and desperate resistance set up by the things that constitute the better part of our present life towards our mentally assuming, by accepting it as true, the formula of a future in which those things are to have no part; a resistance which was at the root of the horror that I had so often been made to feel by the thought that my parents must, one day, die, that the stern necessity of life might qblige me to live remote from Gilberte, or simply to settle permanently in a place where I should never see any of my old friends; a resistance which was also at the root of the difficulty that I found in imagining my own death, or a survival such as Bergotte used to promise to mankind in his books, a survival in which I should not be allowed to take with me my memories, my frailties, my character, which did not easily resign themselves to the idea of ceasing to be, and desired for me neither annihilation nor an eternity in which they would have no part.

When Swann had said to me, in Paris one day when I felt particularly unwell: “You ought to go off to one of those glorious islands in the Pacific; you’d never come back again if you did.” I should have liked to answer: “But then I shall not see your daughter any more; I shall be living among people and things she has never seen.” And yet my better judgment whispered: “What difference can that make, since you are not going to be affected by it? When M. Swann tells you that you will not come back he means by that that you will not want to come back, and if you don’t want to that is because you will be happier out there.” For my judgment was aware that Habit — Habit which was even now setting to work to make me like this unfamiliar lodging, to change the position of the mirror, the shade of the curtains, to stop the clock — undertakes as well to make dear to us the companions whom at first we disliked, to give another appearance to their faces, to make attractive the sound of their voices, to modify the inclinations of their hearts. It is true that these new friendships for places and people are based upon forgetfulness of the old; but what my better judgment was thinking was simply that I could look without apprehension along the vista of a life in which I should be for ever separated from people all memory of whom I should lose, and it was by way of consolation that my mind was offering to my heart a promise of oblivion which succeeded only in sharpening the edge of its despair. Not that the heart also is not bound in time, when separation is complete, to feel the anodyne effect of habit; but until then it will continue to

suffer. And our dread of a future in which we must forego the sight of faces, the sound of voices that we love, friends from whom we derive to-day our keenest joys, this dread, far from being dissipated, is intensified, if to the grief of such a privation we reflect that there will be added what seems to us now in anticipation an even more cruel grief; not to feel it as a grief at all — to remain indifferent; for if that should occur, our ego would have changed, it would then be not merely the attractiveness of our family, our mistress, our friends that had ceased to environ us, but our affection for them; it would have been so completely eradicated from our heart, in which to-day it is a conspicuous element, that we should be able to enjoy that life apart from them the very thought of which to-day makes us recoil in horror; so that it would be in a real sense the death of ourselves, a death followed, it is true, by resurrection but in a different ego, the life, the love of which are beyond the reach of those elements of the existing ego that are doomed to die. It is they — even the meanest of them, such as our obscure attachments to the dimensions, to the atmosphere of a bedroom — that grow stubborn and refuse, in acts of rebellion which we must recognise to be a secret, partial, tangible and true aspect of our resistance to death, of the long resistance, desperate and daily renewed, to a fragmentary and gradual death such as interpolates itself throughout the whole course of our life, tearing away from us at every moment a shred of ourselves, dead matter on which new cells will multiply, and grow. And for a neurotic nature such as mine, one that is to say in which the intermediaries, the nerves, perform their functions badly — fail to arrest on its way to the consciousness, allow indeed to penetrate there, distinct, exhausting, innumerable, agonising, the plaint of those most humble elements of the personality which are about to disappear — the anxiety and alarm which I felt as I lay outstretched beneath that strange and too lofty ceiling were but the protest of an affection that survived in me for a ceiling that was familiar and low. Doubtless this affection too would disappear, and another have taken its place (when death, and then another life, would, in the guise of Habit, have performed their double task); but until its annihilation, every night it would suffer afresh, and on this first night especially, confronted with a future already realised in which there would no longer be any place for it, it rose in revolt, it tortured me with the sharp sound of its lamentations whenever my straining eyes, powerless to turn from what was wounding them, endeavoured to fasten their gaze upon that inaccessible ceiling.

But next morning!— after a servant had come to call me, and had brought me hot water, and while I was washing and dressing myself and trying in vain to

find the things that I wanted in my trunk, from which I extracted, pell-mell, only a lot of things that were of no use whatever, what a joy it was to me, thinking already of the delights of luncheon and of a walk along the shore, to see in the window, and in all the glass fronts of the bookcases as in the portholes of a ship's cabin, the open sea, naked, unshadowed, and yet with half of its expanse in shadow, bounded by a thin and fluctuant line, and to follow with my eyes the waves that came leaping towards me, one behind another, like divers along a springboard. Every other moment, holding in one hand the starched, unyielding towel, with the name of the hotel printed upon it, with which I was making futile efforts to dry myself, I returned to the window to gaze once more upon that vast amphitheatre, dazzling, mountainous, and upon the snowy crests of its emerald waves, here and there polished and translucent, which with a placid violence, a leonine bending of the brows, let their steep fronts, to which the sun now added a smile without face or features, run forward to their goal, totter and melt and be no more. Window in which I was, henceforward, to plant myself every morning, as at the pane of a mail coach in which one has slept, to see whether, in the night, a long sought mountain-chain has come nearer or withdrawn — only here it was those hills of the sea which, before they come dancing back towards us, are apt to retire so far that often it was only at the end of a long and sandy plain that I would distinguish, miles it seemed away, their first undulations upon a background transparent, vaporous, bluish, like the glaciers that one sees in the backgrounds of the Tuscan Primitives. On other mornings it was quite close at hand that the sun was smiling upon those waters of a green as tender as that preserved in Alpine pastures (among mountains on which the sun spreads himself here and there like a lazy giant who may at any moment come leaping gaily down their craggy sides) less by the moisture of their soil than by the liquid mobility of their light. Anyhow, in that breach which shore and water between them drive through all the rest of the world, for the passage, the accumulation there of light, it is light above all, according to the direction from which it comes and along which our eyes follow it, it is light that shifts and fixes the undulations of the sea. Difference of lighting modifies no less the orientation of a place, constructs no less before our eyes new goals which it inspires in us the yearning to attain, than would a distance in space actually traversed in the course of a long journey. When, in the morning, the sun came from behind the hotel, disclosing to me the sands bathed in light as far as the first bastions of the sea, it seemed to be shewing me another side of the picture, and to be engaging me in the pursuit, along the winding path of its rays, of a journey motionless but ever varied amid

all the fairest scenes of the diversified landscape of the hours. And on this first morning the sun pointed out to me far off with a jovial finger those blue peaks of the sea, which bear no name upon any geographer's chart, until, dizzy with its sublime excursion over the thundering and chaotic surface of their crests and avalanches, it came back to take shelter from the wind in my bedroom, swaggering across the unmade bed and scattering its riches over the splashed surface of the basin-stand, and into my open trunk, where by its very splendour and ill-matched luxury it added still further to the general effect of disorder. Alas, that wind from the sea; an hour later, in the great dining-room — while we were having our luncheon, and from the leathern gourd of a lemon were sprinkling a few golden drops on to a pair of soles which presently left on our plates the plumes of their picked skeletons, curled like stiff feathers and resonant as citherns,— it seemed to my grandmother a cruel deprivation not to be able to feel its life-giving breath on her cheek, on account of the window, transparent but closed, which like the front of a glass case in a museum divided us from the beach while allowing us to look out upon its whole extent, and into which the sky entered so completely that its azure had the effect of being the colour of the windows and its white clouds only so many flaws in the glass. Imagining that I was 'seated upon the mole' or at rest in the 'boudoir' of which Baudelaire speaks I asked myself whether his 'Sun's rays upon the sea' were not — a very different thing from the evening ray, simple and superficial as the wavering stroke of a golden pencil — just what at that moment was scorching the sea topaz-brown, fermenting it, turning it pale and milky like foaming beer, like milk, while now and then there hovered over it great blue shadows which some god seemed, for his pastime, to be shifting to and fro by moving a mirror in the sky. Unfortunately, it was not only in its outlook that it differed from our room at Combray, giving upon the houses over the way, this dining-room at Balbec, bare-walled, filled with a sunlight green as the water in a marble font, while a few feet away the full tide and broad daylight erected as though before the gates of the heavenly city an indestructible and moving rampart of emerald and gold. At Combray, since we were known to everyone, I took heed of no one. In life at the seaside one knows only one's own party. I was not yet old enough, I was still too sensitive to have outgrown the desire to find favour in the sight of other people and to possess their hearts. Nor had I acquired the more noble indifference which a man of the world would have felt, with regard to the people who were eating their luncheon in the room, nor to the boys and girls who strolled past the window, with whom I was pained by the thought that I should never be allowed

to go on expeditions, though not so much pained as if my grandmother, contemptuous of social formalities and concerned about nothing but my health, had gone to them with the request, humiliating for me to overhear, that they would consent to let me accompany them. Whether they were returning to some villa beyond my ken, or had emerged from it, racquet in hand, on their way to some lawn-tennis court, or were mounted on horses whose hooves trampled and tore my heart, I gazed at them with a passionate curiosity, in that blinding light of the beach by which social distinctions are altered, I followed all their movements through the transparency of that great bay of glass which allowed so much light to flood the room. But it intercepted the wind, and this seemed wrong to my grandmother, who, unable to endure the thought that I was losing the benefit of an hour in the open air, surreptitiously unlatched a pane and at once set flying, with the bills of fare, the newspapers, veils and hats of all the people at the other tables; she herself, fortified by the breath of heaven, remained calm and smiling like Saint Blandina, amid the torrent of invective which, increasing my sense of isolation and misery, those scornful, dishevelled, furious visitors combined to pour on us.

To a certain extent — and this, at Balbec, gave to the population, as a rule monotonously rich and cosmopolitan, of that sort of smart and ‘exclusive’ hotel, a quite distinctive local character — they were composed of eminent persons from the departmental capitals of that region of France, a chief magistrate from Caen, a leader of the Cherbourg bar, a big solicitor from Le Mans, who annually, when the holidays came round, starting from the various points over which, throughout the working year, they were scattered like snipers in a battle or draughtsmen upon a board, concentrated their forces upon this hotel. They always reserved the same rooms, and with their wives, who had pretensions to aristocracy, formed a little group, which was joined by a leading barrister and a leading doctor from Paris, who on the day of their departure would say to the others:

“Oh, yes, of course; you don’t go by our train. You are fortunate, you will be home in time for luncheon.”

“Fortunate, do you say? You, who live in the Capital, in ‘Paris, the great town,’ while I have to live in a wretched county town of a hundred thousand souls (it is true, we managed to muster a hundred and two thousand at the last census, but what is that compared to your two and a half millions?) going back, too, to asphalt streets and all the bustle and gaiety of Paris life?”

They said this with a rustic burring of their r’s, but without bitterness, for

they were leading lights each in his own province, who could like other people have gone to Paris had they chosen — the chief magistrate of Caen had several times been offered a judgeship in the Court of Appeal — but had preferred to stay where they were, from love of their native towns or of obscurity or of fame, or because they were reactionaries, and enjoyed being on friendly terms with the country houses of the neighbourhood. Besides several of them were not going back at once to their county towns.

For — inasmuch as the Bay of Balbec was a little world apart in the midst of a great world, a basketful of the seasons in which were clustered in a ring good days and bad, and the months in their order, so that not only, on days when one could make out Rivebelle, which was in itself a sign of coming storms, could one see the sunlight on the houses there while Balbec was plunged in darkness, but later on, when the cold weather had reached Balbec, one could be certain of finding on that opposite shore two or three supplementary months of warmth — those of the regular visitors to the Grand Hotel whose holidays began late or lasted long, gave orders, when rain and fog came and Autumn was in the air, for their boxes to be packed and embarked, and set sail across the Bay to find summer again at Rivebelle or Costedor. This little group in the Balbec hotel looked with distrust upon each new arrival, and while affecting to take not the least interest in him, hastened, all of them, to ply with questions their friend the head waiter. For it was the same head waiter — Aimé— who returned every year for the season, and kept their tables for them; and their good ladies, having heard that his wife was ‘expecting,’ would sit after meals working each at one of the ‘little things,’ stopping only to put up their glasses and stare at us, my grandmother and myself, because we were eating hard-boiled eggs in salad, which was considered common, and was, in fact, ‘not done’ in the best society of Alençon. They affected an attitude of contemptuous irony with regard to a Frenchman who was called ‘His Majesty’ and had indeed proclaimed himself King of a small island in the South Seas, inhabited by a few savages. He was staying in the hotel with his pretty mistress, whom, as she crossed the beach to bathe, the little boys would greet with “Three cheers for the Queen!” because she would reward them with a shower of small silver. The chief magistrate and the barrister went so far as to pretend not to see her, and if any of their friends happened to look at her, felt bound to warn him that she was only a little shop-girl.

“But I was told that at Ostend they used the royal bathing machine.”

“Well, and why not? It’s on hire for twenty francs. You can take it yourself,

if you care for that sort of thing. Anyhow, I know for a fact that the fellow asked for an audience, when he was there, with the King, who sent back word that he took no cognisance of any Pantomime Princes." "Really, that's interesting! What queer people there are in the world, to be sure!"

And I dare say it was all quite true: but it was also from resentment of the thought that, to many of their fellow-visitors, they were themselves simply respectable but rather common people who did not know this King and Queen so prodigal with their small change, that the solicitor, the magistrate, the barrister, when what they were pleased to call the 'Carnival' went by, felt so much annoyance, and expressed aloud an indignation that was quite understood by their friend the head waiter who, obliged to shew proper civility to these generous if not authentic Sovereigns, still, while he took their orders, would dart from afar at his old patrons a covert but speaking glance. Perhaps there was also something of the same resentment at being erroneously supposed to be less and unable to explain that they were more smart, underlining the 'fine specimen' with which they qualified a young 'blood,' the consumptive and dissipated son of an industrial magnate, who appeared every day in a new suit of clothes with an orchid in his buttonhole, drank champagne at luncheon, and then strolled out of the hotel, pale, impassive, a smile of complete indifference on his lips, to the casino to throw away at the baccarat table enormous sums, 'which he could ill afford to lose,' as the solicitor said with a resigned air to the chief magistrate, whose wife had it 'on good authority' that this 'detrimental' young man was bringing his parents' grey hair in sorrow to the grave.

On the other hand, the barrister and his friends could not exhaust their flow of sarcasm on the subject of a wealthy old lady of title, because she never moved anywhere without taking her whole household with her. Whenever the wives of the solicitor and the magistrate saw her in the dining-room at meal-times they put up their glasses and gave her an insolent scrutiny, as minute and distrustful as if she had been some dish with a pretentious name but a suspicious appearance which, after the negative result of a systematic study, must be sent away with a lofty wave of the hand and a grimace of disgust.

No doubt by this behaviour they meant only to shew that, if there were things in the world which they themselves lacked — in this instance, certain prerogatives which the old lady enjoyed, and the privilege of her acquaintance — it was not because they could not, but because they did not choose to acquire them. But they had succeeded in convincing themselves that this really was what they felt; and it was the suppression of all desire for, of all curiosity as to forms

of life which were unfamiliar, of all hope of pleasing new people (for which, in the women, had been substituted a feigned contempt, an artificial brightness) that had the awkward result of obliging them to label their discontent satisfaction, and lie everlastingly to themselves, for which they were greatly to be pitied. But everyone else in the hotel was no doubt behaving in a similar fashion, though his behaviour might take a different form, and sacrificing, if not to self-importance, at any rate to certain inculcated principles and mental habits the thrilling delight of mixing in a strange kind of life. Of course, the atmosphere of the microcosm in which the old lady isolated herself was not poisoned with virulent bitterness, as was that of the group in which the wives of the solicitor and magistrate sat chattering with impotent rage. It was indeed embalmed with a delicate and old-world fragrance which, however, was none the less artificial. For at heart the old lady would probably have found in attracting, in attaching to herself (and, with that object, recreating herself), the mysterious sympathy of new friends a charm which is altogether lacking from the pleasure that is to be derived from mixing only with the people of one's own world, and reminding oneself that, one's own being the best of all possible worlds, the ill-informed contempt of 'outsiders' may be disregarded. Perhaps she felt that — were she to arrive *incognito* at the Grand Hotel, Balbec, she would, in her black stuff gown and old-fashioned bonnet, bring a smile to the lips of some old reprobate, who from the depths of his rocking chair would glance up and murmur, "What a scarecrow!" or, still worse, to those of some man of repute who bad, like the magistrate, kept between his pepper-and-salt whiskers a rosy complexion and a pair of sparkling eyes such as she liked to see, and would at once bring the magnifying lens of the conjugal glasses to bear upon so quaint a phenomenon; and perhaps it was in unconfessed dread of those first few minutes, which, though one knows that they will be but a few minutes, are none the less terrifying, like the first plunge of one's head under water, that this old lady sent down in advance a servant, who would inform the hotel of the personality and habits of his mistress, and, cutting short the manager's greetings, made, with an abruptness in which there was more timidity than pride, for her room, where her own curtains, substituted for those that draped the hotel windows, her own screens and photographs, set up so effectively between her and the outside world, to which otherwise she would have had to adapt herself, the barrier of her private life that it was her home (in which she had comfortably stayed) that travelled rather than herself.

Thenceforward, having placed between herself, on the one hand, and the

staff of the hotel and its decorators on the other the servants who bore instead of her the shock of contact with all this strange humanity, and kept up around their mistress her familiar atmosphere, having set her prejudices between herself and the other visitors, indifferent whether or not she gave offence to people whom her friends would not have had in their houses, it was in her own world that she continued to live, by correspondence with her friends, by memories, by her intimate sense of and confidence in her own position, the quality of her manners, the competence of her politeness. And every day, when she came downstairs to go for a drive in her own carriage, the lady's-maid who came after her carrying her wraps, the footman who preceded her, seemed like sentries who, at the gate of an embassy, flying the flag of the country to which she belonged, assured to her upon foreign soil the privilege of extra-territoriality. She did not leave her room until late in the afternoon on the day following our arrival, so that we did not see her in the dining-room, into which the manager, since we were strangers there, conducted us, taking us under his wing, as a corporal takes a squad of recruits to the master-tailor, to have them fitted; we did see however, a moment later, a country gentleman and his daughter, of an obscure but very ancient Breton family, M. and Mlle, de Stermaria, whose table had been allotted to us, in the belief that they had gone out and would not be back until the evening. Having come to Balbec only to see various country magnates whom they knew in that neighbourhood, they spent in the hotel dining-room, what with the invitations they accepted and the visits they paid, only such time as was strictly unavoidable. It was their stiffness that preserved them intact from all human sympathy, from interesting at all the strangers seated round about them, among whom M. de Stermaria kept up the glacial, preoccupied, distant, rude, punctilious and distrustful air that we assume in a railway refreshment-room, among fellow-passengers whom we have never seen before and will never see again, and with whom we can conceive of no other relations than to defend from their onslaught our 'portion' of cold chicken and our corner seat in the train. No sooner had we begun our luncheon than we were asked to leave the table, on the instructions of M. de Stermaria who had just arrived and, without the faintest attempt at an apology to us, requested the head waiter, in our hearing, to "see that such a mistake did not occur again," for it was repugnant to him that "people whom he did not know" should have taken his table.

And certainly into the feeling which impelled a young actress (better known, though, for her smart clothes, her smart sayings, her collection of German porcelain, than in the occasional parts that she had played at the Odéon), her

lover, an immensely rich young man for whose sake she had acquired her culture, and two sprigs of aristocracy at that time much in the public eye to form a little band apart, to travel only together, to come down to luncheon — when at Balbec — very late, after everyone had finished; to spend the whole day in their sitting-room playing cards, there entered no sort of ill-humour against the rest of us but simply the requirements of the taste that they had formed for a certain type of conversation, for certain refinements of good living, which made them find pleasure in spending their time, in taking their meals only by themselves, and would have rendered intolerable a life in common with people who had not been initiated into those mysteries. Even at a dinner or a card table, each of them had to be certain that, in the diner or partner who sat opposite to him, there was, latent and not yet made use of, a certain brand of knowledge which would enable him to identify the rubbish with which so many houses in Paris were littered as genuine mediaeval or renaissance ‘pieces’ and, whatever the subject of discussion, to apply the critical standards common to all their party whereby they distinguished good work from bad. Probably it was only — at such moments — by some infrequent, amusing interruption flung into the general silence of meal or game, or by the new and charming frock which the young actress had put on for luncheon or for poker, that the special kind of existence in which these four friends desired, above all things, to remain plunged was made apparent. But by engulfing them thus in a system of habits which they knew by heart it sufficed to protect them from the mystery of the life that was going on all round them. All the long afternoon, the sea was suspended there before their eyes only as a canvas of attractive colouring might hang on the wall of a wealthy bachelor’s flat and it was only in the intervals between the ‘hands’ that one of the players, finding nothing better to do, raised his eyes to it to seek from it some indication of the weather or the time, and to remind the others that tea was ready. And at night they did not dine in the hotel, where, hidden springs of electricity flooding the great dining-room with light, it became as it were an immense and wonderful aquarium against whose wall of glass the working population of Balbec, the fishermen and also the tradesmen’s families, clustering invisibly in the outer darkness, pressed their faces to watch, gently floating upon the golden eddies within, the luxurious life of its occupants, a thing as extraordinary to the poor as the life of strange fishes or molluscs (an important social question, this: whether the wall of glass will always protect the wonderful creatures at their feasting, whether the obscure folk who watch them hungrily out of the night will not break in some day to gather them from their aquarium and devour them).

Meanwhile there may have been, perhaps, among the gazing crowd, a motionless, formless mass there in the dark, some writer, some student of human ichthyology who, as he watched the jaws of old feminine monstrosities close over a mouthful of food which they proceeded then to absorb, was amusing himself by classifying them according to their race, by their innate characteristics as well as by those acquired characteristics which bring it about that an old Serbian lady whose buccal protuberance is that of a great sea-fish, because from her earliest years she has moved in the fresh waters of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, eats her salad for all the world like a La Rochefoucauld.

At that hour one could see the three young men in dinner-jackets, waiting for the young woman, who was as usual late but presently, wearing a dress that was almost always different and one of a series of scarves, chosen to gratify some special instinct in her lover, after having from her landing rung for the lift, would emerge from it like a doll coming out of its box. And then all four, because they found that the international phenomenon of the 'Palace,' planted on Balbec soil, had blossomed there in material splendour rather than in food that was fit to eat, bundled into a carriage and went to dine, a mile off, in a little restaurant that was well spoken of, where they held with the cook himself endless discussions of the composition of their meal and the cooking of its various dishes. During their drive, the road bordered with apple-trees that led out of Balbec was no more to them than the distance that must be traversed — barely distinguishable in the darkness from that which separated their homes in Paris from the Café Anglais or the Tour d'Argent — before they could arrive at the fashionable little restaurant where, while the young man's friends envied him because he had such a smartly dressed mistress, the latter's scarves were spread about the little company like a fragrant, flowing veil, but one that kept it apart from the outer world.

Alas for my peace of mind, I had none of the detachment that all these people shewed. To many of them I gave constant thought; I should have liked not to pass unobserved by a man with a receding brow and eyes that dodged between the blinkers of his prejudices and his education, the great nobleman of the district, who was none other than the brother-in-law of Legrandin, and came every now and then to see somebody at Balbec and on Sundays, by reason of the weekly garden-party that his wife and he gave, robbed the hotel of a large number of its occupants, because one or two of them were invited to these entertainments and the others, so as not to appear to have been not invited, chose

that day for an expedition to some distant spot. He had had, as it happened, an exceedingly bad reception at the hotel on the first day of the season, when the staff, freshly imported from the Riviera, did not yet know who or what he was. Not only was he not wearing white flannels, but, with old-fashioned French courtesy and in his ignorance of the ways of smart hotels, on coming into the hall in which there were ladies sitting, he had taken off his hat at the door, the effect of which had been that the manager did not so much as raise a finger to his own in acknowledgment, concluding that this must be some one of the most humble extraction, what he called ‘sprung from the ordinary.’ The solicitor’s wife, alone, had felt herself attracted by the stranger, who exhaled all the starched vulgarity of the really respectable, and had declared, with the unerring discernment and the indisputable authority of a person from whom the highest society of Le Mans held no secrets, that one could see at a glance that one was in the presence of a gentleman of great distinction, of perfect breeding, a striking contrast to the sort of people one usually saw at Balbec, whom she condemned as impossible to know so long as she did not know them. This favourable judgment which she had pronounced on Legrandin’s brother-in-law was based perhaps on the spiritless appearance of a man about whom there was nothing to intimidate anyone; perhaps also she had recognised in this gentleman farmer with the gait of a sacristan the Masonic signs of her own inveterate clericalism.

It made no difference my knowing that the young fellows who went past the hotel every day on horseback were the sons of the questionably solvent proprietor of a linen-drapery to whom my father would never have dreamed of speaking; the glamour of ‘seaside life’ exalted them in my eyes to equestrian statues of demi-gods, and the best thing that I could hope for was that they would never allow their proud gaze to fall upon the wretched boy who was myself, who left the hotel dining-room only to sit humbly upon the sands. I should have been glad to arouse some response even from the adventurer who had been king of a desert island in the South Seas, even of the young consumptive, of whom I liked to think that he was hiding beneath his insolent exterior a shy and tender heart, which would perhaps have lavished on me, and on me alone, the treasures of its affection. Besides (unlike what one generally says of the people one meets when travelling) just as being seen in certain company can invest us, in a watering-place to which we shall return another year, with a coefficient that has no equivalent in our true social life, so there is nothing — not which we keep so resolutely at a distance, but — which we cultivate with such assiduity after our return to Paris as the friendships that we

have formed by the sea. I was anxious about the opinion that might be held of me by all these temporary or local celebrities whom my tendency to put myself in the place of other people and to reconstruct what was in their minds had made me place not in their true rank, that which they would have held in Paris, for instance, and which would have been quite low, but in that which they must imagine to be, and which indeed was their rank at Balbec, where the want of a common denominator gave them a sort of relative superiority and an individual interest. Alas, none of these people's contempt for me was so unbearable as that of M. de Stermaria.

For I had noticed his daughter, the moment she came into the room, her pretty features, her pallid, almost blue complexion, what there was peculiar in the carriage of her tall figure, in her gait, which suggested to me — and rightly — her long descent, her aristocratic upbringing, all the more vividly because I knew her name, like those expressive themes composed by musicians of genius which paint in splendid colours the glow of fire, the rush of water, the peace of fields and woods, to audiences who, having first let thçir eyes run over the programme, have their imaginations trained in the right direction. The label 'Centuries of Breeding,' by adding to Mlle, de Stermaria's charms the idea of their origin, made them more desirable also, advertising their rarity as a high price enhances the value of a thing that has already taken our fancy. And its stock of heredity gave to her complexion, in which so many selected juices had been blended, the savour of an exotic fruit or of a famous vintage.

And then mere chance put into our hands, my grandmother's and mine, the means of giving ourselves an immediate distinction in the eyes of all the other occupants of the hotel. On that first afternoon, at the moment when the old lady came downstairs from her room, producing, thanks to the footman who preceded her, the maid who came running after her with a book and a rug that had been left behind, a marked effect upon all who beheld her and arousing in each of them a curiosity from which it was evident that none was so little immune as M. de Stermaria, the manager leaned across to my grandmother and, from pure kindness of heart (as one might point out the Shah, or Queen Ranavalo to an obscure onlooker who could obviously have no sort of connexion with so mighty a potentate, but might be interested, all the same, to know that he had been standing within a few feet of one) whispered in her ear, "The Marquise de Villeparisis!" while at the same moment the old lady, catching sight of my grandmother,-could not repress a start of pleased surprise.

It may be imagined that the sudden appearance, in the guise of a. little old

woman, of the most powerful of fairies would not have given me so much pleasure, destitute as I was of any means of access to Mlle, de Stermaria, in a strange place where I knew no one: no one, that is to say, for any practical purpose. Aesthetically the number of types of humanity is so restricted that we must constantly, wherever we may be, have the pleasure of seeing people we know, even without looking for them in the works of the old masters, like Swann. Thus it happened that in the first few days of our visit to Balbec I had succeeded in finding Legrandin, Swann's hall porter and Mme. Swann herself, transformed into a waiter, a foreign visitor whom I never saw again and a bathing superintendent. And a sort of magnetism attracts and retains so inseparably, one after another, certain characteristics, facial and mental, that when nature thus introduces a person into a new body she does not mutilate him unduly. Legrandin turned waiter kept intact his stature, the outline of his nose, part of his chin; Mme. Swann, in the masculine gender and the calling of a bathing superintendent, had been accompanied not only by familiar features, but even by the way she had of speaking. Only, she could be of little if any more use to me, standing upon the beach there in the red sash of her office, and hoisting at the first gust of wind the flag which forbade us to bathe (for these superintendents are prudent men, and seldom know how to swim) than she would have been in that fresco of the *Life of Moses* in which Swann had long ago identified her in the portrait of Jethro's Daughter. Whereas this Mme. de Villeparisis was her real self, she had not been the victim of an enchantment which had deprived her of her power, but was capable, on the contrary, of putting at the service of my power an enchantment which would multiply it an hundredfold, and thanks to which, as though I had been swept through the air on the wings of a fabulous bird, I was to cross in a few moments the infinitely wide (at least, at Balbec) social gulf which separated me from Mlle, de Stermaria.

Unfortunately, if there was one person in the world who, more than anyone else, lived shut up in a little world of her own, it was my grandmother. She would not, indeed, have despised me, she would simply not have understood what I meant had she been told that I attached importance to the opinions, that I felt an interest in the persons of people the very existence of whom she had never noticed and would, when the time came to leave Balbec, retain no impression of their names. I dared not confess to her that if these same people had seen her talking to Mme. de Villeparisis, I should have been immensely gratified, because I felt that the Marquise counted for much in the hotel and that her friendship would have given us a position in the eyes of Mlle, de Stermaria.

Not that my grandmother's friend represented to me, in any sense of the word, a member of the aristocracy: I was too well used to her name, which had been familiar to my ears before my mind had begun to consider it, when as a child I had heard it occur in conversation at home: while her title added to it only a touch of quaintness — as some uncommon Christian name would have done, or as in the names of streets, among which we can see nothing more noble in the Rue Lord Byron, in the plebeian and even squalid Rue Rochechouart, or in the Rue Grammont than in the Rue Léonce Reynaud or the Rue Hyppolyte Lebas. Mme. de Villeparisis no more made me think of a person who belonged to a special world than did her cousin MacMahon, whom I did not clearly distinguish from M. Carnot, likewise President of the Republic, or from Raspail, whose photograph Françoise had bought with that of Pius IX. It was one of my grandmother's principles that, when away from home, one should cease to have any social intercourse, that one did not go to the seaside to meet people, having plenty of time for that sort of thing in Paris, that they would make one waste on being merely polite, in pointless conversation, the precious time which ought all to be spent in the open air, beside the waves; and finding it convenient to assume that this view was shared by everyone else, and that it authorised, between old friends whom chance brought face to face in the same hotel, the fiction of a mutual *incognito*, on hearing her friend's name from the manager she merely looked the other way, and pretended not to see Mme. de Villeparisis, who, realising that my grandmother did not want to be recognised, looked also into the void. She went past, and I was left in my isolation like a shipwrecked mariner who has seen a vessel apparently coming towards him which has then, without lowering a boat, vanished under the horizon.

She, too, had her meals in the dining-room, but at the other end of it. She knew none of the people who were staying in the hotel, or who came there to call, not even M. de Cambremer; in fact, I noticed that he gave her no greeting, one day when, with his wife, he had accepted an invitation to take luncheon with the barrister, who drunken with the honour of having the nobleman at his table avoided his friends of every day, and confined himself to a distant twitch of the eyelid, so as to draw their attention to this historic event but so discreetly that his signal could not be interpreted by them as an invitation to join the party.

"Well, I hope you've got on your best clothes; I hope you feel smart enough," was the magistrate's wife's greeting to him that evening.

"Smart? Why should I?" asked the barrister, concealing his rapture in an exaggerated astonishment. "Because of my guests, do you mean?" he went on,

feeling that it was impossible to keep up the farce any longer. “But what is there smart about having a few friends in to luncheon? After all, they must feed somewhere!”

“But it is smart! They are the *de* Cambremers, aren’t they? I recognized them at once. She is a Marquise. And quite genuine, too. Not through the females.”

“Oh, she’s a very simple soul, she is charming, no stand-offishness about her. I thought you were coming to join us. I was making signals to you... I would have introduced you!” he asserted, tempering with a hint of irony the vast generosity of the offer, like Ahasuerus when he says to Esther:

Of all my Kingdom must I give you half!

“No, no, no, no! We lie hidden, like the modest violet.”

“But you were quite wrong, I assure you,” replied the barrister, growing bolder now that the danger point was passed. “They weren’t going to eat you. I say, aren’t we going to have our little game of bezique?”

“Why, of course! We were afraid to suggest it, now that you go about entertaining Marquises.”

“Oh, get along with you; there’s nothing so very wonderful about them, Why, I’m dining there to-morrow. Would you care to go instead of me? I mean it. Honestly, I’d just as soon stay here.”

“No, no! I should be removed from the bench as a Reactionary,” cried the chief magistrate, laughing till the tears stood in his eyes at his own joke. “But you go to Féterne too, don’t you?” he went on, turning to the solicitor.

“Oh, I go there on Sundays — in at one door and out at the other. But I don’t have them here to luncheon, like the Leader.” M. de Stermaria was not at Balbec that day, to the barrister’s great regret. But he managed to say a word in season to the head waiter:

“Aimé, you can tell M. de Stermaria that he’s not the only nobleman you’ve had in here. You saw the gentleman who was with me to-day at luncheon? Eh? A small moustache, looked like a military man. Well, that was the Marquis de Cambremer!”

“Was it indeed? I’m not surprised to hear it.”

“That will shew him that he’s not the only man who’s got a title. That will teach him! It’s not a bad thing to take ‘em down a peg or two, those noblemen. I say, Aimé, don’t say anything to him unless you like: I mean to say, it’s no business of mine; besides, they know each other already.”

And next day M. de Stermaria, who remembered that the barrister had once

held a brief for one of his friends, came up and introduced himself.

"Our friends in common, the de Cambremers, were anxious that we should meet; the days didn't fit; I don't know quite what went wrong —" stammered the barrister, who, like most liars, imagined that other people do not take the trouble to investigate an unimportant detail which, for all that, may be sufficient (if chance puts you in possession of the humble facts of the case, and they contradict it) to shew the liar in his true colours and to inspire a lasting mistrust.

Then as at all times, but more easily now that her father had left her and was talking to the barrister, I was gazing at Mlle, de Stermaria. No less than the bold and always graceful originality of her attitudes, as when, leaning her elbows on the table, she raised her glass in both hands over her outstretched arms, the dry flame of a glance at once extinguished, the ingrained, congenital hardness that one could feel, ill-concealed by her own personal inflexions, in the sound of her voice, which had shocked my grandmother; a sort of atavistic starting point to which she recoiled whenever, by glance or utterance, she had succeeded in expressing a thought of her own; all of these qualities carried the mind of him who watched her back to the line of ancestors who had bequeathed to her that inadequacy of human sympathy, those blanks in her sensibility, that short measure of humanity which was at every moment running out. But from a certain look which flooded for a moment the wells — instantly dry again — of her eyes, a look in which I could discern that almost obsequious docility which the predominance of a taste for sensual pleasures gives to the proudest of women, who will soon come to recognise but one form of personal distinction, that namely which any man enjoys who can make her feel those pleasures, an actor, an acrobat even, for whom, perhaps, she will one day leave her husband; — from a certain rosy tint, warm and sensual, which flushed her pallid cheeks, like the colour that stained the hearts of the white water-lilies in the Vivonne, I thought I could discern that she would readily have consented to my coming to seek in her the savour of that life of poetry and romance which she led in Brittany, a life to which, whether from over-familiarity or from innate superiority, or from disgust at the penury or the avarice of her family, she seemed not to attach any great value, but which, for all that, she held enclosed in her body. In the meagre stock of will-power that had been transmitted to her, and gave an element of weakness to her expression, she would not perhaps have found the strength to resist. And, crowned by a feather that was a trifle old-fashioned and pretentious, the grey felt hat which she invariably wore at meals made her all the more attractive to me, not because it was in harmony with her

pearly or rosy complexion, but because, by making me suppose her to be poor, it brought her closer to myself. Obliged by her father's presence to adopt a conventional attitude, but already bringing to the perception and classification of the people who passed before her eyes other principles than his, perhaps she saw in me not my humble rank, but the right sex and age. If one day M. de Stermaria had gone out leaving her behind, if, above all, Mme. de Villeparisis, by coming to sit at our table, had given her an opinion of me which might have emboldened me to approach her, perhaps then we might have contrived to exchange a few words, to arrange a meeting, to form a closer tie. And for a whole month during which she would be left alone, without her parents, in her romantic Breton castle, we should perhaps have been able to wander by ourselves at evening, she and I together in the dusk which would shew in a softer light above the darkening water pink briar roses, beneath oak trees beaten and stunted by the hammering of the waves. Together we should have roamed that isle impregnated with so intense a charm for me because it had enclosed the everyday life of Mlle, de Stermaria and lay at rest in her remembering eyes. For it seemed to me that I should not really have possessed her save there, when I should have traversed those regions which enveloped her in so many memories — a veil which my desire sought to tear apart, one of those veils which nature interposes between woman and her pursuers (with the same intention as when, for all of us, she places the act of reproduction between ourselves and our keenest pleasure, and for insects, places before the nectar the pollen which they must carry away with them) in order that, tricked by the illusion of possessing her thus more completely, they may be forced to occupy first the scenes among which she lives, and which, of more service to their imagination than sensual pleasure can be, yet would not without that pleasure have had the power to attract them.

But I was obliged to take my eyes from Mlle, de Stermaria, for already, considering no doubt that making the acquaintance of an important person was a brief, inquisitive act which was sufficient in itself, and to bring out all the interest that was latent in it required only a handshake and a penetrating stare, without either immediate conversation or any subsequent relations, her father had taken leave of the barrister and returned to sit down facing her, rubbing his hands like a man who has just made a valuable acquisition. As for the barrister, once the first emotion of this interview had subsided, then, as on other days, he could be heard every minute addressing the head waiter:

"But I am not a king, Aimé; go and attend to the king! I say, Chief, those little trout don't look at all bad, do they? We must ask Aimé to let us have some.

Aimé, that little fish you have over there looks to me highly commendable; will you bring us some, please, Aimé, and don't be sparing with it?"

He would repeat the name 'Aimé' all day long, one result of which was that when he had anyone to dinner the guest would remark "I can see, you are quite at home in this place," and would feel himself obliged to keep, on saying 'Aimé' also, from that tendency, combining elements of timidity, vulgarity and silliness, which many people have, to believe that it is smart and witty to copy to the letter what is said by the company in which they may happen to be. The barrister repeated the name incessantly, but with a smile, for he felt that he was exhibiting at once the good terms on which he stood with the head waiter and his own superior station. And the head waiter, whenever he caught the sound of his own name, smiled too, as though touched and at the same time proud, shewing that he was conscious of the honour and could appreciate the pleasantry.

Terrifying as I always found these meals, in the vast restaurant, generally full, of the mammoth hotel, they became even more terrifying when there arrived for a few days the Proprietor (or he may have been only the General Manager, appointed by a board of directors) not only of this 'palace' but of seven or eight more besides, situated at all the four corners of France, in each of which, travelling continuously, he would spend a week now and again. Then, just after dinner had begun, there appeared every evening in the doorway of the dining-room this small man with white hair and a red nose, astonishingly neat and impassive, who was known, it appeared, as well in London as at Monte-Carlo, as one of the leading hotel-keepers in Europe. Once when I had gone out for a moment at the beginning of dinner, as I came in again I passed close by him, and he bowed to me, but with a coldness in which I could not distinguish whether it should be attributed to the reserve of a man who could never forget what he was, or to his contempt for a customer of so little importance. To those whose importance was considerable the Managing Director would bow, with quite as much coldness but more deeply, lowering his eyelids with a reverence that was almost offended modesty, as though he had found himself confronted, at a funeral, with the father of the deceased or with the Blessed Sacrament. Except for these icy and infrequent salutations, he made not the slightest movement, as if to show that his glittering eyes, which appeared to be starting out of his head, saw everything, controlled everything, assured to us in the 'Hotel dinner' perfection in every detail as well as a general harmony. He felt, evidently, that he was more than the producer of a play, than the conductor of an orchestra, nothing less than a general in supreme command. Having decided that a contemplation

carried to its utmost intensity would suffice to assure him that everything was in readiness, that no mistake had been made which could lead to disaster,— to invest him, in a word, with full responsibility, he abstained not merely from any gesture but even from moving his eyes, which, petrified by the intensity of their gaze, took in and directed everything that was going on. I felt that even the movements of my spoon did not escape him, and were he to vanish after the soup, for the whole of dinner the review that he had held would have taken away my appetite. His own was exceedingly good, as one could see at luncheon, which he took like an ordinary guest of the hotel at a table that anyone else might have had in the public dining-room. His table had this peculiarity only, that by his side, while he was eating, the other manager, the resident one, remained standing all the time to make conversation. For being subordinate to this Managing Director he was anxious to please a man of whom he lived in constant fear. My fear of him diminished during these luncheons, for being then lost in the crowd of visitors he would exercise the discretion of a general sitting in a restaurant where there are also private soldiers, in not seeming to take any notice of them. Nevertheless when the porter, from among a cluster of pages, announced to me: “He leaves to-morrow morning for Dinard. Then he’s going down to Biarritz, and after that to Cannes,” I began to breathe more freely.

My life in the hotel was rendered not only dull because I had no friends there but uncomfortable because Françoise had made so many. It might be thought that they would have made things easier for us in various respects. Quite the contrary. The proletariat, if they succeeded only with great difficulty in being treated as people she knew by Françoise, and could not succeed at all unless they fulfilled the condition of shewing the utmost politeness to her, were, on the other hand, once they had reached the position, the only people who ‘counted.’ Her time-honoured code taught her that she was in no way bound to the friends of her employers, that she might, if she was busy, shut the door without ceremony in the face of a lady who had come to call on my grandmother. But towards her own acquaintance, that is to say, the select handful of the lower orders whom she admitted to an unconquerable intimacy, her actions were regulated by the most subtle and most stringent of protocols. Thus Françoise having made the acquaintance of the man in the coffee-shop and of a little maid who did dressmaking for a Belgian lady, no longer came upstairs immediately after luncheon to get my grandmother’s things ready, but came an hour later, because the coffee man had wanted to make her a cup of coffee or a *tisane* in his shop, or the maid had invited her to go and watch her sew, and to refuse either of them

would have been impossible, and one of the things that were not done. Moreover, particular attention was due to the little sewing-maid, who was an orphan and had been brought up by strangers to whom she still went occasionally for a few days' holiday. Her unusual situation aroused Franchise's pity, and also a benevolent contempt. She, who had a family, a little house that had come to her from her parents, with a field in which her brother kept his cows, how could she regard so uprooted a creature as her equal? And since this girl hoped, on Assumption Day, to be allowed to pay her benefactors a visit, Françoise kept on repeating: "She does make me laugh! She says, 'I hope to be going home for the Assumption.' 'Home!' says she! It isn't just that it's not her own place, they're people who took her in from nowhere, and the creature says 'home' just as if it really was her home. Poor girl! What a wretched state she must be in, not to know what it is to have a home." Still, if Françoise had associated only with the ladies'-maids brought to the hotel by other visitors, who fed with her in the 'service' quarters and, seeing her grand lace cap and her handsome profile, took her perhaps for some lady of noble birth, whom 'reduced circumstances,' or a personal attachment had driven to serve as companion to my grandmother, if in a word Françoise had known only people who did not belong to the hotel, no great harm would have been done, since she could not have prevented them from doing us any service, for the simple reason that in no circumstances, even without her knowledge, would it have been possible for them to serve us at all. But she had formed connexions also with one of the wine waiters, with a man in the kitchen, and with the head chambermaid of our landing. And the result of this in our everyday life was that Françoise, who on the day of her arrival, when she still did not know anyone, would set all the bells jangling for the slightest thing, at an hour when my grandmother and I would never have dared to ring, and if we offered some gentle admonition answered: "Well, we're paying enough for it, aren't we?" as though it were she herself that would have to pay; nowadays, since she had made friends with a personage in the kitchen, which had appeared to us to augur well for our future comfort, were my grandmother or I to complain of cold feet, Françoise, even at an hour that was quite normal, dared not ring; she assured us that it would give offence because they would have to light the furnace again, or because it would interrupt the servants' dinner and they would be annoyed. And she ended with a formula that, in spite of the ambiguous way in which she uttered it, was none the less clear, and put us plainly in the wrong: "The fact is..." We did not insist, for fear of bringing upon ourselves another, far more serious: "It's a matter...!" So that it

amounted to this, that we could no longer have any hot water because Françoise had become a friend of the man who would have to heat it.

In the end we too formed a connexion, in spite of but through my grandmother, for she and Mme. de Villeparisis came in collision one morning in a doorway and were obliged to accost each other, not without having first exchanged gestures of surprise and hesitation, performed movements of recoil and uncertainty, and finally uttered protestations of joy and greeting, as in some of Molière's plays, where two actors who have been delivering long soliloquies from opposite sides of the stage, a few feet apart, are supposed not to have seen each other yet, and then suddenly catch sight of each other, cannot believe their eyes, break off what they are saying and finally address each other (the chorus having meanwhile kept the dialogue going) and fall into each other's arms. Mme. de Villeparisis was tactful, and made as if to leave my grandmother to herself after the first greetings, but my grandmother insisted on her staying to talk to her until luncheon, being anxious to discover how her friend managed to get her letters sent up to her earlier than we got ours, and to get such nice grilled things (for Mme. de Villeparisis, a great epicure, had the poorest opinion of the hotel kitchen which served us with meals that my grandmother, still quoting Mme. de Sévigné, described as "of a magnificence to make you die of hunger.") And the Marquise formed the habit of coming every day, until her own meal was ready, to sit down for a moment at our table in the dining-room, insisting that we should not rise from our chairs or in any way put ourselves out. At the most we would linger, as often as not, in the room after finishing our luncheon, to talk to her, at that sordid moment when the knives are left littering the tablecloth among crumpled napkins. For my own part, so as to preserve (in order that I might be able to enjoy Balbec) the idea that I was on the uttermost promontory of the earth, I compelled myself to look farther afield, to notice only the sea, to seek in it the effects described by Baudelaire and to let my gaze fall upon our table only on days when there was set on it some gigantic fish, some marine monster, which unlike the knives and forks was contemporary with the primitive epochs in which the Ocean first began to teem with life, in the Cimmerians' time, a fish whose body with its numberless vertebrae, its blue veins and red, had been constructed by nature, but according to an architectural plan, like a polychrome cathedral of the deep.

As a barber, seeing an officer whom he is accustomed to shave with special deference and care recognise a customer who has just entered the shop and stop for a moment to talk to him, rejoices in the thought that these are two men of the

same social order, and cannot help smiling as he goes to fetch the bowl of soap, for he knows that in his establishment,' to the vulgar routine of a mere barber's-shop, are being added social, not to say aristocratic pleasures, so Aimé, seeing that Mme. de Villeparisis had found in us old friends, went to fetch our finger-bowls with precisely the smile, proudly modest and knowingly discreet, of a hostess who knows when to leave her guests to themselves. He suggested also a pleased and loving father who looks on, without interfering, at the happy pair who have plighted their troth at his hospitable board. Besides, it was enough merely to utter the name of a person of title for Aimé to appear pleased, unlike Françoise, before whom you could not mention Count So-and-so without her face darkening and her speech becoming dry and sharp, all of which meant that she worshipped the aristocracy not less than Aimé but far more. But then Françoise had that quality which in others she condemned as the worst possible fault; she was proud. She was not of that friendly and good-humoured race to which Aimé belonged. They feel, they exhibit an intense delight when you tell them a piece of news which may be more or less sensational but is at any rate new, and not to be found in the papers. Françoise declined to appear surprised. You might have announced in her hearing that the Archduke Rudolf — not that she had the least suspicion of his having ever existed — was not, as was generally supposed, dead, but 'alive and kicking'; she would have answered only 'Yes,' as though she had known it all the time. It may, however, have been that if even from our own lips, from us whom she so meekly called her masters, who had so nearly succeeded in taming her, she could not, without having to check an angry start, hear the name of a noble, that was because the family from which she had sprung occupied in its own village a comfortable and independent position, and was not to be threatened in the consideration which it enjoyed save by those same nobles, in whose households, meanwhile, from his boyhood, an Aimé would have been domiciled as a servant, if not actually brought up by their charity. Of Françoise, then, Mme. de Villeparisis must ask pardon, first, for her nobility. But (in France, at any rate) that is precisely the talent, in fact the sole occupation of our great gentlemen and ladies. Françoise, following the common tendency of servants, who pick up incessantly from the conversation of their masters with other people fragmentary observations from which they are apt to draw erroneous inductions, as the human race generally does with respect to the habits of animals, was constantly discovering that somebody had 'failed' us, a conclusion to which she was easily led, not so much, perhaps, by her extravagant love for us, as by the delight that she took in being disagreeable to us. But

having once established, without possibility of error, the endless little attentions paid to us, and paid to herself also by Mme. de Villeparisis, Françoise forgave her for being a Marquise, and, as she had never ceased to be proud of her because she was one, preferred her thenceforward to all our other friends. It must be added that no one else took the trouble to be so continually nice to us. Whenever my grandmother remarked on a book that Mme. de Villeparisis was reading, or said she had been admiring the fruit which some one had just sent to our friend, within an hour the footman would come to our rooms with book or fruit. And the next time we saw her, in response to our thanks, she would say only, seeming to seek some excuse for the meagreness of her present in some special use to which it might be put: “It’s nothing wonderful, but the newspapers come so late here, one must have something to read.” Or, “It is always wiser to have fruit one can be quite certain of, at the seaside.”—”But I don’t believe I’ve ever seen you eating oysters,” she said to us, increasing the sense of disgust which I felt at that moment, for the living flesh of the oyster revolted me even more than the gumminess of the stranded jellyfish defiled for me the beach at Balbec; “they are delicious down here! Oh, let me tell my maid to fetch your letters when she goes for mine. What, your daughter writes every day? But what on earth can you find to say to each other?” My grandmother was silent, but it may be assumed that her silence was due to scorn, in her who used to repeat, when she wrote to Mamma, the words of Mme. de Sévigné: “As soon as I have received a letter, I want another at once; I cannot breathe until it comes. There are few who are worthy to understand what I mean.” And I was afraid of her applying to Mme. de Villeparisis the conclusion: “I seek out those who are of the chosen few, and I avoid the rest.” She fell back upon praise of the fruit which Mme. de Villeparisis had sent us the day before. And this had been, indeed, so fine that the manager, in spite of the jealousy aroused by our neglect of his official offerings, had said to me: “I am like you; I’m madder about fruit than any other kind of dessert.” My grandmother told her friend that she had enjoyed them all the more because the fruit which we got in the hotel was generally horrid. “I cannot,” she went on, “say, like Mme. de Sévigné, that if we should take a sudden fancy for bad fruit we should be obliged to order it from Paris.” “Oh yes, of course, you read Mme. de Sévigné. I saw you with her letters the day you came.” (She forgot that she had never officially seen my grandmother in the hotel until their collision in the doorway.) “Don’t you find it rather exaggerated, her constant anxiety about her daughter? She refers to it too often to be really sincere. She is not natural.” My grandmother felt that any discussion would be

futile, and so as not to be obliged to speak of the things she loved to a person incapable of understanding them, concealed by laying her bag upon them the *Mémoires de Mme. de Beausergent*.

Were she to encounter Françoise at the moment (which Françoise called ‘the noon’) when, wearing her fine cap and surrounded with every mark of respect, she was coming downstairs to ‘feed with the service,’ Mme. Villeparisis would stop her to ask after us. And Françoise, when transmitting to us the Marquise’s message: “She said to me, ‘You’ll be sure and bid them good day,’ she said,” counterfeited the voice of Mme. de Villeparisis, whose exact words she imagined herself to be quoting textu-ally, whereas she was really corrupting them no less than Plato corrupts the words of Socrates or Saint John the words of Jesus. Françoise, as was natural, was deeply touched by these attentions. Only she did not believe my grandmother, but supposed that she must be lying in the interest of her class (the rich always combining thus to support one another) when she assured us that Mme. de Villeparisis had been lovely as a young woman. It was true that of this loveliness only the faintest trace remained, from which no one — unless he happened to be a great deal more of an artist than Françoise — would have been able to restore her ruined beauty. For in order to understand how beautiful an elderly woman can once have been one must not only study but interpret every line of her face.

“I must remember, some time, to ask her whether I’m not right, after all, in thinking that there is some connexion with the Guermantes,” said my grandmother, to my great indignation. How could I be expected to believe in a common origin uniting two names which had entered my consciousness, one through the low and shameful gate of experience, the other by the golden gate of imagination?

We had several times, in the last few days, seen driving past us in a stately equipage, tall, auburn, handsome, with a rather prominent nose, the Princesse de Luxembourg, who was staying in the neighbourhood for a few weeks. Her carriage had stopped outside the hotel, a footman had come in and spoken to the manager, had gone back to the carriage and had reappeared with the most amazing armful of fruit (which combined in a single basket, like the bay itself, different seasons) with a card: “La Princesse de Luxembourg,” on which were scrawled a few words in pencil. For what princely traveller sojourning here *incognito*, could they be intended, those glaucous plums, luminous and spherical as was at that moment the circumfluent sea, transparent grapes clustering on a shrivelled stick, like a fine day in autumn, pears of a heavenly ultramarine? For

it could not be on my grandmother's friend that the Princess had meant to pay a call. And yet on the following evening Mme. de Villeparisis sent us the bunch of grapes, cool, liquid, golden; plums too and pears which we remembered, though the plums had changed, like the sea at our dinner-hour, to a dull purple, and on the ultramarine surface of the pears there floated the forms of a few rosy clouds. A few days later we met Mme. de Villeparisis as we came away from the symphony concert that was given every morning on the beach. Convinced that the music to which I had been listening (the Prelude to *Lohengrin*, the Overture to *Tannhäuser* and suchlike) expressed the loftiest of truths, I was trying to elevate myself, as far as I could, so as to attain to a comprehension of them, I was extracting from myself so as to understand them, and was attributing to them, all that was best and most profound in my own nature at that time.

Well, as we came out of the concert, and, on our way back to the hotel, had stopped for a moment on the 'front,' my grandmother and I, for a few words with Mme. de Villeparisis who told us that she had ordered some*croque-monsieurs* and a dish of creamed eggs for us at the hotel, I saw, a long way away, coming in our direction, the Princesse de Luxembourg, half leaning upon a parasol in such a way as to impart to her tall and wonderful form that slight inclination, to make it trace that arabesque dear to the women who had been beautiful under the Empire, and knew how, with drooping shoulders, arched backs, concave hips and bent limbs, to make their bodies float as gently as a silken scarf about the rigidity of the invisible stem which might be supposed to have been passed diagonally through them. She went out every morning for a turn on the beach almost at the time when everyone else, after bathing, was climbing home to luncheon, and as hers was not until half past one she did not return to her villa until long after the hungry bathers had left the scorching 'front' a desert. Mme. de Villeparisis presented my grandmother and would have presented me, but had first to ask me my name, which she could not remember. She had, perhaps, never known it, or if she had must have forgotten years ago to whom my grandmother had married her daughter. My name, when she did hear it, appeared to impress Mme. de Villeparisis considerably. Meanwhile the Princesse de Luxembourg had given us her hand and, now and again, while she conversed with the Marquise, turned to bestow a kindly glance on my grandmother and myself, with that embryonic kiss which we put into our smiles when they are addressed to a baby out with its 'Nana.' Indeed, in her anxiety not to appear to be a denizen of a higher sphere than ours, she had probably miscalculated the distance there was indeed between us, for by an error in adjustment she made her eyes beam with

such benevolence that I could see the moment approaching when she would put out her hand and stroke us, as if we were two nice beasts and had poked our heads out at her through the bars of our cage in the Gardens. And, immediately, as it happened, this idea of caged animals and the Bois de Boulogne received striking confirmation. It was the time of day at which the beach is crowded by itinerant and clamorous vendors, hawking cakes and sweets and biscuits. Not knowing quite what to do to shew her affection for us, the Princess hailed the next that came by; he had nothing left but one rye-cake, of the kind one throws to the ducks. The Princess took it and said to me: “For your grandmother.” And yet it was to me that she held it out, saying with a friendly smile, “You shall give it to her yourself!” thinking that my pleasure would thus be more complete if there were no intermediary between myself and the animals. Other vendors came up; she stuffed my pockets with everything that they had, tied up in packets, comfits, sponge-cakes, sugar-sticks. “You will eat some yourself,” she told me, “and give some to your grandmother,” and she had the vendors paid by the little Negro page, dressed in red satin, who followed her everywhere and was a nine days’ wonder upon the beach. Then she said good-bye to Mme. de Villeparisis and held out her hand to us with the intention of treating us in the same way as she treated her friend, as people whom she knew, and of bringing herself within our reach. But this time she must have reckoned our level as not quite so low in the scale of creation, for her and our equality was indicated by the Princess to my grandmother by that tender and maternal smile which a woman gives a little boy when she says good-bye to him as though to a grown-up person. By a miraculous stride in evolution, my grandmother was no longer a duck or an antelope, but had already become what the anglophil Mme. Swann would have called a ‘baby.’ Finally, having taken leave of us all, the Princess resumed her stroll along the basking ‘front,’ curving her splendid shape which, like a serpent coiled about a wand, was interlaced with the white parasol patterned in blue which Mme. de Luxembourg held, unopened, in her hand. She was my first Royalty — I say my first, for strictly speaking Princesse Mathilde did not count. The second, as we shall see in due course, was to astonish me no less by her indulgence. One of the ways in which our great nobles, kindly intermediaries between commoners and kings, can befriend us was revealed to me next day when Mme. de Villeparisis reported: “She thought you quite charming. She is a woman of the soundest judgment, the warmest heart. Not like so many Queens and people! She has real merit.” And Mme. de Villeparisis went on in a tone of conviction, and quite thrilled to be able to say it to us: “I am sure she would be

delighted to see you again."

But on that previous morning, after we had parted from the Princesse de Luxembourg, Mme. de Villeparisis said a thing which impressed me far more and was not prompted merely by friendly feeling.

"Are you," she had asked me, "the son of the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry? Indeed! I am told your father is a most charming man. He is having a splendid holiday just now."

A few days earlier we had heard, in a letter from Mamma, that my father and his friend M. de Norpois had lost their luggage.

"It has been found; as a matter of fact, it was never really lost, I can tell you what happened," explained Mme. de Villeparisis, who, without our knowing how, seemed to be far better informed than ourselves of the course of my father's travels. "I think your father is now planning to come home earlier, next week, in fact, as he will probably give up the idea of going to Algeciras. But he is anxious to devote a day longer to Toledo; it seems, he is an admirer of a pupil of Titian, — I forget the name — whose work can only be seen properly there."

I asked myself by what strange accident, in the impartial glass through which Mme. de Villeparisis considered, from a safe distance, the bustling, tiny, purposeless agitation of the crowd of people whom she knew, there had come to be inserted at the spot through which she observed rhy father a fragment of prodigious magnifying power which made her see in such high relief and in the fullest detail everything that there was attractive about him, the contingencies that were obliging him to return home, his difficulties with the customs, his admiration for El Greco, and, altering the scale of her vision, shewed her this one man so large among all the rest quite small, like that Jupiter to whom Gustave Moreau gave, when he portrayed him by the side of a weak mortal, a superhuman stature.

My grandmother bade Mme. de Villeparisis good-bye, so that we might stay and imbibe the fresh air for a little while longer outside the hotel, until they signalled to us through the glazed partition that our luncheon was ready. There were sounds of tumult. The young mistress of the King of the Cannibal Island had been down to bathe and was now coming back to the hotel.

"Really and truly, it's a perfect plague: it's enough to make one decide to emigrate!" cried the barrister, who had happened to cross her path, in a towering rage.

Meanwhile the solicitor's wife was following the bogus Queen with eyes that seemed ready to start from their sockets.

“I can’t tell you how angry Mme. Blandais makes me when she stares at those people like that,” said the barrister to the chief magistrate, “I feel I want to slap her. That is just the way to make the wretches appear important; and of course that’s the very thing they want, that people should take an interest in them. Do ask her husband to tell her what a fool she’s making of herself. I swear I won’t go out with them again if they stop and gape at those masqueraders.”

As to the coming of the Princesse de Luxembourg, whose carriage, on the day on which she left the fruit, had drawn up outside the hotel, it had not passed unobserved by the little group of wives, the solicitor’s, the barrister’s and the magistrate’s, who had for some time past been most concerned to know whether she was a genuine Marquise and not an adventuress, that Mme. de Villeparisis whom everyone treated with so much respect, which all these ladies were burning to hear that she did not deserve. Whenever Mme. de Villeparisis passed through the hall the chief magistrate’s wife, who scented irregularities everywhere, would raise her eyes from her ‘work’ and stare at the intruder in a way that made her friends die of laughter.

“Oh, well, you know,” she explained with lofty condescension, “I always begin by believing the worst. I will never admit that a woman is properly married until she has shewn me her birth certificate and her marriage lines. But there’s no need to alarm yourselves; just wait till I’ve finished my little investigation.”

And so, day after day the ladies would come together, and, laughingly, ask one another: “Any news?”

But on the evening after the Princesse de Luxembourg’s call the magistrate’s wife laid a finger on her lips.

“I’ve discovered something.”

“Oh, isn’t Mme. Poncin simply wonderful? I never saw anyone.... But do tell us! What has happened?”

“Just listen to this. A woman with yellow hair and six inches of paint on her face and a carriage like a — you could *smell* it a mile off; which only a creature like that would dare to have — came here to-day to call on the Marquise, by way of!”

“Oh-yow-yow! Tut-tut-tut-tut. Did you ever! Why, it must be that woman we saw — you remember, Leader,— we said at the time we didn’t at all like the look of her, but we didn’t know that it was the ‘Marquise’ sheîd come to see. A woman with a nigger-boy, you mean?”

“That’s the one.”

“D’you mean to say so? You don’t happen to know her name?”

“Yes, I made a mistake on purpose; I picked up her card; she *trades*under the name of the ‘Princesse de Luxembourg!’ Wasn’t I right to have my doubts about her? It’s a nice thing to have to mix promiscuously with a Baronne d’Ange like that?” The barrister quoted Mathurin Régnier’s*Macette* to the chief magistrate.

It must not, however, be supposed that this misunderstanding was merely temporary, like those that occur in the second act of a farce to be cleared up before the final curtain. Mme. de Luxembourg, a niece of the King of England and of the Emperor of Austria, and Mme. de Villeparisis, when one called to take the other for a drive, did look like nothing but two ‘old trots’ of the kind one has always such difficulty in avoiding at a watering place. Nine tenths of the men of the Faubourg Saint-Germain appear to the average man of the middle class simply as alcoholic wasters (which, individually, they not infrequently are) whom, therefore, no respectable person would dream of asking to dinner. The middle class fixes its standard, in this respect, too high, for the feelings of these men would never prevent their being received with every mark of esteem in houses which it, the middle class, may never enter. And so sincerely do they believe that the middle class knows this that they affect a simplicity in speaking of their own affairs and a tone of disparagement of their friends, especially when they are ‘at the coast,’ which make the misunderstanding complete. If, by any chance, a man of the fashionable world is kept in touch with ‘business people’ because, having more money than he knows what to do with, he finds himself elected chairman of all sorts of important financial concerns, the business man who at last sees a nobleman worthy, he considers, to rank with ‘big business,’ would take his oath that such a man can have no dealings with the Marquis ruined by gambling whom the said business man supposes to be all the more destitute of friends the more friendly he makes himself. And he cannot get over his surprise when the Duke, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the colossal undertaking, arranges a marriage for his son with the daughter of that very Marquis, who may be a gambler but who bears the oldest name in France, just as a Sovereign would sooner see his son marry the daughter of a dethroned King than that of a President still in office. That is to say, the two worlds take as fantastic! a view of one another as the inhabitants of a town situated at one end of Balbec Bay have of the town at the other end: from Rivebelle you can just see Marcouville l’Orgueilleuse; but even that is deceptive, for you imagine that you are seen from Marcouville, where, as a matter of fact, the splendours of Rive-

belle are almost wholly invisible.

The Balbec doctor, who had been called in to cope with a sudden feverish attack, having given the opinion that I ought not to stay out all day on the beach, in the blazing sun, without shelter, and having written out various prescriptions for my use, my grandmother took his prescriptions with a show of respect in which I could at once discern her firm resolve not to have any of them ‘made up,’ but did pay attention to his advice on the matter of hygiene, and accepted an offer from Mme. de Villeparisis to take us for drives in her carriage. After this I would spend the mornings, until luncheon, going to and fro between my own room and my grandmother’s. Hers did not look out directly upon the sea, as mine did, but was lighted from three of its four sides — with views of a strip of the ‘front,’ of a well inside the building, and of the country inland, and was furnished differently from mine, with armchairs upholstered in a metallic tissue with red flowers from which seemed to emanate the cool and pleasant odour that greeted me when I entered the room. And at that hour when the sun’s rays, coming from different aspects and, as it were, from different hours of the day, broke the angles of the wall, thrust in a reflexion of the beach, made of the chest of drawers a festal altar, variegated as a bank of field-flowers, attached to the wall the wings, folded, quivering, warm, of a radiance that would, at any moment, resume its flight, warmed like a bath a square of provincial carpet before the window overlooking the well, which the sun festooned and patterned like a climbing vine, added to the charm and complexity of the room’s furniture by seeming to pluck and scatter the petals of the silken flowers on the chairs, and to make their silver threads stand out from the fabric, this room in which I lingered for a moment before going to get ready for our drive suggested a prism in which the colours of the light that shone outside were broken up, or a hive in which the sweet juices of the day which I was about to taste were distilled, scattered, intoxicating, visible, a garden of hope which dissolved in a quivering haze of silver threads and rose leaves. But before all this I had drawn back my own curtains, impatient to know what Sea it was that was playing that morning by the shore, like a Nereid. For none of those Seas ever stayed with us longer than a day. On the morrow there would be another, which sometimes resembled its predecessor. But I never saw the same one twice.

There were some that were of so rare a beauty that my pleasure on catching sight of them was enhanced by surprise. By what privilege, on one morning rather than another, did the window on being uncurtained disclose to my wondering eyes the nymph Glauconome, whose lazy beauty, gently breathing,

had the transparence of a vaporous emerald beneath whose surface I could see teeming the ponderable elements that coloured it? She made the sun join in her play, with a smile rendered languorous by an invisible haze which was nought but a space kept vacant about her translucent surface, which, thus curtailed, became more appealing, like those goddesses whom the sculptor carves in relief upon a block of marble, the rest of which he leaves unchiselled. So, in her matchless colour, she invited us out over those rough terrestrial roads, from which, seated beside Mme. de Villeparisis in her barouche, we should see, all day long and without ever reaching it, the coolness of her gentle palpitation.

Mme. de Villeparisis used to order her carriage early, so that we should have time to reach Saint-Mars le Vêtu, or the rocks of Quetteholme, or some other goal which, for a somewhat lumbering vehicle, was far enough off to require the whole day. In my joy at the long drive we were going to take I would be humming some tune that I had heard recently as I strolled up and down until Mme. de Villeparisis was ready. If it was Sunday hers would not be the only carriage drawn up outside the hotel; several hired flies would be waiting there, not only for the people who had been invited to Féterne by Mme. de Cambremer, but for those who, rather than stay at home all day, like children in disgrace, declared that Sunday was always quite impossible at Balbec and started off immediately after luncheon to hide themselves in some neighbouring watering-place or to visit one of the ‘sights’ of the district. And indeed whenever (which was often) anyone asked Mme. Blandais if she had been to the Cambremers’, she would answer peremptorily: “No; we went to the Falls of the Bee,” as though that were the sole reason for her not having spent the day at Féteme. And the barrister would be charitable, and say:

“I envy you. I wish I had gone there instead; they must be well worth seeing.”

Beside the row of carriages, in front of the porch in which I stood waiting, was planted, like some shrub of a rare species, a young page who attracted the eye no less by the unusual and effective colouring of his hair than by his plant-like epidermis. Inside, in the hall, corresponding to the narthex, or Church of the Catechumens in a primitive basilica, through which persons who were not staying in the hotel were entitled to pass, the comrades of this ‘outside’ page did not indeed work much harder than he but did at least execute certain drilled movements. It is probable that in the early morning they helped with the cleaning. But in the afternoon they stood there only like a Chorus who, even when there is nothing for them to do, remain upon the stage in order to

strengthen the cast. The General Manager, the same who had so terrified me, reckoned on increasing their number considerably next year, for he had ‘big ideas.’ And this prospect greatly afflicted the manager of the hotel, who found that all these boys about the place only ‘created a nuisance,’ by which he meant that they got in the visitors’ way and were of no use to anyone. But between luncheon and dinner at least, between the exits and entrances of the visitors, they did fill an otherwise empty stage, like those pupils of Mme. de Maintenon who, in the garb of young Israelites, carry on the action whenever Esther or Joad ‘goes off.’ But the outside page, with his delicate tints, his tall, slender, fragile trunk, in proximity to whom I stood waiting for the Marquise to come downstairs, preserved an immobility into which a certain melancholy entered, for his elder brothers had left the hotel for more brilliant careers elsewhere, and he felt keenly his isolation upon this alien soil. At last Mme. de Villeparisis appeared. To stand by her carriage and to help her into it ought perhaps to have been part of the young page’s duties. But he knew on the one hand that a person who brings her own servants to an hotel expects them to wait on her and is not as a rule lavish with her ‘tips,’ and that generally speaking this was true also of the nobility of the old Faubourg Saint-Germain. Mme. de Villeparisis was included in both these categories. The arborescent page concluded therefore that he need expect nothing from her, and leaving her own maid and footman to pack her and her belongings into the carriage, he continued to dream sadly of the enviable lot of his brothers and preserved his vegetable immobility.

We would start off; some time after rounding the railway station, we came into a country road which soon became as familiar to me as the roads round Combray, from the bend where, like a fish-hook, it was baited with charming orchards, to the turning at which we left it, with tilled fields upon either side. Among these we could see here and there an apple-tree, stripped it was true of its blossom, and bearing no more now than a fringe of pistils, but sufficient even so to enchant me since I could imagine, seeing those inimitable leaves, how their broad expanse, like the ceremonial carpet spread for a wedding that was now over, had been but the other day swept by the white satin train of their blushing flowers.

How often in Paris, during the May of the following year, was I to bring home a branch of apple-blossom from the florist, and to stay all night long before its flowers in which bloomed the same creamy essence that powdered besides and whitened the green unfolding leaves, flowers between whose snowy cups it seemed almost as though it had been the salesman who had, in his

generosity towards myself, out of his wealth of invention too and as an effective contrast, added on either side the supplement of a becoming crimson bud: I sat gazing at them, I grouped them in the light of my lamp — for so long that I was often still there when the dawn brought to their whiteness the same flush with which it must at that moment have been tingeing their sisters on the Balbec road — and I sought to carry them back in my imagination to that roadside, to multiply them, to spread them out, so as to fill the frame prepared for them, on the canvas, all ready, of those closes the outline of which I knew by heart, which I so longed to see — which one day I must see again, at the moment when, with the exquisite fervour of genius, spring was covering their canvas with its colours.

Before getting into the carriage I had composed the seascape for which I was going to look out, which I had hoped to see with the 'sun radiant' upon it, and which at Balbec I could distinguish only in too fragmentary a form, broken by so many vulgar intromissions that had no place in my dream, bathers, dressing-boxes, pleasure yachts. But when, Mme. de Ville-parisis's carriage having reached high ground, I caught a glimpse of the sea through the leafy boughs of trees, then no doubt at such a distance those temporal details which had set the sea, as it were, apart from nature and history disappeared, and I could as I looked down towards its waves make myself realise that they were the same which Leconte de Lisle describes for us in his *Orestie*, where "like a flight of birds of prey, before the dawn of day" the long-haired warriors of heroic Hellas "with oars an hundred thousand sweep the huge resounding deep." But on the other hand I was no longer near enough to the sea which seemed to me not a living thing now, but fixed; I no longer felt any power beneath its colours, spread like those of a picture among the leaves, through which it appeared as inconsistent as the sky and only of an intenser blue.

Mme. de Villeparisis, seeing that I was fond of churches, promised me that we should visit one one day and another another, and especially the church at Carqueville 'quite buried in all its old ivy,' as she said with a wave of the hand which seemed tastefully to be clothing the absent 'front' in an invisible and delicate screen of foliage. Mme. de Villeparisis would often, with this little descriptive gesture, find just the right word to define the attraction and the distinctive features of an historic building, always avoiding technical terms, but incapable of concealing her thorough understanding of the things to which she referred. She appeared to seek an excuse for this erudition in the fact that one of her father's country houses, the one in which she had lived as a girl, was situated in a district in which there were churches similar in style to those round Balbec,

so that it would have been unaccountable if she had not acquired a taste for architecture, this house being, incidentally, one of the finest examples of that of the Renaissance. But as it was also a regular museum, as moreover Chopin and Liszt had played there, Lamartine recited poetry, all the most famous artists for fully a century inscribed ‘sentiments,’ scored melodies, made sketches in the family album, Mme. de Villeparisis ascribed, whether from delicacy, good breeding, true modesty or want of intelligence, only this purely material origin to her acquaintance with all the arts, and had come, apparently, to regard painting, music, literature and philosophy as the appanage of a young lady brought up on the most aristocratic lines in an historic building that was catalogued and starred. You would have said, listening to her, that she knew of no pictures that were not heirlooms. She was pleased that my grandmother liked a necklace which she wore, and which fell over her dress. It appeared in the portrait of an ancestress of her own by Titian which had never left the family. So that one could be certain of its being genuine. She would not listen to a word about pictures bought, heaven knew where, by a Croesus, she was convinced before you spoke that they were forgeries, and had so desire to see them. We knew that she herself painted flowers in water-colour, and my grandmother, who had heard these praised, spoke to her of them. Mme. de Villeparisis modestly changed the subject, but without shewing either surprise or pleasure more than would an artist whose reputation was established and to whom compliments meant nothing. She said merely that it was a delightful pastime because, even if the flowers that sprang from the brush were nothing wonderful, at least the work made you live in the company of real flowers, of the beauty of which, especially when you were obliged to study them closely in order to draw them, you could never grow tired. But at Balbec Mme. de Villeparisis was giving herself a holiday, so as to spare her eyes.

We were astonished, my grandmother and I, to find how much more ‘Liberal’ she was than even the majority of the middle class. She did not understand how anyone could be scandalised by the expulsion of the Jesuits, saying that it had always been done, even under the Monarchy, in Spain even. She took up the defence of the Republic, and against its anti-clericalism had not more to say than: “I should be equally annoyed whether they prevented me from hearing mass when I wanted to, or forced me to hear it when I didn’t!” and even startled us with such utterances as: “Oh! the aristocracy in these days, what does it amount to?” “To my mind, a man who doesn’t work doesn’t count!”— perhaps only because she felt that they gained point and flavour, became memorable, in

fact, on her lips.

When we heard these advanced opinions — though never so far advanced as to amount to Socialism, which Mme. de Villeparisis held in abhorrence — expressed so frequently and with so much frankness precisely by one of those people in consideration of whose intelligence our scrupulous and timid impartiality would refuse to condemn outright the ideas of the Conservatives, we came very near, my grandmother and I, to believing that in the pleasant companion of our drives was to be found the measure and the pattern of truth in all things. We took her word for it when she appreciated her Titians, the colonnade of her country house, the conversational talent of Louis-Philippe. But — like those mines of learning who hold us spellbound when we get them upon Egyptian paintings or Etruscan inscriptions, and yet talk so tediously about modern work that we ask ourselves whether we have not been over-estimating the interest of the sciences in which they are versed since there is not apparent in their treatment of them the mediocrity of mind which they must have brought to those studies just as much as to their fatuous essays on Baudelaire — Mme. de Villeparisis, questioned by me about Chateaubriand, about Balzac, about Victor Hugo, each of whom had in his day been the guest of her parents, and had been seen and spoken to by her, smiled at my reverence, told amusing anecdotes of them, such as she had a moment ago been telling us of dukes and statesmen, and severely criticised those writers simply because they had been lacking in that modesty, that self-effacement, that sober art which is satisfied with a single right line, and lays no stress on it, which avoids more than anything else the absurdity of grandiloquence, in that opportuneness, those qualities of moderation, of judgment and simplicity to which she had been taught that real greatness aspired and attained: it was evident that she had no hesitation in placing above them men who might after all, perhaps, by virtue of those qualities, have had the advantage of a Balzac, a Hugo, a Vigny in a drawing-room, an academy, a cabinet council, men like Mole, Fontanes, Vitroles, Bersot, Pasquier, Lebrun, Salvandy or Daru.

“Like those novels of Stendhal, which you seem to admire. You would have given him a great surprise, I assure you, if you had spoken to him in that tone. My father, who used to meet him at M. Mérimée’s — now he was a man of talent, if you like — often told me that Beyle (that was his real name) was appallingly vulgar, but quite good company at dinner, and never in the least conceited about his books. Why, you can see for yourself how he just shrugged his shoulders at the absurdly extravagant compliments of M. de Balzac. There at least he shewed that he knew how to behave like a gentleman.” She possessed

the autographs of all these great men, and seemed, when she put forward the personal relations which her family had had with them, to assume that her judgment of them must be better founded than that of young people who, like myself, had had no opportunity of meeting them. “I’m sure I have a right to speak, for they used to come to my father’s house; and as M. Sainte-Beuve, who was a most intelligent man, used to say, in forming an estimate you must take the word of people who saw them close, and were able to judge more exactly of their real worth.”

Sometimes as the carriage laboured up a steep road through tilled country, making the fields more real, adding to them a mark of authenticity like the precious flower with which certain of the old masters used to sign their pictures, a few hesitating cornflowers, like the Combray cornflowers, would stream in our wake. Presently the horses outdistanced them, but a little way on we would catch sight of another which while it stayed our coming had pricked up to welcome us amid the grass its azure star; some made so bold as to come and plant themselves by the side of the road, and the impression left in my mind was a nebulous blend of distant memories and of wild flowers grown tame.

We began to go down hill; and then met, climbing on foot, on a bicycle, in a cart or carriage, one of those creatures — flowers of a fine day but unlike the flowers of the field, for each of them secretes something that is not to be found in another, with the result that we can never satisfy upon any of her fellows the desire which she has brought to birth in us — a farm-girl driving her cow or half-lying along a waggon, a shopkeeper’s daughter taking the air, a fashionable young lady erect on the back seat of a landau, facing her parents. Certainly Bloch had been the means of opening a new era and had altered the value of life for me on the day when he had told me that the dreams which I had entertained on my solitary walks along the Méséglise way, when I hoped that some peasant girl might pass whom I could take in my arms, were not a mere fantasy which corresponded to nothing outside myself, but that all the girls one met, whether villagers or ‘young ladies,’ were alike ready and willing to give ear to such prayers. And even if I were fated, now that I was ill and did not go out by myself, never to be able to make love to them, I was happy all the same, like a child born in a prison or a hospital, who, having always supposed that the human organism was capable of digesting only dry bread and ‘physic,’ has learned suddenly that peaches, apricots and grapes are not simply part of the decoration of the country scene but delicious and easily assimilated food. Even if his gaoler or his nurse does not allow him to pluck those tempting fruits, still the world

seems to him a better place and existence in it more clement. For a desire seems to us more attractive, we repose on it with more confidence, when we know that outside ourselves there is a reality which conforms to it, even if, for us, it is not to be realised. And we think with more joy of a life in which (on condition that we eliminate for a moment from our mind the tiny obstacle, accidental and special, which prevents us personally from doing so) we can imagine ourself to be assuaging that desire. As to the pretty girls who went past, from the day on which I had first known that their cheeks could be kissed, I had become curious about their souls. And the universe had appeared to me more interesting.

Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage moved fast. Scarcely had I time to see the girl who was coming in our direction; and yet — as the beauty of people is not like the beauty of things, as we feel that it is that of an unique creature, endowed with consciousness and free-will — as soon as her individuality, a soul still vague, a will unknown to me, presented a tiny picture of itself, enormously reduced but complete, in the depths of her indifferent eyes, at once, by a mysterious response of the pollen ready in me for the pistils that should receive it, I felt surging through me the embryo, as vague, as minute, of the desire not to let this girl pass without forcing her mind to become conscious of my person, without preventing her desires from wandering to some one else, without coming to fix myself in her dreams and to seize and occupy her heart. Meanwhile our carriage rolled away from her, the pretty girl was already left behind, and as she had — of me — none of those notions which constitute a person in one's mind, her eyes which had barely seen me had forgotten me already. Was it because I had caught but a fragmentary glimpse of her that I had found her so attractive? It may have been. In the first place, the impossibility of stopping when I came to her, the risk of not meeting her again another day, give at once to such a girl the same charm as a place derives from the illness or poverty that prevents us from visiting it, or the so unadventurous days through which we should otherwise have to live from the battle in which we shall doubtless fall. So that, if there were no such thing as habit, life must appear delightful to those of us who would at every moment be threatened with death — that is to say, to all mankind. Then, if our imagination is set going by the desire for what we may not possess, its flight is not limited by a reality completely perceived, in these casual encounters in which the charms of the passing stranger are generally in direct ratio to the swiftness of our passage. If only night is falling and the carriage is moving fast, whether in town or country, there is not a female torso, mutilated like an antique marble by the speed that tears us away and the dusk that drowns it, but aims at

our heart, from every turning in the road, from the lighted interior of every shop, the arrows of Beauty, that Beauty of which we are sometimes tempted to ask ourselves whether it is, in this world, anything more than the complementary part that is added to a fragmentary and fugitive stranger by our imagination over-stimulated by regret.

Had I been free to stop, to get down from the carriage and to speak to the girl whom we were passing, should I perhaps have been disillusioned by some fault in her complexion which from the carriage I had not distinguished? (After which every effort to penetrate into her life would have seemed suddenly impossible. For beauty is a sequence of hypotheses which ugliness cuts short when it bars the way that we could already see opening into the unknown.) Perhaps a single word which she might have uttered, a smile, would have furnished me with a key, a clue that I had not expected, to read the expression of her face, to interpret her bearing, which would at once have ceased to be of any interest. It is possible, for I have never in real life met any girls so desirable as on days when I was with some serious person from whom, despite the — myriad pretexts that I invented, I could not tear myself away: some years after that in which I went for the first time to Balbec, as I was driving through Paris with a friend of my father, and had caught sight of a woman walking quickly along the dark street, I felt that it was unreasonable to forfeit, for a purely conventional scruple, my share of happiness in what may very well be the only life there is, and jumping from the carriage without a word of apology I followed in quest of the stranger; lost her where two streets crossed; caught her up again in a third, and arrived at last, breathless, beneath a street lamp, face to face with old Mme. Verdurin whom I had been carefully avoiding for years, and who, in her delight and surprise, exclaimed: “But how very nice of you to have run all this way just to say how d’ye do to me!”

That year at Balbec, at the moments of such encounters, I would assure my grandmother and Mme. de Villeparisis that I had so severe a headache that the best thing for me would be to go home alone on foot. But they would never let me get out of the carriage. And I must add that pretty girl (far harder to find again than an historic building, for she was nameless and had the power of locomotion) to the collection of all those whom I promised myself that I would examine more closely at a later date. One of them, however, happened to pass more than once before my eyes in circumstances which allowed me to believe that I should be able to get to know her when I chose. This was a milk-girl who came from a farm with an additional supply of cream for the hotel. I fancied that

she had recognised me also; and she did, in fact, look at me with an attentiveness which was perhaps due only to the surprise which my attentiveness caused her. And next day, a day on which I had been resting all morning, when Françoise came in about noon to draw my curtains, she handed me a letter which had been left for me downstairs. I knew no one at Balbec. I had no doubt that the letter was from the milk-girl. Alas, it was only from Bergotte who, as he happened to be passing, had tried to see me, but on hearing that I was asleep had scribbled a few charming lines for which the lift-boy had addressed an envelope which I had supposed to have been written by the milk-girl. I was bitterly disappointed, and the thought that it was more difficult, and more flattering to myself to get a letter from Bergotte did not in the least console me for this particular letter's not being from her. As for the girl, I never came across her again any more than I came across those whom I had seen only from Mme. de Ville-parisis's carriage. Seeing and then losing them all thus increased the state of agitation in which I was living, and I found a certain wisdom in the philosophers who recommend us to set a limit to our desires (if, that is, they refer to our desire for people, for that is the only kind that ends in anxiety, having for its object a being at once unknown and unconscious. To suppose that philosophy could refer to the desire for wealth would be too silly.). At the same time I was inclined to regard this wisdom as incomplete, for I said to myself that these encounters made me find even more beautiful a world which thus caused to grow along all the country roads flowers at once rare and common, fleeting treasures of the day, windfalls of the drive, of which the contingent circumstances that would never, perhaps, recur had alone prevented me from taking advantage, and which gave a new zest to life.

But perhaps in hoping that, one day, with greater freedom, I should be able to find on other roads girls much the same, I was already beginning to falsify and corrupt what there is exclusively individual in the desire to live in the company of a woman whom one has found attractive, and by the mere fact that I admitted the possibility of making this desire grow artificially, I had implicitly acknowledged my allusion.

The day on which Mme. de Villeparisis took us to Carqueville, where there was that church, covered in ivy, of which she had spoken to us, a church that, built upon rising ground, dominated both its village and the river that flowed beneath it, and had kept its own little bridge from the middle ages, my grandmother, thinking that I would like to be left alone to study the building at my leisure, suggested to her friend that they should go on and wait for me at the pastry-cook's, in the village square which was clearly visible from where we

were and, in its mellow bloom in the sunshine, seemed like another part of a whole that was all mediaeval. It was arranged that I should join them there later. In the mass of verdure before which I was left standing I was obliged, if I was to discover the church, to make a mental effort which involved my grasping more intensely the idea ‘Church’; in fact, as happens to schoolboys who gather more fully the meaning of a sentence when they are made, by translating or by paraphrasing it, to divest it of the forms to which they are accustomed, this idea of ‘Church,’ which as a rule I scarcely needed when I stood beneath steeples that were recognisable in themselves, I was obliged perpetually to recall so as not to forget, here that the arch in this clump of ivy was that of a pointed window, there that the projection of the leaves was due to the swelling underneath of a capital. Then came a breath of wind, and sent a tremor through the mobile porch, which was overrun by eddies that shot and quivered like a flood of light; the pointed leaves opened one against another; and, shuddering, the arboreal front drew after it green pillars, undulant, caressed and fugitive.

As I came away from the church I saw by the old bridge a cluster of girls from the village who, probably because it was Sunday, were standing about in their best clothes, rallying the young men who went past. Not so well dressed as the others, but seeming to enjoy some ascendancy over them — for she scarcely answered when they spoke to her — with a more serious and a more determined air, there was a tall one who, hoisted upon the parapet of the bridge with her feet hanging down, was holding on her lap a small vessel full of fish which she had presumably just been catching. She had a tanned complexion, gentle eyes but with a look of contempt for her surroundings, a small nose, delicately and attractively modelled. My eyes rested upon her skin; and my lips, had the need arisen, might have believed that they had followed my eyes. But it was not only to her body that I should have liked to attain, there was also her person, which abode within her, and with which there is but one form of contact, namely to attract its attention, but one sort of penetration, to awaken an idea in it.

And this inner self of the charming fisher-girl seemed to be still closed to me, I was doubtful whether I had entered it, even after I had seen my own image furtively reflect itself in the twin mirrors of her gaze, following an index of refraction that was as unknown to me as if I had been placed in the field of vision of a deer. But just as it would not have sufficed that my lips should find pleasure in hers without giving pleasure to them also, so I should have wished that the idea of me which was to enter this creature, was to fasten itself in her, should attract to me not merely her attention but her admiration, her desire, and

should compel her to keep me in her memory until the day when I should be able to meet her again. Meanwhile I could see, within a stone's-throw, the square in which Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage must be waiting for me. I had not a moment to lose; and already I could feel that the girls were beginning to laugh at the sight of me thus held suspended before them. I had a five-franc piece in my pocket. I drew it out, and, before explaining to the girl the errand on which I proposed to send her, so as to have a better chance of her listening to me, I held the coin for a moment before her eyes.

"Since you seem to belong to the place," I said to her, "I wonder if you would be so good as to take a message for me. I want you to go to a pastrycook's — which is apparently in a square, but I don't know where that is — where there is a carriage waiting for me. One moment! To make quite sure, will you ask if the carriage belongs to the Marquise de Villeparisis? But you can't miss it; it's a carriage and pair."

That was what I wished her to know, so that she should regard me as someone of importance. But when I had uttered the words ‘Marquise’ and ‘carriage and pair,’ suddenly I had a great sense of calm. I felt that the fisher-girl would remember me, and I felt vanishing, with my fear of not being able to meet her again, part also of my desire to meet her. It seemed to me that I had succeeded in touching her person with invisible lips, and that I had pleased her. And this assault and capture of her mind, this immaterial possession had taken from her part of her mystery, just as physical possession does.

We came down towards Hudimesnil; suddenly I was overwhelmed with that profound happiness which I had not often felt since Combray; happiness analogous to that which had been given me by — among other things — the steeples of Martinville. But this time it remained incomplete. I had just seen, standing a little way back from the steep ridge over which we were passing, three trees, probably marking the entrance to a shady avenue, which made a pattern at which I was looking now not for the first time; I could not succeed in reconstructing the place from which they had been, as it were, detached, but I felt that it had been familiar to me once; so that my mind having wavered between some distant year and the present moment, Balbec and its surroundings began to dissolve and I asked myself whether the whole of this drive were not a make-believe, Balbec a place to which I had never gone save in imagination, Mme. de Villeparisis a character in a story and the three old trees the reality which one recaptures on raising one’s eyes from the book which one has been reading and which describes an environment into which one has come to believe that one has been bodily transported.

I looked at the three trees; I could see them plainly, but my mind felt that they were concealing something which it had not grasped, as when things are placed out of our reach, so that our fingers, stretched out at arm’s-length, can only touch for a moment their outer surface, and can take hold of nothing. Then we rest for a little while before thrusting out our arm with refreshed vigour, and trying to reach an inch or two farther. But if my mind was thus to collect itself, to gather strength, I should have to be alone. What would I not have given to be able to escape as I used to do on those walks along the Guermantes way, when I detached myself from my parents! It seemed indeed that I ought to do so now. I recognised that kind of pleasure which requires, it is true, a certain effort on the part of the mind, but in comparison with which the attractions of the inertia which inclines us to renounce that pleasure seem very slight. That pleasure, the

object of which I could but dimly feel, that pleasure which I must create for myself, I experienced only on rare occasions, but on each of these it seemed to me that the things which had happened in the interval were of but scant importance, and that in attaching myself to the reality of that pleasure alone I could at length begin to lead a new life. I laid my hand for a moment across my eyes, so as to be able to shut them without Mme. de Villeparisis's noticing. I sat there, thinking of nothing, then with my thoughts collected, compressed and strengthened I sprang farther forward in the direction of the trees, or rather in that inverse direction at the end of which I could see them growing within myself. I felt again behind them the same object, known to me and yet vague, which I could not bring nearer. And yet all three of them, as the carriage moved on, I could see coming towards me. Where had I looked at them before? There was no place near Combray where an avenue opened off the road like that. The site which they recalled to me, there was no room for it either in the scenery of the place in Germany where I had gone one year with my grandmother to take the waters. Was I to suppose, then, that they came from years already so remote in my life that the landscape which accompanied them had been entirely obliterated from my memory, and that, like the pages which, with sudden emotion, we recognise in a book which we imagined that we had never read, they surged up by themselves out of the forgotten chapter of my earliest infancy? Were they not rather to be numbered among those dream landscapes, always the same, at least for me in whom their unfamiliar aspect was but the objectivation in my dreams of the effort that I had been making while awake either to penetrate the mystery of a place beneath the outward appearance of which I was dimly conscious of there being something more, as had so often happened to me on the Guermantes way, or to succeed in bringing mystery back to a place which I had longed to know and which, from the day on which I had come to know it, had seemed to me to be wholly superficial, like Balbec? Or were they but an image freshly extracted from a dream of the night before, but already so worn, so altered that it seemed to me to come from somewhere far more distant? Or had I indeed never seen them before; did they conceal beneath their surface, like the trees, like the tufts of grass that I had seen beside the Guermantes way, a meaning as obscure, as hard to grasp as is a distant past, so that, whereas they are pleading with me that I would master a new idea, I imagined that I had to identify something in my memory? Or again were they concealing no hidden thought, and was it simply my strained vision that made me see them double in time as one occasionally sees things double in space? I could not tell. And yet all

the time they were coming towards me; perhaps some fabulous apparition, a ring of witches or of norns who would propound their oracles to me. I chose rather to believe that they were phantoms of the past, dear companions of my childhood, vanished friends who recalled our common memories. Like ghosts they seemed to be appealing to me to take them with me, to bring them back to life. In their simple, passionate gesticulation I could discern the helpless anguish of a beloved person who has lost the power of speech, and feels that he will never be able to say to us what he wishes to say and we can never guess. Presently, at a cross-roads, the carriage left them. It was bearing me away from what alone I believed to be true, what would have made me truly happy; it was like my life.

I watched the trees gradually withdraw, waving their despairing arms, seeming to say to me: “What you fail to learn from us to-day, you will never know. If you allow us to drop back into the hollow of this road from which we sought to raise ourselves up to you, a whole part of yourself which we were bringing to you will fall for ever into the abyss.” And indeed if, in the course of time, I did discover the kind of pleasure and of disturbance which I had just been feeling once again, and if one evening — too late, but then for all time — I fastened myself to it, of those trees themselves I was never to know what they had been trying to give me nor where else I had seen them. And when, the road having forked and the carriage with it, I turned my back on them and ceased to see them, with Mme. de Villeparisis asking me what I was dreaming about, I was as wretched as though I had just lost a friend, had died myself, had broken faith with the dead or had denied my God.

It was time to be thinking of home. Mme. de Villeparisis, who had a certain feeling for nature, colder than that of my grandmother but capable of recognising, even outside museums and noblemen’s houses, the simple and majestic beauty of certain old and venerable things, told her coachman to take us back by the old Balbec road, a road little used but planted with old elm-trees which we thought quite admirable.

Once we had got to know this road, for a change we would return — that is, if we had not taken it on the outward journey — by another which ran through the woods of Chantereine and Canteloup. The invisibility of the numberless birds that took up one another’s song close beside us in the trees gave me the same sense of being at rest that one has when one shuts one’s eyes. Chained to my back-seat like Prometheus on his rock I listened to my Oceanides. And when it so happened that I caught a glimpse of one of those birds as it passed from one leaf to another, there was so little apparent connexion between it and the songs

that I heard that I could not believe that I was beholding their cause in that little body, fluttering, startled and unseeing.

This road was like many others of the same kind which are to be found in France, climbing on a fairly steep gradient to its summit and then gradually falling for the rest of the way. At the time, I found no great attraction in it, I was only glad to be going home. But it became for me later on a frequent source of joy by remaining in my memory as a lodestone to which all the similar roads that I was to take, on walks or drives or journeys, would at once attach themselves without breach of continuity and would be able, thanks to it, to communicate directly with my heart. For as soon as the carriage or the motor-car turned into one of these roads that seemed to be merely the continuation of the road along which I had driven with Mme. de Villeparisis, the matter to which I found my consciousness directly applying itself, as to the most recent event in my past, would be (all the intervening years being quietly obliterated) the impressions that I had had on those bright summer afternoons and evenings, driving round Balbec, when the leaves smelt good, a mist rose from the ground, and beyond the village close at hand one could see through the trees the sun setting as though it had been merely some place farther along the road, a forest place and distant, which we should not have time to reach that evening. Harmonised with what I was feeling now in another place, on a similar road, surrounded by all the accessory sensations of breathing deep draughts of air, of curiosity, indolence, appetite, lightness of heart which were common to them both, and excluding all others, these impressions would be reinforced, would take on the consistency of a particular type of pleasure, and almost of a setting of life which, as it happened, I rarely had the luck to-come across, but in which these awakened memories placed, amid the reality that my senses could perceive, no small part of a reality suggested, dreamed, unseizable, to give me, among those regions through which I was passing, more than an aesthetic feeling, a transient but exalted ambition to stay there and to live there always. How often since then, simply because I could smell green leaves, has not being seated on a backseat opposite Mme. de Villeparisis, meeting the Princesse de Luxembourg who waved a greeting to her from her own carriage, coming back to dinner at the Grand Hotel appeared to me as one of those indescribable happinesses which neither the present nor the future can restore to us, which we may taste once only in a lifetime.

Often dusk would have fallen before we reached the hotel. Timidly I would quote to Mme. de Villeparisis, pointing to the moon in the sky, some memorable

expression of Chateaubriand or Vigny or Victor Hugo: ‘Shedding abroad that ancient secret of melancholy’ or ‘Weeping like Diana by the brink of her streams’ or ‘The shadows nuptial, solemn and august.’

“And so you think that good, do you?” she would ask, “inspired, as you call it. I must confess that I am always surprised to see people taking things seriously nowadays which the friends of those gentlemen, while doing ample justice to their merits, were the first to laugh at. People weren’t so free then with the word ‘inspired’ as they are now, when if you say to a writer that he has mere talent he thinks you’re insulting him. You quote me a fine passage from M. de Chateaubriand about moonlight. You shall see that I have my own reasons for being refractory. M. de Chateaubriand used constantly to come to see my father. He was quite a pleasant person when you were alone with him, because then he was simple and amusing, but the moment he had an audience he would begin to pose, and then he became absurd; when my father was in the room, he pretended that he had flung his resignation in the King’s face, and that he had controlled the voting in the Conclave, forgetting that it was my father whom he had asked to beg the King to take him back, and that my father had heard him make the most idiotic forecasts of the Papal election. You ought to have heard M. de Blacas on that famous Conclave; he was a very different kind of man from M. de Chateaubriand. As to his fine phrases about the moon, they became part of our regular programme for entertaining our guests. Whenever there was any moonlight about the house, if there was anyone staying with us for the first time he would be told to take M. de Chateaubriand for a stroll after dinner. When they came in, my father would take his guest aside and say: ‘Well, and was M. de Chateaubriand very eloquent?’—’Oh, yes.’ ‘He’s been talking about the moon?’—’Yes, how did you know?’—’One moment, didn’t he say ——’ and then my father would quote the passage. ‘He did; but how in the world...?’—’And he spoke to you of the moonlight on the Roman Campagna?’—’But, my dear sir, you’re a magician.’ My father was no magician, but M. de Chateaubriand had the same little speech about the moon which he served up every time.”

At the mention of Vigny she laughed: “The man who said: ‘I am the Comte Alfred de Vigny!’ One either is a Comte or one isn’t; it is not of the slightest importance.” And then perhaps she discovered that it was after all, of some slight importance, for she went on: “For one thing I am by no means sure that he was, and in any case he was of the humblest origin, that gentleman who speaks in his verses of his ‘Esquire’s crest.’ In such charming taste, is it not, and so

interesting to his readers! Like Musset, a plain Paris cit, who laid so much stress on ‘The golden falcon that surmounts my helm.’ As if you would ever hear a real gentleman say a thing like that! And yet Musset had some talent as a poet. But except *Cinq-Mars* I have never been able to read a thing by M. de Vigny. I get so bored that the book falls from my hands. M. Mole, who had all the cleverness and tact that were wanting in M. de Vigny, put him properly in his place when he welcomed him to the Academy. Do you mean to say you don’t know the speech? It is a masterpiece of irony and impertinence.” She found fault with Balzac, whom she was surprised to see her nephews admire, for having pretended to describe a society ‘in which he was never received’ and of which his descriptions were wildly improbable. As for Victor Hugo, she told us that M. de Bouillon, her father, who had friends among the young leaders of the Romantic movement, had been taken by some of them to the first performance of *Hernani*, but that he had been unable to sit through it, so ridiculous had he found the lines of that talented but extravagant writer who had acquired the title of ‘Major Poet’ only by virtue of having struck a bargain, and as a reward for the not disinterested indulgence that he shewed to the dangerous errors of the Socialists.

We had now come in sight of the hotel, with its lights, so hostile that first evening, on our arrival, now protecting and kind, speaking to us of home. And when the carriage drew up outside the door, the porter, the pages, the lift-boy, attentive, clumsy, vaguely uneasy at our lateness, were numbered, now that they had grown familiar, among those beings who change so many times in the course of our life, as we ourself change, but by whom, when they are for the time being the mirror of our habits, we find something attractive in the feeling that we are being faithfully reflected and in a friendly spirit. We prefer them to friends whom we have not seen for some time, for they contain more of what we actually are. Only the outside page, exposed to the sun all day, had been taken indoors for protection from the cold night air and swaddled in thick woollen garments which, combined with the orange effulgence of his locks and the curiously red bloom of his cheeks, made one, seeing him there through the glass front of the hall, think of a hot-house plant muffled up for protection from the frost. We got out of the carriage, with the help of a great many more servants than were required, but they were conscious of the importance of the scene and each felt obliged to take some part in it. I was always very hungry. And so, often, so as not to keep dinner waiting, I would not go upstairs first to the room which had succeeded in becoming so really mine that to catch sight of its long violet curtains and low bookcases was to find myself alone again with that self of

which things, like people, gave me a reflected image; but we would all wait together in the hall until the head waiter came to tell us that our dinner was ready. And this gave us another opportunity of listening to Mme. de Villeparisis.

"But you must be tired of us by now," protested my grandmother.

"Not at all! Why, I am delighted, what could be nicer?" replied her friend with a winning smile, drawing out, almost intoning her words in a way that contrasted markedly with her customary simplicity of speech.

And indeed at such moments as this she was not natural, her mind reverted to her early training, to the aristocratic manner in which a great lady is supposed to shew common people that she is glad to see them, that she is not at all stiff. And her one and only failure in true politeness lay in this excess of politeness; which it was easy to identify as one of the professional 'wrinkles' of a lady of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, who, always seeing in her humbler friends the latent discontent that she must one day arouse in their bosoms, greedily seizes every opportunity in which she can possibly, in the ledger in which she keeps her social account with them, write down a credit balance which will allow her to enter presently on the opposite page the dinner or reception to which she will not invite them. And so, having long ago taken effect in her once and for all, and ignoring the fact that now both the circumstances and the people concerned were different, that in Paris she hoped to see us often come to her house, the spirit of her caste was urging Mme. de Villeparisis on with feverish ardour, and as if the time that was allowed her for being kind to us was limited, to multiply, while we were still at Balbec, her gifts of roses and melons, loans of books, drives in her carriage and verbal effusions. And for that reason, quite as much as the dazzling glories of the beach, the many-coloured flamboyance and subaqueous light of the rooms, as much even as the riding-lessons by which tradesmen's sons were deified like Alexander of Macedon, the daily kindnesses shewn us by Mme. de Villeparisis and also the unaccustomed, momentary, holiday ease with which my grandmother accepted them have remained in my memory as typical of life at a watering-place.

"Give them your cloaks to take upstairs."

My grandmother handed hers to the manager, and because he had been so nice to me I was distressed by this want of consideration, which seemed to pain him.

"I think you've hurt his feelings," said the Marquise. "He probably fancies himself too great a gentleman to carry your wraps. I remember so well the Duc de Nemours, when I was still quite little, coming to see my father who was

living then on the top floor of the Bouillon house, with a fat parcel under his arm of letters and newspapers. I can see the Prince now, in his blue coat, framed in our doorway, which had such pretty woodwork round it — I think it was Bagard made it — you know those fine laths that they used to cut, so supple that the joiner would twist them sometimes into little shells and flowers, like the ribbons round a nosegay. ‘Here you are, Cyrus,’ he said to my father, ‘look what your porter’s given me to bring you. He said to me: “Since you’re going up to see the Count, it’s not worth my while climbing all those stairs; but take care you don’t break the string.”‘ Now that you have got rid of your things, why don’t you sit down; look, sit in this seat,” she said to my grandmother, taking her by the hand.

“Oh, if you don’t mind, not in that one! There is not room for two, and it’s too big for me by myself; I shouldn’t feel comfortable.”

“You remind me, for it was exactly like this, of a seat that I had for many years until at last I couldn’t keep it any longer because it had been given to my mother by the poor Duchesse de Praslin. My mother, though she was the simplest person in the world, really, had ideas that belonged to another generation, which even in those days I could scarcely understand; and at first she had not been at all willing to let herself be introduced to Mme. de Praslin, who had been plain Mlle. Sébastian!, while she, because she was a Duchess, felt that it was not for her to be introduced to my mother. And really, you know,” Mme. de Villeparisis went on, forgetting that she herself did not understand these fine shades of distinction, “even if she had just been Mme. de Choiseul, there was a good deal to be said for her claim. The Choiseuls are everything you could want; they spring from a sister of Louis the Fat; they were ruling princes down in Basigny. I admit that we beat them in marriages and in distinction, but the precedence is pretty much the same. This little difficulty gave rise to several amusing incidents, such as a luncheon party which was kept waiting a whole hour or more before one of these ladies could make up her mind to let herself be introduced to the other. In spite of which they became great friends, and she gave my mother a seat like that, in which people always refused to sit, just as you did, until one day my mother heard a carriage drive into the courtyard. She asked a young servant we had, who it was. ‘The Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, ma’am.’ ‘Very well, say that I am at home.’ A quarter of an hour passed; no one came. ‘What about the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld?’ my mother asked. ‘Where is she?’ ‘She’s on the stairs, ma’am, getting her breath,’ said the young servant, who had not been long up from the country, where my mother had the excellent habit of getting all her servants. Often she had seen them born. That’s

the only way to get really good ones. And they're the rarest of luxuries. And sure enough the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld had the greatest difficulty in getting upstairs, for she was an enormous woman, so enormous, indeed, that when she did come into the room my mother was quite at a loss for a moment to know where to put her. And then the seat that Mme. de Praslin had given her caught her eye. 'Won't you sit down?' she said, bringing it forward. And the Duchess filled it from side to side. She was quite a pleasant woman, for all her massiveness. 'She still creates an effect when she comes in,' one of our friends said once. 'She certainly creates an effect when she goes out,' said my mother, who was rather more free in her speech than would be thought proper nowadays. Even in Mme. de La Rochefoucauld's own drawing-room people weren't afraid to make fun of her to her face (at which she was always the first to laugh) over her ample proportions. 'But are you all alone?' my grandmother once asked M. de La Rochefoucauld, when she had come to pay a call on the Duchess, and being met at the door by him had not seen his wife who was at the other end of the room. 'Is Mme. de La Rochefoucauld not at home? I don't see her.'—'How charming of you!' replied the Duke, who had about the worst judgment of any man I have ever known, but was not altogether lacking in humour."

After dinner, when I had retired upstairs with my grandmother, I said to her that the qualities which attracted us in Mme. de Villeparisis, her tact, her shrewdness, her discretion, her modesty in not referring to herself, were not, perhaps, of very great value since those who possessed them in the highest degree were simply people like Mole and Loménie, and that if the want of them can make our social relations unpleasant yet it did not prevent from becoming Chateaubriand, Vigny, Hugo, Balzac, a lot of foolish fellows who had no judgment, at whom it was easy to mock, like Bloch.... But at the name of Bloch, my grandmother cried out in protest. And she began to praise Mme. de Villeparisis. As we are told that it is the preservation of the species which guides our individual preferences in love, and, so that the child may be constituted in the most normal fashion, sends fat men in pursuit of lean women and vice versa, so in some dim way it was the requirements of my happiness threatened by my disordered nerves, by my morbid tendency to melancholy, to solitude, that made her allot the highest place to the qualities of balance and judgment, peculiar not only to Mme. de Villeparisis but to a society in which our ancestors saw blossom the minds of a Doudan, a M. de Rémusat, not to mention a Beausergent, a Joubert, a Sévigné, a type of mind that invests life with more happiness, with greater dignity than the converse refinements which brought a Baudelaire, a Poe,

a Verlaine, a Rimbaud to sufferings, to a disrepute such as my grandmother did not wish for her daughter's child. I interrupted her with a kiss and asked her if she had noticed some expression which Mme. de Villeparisis had used and which seemed to point to a woman who thought more of her noble birth than she was prepared to admit. In this way I used to submit my impressions of life to my grandmother, for I was never certain what degree of respect was due to anyone until she had informed me. Every evening I would come to her with the mental sketches that I had made during the day of all those non-existent people who were not her. Once I said to her: "I shouldn't be able to live without you." "But you mustn't speak like that;" her voice was troubled. "We must harden our hearts more than that, you know. Or what would become of you if I went away on a journey? But I hope that you would be quite sensible and quite happy."

"I could manage to be sensible if you went away for a few days, but I should count the hours."

"But if I were to go away for months..." (at the bare suggestion of such a thing my heart was wrung) "... for years... for..."

We both remained silent. We dared not look one another in the face. And yet I was suffering more keenly from her anguish than from my own. And so I walked across to the window, and said to her, with a studied clearness of tone but with averted eyes:

"You know what a creature of habit I am. For the first few days after I have been parted from the people I love best, I am wretched. But though I go on loving them just as much, I grow used to their absence; life becomes calm, bearable, pleasant; I could stand being parted from them for months, for years..."

I was obliged to stop, and looked straight out of the window. My grandmother went out of the room for something. But next day I began to talk to her about philosophy, and, speaking in a tone of complete indifference, but at the same time taking care that my grandmother should pay attention to what I was saying, I remarked what a curious thing it was that, according to the latest scientific discoveries, the materialist position appeared to be crumbling, and the most likely thing to be, once again, the survival of the soul and reunion in a life everlasting.

Mme. de Villeparisis gave us warning that presently she would not be able to see so much of us. A young nephew who was preparing for Sau-mur, and was meanwhile stationed in the neighbourhood, at Doncières, was coming to spend a few weeks' furlough with her, and she would be devoting most of her time to him. In the course of our drives together she had boasted to us of his extreme

cleverness, and above all of his goodness of heart; already I was imagining that he would have an instinctive feeling for me, that I was to be his best friend; and when, before his arrival, his aunt gave my grandmother to understand that he had unfortunately fallen into the clutches of an appalling woman with whom he was quite infatuated and who would never let him go, since I believed that that sort of love was doomed to end in mental aberration, crime and suicide, thinking how short the time was that was set apart for our friendship, already so great in my heart, although I had not yet set eyes on him, I wept for that friendship and for the misfortunes that were in store for it, as we weep for a person whom we love when some one has just told us that he is seriously ill and that his days are numbered.

One afternoon of scorching heat I was in the dining-room of the hotel, which they had plunged in semi-darkness, to shield it from the glare, by drawing the curtains which the sun gilded, while through the gaps between them I caught flashing blue glimpses of the sea, when along the central gangway leading inland from the beach to the high road I saw, tall, slender, his head held proudly erect upon a springing neck, a young man go past with searching eyes, whose skin was as fair and whose hair as golden as if they had absorbed all the rays of the%un. Dressed in a clinging, almost white material such as I could never have believed that any man would have the audacity to wear, the thinness of which suggested no less vividly than the coolness of the dining-room the heat and brightness of the glorious day outside, he was walking fast. His eyes, from one of which a monocle kept dropping, were of the colour of the sea. Everyone looked at him with interest as he passed, knowing that this young Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray was famed for the smartness of his clothes. All the newspapers had described the suit in which he had recently acted as second to the young Duc d’Uzès in a duel. One felt that this so special quality of his hair, his eyes, his skin, his figure, which would have marked him out in a crowd like a precious vein of opal, azure-shot and luminous, embedded in a mass of coarser substance, must correspond to a life different from that led by other men. So that when, before the attachment which Mme. de Villeparisis had been deploring, the prettiest women in society had disputed the possession of him, his presence, at a watering-place for instance, in the company of the beauty of the season to whom he was paying court, not only made her conspicuous, but attracted every eye fully as much to himself. Because of his ‘tone,’ of his impertinence befitting a young ‘lion,’ and especially of his astonishing good looks, some people even thought him effeminate, though without attaching any stigma, for everyone knew

how manly he was and that he was a passionate ‘womaniser.’ This was Mme. de Villeparisis’s nephew of whom she had spoken to us. I was overcome with joy at the thought that I was going to know him and to see him for several weeks on end, and confident that he would bestow on me all his affection. He strode rapidly across the hotel, seeming to be in pursuit of his monocle, which kept darting away in front of him like a butterfly. He was coming from the beach, and the sea which filled the lower half of the glass front of the hall gave him a background against which he was drawn at full length, as in certain portraits whose painters attempt, without in anyway falsifying the most accurate observation of contemporary life, but by choosing for their sitter appropriate surroundings, a polo ground, golf links, a racecourse, the bridge of a yacht, to furnish a modern equivalent of those canvases on which the old masters used to present the human figure in the foreground of a landscape. A carriage and pair was waiting for him at the door; and, while his monocle resumed its gambollings in the air of the sunlit street, with the elegance and mastery which a great pianist contrives to display in the simplest piece of execution, where it has not appeared possible that he could shew himself superior to a performer of the second class, Mme. de Villeparisis’s nephew, taking the reins that were handed him by the groom, jumped on to the box seat by his side and, while he opened a letter which the manager of the hotel sent out after him, made his horses start.

What a disappointment was mine on the days that followed, when, each time that I met him outside or in the hotel — his head erect, perpetually balancing the movements of his limbs round the fugitive and dancing monocle which seemed to be their centre of gravity — I was forced to admit that he had evidently no desire to make our acquaintance, and saw that he did not bow to us although he must have known that we were friends of his aunt. And calling to mind the friendliness that Mme. de Villeparisis, and before her M. de Norpois, had shewn me, I thought that perhaps they were only of a bogus nobility, and that there might be a secret section in the laws that govern the aristocracy which allowed women, perhaps, and certain diplomats to discard, in their relations with plebeians, for a reason which was beyond me, the stiffness which must, on the other hand, be pitilessly maintained by a young Marquis. My intelligence might have told me the opposite. But the characteristic feature of the silly phase through which I was passing — a phase by no means irresponsive, indeed highly fertile — is that we do not consult our intelligence and that the most trivial attributes of other people seem to us then to form an inseparable part of their personality. In a world thronged with monsters and with gods, we are barely

conscious of tranquillity. There is hardly one of the actions which we performed in that phase which we would not give anything, in later life, to be able to erase from our memory. Whereas what we ought to regret is that we no longer possess the spontaneity which made us perform them. In later life we look at things in a more practical way, in full conformity with the rest of society, but youth was the only time in which we learned anything.

This insolence which I surmised in M. de Saint-Loup, and all that it implied of ingrained severity, received confirmation from his attitude whenever he passed us, his body as inflexibly erect, his head always held as high, his gaze as impassive, or rather, I should say, as implacable, devoid of that vague respect which one has for the rights of other people, even if they do not know one's aunt, one example of which was that I did not look in quite the same way at an old lady as at a gas lamp. These frigid manners were as far removed from the charming letters which, but a few days since, I had still been imagining him as writing to tell me of his regard for myself, as is removed from the enthusiasm of the Chamber and of the populace which he has been picturing himself as rousing by an imperishable speech, the humble, dull, obscure position of the dreamer who, after pondering it thus by himself, for himself, aloud, finds himself, once the imaginary applause has died away, just the same Tom, Dick or Harry as before. When Mme. de Villeparisis, doubtless in an attempt to counteract the bad impression that had been made on us by an exterior indicative of an arrogant and evil nature, spoke to us again of the inexhaustible goodness of her great-nephew (he was the son of one of her nieces, and a little older than myself), I marvelled how the world, with an utter disregard of truth, ascribes tenderness of heart to people whose hearts are in reality so hard and dry, provided only that they behave with common courtesy to the brilliant members of their own sets. Mme. de Villeparisis herself confirmed, though indirectly, my diagnosis, which was already a conviction, of the essential points of her nephew's character one day when I met them both coming along a path so narrow that there was nothing for it but to introduce me to him. He seemed not to hear that a person's name was being repeated to him, not a muscle of his face moved; his eyes, in which there shone not the faintest gleam of human sympathy, shewed merely in the insensibility, in the inanity of their gaze an exaggeration failing which there would have been nothing to distinguish them from lifeless mirrors. Then fastening on me those hard eyes, as though he wished to make sure of me before returning my salute, by an abrupt release which seemed to be due rather to a reflex action of his muscles than to an exercise of will, keeping between himself

and me the greatest possible interval, he stretched his arm out to its full extension and, at the end of it, offered me his hand. I supposed that it must mean, at the very least, a duel when, next day, he sent me his card. But he spoke to me only of literature, declared after a long talk that he would like immensely to spend several hours with me every day. He had not only, in this encounter, given proof of an ardent zest for the things of the spirit, he had shewn a regard for myself which was little in keeping with his greeting of me the day before. After I had seen him repeat the same process whenever anyone was introduced to him, I realised that it was simply a social usage peculiar to his branch of the family, to which his mother, who had seen to it that he should be perfectly brought up, had moulded his limbs; he went through those motions without thinking, any more than he thought about his beautiful clothes or hair; they were a thing devoid of the moral significance which I had at first ascribed to them, a thing purely acquired like that other habit that he had of at once demanding an introduction to the family of anyone whom he knew, which had become so instinctive in him that, seeing me again the day after our talk, he fell upon me and without asking how I did begged me to make him known to my grandmother, who was with me, with the same feverish haste as if the request had been due to some instinct of self-preservation, like the act of warding off a blow, or of shutting one's eyes to avoid a stream of boiling water, without which precautions it would have been dangerous to stay where one was a moment longer.

The first rites of exorcism once performed, as a wicked fairy discards her outer form and endures all the most enchanting graces, I saw this disdainful creature become the most friendly, the most considerate young man that I had ever met. "Good," I said to myself, "I've been mistaken about him once already; I was taken in by a mirage; but I have corrected the first only to fall into a second, for he must be a great gentleman who has grown sick of his nobility and is trying to hide it." As a matter of fact it was not long before all the exquisite breeding, all the friendliness of Saint-Loup were indeed to let me see another creature but one very different from what I had suspected.

This young man who had the air of a scornful, sporting aristocrat had in fact no respect, no interest save for and in the things of the spirit, and especially those modern manifestations of literature and art which seemed so ridiculous to his aunt; he was imbued, moreover, with what she called 'Socialistic spoutings,' was filled with the most profound contempt for his caste and spent long hours in the study of Nietzsche and Proudhon. He was one of those intellectuals, quick to admire what is good, who shut themselves up in a book, and are interested only

in pure thought. Indeed in Saint-Loup the expression of this highly abstract tendency, which removed him so far from my customary preoccupations, while it seemed to me touching, also annoyed me not a little. I may say that when I realised properly who had been his father, on days when I had been reading memoirs rich in anecdotes of that famous Comte de Marsantes, in whom were embodied the special graces of a generation already remote, the mind full of speculation — anxious to obtain fuller details of the life that M. de Marsantes had led, it used to infuriate me that Robert de Saint-Loup, instead of being content to be the son of his father, instead of being able to guide me through the old-fashioned romance of what had been that father's existence, had trained himself to enjoy Nietzsche and Proudhon. His father would not have shared my regret. He had been himself a man of brains, who had transcended the narrow confines of his life as a man of the world. He had hardly had time to know his son, but had hoped that his son would prove a better man than himself. And I really believe that, unlike the rest of the family, he would have admired his son, would have rejoiced at his abandoning what had been his own small diversions for austere meditations, and without saying a word, in his modesty as a great gentleman endowed with brains, he would have read in secret his son's favourite authors in order to appreciate how far Robert was superior to himself.

There was, however, this rather painful consideration: that if M. de Marsantes, with his extremely open mind, would have appreciated a son so different from himself, Robert de Saint-Loup, because he was one of those who believe that merit is attached only to certain forms of art and life, had an affectionate but slightly contemptuous memory of a father who had spent all his time hunting and racing, who yawned at Wagner and raved over Offenbach. Saint-Loup had not the intelligence to see that intellectual worth has nothing to do with adhesion to any one aesthetic formula, and had for the intellectuality of M. de Marsantes much the same sort of scorn as might have been felt for Boieldieu or Labiche by a son of Boieldieu or Labiche who had become adepts in the most symbolic literature and the most complex music. "I scarcely knew my father," he used to say. "He seems to have been a charming person. His tragedy was the deplorable age in which he lived. To have been born in the Faubourg Saint-Germain and to have to live in the days of La Belle Hélène would be enough to wreck any existence. Perhaps if he'd been some little shopkeeper mad about the Ring he'd have turned out quite different. Indeed they tell me that he was fond of literature. But that can never be proved, because literature to him meant such utterly god-forsaken books." And in my own case,

if I found Saint-Loup a trifle earnest, he could not understand why I was not more earnest still. Never judging anything except by the weight of the intelligence that it contained, never perceiving the magic appeal to the imagination that I found in things which he condemned as frivolous, he was astonished that I— I, to whom he imagined himself to be so utterly inferior — could take any interest in them.

From the first Saint-Loup made a conquest of my grandmother, not only by the incessant acts of kindness which he went out of his way to shew to us both, but by the naturalness which he put into them as into everything. For naturalness — doubtless because through the artifice of man it allows a feeling of nature to permeate — was the quality which my grandmother preferred to all others, whether in gardens, where she did not like there to be, as there had been in our Combray garden, too formal borders, or at table, where she detested those dressed-up dishes in which you could hardly detect the foodstuffs that had gone to make them, or in piano-playing, which she did not like to be too finicking, too laboured, having indeed had a special weakness for the discords, the wrong notes of Rubinstein. This naturalness she found and enjoyed even in the clothes that Saint-Loup wore, of a pliant elegance, with nothing swagger, nothing formal about them, no stiffness or starch. She appreciated this rich young man still more highly for the free and careless way that he had of living in luxury without ‘smelling of money,’ without giving himself airs; she even discovered the charm of this naturalness in the incapacity which Saint-Loup had kept, though as a rule it is outgrown with childhood, at the same time as certain physiological peculiarities of that period, for preventing his face from at once reflecting every emotion. Something, for instance, that he wanted to have but had not expected, were it no more than a compliment, reacted in him in a burst of pleasure so quick, so burning, so volatile, so expansive that it was impossible for him to contain and to conceal it; a grin of delight seized irresistible hold of his face; the too delicate skin of his cheeks allowed a vivid glow to shine through them, his eyes sparkled with confusion and joy; and my grandmother was infinitely touched by this charming show of innocence and frankness, which, incidentally, in Saint-Loup — at any rate at the period of our first friendship — was not misleading. But I have known another person, and there are many such, in whom the physiological sincerity of that fleeting blush in no way excluded moral duplicity; as often as not it proves nothing more than the vivacity with which pleasure is felt — so that it disarms them and they are forced publicly to confess it — by natures capable of the vilest treachery. But where my grandmother did

really adore Saint-Loup's naturalness was in his way of admitting, without any evasion, his affection for me, to give expression to which he found words than which she herself, she told me, could not have thought of any more appropriate, more truly loving, words to which 'Sévigné and Beausergent' might have set their signatures. He was not afraid to make fun of my weaknesses — which he had discerned with an acuteness that made her smile — but as she herself would have done, lovingly, at the same time extolling my good qualities with a warmth, an impulsive freedom that shewed no sign of the reserve, the coldness by means of which young men of his age are apt to suppose that they give themselves importance. And he shewed in forestalling every discomfort, however slight, in covering my legs if the day had turned cold without my noticing it, in arranging (without telling me) to stay later with me in the evening if he thought that I was depressed or felt unwell, a vigilance which, from the point of view of my health, for which a more hardening discipline would perhaps have been better, my grandmother found almost excessive, though as a proof of his affection for myself she was deeply touched by it.

It was promptly settled between us that he and I were to be great friends for ever, and he would say 'our friendship' as though he were speaking of some important and delightful thing which had an existence independent of ourselves, and which he soon called — not counting his love for his mistress — the great joy of his life. These words made me rather uncomfortable and I was at a loss for an answer, for I did not feel when I was with him and talked to him — and no doubt it would have been the same with everyone else — any of that happiness which it was, on the other hand, possible for me to experience when I was by myself. For alone, at times, I felt surging from the depths of my being one or other of those impressions which gave me a delicious sense of comfort. But as soon as I was with some one else, when I began to talk to a friend, my mind at once 'turned about,' it was towards the listener and not myself that it directed its thoughts, and when they followed this outward course they brought me no pleasure. Once I had left Saint-Loup, I managed, with the help of words, to put more or less in order the confused minutes that I had spent with him; I told myself that I had a good friend, that a good friend was a rare thing, and I tasted, when I felt myself surrounded by 'goods' that were difficult to acquire, what was precisely the opposite of the pleasure that was natural to me, the opposite of the pleasure of having extracted from myself and brought to light something that was hidden in my inner darkness. If I had spent two or three hours in conversation with Saint-Loup, and he had expressed his admiration of what I had

said to him, I felt a sort of remorse, or regret, or weariness at not having been left alone and ready, at last, to begin my work. But I told myself that one is not given intelligence for one's own benefit only, that the greatest of men have longed for appreciation, that I could not regard as wasted hours in which I had built up an exalted idea of myself in the mind of my friend; I had no difficulty in persuading myself that I ought to be happy in consequence, and I hoped all the more anxiously that this happiness might never be taken from me simply because I had not yet been conscious of it. We fear more than the loss of everything else the disappearance of the 'goods' that have remained beyond our reach, because our heart has not taken possession of them. I felt that I was capable of exemplifying the virtues of friendship better than most people (because I should always place the good of my friends before those personal interests to which other people were devoted but which did not count for me), but not of finding happiness in a feeling which, instead of multiplying the differences that there were between my nature and those of other people — as there are among all of us — would cancel them. At the same time my mind was distinguishing in Saint-Loup a personality more collective than his own, that of the 'noble'; which like an indwelling spirit moved his limbs, ordered his gestures and his actions; then, at such moments, although in his company, I was as much alone as I should have been gazing at a landscape the harmony of which I could understand. He was no more then than an object the properties of which, in my musing contemplations, I sought to explore. The perpetual discovery in him of this pre-existent, this aeonial creature, this aristocrat who was just what Robert aspired not to be, gave me a keen delight, but one that was intellectual and not social. In the moral and physical agility which gave so much grace to his kindnesses, in the ease with which he offered my grandmother his carriage and made her get into it, in the alacrity with which he sprang from the box, when he was afraid that I might be cold, to spread his own cloak over my shoulders, I felt not only the inherited litheness of the mighty hunters who had been for generations the ancestors of this young man who made no pretence save to intellectuality, their scorn of wealth which, subsisting in him side by side with his enjoyment of it simply because it enabled him to entertain his friends more lavishly, made him so carelessly shower his riches at their feet; I felt in him especially the certainty or the illusion in the minds of those great lords of being 'better than other people,' thanks to which they had not been able to hand down to Saint-Loup that anxiety to shew that one is 'just as good that dread of seeming inferior, of which he was indeed wholly unconscious, but which mars with so much ugliness, so much

awkwardness, the most sincere overtures of a plebeian. Sometimes I found fault with myself for thus taking pleasure in my friend as in a work of art, that is to say in regarding the play of all the parts of his being as harmoniously ordered by a general idea from which they depended but which he did not know, so that it added nothing to his own good qualities, to that personal value, intellectual and moral, to which he attached so high a price.

And yet that idea was to a certain extent their determining cause. It was because he was a gentleman that that mental activity, those socialist aspirations, which made him seek the company of young students, arrogant and ill-dressed, connoted in him something really pure and disinterested which was not to be found in them. Looking upon himself as the heir of an ignorant and selfish caste, he was sincerely anxious that they should forgive in him that aristocratic origin which they, on the contrary, found irresistibly attractive and on account of which they sought to know him, though with a show of coldness and indeed of insolence towards him. He was thus led to make advances to people from whom my parents, faithful to the sociological theories of Combray, would have been stupefied at his not turning away in disgust. One day when we were sitting on the sands, Saint-Loup and I, we heard issuing from a canvas tent against which we were leaning a torrent of imprecation against the swarm of Israelites that infested Balbec. “You can’t go a yard without meeting them,” said the voice. “I am not in principle irremediably hostile to the Jewish nation, but here there is a plethora of them. You hear nothing but, ‘I thay, Apraham, I’ve chust theen Chacop.’ You would think you were in the Rue d’Abou-kir.” The man who thus inveighed against Israel emerged at last from the tent; we raised our eyes to behold this anti-Semite. It was my old friend Bloch. Saint-Loup at once begged me to remind him that they had met before the Board of Examiners, when Bloch had carried off the prize of honour, and since then at a popular university course.

At the most I may have smiled now and then, to discover in Robert the marks of his Jesuit schooling, in the awkwardness which the fear of hurting people’s feelings at once created in him whenever one of his intellectual friends made a social error, did something silly to which Saint-Loup himself attached no importance but felt that the other would have blushed if anybody had noticed it. And it was Robert who used to blush as though it had been he that was to blame, for instance on the day when Bloch, after promising to come and see him at the hotel, went on:

“As I cannot endure to be kept waiting among all the false splendour of these great caravanserais, and the Hungarian band would make me ill, you must

tell the ‘lighft-boy’ to make them shut up, and to let you know at once.”

Personally, I was not particularly anxious that Bloch should come to the hotel. He was at Balbec not by himself, unfortunately, but with his sisters, and they in turn had innumerable relatives and friends staying there. Now this Jewish colony was more picturesque than pleasant. Balbec was in this respect like such countries as Russia or Rumania, where the geography books teach us that the Israelite population does not enjoy anything approaching the same esteem and has not reached the same stage of assimilation as, for instance, in Paris. Always together, with no blend of any other element, when the cousins and uncles of Bloch or their coreligionists male or female repaired to the Casino, the ladies to dance, the gentlemen branching off towards the baccarat-tables, they formed a solid troop, homogeneous within itself, and utterly dissimilar to the people who watched them go past and found them there again every year without ever exchanging a word or a sign with them, whether these were on the Cambremers’ list, or the presiding magistrate’s little group, professional or ‘business’ people, or even simple corn-chandlers from Paris, whose daughters, handsome, proud, derisive and French as the statues at Rheims, would not care to mix with that horde of ill-bred tomboys, who carried their zeal for ‘seaside fashions’ so far as to be always apparently on their way home from shrimping or out to dance the tango. As for the men, despite the brilliance of their dinner-jackets and patent-leather shoes, the exaggeration of their type made one think of what people call the ‘intelligent research’ of painters who, having to illustrate the Gospels or the Arabian Nights, consider the country in which the scenes are laid, and give to Saint Peter or to Ali-Baba the identical features of the heaviest ‘punter’ at the Balbec tables. Bloch introduced his sisters, who, though he silenced their chatter with the utmost rudeness, screamed with laughter at the mildest sallies of this brother, their blindly worshipped idol. So that it is probable that this set of people contained, like every other, perhaps more than any other, plenty of attractions, merits and virtues. But in order to experience these, one had first to penetrate its enclosure. Now it was not popular; it could feel this; it saw in its unpopularity the mark of an anti-semitism to which it presented a bold front in a compact and closed phalanx into which, as it happened, no one ever dreamed of trying to make his way.

At his use of the word ‘lighft’ I had all the less reason to be surprised in that, a few days before, Bloch having asked me why I had come to Balbec (although it seemed to him perfectly natural that he himself should be there) and whether it had been “in the hope of making grand friends,” when I had explained to him

that this visit was a fulfilment of one of my earliest longings, though one not so deep as my longing to see Venice, he had replied: “Yes, of course, to sip iced drinks with the pretty ladies, while you pretend to be reading the *Stones of Venighce*, by Lord John Ruskin, a dreary shaver, in fact one of the most garrulous old barbers that you could find.” So that Bloch evidently thought that in England not only were all the inhabitants of the male sex called ‘Lord,’ but the letter ‘i’ was invariably pronounced ‘igh.’ As for Saint-Loup, this mistake in pronunciation seemed to him all the less serious inasmuch as he saw in it pre-eminently a want of those almost ‘society’ notions which my new friend despised as fully as he was versed in them. But the fear lest Bloch, discovering one day that one says ‘Venice’ and that Ruskin was not a lord, should retrospectively imagine that Robert had been laughing at him, made the latter feel as guilty as if he had been found wanting in the indulgence with which, as we have seen, he overflowed, so that the blush which would no doubt one day dye the cheek of Bloch on the discovery of his error, Robert already, by anticipation and reflex action, could feel mounting to his own. For he fully believed that Bloch attached more importance than he to this mistake. Which Bloch proved to be true some time later, when he heard me pronounce the word ‘lift,’ by breaking in with:

“Oh, you say ‘lift,’ do you?” And then, in a dry and lofty tone: “Not that it is of the slightest importance.” A phrase that is like a reflex action of the body, the same in all men whose self-esteem is great, in the gravest circumstances as well as in the most trivial, betraying there as clearly as on this occasion how important the thing in question seems to him who declares that it is of no importance; a tragic phrase at times, the first to escape (and then how heart-breaking) the lips of every man at all proud from whom we have just taken the last hope to which he still clung by refusing to do him a service. “Oh, well, it’s not of the slightest importance; I shall make some other arrangement:” the other arrangement which it is not of the slightest importance that he should be driven to adopt being often suicide.

Apart from this, Bloch made me the prettiest speeches. He was certainly anxious to be on the best of terms with me. And yet he asked me: “Is it because you’ve taken a fancy to raise yourself to the peerage that you run after de Saint-Loup-en-Bray? You must be going through a fine crisis of snobbery. Tell me, are you a snob? I think so, what?” Not that his desire to be friendly had suddenly changed. But what is called, in not too correct language, ‘ill breeding’ was his defect, and therefore the defect which he was bound to overlook, all the more

that by which he did not believe that other people could be shocked. In the human race the frequency of the virtues that are identical in us all is not more wonderful than the multiplicity of the defects that are peculiar to each one of us. Undoubtedly, it is not common sense that is “the commonest thing in the world”; but human kindness. In the most distant, the most desolate ends of the earth, we marvel to see it blossom of its own accord, as in a remote valley a poppy like the poppies in the world beyond, poppies which it has never seen as it has never known aught but the wind that, now and again, stirring the folds of its scarlet cloak, disturbs its solitude. Even if this human kindness, paralysed by self-interest, is not exercised, it exists none the less, and whenever any inconstant egoist does not restrain its action, when, for example, he is reading a novel or a newspaper, it will bud, blossom, grow, even in the heart of him who, cold-blooded in real life, has retained a tender heart, as a lover of fiction, for the weak, the righteous and the persecuted. But the variety of our defects is no less remarkable than the similarity of our virtues. Each of us has his own, so much so that to continue loving him we are obliged not to take them into account but to ignore them and look only to the rest of his character. The most perfect person in the world has a certain defect which shocks us or makes us angry. One man is of rare intelligence, sees everything from an exalted angle, never speaks evil of anyone, but will pocket and forget letters of supreme importance which it was he himself who asked you to let him post for you, and will then miss a vital engagement without offering you any excuse, with a smile, because he prides himself upon never knowing the time. Another is so refined, so gentle, so delicate in his conduct that he never says anything about you before your face except what you are glad to hear; but you feel that he refrains from uttering, that he keeps buried in his heart, where they grow bitter, very different opinions, and the pleasure that he derives from seeing you is so dear to him that he will let you faint with exhaustion sooner than leave you to yourself. A third has more sincerity, but carries it so far that he feels bound to let you know, when you have pleaded the state of your health as an excuse for not having been to see him, that you were seen going to the theatre and were reported to be looking well, or else that he has not been able to profit entirely by the action which you have taken on his behalf, which, by the way, three other of his friends had already offered to take, so that he is only moderately indebted to you. In similar circumstances the previous friend would have pretended not to know that you had gone to the theatre, or that other people could have done him the same service. But this last friend feels himself obliged to repeat or to reveal to somebody the very thing that

is most likely to give offence; is delighted with his own frankness and tells you, emphatically: “I am like that.” While others infuriate you by their exaggerated curiosity, or by a want of curiosity so absolute that you can speak to them of the most sensational happenings without their grasping what it is all about; and others again take months to answer you if your letter has been about something that concerns yourself and not them, or else, if they write that they are coming to ask you for something and you dare not leave the house for fear of missing them, do not appear, but leave you in suspense for weeks because, not having received from you the answer which their letter did not in the least ‘expect,’ they have concluded that you must be cross with them. And others, considering their own wishes and not yours, talk to you without letting you get a word in if they are in good spirits and want to see you, however urgent the work you may have in hand, but if they feel exhausted by the weather or out of humour, you cannot get a word out of them, they meet your efforts with an inert languor and no more take the trouble to reply, even in monosyllables, to what you say to them than if they had not heard you. Each of our friends has his defects so markedly that to continue to love him we are obliged to seek consolation for those defects — in the thought of his talent, his goodness, his affection for ourself — or rather to leave them out of account, and for that we need to display all our good will. Unfortunately our obliging obstinacy in refusing to see the defect in our friend is surpassed by the obstinacy with which he persists in that defect, from his own blindness to it or the blindness that he attributes to other people. For he does not notice it himself, or imagines that it is not noticed. Since the risk of giving offence arises principally from the difficulty of appreciating what does and what does not pass unperceived, we ought, at least, from prudence, never to speak of ourselves, because that is a subject on which we may be sure that other people’s views are never in accordance with our own. If we find as many surprises as on visiting a house of plain exterior which inside is full of hidden treasures, torture-chambers, skeletons, when we discover the true lives of other people, the real beneath the apparent universe, we are no less surprised if, in place of the image that we have made of ourself with the help of all the things that people have said to us, we learn from the terms in which they speak of us in our absence what an entirely different image they have been carrying in their own minds of us and of our life. So that whenever we have spoken about ourselves, we may be sure that our inoffensive and prudent words, listened to with apparent politeness and hypocritical approbation, have given rise afterwards to the most exasperated or the most mirthful, but in either case the least favourable, criticism. The least risk

that we run is that of irritating people by the disproportion that there is between our idea of ourselves and the words that we use, a disproportion which as a rule makes people's talk about themselves as ludicrous as the performances of those self-styled music-lovers who when they feel the need to hum a favourite melody compensate for the inadequacy of their inarticulate murmurings by a strenuous mimicry and a look of admiration which is hardly justified by all that they let us hear. And to the bad habit of speaking about oneself and one's defects there must be added, as part of the same thing, that habit of denouncing in other people defects precisely analogous to one's own. For it is always of those defects that people speak, as though it were a way of speaking about oneself, indirectly, which added to the pleasure of absolution that of confession. Besides it seems that our attention, always attracted by what is characteristic of ourselves, notices that more than anything else in other people. One short-sighted man says of another: "But he can scarcely open his eyes!"; a consumptive has his doubts as to the pulmonary integrity of the most robust; an unwashed man speaks only of the baths that other people do not take; an evil-smelling man insists that other people smell; a cuckold sees cuckolds everywhere, a light woman light women, a snob snobs. Then, too, every vice, like every profession, requires and trains a special knowledge which we are never loath to display. The invert detects and denounces inverts; the tailor asked out to dine, before he has begun to talk to you, has passed judgment on the cloth of your coat, which his fingers are itching to feel, and if after a few words of conversation you were to ask a dentist what he really thought of you, he would tell you how many of your teeth wanted filling. To him nothing appears more important, nor more absurd to you who have noticed his own. And it is not only when we speak of ourselves that we imagine other people to be blind; we behave as though they were. On every one of us there is a special god in attendance who hides from him or promises him the concealment from other people of his defect, just as he stops the eyes and nostrils of people who do not wash to the streaks of dirt which they carry in their ears and the smell of sweat which emanates from their armpits, and assures them that they can with impunity carry both of these about a world that will notice nothing. And those who wear artificial pearls, or give them as presents, imagine that people will take them to be genuine. Bloch was ill-bred, neurotic, a snob, and, since he belonged to a family of little repute, had to support, as on the floor of ocean, the incalculable pressure that was imposed on him not only by the Christians upon the surface but by all the intervening layers of Jewish castes superior to his own, each of them crushing with its contempt the one that was

immediately beneath it. To carve his way through to the open air by raising himself from Jewish family to Jewish family would have taken Bloch many thousands of years. It was better worth his while to seek an outlet in another direction.

When Bloch spoke to me of the crisis of snobbery through which I must be passing, and bade me confess that I was a snob, I might well have replied: “If I were, I should not be going about with you.” I said merely that he was not being very polite. Then he tried to apologise, but in the way that is typical of the ill-bred man who is only too glad to hark back to whatever it was if he can find an opportunity to aggravate his offence. “Forgive me,” he used now to plead, whenever we met, “I have vexed you, tormented you; I have been wantonly mischievous. And yet — man in general and your friend in particular is so singular an animal — you cannot imagine the affection that I, I who tease you so cruelly, have for you. It carries me often, when I think of you, to tears.” And he gave an audible sob.

What astonished me more in Bloch than his bad manners was to find how the quality of his conversation varied. This youth, so hard to please that of authors who were at the height of their fame he would say: “He’s a gloomy idiot; he’s a sheer imbecile,” would every now and then tell, with immense gusto, stories that were simply not funny or would instance as a ‘really remarkable person’ some man who was completely insignificant. This double scale of measuring the wit, the worth, the interest of people continued to puzzle me until I was introduced to M. Bloch, senior.

I had not supposed that we should ever be allowed to know him, for Bloch junior had spoken ill of me to Saint-Loup and of Saint-Loup to me. In particular, he had said to Robert that I was (always) a frightful snob. “Yes, really, he is overjoyed at knowing M. LLLLegrandin.” This trick of isolating a word, was, in Bloch, a sign at once of irony and of learning. Saint-Loup, who had never heard the name of Legrandin, was bewildered. “But who is he?” “Oh, he’s a bit of all right, he is!” Bloch laughed, thrusting his hands into his pockets as though for warmth, convinced that he was at that moment engaged in contemplation of the picturesque aspect of an extraordinary country gentleman compared to whom those of Barbey d’Aurevilly were as nothing. He consoled himself for his inability to portray M. Legrandin by giving him a string of capital L’s, smacking his lips over the name as over a wine from the farthest bin. But these subjective enjoyments remained hidden from other people. If he spoke ill of me to Saint-Loup he made up for it by speaking no less ill of Saint-Loup to me. We had each

of us learned these slanders in detail, the next day, not that we repeated them to each other, a thing which would have seemed to us very wrong, but to Bloch appeared so natural and almost inevitable that in his natural anxiety, in the certainty moreover that he would be telling us only what each of us was bound sooner or later to know, he preferred to anticipate the disclosure and, taking Saint-Loup aside, admitted that he had spoken ill of him, on purpose, so that it might be repeated to him, swore to him “by Zeus Kronion, binder of oaths” that he loved him dearly, that he would lay down his life for him; and wiped away a tear. The same day, he contrived to see me alone, made his confession, declared that he had acted in my interest, because he felt that a certain kind of social intercourse was fatal to me and that I was ‘worthy of better things.’ Then, clasping me by the hand, with the sentimentality of a drunkard, albeit his drunkenness was purely nervous: “Believe me,” he said, “and may the black Ker seize me this instant and bear me across the portals of Hades, hateful to men, if yesterday, when I thought of you, of Combray, of my boundless affection for you, of afternoon hours in class which you do not even remember, I did not lie awake weeping all night long. Yes, all night long, I swear it, and alas, I know — for I know the human soul — you will not believe me.” I did indeed ‘not believe’ him, and to his words which, I felt, he was making up on the spur of the moment, and expanding as he went on, his swearing ‘by Ker’ added no great weight, the Hellenic cult being in Bloch purely literary. Besides, whenever he began to grow sentimental and wished his hearer to grow sentimental over a falsehood, he would say: “I swear it,” more for the hysterical satisfaction of lying than to make people think that he was speaking the truth. I did not believe what he was saying, but I bore him no ill-will for that, for I had inherited from my mother and grandmother their incapacity for resentment even of far worse offenders, and their habit of never condemning anyone.

Besides, he was not altogether a bad youth, this Bloch; he could be, and was at times quite charming. And now that the race of Combray, the race from which sprang creatures absolutely unspoiled like my grandmother and mother, seems almost extinct, as I have hardly any choice now save between honest brutes — insensible and loyal, in whom the mere sound of their voices shews at once that they take absolutely no interest in one’s life — and another kind of men who so long as they are with one understand one, cherish one, grow sentimental even to tears, take — their revenge a few hours later by making some cruel joke at one’s expense, but return to one, always just as comprehending, as charming, as closely assimilated, for the moment, to oneself, I think that it is of this latter sort

that I prefer if not the moral worth at any rate the society.

"You cannot imagine my grief when I think of you," Bloch went on. "When you come to think of it, it is a rather Jewish side of my nature," he added ironically, contracting his pupils as though he had to prepare for the microscope an infinitesimal quantity of 'Jewish blood,' and as might (but never would) have said a great French noble who among his ancestors, all Christian, might nevertheless have included Samuel Bernard, or further still, the Blessed Virgin from whom, it is said, the Levy family claim descent, "coming out. I rather like," he continued, "to find room among my feelings for the share (not that it is more than a very tiny share) which may be ascribed to my Jewish origin." He made this statement because it seemed to him at once clever and courageous to speak the truth about his race, a truth which at the same time he managed to water down to a remarkable extent, like misers who decide to pay their debts but have not the courage to pay more than half. This kind of deceit which consists in having the boldness to proclaim the truth, but only after mixing with it an ample measure of lies which falsify it, is commoner than people think, and even among those who do not habitually practise it certain crises in life, especially those in which love is at stake, give them an opportunity of taking to it.

All these confidential diatribes by Bloch to Saint-Loup against me and to me against Saint-Loup ended in an invitation to dinner. I am by no means sure that he did not first make an attempt to secure Saint-Loup by himself. It would have been so like Bloch to do so that probably he did; but if so success did not crown his effort, for it was to myself and Saint-Loup that Bloch said one day: "Dear master, and you, O horseman beloved of Ares, de Saint-Loup-en-Bray, tamer of horses, since I have encountered you by the shore of Amphitrite, resounding with foam, hard by the tents of the swift-shipped Méniers, will both of you come to dinner any day this week with my illustrious sire, of blameless heart?" He proffered this invitation because he desired to attach himself more closely to Saint-Loup who would, he hoped, secure him the right of entry into aristocratic circles. Formed by me for myself, this ambition would have seemed to Bloch the mark of the most hideous snobbishness, quite in keeping with the opinion that he already held of a whole side of my nature which he did not regard — or at least had not hitherto regarded — as its most important side; but the same ambition in himself seemed to him the proof of a finely developed curiosity in a mind anxious to carry out certain social explorations from which he might perhaps glean some literary benefit. M. Bloch senior, when his son had told him that he was going to bring one of his friends in to dinner, and had in a sarcastic but

satisfied tone enunciated the name and title of that friend: “The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray,” had been thrown into great commotion. “The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray! I’ll be jiggered!” he had exclaimed, using the oath which was with him the strongest indication of social deference. And he cast at a son capable of having formed such an acquaintance an admiring glance which seemed to say: “Really, it is astounding. Can this prodigy be indeed a child of mine?” which gave my friend as much pleasure as if his monthly allowance had been increased by fifty francs. For Bloch was not in his element at home and felt that his father treated him like a lost sheep because of his lifelong admiration for Leconte de Lisle, Heredia and other ‘Bohemians.’ But to have got to know Saint-Loup-en-Bray, whose father had been chairman of the Suez Canal board (‘I’ll be jiggered!’) was an indisputable ‘score.’ What a pity, indeed, that they had left in Paris, for fear of its being broken on the journey, the stereoscope. Alone among men, M. Bloch senior had the art, or at least the right to exhibit it. He did this, moreover, on rare occasions only, and then to good purpose, on evenings when there was a full-dress affair, with hired waiters. So that from these exhibitions of the stereoscope there emanated, for those who were present, as it were a special distinction, a privileged position, and for the master of the house who gave them a reputation such as talent confers on a man — which could not have been greater had the photographs been taken by M. Bloch himself and the machine his own invention. “You weren’t invited to Solomon’s yesterday?” one of the family would ask another. “No! I was not one of the elect. What was on?” “Oh, a great how-d’ye-do, the stereoscope, the whole box of tricks!” “Indeed! If they had the stereoscope I’m sorry I wasn’t there; they say Solomon is quite amazing when he works it.”—”It can’t be helped;” said M. Bloch now to his son, “it’s a mistake to let him have everything at once; that would leave him nothing to look forward to.” He had actually thought, in his paternal affection and in the hope of touching his son’s heart, of sending for the instrument. But there was not time, or rather they had thought there would not be; for we were obliged to put off the dinner because Saint-Loup could not leave the hotel, where he was waiting for an uncle who was coming to spend a few days with Mme. de Villeparisis. Since — for he was greatly addicted to physical culture, and especially to long walks — it was largely on foot, spending the night in wayside farms, that this uncle was to make the journey from the country house in which he was staying, the precise date of his arrival at Balbec was by no means certain. And Saint-Loup, afraid to stir out of doors, even entrusted me with the duty of taking to Incauville, where the nearest telegraph-office was, the messages that he sent every day to his mistress.

The uncle for whom we were waiting was called Palamède, a name that had come down to him from his ancestors, the Princes of Sicily. And later on when I found, as I read history, belonging to this or that Podestà or Prince of the Church, the same Christian name, a fine renaissance medal — some said, a genuine antique — that had always remained in the family, having passed from generation to generation, from the Vatican cabinet to the uncle of my friend, I felt the pleasure that is reserved for those who, unable from lack of means to start a case of medals, or a picture gallery, look out for old names (names of localities, instructive and picturesque as an old map, a bird's-eye view, a sign-board or a return of customs; baptismal names, in which rings out and is plainly heard, in their fine French endings, the defect of speech, the intonation of a racial vulgarity, the vicious pronunciation by which our ancestors made Latin and Saxon words undergo lasting mutilations which in due course became the august law-givers of our grammar books) and, in short, by drawing upon their collections of ancient and sonorous words, give themselves concerts like the people who acquire viols da gamba and viols d'amour so as to perform the music of days gone by upon old-fashioned instruments. Saint-Loup told me that even in the most exclusive aristocratic society his uncle Palamède had the further distinction of being particularly difficult to approach, contemptuous, double-dyed in his nobility, forming with his brother's wife and a few other chosen spirits what was known as the Phoenix Club. There even his insolence was so much dreaded that it had happened more than once that people of good position who had been anxious to meet him and had applied to his own brother for an introduction had met with a refusal: "Really, you mustn't ask me to introduce you to my brother Palamède. My wife and I, we would all of us do our best for you, but it would be no good. Besides, there's always the danger of his being rude to you, and I shouldn't like that." At the Jockey Club he had, with a few of his friends, marked a list of two hundred members whom they would never allow to be introduced to them. And in the Comte de Paris's circle he was known by the nickname of 'The Prince' because of his distinction and his pride.

Saint-Loup told me about his uncle's early life, now a long time ago. Every day he used to take women to a bachelor establishment which he shared with two of his friends, as good-looking as himself, on account of which they were known as 'The Three Graces.'

"One day, a man who just now is very much in the eye, as Balzac would say, of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but who at a rather awkward period of his early life displayed odd tastes, asked my uncle to let him come to this place. But no

sooner had he arrived than it was not to the ladies but to my uncle Palamède that he began to make overtures. My uncle pretended not to understand, made an excuse to send for his two friends; they appeared on the scene, seized the offender, stripped him, thrashed him till he bled, and then with twenty degrees of frost outside kicked him into the street where he was found more dead than alive; so much so that the police started an inquiry which the poor devil had the greatest difficulty in getting them to abandon. My uncle would never go in for such drastic methods now, in fact you can't conceive the number of men of humble position that he, who is so haughty with people in society, has shewn his affection, taken under his wing, even if he is paid for it with ingratitude. It may be a servant who has looked after him in a hotel, for whom he will find a place in Paris, or a farm-labourer whom he will pay to have taught a trade. That is really the rather nice side of his character, in contrast to his social side." Saint-Loup indeed belonged to that type of young men of fashion, situated at an altitude at which it has been possible to cultivate such expressions as: "What is really rather nice about him," "His rather nice side," precious seeds which produce very rapidly a way of looking at things in which one counts oneself as nothing and the 'people' as everything; the exact opposite, in a word, of plebeian pride. "It seems, it is quite impossible to imagine how he set the tone, how he laid down the law for the whole of society when he was a young man. He acted entirely for himself; in any circumstances he did what seemed pleasing to himself, what was most convenient, but at once the snobs would start copying him. If he felt thirsty at the play, and sent out from his box for a drink, the little sitting-rooms behind all the boxes would be filled, a week later, with refreshments. One wet summer, when he had a touch of rheumatism, he ordered an ulster of a loose but warm vicuna wool, which is used only for travelling rugs, and kept the blue and orange stripes shewing. The big tailors at once received orders from all their customers for blue and orange ulsters of rough wool. If he had some reason for wishing to keep every trace of ceremony out of a dinner in a country house where he was spending the day, and to point the distinction had come without evening clothes and sat down to table in the suit he had been wearing that afternoon, it became the fashion, when you were dining in the country, not to dress. If he was eating some special sweet and instead of taking his spoon used a knife, or a special implement of his own invention which he had had made for him by a silversmith, or his fingers, it at once became wrong to eat it in any other way. He wanted once to hear some Beethoven quartets again (for with all his preposterous ideas he is no fool, mind, he has great gifts) and

arranged for some musicians to come and play them to him and a few friends once a week. The ultra-fashionable thing that season was to give quite small parties, with chamber music. I should say he's not done at all badly out of life. With his looks, he must have had any number of women! I can't tell you exactly whom, for he is very discreet. But I do know that he was thoroughly unfaithful to my poor aunt. Not that that prevented his being always perfectly charming to her, and her adoring him; he was in mourning for her for years. When he is in Paris, he still goes to the cemetery nearly every day."

The morning after Robert had told me all these things about his uncle, while he waited for him (and waited, as it happened, in vain), as I was coming by myself past the Casino on my way back to the hotel, I had the sensation of being watched by somebody who was not far off. I turned my head and saw a man of about forty, very tall and rather stout, with a very dark moustache, who, nervously slapping the leg of his trousers with a switch, kept fastened upon me a pair of eyes dilated with observation. Every now and then those eyes were shot through by a look of intense activity such as the sight of a person whom they do not know excites only in men to whom, for whatever reason, it suggests thoughts that would not occur to anyone else — madmen, for instance, or spies. He trained upon me a supreme stare at once bold, prudent, rapid and profound, like a last shot which one fires at an enemy at the moment when one turns to flee, and, after first looking all round him, suddenly adopting an absent and lofty air, by an abrupt revolution of his whole body turned to examine a playbill on the wall in the reading of which he became absorbed, while he hummed a tune and fingered the moss-rose in his buttonhole. He drew from his pocket a note-book in which he appeared to be taking down the title of the performance that was announced, looked two or three times at his watch, pulled down over his eyes a black straw hat the brim of which he extended with his hand held out over it like a visor, as though to see whether some one were at last coming, made the perfunctory gesture of annoyance by which people mean to shew that they have waited long enough, although they never make it when they are really waiting, then pushing back his hat and exposing a scalp cropped close except at the sides where he allowed a pair of waved 'pigeon's-wings' to grow quite long, he emitted the loud panting breath that people give who are not feeling too hot but would like it to be thought that they were. He gave me the impression of a 'hotel crook' who had been watching my grandmother and myself for some days, and while he was planning to rob us had just discovered that I had surprised him in the act of spying; to put me off the scent, perhaps he was seeking only, by his

new attitude, to express boredom and detachment, but it was with an exaggeration so aggressive that his object appeared to be — at least as much as the dissipating of the suspicions that I must have had of him — to avenge a humiliation which quite unconsciously I must have inflicted on him, to give me the idea not so much that he had not seen me as that I was an object of too little importance to attract his attention. He threw back his shoulders with an air of bravado, bit his lips, pushed up his moustache, and in the lens of his eyes made an adjustment of something that was indifferent, harsh, almost insulting. So effectively that the singularity of his expression made me take him at one moment for a thief and at another for a lunatic. And yet his scrupulously ordered attire was far more sober and far more simple than that of any of the summer visitors I saw at Balbec, and gave a reassurance to my own suit, so often humiliated by the dazzling and commonplace whiteness of their holiday garb. But my grandmother was coming towards me, we took a turn together, and I was waiting for her, an hour later, outside the hotel into which she had gone for a moment, when I saw emerge from it Mme. de Villeparisis with Robert de Saint-Loup and the stranger who had stared at me so intently outside the Casino. Swift as a lightning-flash his look shot through me, just as at the moment when I first noticed him, and returned, as though he had not seen me, to hover, slightly lowered, before his eyes, dulled, like the neutral look which feigns to see nothing without and is incapable of reporting anything to the mind within, the look which expresses merely the satisfaction of feeling round it the eyelids which it cleaves apart with its sanctimonious roundness, the devout, the steeped look that we see on the faces of certain hypocrites, the smug look on those of certain fools. I saw that he had changed his clothes. The suit he was wearing was darker even than the other; and no doubt this was because the true distinction in dress lies nearer to simplicity than the false; but there was something more; when one came near him one felt that if colour was almost entirely absent from these garments it was not because he who had banished it from them was indifferent to it but rather because for some reason he forbade himself the enjoyment of it. And the sobriety which they displayed seemed to be of the kind that comes from obedience to a rule of diet rather than from want of appetite. A dark green thread harmonised, in the stuff of his trousers, with the clock on his socks, with a refinement which betrayed the vivacity of a taste that was everywhere else conquered, to which this single concession had been made out of tolerance for such a weakness, while a spot of red on his necktie was imperceptible, like a liberty which one dares not take.

“How are you? Let me introduce my nephew, the Baron de Guermantes,” Mme. de Villeparisis greeted me, while the stranger without looking at me, muttering a vague “Charmed!” which he followed with a “H’m, h’m, h’m” to give his affability an air of having been forced, and doubling back his little finger, forefinger and thumb, held out to me his middle and ring fingers, the latter bare of any ring, which I clasped through his suede glove; then, without lifting his eyes to my face, he turned towards Mme. de Villeparisis.

“Good gracious; I shall be forgetting my own name next!” she exclaimed. “Here am I calling you Baron de Guermantes. Let me introduce the Baron de Charlus. After all, it’s not a very serious mistake,” she went on, “for you’re a thorough Guermantes whatever else you are.”

By this time my grandmother had reappeared, and we all set out together. Saint-Loup’s uncle declined to honour me not only with a word, with so much as a look, even, in my direction. If he stared strangers out of countenance (and during this short excursion he two or three times hurled his terrible and searching scrutiny like a sounding lead at insignificant people of obviously humble extraction who happened to pass), to make up for that he never for a moment, if I was to judge by myself, looked at the people whom he did know, just as a detective on special duty might except his personal friends from his professional vigilance. Leaving them — my grandmother, Mme. de Villeparisis and him — to talk to one another, I fell behind with Saint-Loup.

“Tell me, am I right in thinking I heard Mme. de Villeparisis say just now to your uncle that he was a Guermantes?”

“Of course he is; Palamède de Guermantes.”

“Not the same Guermantes who have a place near Combray, and claim descent from Geneviève de Brabant?”

“Most certainly: my uncle, who is the very last word in heraldry and all that sort of thing, would tell you that our ‘cry,’ our war-cry, that is to say, which was changed afterwards to ‘Passavant’ was originally ‘Combraysis,’” he said, smiling so as not to appear to be priding himself on this prerogative of a ‘cry,’ which only the semi-royal houses, the great chiefs of feudal bands enjoyed. “It’s his brother who has the place now.”

And so she was indeed related, and quite closely, to the Guermantes, this Mme. de Villeparisis who had so long been for me the lady who had given me a duck filled with chocolates, when I was little, more remote then from the Guermantes way than if she had been shut up somewhere on the Méséglise, less brilliant, less highly placed by me than was the Combray optician, and who now

suddenly went through one of those fantastic rises in value, parallel to the depreciations, no less unforeseen, of other objects in our possession, which — rise and fall alike — introduce in our youth and in those periods of our life in which a trace of youth persists changes as numerous as the Metamorphoses of Ovid.

"Haven't they got, down there, the busts of all the old lords of Guermantes?"

"Yes; and a lovely sight they are!" Saint-Loup was ironical. "Between you and me, I look on all that sort of thing as rather a joke. But they have got at Guermantes, what is a little more interesting, and, that is quite a touching portrait of my aunt by Carrière. It's as fine as Whistler or Velasquez," went on Saint-Loup, who in his neophyte zeal was not always very exact about degrees of greatness. "There are also some moving pictures by Gustave Moreau. My aunt is the niece of your friend Mme. de Ville-parisis; she was brought up by her, and married her cousin, who was a nephew, too, of my aunt Villeparisis, the present Duc de Guermantes."

"Then who is this uncle?"

"He bears the title of Baron de Charlus. Properly speaking, when my great-uncle died, my uncle Palamède ought to have taken the title of Prince des Laumes, which his brother used before he became Duc de Guermantes, for in that family they change their names as you'd change your shirt. But my uncle has peculiar ideas about all that sort of thing. And as he feels that people are rather apt to overdo the Italian Prince and Grandee of Spain business nowadays, though he had half-a-dozen titles of 'Prince' to choose from, he has remained Baron de Charlus, as a protest, and with an apparent simplicity which really covers a good deal of pride. 'In these days,' he says, 'everybody is Prince something-or-other; one really must have a title that will distinguish one; I shall call myself Prince when I wish to travel incognito.' According to him there is no older title than the Charlus barony; to prove to you that it is earlier than the Montmorency title, though they used to claim, quite wrongly, to be the premier barons of France when they were only premier in the He de France, where their fief was, my uncle will explain to you for hours on end and enjoy doing it, because, although he's a most intelligent man, really gifted, he regards that sort of thing as quite a live topic of conversation," Saint-Loup smiled again. "But as I am not like him, you mustn't ask me to talk pedigrees; I know nothing more deadly, more perishing; really, life is not long enough."

I now recognised in the hard look which had made me turn round that

morning outside the Casino the same that I had seen fixed on me at Tan-sonville, at the moment when Mme. Swann called Gilberte away.

"But, I say, all those mistresses that, you told me, your uncle M. de Charlus had had, wasn't Mme. Swann one of them?"

"Good lord, no! That is to say, my uncle's a great friend of Swann, and has always stood up for him. But no one has ever suggested that he was his wife's lover. You would make a great sensation in Paris society if people thought you believed that."

I dared not reply that it would have caused an even greater sensation in Combray society if people had thought that I did not believe it.

My grandmother was delighted with M. de Charlus. No doubt he attached an extreme importance to all questions of birth and social position, and my grandmother had remarked this, but without any trace of that severity which as a rule embodies a secret envy and the annoyance of seeing some one else enjoy an advantage which one would like but cannot oneself possess. As on the other hand my grandmother, content with her lot and never for a moment regretting that she did not move in a more brilliant sphere, employed only her intellect in observing the eccentricities of M. de Charlus, she spoke of Saint-Loup's uncle with that detached, smiling, almost affectionate kindness with which we reward the object of our disinterested study for the pleasure that it has given us, all the more that this time the object was a person with regard to whom she found that his if not legitimate, at any rate picturesque pretensions shewed him in vivid contrast to the people whom she generally had occasion to see. But it was especially in consideration of his intelligence and sensibility, qualities which it was easy to see that M. de Charlus, unlike so many of the people in society whom Saint-Loup derided, possessed in a marked degree, that my grandmother had so readily forgiven him his aristocratic prejudice. And yet this had not been sacrificed by the uncle, as it was by the nephew, to higher qualities. Rather, M. de Charlus had reconciled it with them. Possessing, by virtue of his descent from the Ducs de Nemours and Princes de Lamballe, documents, furniture, tapestries, portraits painted for his ancestors by Raphael, Velasquez, Boucher, justified in saying that he was visiting a museum and a matchless library when he was merely turning over his family relics at home, he placed in the rank from which his nephew had degraded it the whole heritage of the aristocracy. Perhaps also, being less metaphysical than Saint-Loup, less satisfied with words, more of a realist in his study of men, he did not care to neglect a factor that was essential to his prestige in their eyes and, if it gave certain disinterested pleasures to his

imagination, could often be a powerfully effective aid to his utilitarian activities. No agreement can ever be reached between men of his sort and those who obey the ideal within them which urges them to strip themselves bare of such advantages so that they may seek only to realise that ideal, similar in that respect to the painters, the writers who renounce their virtuosity, the artistic peoples who modernise themselves, warrior peoples who take the initiative in a move for universal disarmament, absolute governments which turn democratic and repeal their harsh laws, though as often as not the sequel fails to reward their noble effort; for the men lose their talent, the nations their secular predominance; 'pacificism' often multiplies wars and indulgence criminality. If Saint-Loup's efforts towards sincerity and emancipation were only to be commended as most noble, to judge by their visible result, one could still be thankful that they had failed to bear fruit in M. de Charlus, who had transferred to his own home much of the admirable panelling from the Guermantes house, instead of substituting, like his nephew, a 'modern style' of decoration, employing Lebourg or Guillaumin. It was none the less true that M. de Charlus's ideal was highly artificial, and, if the epithet can be applied to the word ideal, as much social as artistic. In certain women of great beauty and rare culture whose ancestresses, two centuries earlier, had shared in all the glory and grace of the old order, he found a distinction which made him take pleasure only in their society, and no doubt the admiration for them which he had protested was sincere, but countless reminiscences; historical and artistic, called forth by their names, entered into and formed a great part of it, just as suggestions of classical antiquity are one of the reasons for the pleasure which a booklover finds in reading an Ode of Horace that is perhaps inferior to poems of our own day which would leave the same booklover cold. Any of these women by the side of a pretty commoner was for him what are, hanging beside a contemporary canvas representing a procession or a wedding, those old pictures the history of which we know, from the Pope or King who ordered them, through the hands of people whose acquisition of them, by gift, purchase, conquest or inheritance, recalls to us some event or at least some alliance of historic interest, and consequently some knowledge that we ourselves have acquired, gives it a fresh utility, increases our sense of the richness of the possessions of our memory or of our erudition. M. de Charlus might be thankful that a prejudice similar to his own, by preventing these several great ladies from mixing with women whose blood was less pure, presented them for his veneration unspoiled, in their unaltered nobility, like an eighteenth-century house-front supported on its flat columns of pink marble, in which the

passage of time has wrought no change.

M. de Charlus praised the true ‘nobility’ of mind and heart which characterised these women, playing upon the word in a double sense by which he himself was taken in, and in which lay the falsehood of this bastard conception, of this medley of aristocracy, generosity and art, but also its seductiveness, dangerous to people like my grandmother, to whom the less refined but more innocent prejudice of a nobleman who cared only about quarterings and took no thought for anything besides would have appeared too silly for words, whereas she was defenceless as soon as a thing presented itself under the externals of a mental superiority, so much so, indeed, that she regarded Princes as enviable above all other men because they were able to have a Labruyère, a Fénelon as their tutors. Outside the Grand Hotel the three Guermantes left us; they were going to luncheon with the Princesse de Luxembourg. While my grandmother was saying good-bye to Mme. de Villcparisis and Saint-Loup to my grandmother, M. de Charlus who, so far, had not uttered a word to me, drew back a little way from the group and, when he reached my side, said: “I shall be taking tea this evening after dinner in my aunt Villeparisis’s room; I hope that you will give me the pleasure of seeing you there, and your grandmother.” With which he rejoined the Marquise.

Although it was Sunday there were no more carriages waiting outside the hotel now than at the beginning of the season. The solicitor’s wife, in particular, had decided that it was not worth the expense of hiring one every time simply because she was not going to the Cambremers’, and contented herself with staying in her room.

“Is Mme. Blandais not well?” her husband was asked. “We haven’t seen her all day.”

“She has a slight headache; it’s the heat, there’s thunder coming. The least thing upsets her; but I expect you will see her this evening; I’ve told her she ought to come down. It can’t do her any harm.”

I had supposed that in thus inviting us to take tea with his aunt, whom I never doubted that he would have warned that we were coming, M. de Charlus wished to make amends for the impoliteness which he had shewn me during our walk that morning. But when, on our entering Mme. de Villeparisis’s room, I attempted to greet her nephew, even although I walked right round him, while in shrill accents he was telling a somewhat spiteful story about one of his relatives, I did not succeed in catching his eye; I decided to say “Good evening” to him, and fairly loud, to warn him of my presence; but I realised that he had observed

it, for before ever a word had passed my lips, just as I began to bow to him, I saw his two fingers stretched out for me to shake without his having turned to look at me or paused in his story. He had evidently seen me, without letting it appear that he had, and I noticed then that his eyes, which were never fixed on the person to whom he was speaking, strayed perpetually in all directions, like those of certain animals when they are frightened, or those of street hawkers who, while they are bawling their patter and displaying their illicit merchandise, keep a sharp look-out, though without turning their heads, on the different points of the horizon from any of which may appear, suddenly, the police. At the same time I was a little surprised to find that Mme. de Villeparisis, while glad to see us, did not seem to have been expecting us, and I was still more surprised to hear M. de Charlus say to my grandmother: “Ah! that was a capital idea of yours to come and pay us a visit; charming of them, is it not, my dear aunt?” No doubt he had noticed his aunt’s surprise at our entry and thought, as a man accustomed to set the tone, to strike the right note, that it would be enough to transform that surprise into joy were he to shew that he himself felt it, that it was indeed the feeling which our arrival there ought to have prompted. In which he calculated wisely; for Mme. de Villeparisis, who had a high opinion of her nephew and knew how difficult it was to please him, appeared suddenly to have found new attractions in my grandmother and continued to make much of her. But I failed to understand how M. de Charlus could, in the space of a few hours, have forgotten the invitation — so curt but apparently so intentional, so premeditated — which he had addressed to me that same morning, or why he called a ‘capital idea’ on my grandmother’s part an idea that had been entirely his own. With a scruple of accuracy which I retained until I had reached the age at which I realised that it is not by asking him questions that one learns the truth of what another man has had in his mind, and that the risk of a misunderstanding which will probably pass unobserved is less than that which may come from a purblind insistence: “But, sir,” I reminded him, “you remember, surely, that it was you who asked me if we would come in this evening?” Not a sound, not a movement betrayed that M. de Charlus had so much as heard my question. Seeing which I repeated it, like a diplomat, or like young men after a misunderstanding who endeavour, with untiring and unrewarded zeal, to obtain an explanation which their adversary is determined not to give them. Still M. de Charlus answered me not a word. I seemed to see hovering upon his lips the smile of those who from a great height pass judgment on the characters and breeding of their inferiors.

Since he refused to give any explanation, I tried to provide one for myself,

but succeeded only in hesitating between several, none of which could be the right one. Perhaps he did not remember, or perhaps it was I who had failed to understand what he had said to me that morning.... More probably, in his pride, he did not wish to appear to have sought to attract people whom he despised, and preferred to cast upon them the responsibility for their intrusion. But then, if he despised us, why had he been so anxious that we should come, or rather that my grandmother should come, for of the two of us it was to her alone that he spoke that evening, and never once to me. Talking with the utmost animation to her, as also to Mme. de Villeparisis, hiding, so to speak, behind them, as though he were seated at the back of a theatre-box, he contented himself, turning from them every now and then the exploring gaze of his penetrating eyes, with fastening it on my face, with the same gravity, the same air of preoccupation as if my face had been a manuscript difficult to decipher.

No doubt, if he had not had those eyes, the face of M. de Charlus would have been similar to the faces of many good-looking men. And when Saint-Loup, speaking to me of various other Guermantes, on a later occasion, said: “Gad, they’ve not got that thoroughbred air, of being gentlemen to their finger-tips, that uncle Palamède has!” confirming my suspicion that a thoroughbred air and aristocratic distinction were not anything mysterious and new but consisted in elements which I had recognised without difficulty and without receiving any particular impression from them, I was to feel that another of my illusions had been shattered. But that face, to which a faint layer of powder gave almost the appearance of a face on the stage, in vain might M. de Charlus hermetically seal its expression; his eyes were like two crevices, two loopholes which alone he had failed to stop, and through which, according to where one stood or sat in relation to him, one felt suddenly flash across one the glow of some internal engine which seemed to offer no reassurance even to him who without being altogether master of it must carry it inside him, at an unstable equilibrium and always on the point of explosion; and the circumspect and unceasingly restless expression of those eyes, with all the signs of exhaustion which, extending from them to a pair of dark rings quite low down upon his cheeks, were stamped on his face, however carefully he might compose and regulate it, made one think of some *incognito*, some disguise assumed by a powerful mam in danger, or merely by a dangerous — but tragic — person. I should have liked to divine what was this secret which other men did not carry in their breasts and which had already made M. de Charlus’s gaze so enigmatic to me when I had seen him that morning outside the Casino. But with what I now knew of his family I could no

longer believe that they were the eyes of a thief, nor, after what I had heard of his conversation, could I say that they were those of a madman. If he was cold with me, while making himself agreeable to my grandmother, that arose perhaps not from a personal antipathy for, generally speaking, just as he was kindly disposed towards women, of whose faults he used to speak without, as a rule, any narrowing of the broadest tolerance, so he shewed with regard to men, and especially young men, a hatred so violent as to suggest that of certain extreme misogynists for women. Two or three 'carpet-knights,' relatives or intimate friends of Saint-Loup who happened to mention their names, M. de Charlus, with an almost ferocious expression, in sharp contrast to his usual coldness, called: "Little cads!" I gathered that the particular fault which he found in the young men of the period was their extreme effeminacy. "They're absolute women," he said with scorn. But what life would not have appeared effeminate beside that which he expected a man to lead, and never found energetic or virile enough? (He himself, when he walked across country, after long hours on the road would plunge his heated body into frozen streams.) He would not even allow a man to wear a single ring. But this profession of virility did not prevent his having also the most delicate sensibilities. When Mme. de Villeparisis asked him to describe to my grandmother some country house in which Mme. de Sévigné had stayed, adding that she could not help feeling that there was something rather 'literary' about that lady's distress at being parted from "that tiresome Mme. de Grignan":

"On the contrary," he retorted, "I can think of nothing more true. Besides, it was a time in which feelings of that sort were thoroughly understood. The inhabitant of Lafontaine's Monomotapa, running to see his friend who had appeared to him in a dream, and had looked sad, the pigeon finding that the greatest of evils is the absence of the other pigeon, seem to you perhaps, my dear aunt, as exaggerated as Mme. de Sévigné's impatience for the moment when she will be alone with her daughter. It is so fine what she says when she leaves her: 'This parting gives a pain to my soul which I feel like an ache in my body. In absence one is liberal with the hours. One anticipates a time for which one is longing.'" My grandmother was in ecstasies at hearing the Letters thus spoken of, exactly as she would have spoken of them herself. She was astonished that a man could understand them so thoroughly. She found in M. de Charlus a delicacy, a sensibility that were quite feminine. We said to each other afterwards, when we were by ourselves and began to discuss him together, that he must have come under the strong influence of a woman, his mother, or in later life his

daughter if he had any children. “A mistress, perhaps,” I thought to myself, remembering the influence that Saint-Loup’s seemed to have had over him, which enabled me to realise the point to which men can be refined by the women with whom they live.

“Once she was with her daughter, he had probably nothing to say to her,” put in Mme. de Villeparisis.

“Most certainly she had: if it was only what she calls ‘things so slight that nobody else would notice them but you and me.’ And anyhow she was with her. And Labruyère tells us that that is everything. ‘To be with the people one loves, to speak to them, not to speak to them, it is all the same.’ He is right; that is the only form of happiness,” added M. de Charlus in a mournful voice, “and that happiness — alas, life is so ill arranged that one very rarely tastes it; Mme. de Sévigné was after all less to be pitied than most of us. She spent a great part of her life with the person whom she loved.”

“You forget that it was not ‘love’ in her case; the person was her daughter.”

“But what matters in life is not whom or what one loves,” he went on, in a judicial, peremptory, almost a cutting tone; “it is the fact of loving. What Mme. de Sévigné felt for her daughter has a far better claim to rank with the passion that Racine described in *Andromaque* or *Phèdre* than the commonplace relations young Sévigné had with his mistresses. It’s the same with a mystic’s love for his God. The hard and fast lines with which we circumscribe love arise solely from our complete ignorance of life.”

“You think all that of *Andromaque* and *Phèdre*, do you?” Saint-Loup asked his uncle in a faintly contemptuous tone. “There is more truth in a single tragedy of Racine than in all the dramatic works of Monsieur Victor Hugo,” replied M. de Charlus. “People really are overwhelming,” Saint-Loup murmured in my ear. “Preferring Racine to Victor, you may say what you like, it’s epoch-making!” He was genuinely distressed by his uncle’s words, but the satisfaction of saying “you may say what you like” and, better still, “epoch-making” consoled him.

In these reflexions upon the sadness of having to live apart from the person whom one loves (which were to lead my grandmother to say to me that Mme. de Villeparisis’s nephew understood certain things quite as well as his aunt, but in a different way, and moreover had something about him that set him far above the average clubman) M. de Charlus not only allowed a refinement of feeling to appear such as men rarely shew; his voice itself, like certain contralto voices which have not been properly trained to the right pitch, so that when they sing it sounds like a duet between a young man and a woman, singing alternately,

mounted, when he expressed these delicate sentiments, to its higher notes, took on an unexpected sweetness and seemed to be embodying choirs of betrothed maidens, of sisters, who poured out the treasures of their love. But the bevy of young girls, whom M. de Charlus in his horror of every kind of effeminacy would have been so distressed to learn that he gave the impression of sheltering thus within his voice, did not confine themselves to the interpretation, the modulation of scraps of sentiment. Often while M. de Charlus was talking one could hear their laughter, shrill, fresh laughter of school-girls or coquettes quizzing their partners with all the archness of clever tongues and pretty wits.

He told us how a house that had belonged to his family, in which Marie Antoinette had slept, with a park laid out by Lenôtre, was now in the hands of the Israels, the wealthy financiers, who had bought it. “Israel — at least that is the name these people go by, which seems to me a generic, a racial term rather than a proper name. One cannot tell; possibly people of that sort do not have names, and are designated only by the collective title of the tribe to which they belong. It is of no importance! But fancy, after being a home of the Guermantes, to belong to Israels!!!” His voice rose. “It reminds me of a room in the Château of Blois where the caretaker who was shewing me over said: ‘This is where Mary Stuart used to say her prayers; I use it to keep my brooms in.’ Naturally I wish to know nothing more of this house that has let itself be dishonoured, any more than of my cousin Clara de Chimay after she left her husband. But I keep a photograph of the house, when it was still unspoiled, just as I keep one of the Princess before her large eyes had learned to gaze on anyone but my cousin. A photograph acquires something of the dignity which it ordinarily lacks when it ceases to be a reproduction of reality and shews us things that no longer exist. I could give you a copy, since you are interested in that style of architecture,” he said to my grandmother. At that moment, noticing that the embroidered handkerchief which he had in his pocket was shewing some coloured threads, he thrust it sharply down out of sight with the scandalised air of a prudish but far from innocent lady concealing attractions which, by an excess of scrupulosity, she regards as indecent. “Would you believe,” he went on, “that the first thing the creatures did was to destroy Lenôtre’s park, which is as bad as slashing a picture by Poussin? For that alone, these Israels ought to be in prison. It is true,” he added with a smile, after a moment’s silence, “that there are probably plenty of other reasons why they should be there! In any case, you can imagine the effect, with that architecture behind it, of an English garden.”

“But the house is in the same style as the Petit Trianon,” said Mme. de

Villeparisis, “and Marie-Antoinette had an English garden laid out there.”

“Which, all the same, ruins Gabriel’s front,” replied M. de Charlus. “Obviously, it would be an act of vandalism now to destroy the Hameau. But whatever may be the spirit of the age, I doubt, all the same, whether, in that respect, a whim of Mme. Israel has the same importance as the memory of the Queen.”

Meanwhile my grandmother had been making signs to me to go up to bed, in spite of the urgent appeals of Saint-Loup who, to my utter confusion, had alluded in front of M. de Charlus to the depression that used often to come upon me at night before I went to sleep, which his uncle must regard as betokening a sad want of virility. I lingered a few moments still, then went upstairs, and was greatly surprised when, a little later, having heard a knock at my bedroom door and asked who was there, I heard the voice of M. de Charlus saying dryly:

“It is Charlus. May I come in, sir? Sir,” he began again in the same tone as soon as he had shut the door, “my nephew was saying just now that you were apt to be worried at night before going to sleep, and also that you were an admirer of Bergotte’s books. As I had one here in my luggage which you probably do not know, I have brought it to help you to while away these moments in which you are not comfortable.”

I thanked M. de Charlus with some warmth and told him that, on the contrary, I had been afraid that what Saint-Loup had said to him about my discomfort when night came would have made me appear in his eyes more stupid even than I was.

“No; why?” he answered, in a gentler voice. “You have not, perhaps, any personal merit; so few of us have! But for a time at least you have youth, and that is always a charm. Besides, sir, the greatest folly of all is to laugh at or to condemn in others what one does not happen oneself to feel. I love the night, and you tell me that you are afraid of it. I love the scent of roses, and I have a friend whom it throws into a fever. Do you suppose that I think, for that reason, that he is inferior to me? I try to understand everything and I take care to condemn nothing. After all, you must not be too sorry for yourself; I do not say that these moods of depression are not painful, I know that one can be made to suffer by things which the world would not understand. But at least you have placed your affection wisely, in your grandmother. You see a great deal of her. And besides, that is a legitimate affection, I mean one that is repaid. There are so many of which one cannot say that.”

He began walking up and down the room, looking at one thing, taking up

another. I had the impression that he had something to tell me, and could not find the right words to express it.

"I have another volume of Bergotte here; I will fetch it for you," he went on, and rang the bell. Presently a page came. "Go and find me your head waiter. He is the only person here who is capable of obeying an order intelligently," said M. de Charlus stiffly. "Monsieur Aimé, sir?" asked the page. "I cannot tell you his name; yes, I remember now, I did hear him called Aimé. Run along, I am in a hurry." "He won't be a minute, sir, I saw him downstairs just now," said the page, anxious to appear efficient. There was an interval of silence. The page returned. "Sir, M. Aimé has gone to bed. But I can take your message." "No, you have only to get him out of bed." "But I can't do that, sir; he doesn't sleep here." "Then you can leave us alone." "But, sir," I said when the page had gone, "you are too kind; one volume of Bergotte will be quite enough." "That is just what I was thinking." M. de Charlus walked up and down the room. Several minutes passed in this way, then after a prolonged hesitation, and several false starts, he swung sharply round and, his voice once more stinging, flung at me: "Good night, sir!" and left the room. After all the lofty sentiments which I had heard him express that evening, next day, which was the day of his departure, on the beach, before noon, when I was on my way down to bathe, and M. de Charlus had come across to tell me that my grandmother was waiting for me to join her as soon as I left the water, I was greatly surprised to hear him say, pinching my neck as he spoke, with a familiarity and a laugh that were frankly vulgar:

"But he doesn't give a damn for his old grandmother, does he, eh? Little rascal!"

"What, sir! I adore her!"

"Sir," he said, stepping back a pace, and with a glacial air, "you are still young; you should profit by your youth to learn two things; first, to refrain from expressing sentiments that are too natural not to be taken for granted; and secondly not to dash into speech to reply to things that are said to you before you have penetrated their meaning. If you had taken this precaution a moment ago you would have saved yourself the appearance of speaking at cross-purposes like a deaf man, thereby adding a second absurdity to that of having anchors embroidered on your bathing-dress. I have lent you a book by Bergotte which I require. See that it is brought to me within the next hour by that head waiter with the silly and inappropriate name, who, I suppose, is not in bed at this time of day. You make me see that I was premature in speaking to you last night of the charms of youth; I should have done you a better service had I pointed out to you

its thoughtlessness, its inconsequence, and its want of comprehension. I hope, sir, that this little douche will be no less salutary to you than your bathe. But don't let me keep you standing: you may catch cold. Good day, sir."

No doubt he was sorry afterwards for this speech, for some time later I received — in a morocco binding on the front of which was inlaid a panel of tooled leather representing in demi-relief a spray of forget-me-nots — the book which he had lent me, and I had sent back to him, not by Aimé who was apparently 'off duty,' but by the lift-boy.

M. de Charlus having gone, Robert and I were free at last to dine with Bloch. And I realised during this little party that the stories too readily admitted by our friend as funny were favourite stories of M. Bloch senior, and that the son's 'really remarkable person' was always one of his father's friends whom he had so classified. There are a certain number of people whom we admire in our boyhood, a father with better brains than the rest of the family, a teacher who acquires credit in our eyes from the philosophy he reveals to us, a schoolfellow more advanced than we are (which was what Bloch had been to me), who despises the Musset of the Espoir en Dieu when we still admire it, and when we have reached Le-conte or Claudel will be in ecstasies only over:

A Saint-Biaise, à la Zuecca
Vous étiez, vous étiez bien aise:

with which he will include:

Padoue est un fort bel endroit
Où de très grands docteurs en droit....
Mais j'aime mieux la polenta....
Passe dans mon domino noir
La Toppatelle

and of all the *Nuits* will remember only:

Au Havre, devant l'Atlantique
A Venise, à l'affreux Lido.
Où vient sur l'herbe d'un tombeau
Mourir la pâle Adriatique.

So, whenever we confidently admire anyone, we collect from him, we quote with admiration sayings vastly inferior to the sort which, left to our own judgment, we would sternly reject, just as the writer of a novel puts into it, on the pretext that they are true, things which people have actually said, which in the living context are like a dead weight, form the dull part of the work. Saint-Simon's portraits composed by himself (and very likely without his admiring

them himself) are admirable, whereas what he cites as the charming wit of his clever friends is frankly dull where it has not become meaningless. He would have scorned to invent what he reports as so pointed or so coloured when said by Mme. Cornuel or Louis XIV, a point which is to be remarked also in many other writers, and is capable of various interpretations, of which it is enough to note but one for the present: namely, that in the state of mind in which we 'observe' we are a long way below the level to which we rise when we create.

There was, then, embedded in my friend Bloch a father Bloch who lagged forty years behind his son, told impossible stories and laughed as loudly at them from the heart of my friend as did' the separate, visible and authentic father Bloch, since to the laugh which the latter emitted, not without several times repeating the last word so that his public might taste the full flavour of the story, was added the braying laugh with which the son never failed, at table, to greet his father's anecdotes. Thus it came about that after saying the most intelligent things young Bloch, to indicate the portion that he had inherited from his family, would tell us for the thirtieth time some of the gems which father Bloch brought out only (with his swallow-tail coat) on the solemn occasions on which young Bloch brought someone to the house on whom it was worth while making an impression; one of his masters, a 'chum' who had taken all the prizes, or, this evening, Saint-Loup and myself. For instance: "A military critic of great insight, who had brilliantly worked out, supporting them with proofs, the reasons for which, in the Russo-Japanese war, the Japanese must inevitably be beaten and the Russians victorious," or else: "He is an eminent gentleman who passes for a great financier in political circles and for a great politician among financiers." These stories were interchangeable with one about Baron de Rothschild and one about Sir Rufus Israels, who were brought into the conversation in an equivocal manner which might let it be supposed that M. Bloch knew them personally.

I was myself taken in, and from the way in which M. Bloch spoke of Bergotte I assumed that he too was an old friend. But with him as with all famous people, M. Bloch knew them only 'without actually knowing them,' from having seen them at a distance in the theatre or in the street. He imagined, moreover, that his appearance, his name, his personality were not unknown to them, and that when they caught sight of him they had often to repress a stealthy inclination to bow. People in society, because they know men of talent, original characters, and have them to dine in their houses, do not on that account understand them any better. But when one has lived to some extent in society, the silliness of its inhabitants makes one too anxious to live, suppose too high a

standard of intelligence in the obscure circles in which people know only ‘without actually knowing.’ I was to discover this when I introduced the topic of Bergotte. M. Bloch was not the only one who was a social success at home. My friend was even more so with his sisters, whom he continually questioned in a hectoring tone, burying his face in his plate, all of which made them laugh until they cried. They had adopted their brother’s language, and spoke it fluently, as if it had been obligatory and the only form of speech that people of intelligence might use. When we arrived, the eldest sister said to one of the younger ones: “Go, tell our sage father and our venerable mother!” “Puppies,” said Bloch, “I present to you the cavalier Saint-Loup, hurler of javelins, who is come for a few days from Doncières to the dwellings of polished stone, fruitful in horses.” And, since he was as vulgar as he was literary, his speech ended as a rule in some pleasantry of a less Homeric kind: “See, draw closer your pepla with fair clasps, what is all that that I see? Does your mother know you’re out?” And the Misses Bloch subsided in a tempest of laughter. I told their brother how much pleasure he had given me by recommending me to read Bergotte, whose books I had loved.

M. Bloch senior, who knew Bergotte only by sight, and Bergotte’s life only from what was common gossip, had a manner quite as indirect of making the acquaintance of his books, by the help of criticisms that were apparently literary. He lived in the world of ‘very nearlies,’ where people salute the empty air and arrive at wrong judgments. Inexactitude, incompetence do not modify their assurance; quite the contrary. It is the propitious miracle of self-esteem that, since few of us are in a position to enjoy the society of distinguished people, or to form intellectual friendships, those to whom they are denied still believe themselves to be the best endowed of men, because the optics of our social perspective make every grade of society seem the best to him who occupies it, and beholds as less favoured than himself, less fortunate and therefore to be pitied, the greater men whom he names and calumniates without knowing, judges and — despises without understanding them. Even in cases where the multiplication of his modest personal advantages by his self-esteem would not suffice to assure a man the dose of happiness, superior to that accorded to others, which is essential to him, envy is always there to make up the balance. It is true that if envy finds expression in scornful phrases, we must translate ‘I have no wish to know him’ by ‘I have no means of knowing him.’ That is the intellectual sense. But the emotional sense is indeed, ‘I have no wish to know him.’ The speaker knows that it is not true, but he does not, all the same, say it simply to

deceive; he says it because it is what he feels, and that is sufficient to bridge the gulf between them, that is to say to make him happy.

Self-centredness thus enabling every human being to see the universe spread out in a descending scale beneath himself who is its lord, M. Bloch afforded himself the luxury of being pitiless when in the morning, as he drank his chocolate, seeing Bergotte's signature at the foot of an article in the newspaper which he had scarcely opened, he disdainfully granted the writer an audience soon cut short, pronounced sentence upon him, and gave himself the comforting pleasure of repeating after every mouthful of the scalding brew: "That fellow Bergotte has become unreadable. My word, what a bore the creature can be. I really must stop my subscription. How involved it all is, bread and butter nonsense!" And he helped himself to another slice.

This illusory importance of M. Bloch senior did, moreover, extend some little way beyond the radius of his own perceptions. In the first place his children regarded him as a superior person. Children have always a tendency either to depreciate or to exalt their parents, and to a good son his father is always the best of fathers, quite apart from any objective reason there may be for admiring him. Now, such reasons were not altogether lacking in the case of M. Bloch, who was an educated man, shrewd, affectionate towards his family. In his most intimate circle they were all the more proud of him because, if, in 'society,' people are judged by a standard (which is incidentally absurd) and according to false but fixed rules, by comparison with the aggregate of all the other fashionable people, in the subdivisions of middle-class life, on the other hand, the dinners, the family parties all turn upon certain people who are pronounced good company, amusing, and who in 'society' would not survive a second evening. Moreover in such an environment where the artificial values of the aristocracy do not exist, their place is taken by distinctions even more stupid. Thus it was that in his family circle, and even among the remotest branches of the tree, an alleged similarity in his way of wearing his moustache and in the bridge of his nose led to M. Bloch's being called "the Due d'Aumale's double." (In the world of club pages, the one who wears his cap on one side and his jacket tightly buttoned, so as to give himself the appearance, he imagines, of a foreign officer, is he not also a personage of a sort to his comrades?)

The resemblance was the faintest, but you would have said that it conferred a title. When he was mentioned, it would always be: "Bloch? Which one? The Due d'Aumale?" as people say "Princesse Murât? Which one? The Queen (of Naples)?" And there were certain other minute marks which combined to give

him, in the eyes of the cousinhood, an acknowledged claim to distinction. Not going the length of having a carriage of his own, M. Bloch used on special occasions to hire an open victoria with a pair of horses from the Company, and would drive through the Bois de Boulogne, his body sprawling limply from side to side, two fingers pressed to his brow, other two supporting his chin, and if people who did not know him concluded that he was an 'old nuisance,' they were all convinced, in the family, that for smartness Uncle Solomon could have taught Gramont-Caderousse a thing or two. He was one of those people who when they die, because for years they have shared a table in a restaurant on the boulevard with its news-editor, are described as "well known Paris figures" in the social column of the *Radical*. M. Bloch told Saint-Loup and me that Bergotte knew so well why he, M. Bloch, always cut him that as soon as he caught sight of him, at the theatre or in the club, he avoided his eye. Saint-Loup blushed, for it had occurred to him that this club could not be the Jockey, of which his father had been chairman. On the other hand it must be a fairly exclusive club, for M. Bloch had said that Bergotte would never have got into it if he had come up now. So it was not without the fear that he might be 'underrating his adversary' that Saint-Loup asked whether the club in question were the Rue Royale, which was considered 'lowering' by his own family, and to which he knew that certain Israelites had been admitted. "No," replied M. Bloch in a tone at once careless, proud and ashamed, "it is a small club, but far more pleasant than a big one, the Ganaches. We're very strict there, don't you know." "Isn't Sir Rufus Israels the chairman?" Bloch junior asked his father, so as to give him the opportunity for a glorious lie, never suspecting that the financier had not the same eminence in Saint-Loup's eyes as in his. The fact of the matter was that the Ganaches club boasted not Sir Rufus Israels but one of his staff. But as this man was on the best of terms with his employer, he had at his disposal a stock of the financier's cards, and would give one to M. Bloch whenever he wished to travel on a line of which Sir Rufus was a director, the result of which was that old Bloch would say: "I'm just going round to the Club to ask Sir Rufus for a line to the Company." And the card enabled him to dazzle the guards on the trains. The Misses Bloch were more interested in Bergotte and, reverting to him rather than pursue the subject of the Ganaches, the youngest asked her brother, in the most serious tone imaginable, for she believed that there existed in the world, for the designation of men of talent, no other terms than those which he was in the habit of using: "Is he really an amazing good egg, this Bergotte? Is he in the category of the great lads, good eggs like Villiers and Catullus?" "I've met him several

times at dress rehearsals," said M. Nissim Bernard. "He is an uncouth creature, a sort of Schlemihl." There was nothing very serious in this allusion to Chamisso's story but the epithet 'Schlemihl' formed part of that dialect, half-German, half-Jewish, the use of which delighted M. Bloch in the family circle, but struck him as vulgar and out of place before strangers. And so he cast a reproving glance at his uncle. "He has talent," said Bloch. "Ah!" His sister sighed gravely, as though to imply that in that case there was some excuse for me. "All writers have talent," said M. Bloch scornfully. "In fact it appears," went on his son, raising his fork, and screwing up his eyes with an air of impish irony, "that he is going to put up for the Academy." "Go on. He hasn't enough to shew them," replied his father, who seemed not to have for the Academy the same contempt as his son and daughters. "He's not big enough." "Besides, the Academy is a salon, and Bergotte has no polish," declared the uncle (whose heiress Mme. Bloch was), a mild and inoffensive person whose surname, Bernard, might perhaps by itself have quickened my grandfather's powers of diagnosis, but would have appeared too little in harmony with a face which looked as if it had been brought back from Darius's palace and restored by Mme. Dieulafoy, had not (chosen by some collector desirous of giving a crowning touch of orientalism to this figure from Susa) his first name, Nissim, stretched out above it the pinions of an androcephalous bull from Khorsabad. But M. Bloch never stopped insulting his uncle, whether it was that he was excited by the unresisting good-humour of his butt, or that the rent of the villa being paid by M. Nissim Bernard, the beneficiary wished to shew that he kept his independence, and, more important still, that he was not seeking by flattery to make sure of the rich inheritance to come. What most hurt the old man was being treated so rudely in front of the manservant. He murmured an unintelligible sentence of which all that could be made out was: "when the meschores are in the room." 'Meschores,' in the Bible, means 'the servant of God.' In the family circle the Blochs used the word when they referred to their own servants, and were always exhilarated by it, because their certainty of not being understood either by Christians or by the servants themselves enhanced in M. Nissim Bernard and M. Bloch their twofold distinction of being 'masters' and at the same time 'Jews.' But this latter source of satisfaction became a source of displeasure when there was 'company.' At such times M. Bloch, hearing his uncle say 'meschores,' felt that he was making his oriental side too prominent, just as a light-of-love who has invited some of her sisters to meet her respectable friends is annoyed if they allude to their profession or use words that do not sound quite nice. Therefore, so far from his

uncle's request's producing any effect on M. Bloch, he, beside himself with rage, could contain himself no longer. He let no opportunity pass of scarifying his wretched uncle. "Of course, when there is a chance of saying anything stupid, one can be quite certain that you won't miss it. You would be the first to lick his boots if he were in the room!" shouted M. Bloch, while M. Nissim Bernard in sorrow lowered over his plate the ringleted beard of King Sargon. My friend, when he began to grow his beard, which also was blue-black and crimped, became very like his great-uncle.

"What! Are you the son of the Marquis de Marsantes? Why, I knew him very well," said M. Nissim Bernard to Saint-Loup. I supposed that he meant the word 'knew' in the sense in which Bloch's father had said that he knew Bergotte, namely by sight. But he went on: "Your father was one of my best friends." Meanwhile Bloch had turned very red, his father was looking intensely cross, the Misses Bloch were choking with suppressed laughter. The fact was that in M. Nissim Bernard the love of ostentation which in M. Bloch and his children was held in cheek, had engendered the habit of perpetual lying. For instance, if he was staying in an hotel, M. Nissim Bernard, as M. Bloch equally might have done, would have his newspapers brought to him always by his valet in the dining-room, in the middle of luncheon, when everybody was there, so that they should see that he travelled with a valet. But to the people with whom he made friends in the hotel the uncle used to say what the nephew would never have said, that he was a Senator. He might know quite well that they would sooner or later discover that the title was usurped; he could not, at the critical moment, resist the temptation to assume it. M. Bloch suffered acutely from his uncle's lies and from all the embarrassments that they led to. "Don't pay any attention to him, he talks a great deal of nonsense," he whispered to Saint-Loup, whose interest was all the more whetted, for he was curious to explore the psychology of liars. "A greater liar even than the Ithacan Odysseus, albeit Athene called him the greatest liar among mortals," his son completed the indictment. "Well, upon my word!" cried M. Nissim Bernard, "If I'd only known that I was going to sit down to dinner with my old friend's son! Why, I have a photograph still of your father at home, in Paris, and any number of letters from him. He used always to call me 'uncle,' nobody ever knew why. He was a charming man, sparkling. I remember so well a dinner I gave at Nice; there were Sardou, Labiche, Augier," "Molière, Racine, Corneille," M. Bloch added with sarcasm, while his son completed the tale of guests with "Plautus, Menander, Kalidasa." M. Nissim Bernard, cut to the quick, stopped short in his reminiscence, and, ascetically

depriving himself of a great pleasure, remained silent until the end of dinner.

"Saint-Loup with helm of bronze," said Bloch, "have a piece more of this duck with thighs heavy with fat, over which the illustrious sacrificer of birds has spilled numerous libations of red wine."

As a rule, after bringing out from his store for the entertainment of a distinguished guest his anecdotes of Sir Rufus Israels and others, M. Bloch, feeling that he had succeeded in touching and melting his son's heart, would withdraw, so as not to spoil his effect in the eyes of the 'big pot.' If, however, there was an absolutely compelling reason, as for instance on the night when his son won his fellowship, M. Bloch would add to the usual string of anecdotes the following ironical reflexion which he ordinarily reserved for his own personal friends, so that young Bloch was extremely proud to see it produced for his: "The Government have acted unpardonably. They have forgotten to consult M. Coquelin! M. Coquelin has let it be known that he is displeased." (M. Bloch prided himself on being a reactionary, with a contempt for theatrical people.)

But the Misses Bloch and their brother reddened to the tips of their ears, so much impressed were they when Bloch senior, to shew that he could be regal to the last in his entertainment of his son's two 'chums,' gave the order for champagne to be served, and announced casually that, as a treat for us, he had taken three stalls for the performance which a company from the Opéra-Comique was giving that evening at the Casino. He was sorry that he had not been able to get a box. They had all been taken. However, he had often been in the boxes, and really one saw and heard better down by the orchestra. All very well, only, if the defect of his son, that is to say the defect which his son believed to be invisible to other people, was coarseness, the father's was avarice. And so it was in a decanter that we were served with, under the name of champagne, a light sparkling wine, while under that of orchestra stalls he had taken three in the pit, which cost half as much, miraculously persuaded by the divine intervention of his defect that neither at table nor in the theatre (where the boxes were all empty) would the defect be noticed. When M. Bloch had let us moisten our lips in the flat glasses which his son dignified with the style and title of 'craters with deeply hollowed flanks,' he made us admire a picture to which he was so much attached that he had brought it with him to Balbec. He told us that it was a Rubens. Saint-Loup asked innocently if it was signed. M. Bloch replied, blushing, that he had had the signature cut off to make it fit the frame, but that it made no difference, as he had no intention of selling the picture. Then he hurriedly bade us good-night, in order to bury himself in the *Journal Officiel*,

back numbers of which littered the house, and which, he informed us, he was obliged to read carefully on account of his ‘parliamentary position’ as to the precise nature of which, however, he gave us no enlightenment. “I shall take a muffler,” said Bloch, “for Zephyrus and Boreas are disputing to which of them shall belong the fish-teeming sea, and should we but tarry a little after the show is over, we shall not be home before the first flush of Eos, the rosy-fingered. By the way,” he asked Saint-Loup when we were outside, and I trembled, for I realised at once that it was of M. de Charlus that Bloch was speaking in that tone of irony, “who was that excellent old card dressed in black that I saw you walking with, the day before yesterday, on the beach?” “That was my uncle.” Saint-Loup was ruffled. Unfortunately, a ‘floater’ was far from seeming to Bloch a thing to be avoided. He shook with laughter. “Heartiest congratulations; I ought to have guessed; he has an excellent style, the most priceless dial of an old ‘gaga’ of the highest lineage.” “You are absolutely mistaken; he is an extremely clever man,” retorted Saint-Loup, now furious. “I am sorry about that; it makes him less complete. All the same, I should like very much to know him, for I flatter myself I could write some highly adequate pieces about old buffers like that. Just to see him go by, he’s killing. But I should leave out of account the caricaturable side, which really is hardly worthy of an artist enamoured of the plastic beauty of phrases, of his mug, which (you’ll forgive me) doubled me up for a moment with joyous laughter, and I should bring into prominence the aristocratic side of your uncle, who after all has a distinct bovine effect, and when one has finished laughing does impress one by his great air of style. But,” he went on, addressing myself this time, “there is also a matter of a very different order about which I have been meaning to question you, and every time we are together, some god, blessed denizen of Olympus, makes me completely forget to ask for a piece of information which might before now have been and is sure some day to be of the greatest use to me. Tell me, who was the lovely lady I saw you with in the Jardin d’Acclimatation accompanied by a gentleman whom I seem to know by sight and a little girl with long hair?” It had been quite plain to me at the time that Mme. Swann did not remember Bloch’s name, since she had spoken of him by another, and had described my friend as being on the staff of some Ministry, as to which I had never since then thought of finding out whether he had joined it. But how came it that Bloch, who, according to what she then told me, had got himself introduced to her, was ignorant of her name? I was so much surprised that I stopped for a moment before answering. “Whoever she is,” he went on, “hearty congratulations; you can’t have been bored with her. I

picked her up a few days before that on the Zone railway, where, speaking of zones, she was so kind as to undo hers for the benefit of your humble servant; I have never had such a time in my life, and we were just going to make arrangements to meet again when somebody she knew had the bad taste to get in at the last station but one." My continued silence did not appear to please Bloch. "I was hoping," he said, "thanks to you, to learn her address, so as to go there several times a week to taste in her arms the delights of Eros, dear to the gods; but I do not insist since you seem pledged to discretion with respect to a professional who gave herself to me three times running, and in the most refined manner, between Paris and the Point-du-Jour. I am bound to see her again, some night."

I called upon Bloch after this dinner; he returned my call, but I was out and he was seen asking for me by Françoise, who, as it happened, albeit he had visited us at Combray, had never set eyes on him until then. So that she knew only that one of 'the gentlemen' who were friends of mine had looked in to see me, she did not know 'with what object,' dressed in a nondescript way, which had not made any particular impression upon her. Now though I knew quite well that certain of Françoise's social ideas must for ever remain impenetrable by me, ideas based, perhaps, partly upon confusions between words, between names which she had once and for all time mistaken for one another, I could not restrain myself, who had long since abandoned the quest for enlightenment in such cases, from seeking — and seeking, moreover, in vain — to discover what could be the immense significance that the name of Bloch had for Françoise. For no sooner had I mentioned to her that the young man whom she had seen was M. Bloch than she recoiled several paces, so great were her stupor and disappointment. "What! Is that M. Bloch?" she cried, thunderstruck, as if so portentous a personage ought to have been endowed with an appearance which 'made you know' as soon as you saw him that you were in the presence of one of the great ones of the earth; and, like some one who has discovered that an historical character is not 'up to' the level of his reputation, she repeated in an impressed tone, in which I could detect latent, for future growth, the seeds of a universal scepticism: "What! Is that M. Bloch? Well, really, you would never think it, to look at him." She seemed also to bear me a grudge, as if I had always 'overdone' the praise of Bloch to her. At the same time she was kind enough to add: "Well, he may be M. Bloch, and all that. I'm sure Master can say he's every bit as good."

She had presently, with respect to Saint-Loup, whom she worshipped, a

disillusionment of a different kind and of less severity: she discovered that he was a Republican. Now for all that, when speaking, for instance, of the Queen of Portugal, she would say with that disrespect which is, among the people, the supreme form of respect: “Amélie, Philippe’s sister,” Françoise was a Royalist. But when it came to a Marquis; a Marquis who had dazzled her at first sight, and who was for the Republic, seemed no longer real. And she shewed the same ill-humour as if I had given her a box which she had believed to be made of gold, and had thanked me for it effusively, and then a jeweller had revealed to her that it was only plated. She at once withdrew her esteem from Saint-Loup, but soon afterwards restored it to him, having reflected that he could not, being the Marquis de Saint-Loup, be a Republican, that he was just pretending, in his own interest, for with such a Government as we had it might be a great advantage to him. From that moment her coldness towards him, her resentment towards myself ceased. And when she spoke of Saint-Loup she said: “He is a hypocrite,” with a broad and friendly smile which made it clear that she ‘considered’ him again just as much as when she first knew him, and that she had forgiven him.

As a matter of fact, Saint-Loup was absolutely sincere and disinterested, and it was this intense moral purity which, not being able to find entire satisfaction in a selfish sentiment such as love, nor on the other hand meeting in him the impossibility (which existed in me, for instance) of finding its spiritual nourishment elsewhere than in himself, rendered him truly capable (just as I was incapable) of friendship.

Françoise was no less mistaken about Saint-Loup when she complained that he had that sort of air, as if he did not look down upon the people, but that it was all just a pretence, and you had only to see him when he was in a temper with his groom. It had indeed sometimes happened that Robert would scold his groom with a certain amount of brutality, which proved that he had the sense not so much of the difference as of the equality between classes and masses. “But,” he said in answer to my rebuke of his having treated the man rather harshly, “why should I go out of my way to speak politely to him? Isn’t he my equal? Isn’t he just as near to me as any of my uncles and cousins? You seem to think that I ought to treat him with respect, as an inferior. You talk like an aristocrat!” he added scornfully.

And indeed if there was a class to which he shewed himself prejudiced and hostile, it was the aristocracy, so much so that he found it as hard to believe in the superior qualities of a man in society as he found it easy to believe in those of a man of the people. When I mentioned the Princesse de Luxembourg, whom

I had met with his aunt:

"An old trout," was his comment. "Like all that lot. She's a sort of cousin of mine, by the way."

Having a strong prejudice against the people who frequented it, he went rarely into 'Society,' and the contemptuous or hostile attitude which he adopted towards it served to increase, among all his near relatives, the painful impression made by his intimacy with a woman on the stage, a connexion which, they declared, would be his ruin, blaming it specially for having bred in him that spirit of denigration, that bad spirit, and for having led him astray, after which it was only a matter of time before he would have dropped out altogether. And so, many easy-going men of the Faubourg Saint-Germain were without compunction when they spoke of Robert's mistress. "Those girls do their job," they would say, "they are as good as anybody else. But that one; no, thank youl We cannot forgive her. She has done too much harm to a fellow we were fond of." Of course, he was not the first to be caught in that snare. But the others amused themselves like men of the world, continued to think like men of the world about politics, about everything. As for him, his family found him 'soured.' They did not bear in mind that, for many young men of fashion who would otherwise remain uncultivated mentally, rough in their friendships, without gentleness or taste — it is very often their mistress who is their real master, and connexions of this sort the only school of morals in which they are initiated into a superior culture, and learn the value of disinterested relations. Even among the lower orders (who, when it comes to coarseness, so often remind us of the world of fashion) the woman, more sensitive, finer, more leisured, is driven by curiosity to adopt certain refinements, respects certain beauties of sentiment and of art which, though she may fail to understand them, she nevertheless places above what has seemed most desirable to the man, above money or position. Now whether the mistress be a young blood's (such as Saint-Loup) or a young workman's (electricians, for instance, must now be included in our truest order of Chivalry) her lover has too much admiration and respect for her not to extend them also to what she herself respects and admires; and for him the scale of values is thereby reversed. Her sex alone makes her weak; she suffers from nervous troubles, inexplicable things which in a man, or even in another woman — a woman whose nephew or cousin he was — would bring a smile to the lips of this stalwart young man. But he cannot bear to see her suffer whom he loves. The young nobleman who, like Saint-Loup, has a mistress acquires the habit, when he takes her out to dine, of carrying in his pocket the

valerian ‘drops’ which she may need, of ordering the waiter, firmly and with no hint of sarcasm, to see that he shuts the doors quietly and not to put any damp moss on the table, so as to spare his companion those discomforts which himself he has never felt, which compose for him an occult world in whose reality she has taught him to believe, discomforts for which he now feels pity without in the least needing to understand them, for which he will still feel pity when other women than she shall be the sufferers. Saint-Loup’s mistress — as the first monks of the middle ages taught Christendom — had taught him to be kind to animals, for which she had a passion, never moving without her dog, her canaries, her love-birds; Saint-Loup looked after them with motherly devotion and treated as brutes the people who were not good to dumb creatures. On the other hand, an actress, or so-called actress, like this one who was living with him,— whether she were intelligent or not, and as to that I had no knowledge — by making him find the society of fashionable women boring, and look upon having to go out to a party as a painful duty, had saved him from snobbishness and cured him of frivolity. If, thanks to her, his social engagements filled a smaller place in the life of her young lover, at the same time, whereas if he had been simply a drawing-room man, vanity or self-interest would have dictated his choice of friends as rudeness would have characterised his treatment of them, his mistress had taught him to bring nobility and refinement into his friendship. With her feminine instinct, with a keener appreciation in men of certain qualities of sensibility which her lover might perhaps, without her guidance, have misunderstood and laughed at, she had always been swift to distinguish from among the rest of Saint-Loup’s friends, the one who had a real affection for him, and to make that one her favourite. She knew how to make him feel grateful to such a friend, shew his gratitude, notice what things gave his friend pleasure and what pain. And presently Saint-Loup, without any more need of her to prompt him, began to think of all these things by himself, and at Balbec, where she was not with him, for me whom she had never seen, whom he had perhaps not yet so much as mentioned in his letters to her, of his own accord would pull up the window of a carriage in which I was sitting, take out of the room the flowers that made me feel unwell, and when he had to say good-bye to several people at once manage to do so before it was actually time for him to go, so as to be left alone and last with me, to make that distinction between them and me, to treat me differently from the rest. His mistress had opened his mind to the invisible, had brought a serious element into his life, delicacy into his heart, but all this escaped his sorrowing family who repeated: “That creature will be the death of

him; meanwhile she's doing what she can to disgrace him." It is true that he had succeeded in getting out of her all the good that she was capable of doing him; and that she now caused him only incessant suffering, for she had taken an intense dislike to him and tormented him in every possible way. She had begun, one fine day, to look upon him as stupid and absurd because the friends that she had among the younger writers and actors had assured her that he was, and she duly repeated what they had said with that passion, that want of reserve which we shew whenever we receive from without and adopt as our own opinions or customs of which we previously knew nothing. She readily professed, like her actor friends, that between Saint-Loup and herself there was a great gulf fixed, and not to be crossed, because they were of different races, because she was an intellectual and he, whatever he might pretend, the born enemy of the intellect. This view of him seemed to her profound, and she sought confirmation of it in the most insignificant words, the most trivial actions of her lover. But when the same friends had further convinced her that she was destroying, in company so ill-suited to her, the great hopes which she had, they said, aroused in them, that her lover would leave a mark on her, that by living with him she was spoiling her future as an artist; to her contempt for Saint-Loup was added the same hatred that she would have felt for him if he had insisted upon inoculating her with a deadly germ. She saw him as seldom as possible, at the same time postponing the hour of a definite rupture, which seemed to me a highly improbable event. Saint-Loup made such sacrifices for her that unless she was ravishingly beautiful (but he had always refused to shew me her photograph, saying: "For one thing, she's not a beauty, and besides she always takes badly. These are only some snapshots that I took myself with my kodak; they would give you a wrong idea of her.") it would surely be difficult for her to find another man who would consent to anything of the sort. I never reflected that a certain obsession to make a name for oneself, even when one has no talent, that the admiration, no more than the privately expressed admiration of people who are imposing on one, can (although it may not perhaps have been the case with Saint-Loup's mistress) be, even for a little prostitute, motives more determining than the pleasure of making money. Saint-Loup who, without quite understanding what was going on in the mind of his mistress, did not believe her to be completely sincere either in her unfair reproaches or in her promises of undying love, had all the same at certain moments the feeling that she would break with him whenever she could, and accordingly, impelled no doubt by the instinct of self-preservation which was part of his love, a love more clear-sighted, possibly, than Saint-Loup

himself, making use, too, of a practical capacity for business which was compatible in him with the loftiest and blindest flights of the heart, had refused to settle upon her any capital, had borrowed an enormous sum so that she should want nothing, but made it over to her only from day to day. And no doubt, assuming that she really thought of leaving him, she was calmly waiting until she had feathered her nest, a process which, with the money given her by Saint-Loup, would not perhaps take very long, but would all the same require a time which must be conceded to prolong the happiness of my new friend — or his misery.

This dramatic period of their connexion, which had now reached its most acute stage, the most cruel for Saint-Loup, for she had forbidden him to remain in Paris, where his presence exasperated her, and had forced him to spend his leave at Balbec, within easy reach of his regiment — had begun one evening at the house of one of Saint-Loup's aunts, on whom he had prevailed to allow his friend to come there, before a large party, to recite some of the speeches from a symbolical play in which she had once appeared in an 'advanced' theatre, and for which she had made him share the admiration that she herself professed.

But when she appeared in the room, with a large lily in her hand, and wearing a costume copied from the *Ancilla Domini*, which she had persuaded Saint-Loup was an absolute 'vision of beauty,' her entrance had been greeted, in that assemblage of clubmen and duchesses, with smiles which the monotonous tone of her chantings, the oddity of certain words and their frequent recurrence had changed into fits of laughter, stifled at first but presently so uncontrollable that the wretched reciter had been unable to go on. Next day Saint-Loup's aunt had been universally censured for having allowed so grotesque an actress to appear in her drawing-room. A well-known duke made no bones about telling her that she had only herself to blame if she found herself criticised. "Damn it all, people really don't come to see 'turns' like that! If the woman had talent, even; but she has none and never will have any. 'Pon my soul, Paris is not such a fool as people make out. Society does not consist exclusively of imbeciles. This little lady evidently believed that she was going to take Paris by surprise. But Paris is not so easily surprised as all that, and there are still some things that they can't make us swallow."

As for the actress, she left the house with Saint-Loup, exclaiming: "What do you mean by letting me in for those geese, those uneducated bitches, those dirty corner-boys? I don't mind telling you, there wasn't a man in the room who didn't make eyes at me or squeeze my foot, and it was because I wouldn't look at them

that they were out for revenge."

Words which had changed Robert's antipathy for people in society into a horror that was at once deep and distressing, and was provoked in him most of all by those who least deserved it, devoted kinsmen who, on behalf of the family, had sought to persuade Saint-Loup's lady to break with him, a move which she represented to him as inspired by their passion for her. Robert, although he had at once ceased to see them, used to imagine when he was parted from his mistress as he was now, that they or others like them were profiting by his absence to return to the charge and had possibly prevailed over her. And when he spoke of the sensualists who were disloyal to their friends, who sought to seduce their friends' wives, tried to make them come to houses of assignation, his whole face would glow with suffering and hatred.

"I would kill them with less compunction than I would kill a dog, which is at least a well-behaved beast, and loyal and faithful. There are men who deserve the guillotine if you like, far more than poor wretches who have been led into crime by poverty and by the cruelty of the rich."

He spent the greater part of his time in sending letters and telegrams to his mistress. Every time that, while still preventing him from returning to Paris, she found an excuse to quarrel with him by post, I read the news at once in his evident discomposure. Inasmuch as his mistress never told him what fault she found with him, suspecting that possibly if she did not tell him it was because she did not know herself, and simply had had enough of him, he would still have liked an explanation and used to write to her: "Tell me what I have done wrong. I am quite ready to acknowledge my faults," the grief that overpowered him having the effect of persuading him that he had behaved badly.

But she kept him waiting indefinitely for her answers which, when they did come, were meaningless. And so it was almost always with a furrowed brow, and often with empty hands that I would see Saint-Loup returning from the post office, where, alone in all the hotel, he and Françoise went to fetch or to hand in letters, he from a lover's impatience, she with a servant's mistrust of others. (His telegrams obliged him to take a much longer journey.)

When, some days after our dinner with the Blochs, my grandmother told me with a joyful air that Saint-Loup had just been asking her whether, before he left Balbec, she would not like him to take a photograph of her, and when I saw that she had put on her nicest dress on purpose, and was hesitating between several of her best hats, I felt a little annoyed by this childishness, which surprised me coming from her. I even went the length of asking myself whether I had not been

mistaken in my grandmother, whether I did not esteem her too highly, whether she was as unconcerned as I had always supposed in the adornment of her person, whether she had not indeed the very weakness that I believed most alien to her temperament, namely coquetry.

Unfortunately, this displeasure that I derived from the prospect of a photographic ‘sitting,’ and more particularly from the satisfaction with which my grandmother appeared to be looking forward to it, I made so apparent that Françoise remarked it and did her best, unintentionally, to increase it by making me a sentimental, gushing speech, by which I refused to appear moved.

“Oh, Master; my poor Madame will be so pleased at having her likeness taken, she is going to wear the hat that her old Françoise has trimmed for her, you must allow her, Master.”

I acquired the conviction that I was not cruel in laughing at Françoise’s sensibility, by reminding myself that my mother and grandmother, my models in all things, often did the same. But my grandmother, noticing that I seemed cross, said that if this plan of her sitting for her photograph offended me in any way she would give it up. I would not let her; I assured her that I saw no harm in it, and left her to adorn herself, but, thinking that I shewed my penetration and strength of mind, I added a few stinging words of sarcasm, intended to neutralize the pleasure which she seemed to find in being photographed, so that if I was obliged to see my grandmother’s magnificent hat, I succeeded at least in driving from her face that joyful expression which ought to have made me glad; but alas, it too often happens, while the people we love best are still alive, that such expressions appear to us as the exasperating manifestation of some unworthy freak of fancy rather than as the precious form of the happiness which we should dearly like to procure for them. My ill-humour arose more particularly from the fact that, during the last week, my grandmother had appeared to be avoiding me, and I had not been able to have her to myself for a moment, either by night or day. When I came back in the afternoon to be alone with her for a little I was told that she was not in the hotel; or else she would shut herself up with Françoise for endless confabulations which I was not permitted to interrupt. And when, after being out all evening with Saint-Loup, I had been thinking on the way home of the moment at which I should be able to go to my grandmother and to kiss her, in vain might I wait for her to knock on the partition between us the three little taps which would tell me to go in and say good night to her; I heard nothing; at length I would go to bed, a little resentful of her for depriving me, with an indifference so new and strange in her, of a joy on which I had so much counted,

I would lie still for a while, my heart throbbing as in my childhood, listening to the wall which remained silent, until I cried myself to sleep.

Seascape, with Frieze of Girls

That day, as for some days past, Saint-Loup had been obliged to go to Doncières, where, until his leave finally expired, he would be on duty now until late every afternoon. I was sorry that he was not at Balbec. I had seen alight from carriages and pass, some into the ball-room of the Casino, others into the ice-cream shop, young women who at a distance had seemed to me lovely. I was passing through one of those periods of our youth, unprovided with any one definite love, vacant, in which at all times and in all places — as a lover the woman by whose charms he is smitten — we desire, we seek, we see Beauty. Let but a single real feature — the little that one distinguishes of a woman seen from afar or from behind — enable us to project the form of beauty before our eyes, we imagine that we have seen her before, our heart beats, we hasten in pursuit, and will always remain half-persuaded that it was she, provided that the woman has vanished: it is only if we manage to overtake her that we realise our mistake.

Besides, as I grew more and more delicate, I was inclined to overrate the simplest pleasures because of the difficulties that sprang up in the way of my attaining them. Charming women I seemed to see all round me, because I was too tired, if it was on the beach, too shy if it was in the Casino or at a pastry-cook's, to go anywhere near them. And yet if I was soon to die I should have liked first to know the appearance at close quarters, in reality of the prettiest girls that life had to offer, even although it should be another than myself or no one at all who was to take advantage of the offer. (I did not, in fact, appreciate the desire for possession that underlay my curiosity.) I should have had the courage to enter the ballroom if Saint-Loup had been with me. Left by myself, I was simply hanging about in front of the Grand Hotel until it was time for me to join my grandmother, when, still almost at the far end of the paved 'front' along which they projected in a discordant spot of colour, I saw coming towards me five or six young girls, as different in appearance and manner from all the people whom one was accustomed to see at Balbec as could have been, landed there none knew whence, a flight of gulls which performed with measured steps upon the sands — the dawdlers using their wings to overtake the rest — a movement

the purpose of which seems as obscure to the human bathers, whom they do not appear to see, as it is clearly determined in their own birdish minds.

One of these strangers was pushing as she came, with one hand, her bicycle; two others carried golf-clubs; and their attire generally was in contrast to that of the other girls at Balbec, some of whom, it was true, went in for games, but without adopting any special outfit.

It was the hour at which ladies and gentlemen came out every day for a turn on the 'front,' exposed to the merciless fire of the long glasses fastened upon them, as if they had each borne some disfigurement which she felt it her duty to inspect in its minutest details, by the chief magistrate's wife, proudly seated there with her back to the band-stand, in the middle of that dread line of chairs on which presently they too, actors turned critics, would come and establish themselves, to scrutinise in their turn those others who would then be filing past them. All these people who paced up and down the 'front,' tacking as violently as if it had been the deck of a ship (for they could not lift a leg without at the same time waving their arms, turning their heads and eyes, settling their shoulders, compensating by a balancing movement on one side for the movement they had just made on the other, and puffing out their faces), and who, pretending not to see so as to let it be thought that they were not interested, but covertly watching, for fear of running against the people who were walking beside or coming towards them, did, in fact, butt into them, became entangled with them, because each was mutually the object of the same secret attention veiled beneath the same apparent disdain; their love — and consequently their fear — of the crowd being one of the most powerful motives in all men, whether they seek to please other people or to astonish them, or to shew them that they despise them. In the case of the solitary, his seclusion, even when it is absolute and ends only with life itself, has often as its primary cause a disordered love of the crowd, which so far overrules every other feeling that, not being able to win, when he goes out, the admiration of his hall-porter, of the passers-by, of the cabman whom he hails, he prefers not to be seen by them at all, and with that object abandons every activity that would oblige him to go out of doors.

Among all these people, some of whom were pursuing a train of thought, but if so betrayed its instability by spasmodic gestures, a roving gaze as little in keeping as the circumspect titubation of their neighbours, the girls whom I had noticed, with that mastery over their limbs which comes from perfect bodily condition and a sincere contempt for the rest of humanity, were advancing straight ahead, without hesitation or stiffness, performing exactly the movements

that they wished to perform, each of their members in full independence of all the rest, the greater part of their bodies preserving that immobility which is so noticeable in a good waltzer. They were now quite near me. Although each was a type absolutely different from the others, they all had beauty; but to tell the truth I had seen them for so short a time, and without venturing to look them straight in the face, that I had not yet individualised any of them. Save one, whom her straight nose, her dark complexion pointed in contrast among the rest, like (in a renaissance picture of the Epiphany) a king of Arab cast, they were known to me only, one by a pair of eyes, hard, set and mocking; another by cheeks in which the pink had that coppery tint which makes one think of geraniums; and even of these points I had not yet indissolubly attached any one to one of these girls rather than to another; and when (according to the order in which their series met the eye, marvellous because the most different aspects came next one another, because all scales of colours were combined in it, but confused as a piece of music in which I should not have been able to isolate and identify at the moment of their passage the successive phrases, no sooner distinguished than forgotten) I saw emerge a pallid oval, black eyes, green eyes, I knew not if these were the same that had already charmed me a moment ago, I could not bring them home to any one girl whom I might thereby have set apart from the rest and so identified. And this want, in my vision, of the demarcations which I should presently establish between them sent flooding over the group a wave of harmony, the continuous transfusion of a beauty fluid, collective and mobile.

It was not perhaps, in this life of ours, mere chance that had, in forming this group of friends, chosen them all of such beauty; perhaps these girls (whose attitude was enough to reveal their nature, bold, frivolous and hard), extremely sensitive to everything that was ludicrous or ugly, incapable of yielding to an intellectual or moral attraction, had naturally felt themselves, among companions of their own age, repelled by all those in whom a pensive or sensitive disposition was betrayed by shyness, awkwardness, constraint, by what, they would say,'didn't appeal' to them, and from such had held aloof; while they attached themselves, on the other hand, to others to whom they were drawn by a certain blend of grace, suppleness, and physical neatness, the only form in which they were able to picture the frankness of a seductive character and the promise of pleasant hours in one another's company. Perhaps, too, the class to which they belonged, a class which I should not have found it easy to define, was at that point in its evolution at which, whether thanks to its growing wealth and leisure, or thanks to new athletic habits, extended now even to certain plebeian elements,

and a habit of physical culture to which had not yet been added the culture of the mind, a social atmosphere, comparable to that of smooth and prolific schools of sculpture, which have not yet gone in for tortured expressions, produces naturally and in abundance fine bodies with fine legs, fine hips, wholesome and reposeful faces, with an air of agility and guile. And were they not noble and calm models of human beauty that I beheld there, outlined against the sea, like statues exposed to the sunlight upon a Grecian shore?

Just as if, in the heart of their band, which progressed along the ‘front’ like a luminous comet, they had decided that the surrounding crowd was composed of creatures of another race whose sufferings even could not awaken in them any sense of fellowship, they appeared not to see them, forced those who had stopped to talk to step aside, as though from the path of a machine that had been set going by itself, so that it was no good waiting for it to get out of their way, their utmost sign of consciousness being when, if some old gentleman of whom they did not admit the existence and thrust from them the contact, had fled with a frightened or furious, but a headlong or ludicrous motion, they looked at one another and smiled. They had, for whatever did not form part of their group, no affectation of contempt; their genuine contempt was sufficient. But they could not set eyes on an obstacle without amusing themselves by crossing it, either in a running jump or with both feet together, because they were all filled to the brim, exuberant with that youth which we need so urgently to spend that even when we are unhappy or unwell, obedient rather to the necessities of our age than to the mood of the day, we can never pass anything that can be jumped over or slid down without indulging ourselves conscientiously, interrupting, interspersing our slow progress — as Chopin his most melancholy phrase — with graceful deviations in which caprice is blended with virtuosity. The wife of an elderly banker, after hesitating between various possible exposures for her husband, had settled him on a folding chair, facing the ‘front,’ sheltered from wind and sun by the band-stand. Having seen him comfortably installed there, she had gone to buy a newspaper which she would read aloud to him, to distract him — one of her little absences which she never prolonged for more than five minutes, which seemed long enough to him but which she repeated at frequent intervals so that this old husband on whom she lavished an attention that she took care to conceal, should have the impression that he was still quite alive and like other people and was in no need of protection. The platform of the band-stand provided, above his head, a natural and tempting springboard, across which, without a moment’s hesitation, the eldest of the little band began to run; she

jumped over the terrified old man, whose yachting cap was brushed by the nimble feet, to the great delight of the other girls, especially of a pair of green eyes in a ‘dashing’ face, which expressed, for that bold act, an admiration and a merriment in which I seemed to discern a trace of timidity, a shamefaced and blustering timidity which did not exist in the others. “Oh, the poor old man; he makes me sick; he looks half dead;” said a girl with a croaking voice, but with more sarcasm than sympathy. They walked on a little way, then stopped for a moment in the middle of the road, with no thought whether they were impeding the passage of other people, and held a council, a solid body of irregular shape, compact, unusual and shrill, like birds that gather on the ground at the moment of flight; then they resumed their leisurely stroll along the ‘front,’ against a background of sea.

By this time their charming features had ceased to be indistinct and impersonal. I had dealt them like cards into so many heaps to compose (failing their names, of which I was still ignorant) the big one who had jumped over the old banker; the little one who stood out against the horizon of sea with her plump and rosy cheeks, her green eyes; the one with the straight nose and dark complexion, in such contrast to all the rest; another, with a white face like an egg on which a tiny nose described an arc of a circle like a chicken’s beak; yet another, wearing a hooded cape (which gave her so poverty-stricken an appearance, and so contradicted the smartness of the figure beneath that the explanation which suggested itself was that this girl must have parents of high position who valued their self-esteem so far above the visitors to Balbec and the sartorial elegance of their own children that it was a matter of the utmost indifference to them that their daughter should stroll on the ‘front’ dressed in a way which humbler people would have considered too modest); a girl with brilliant, laughing eyes and plump, colourless cheeks, a black polo-cap pulled down over her face, who was pushing a bicycle with so exaggerated a movement of her hips, with an air borne out by her language, which was so typically of the gutter and was being shouted so loud, when I passed her (although among her expressions I caught that irritating ‘live my own life’) that, abandoning the hypothesis which her friend’s hooded cape had made me construct, I concluded instead that all these girls belonged to the population which frequents the racing-tracks, and must be the very juvenile mistresses of professional bicyclists. In any event, in none of my suppositions was there any possibility of their being virtuous. At first sight — in the way in which they looked at one another and smiled, in the insistent stare of the one with the dull cheeks — I had grasped that

they were not. Besides, my grandmother had always watched over me with a delicacy too timorous for me not to believe that the sum total of the things one ought not to do was indivisible or that girls who were lacking in respect for their elders would suddenly be stopped short by scruples when there were pleasures at stake more tempting than that of jumping over an octogenarian.

Though they were now separately identifiable, still the mutual response which they gave one another with eyes animated by self-sufficiency and the spirit of comradeship, in which were kindled at every moment now the interest now the insolent indifference with which each of them sparkled according as her glance fell on one of her friends or on passing strangers, that consciousness, moreover, of knowing one another intimately enough always to go about together, by making them a ‘band apart’ established between their independent and separate bodies, as slowly they advanced, a bond invisible but harmonious, like a single warm shadow, a single atmosphere making of them a whole as homogeneous in its parts as it was different from the crowd through which their procession gradually wound.

For an instant, as I passed the dark one with the fat cheeks who was wheeling a bicycle, I caught her smiling, sidelong glance, aimed from the centre of that inhuman world which enclosed the life of this little tribe, an inaccessible, unknown world to which the idea of what I was could certainly never attain nor find a place in it. Wholly occupied with what her companions were saying, this young girl in her polo-cap, pulled down very low over her brow, had she seen me at the moment in which the dark ray emanating from her eyes had fallen on me? In the heart of what universe did she distinguish me? It would have been as hard for me to say as, when certain peculiarities are made visible, thanks to the telescope, in a neighbouring planet, it is difficult to arrive at the conclusion that human beings inhabit it, that they can see us, or to say what ideas the sight of us can have aroused in their minds.

If we thought that the eyes of a girl like that were merely two glittering sequins of mica, we should not be athirst to know her and to unite her life to ours. But we feel that what shines in those reflecting discs is not due solely to their material composition; that it is, unknown to us, the dark shadows of the ideas that the creature is conceiving, relative to the people and places that she knows — the turf of racecourses, the sand of cycling tracks over which, pedalling on past fields and woods, she would have drawn me after her, that little peri, more seductive to me than she of the Persian paradise — the shadows, too, of the home to which she will presently return, of the plans that she is forming or

that others have formed for her; and above all that it is she, with her desires, her sympathies, her revulsions, her obscure and incessant will. I knew that I should never possess this young cyclist if I did not possess also what there was in her eyes. And it was consequently her whole life that filled me with desire; a sorrowful desire because I felt that it was not to be realised, but exhilarating, because what had hitherto been my life, having ceased of a sudden to be my whole life, being no more now than a little part of the space stretching out before me, which I was burning to cover and which was composed of the lives of these girls, offered me that prolongation, that possible multiplication of oneself which is happiness. And no doubt the fact that we had, these girls and I, not one habit — as we had not one idea — in common, was to make it more difficult for me to make friends with them and to please them. But perhaps, also, it was thanks to those differences, to my consciousness that there did not enter into the composition of the nature and actions of these girls a single element that I knew or possessed, that there came in place of my satiety a thirst — like that with which a dry land burns — for a life which my soul, because it had never until now received one drop of it, would absorb all the more greedily in long draughts, with a more perfect imbibition.

I had looked so closely at the dark cyclist with the bright eyes that she seemed to notice my attention, and said to the biggest of the girls something that I could not hear. To be honest, this dark one was not the one that pleased me most, simply because she was dark and because (since the day on which, from the little path by Tansonville, I had seen Gilberte) a girl with reddish hair and a golden skin had remained for me the inaccessible ideal. But Gilberte herself, had I not loved her principally because she had appeared to me haloed with that aureole of being the friend of Bergotte, of going with him to look at old cathedrals? And in the same way could I not rejoice at having seen this dark girl look at me (which made me hope that it would be easier for me to get to know her first), for she would introduce me to the others, to the pitiless one who had jumped over the old man’s head, to the cruel one who had said “He makes me sick, poor old man!”— to all of them in turn, among whom, moreover, she had the distinction of being their inseparable companion? And yet the supposition that I might some day be the friend of one or other of these girls, that their eyes, whose incomprehensible gaze struck me now and again, playing upon me unawares, like the play of sunlight upon a wall, might ever, by a miraculous alchemy, allow to interpenetrate among their ineffable particles the idea of my existence, some affection for my person, that I myself might some day take my

place among them in the evolution of their course by the sea's edge — that supposition appeared to me to contain within it a contradiction as insoluble as if, standing before some classical frieze or a fresco representing a procession, I had believed it possible for me, the spectator, to take my place, beloved of them, among the godlike hierophants.

The happiness of knowing these girls was, then, not to be realised. Certainly it would not have been the first of its kind that I had renounced. I had only to recall the numberless strangers whom, even at Balbec, the carriage bowling away from them at full speed had forced me for ever to abandon. And indeed the pleasure that was given me by the little band, as noble as if it had been composed of Hellenic virgins, came from some suggestion that there was in it of the flight of passing figures along a road. This fleetingness of persons who are not known to us, who force us to put out from the harbour of life, in which the women whose society we frequent have all, in course of time, laid bare their blemishes, urges us into that state of pursuit in which there is no longer anything to arrest the imagination. But to strip our pleasures of imagination is to reduce them to their own dimensions, that is to say to nothing. Offered me by one of those procuresses (whose good offices, all the same, the reader has seen that I by no means scorned), withdrawn from the element which gave them so many fine shades and such vagueness, these girls would have enchanted me less. We must have imagination, awakened by the uncertainty of being able to attain our object, to create a goal which hides our other goal from us, and by substituting for sensual pleasures the idea of penetrating into a life prevents us from recognising that pleasure, from tasting its true savour, from restricting it to its own range.

There must be, between us and the fish which, if we saw it for the first time cooked and served on a table, would not appear worth the endless trouble, craft and stratagem that are necessary if we are to catch it, interposed, during our afternoons with the rod, the ripple to whose surface come wavering, without our quite knowing what we intend to do with them, the burnished gleam of flesh, the indefiniteness of a form, in the fluidity of a transparent and flowing azure.

These girls benefited also by that alteration of social values characteristic of seaside life. All the advantages which, in our ordinary environment, extend and magnify our importance, we there find to have become invisible, in fact to be eliminated; while on the other hand the people whom we suppose, without reason, to enjoy similar advantages appear to us amplified to artificial dimensions. This made it easy for strange women generally, and to-day for these girls in particular, to acquire an enormous importance in my eyes, and

impossible to make them aware of such importance as I might myself possess.

But if there was this to be said for the excursion of the little band, that it was but an excerpt from the innumerable flight of passing women, which had always disturbed me, their flight was here reduced to a movement so slow as to approach immobility. Now, precisely because, in a phase so far from rapid, faces no longer swept past me in a whirlwind, but calm and distinct still appeared beautiful, I was prevented from thinking as I had so often thought when Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage bore me away that, at closer quarters, if I had stopped for a moment, certain details, a pitted skin, drooping nostrils, a silly gape, a grimace of a smile, an ugly figure might have been substituted, in the face and body of the woman, for those that I had doubtless imagined; for there had sufficed a pretty outline, a glimpse of a fresh complexion, for me to add, in entire good faith, a fascinating shoulder, a delicious glance of which I carried in my mind for ever a memory or a preconceived idea, these rapid decipherings of a person whom we see in motion exposing us thus to the same errors as those too rapid readings in which, on a single syllable and without waiting to identify the rest, we base instead of the word that is in the text a wholly different word with which our memory supplies us. It could not be so with me now. I had looked well at them all; each of them I had seen, not from every angle and rarely in full face, but all the same in two or three aspects different enough to enable me to make either the correction or the verification, to take a 'proof of the different possibilities of line and colour that are hazarded at first sight, and to see persist in them, through a series of expressions, something unalterably material. I could say to myself with conviction that neither in Paris nor at Balbec, in the most favourable hypotheses of what might have happened, even if I had been able to stop and talk to them, the passing women who had caught my eye, had there ever been one whose appearance, followed by her disappearance without my having managed to know her, had left me with more regret than would these, had given me the idea that her friendship might be a thing so intoxicating. Never, among actresses nor among peasants nor among girls from a convent school had I beheld anything so beautiful, impregnated with so much that was unknown, so inestimably precious, so apparently inaccessible. They were, of the unknown and potential happiness of life, an illustration so delicious and in so perfect a state that it was almost for intellectual reasons that I was desperate with the fear that I might not be able to make, in unique conditions which left no room for any possibility of error, proper trial of what is the most mysterious thing that is offered to us by the beauty which we desire and console ourselves for never

possessing, by demanding pleasure — as Swann had always refused to do before Odette's day — from women whom we have not desired, so that, indeed, we die without having ever known what that other pleasure was. No doubt it was possible that it was not in reality an unknown pleasure, that on a close inspection its mystery would dissipate and vanish, that it was no more than a projection, a mirage of desire. But in that case I could blame only the compulsion of a law of nature — which if it applied to these girls would apply to all — and not the imperfection of the object. For it was that which I should have chosen above all others, feeling quite certain, with a botanist's satisfaction, that it was not possible to find collected anywhere rarer specimens than these young flowers who were interrupting at this moment before my eyes the line of the sea with their slender hedge, like a bower of Pennsylvania roses adorning a garden on the brink of a cliff, between which is contained the whole tract of ocean crossed by some steamer, so slow in gliding along the blue and horizontal line that stretches from one stem to the next that an idle butterfly, dawdling in the cup of a flower which the moving hull has long since passed, can, if it is to fly and be sure of arriving before the vessel, wait until nothing but the tiniest slice of blue still separates the questing prow from the first petal of the flower towards which it is steering.

I went indoors because I was to dine at Rivebelle with Robert, and my grandmother insisted that on those evenings, before going out, I must lie down for an hour on my bed, a rest which the Balbec doctor presently ordered me to extend to the other evenings also.

However, there was no need, when one went indoors, to leave the 'front' and to enter the hotel by the hall, that is to say from behind. By virtue of an alteration of the clock which reminded me of those Saturdays when, at Combray, we used to have luncheon an hour earlier, now with summer at the full the days had become so long that the sun was still high in the heavens, as though it were only tea-time, when the tables were being laid for dinner in the Grand Hotel. And so the great sliding windows were kept open from the ground. I had but to step across a low wooden sill to find myself in the dining-room, through which I walked and straight across to the lift.

As I passed the office I addressed a smile to the manager, and with no shudder of disgust gathered one for myself from his face which, since I had been at Balbec, my comprehensive study of it was injecting and transforming, little by little, like a natural history preparation. His features had become familiar to me, charged with a meaning that was of no importance but still intelligible, like a script which one can read, and had ceased in any way to resemble these queer,

intolerable characters which his face had presented to me on that first day, when I had seen before me a personage now forgotten, or, if I succeeded in recalling him, unrecognisable, difficult to identify with this insignificant and polite personality of which the other was but a caricature, a hideous and rapid sketch. Without either the shyness or the sadness of the evening of my arrival I rang for the attendant, who no longer stood in silence while I rose by his side in the lift as in a mobile thoracic cage propelled upwards along its ascending pillar, but repeated:

"There aren't the people now there were a month back. They're beginning to go now; the days are drawing in." He said this not because there was any truth in it but because, having an engagement, presently, for a warmer part of the coast, he would have liked us all to leave, so that the hotel could be shut up and he have a few days to himself before 'rejoining' in his new place. 'Rejoin' and 'new' were not, by the way, incompatible terms, since, for the lift-boy,'rejoin' was the usual form of the verb 'to join.' The only thing that surprised me was that he condescended to say 'place,' for he belonged to that modern proletariat which seeks to efface from our language every trace of the rule of domesticity. A moment later, however, he informed me that in the 'situation' which he was about to 'rejoin,' he would have a smarter 'tunic' and a better 'salary,' the words 'livery' and 'wages' sounding to him obsolete and unseemly. And as, by an absurd contradiction, the vocabulary has, through thick and thin, among us 'masters,' survived the conception of inequality, I was always failing to understand what the lift-boy said. For instance, the only thing that interested me was to know whether my grandmother was in the hotel. Now, forestalling my questions, the lift-boy would say to me: "That lady has just gone out from your rooms." I was invariably taken in; I supposed that he meant my grandmother. "No, that lady; I think she's an employee of yours." As in the old speech of the middle classes, which ought really to be done away with, a cook is not called an employee, I thought for a moment: "But he must be mistaken. We don't own a factory; we haven't any employees." Suddenly I remembered that the title of 'employee' is, like the wearing of a moustache among waiters, a sop to their self-esteem given to servants, and realised that this lady who had just gone out must be Françoise (probably on a visit to the coffee-maker, or to watch the Belgian lady's little maid at her sewing), though even this sop did not satisfy the lift-boy, for he would say quite naturally, speaking pityingly of his own class, 'with the working man' or 'the small person,' using the same singular form as Racine when he speaks of 'the poor.' But as a rule, for my zeal and timidity of the first

evening were now things of the past, I no longer spoke to the lift-boy. It was he now who stood there and received no answer during the short journey on which he threaded his way through the hotel, hollowed out inside like a toy, which extended round about us, floor by floor, the ramifications of its corridors in the depths of which the light grew velvety, lost its tone, diminished the communicating doors, the steps of the service stairs which it transformed into that amber haze, unsubstantial and mysterious as a twilight, in which Rembrandt picks out here and there a window-sill or a well-head. And on each landing a golden light reflected from the carpet indicated the setting sun and the lavatory window.

I asked myself whether the girls I had just seen lived at Balbec, and who they could be. When our desire is thus concentrated upon a little tribe of humanity which it singles out from the rest, everything that can be associated with that tribe becomes a spring of emotion and then of reflexion. I had heard a lady say on the ‘front’: “She is a friend of the little Simonet girl” with that self-important air of inside knowledge, as who should say: “He is the inseparable companion of young La Rochefoucauld.” And immediately she had detected on the face of the person to whom she gave this information a curiosity to see more of the favoured person who was ‘a friend of the little Simonet.’ A privilege, obviously, that did not appear to be granted to all the world. For aristocracy is a relative state. And there are plenty of inexpensive little holes and corners where the son of an upholsterer is the arbiter of fashion and reigns over a court like any young Prince of Wales. I have often since then sought to recall how it first sounded for me there on the beach, that name of Simonet, still quite indefinite as to its form, which I had failed to distinguish, and also as to its significance, to the designation by it of such and such a person, or perhaps of some one else; imprinted, in fact, with that vagueness, that novelty which we find so moving in the sequel, when the name whose letters are every moment engraved more deeply on our hearts by our incessant thought of them has become (though this was not to happen to me with the name of the ‘little Simonet’ until several years had passed) the first coherent sound that comes to our lips, whether on waking from sleep or on recovering from a swoon, even before the idea of what o’clock it is or of where we are, almost before the word ‘I,’ as though the person whom it names were more ‘we’ even than we ourselves, and as though after a brief spell of unconsciousness the phase that is the first of all to dissolve is that in which we were not thinking of her. I do not know why I said to myself from the first that the name Simonet must be that of one of the band of girls; from that moment I

never ceased to ask myself how I could get to know the Simonet family, get to know them, moreover, through people whom they considered superior to themselves (which ought not to be difficult if the girls were only common little ‘bounders’) so that they might not form a disdainful idea of me. For one cannot have a perfect knowledge, one cannot effect the complete absorption of a person who disdains one, so long as one has not overcome her disdain. And since, whenever the idea of women who are so different from us penetrates our senses, unless we are able to forget it or the competition of other ideas eliminates it, we know no rest until we have converted those aliens into something that is compatible with ourself, our heart being in this respect endowed with the same kind of reaction and activity as our physical organism, which cannot abide the infusion of any foreign body into its veins without at once striving to digest and assimilate it: the little Simonet must be the prettiest of them all — she who, I felt moreover, might yet become my mistress, for she was the only one who, two or three times half-turning her head, had appeared to take cognisance of my fixed stare. I asked the lift-boy whether he knew of any people at Balbec called Simonet. Not liking to admit that there was anything which he did not know, he replied that he seemed to have heard the name somewhere. As we reached the highest landing I told him to have the latest lists of visitors sent up to me.

I stepped out of the lift, but instead of going to my room I made my way farther along the corridor, for before my arrival the valet in charge of the landing, despite his horror of draughts, had opened the window at the end, which instead of looking out to the sea faced the hill and valley inland, but never allowed them to be seen, for its panes, which were made of clouded glass, were generally closed. I made a short ‘station’ in front of it, time enough just to pay my devotions to the view which for once it revealed over the hill against which the back of the hotel rested, a view that contained but a solitary house, planted in the middle distance, though the perspective and the evening light in which I saw it, while preserving its mass, gave it a sculptural beauty and a velvet background, as though to one of those architectural works in miniature, tiny temples or chapels wrought in gold and enamels, which serve as reliquaries and are exposed only on rare and solemn days for the veneration of the faithful. But this moment of adoration had already lasted too long, for the valet, who carried in one hand a bunch of keys and with the other saluted me by touching his verger’s skull-cap, though without raising it, on account of the pure, cool evening air, came and drew together, like those of a shrine, the two sides of the window, and so shut off the minute edifice, the glistening relic from my adoring gaze. I went into my

room. Regularly, as the season advanced, the picture that I found there in my window changed. At first it was broad daylight, and dark only if the weather was bad: and then, in the greenish glass which it distended with the curve of its round waves, the sea, set among the iron uprights of my window like a piece of stained glass in its leads, ravelled out over all the deep rocky border of the bay little plumed triangles of an unmoving spray delineated with the delicacy of a feather or a downy breast from Pisanello's pencil, and fixed in that white, unalterable, creamy enamel which is used to depict fallen snow in Gallé's glass.

Presently the days grew shorter and at the moment when I entered my room the violet sky seemed branded with the stiff, geometrical, travelling, effulgent figure of the sun (like the representation of some miraculous sign, of some mystical apparition) leaning over the sea from the hinge of the horizon as a sacred picture leans over a high altar, while the different parts of the western sky exposed in the glass fronts of the low mahogany bookcases that ran along the walls, which I carried back in my mind to the marvellous painting from which they had been detached, seemed like those different scenes which some old master executed long ago for a. confraternity upon a shrine, whose separate panels are now exhibited side by side upon the wall of a museum gallery, so that the visitor's imagination alone can restore them to their place on the predella of the reredos. A few weeks later, when I went upstairs, the sun had already set. Like the one that I used to see at Combray, behind the Calvary, when I was coming home from a walk and looking forward to going down to the kitchen before dinner, a band of red sky over the sea, compact and clear-cut as a layer of aspic over meat, then, a little later, over a sea already cold and blue like a grey mullet, a sky of the same pink as the salmon that we should presently be ordering at Rivebelle reawakened the pleasure which I was to derive from the act of dressing to go out to dinner. Over the sea, quite near the shore, were trying to rise, one beyond another, at wider and wider intervals, vapours of a pitchy blackness but also of the polish and consistency of agate, of a visible weight, so much so that the highest among them, poised at the end of their contorted stem and overreaching the centre of gravity of the pile that had hitherto supported them, seemed on the point of bringing down in ruin this lofty structure already half the height of the sky, and of precipitating it into the sea. The sight of a ship that was moving away like a nocturnal traveller gave me the same impression that I had had in the train of being set free from the necessity of sleep and from confinement in a bedroom. Not that I felt myself a prisoner in the room in which I now was, since in another hour I should have left it and be getting into the

carriage. I threw myself down on the bed; and, just as if I had been lying in a berth on board one of those steamers which I could see quite near to me and which, when night came, it would be strange to see stealing slowly out into the darkness, like shadowy and silent but unsleeping swans, I was on all sides surrounded by pictures of the sea.

But as often as not they were, indeed, only pictures; I forgot that below their coloured expanse was hollowed the sad desolation of the beach, travelled by the restless evening breeze whose breath I had so anxiously felt on my arrival at Balbec; besides, even in my room, being wholly taken up with thoughts of the girls whom I had seen go past, I was no longer in a state of mind calm or disinterested enough to allow the formation of any really deep impression of beauty. The anticipation of dinner at Rivebelle made my mood more frivolous still, and my mind, dwelling at such moments upon the surface of the body which I was going to dress up so as to try to appear as pleasing as possible in the feminine eyes which would be scrutinising me in the brilliantly lighted restaurant, was incapable of putting any depth behind the colour of things. And if, beneath my window, the unwearying, gentle flight of sea-martins and swallows had not arisen like a playing fountain, like living fireworks, joining the intervals between their soaring rockets with the motionless white streaming lines of long horizontal wakes of foam, without the charming miracle of this natural and local phenomenon, which brought into touch with reality the scenes that I had before my eyes, I might easily have believed that they were no more than a selection, made afresh every day, of paintings which were shewn quite arbitrarily in the place in which I happened to be and without having any necessary connexion with that place. At one time it was an exhibition of Japanese colour-prints: beside the neat disc of sun, red and round as the moon, a yellow cloud seemed a lake against which black swords were outlined like the trees upon its shore; a bar of a tender pink which I had never seen again after my first paint-box swelled out into a river on either bank of which boats seemed to be waiting high and dry for some one to push them down and set them afloat. And with the contemptuous, bored, frivolous glance of an amateur or a woman hurrying through a picture gallery between two social engagements, I would say to myself: “Curious sunset, this; it’s different from what they usually are but after all I’ve seen them just as fine, just as remarkable as this.” I had more pleasure on evenings when a ship, absorbed and liquefied by the horizon so much the same in colour as herself (an Impressionist exhibition this time) that it seemed to be also of the same matter, appeared as if some one had simply cut out with a pair

of scissors her bows and the rigging in which she tapered into a slender filigree from the vaporous blue of the sky. Sometimes the ocean filled almost the whole of my window, when it was enlarged and prolonged by a band of sky edged at the top only by a line that was of the same blue as the sea, so that I supposed it all to be still sea, and the change in colour due only to some effect of light and shade. Another day the sea was painted only in the lower part of the window, all the rest of which was so filled with innumerable clouds, packed one against another in horizontal bands, that its panes seemed to be intended, for some special purpose or to illustrate a special talent of the artist, to present a ‘Cloud Study,’ while the fronts of the various bookcases shewing similar clouds but in another part of the horizon and differently coloured by the light, appeared to be offering as it were the repetition — of which certain of our contemporaries are so fond — of one and the same effect always observed at different hours but able now in the immobility of art to be seen all together in a single room, drawn in pastel and mounted under glass. And sometimes to a sky and sea uniformly grey a rosy touch would be added with an exquisite delicacy, while a little butterfly that had gone to sleep at the foot of the window seemed to be attaching with its wings at the corner of this ‘Harmony in Grey and Pink’ in the Whistler manner the favourite signature of the Chelsea master. The pink vanished; there was nothing now left to look at. I rose for a moment and before lying down again drew dose the inner curtains. Above them I could see from my bed the ray of light that still remained, growing steadily fainter and thinner, but it was without any feeling of sadness, without any regret for its passing that I thus allowed to die above the curtains the hour at which, as a rule, I was seated at table, for I knew that this day was of another kind than ordinary days, longer, like those arctic days which night interrupts for a few minutes only; I knew that from the chrysalis of the dusk was preparing to emerge, by a radiant metamorphosis, the dazzling light of the Rivebelle restaurant. I said to myself: “It is time”; I stretched myself on the bed, and rose, and finished dressing; and I found a charm in these idle moments, lightened of every material burden, in which while down below the others were dining I was employing the forces accumulated during the inactivity of this last hour of the day only in drying my washed body, in putting on a dinner jacket, in tying my tie, in making all those gestures which were already dictated by the anticipated pleasure of seeing again some woman whom I had noticed, last time, at Rivebelle, who had seemed to be watching me, had perhaps left the table for a moment only in the hope that I would follow her; it was with joy that I enriched myself with all these attractions so as to give

myself, whole, alert, willing, to a new life, free, without cares, in which I would lean my hesitations upon the calm strength of Saint-Loup, and would choose from among the different species of animated nature and the produce of every land those which, composing the unfamiliar dishes that my companion would at once order, might have tempted my appetite or my imagination. And then at the end of the season came the days when I could no longer pass indoors from the 'front' through the dining-room; its windows stood open no more, for it was night now outside and the swarm of poor folk and curious idlers, attracted by the blaze of light which they might not reach, hung in black clusters chilled by the north wind to the luminous sliding walls of that buzzing hive of glass.

There was a knock at my door; it was Aimé who had come upstairs in person with the latest lists of visitors.

Aimé could not go away without telling me that Dreyfus was guilty a thousand times over. "It will all come out," he assured me, "not this year, but next. It was a gentleman who's very thick with the General Staff, told me. I asked him if they wouldn't decide to bring it all to light at once, before the year is out. He laid down his cigarette," Aimé went on, acting the scene for my benefit, and, shaking his head and his forefinger as his informant had done, as much as to say: "We mustn't expect too much!"—"'Not this year, Aimé,' those were his very words, putting his hand on my shoulder, 'It isn't possible. But next Easter, yes!'" And Aimé tapped me gently on my shoulder, saying, "You see, I'm letting you have it exactly as he told me," whether because he was flattered at this act of familiarity by a distinguished person or so that I might better appreciate, with a full knowledge of the facts, the worth of the arguments and our grounds for hope.

It was not without a slight throb of the heart that on the first page of the list I caught sight of the words 'Simonet and family.' I had in me a store of old dream-memories which dated from my childhood, and in which all the tenderness (tenderness that existed in my heart, but, when my heart felt it, was not distinguishable from anything else) was wafted to me by a person as different as possible from myself. This person, once again I fashioned her, utilising for the purpose the name Simonet and the memory of the harmony that had reigned between the young bodies which I had seen displaying themselves on the beach, in a sportive procession worthy of Greek art or of Giotto. I knew not which of these girls was Mlle. Simonet, if indeed any of them were so named, but I did know that I was loved by Mlle. Simonet and that I was going, with Saint-Loup's help, to attempt to know her. Unfortunately, having on that condition only

obtained an extension of his leave, he was obliged to report for duty every day at Doncières: but to make him forsake his military duty I had felt that I might count, more even than on his friendship for myself, on that same curiosity, as a human naturalist, which I myself had so often felt — even without having seen the person mentioned, and simply on hearing some one say that there was a pretty cashier at a fruiterer's — to acquaint myself with a new variety of feminine beauty. But that curiosity I had been wrong in hoping to excite in Saint-Loup by speaking to him of my band of girls. For it had been and would long remain paralysed in him by his love for that actress whose lover he was. And even if he had felt it lightly stirring him he would have repressed it, from an almost superstitious belief that on his own fidelity might depend that of his mistress. And so it was without any promise from him that he would take an active interest in my girls that we started out to dine at Rivebelle.

At first, when we arrived there, the sun used just to have set, but it was light still; in the garden outside the restaurant, where the lamps had not yet been lighted, the heat of the day fell and settled, as though in a vase along the sides of which the transparent, dusky jelly of the air seemed of such consistency that a tall rose-tree fastened against the dim wall which it streaked with pink veins, looked like the arborescence that one sees at the heart of an onyx. Presently night had always fallen when we left the carriage, often indeed before we started from Balbec if the evening was wet and we had put off sending for the carriage in the hope of the weather's improving. But on those days it was without any sadness that I listened to the wind howling, I knew that it did not mean the abandonment of my plans, imprisonment in my bedroom; I knew that in the great dining-room of the restaurant, which we would enter to the sound of the music of the gypsy band, the innumerable lamps would triumph easily over darkness and chill, by applying to them their broad cauteries of molten gold, and I jumped light-heartedly after Saint-Loup into the closed carriage which stood waiting for us in the rain. For some time past the words of Bergotte, when he pronounced himself positive that, in spite of all I might say, I had been created to enjoy, pre-eminently, the pleasures of the mind, had restored to me, with regard to what I might succeed in achieving later on, a hope that was disappointed afresh every day by the boredom that I felt on setting myself down before a writing-table to start work on a critical essay or a novel. "After all," I said to myself, "possibly the pleasure that its author has found in writing it is not the infallible test of the literary value of a page; it may be only an accessory, one that is often to be found superadded to that value, but the want of which can have no

prejudicial effect on it. Perhaps some of the greatest masterpieces were written yawning." My grandmother set my doubts at rest by telling me that I should be able to work and should enjoy working as soon as my health improved. And, our doctor having thought it only prudent to warn me of the grave risks to which my state of health might expose me, and having outlined all the hygienic precaution that I ought to take to avoid any accident — I subordinated all my pleasures to an object which I judged to be infinitely more important than them, that of becoming strong enough to be able to bring into being the work which I had, possibly, within me; I had been exercising over myself, ever since I had come to Balbec, a scrupulous and constant control. Nothing would have induced me, there, to touch the cup of coffee which would have robbed me of the night's sleep that was necessary if I was not to be tired next day. But as soon as we reached Rivebelle, immediately, what with the excitement of a new pleasure, and finding myself in that different zone into which the exception to our rule of life takes us after it has cut the thread, patiently spun throughout so many days, that was guiding us towards wisdom — as though there were never to be any such thing as to-morrow, nor any lofty aims to be realised, vanished all that exact machinery of prudent hygienic measures which had been working to safeguard them. A waiter was offering to take my coat, whereupon Saint-Loup asked: "You're sure you won't be cold? Perhaps you'd better keep it: it's not very warm in here."

"No, no," I assured him; and perhaps I did not feel the cold; but however that might be, I no longer knew the fear of falling ill, the necessity of not dying, the importance of work. I gave up my coat; we entered the dining-room to the sound of some warlike march played by the gipsies, we advanced between two rows of tables laid for dinner as along an easy path of glory, and, feeling a happy glow imparted to our bodies by the rhythms of the orchestra which rendered us its military honours, gave us this unmerited triumph, we concealed it beneath a grave and frozen mien, beneath a languid, casual gait, so as not to be like those music-hall 'mashers' who, having wedded a ribald verse to a patriotic air, come running on to the stage with the martial countenance of a victorious general.

From that moment I was a new man, who was no longer my grandmother's grandson and would remember her only when it was time to get up and go, but the brother, for the time being, of the waiters who were going to bring us our dinner.

The dose of beer — all the more, that of champagne — which at Balbec I should not have ventured to take in a week, albeit to my calm and lucid

consciousness the flavour of those beverages represented a pleasure clearly appreciable, since it was also one that could easily be sacrificed, I now imbibed at a sitting, adding to it a few drops of port wine, too much distracted to be able to taste it, and I gave the violinist who had just been playing the two louis which I had been saving up for the last month with a view to buying something, I could not remember what. Several of the waiters, set going among the tables, were flying along at full speed, each carrying on his outstretched palms a dish which it seemed to be the object of this kind of race not to let fall. And in fact the chocolate *soufflés* arrived at their destination unspilled, the potatoes à l'anglaise, in spite of the pace which ought to have sent them flying, came arranged as at the start round the Pauilhac lamb. I noticed one of these servants, very tall, plumed with superb black locks, his face dyed in a tint that suggested rather certain species of rare birds than a human being, who, running without pause (and, one would have said, without purpose) from one end of the room to the other, made me think of one of those macaws which fill the big aviaries in zoological gardens with their gorgeous colouring and incomprehensible agitation. Presently the spectacle assumed an order, in my eyes at least, growing at once more noble and more calm. All this dizzy activity became fixed in a quiet harmony. I looked at the round tables whose innumerable assemblage filled the restaurant like so many planets as planets are represented in old allegorical pictures. Moreover, there seemed to be some irresistibly attractive force at work among these divers stars, and at each table the diners had eyes only for the tables at which they were not sitting, except perhaps some wealthy amphitryon who, having managed to secure a famous author, was endeavouring to extract from him, thanks to the magic properties of the turning table, a few unimportant remarks at which the ladies marvelled. The harmony of these astral tables did not prevent the incessant revolution of the countless servants who, because instead of being seated like the diners they were on their feet, performed their evolutions in a more exalted sphere. No doubt they were running, one to fetch the *hors d'oeuvres*, another to change the wine or with clean glasses. But despite these special reasons, their perpetual course among the round tables yielded, after a time, to the observer the law of its dizzy but ordered circulation. Seated behind a bank of flowers, two horrible cashiers, busy with endless calculations, seemed two witches occupied in forecasting by astrological signs the disasters that might from time to time occur in this celestial vault fashioned according to the scientific conceptions of the middle ages.

And I rather pitied all the diners because I felt that for them the round tables

were not planets and that they had not cut through the scheme of things one of those sections which deliver us from the bondage of appearances and enable us to perceive analogies. They thought that they were dining with this or that person, that the dinner would cost roughly so much, and that to-morrow they would begin all over again. And they appeared absolutely unmoved by the progress through their midst of a train of young assistants who, having probably at that moment no urgent duty, advanced processionally bearing rolls of bread in baskets. Some of them, the youngest, stunned by the cuffs which the head waiters administered to them as they passed, fixed melancholy eyes upon a distant dream and were consoled only if some visitor from the Balbec hotel in which they had once been employed, recognising them, said a few words to them, telling them in person to take away the champagne which was not fit to drink, an order that filled them with pride.

I could hear the twinging of my nerves, in which there was a sense of comfort independent of the external objects that might have produced it, a comfort which the least shifting of my body or of my attention was enough to make me feel, just as to a shut eye a slight pressure gives the sensation of colour. I had already drunk a good deal of port wine, and if I now asked for more it was not so much with a view to the comfort which the additional glasses would bring me as an effect of the comfort produced by the glasses that had gone before. I allowed the music itself to guide to each of its notes my pleasure which, meekly following, rested on each in turn. If, like one of those chemical industries by means of which are prepared in large quantities bodies which in a state of nature come together only by accident and very rarely, this restaurant at Rivebelle united at one and the same moment more women to tempt me with beckoning vistas of happiness than the hazard of walks and drives would have made me encounter in a year; on the other hand, this music that greeted our ears,— arrangements of waltzes, of German operettas, of music-hall songs, all of them quite new to me — was itself like an ethereal resort of pleasure superimposed upon the other and more intoxicating still. For these tunes, each as individual as a woman, were not keeping, as she would have kept, for some privileged person, the voluptuous secret which they contained: they offered me their secrets, ogled me, came up to me with affected or vulgar movements, accosted me, caressed me as if I had suddenly become more seductive, more powerful and more rich; I indeed found in these tunes an element of cruelty; because any such thing as a disinterested feeling for beauty, a gleam of intelligence was unknown to them; for them physical pleasures alone existed. And they are the most merciless of

hells, the most gateless and imprisoning for the jealous wretch to whom they present that pleasure — that pleasure which the woman he loves is enjoying with another — as the only thing that exists in the world for her who is all the world to him. But while I was humming softly to myself the notes of this tune, and returning its kiss, the pleasure peculiar to itself which it made me feel became so dear to me that I would have left my father and mother, to follow it through the singular world which it constructed in the invisible, in lines instinct with alternate languor and vivacity. Although such a pleasure as this is not calculated to enhance the value of the person to whom it comes, for it is perceived by him alone, and although whenever, in the course of our life, we have failed to attract a woman who has caught sight of us, she could not tell whether at that moment we possessed this inward and subjective felicity which, consequently, could in no way have altered the judgment that she passed on us, I felt myself more powerful, almost irresistible. It seemed to me that my love was no longer something unattractive, at which people might smile, but had precisely the touching beauty, the seductiveness of this music, itself comparable to a friendly atmosphere in which she whom I loved and I were to meet, suddenly grown intimate.

This restaurant was the resort not only of light women; it was frequented also by people in the very best society, who came there for afternoon tea or gave big dinner-parties. The tea-parties were held in a long gallery, glazed and narrow, shaped like a funnel, which led from the entrance hall to the dining-room and was bounded on one side by the garden, from which it was separated (save for a few stone pillars) only by its wall of glass, in which panes would be opened here and there. The result of which, apart from ubiquitous draughts, was sudden and intermittent bursts of sunshine, a dazzling light that made it almost impossible to see the tea-drinkers, so that when they were installed there, at tables crowded pair after pair the whole way along the narrow gully, as they were shot with colours at every movement they made in drinking their tea or in greeting one another, you would have called it a reservoir, a stewpond in which the fisherman has collected all his glittering catch, and the fish, half out of water and bathed in sunlight, dazzle the eye as they mirror an ever-changing iridescence.

A few hours later, during dinner, which, naturally, was served in the dining-room, the lights would be turned on, although it was still quite light out of doors, so that one saw before one’s eyes, in the garden, among summer-houses glimmering in the twilight, like pale spectres of evening, alleys whose greyish verdure was pierced by the last rays of the setting sun and, from the lamp-lit

room in which we were dining, appeared through the glass — no longer, as one would have said of the ladies who had been drinking tea there in the afternoon, along the blue and gold corridor, caught in a glittering and dripping net — but like the vegetation of a pale and green aquarium of gigantic size seen by a supernatural light. People began to rise from table; and if each party while their dinner lasted, albeit they spent the whole time examining, recognising, naming the party at the next table, had been held in perfect cohesion about their own, the attractive force that had kept them gravitating round their host of the evening lost its power at the moment when, for coffee, they repaired to the same corridor that had been used for the tea-parties; it often happened that in its passage from place to place some party on the march dropped one or more of its human corpuscles who, having come under the irresistible attraction of the rival party, detached themselves for a moment from their own, in which their places were taken by ladies or gentlemen who had come across to speak to friends before hurrying off with an “I really must fly: I’m dining with M. So-and-So.” And for the moment you would have been reminded, looking at them, of two separate nosegays that had exchanged a few of their flowers. Then the corridor too began to empty. Often, since even after dinner there was still a little light left outside, they left this long corridor unlighted, and, skirted by the trees that overhung it on the other side of the glass, it suggested a pleached alley in a wooded and shady garden. Here and there, in the gloom, a fair diner lingered. As I passed through this corridor one evening on my way out I saw, sitting among a group of strangers, the beautiful Princesse de Luxembourg. I raised my hat without stopping. She remembered me, and bowed her head with a smile; in the air, far above her bowed head, but emanating from the movement, rose melodiously a few words addressed to myself, which must have been a somewhat amplified good-evening, intended not to stop me but simply to complete the gesture, to make it a spoken greeting. But her words remained so indistinct and the sound which was all that I caught was prolonged so sweetly and seemed to me so musical that it seemed as if among the dim branches of the trees a nightingale had begun to sing. If it so happened that, to finish the evening with a party of his friends whom we had met, Saint-Loup decided to go on to the Casino of a neighbouring village, and, taking them with him, put me in a carriage by myself, I would urge the driver to go as fast as he possibly could, so that the minutes might pass less slowly which I must spend without having anyone at hand to dispense me from the obligation myself to provide my sensibility — reversing the engine, so to speak, and emerging from the passivity in which I was caught

and held as in the teeth of a machine — with those modifications which, since my arrival at Rivebelle, I had been receiving from other people. The risk of collision with a carriage coming the other way along those lanes where there was barely room for one and it was dark as pitch, the insecurity of the soil, crumbling in many places, at the cliff's edge, the proximity of its vertical drop to the sea, none of these things exerted on me the slight stimulus that would have been required to bring the vision and the fear of danger within the scope of my reasoning. For just as it is not the desire to become famous but the habit of being laborious that enables us to produce a finished work, so it is not the activity of the present moment but wise reflexions from the past that help us to safeguard the future. But if already, before this point, on my arrival at Rivebelle, I had flung irretrievably away from me those crutches of reason and self-control which help our infirmity to follow the right road, if I now found myself the victim of a sort of moral ataxy, the alcohol that I had drunk, by unduly straining my nerves, gave to the minutes as they came a quality, a charm which did not have the result of leaving me more ready, or indeed more resolute to inhibit them, prevent their coming; for while it made me prefer them a thousand times to anything else in my life, my exaltation made me isolate them from everything else; I was confined to the present, as heroes are or drunkards; eclipsed for the moment, my past no longer projected before me that shadow of itself which we call our future; placing the goal of my life no longer in the realisation of the dreams of that past, but in the felicity of the present moment, I could see nothing now of what lay beyond it. So that, by a contradiction which, however, was only apparent, it was at the very moment in which I was tasting an unfamiliar pleasure, feeling that my life might yet be happy, in which it should have become more precious in my sight; it was at this very moment that, delivered from the anxieties which my life had hitherto contrived to suggest to me, I unhesitatingly abandoned it to the chance of an accident. After all, I was doing no more than concentrate in a single evening the carelessness that, for most men, is diluted throughout their whole existence, in which every day they face, unnecessarily, the dangers of a sea-voyage, of a trip in an aeroplane or motor-car, when there is waiting for them at home the creature whose life their death would shatter, or when there is still stored in the fragile receptacle of their brain that book the approaching publication of which is their one object, now, in life. And so too in the Rivebelle restaurant, on evenings when we just stayed there after dinner, if anyone had come in with the intention of killing me, as I no longer saw, save in a distant prospect too remote to have any reality, my grandmother,

my life to come, the books that I was going to write, as I clung now, body and mind, wholly to the scent of the lady at the next table, the politeness of the waiters, the outline of the waltz that the band was playing, as I was glued to my immediate sensation, with no extension beyond its limits, nor any object other than not to be separated from it, I should have died in and with that sensation, I should have let myself be strangled without offering any resistance, without a movement, a bee drugged with tobacco smoke that had ceased to take any thought for preserving the accumulation of its labours and the hopes of its hive.

I ought here to add that this insignificance into which the most serious matters subsided, by contrast with the violence of my exaltation, came in the end to include Mlle. Simonet and her friends. The enterprise of knowing them seemed to me easy now but hardly worth the trouble, for my immediate sensation alone, thanks to its extraordinary intensity, to the joy that its slightest modifications, its mere continuity provoked, had any importance for me; all the rest — parents, work, pleasures, girls at Balbec weighed with me no more than does a flake of foam in a strong wind that will not let it find a resting place, existed no longer save in relation to this internal power: intoxication makes real for an hour or two a subjective idealism, pure phenomenism; nothing is left now but appearances, nothing exists save as a function of our sublime self. This is not to say that a genuine love, if we have one, cannot survive in such conditions. But we feel so unmistakably, as though in a new atmosphere, that unknown pressures have altered the dimensions of that sentiment that we can no longer consider it in the old way. It is indeed still there and we shall find it, but in a different place, no longer weighing upon us, satisfied by the sensation which the present affords it, a sensation that is sufficient for us, since for what is not actually present we take no thought. Unfortunately the coefficient which thus alters our values alters them only in the hour of intoxication. The people who had lost all their importance, whom we scattered with our breath like soap-bubbles, will to-morrow resume their density; we shall have to try afresh to settle down to work which this evening had ceased to have any significance. A more serious matter still, these mathematics of the morrow, the same as those of yesterday, in whose problems we shall find ourselves inexorably involved, it is they that govern us even in these hours, and we alone are unconscious of their rule. If there should happen to be, near us, a woman, virtuous or inimical, that question so difficult an hour ago — to know whether we should succeed in finding favour with her — seems to us now a million times easier of solution without having become easier in any respect, for it is only in our own sight, in our own inward sight, that we have

altered. And she is as much annoyed with us at this moment as we shall be next day at the thought of our having given a hundred francs to the messenger, and for the same reason which in our case has merely been delayed in its operation, namely the absence of intoxication.

I knew none of the women who were at Rivebelle and, because they formed a part of my intoxication just as its reflexions form part of a mirror, appeared to me now a thousand times more to be desired than the less and less existent Mlle. Simonet. One of them, young, fair, by herself, with a sad expression on a face framed in a straw hat trimmed with field-flowers, gazed at me for a moment with a dreamy air and struck me as being attractive. Then it was the turn of another, and of a third; finally of a dark one with glowing cheeks. Almost all of them were known, if not to myself, to Saint-Loup.

He had, in fact, before he made the acquaintance of his present mistress, lived so much in the restricted world of amorous adventure that all the women who would be dining on these evenings at Rivebelle, where many of them had appeared quite by chance, having come to the coast some to join their lovers, others in the hope of finding fresh lovers there, there was scarcely one that he did not know from having spent — or if not he, one or other of his friends — at least one night in their company. He did not bow to them if they were with men, and they, albeit they looked more at him than at anyone else, for the indifference which he was known to feel towards every woman who was not his mistress gave him in their eyes an exceptional interest, appeared not to know him. But you could hear them whispering: “That’s young Saint-Loup. It seems he’s still quite gone on that girl of his. Got it bad, he has. What a dear boy! I think he’s just wonderful; and what style! Some girls do have all the luck, don’t they? And he’s so nice in every way. I saw a lot of him when I was with d’Orléans. They were quite inseparable, those two. He was going the pace, that time. But he’s given it all up now, she can’t complain. She’s had a good run of luck, that she can say. And I ask you, what in the world can he see in her? He must be a bit of a chump, when all’s said and done. She’s got feet like boats, whiskers like an American, and her undies are filthy. I can tell you, a little shop girl would be ashamed to be seen in her knickers. Do just look at his eyes a moment; you would jump into the fire for a man like that. Hush, don’t say a word; he’s seen me; look, he’s smiling. Oh, he remembers me all right. Just you mention my name to him, and see what he says!” Between these girls and him I surprised a glance of mutual understanding. I should have liked him to introduce me to them, so that I might ask them for assignations and they give them to me, even if

I had been unable to keep them. For otherwise their appearance would remain for all time devoid, in my memory, of that part of itself — just as though it had been hidden by a veil — which varies in every woman, which we cannot imagine in any woman until we have actually seen it in her, and which is apparent only in the glance that she directs at us, that acquiesces in our desire and promises that it shall be satisfied. And yet, even when thus reduced, their aspect was for me far more than that of women whom I should have known to be virtuous, and it seemed to me not to be, like theirs, flat, with nothing behind it, fashioned in one piece with no solidity. It was not, of course, for me what it must be for Saint-Loup who, by an act of memory, beneath the indifference, transparent to him, of the motionless features which affected not to know him, or beneath the dull formality of the greeting that might equally well have been addressed to anyone else, could recall, could see, through dishevelled locks, a swooning mouth, a pair of half-closed eyes, a whole silent picture like those that painters, to cheat their visitors' senses, drape with a decent covering. Undoubtedly, for me who felt that nothing of my personality had penetrated the surface of this woman or that, or would be borne by her upon the unknown ways which she would tread through life, those faces remained sealed. But it was quite enough to know that they did open, for them to seem to me of a price which I should not have set on them had they been but precious medals, instead of lockets within which were hidden memories of love. As for Robert, scarcely able to keep in his place at table, concealing beneath a courtier's smile his warrior's thirst for action — when I examined him I could see how closely the vigorous structure of his triangular face must have been modelled on that of his ancestors' faces, a face devised rather for an ardent bowman than for a delicate student. Beneath his fine skin the bold construction, the feudal architecture were apparent. His head made one think of those old dungeon keeps on which the disused battlements are still to be seen, although inside they have been converted into libraries.

On our way back to Balbec, of those of the fair strangers to whom he had introduced me I would repeat to myself without a moment's interruption, and yet almost unconsciously: "What a delightful woman!" as one chimes in with the refrain of a song. I admit that these words were prompted rather by the state of my nerves than by any lasting judgment. It was nevertheless true that if I had had a thousand francs on me and if there had still been a jeweller's shop open at that hour, I should have bought the lady a ring. When the successive hours of our life are thus displayed against too widely dissimilar backgrounds, we find that we

give away too much of ourselves to all sorts of people who next day will not interest us in the least. But we feel that we are still responsible for what we said to them overnight, and that we must honour our promises.

As on these evenings I came back later than usual to the hotel, it was with joy that I recognised, in a room no longer hostile, the bed on which, on the day of my arrival, I had supposed that it would always be impossible for me to find any rest, whereas now my weary limbs turned to it for support; so that, in turn, thighs, hips, shoulders burrowed into, trying to adhere at every angle to, the sheets that covered its mattress, as if my fatigue, like a sculptor, had wished to take a cast of an entire human body. But I could not go to sleep; I felt the approach of morning; peace of mind, health of body, were no longer mine. In my distress it seemed that never should I recapture them. I should have had to sleep for a long time if I were to overtake them. But then, had I begun to doze, I must in any event be awakened in a couple of hours by the symphonic concert on the beach. Suddenly I was asleep, I had fallen into that deep slumber in which are opened to us a return to childhood, the recapture of past years, of lost feelings, the disincarnation, the transmigration of the soul, the evoking of the dead, the illusions of madness, retrogression towards the most elementary of the natural kingdoms (for we say that we often see animals in our dreams, but we forget almost always that we are ourself then an animal deprived of that reasoning power which projects upon things the light of certainty; we present on the contrary to the spectacle of life only a dubious vision, destroyed afresh every moment by oblivion, the former reality fading before that which follows it as one projection of a magic lantern fades before the next as we change the slide), all those mysteries which we imagine ourselves not to know and into which we are in reality initiated almost every night, as we are into the other great mystery of annihilation and resurrection. Rendered more vagabond by the difficulty of digesting my Rivebelle dinner, the successive and flickering illumination of shadowy zones of my past made of me a being whose supreme happiness would have been that of meeting Legrandin, with whom I had just been talking in my dream.

And then, even my own life was entirely hidden from me by a new setting, like the ‘drop’ lowered right at the front of the stage before which, while the scene snifters are busy behind, actors appear in a fresh ‘turn.’ The turn in which I was now cast for a part was in the manner of an Oriental fairy-tale; I retained no knowledge of my past or of myself, on account of the intense proximity of this interpolated scenery; I was merely a person who received the bastinado and

underwent various punishments for a crime the nature of which I could not distinguish, though it was actually that of having taken too much port wine. Suddenly I awoke and discovered that, thanks to a long sleep, I had not heard a note of the concert. It was already afternoon; I verified this by my watch after several efforts to sit up in bed, efforts fruitless at first and interrupted by backward falls on to my pillow, but those short falls which are a sequel of sleep as of other forms of intoxication, whether due to wine or to convalescence; besides, before I had so much as looked at the time, I was certain that it was past midday. Last night I had been nothing more than an empty vessel, without weight, and (since I must first have gone to bed to be able to keep still, and have been asleep to be able to keep silent) had been unable to refrain from moving about and talking; I had no longer any stability, any centre of gravity, I was set in motion and it seemed that I might have continued on my dreary course until I reached the moon. But if, while I slept, my eyes had not seen the time, my body had nevertheless contrived to calculate it, had measured the hours; not on a dial superficially marked and figured, but by the steadily growing weight of all my replenished forces which, like, a powerful clockwork, it had allowed, notch by notch, to descend from my brain into the rest of my body in which there had risen now to above my knees the unbroken abundance of their store. If it is true that the sea was once upon a time our native element, into which we must plunge our cooling blood if we are to recover our strength, it is the same with the oblivion, the mental non-existence of sleep; we seem then to absent ourselves for a few hours from Time, but the forces which we have gathered in that interval without expending them, measure it by their quantity as accurately as the pendulum of the clock or the crumbling pyramid of the sandglass. Nor does one emerge more easily from such sleep than from a prolonged spell of wakefulness, so strongly does everything tend to persist; and if it is true that certain narcotics make us sleep, to have slept for any time is an even stronger narcotic, after which we have great difficulty in making ourselves wake up. Like a sailor who sees plainly the harbour in which he can moor his vessel, still tossed by the waves, I had a quite definite idea of looking at the time and of getting up, but my body was at every moment cast back upon the tide of sleep; the landing was difficult, and before I attained a position in which I could reach my watch and confront with its time that indicated by the wealth of accumulated material which my stiffened limbs had at their disposal, I fell back two or three times more upon my pillow.

At length I could reach and read it: “Two o’clock in the afternoon!” I rang;

but at once I returned to a slumber which, this time, must have lasted infinitely longer, if I was to judge by the refreshment, the vision of an immense night overpassed, which I found on awakening. And yet as my awakening was caused by the entry of Françoise, and as her entry had been prompted by my ringing the bell, this second sleep which, it seemed to me, must have been longer than the other, and had brought me so much comfort and forgetfulness, could not have lasted for more than half a minute.

My grandmother opened the door of my bedroom; I asked her various questions about the Legrandin family.

It is not enough to say that I had returned to tranquillity and health, for it was more than a mere interval of space that had divided them from me yesterday, I had had all night long to struggle against a contrary tide, and now I not only found myself again in their presence, they had once more entered into me. At certain definite and still somewhat painful points beneath the surface of my empty head which would one day be broken, letting my ideas escape for all time, those ideas had once again taken their proper places and resumed that existence by which hitherto, alas, they had failed to profit.

Once again I had escaped from the impossibility of sleeping, from the deluge, the shipwreck of my nervous storms. I feared now not at all the menaces that had loomed over me the evening before, when I was dismantled of repose. A new life was opening before me; without making a single movement, for I was still shattered, although quite alert and well, I savoured my weariness with a light heart; it had isolated and broken asunder the bones of my legs and arms, which I could feel assembled before me, ready to cleave together, and which I was to raise to life merely by singing, like the builder in the fable.

Suddenly I thought of the fair girl with the sad expression whom I had seen at Rivebelle, where she had looked at me for a moment. Many others, in the course of the evening, had seemed to me attractive; now she alone arose from the dark places of my memory. I had felt that she noticed me, had expected one of the waiters to come to me with a whispered message from her. Saint-Loup did not know her and fancied that she was respectable. It would be very difficult to see her, to see her constantly. But I was prepared to make any sacrifice, I thought now only of her. Philosophy distinguishes often between free and necessary acts. Perhaps there is none to the necessity of which we are more completely subjected than that which, by virtue of an ascending power held in check during the act itself, makes so unfailingly (once our mind is at rest) spring up a memory that was levelled with other memories by the distributed pressure of our indiffer-

ance, and rush to the surface, because unknown to us it contained, more than any of the others, a charm of which we do not become aware until the following day. And perhaps there is not, either, any act so free, for it is still unprompted by habit, by that sort of mental hallucination which, when we are in love, facilitates the invariable reappearance of the image of one particular person.

This was the day immediately following that on which I had seen file past me against a background of sea the beautiful procession of young girls. I put questions about them to a number of the visitors in the hotel, people who came almost every year to Balbec. They could tell me nothing. Later on, a photograph shewed me why. Who could ever recognise now in them, scarcely and yet quite definitely beyond an age in which one changes so utterly, that amorphous, delicious mass, still wholly infantine, of little girls who, only a few years back, might have been seen sitting in a ring on the sand round a tent; a sort of white and vague constellation in which one would have distinguished a pair of eyes that sparkled more than the rest, a mischievous face, flaxen hair, only to lose them again and to confound them almost at once in the indistinct and milky nebula.

No doubt, in those earlier years that were still so recent, it was not, as it had been yesterday when they appeared for the first time before me, one's impression of the group, but the group itself that had been lacking in clearness. Then those children, mere babies, had been still at that elementary stage in their formation when personality has not set its seal on every face. Like those primitive organisms in which the individual barely exists by itself, consists in the reef rather than in the coral insects that compose it, they were still pressed one against another. Sometimes one pushed her neighbour over, and then a wild laugh, which seemed the sole manifestation of their personal life, convulsed them all at once, obliterating, confounding those indefinite, grinning faces in the congealment of a single cluster, scintillating and tremulous. In an old photograph of themselves, which they were one day to give me, and which I have kept ever since, their infantile troop already presents the same number of participants as, later, their feminine procession; one can see from it that their presence must, even then, have made on the beach an unusual mark which forced itself on the attention; but one cannot recognise them individually in it save by a process of reasoning, leaving a clear field to all the transformations possible during girlhood, up to the point at which one reconstructed form would begin to encroach upon another individuality, which must be identified also, and whose handsome face, owing to the accessories of a large build and curly hair, may

quite possibly have been, once, that wizened and impish little grin which the photograph album presents to us; and the distance traversed in a short interval of time by the physical characteristics of each of these girls making of them a criterion too vague to be of any use, whereas what they had in common and, so to speak, collectively, had at that early date been strongly marked, it sometimes happened that even their most intimate friends mistook one for another in this photograph, so much so that the question could in the last resort be settled only by some detail of costume which one of them could be certain that she herself, and not any of the others, had worn. Since those days, so different from the day on which I had just seen them strolling along the 'front,' so different and yet so close in time, they still gave way to fits of laughter, as I had observed that afternoon, but to laughter of a kind that was no longer the intermittent and almost automatic laughter of childhood, a spasmodic discharge which, in those days, had continually sent their heads dipping out of the circle, as the clusters of minnows in the Vivonne used to scatter and vanish only to gather again a moment later; each countenance was now mistress of itself, their eyes were fixed on the goal towards which they were marching; and it had taken, yesterday, the indecision and tremulousness of my first impression to make me confuse vaguely (as their childish hilarity and the old photograph had confused) the spores now individualised and disjoined of the pale madrepore.

Repeatedly, I dare say, when pretty girls went by, I had promised myself that I would see them again. As a rule, people do not appear a second time; moreover our memory, which speedily forgets their existence, would find it difficult to recall their appearance; our eyes would not recognise them, perhaps, and in the meantime we have seen new girls go by, whom we shall not see again either. But at other times, and this was what was to happen with the pert little band at Balbec, chance brings them back insistently before our eyes. Chance seems to us then a good and useful thing, for we discern in it as it were rudiments of organisation, of an attempt to arrange our life; and it makes easy to us, inevitable, and sometimes — after interruptions that have made us hope that we may cease to remember — cruel, the retention in our minds of images to the possession of which we shall come in time to believe that we were predestined, and which but for chance we should from the very first have managed to forget, like so many others, with so little difficulty.

Presently Saint-Loup's visit drew to an end. I had not seen that party of girls again on the beach. He was too little at Balbec in the afternoons to have time to bother about them, or to attempt, in my interest, to make their acquaintance. In

the evenings he was more free, and continued to take me constantly to Rivebelle. There are, in those restaurants, as there are in public gardens and railway trains, people embodied in a quite ordinary appearance, whose name astonishes us when, having happened to ask it, we discover that this is not the mere inoffensive stranger whom we supposed but nothing less than the Minister or Duke of whom we have so often heard. Two or three times already, in the Rivebelle restaurant, we had — Saint-Loup and I— seen come in and sit down at a table when everyone else was getting ready to go, a man of large stature, very muscular, with regular features and a grizzled beard, gazing, with concentrated attention, into the empty air. One evening, on our asking the landlord who was this obscure, solitary and belated diner, “What!” he exclaimed, “do you mean to say you don’t know the famous painter Elstir?” Swann had once mentioned his name to me, I had entirely forgotten in what connexion; but the omission of a particular memory, like that of part of a sentence when we are reading, leads sometimes not to uncertainty but to a birth of certainty that is premature. “He is a friend of Swann, a very well known artist, extremely good,” I told Saint-Loup. Whereupon there passed over us both, like a wave of emotion, the thought that Elstir was a great artist, a celebrated man, and that, confounding us with the rest of the diners, he had no suspicion of the ecstasy into which we were thrown by the idea of his talent. Doubtless, his unconsciousness of our admiration and of our acquaintance with Swann would not have troubled us had we not been at the seaside. But since we were still at an age when enthusiasm cannot keep silence, and had been transported into a life in which not to be known is unendurable, we wrote a letter, signed with both our names, in which we revealed to Elstir in the two diners seated within a few feet of him two passionate admirers of his talent, two friends of his great friend Swann, and asked to be allowed to pay our homage to him in person. A waiter undertook to convey this missive to the celebrity.

A celebrity Elstir was, perhaps, not yet at this period quite to the extent claimed by the landlord, though he was to reach the height of his fame within a very few years. But he had been one of the first to frequent this restaurant when it was still only a sort of farmhouse, and had brought to it a whole colony of artists (who had all, as it happened, migrated elsewhere as soon as the farm-yard in which they used to feed in the open air, under a lean-to roof, had become a fashionable centre); Elstir himself had returned to Rivebelle this evening only on account of a temporary absence of his wife, from the house which he had taken in the neighbourhood. But great talent, even when its existence is not yet

recognised, will inevitably provoke certain phenomena of admiration, such as the landlord had managed to detect in the questions asked by more than one English lady visitor, athirst for information as to the life led by Elstir, or in the number of letters that he received from abroad. Then the landlord had further remarked that Elstir did not like to be disturbed when he was working, that he would rise in the middle of the night and take a little model down to the water's edge to pose for him, nude, if the moon was shining; and had told himself that so much labour was not in vain, nor the admiration of the tourists unjustified when he had, in one of Elstir's pictures, recognised a wooden cross which stood by the roadside as you came into Rivebelle.

"It's all right!" he would repeat with stupefaction, "there are all the four beams! Oh, he does take a lot of trouble!"

And he did not know whether a little *Sunrise Over the Sea* which Elstir had given him might not be worth a fortune.

We watched him read our letter, put it in his pocket, finish his dinner, begin to ask for his things, get up to go; and we were so convinced that we had shocked him by our overture that we would now have hoped (as keenly as at first we had dreaded) to make our escape without his noticing us. We did not bear in mind for a single instant a consideration which should, nevertheless, have seemed to us most important, namely that our enthusiasm for Elstir, on the sincerity of which we should not have allowed the least doubt to be cast, which we could indeed have supported with the evidence of our breathing arrested by expectancy, our desire to do no matter what that was difficult or heroic for the great man, was not, as we imagined it to be, admiration, since neither of us had ever seen anything that he had painted; our feeling might have as its object the hollow idea of a 'great artist,' but not a body of work which was unknown to us. It was, at the most, admiration in the abstract, the nervous envelope, the sentimental structure of an admiration without content, that is to say a thing as indissolubly attached to boyhood as are certain organs which have ceased to exist in the adult man; we were still boys. Elstir meanwhile was reaching the door when suddenly he turned and came towards us. I was transported by a delicious thrill of terror such as I could not have felt a few years later, because, while age diminishes our capacity, familiarity with the world has meanwhile destroyed in us any inclination to provoke such strange encounters, to feel that kind of emotion.

In the course of the few words that Elstir had come back to say to us, sitting down at our table, he never gave any answer on the several occasions on which I

spoke to him of Swann. I began to think that he did not know him. He asked me, nevertheless, to come and see him at his Balbec studio, an invitation which he did not extend to Saint-Loup, and which I had earned (as I might not, perhaps, from Swann's recommendation, had Elstir been intimate with him, for the part played by disinterested motives is greater than we are inclined to think in people's lives) by a few words which made him think that I was devoted to the arts. He lavished on me a friendliness which was as far above that of Saint-Loup as that was above the affability of a mere tradesman. Compared with that of a great artist, the friendliness of a great gentleman, charming as it may be, has the effect of an actor's playing a part, of being feigned. Saint-Loup sought to please; Elstir loved to give, to give himself. Everything that he possessed, ideas, work, and the rest which he counted for far less, he would have given gladly to anyone who could understand him. But, failing society that was endurable, he lived in an isolation, with a savagery which fashionable people called pose and ill-breeding, public authorities a recalcitrant spirit, his neighbours madness, his family selfishness and pride.

And no doubt at first he had thought, even in his solitude, with enjoyment that, thanks to his work, he was addressing, in spite of distance, he was giving a loftier idea of himself, to those who had misunderstood or hurt him. Perhaps, in those days, he lived alone not from indifference but from love of his fellows, and, just as I had renounced Gilberte to appear to her again one day in more attractive colours, dedicated his work to certain people as a way of approaching them again, by which without actually seeing him they would be made to love him, admire him, talk about him; a renunciation is not always complete from the start, when we decide upon it in our original frame of mind and before it has reacted upon us, whether it be the renunciation of an invalid, a monk, an artist or a hero. But if he had wished to produce with certain people in his mind, in producing he had lived for himself, remote from the society to which he had become indifferent; the practice of solitude had given him a love for it, as happens with every big thing which we have begun by fearing, because we knew it to be incompatible with smaller things to which we clung, and of which it does not so much deprive us as it detaches us from them. Before we experience it, our whole preoccupation is to know to what extent we can reconcile it with certain pleasures which cease to be pleasures as soon as we have experienced it.

Elstir did not stay long talking to us. I made up my mind that I would go to his studio during the next few days, but on the following afternoon, when I had accompanied my grandmother right to the point at which the 'front' ended, near

the cliffs of Canapville, on our way back, at the foot of one of the little streets which ran down at right angles to the beach, we came upon a girl who, with lowered head like an animal that is being driven reluctant to its stall, and carrying golf-clubs, was walking in front of a person in authority, in all probability her or her friends' 'Miss,' who suggested a portrait of Jeffreys by Hogarth, with a face as red as if her favourite beverage were gin rather than tea, on which a dried smear of tobacco at the corner of her mouth prolonged the curve of a moustache that was grizzled but abundant. The girl who preceded her was like that one of the little band who, beneath a black polo-cap, had shewn in an inexpressive chubby face a pair of laughing eyes. Now, the girl who was now passing me had also a black polo-cap, but she struck me as being even prettier than the other, the line of her nose was straighter, the curve of nostril at its base fuller and more fleshy. Besides, the other had seemed a proud, pale girl, this one a child well-disciplined and of rosy complexion. And yet, as she was pushing a bicycle just like the other's, and was wearing the same reindeer gloves, I concluded that the differences arose perhaps from the angle and circumstances in which I now saw her, for it was hardly likely that there could be at Balbec a second girl, with a face that, when all was said, was so similar and with the same details in her accoutrements. She cast a rapid glance in my direction; for the next few days, when I saw the little band again on the beach, and indeed long afterwards when I knew all the girls who composed it, I could never be absolutely certain that any of them — even she who among them all was most like her, the girl with the bicycle — was indeed the one that I had seen that evening at the end of the 'front,' where a street ran down to the beach, a girl who differed hardly at all, but was still just perceptibly different from her whom I had noticed in the procession.

From that moment, whereas for the last few days my mind had been occupied chiefly by the tall one, it was the one with the golf-clubs, presumed to be Mlle. Simonet, who began once more to absorb my attention. When walking with the others she would often stop, forcing her friends, who seemed greatly to respect her, to stop also. Thus it is, calling a halt, her eyes sparkling beneath her polo-cap, that I see her again to-day, outlined against the screen which the sea spreads out behind her, and separated from me by a transparent, azure space, the interval of time that has elapsed since then, a first impression, faint and fine in my memory, desired, pursued, then forgotten, then found again, of a face which I have many times since projected upon the cloud of the past to be able to say to myself, of a girl who was actually in my room: "It is she!" But it was perhaps yet

another, the one with geranium cheeks and green eyes, whom I should have liked most to know. And yet, whichever of them it might be, on any given day, that I preferred to see, the others, without her, were sufficient to excite my desire which, concentrated now chiefly on one, now on another, continued — as, on the first day, my confused vision — to combine and blend them, to make of them the little world apart, animated by a life in common, which for that matter they doubtless imagined themselves to form; and I should have penetrated, in becoming a friend of one of them — like a cultivated pagan or a meticulous Christian going among barbarians — into a rejuvenating society in which reigned health, unconsciousness of others, sensual pleasures, cruelty, unintellectuality and joy.

My grandmother, who had been told of my meeting with Elstir, and rejoiced at the thought of all the intellectual profit that I might derive from his friendship, considered it absurd and none too polite of me not to have gone yet to pay him a visit. But I could think only of the little band, and being uncertain of the hour at which the girls would be passing along the front, I dared not absent myself. My grandmother was astonished, too, at the smartness of my attire, for I had suddenly remembered suits which had been lying all this time at the bottom of my trunk. I put on a different one every day, and had even written to Paris ordering new hats and neckties.

It adds a great charm to life in a watering-place like Balbec if the face of a pretty girl, a vendor of shells, cakes or flowers, painted in vivid colours in our mind, is regularly, from early morning, the purpose of each of those leisured, luminous days which we spend upon the beach. They become then, and for that reason, albeit unoccupied by any business, as alert as working-days, pointed, magnetised, raised slightly to meet an approaching moment, that in which, while we purchase sand-cakes, roses, ammonites, we will delight in seeing upon a feminine face its colours displayed as purely as on a flower. But at least, with these little traffickers, first of all we can speak to them, which saves us from having to construct with our imagination their aspects other than those with which the mere visual perception of them furnishes us, and to recreate their life, magnifying its charm, as when we stand before a portrait; moreover, just because we speak to them, we can learn where and at what time it will be possible to see them again. Now I had none of these advantages with respect to the little band. Their habits were unknown to me; when on certain days I failed to catch a glimpse of them, not knowing the cause of their absence I sought to discover whether it was something fixed and regular, if they were to be seen only every

other day, or in certain states of the weather, or if there were days on which no one ever saw them. I imagined myself already friends with them, and saying: “But you weren’t there the other day?” “Weren’t we? Oh, no, of course not; that was because it was a Saturday. On Saturdays we don’t ever come, because...” If it were only as simple as that, to know that on black Saturday it was useless to torment oneself, that one might range the beach from end to end, sit down outside the pastry-cook’s and pretend to be nibbling an éclair, poke into the curiosity shop, wait for bathing time, the concert, high tide, sunset, night, all without seeing the longed-for little band. But the fatal day did not, perhaps, come once a week. It did not, perhaps, of necessity fall on Saturdays. Perhaps certain atmospheric conditions influenced it or were entirely unconnected with it. How many observations, patient but not at all serene, must one accumulate of the movements, to all appearance irregular, of those unknown worlds before being able to be sure that one has not allowed oneself to be led astray by mere coincidence, that one’s forecasts will not be proved wrong, before one elucidates the certain laws, acquired at the cost of so much painful experience, of that passionate astronomy. Remembering that I had not yet seen them on some particular day of the week, I assured myself that they would not be coming, that it was useless to wait any longer on the beach. And at that very moment I caught sight of them. And yet on another day which, so far as I could suppose that there were laws that guided the return of those constellations, must, I had calculated, prove an auspicious day, they did not come. But to this primary uncertainty whether I should see them or not that day, there was added another, more disquieting: whether I should ever set eyes on them again, for I had no reason, after all, to know that they were not about to sail for America, or to return to Paris. This was enough to make me begin to love them. One can feel an attraction towards a particular person. But to release that fount of sorrow, that sense of the irreparable, those agonies which prepare the way for love, there must be — and this is, perhaps, more than any person can be, the actual object which our passion seeks so anxiously to embrace — the risk of an impossibility. Thus there were acting upon me already those influences which recur in the course of our successive love-affairs, which can, for that matter, be provoked (but then rather in the life of cities) by the thought of little working girls whose half-holiday is we know not on what day, and whom we are afraid of having missed as they came out of the factory; or which at least have recurred in mine. Perhaps they are inseparable from love; perhaps everything that formed a distinctive feature of our first love attaches itself to those that come after, by

recollection, suggestion, habit, and through the successive periods of our life gives to its different aspects a general character.

I seized every pretext for going down to the beach at the hours when I hoped to succeed in finding them there. Having caught sight of them once while we were at luncheon, I now invariably came in late for it, waiting interminably upon the ‘front’ for them to pass; devoting all the short time that I did spend in the dining-room to interrogating with my eyes its azure wall of glass; rising long before the dessert, so as not to miss them should they have gone out at a different hour, and chafing with irritation at my grandmother, when, with unwitting malevolence, she made me stay with her past the hour that seemed to me propitious. I tried to prolong the horizon by setting my chair aslant; if, by chance, I did catch sight of no matter which of the girls, since they all partook of the same special essence, it was as if I had seen projected before my face in a shifting, diabolical hallucination, a little of the unfriendly and yet passionately coveted dream which, but a moment ago, had existed only — where it lay stagnant for all time — in my brain.

I was in love with none of them, loving them all, and yet the possibility of meeting them was in my daily life the sole element of delight, alone made to burgeon in me those high hopes by which every obstacle is surmounted, hopes ending often in fury if I had not seen them. For the moment, these girls eclipsed my grandmother in my affection; the longest journey would at once have seemed attractive to me had it been to a place in which they might be found. It was to them that my thoughts comfortably clung when I supposed myself to be thinking of something else or of nothing. But when, even without knowing it, I thought of them, they, more unconsciously still, were for me the mountainous blue undulations of the sea, a troop seen passing in outline against the waves. Our most intensive love for a person is always the love, really, of something else as well.

Meanwhile my grandmother was shewing, because now I was keenly interested in golf and lawn-tennis and was letting slip an opportunity of seeing at work and hearing talk an artist whom she knew to be one of the greatest of his time, a disapproval which seemed to me to be based on somewhat narrow views. I had guessed long ago in the Champs-Elysées, and had since established to my own satisfaction, that when we are in love with a woman we simply project into her a state of our own soul, that the important thing is, therefore, not the worth of the woman but the depth of the state; and that the emotions which a young girl of no kind of distinction arouses in us can enable us to bring to the surface of our

consciousness some of the most intimate parts of our being, more personal, more remote, more essential than would be reached by the pleasure that we derive from the conversation of a great man or even from the admiring contemplation of his work.

I was to end by complying with my grandmother's wishes, all the more reluctantly in that Elstir lived at some distance from the 'front' in one of the newest of Balbec's avenues. The heat of the day obliged me to take the tramway which passed along the Rue de la Plage, and I made an effort (so as still to believe that I was in the ancient realm of the Cimmerians, in the country it might be, of King Mark, or upon the site of the Forest of Broceliande) not to see the gimcrack splendour of the buildings that extended on either hand, among which Elstir's villa was perhaps the most sumptuously hideous, in spite of which he had taken it, because, of all that there were to be had at Balbec, it was the only one that provided him with a really big studio.

It was also with averted eyes that I crossed the garden, which had a lawn — in miniature, like any little suburban villa round Paris — a statuette of an amorous gardener, glass balls in which one saw one's distorted reflexion, beds of begonias and a little arbour, beneath which rocking chairs were drawn up round an iron table. But after all these preliminaries hallmarked with philistine ugliness, I took no notice of the chocolate mouldings on the plinths once I was in the studio; I felt perfectly happy, for, with the help of all the sketches and studies that surrounded me, I foresaw the possibility of raising myself to a poetical understanding, rich in delights, of many forms which I had not, hitherto, isolated from the general spectacle of reality. And Elstir's studio appeared to me as the laboratory of a sort of new creation of the world in which, from the chaos that is all the things we see, he had extracted, by painting them on various rectangles of canvas that were hung everywhere about the room, here a wave of the sea crushing angrily on the sand its lilac foam, there a young man in a suit of white linen, leaning upon the rail of a vessel. His jacket and the spattering wave had acquired fresh dignity from the fact that they continued to exist, even although they were deprived of those qualities in which they might be supposed to consist, the wave being no longer able to splash nor the jacket to clothe anyone.

At the moment at which I entered, the creator was just finishing, with the brush which he had in his hand, the form of the sun at its setting.

The shutters were closed almost everywhere round the studio, which was fairly cool and, except in one place where daylight laid against the wall its brilliant but fleeting decoration, dark; there was open only one little rectangular

window embowered in honeysuckle, which, over a strip of garden, gave on an avenue; so that the atmosphere of the greater part of the studio was dusky, transparent and compact in the mass, but liquid and sparkling at the rifts where the golden clasp of sunlight banded it, like a lump of rock crystal of which one surface, already cut and polished, here and there, gleams like a mirror with iridescent rays. While Elstir, at my request, went on painting, I wandered about in the half-light, stopping to examine first one picture, then another.

Most of those that covered the walls were not what I should chiefly have liked to see of his work, paintings in what an English art journal which lay about on the reading-room table in the Grand Hotel called his first and second manners, the mythological manner and the manner in which he shewed signs of Japanese influence, both admirably exemplified, the article said, in the collection of Mme. de Guermantes. Naturally enough, what he had in his studio were almost all seascapes done here, at Balbec. But I was able to discern from these that the charm of each of them lay in a sort of metamorphosis of the things represented in it, analogous to what in poetry we call metaphor, and that, if God the Father had created things by naming them, it was by taking away their names or giving them other names that Elstir created them anew. The names which denote things correspond invariably to an intellectual notion, alien to our true impressions, and compelling us to eliminate from them everything that is not in keeping with itself.

Sometimes in my window in the hotel at Balbec, in the morning when Françoise undid the fastenings of the curtains that shut out the light, in the evening when I was waiting until it should be time to go out with Saint-Loup, I had been led by some effect of sunlight to mistake what was only a darker stretch of sea for a distant coastline, or to gaze at a belt of liquid azure without knowing whether it belonged to sea or sky. But presently my reason would re-establish between the elements that distinction which in my first impression I had overlooked. In the same way I used, in Paris, in my bedroom, to hear a dispute, almost a. riot, in the street below, until I had referred back to its cause — a carriage for instance that was rattling towards me — this noise, from which I now eliminated the shrill and discordant vociferations which my ear had really heard but which my reason knew that wheels did not produce. But the rare moments in which we see nature as she is, with poetic vision, it was from those that Elstir’s work was taken. One of his metaphors that occurred most commonly in the seascapes which he had round him was precisely that which, comparing land with sea, suppressed every line of demarcation between them. It was this

comparison, tacitly and untiringly repeated on a single canvas, which gave it that multiform and powerful unity, the cause (not always clearly perceived by themselves) of the enthusiasm which Elstir's work aroused in certain collectors.

It was, for instance, for a metaphor of this sort — in a picture of the harbour of Carquethuit, a picture which he had finished a few days earlier and at which I now stood gazing my fill — that Elstir had prepared the mind of the spectator by employing, for the little town, only marine terms, and urban terms for the sea. Whether its houses concealed a part of the harbour, a dry dock, or perhaps the sea itself came cranking in among the land, as constantly happened on the Balbec coast, on the other side of the promontory on which the town was built the roofs were overtopped (as it had been by mill-chimneys or church-steeples) by masts which had the effect of making the vessels to which they belonged appear town-bred, built on land, an impression which was strengthened by the sight of other boats, moored along the jetty but in such serried ranks that you could see men talking across from one deck to another without being able to distinguish the dividing line, the chink of water between them, so that this fishing fleet seemed less to belong to the water than, for instance, the churches of Criquebec which, in the far distance, surrounded by water on every side because you saw them without seeing the town, in a powdery haze of sunlight and crumbling waves, seemed to be emerging from the waters, blown in alabaster or in sea-foam, and, enclosed in the band of a particoloured rainbow, to form an unreal, a mystical picture. On the beach in the foreground the painter had arranged that the eye should discover no fixed boundary, no absolute line of demarcation between earth and ocean. The men who were pushing down their boats into the sea were running as much through the waves as along the sand, which, being wet, reflected their hulls as if they were already in the water. The sea itself did not come up in an even line but followed the irregularities of the shore, which the perspective of the picture increased still further, so that a ship actually at sea, half-hidden by the projecting works of the arsenal, seemed to be sailing across the middle of the town; women who were gathering shrimps among the rocks had the appearance, because they were surrounded by water and because of the depression which, after the ringlike barrier of rocks, brought the beach (on the side nearest the land) down to sea-level, of being in a marine grotto overhung by ships and waves, open yet unharmed in the path of a miraculously averted tide. If the whole picture gave this impression of harbours in which the sea entered into the land, in which the land was already subaqueous and the population amphibian, the strength of the marine element was

everywhere apparent; and round about the rocks, at the mouth of the harbour, where the sea was rough, you felt from the muscular efforts of the fishermen and the obliquity of the boats leaning over at an acute angle, compared with the calm erect-ness of the warehouse on the harbour, the church, the houses of the town to which some of the figures were returning while others were coming out to fish, that they were riding bareback on the water, as it might be a swift and fiery animal whose rearing, but for their skill, must have unseated them. A party of holiday makers were putting gaily out to sea in a boat that tossed like a jaunting-car on a rough road; their boatman, blithe but attentive, also, to what he was doing, trimmed the bellying sail, every one kept in his place, so that the weight should not be all on one side of the boat, which might capsize, and so they went racing over sunlit fields into shadowy places, dashing down into the troughs of waves. It was a fine morning in spite of the recent storm. Indeed, one could still feel the powerful activities that must first be neutralized in order to attain the easy balance of the boats that lay motionless, enjoying sunshine and breeze, in parts where the sea was so calm that its reflexions had almost more solidity and reality than the floating hulls, vaporised by an effect of the sunlight, parts which the perspective of the picture dovetailed in among others. Or rather you would not have called them other parts of the sea. For between those parts there was as much difference as there was between one of them and the church rising from the water, or the ships behind the town. Your reason then set to work and made a single element of what was here black beneath a gathering storm, a little farther all of one colour with the sky and as brightly burnished, and elsewhere so bleached by sunshine, haze and foam, so compact, so terrestrial, so circumscribed with houses that you thought of some white stone causeway or of a field of snow, up the surface of which it was quite frightening to see a ship go climbing high and dry, as a carriage climbs dripping from a ford, but which a moment later, when you saw on the raised and broken surface of the solid plain boats drunkenly heaving, you understood, identical in all these different aspects, to be still the sea.

Although we are justified in saying that there can be no progress, no discovery in art, but only in the sciences, and that the artist who begins afresh upon his own account an individual effort cannot be either helped or hindered by the efforts of all the others, we must nevertheless admit that, in so far as art brings into prominence certain laws, once an industry has taken those laws and vulgarised them, the art that was first in the field loses, in retrospect, a little of its originality. Since Elstir began to paint, we have grown familiar with what are

called ‘admirable’ photographs of scenery and towns. If we press for a definition of what their admirers mean by the epithet, we shall find that it is generally applied to some unusual picture of a familiar object, a picture different from those that we are accustomed to see, unusual and yet true to nature, and for that reason doubly impressive to us because it startles us, makes us emerge from our habits and at the same time brings us back to ourselves by recalling to us an earlier impression. For instance, one of these ‘magnificent’ photographs will illustrate a law of perspective, will shew us some cathedral which we are accustomed to see in the middle of a town, taken instead from a selected point of view from which it will appear to be thirty times the height of the houses and to be thrusting a spur out from the bank of the river, from which it is actually a long way off. Now the effort made by Elstir to reproduce things not as he knew them to be but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed, had led him exactly to this point; he gave special emphasis to certain of these laws of perspective, which were thus all the more striking, since his art had been their first interpreter. A river, because of the windings of its course, a bay because of the apparent contact of the cliffs on either side of it, would look as though there had been hollowed out in the heart of the plain or of the mountains a lake absolutely landlocked on every side. In a picture of a view from Balbec painted upon a scorching day in summer an inlet of the sea appeared to be enclosed in walls of pink granite, not to be the sea, which began farther out. The continuity of the ocean was suggested only by the gulls which, wheeling over what, when one looked at the picture, seemed to be solid rock, were as a matter of fact inhaling the moist vapour of the shifting tide. Other laws were discernible in the same canvas, as, at the foot of immense cliffs, the lilliputian grace of white sails on the blue mirror on whose surface they looked like butterflies asleep, and certain contrasts between the depth of the shadows and the pallidity of the light. This play of light and shade, which also photography has rendered commonplace, had interested Elstir so much that at one time he had painted what were almost mirages, in which a castle crowned with a tower appeared as a perfect circle of castle prolonged by a tower at its summit, and at its foot by an inverted tower, whether because the exceptional purity of the atmosphere on a fine day gave the shadow reflected in the water the hardness and brightness of the stone, or because the morning mists rendered the stone as vaporous as the shadow. And similarly, beyond the sea, behind a line of woods, began another sea roseate with the light of the setting sun, which was, in fact, the sky. The light, as it were precipitating new solids, thrust back the hull of

the boat on which it fell behind the other hull that was still in shadow, and rearranged like the steps of a crystal staircase what was materially a plane surface, but was broken up by the play of light and shade upon the morning sea. A river running beneath the bridges of a town was caught from a certain point of view so that it appeared entirely dislocated, now broadened into a lake, now narrowed into a rivulet, broken elsewhere by the interruption of a hill crowned with trees among which the burgher would repair at evening to taste the refreshing breeze; and the rhythm of this disintegrated town was assured only by the inflexible uprightness of the steeples which did not rise but rather, following the plumb line of the pendulum marking its cadence as in a triumphal march, seemed to hold in suspense beneath them all the confused mass of houses that rose vaguely in the mist along the banks of the crushed, disjointed stream. And (since Elstir's earliest work belonged to the time in which a painter would make his landscape attractive by inserting a human figure), on the cliff's edge or among the mountains, the road, that half human part of nature, underwent, like river or ocean, the eclipses of perspective. And whether a sheer wall of mountain, or the mist blown from a torrent, or the sea prevented the eye from following the continuity of the path, visible to the traveller but not to us, the little human personage in old-fashioned attire seemed often to be stopped short on the edge of an abyss, the path which he had been following ending there, while, a thousand feet above him in those pine-forests, it was with a melting eye and comforted heart that we saw reappear the threadlike whiteness of its dusty surface, hospitable to the wayfaring foot, whereas from us the side of the mountain had hidden, where it turned to avoid waterfall or gully, the intervening bends.

The effort made by Elstir to strip himself, when face to face with reality, of every intellectual concept, was all the more admirable in that this man who, before sitting down to paint, made himself deliberately ignorant, forgot, in his honesty of purpose, everything that he knew, since what one knows ceases to exist by itself, had in reality an exceptionally cultivated mind. When I confessed to him the disappointment that I had felt upon seeing the porch at Balbec: "What!" he had exclaimed, "you were disappointed by the porch! Why, it's the finest illustrated Bible that the people have ever had. That Virgin, and all the bas-reliefs telling the story of her life, they are the most loving, the most inspired expression of that endless poem of adoration and praise in which the middle ages extolled the glory of the Madonna. If you only knew, side by side with the most scrupulous accuracy in rendering the sacred text, what exquisite ideas the old

carver had, what profound thoughts, what delicious poetry!

"A wonderful idea, that great sheet in which the angels are carrying the body of the Virgin, too sacred for them to venture to touch it with their hands"; (I mentioned to him that this theme had been treated also at Saint-André-des-Champs; he had seen photographs of the porch there, and agreed, but pointed out that the bustling activity of those little peasant figures, all hurrying at once towards the Virgin, was not the same thing as the gravity of those two great angels, almost Italian, so springing, so gentle) "the angel who is carrying the Virgin's soul, to reunite it with her body; in the meeting of the Virgin with Elizabeth, Elizabeth's gesture when she touches the Virgin's Womb and marvels to feel that it is great with child; and the bandaged arm of the midwife who had refused, unless she touched, to believe the Immaculate Conception; and the linen cloth thrown by the Virgin to Saint Thomas to give him a proof of the Resurrection; that veil, too, which the Virgin tears from her own bosom to cover the nakedness of her Son, from Whose Side the Church receives in a chalice the Wine of the Sacrament, while, on His other side the Synagogue, whose kingdom is at an end, has its eyes bandaged, holds a half-broken sceptre and lets fall, with the crown that is slipping from its head, the tables of the old law; and the husband who, on the Day of Judgment, as he helps his young wife to rise from her grave, lays her hand against his own heart to reassure her, to prove to her that it is indeed beating, is that such a trumpery idea, do you think, so stale and commonplace? And the angel who is taking away the sun and the moon, henceforth useless, since it is written that the Light of the Cross shall be seven times brighter than the light of the firmament; and the one who is dipping his hand in the water of the Child's bath, to see whether it is warm enough; and the one emerging from the clouds to place the crown upon the Virgin's brow, and all the angels who are leaning from the vault of heaven, between the balusters of the New Jerusalem, and throwing up their arms with terror or joy at the sight of the torments of the wicked or the bliss of the elect! For it is all the circles of heaven, a whole gigantic poem full of theology and symbolism that you have before you there. It is fantastic, mad, divine, a thousand times better than anything you will see in Italy, where for that matter this very tympanum has been carefully copied by sculptors with far less genius. There never was a time when genius was universal; that is all nonsense; it would be going beyond the age of gold. The fellow who carved that front, you may make up your mind that he was every bit as great, that he had just as profound ideas as the men you admire most at the present day. I could shew you what I mean if we went there together. There are

certain passages from the Office of the Assumption which have been rendered with a subtilty of expression that Redon himself has never equalled."

This vast celestial vision of which he spoke to me, this gigantic theological poem which, I understood, had been inscribed there in stone, yet when my eyes, big with desire, had opened to gaze upon the front of Balbec church, it was not these things that I had seen. I spoke to him of those great statues of saints, which, mounted on scaffolds, formed a sort of avenue on either side.

"It starts from the mists of antiquity to end in Jesus Christ," he explained. "You see on one side His ancestors after the spirit, on the other the Kings of Judah, His ancestors after the flesh. All the ages are there. And if you had looked more closely at what you took for scaffolds you would have been able to give names to the figures standing on them. At the feet of Moses you would have recognised the calf of gold, at Abraham's the ram and at Joseph's the demon counselling Potiphar's wife."

I told him also that I had gone there expecting to find an almost Persian building, and that this had doubtless been one of the chief factors in my disappointment. "Indeed, no," he assured me, "it is perfectly true. Some parts of it are quite oriental; one of the capitals reproduces so exactly a Persian subject that you cannot account for it by the persistence of Oriental traditions. The carver must have copied some casket brought from the East by explorers." And he did indeed shew me, later on, the photograph of a capital on which I saw dragons that were almost Chinese devouring one another, but at Balbec this little piece of carving had passed unnoticed by me in the general effect of the building which did not conform to the pattern traced in my mind by the words, 'an almost Persian church.'

The intellectual pleasures which I enjoyed in this studio did not in the least prevent me from feeling, although they enveloped us as it were in spite of ourselves, the warm polish, the sparkling gloom of the place itself and, through the little window framed in honeysuckle, in the avenue that was quite rustic, the resisting dryness of the sun-parched earth, screened only by the diaphanous gauze woven of distance and of a tree-cast shade. Perhaps the unaccountable feeling of comfort which this summer day was giving me came like a tributary to swell the flood of joy that had surged in me at the sight of Elstir's *Carquethuit Harbour*.

I had supposed Elstir to be a modest man, but I realised my mistake on seeing his face cloud with melancholy when, in a little speech of thanks, I uttered the word 'fame.' Men who believe that their work will last — as was the

case with Elstir — form the habit of placing that work in a period when they themselves will have crumbled into dust. And thus, by obliging them to reflect on their own extinction, the thought of fame saddens them because it is inseparable from the thought of death. I changed the conversation in the hope of driving away the cloud of ambitious melancholy with which unwittingly I had loaded Elstir's brow. "Some one advised me once," I began, thinking of the conversation we had had with Legrandin at Combray, as to which I was glad of an opportunity of learning Elstir's views, "not to visit Brittany, because it would not be wholesome for a mind with a natural tendency to dream." "Not at all;" he replied. "When the mind has a tendency to dream, it is a mistake to keep dreams away from it, to ration its dreams. So long as you distract your mind from its dreams, it will not know them for what they are; you will always be being taken in by the appearance of things, because you will not have grasped their true nature. If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all the time. One must have a thorough understanding of one's dreams if one is not to be troubled by them; there is a way of separating one's dreams from one's life which so often produces good results that I ask myself whether one ought not, at all costs, to try it, simply as a preventive, just as certain surgeons make out that we ought, to avoid the risk of appendicitis later on, to have all our appendices taken out when we are children."

Elstir and I had meanwhile been walking about the studio, and had reached the window that looked across the garden on to a narrow avenue, a side-street that was almost a country lane. We had gone there to breathe the cooler air of the late afternoon. I supposed myself to be nowhere near the girls of the little band, and it was only by sacrificing for once the hope of seeing them that I had yielded to my grandmother's prayers and had gone to see Elstir. For where the thing is to be found that we are seeking we never know, and often we steadily, for a long time, avoid the place to which, for quite different reasons, everyone has been asking us to go. But we never suspect that we shall there see the very person of whom we are thinking. I looked out vaguely over the country road which, outside the studio, passed quite close to it but did not belong to Elstir. Suddenly there appeared on it, coming along it at a rapid pace, the young bicyclist of the little band, with, over her dark hair, her polo-cap pulled down towards her plump cheeks, her eyes merry and almost importunate; and on that auspicious path, miraculously filled with promise of delights, I saw her beneath the trees throw to Elstir the smiling greeting of a friend, a rainbow that bridged the gulf for me between our terraqueous world and regions which I had hitherto regarded as

inaccessible. She even came up to give her hand to the painter, though without stopping, and I could see that she had a tiny beauty spot on her chin. “Do you know that girl, sir?” I asked Elstir, realising that he could if he chose make me known to her, could invite us both to the house. And this peaceful studio with its rural horizon was at once filled with a surfeit of delight such as a child might feel in a house where he was already happily playing when he learned that, in addition, out of that bounteousness which enables lovely things and noble hosts to increase their gifts beyond all measure, there was being prepared for him a sumptuous repast. Elstir told me that she was called Albertine Simonet, and gave me the names also of her friends, whom I described to him with sufficient accuracy for him to identify them almost without hesitation. I had, with regard to their social position, made a mistake, but not the mistake that I usually made at Balbec. I was always ready to take for princes the sons of shopkeepers when they appeared on horseback. This time I had placed in an interloping class the daughters of a set of respectable people, extremely rich, belonging to the world of industry and business. It was the class which, on first thoughts, interested me least, since it held for me neither the mystery of the lower orders nor that of a society such as the Guermantes frequented. And no doubt if an inherent quality, a rank which they could never forfeit, had not been conferred on them, in my dazzled eyes, by the glaring vacuity of the seaside life all round them, I should perhaps not have succeeded in resisting and overcoming the idea that they were the daughters of prosperous merchants. I could not help marvelling to see how the French middle class was a wonderful studio full of sculpture of the noblest and most varied kind. What unimagined types, what richness of invention in the character of their faces, what firmness, what freshness, what simplicity in their features. The shrewd old moneychangers from whose loins these Dianas and these nymphs had sprung seemed to me to have been the greatest of statuaries. Before I had time to register the social metamorphosis of these girls — so are these discoveries of a mistake, these modifications of the notion one has of a person instantaneous as a chemical combination — there was already installed behind their faces, so street-arab in type that I had taken them for the mistresses of racing bicyclists, of boxing champions, the idea that they might easily be connected with the family of some lawyer or other whom we knew. I was barely conscious of what was meant by Albertine Simonet; she had certainly no conception of what she was one day to mean to me. Even the name, Simonet, which I had already heard spoken on the beach, if I had been asked to write it down I should have spelt with a double ‘n,’ never dreaming of the importance

which this family attached to there being but one in their name. In proportion as we descend the social scale our snobbishness fastens on to mere nothings which are perhaps no more null than the distinctions observed by the aristocracy, but, being more obscure, more peculiar to the individual, take us more by surprise. Possibly there had been Simonnets who had done badly in business, or something worse still even. The fact remains that the Simonets never failed, it appeared, to be annoyed if anyone doubled their 'n.' They wore the air of being the only Simonets in the world with one 'n' instead of two, and were as proud of it, perhaps, as the Montmorency family were of being the premier barons of France. I asked Elstir whether these girls lived at Balbec; yes, he told me, some of them at any rate. The villa in which one of them lived was at that very spot, right at the end of the beach, where the cliffs of Canapville began. As this girl was a great friend of Albertine Simonet, this was another reason for me to believe that it was indeed the latter whom I had met that day when I was with my grandmother. There were of course so many of those little streets running down to the beach, and all at the same angle, that I could not have pointed out exactly which of them it had been. One would like always to remember a thing accurately, but at the time one's vision was clouded. And yet that Albertine and the girl whom I had seen going to her friend's house were one and the same person was a practical certainty. In spite of which, whereas the countless images that have since been furnished me by the dark young golfer, however different they may have been from one another, have overlaid one another (because I now know that they all belong to her), and if I retrace the thread of my memories I can, under cover of that identity, and as though along a tunnelled passage, pass through all those images in turn without losing my consciousness of the same person behind them all, if, on the other hand, I wish to revert to the girl whom I passed that day when I was with my grandmother, I must escape first into freer air. I am convinced that it is Albertine whom I find there, the same girl as her who would often stop dead among her moving comrades, in her walk along the foreground of the sea; but all those more recent images remain separate from that earlier one because I am unable to confer on her retrospectively an identity which she had not for me at the moment in which she caught my eye; whatever assurance I may derive from the law of probabilities, that girl with plump cheeks who stared at me so boldly from the angle of the little street and the beach, and by whom I believe that I might have been loved, I have never, in the strict sense of the words, seen again.

My hesitation between the different girls of the little band, all of whom

retained something of the collective charm which had at first disturbed me, combined with the reasons already given to allow me later on, even at the time of my greater — my second — passion for Albertine, a sort of intermittent and very brief liberty to abstain from loving her. From having strayed among all her friends before it finally concentrated itself on her, my love kept, now and then, between itself and the image of Albertine a certain ‘play’ of light and shade which enabled it, like a badly fitted lamp, to flit over the surface of each of the others before settling its focus upon her; the connexion between the pain which I felt in my heart and the memory of Albertine did not seem to me necessary; I might perhaps have managed to co-ordinate it with the image of another person, Which enabled me, in a momentary flash, to banish reality altogether, not only external reality, as in my love for Gilberte (which I had recognised to be an internal state in which I drew from myself alone the particular quality, the special character of the person whom I loved, everything that rendered her indispensable to my happiness), but even the other reality, internal and purely subjective.

“Not a day passes but one or the other of them comes by here, and looks in for a minute or two,” Elstir told me, plunging me in despair when I thought that if I had gone to see him at once, when my grandmother had begged me to do so, I should, in all probability, long since have made Albertine’s acquaintance.

She had passed on; from the studio she was no longer in sight. I supposed that she had gone to join her friends on the ‘front.’ Could I have appeared there suddenly with Elstir, I should have got to know them all. I thought of endless pretexts for inducing him to take a turn with me on the beach. I had no longer the same peace of mind as before the apparition of the girl in the frame of the little window; so charming until then in its fringe of honeysuckle, and now so drearily empty. Elstir caused me a joy that was tormenting also when he said that he would go a little way with me, but that he must first finish the piece of work on which he was engaged. It was a flower study but not one of any of the flowers, portraits of which I would rather have commissioned him to paint than the portrait of a person, so that I might learn from the revelation of his genius what I had so often sought in vain from the flowers themselves — hawthorn white and pink, cornflowers, apple-blossom. Elstir as he worked talked botany to me, but I scarcely listened; he was no longer sufficient in himself, he was now only the necessary intermediary between these girls and me; the distinction which, only a few moments ago, his talent had still given him in my eyes was now worthless save in so far as it might confer a little on me also in the eyes of the little band to

whom I should be presented by him.

I paced up and down the room, impatient for him to finish what he was doing; I picked up and examined various sketches, any number of which were stacked against the walls. In this way I happened to bring to light a water-colour which evidently belonged to a much earlier period in Elstir's life, and gave me that particular kind of enchantment which is diffused by works of art not only deliriously executed but representing a subject so singular and so seductive that it is to it that we attribute a great deal of their charm, as if the charm were something that the painter had merely to uncover, to observe, realised already in a material form by nature, and to reproduce in art. That such objects can exist, beautiful quite apart from the painter's interpretation of them, satisfies a sort of innate materialism in us, against which our reason contends and acts as a counterpoise to the abstractions of aesthetics. It was — this water-colour — the portrait of a young woman, by no means beautiful but of a curious type, in a close-fitting mob-cap not unlike a 'billy-cock' hat, trimmed with a ribbon of cherry-coloured silk; in one of her mittened hands was a lighted cigarette, while the other held, level with her knee, a sort of broad-brimmed garden hat, nothing more than a fire screen of plaited straw to keep off the sun. On a table by her side, a tall vase filled with pink carnations. Often (and it was the case here) the singularity of such works is due principally to their having been executed in special conditions for which we do not at first sight make proper allowance, if, for instance, the strange attire of a feminine model is her costume for a masked ball, or conversely the scarlet cloak which an elderly man looks as though he had put on to humour some whim in the painter is his gown as a professor or alderman or his cardinal's cassock. The ambiguous character of the person whose portrait now confronted me arose, without my understanding it, from the fact that she was a young actress of an earlier generation half dressed for a part. But the cap or hat, beneath which the hair stuck out but was cut short, the velvet coat opening without lapels over a white shirt-front, made me hesitate as to the period of the clothes and the sex of the model, so that I did not know what it was exactly that I was holding before my eyes, unless simply the brightest coloured of these scraps of painting. And the pleasure which it afforded me was disturbed only by the fear that Elstir, by delaying further, would make me miss the girls, for the sun was now declining and hung low in the little window. Nothing in this water-colour was merely stated there as a fact and painted because of its utility to the composition, the costume because the young woman must be wearing something, the vase to hold the flowers. The glass of the vase, cherished for its

own sake, seemed to be holding the water in which the stems of the carnations were dipped in something as limpid, almost as liquid as itself; the woman's dress encompassed her in a manner that had an independent, a brotherly charm, and, if the works of man can compete in charm with the wonders of nature, as delicate, as pleasing to the touch of the eye, as freshly painted as the fur of a cat, the petals of a flower, the feathers of a dove. The whiteness of the shirt-front, fine as driven rain, with its gay pleats gathered into little bells like lilies of the valley, was starred with bright gleams of light from the room, as sharply edged and as finely shaded as though they had been posies of flowers stitched on the woven lawn. And the velvet of the coat, brilliant with a milky sheen, had here and there a roughness, a scoring, a shagginess on its surface which made one think of the crumpled brightness of the carnations in the vase. But above all one felt that Elstir, sublimely indifferent to whatever immoral suggestion there might be in this disguise of a young actress for whom the talent with which she would play her part on the stage was doubtless of less importance than the irritant attraction which she would offer to the jaded or depraved senses of some of her audience, had on the contrary fastened upon those ambiguous points as on an aesthetic element which deserved to be brought into prominence, and which he had done everything in his power to emphasise. Along the lines of the face, the latent sex seemed to be on the point of confessing itself to be that of a somewhat boyish girl, then vanished and farther on reappeared with a suggestion rather of an effeminate youth, vicious and pensive, then fled once more to remain uncapturable. The dreamy sadness in the expression of her eyes, by the mere fact of its contrast with the accessories belonging to the world of love-making and play-acting, was not the least disturbing element in the picture. One imagined moreover that it must be feigned, and that the young person who seemed ready to submit to caresses in this provoking costume had probably thought it effective to enhance the provocation with this romantic expression of a secret longing, an unspoken grief. At the foot of the picture was inscribed "*Miss Sacripant*: October, 1872." I could not contain my admiration. "Oh, it's nothing, only a rough sketch I did when I was young; it was a costume for a variety show. It's all ages ago now." "And what has become of the model?" A bewilderment provoked by my words preceded on Elstir's face the indifferent, absent-minded air which, a moment later, he displayed there. "Quick, give it to me!" he cried, "I hear Madame Elstir coming, and, though, I assure you, the young person in the billy-cock hat never played any part in my life, still there's no point in my wife's coming in and finding it staring her in the face. I have kept it only as an amusing

sidelight on the theatre of those days." And, before putting it away behind the pile, Elstir, who perhaps had not set eyes on the sketch for years, gave it his careful scrutiny. "I must keep just the head," he murmured, "the lower part is really too shockingly bad, the hands are a beginner's work." I was miserable at the arrival of Mme. Elstir, who could only delay us still further. The window sill was already aglow. Our excursion would be a pure waste of time. There was no longer the slightest chance of our seeing the girls, consequently it mattered now not at all how soon Mme. Elstir left us or how long she stayed. Not that she did stay for any length of time. I found her most tedious; she might have been beautiful, once, at twenty, driving an ox in the Roman Campagna, but her dark hair was streaked with grey and she was common without being simple, because she believed that a pompous manner and majestic attitudes were required by her statuesque beauty, which, however, advancing age had robbed of all its charm. She was dressed with the utmost simplicity. And it was touching, but at the same time surprising to hear Elstir, whenever he opened his mouth, and with a respectful gentleness, as if merely uttering the words moved him to tenderness and veneration, repeat: "My beautiful Gabrielle!" Later on, when I had become familiar with Elstir's mythological paintings, Mme. Elstir acquired beauty in my eyes also. I understood then that to a certain ideal type illustrated by certain lines, certain arabesques which reappeared incessantly throughout his work, to a certain canon of art he had attributed a character that was almost divine, since the whole of his time, all the mental effort of which he was capable, in a word his whole life he had consecrated to the task of distinguishing those lines as clearly and of reproducing them as faithfully as possible. What such an ideal inspired in Elstir was indeed a cult so solemn, so exacting that it never allowed him to be satisfied with what he had achieved; was the most intimate part of himself, and so he had never been able to look at it from a detached standpoint, to extract emotion from it, until the day on which he encountered it realised outside, apart from himself, in the body of a woman, the body of her who in due course became Mme. Elstir and in whom he had been able (as one is able only with something that is not oneself) to find it meritorious, moving, god-like. How comforting, moreover, to let his lips rest upon that Beauty which hitherto he had been obliged with so great labour to extract from within himself, whereas now, mysteriously incarnate, it offered itself to him in a series of communions, filled with saving grace. Elstir at this period was no longer in that early youth in which we look only to the power of our own mind for the realisation of our ideal. He was nearing the age at which we count on bodily satisfactions to stimulate the

forces of the brain, at which the exhaustion of the brain inclining us to materialism and the diminution of our activity to the possibility of influences passively received, begin to make us admit that there may indeed be certain bodies, certain callings, certain rhythms that are privileged, realising so naturally our ideal that even without genius, merely by copying the movement of a shoulder, the tension of a throat, we can achieve a masterpiece, it is the age at which we like to caress Beauty with our eyes objectively, outside ourselves, to have it near us, in a tapestry, in a lovely sketch by Titian picked up in a second-hand shop, in a mistress as lovely as Titian's sketch. When I understood this I could no longer look without pleasure at Mme. Elstir, and her body began to lose its heaviness, for I filled it with an idea, the idea that she was an immaterial creature, a portrait by Elstir. She was one for me, and for him also I dare say. The facts of life have no meaning for the artist, they are to him merely an opportunity for exposing the naked blaze of his genius. One feels unmistakably, when one sees side by side ten portraits of different people painted by Elstir, that they are all, first and foremost, Elstirs. Only, after this rising tide of genius, which sweeps over and submerges a man's life, when the brain begins to tire, gradually the balance is upset and, like a river that resumes its course after the counter-flow of a spring tide, it is life that once more takes the upper hand. While the first period lasted, the artist has gradually evolved the law, the formula of his unconscious gift. He knows what situations, should he be a novelist — if a painter, what scenes — furnish him with the subject matter, which may be anything in the world but, whatever it is, is essential to his researches as a laboratory might be of a workshop. He knows that he has created his masterpieces out of effects of attenuated light, the action of remorse upon consciousness of guilt, out of women posed beneath trees or half-immersed in water, like statues. A day will come when, owing to the exhaustion of his brain, he will no longer have the strength, when provided with those materials which his genius was wont to use, to make the intellectual effort which alone can produce his work, and will yet continue to seek them out, happy when he finds himself in their presence, because of the spiritual pleasure, the allurement to work that they arouse in him; and, surrounding them besides with a kind of hedge of superstition as if they were superior to all things else, as if in them already dwelt a great part of the work of art which they might be said to carry within them ready made, he will confine himself to the company, to the adoration of his models. He will hold endless conversations with the repentant criminals whose remorse, whose regeneration formed, when he still wrote, the subject of his novels; he will buy a

country house in a district where mists attenuate the light, he will spend long hours gazing at the limbs of bathing women; will collect sumptuous stuffs. And thus the beauty of life, a phase that has to some extent lost its meaning, a stage beyond the boundaries of art at which I had already seen Swann come to rest, was that also which, by a slackening of the creative ardour, idolatry of the forms which had inspired it, desire to avoid effort, must ultimately arrest an Elstir's progress.

At last he had applied the final brush-stroke to his flowers; I sacrificed a minute to look at them; I acquired no merit by the act, for I knew that there was no chance now of our finding the girls on the beach; and yet, had I believed them to be still there, and that these wasted moments would make me miss them, I should have stopped to look none the less, for I should have told myself that Elstir was more interested in his flowers than in my meeting with the girls. My grandmother's nature, a nature that was the exact counterpart of my complete egoism, was nevertheless reflected in certain aspects of my own. In circumstances in which someone to whom I was indifferent, for whom I had always made a show of affection or respect, ran the risk merely of some unpleasantness whereas I was in real danger, I could not have done otherwise than commiserate with him on his annoyance as though it had been something important, and treat my own danger as nothing, because I would feel that these were the proportions in which he must see things. To be quite accurate, I would go even further, and not only not complain of the danger in which I myself stood but go half-way to meet it, and with that which involved other people try, on the contrary, were I to increase the risk of my being caught myself, to avert it from them. The reasons for this are several, none of which does me the slightest credit. One is that if, while only my reason was employed, I have always believed in self-preservation, whenever in the course of my existence I have found myself obsessed by moral anxieties, or merely by nervous scruples, so puerile often that I dare not enumerate them here, if an unforeseen circumstance then arose, involving for me the risk of being killed, this new preoccupation was so trivial in comparison with the others that I welcomed it with a sense of relief, almost of hilarity. Thus I find myself, albeit the least courageous of men, to have known that feeling which has always seemed to me, in my reasoning moods, so foreign to my nature, so inconceivable, the intoxication of danger. But even although I were, when any, even a deadly peril threatened me, passing through an entirely calm and happy phase, I could not, were I with another person, refrain from sheltering him behind me and choosing for myself the post of

danger. When a sufficient store of experience had taught me that I invariably acted, and enjoyed acting, thus, I discovered — and was deeply ashamed by the discovery — that it was because, in contradiction of what I had always believed and asserted, I was extremely sensitive to the opinions of others. Not that this kind of unconfessed self-esteem is in any sense vanity or conceit. For what might satisfy one or other of those failings would give me no pleasure, and I have always refrained from indulging them. But with the people in whose company I have succeeded in concealing most effectively the slight advantages a knowledge of which might have given them a less derogatory idea of myself, I have never been able to deny myself the pleasure of shewing them that I take more trouble to avert the risk of death from their path than from my own. As my motive is then self-esteem and not valour, I find it quite natural that in any crisis they should act differently. I am far from blaming them for it, as I should perhaps if I had been moved by a sense of duty, a duty which would seem to me, in that case, to be as incumbent upon them as upon myself. On the contrary, I feel that it is eminently sensible of them to safeguard their lives, though at the same time I cannot prevent my own safety from receding into the background, which is particularly silly and culpable of me since I have come to realise that the lives of many of the people in front of whom I plant myself when a bomb bursts are more valueless even than my own. However, on the day of this first visit to Elstir, the time was still distant at which I was to become conscious of this difference in value, and there was no question of danger, but simply — a harbinger this of that pernicious self-esteem — the question of my not appearing to attach to the pleasure which I so ardently desired more importance than to the work which the painter had still to finish. It was finished at last. And, once we were out of doors, I discovered that — so long were the days still at this season — it was not so late as I had supposed; we strolled down to the ‘front.’ What stratagems I employed to keep Elstir standing at the spot where I thought that the girls might still come past. Pointing to the cliffs that towered beside us, I kept on asking him to tell me about them, so as to make him forget the time and stay there a little longer. I felt that we had a better chance of waylaying the little band if we moved towards the end of the beach. “I should like to look at those cliffs with you from a little nearer,” I said to him, having noticed that one of the girls was in the habit of going in that direction. “And as we go, do tell me about Carquethuit. I should so like to see Carquethuit,” I went on, without thinking that the so novel character which manifested itself with such force m Elstir’s*Carquethuit Harbour*, might belong perhaps rather to the painter’s vision

than to any special quality in the place itself. “Since I’ve seen your picture, I think that is where I should most like to go, there and to the Pointe du Raz, but of course that would be quite a journey from here.” “Yes, and besides, even if it weren’t nearer, I should advise you perhaps all the same to visit Carquethuit,” he replied. “The Pointe du Raz is magnificent, but after all it is simply the high cliff of Normandy or Brittany which you know already. Carquethuit is quite different, with those rocks bursting from a level shore. I know nothing in France like it, it reminds me rather of what one sees in some parts of Florida. It is most interesting, and for that matter extremely wild too. It is between Clitourps and Nehomme; you know how desolate those parts are; the sweep of the coast-line is delicious. Here, the coast-line is like anywhere else; but along there I can’t tell you what charm it has, what softness.”

Night was falling; it was time to be turning homewards; I was escorting Elstir in the direction of his villa when suddenly, as it were Mephistopheles springing up before Faust, there appeared at the end of the avenue — like simply an objectification, unreal, diabolical, of the temperament diametrically opposed to my own, of the semi-barbarous and cruel vitality of which I, in my weakness, my excess of tortured sensibility and intellectuality was so destitute — a few spots of the essence impossible to mistake for anything else in the world, a few spores of the zoophytic band of girls, who wore an air of not having seen me but were unquestionably, for all that, proceeding as they advanced to pass judgment on me in their ironic vein. Feeling that a collision between them and us was now inevitable, and that Elstir would be certain to call me, I turned my back, like a bather preparing to meet the shock of a wave; I stopped dead and, leaving my eminent companion to pursue his way, remained where I was, stooping, as if I had suddenly become engrossed in it, towards the window of the curiosity shop which we happened to be passing at the moment. I was not sorry to give the appearance of being able to think of something other than these girls, and I was already dimly aware that when Elstir did call me up to introduce me to them I should wear that sort of challenging expression which betokens not surprise but the wish to appear as though one were surprised — so far is every one of us a bad actor, or everyone else a good thought-reader;— that I should even go so far as to point a finger to my breast, as who should ask “It is me, really, that you want?” and then run to join him, my head lowered in compliance and docility and my face coldly masking my annoyance at being torn from the study of old pottery in order to be introduced to people whom I had no wish to know. Meanwhile I explored the window and waited for the moment in which my

name, shouted by Elstir, would come to strike me like an expected and innocuous bullet. The certainty of being introduced to these girls had had the result of making me not only feign complete indifference to them, but actually to feel it. Inevitable from this point, the pleasure of knowing them began at once to shrink, became less to me than the pleasure of talking to Saint-Loup, of dining with my grandmother, of making, in the neighbourhood of Balbec, excursions which I would regret the probability, in consequence of my having to associate with people who could scarcely be much interested in old buildings, of my being forced to abandon. Moreover, what diminished the pleasure which I was about to feel was not merely the imminence but the incoherence of its realisation. Laws as precise as those of hydrostatics maintain the relative position of the images which we form in a fixed order, which the coming event at once upsets. Elstir was just about to call me. This was not at all the fashion in which I had so often, on the beach, in my bedroom, imagined myself making these girls' acquaintance. What was about to happen was a different event, for which I was not prepared. I recognised neither my desire nor its object; I regretted almost that I had come out with Elstir. But, above all, the shrinking of the pleasure that I expected to feel was due to the certainty that nothing, now, could take that pleasure from me. And it resumed, as though by some latent elasticity in itself, its whole extent when it ceased to be subjected to the pressure of that certainty, at the moment when, having decided to turn my head, I saw Elstir, standing where he had stopped a few feet away with the girls, bidding them good-bye. The face of the girl who stood nearest to him, round and plump and glittering with the light in her eyes, reminded me of a cake on the top of which a place has been kept for a morsel of blue sky. Her eyes, even when fixed on an object, gave one the impression of motion, just as on days of high wind the air, although invisible, lets us perceive the speed with which it courses between us and the unchanging azure. For a moment her gaze intersected mine, like those travelling skies on stormy days which hurry after a rain-cloud that moves less rapidly than they, overtake, touch, cover, pass it and are gone; but they do not know one another, and are soon driven far apart. So our eyes were for a moment confronted, neither pair knowing what the celestial continent that lay before their gaze held of future blessing or disaster. Only at the moment when her gaze was directly coincident with mine, without slackening its movement it grew perceptibly duller. So on a starry night the wind-swept moon passes behind a cloud and veils her brightness for a moment, but soon will shine again. But Elstir had already said goodbye to the girls, and had never summoned me. They disappeared down a cross street; he

came towards me. My whole plan was spoiled.

I have said that Albertine had not seemed to me that day to be the same as on previous days and that afterwards, each time I saw her, she was to appear different. But I felt at that moment that certain modifications in the appearance, the importance, the stature of a person may also be due to the variability of certain states of consciousness interposed between that person and us. One of those that play an important part in such transformations is belief; that evening my belief, then the vanishing of my belief, that I was about to know Albertine had, with a few seconds' interval only, rendered her almost insignificant, then infinitely precious in my sight; some years later, the belief, then the disappearance of the belief, that Albertine was faithful to me brought about similar changes.

Of course, long ago, at Combfay, I had seen shrink or stretch, according to the time of day, according as I was entering one or the other of the two dominant moods that governed my sensibility in turn, my grief at not having my mother with me, as imperceptible all afternoon as is the moon's light when the sun is shining, and then, when night had come, reigning alone in my anxious heart in the place of recent memories now obliterated. But on that day at Balbec, when I saw that Elstir was leaving the girls and had not called me, I learned for the first time that the variations in the importance which a pleasure or a pain has in our eyes may depend not merely on this alternation of two moods, but on the displacement of invisible beliefs, such, for example, as make death seem to us of no account because they bathe it in a glow of unreality, and thus enable us to attach importance to our attending an evening party, which would lose much of its charm for if, on the announcement that we were sentenced to die by the guillotine, the belief that had bathed the party in its warm glow was instantly shattered; and this part that belief plays, it is true that something in me was aware of it; this was my will; but its knowledge is vain if the mind, the heart continue in ignorance; these last act in good faith when they believe that we are anxious to forsake a mistress to whom our will alone knows that we are still attached. This is because they are clouded by the belief that we shall see her again at any moment. But let this belief be shattered, let them suddenly become aware that this mistress is gone from us for ever, then the mind and heart, having lost their focus, are driven like mad things, the meanest pleasure becomes infinitely great.

Variance of a belief, annulment also of love, which, pre-existent and mobile, comes to rest at the image of any one woman simply because that woman will be

almost impossible of attainment. Thenceforward we think not so much of the woman of whom we find difficult in forming an exact picture, as of the means of getting to know her. A whole series of agonies develops and is sufficient to fix our love definitely upon her who is its almost unknown object. Our love becomes immense; we never dream how small a place in it the real woman occupies. And if suddenly, as at the moment when I had seen Elstir stop to talk to the girls, we cease to be uneasy, to suffer pain, since it is this pain that is the whole of our love, it seems to us as though love had abruptly vanished at the moment when at length we grasp the prey to whose value we had not given enough thought before. What did I know of Albertine? One or two glimpses of a profile against the sea, less beautiful, assuredly, than those of Veronese's women whom I ought, had I been guided by purely aesthetic reasons, to have preferred to her. By what other reasons could I be guided, since, my anxiety having subsided, I could recapture only those mute profiles; I possessed nothing of her besides. Since my first sight of Albertine I had meditated upon her daily, a thousandfold, I had carried on with what I called by her name an interminable unspoken dialogue in which I made her question me, answer me, think and act, and in the infinite series of imaginary Albertines who followed one after the other in my fancy, hour after hour, the real Albertine, a glimpse caught on the beach, figured only at the head, just as the actress who creates a part, the star, appears, out of a long series of performances, in the few first alone. That Albertine was scarcely more than a silhouette, all that was superimposed being of my own growth, so far when we are in love does the contribution that we ourself make outweigh — even if we consider quantity only — those that come to us from the beloved object. And the same is true of love that is given its full effect. There are loves that manage not only to be formed but to subsist around a very little core — even among those whose prayer has been answered after the flesh. An old drawing-master who had taught my grandmother had been presented by some obscure mistress with a daughter. The mother died shortly after the birth of her child, and the drawing-master was so broken-hearted that he did not long survive her. In the last months of his life my grandmother and some of the Combray ladies, who had never liked to make any allusion in the drawing-master's presence to the woman, with whom, for that matter, he had not officially 'lived' and had had comparatively slight relations, took it into their heads to ensure the little girl's future by combining to purchase an annuity for her. It was my grandmother who suggested this; several of her friends made difficulties; after all was the child really such a very interesting case, was she

even the child of her reputed father; with women like that, it was never safe to say. Finally, everything was settled. The child came to thank the ladies. She was plain, and so absurdly like the old drawing-master as to remove every shadow of doubt; her hair being the only nice thing about her, one of the ladies said to her father, who had come with her: “What pretty hair she has.” And thinking that now, the woman who had sinned being dead and the old man only half alive, a discreet allusion to that past of which they had always pretended to know nothing could do no harm, my grandmother added: “It runs in families. Did her mother have pretty hair like that?” “I don’t know,” was the old man’s quaint answer. “I never saw her except with a hat on.”

But I must not keep Elstir waiting. I caught sight of myself in a glass. To add to the disaster of my not having been introduced to the girls, I noticed that my necktie was all crooked, my hat left long wisps of hair shewing, which did not become me; but it was a piece of luck, all the same, that they should have seen me, even thus attired, in Elstir’s company and so could not forget me; also that I should have put on, that morning, at my grandmother’s suggestion, my smart waistcoat, when I might so easily have been wearing one that was simply hideous, and be carrying my best stick. For while an event for which we are longing never happens quite in the way we have been expecting, failing the advantages on which we supposed that we might count, others present themselves for which we never hoped, and make up for our disappointment; and we have been so dreading the worst that in the end we are inclined to feel that, taking one thing with another, chance has, on the whole, been rather kind to us.

“I did so much want to know them,” I said as I reached Elstir. “Then why did you stand a mile away?” These were his actual words, not that they expressed what was in his mind, since, if his desire had been to grant mine, to call me up to him would have been quite easy, but perhaps because he had heard phrases of this sort, in familiar use among common people when they are in the wrong, and because even great men are in certain respects much the same as common people, take their everyday excuses from the same common stock just as they get their daily bread from the same baker; or it may be that such expressions (which ought, one might almost say, to be read ‘backwards,’ since their literal interpretation is the opposite of the truth) are the instantaneous effect, the negative exposure of a reflex action. “They were in a hurry.” It struck me that of course they must have stopped him from summoning a person who did not greatly attract them; otherwise he would not have failed, after all the questions that I had put to him about them, and the interest which he must have seen that I

took in them, to call me. “We were speaking just now of Carquethuit,” he began, as we walked towards his villa. “I have done a little sketch, in which you can see much better how the beach curves. The painting is not bad, but it is different. If you will allow me, just to cement our friendship, I would like to give you the sketch,” he went on, for the people who refuse us the objects of our desire are always ready to offer us something else.

“I should very much like, if you have such a thing, a photograph of the little picture of Miss Sacripant. ‘Sacripant’— that’s not a real name, surely?” “It is the name of a character the sitter played in a stupid little musical comedy.” “But, I assure you, sir, I have never set eyes on her; you look as though you thought that I knew her.” Elstir was silent. “It isn’t Mme. Swann, before she was married?” I hazarded, in one of those sudden fortuitous stumblings upon the truth, which are rare enough in all conscience, and yet give, in the long run, a certain cumulative support to the theory of presentiments, provided that one takes care to forget all the wrong guesses that would invalidate it. Elstir did not reply. The portrait was indeed that of Odette de Crécy. She had preferred not to keep it for many reasons, some of them obvious. But there were others less apparent. The portrait dated from before the point at which Odette, disciplining her features, had made of her face and figure that creation the broad outlines of which her hairdressers, her dressmakers, she herself — in her way of standing, of speaking, of smiling, of moving her hands, her eyes, of thinking — were to respect throughout the years to come. It required the vitiated tastes of a surfeited lover to make Swann prefer to all the countless photographs of the ‘sealed pattern’ Odette which was his charming wife the little photographs which he kept in his room and in which, beneath a straw hat trimmed with pansies, you saw a thin young woman, not even good-looking, with bunched-out hair and drawn features.

But apart from this, had the portrait been not anterior like Swann’s favourite photograph, to the systématisation of Odette’s features in a fresh type, majestic and charming, but subsequent to it, Elstir’s vision would alone have sufficed to disorganise that type. Artistic genius in its reactions is like those extremely high temperatures which have the power to disintegrate combinations of atoms which they proceed to combine afresh in a diametrically opposite order, following another type. All that artificially harmonious whole into which a woman has succeeded in bringing her limbs and features, the persistence of which every day, before going out, she studies in her glass, changing the angle of her hat, smoothing her hair, exercising the sprightliness in her eyes, so as to ensure its continuity, that harmony the keen eye of the great painter instantly destroys,

substituting for it a rearrangement of the woman's features such as will satisfy a certain pictorial ideal of femininity which he carries in his head. Similarly it often happens that, after a certain age, the eye of a great seeker after truth will find everywhere the elements necessary to establish those relations which alone are of interest to him. Like those craftsmen, those players who, instead of making a fuss and asking for what they cannot have, content themselves with the instrument that comes to their hand, the artist might say of anything, no matter what, that it would serve his purpose. Thus a cousin of the Princesse de Luxembourg, a beauty of the most queenly type, having succumbed to a form of art which was new at that time, had asked the leading painter of the naturalist school to do her portrait. At once the artist's eye had found what he sought everywhere in life. And on his canvas there appeared, in place of the proud lady, a street-boy, and behind him a vast, sloping, purple background which made one think of the Place Pigalle. But even without going so far as that, not only will the portrait of a woman by a great artist not seek in the least to give satisfaction to various demands on the woman's part — such as for instance, when she begins to age, make her have herself photographed in dresses that are almost those of a young girl, which bring out her still youthful figure and make her appear like the sister, or even the daughter of her own daughter, who, if need be, is tricked out for the occasion as a 'perfect fright' by her side — it will, on the contrary, emphasise those very drawbacks which she seeks to hide, and which (as for instance a feverish, that is to say a livid complexion) are all the more tempting to him since they give his picture 'character'; they are quite enough, however, to destroy all the illusions of the ordinary man who, when he sees the picture, sees crumble into dust the ideal which the woman herself has so proudly sustained for him, which has placed her in her unique, her unalterable form so far apart, so far above the rest of humanity. Fallen now, represented otherwise than in her own type in which she sat unassailably enthroned, she is become nothing more than just an ordinary woman, in the legend of whose superiority we have lost all faith. In this type we are so accustomed to regard as included not only the beauty of an Odette but her personality, her identity, that standing before the portrait which has thus transposed her from it we are inclined to protest not simply "How plain he has made her!" but "Why, it isn't the least bit like her!" We find it hard to believe that it can be she. We do not recognise her. And yet there is a person there on the canvas whom we are quite conscious of having seen before. But that person is not Odette; the face of the person, her body, her general appearance seem familiar. They recall to us not this particular woman who never held herself

like that, whose natural pose had no suggestion of any such strange and teasing arabesque in its outlines, but other women, all the women whom Elstir has ever painted, women whom invariably, however they may differ from one another, he has chosen to plant thus on his canvas facing you, with an arched foot thrust out from under the skirt, a large round hat in one hand, symmetrically corresponding at the level of the knee which it hides to what also appears as a disc, higher up in the picture: the face. And furthermore, not only does a portrait by the hand of genius disintegrate and destroy a woman's type, as it has been denned by her coquetry and her selfish conception of beauty, but if it is also old, it is not content with ageing the original in the same way as a photograph ages its sitter, by shewing her dressed in the fashions of long ago. In a portrait, it is not only the manner the woman then had of dressing that dates it, there is also the manner the artist had of painting. And this, Elstir's earliest manner, was the most damaging of birth certificates for Odette because it not only established her, as did her photographs of the same period, as the younger sister of various time-honoured courtesans, but made her portrait contemporary with the countless portraits that Manet or Whistler had painted of all those vanished models, models who already belonged to oblivion or to history.

It was along this train of thought, meditated in silence by the side of Elstir as I accompanied him to his door, that I was being led by the discovery that I had just made of the identity of his model, when this original discovery caused me to make a second, more disturbing still, involving the identity of the artist. He had painted the portrait of Odette de Crécy. Could it possibly be that this man of genius, this sage, this eremite, this philosopher with his marvellous flow of conversation, who towered over everyone and everything, was the foolish, corrupt little painter who had at one time been ‘taken up’ by the Verdurins? I asked him if he had known them, whether by any chance it was he that they used to call M. Biche. He answered me in the affirmative, with no trace of embarrassment, as if my question referred to a period in his life that was ended and already somewhat remote, with no suspicion of what a cherished illusion his words were shattering in me, until looking up he read my disappointment upon my face. His own assumed an expression of annoyance. And, as we were now almost at the gate of his house, a man of less outstanding eminence, in heart and brain, might simply have said ‘good-bye’ to me, a trifle dryly, and taken care to avoid seeing me again. This however was not Elstir’s way with me; like the master that he was — and this was, perhaps, from the point of view of sheer creative genius, his one fault, that he was a master in that sense of the word, for an artist if he is to live the true life of the spirit in its full extent, must be alone and not bestow himself with profusion, even upon disciples — from every circumstance, whether involving himself or other people, he sought to extract, for the better edification of the young, the element of truth that it contained. He chose therefore, rather than say anything that might have avenged the injury to his pride, to say what he thought would prove instructive to me. “There is no man,” he began, “however wise, who has not at some period of his youth said things, or lived in a way the consciousness of which is so unpleasant to him in later life that he would gladly, if he could, expunge it from his memory. And yet he ought not entirely to regret it, because he cannot be certain that he has indeed become a wise man — so far as it is possible for any of us to be wise — unless he has passed through all the fatuous or unwholesome incarnations by which that ultimate stage must be preceded. I know that there are young fellows, the sons and grandsons of famous men, whose masters have instilled into them nobility of mind and moral refinement in their schooldays. They have, perhaps, when they look back upon their past lives, nothing to retract; they can, if they choose, publish a signed account of everything they have ever said or done; but they are

poor creatures, feeble descendants of doctrinaires, and their wisdom is negative and sterile. We are not provided with wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can take for us, an effort which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world. The lives that you admire, the attitudes that seem noble to you are not the result of training at home, by a father, or by masters at school, they have sprung from beginnings of a very different order, by reaction from the influence of everything evil or commonplace that prevailed round about them. They represent a struggle and a victory. I can see that the picture of what we once were, in early youth, may not be recognisable and cannot, certainly, be pleasing to contemplate in later life. But we must not deny the truth of it, for it is evidence that we have really lived, that it is in accordance with the laws of life and of the mind that we have, from the common elements of life, of the life of studios, of artistic groups — assuming that one is a painter — extracted something that goes beyond them." Meanwhile we had reached his door. I was disappointed at not having met the girls. But after all there was now the possibility of meeting them again later on; they had ceased to do no more than pass beyond a horizon on which I had been ready to suppose that I should never see them reappear. Around them no longer swirled that sort of great eddy which had separated me from them, which had been merely the expression of the perpetually active desire, mobile, compelling, fed ever on fresh anxieties, which was aroused in me by their inaccessibility, their flight from me, possibly for ever. My desire for them, I could now set it at rest, hold it in reserve, among all those other desires the realisation of which, as soon as I knew it to be possible, I would cheerfully postpone. I took leave of Elstir; I was alone once again. Then all of a sudden, despite my recent disappointment, I saw in my mind's eye all that chain of coincidence which I had not supposed could possibly come about, that Elstir should be a friend of those very girls, that they who only that morning had been to me merely figures in a picture with the sea for background had seen me, had seen me walking in friendly intimacy with a great painter, who was now informed of my secret longing and would no doubt do what he could to assuage it. All this had been a source of pleasure to me, but that pleasure had remained hidden; it was one of those visitors who wait before letting us know that they are in the room until all the rest have gone and we are by ourselves. Then only do we catch sight of them, and can say to them, "I am at your service," and listen to what they have to tell us. Sometimes between the moment at which these pleasures have entered our consciousness and the moment at which we are free

to entertain them, so many hours have passed, we have in the interval seen so many people that we are afraid lest they should have grown tired of waiting. But they are patient, they do not grow tired, and as soon as the crowd has gone we find them there ready for us. Sometimes it is then we who are so exhausted that it seems as though our weary mind will not have the strength left to seize and retain those memories, those impressions for which our frail self is the one habitable place, the sole means of realisation. And we should regret that failure, for existence to us is hardly interesting save on the days on which the dust of realities is shot with magic sand, on which some trivial incident of life becomes a spring of romance. Then a whole promontory of the inaccessible world rises clear in the light of our dream, and enters into our life, our life in which, like the sleeper awakened, we actually see the people of whom we have been so ardently dreaming that we came to believe that we should never behold them save in our dreams.

The sense of comfort that I drew from the probability of my now being able to meet the little band whenever I chose was all the more precious to me because I should not have been able to keep watch for them during the next few days, which would be taken up with preparations for Saint-Loup's departure. My grandmother was anxious to offer my friend some proof of her gratitude for all the kindnesses that he had shewn to her and myself. I told her that he was a great admirer of Proudhon, and this put it into her head to send for a collection of autograph letters by that philosopher which she had once bought; Saint-Loup came to her room to look at them on the day of their arrival, which was also his last day at Balbec. He read them eagerly, fingering each page with reverence, trying to get the sentences by heart; and then, rising from the table, was beginning to apologise to my grandmother for having stayed so long, when he heard her say: "No, no; take them with you; they are for you to keep; that was why I sent for them, to give them to you."

He was overpowered by a joy which he could no more control than we can a physical condition that arises without the intervention of our will. He blushed scarlet as a child who has just been whipped, and my grandmother was a great deal more touched to see all the efforts that he was making (without success) to control the joy that convulsed him than she would have been to hear any words of thanks that he could have uttered. But he, fearing that he had failed to shew his gratitude properly, begged me to make his excuses to her again, next day, leaning from the window of the little train of the local railway company which was to take him back to his regiment. The distance was, as a matter of fact,

nothing. He had thought of going, as he had frequently done that summer, when he was to return the same evening and was not encumbered with luggage, by road. But this time he would have had, anyhow, to put all his heavy luggage in the train. And he found it simpler to take the train himself also, following the advice of the manager who, on being consulted, replied that "Carriage or train, it was more or less equivocal." He meant us to understand that they were equivalent (in fact, very much what Françoise would have expressed as "coming to as near as made no difference"). "Very well," Saint-Loup had decided, "I will take the 'little crawler.'" I should have taken it too, had I not been tired, and gone with my friend to Doncières; failing this I kept on promising, all the time that we waited in the Balbec station — the time, that is to say, which the driver of the little train spent in waiting for unpunctual friends, without whom he refused to start, and also in seeking some refreshment for himself — to go over there and see him several times a week. As Bloch had come to the station also — much to Saint-Loup's disgust — the latter, seeing that our companion could hear him begging me to come to luncheon, to dinner, to stay altogether at Doncières, finally turned to him and, in the most forbidding tone, intended to counteract the forced civility of the invitation and to prevent Bloch from taking it seriously: "If you ever happen to be passing through Doncières any afternoon when I am off duty, you might ask for me at the barracks; but I hardly ever am off duty." Perhaps, also, Robert feared lest, if left to myself, I might not come, and, thinking that I was more intimate with Bloch than I made out, was providing me in this way with a travelling companion, one who would urge me on.

I was afraid that this tone, this way of inviting a person while warning him not to come, might have wounded Bloch, and felt that Saint-Loup would have done better, saying nothing. But I was mistaken, for after the train had gone, while we were walking back together as far as the crossroads at which we should have to part, one road going to the hotel, the other to the Blochs' villa, he never ceased from asking me on what day we should go to Doncières, for after "all the civilities that Saint-Loup had shewn" him, it would be 'too unmannerly' on his part not to accept the invitation. I was glad that he had not noticed, or was so little displeased as to wish to let it be thought that he had not noticed on how far from pressing, how barely polite a note the invitation had been sounded. At the same time I should have liked Bloch, for his own sake, to refrain from making a fool of himself by going over at once to Doncières. But I dared not offer a piece of advice which could only have offended him by hinting that Saint-Loup had been less pressing than himself impressed. He was a great deal too ready to

respond, and even if all his faults of this nature were atoned for by remarkable qualities which others, with more reserve than he, would not possess, he carried indiscretion to a pitch that was almost maddening. The week must not, to hear him speak, pass without our going to Doncières (he said ‘our’ for I think that he counted to some extent on my presence there as an excuse for his own). All the way home, opposite the gymnasium, in its grove of trees, opposite the lawn-tennis courts, the mayor’s office, the shell-fish stall, he stopped me, imploring me to fix a day, and, as I did not, left me in a towering rage, saying: “As your lordship pleases. For my part, I’m obliged to go since he has invited me.”

Saint-Loup was still so much afraid of not having thanked my grandmother properly that he charged me once again to express his gratitude to her a day or two later in a letter I received from him from the town in which he was quartered, a town which seemed, on the envelope where the post-mark had stamped its name, to be hastening to me across country, to tell me that within its walls, in the Louis XVI cavalry barracks, he was thinking of me. The paper was embossed with the arms of Marsantes, in which I could make out a lion, surmounted by a coronet formed by the cap of a Peer of France.

“After a journey which,” he wrote, “passed pleasantly enough, with a book I bought at the station, by Arvède Barine (a Russian author, I fancy; it seemed to me remarkably well written for a foreigner, but you shall give me your critical opinion, you are bound to know all about it, you fount of knowledge who have read everything), here I am again in the thick of this debased existence, where, alas, I feel a sad exile, not having here what I had to leave at Balbec; this life in which I cannot discover one affectionate memory, any intellectual attraction; an environment on which you would probably look with contempt — and yet it has a certain charm. Everything seems to have changed since I was last here, for in the interval one of the most important periods in my life, that from which our friendship dates, has begun. I hope that it may never come to an end. I have spoken of our friendship, of you, to one person only, to the friend I told you of, who has just paid me a surprise visit here. She would like immensely to know you, and I feel that you would get on well together, for she too is extremely literary. I, on the other hand, to go over in my mind all our talk, to live over again those hours which I never shall forget, have shut myself off from my comrades, excellent fellows, but altogether incapable of understanding that sort of thing. This remembrance of moments spent with you I should almost have preferred, on my first day here, to call up for my own solitary enjoyment, without writing. But I was afraid lest you, with your subtle mind and ultra-

sensitive heart, might, if you did not hear from me, needlessly torment yourself, if, that is to say, you still condescend to occupy your thoughts with this blunt trooper whom you will have a hard task to polish and refine, and make a little more subtle and worthier of your company."

On the whole this letter, in its affectionate spirit, was not at all unlike those which, when I did not yet know Saint-Loup, I had imagined that he would write to me, in those daydreams from which the coldness of his first greeting had shaken me by bringing me face to face with an icy reality which was not, however, to endure. Once I had received this letter, whenever, at luncheon-time, the post was brought in, I could tell at once when it was from him that a letter came, for it had always that second face which a person assumes when he is absent, in the features of which (the characters of his script) there is no reason why we should not suppose that we are tracing an individual soul just as much as in the line of a nose or the inflexions of a voice.

I would now gladly remain at the table while it was being cleared, and, if it was not a moment at which the girls of the little band might be passing, it was no longer solely towards the sea that I would turn my eyes. Since I had seen such things depicted in water-colours by Elstir, I sought to find again in reality, I cherished, as though for their poetic beauty, the broken gestures of the knives still lying across one another, the swollen convexity of a discarded napkin upon which the sun would patch a scrap of yellow velvet, the half-empty glass which thus shewed to greater advantage the noble sweep of its curved sides, and, in the heart of its translucent crystal, clear as frozen daylight, a dreg of wine, dusky but sparkling with reflected lights, the displacement of solid objects, the transmutation of liquids by the effect of light and shade, the shifting colour of the plums which passed from green to blue and from blue to golden yellow in the half-plundered dish, the chairs, like a group of old ladies, that came twice daily to take their places round the white cloth spread on the table as on an altar at which were celebrated the rites of the palate, where in the hollows of oyster-shells a few drops of lustral water had gathered as in tiny holy water stoups of stone; I tried to find beauty there where I had never imagined before that it could exist, in the most ordinary things, in the profundities of 'still life.'

When, some days after Saint-Loup's departure, I had succeeded in persuading Elstir to give a small tea-party, at which I was to meet Albertine, that freshness of appearance, that smartness of attire, both (alas) fleeting, which were to be observed in me at the moment of my starting out from the Grand Hotel, and were due respectively to a longer rest than usual and to special pains over

my toilet, I regretted my inability to reserve them (and also the credit accruing from Elstir's friendship) for the captivation of some other, more interesting person; I regretted having to use them all up on the simple pleasure of making Albertine's acquaintance. My brain assessed this pleasure at a very low value now that it was assured me. But, inside, my will did not for a moment share this illusion, that will which is the persevering and unalterable servant of our successive personalities; hiding itself in secret places, despised, downtrodden, untiringly faithful, toiling without intermission and with no thought for the variability of the self, its master, if only that master may never lack what he requires. Whereas at the moment when we are just about to start on a long-planned and eagerly awaited holiday, our brain, our nerves begin to ask themselves whether it is really worth all the trouble involved, the will, knowing that those lazy masters would at once begin to consider their journey the most wonderful experience, if it became impossible for them to take it, the will leaves them explaining their difficulties outside the station, multiplying their hesitations; but busies itself with taking the tickets and putting us into the carriage before the train starts. It is as invariable as brain and nerves are fickle, but as it is silent, gives no account of its actions, it seems almost non-existent; it is by its dogged determination that the other constituent parts of our personality are led, but without seeing it, while they distinguish clearly all their own uncertainties. My nerves and brain then started a discussion as to the real value of the pleasure that there would be in knowing Albertine, while I studied in the glass vain and perishable attractions which nerves and brain would have preserved intact for use on some other occasion. But my will would not let the hour pass at which I must start, and 'it was Elstir's address that it called out to the driver. Brain and nerves were at liberty, now that the die was cast, to think this 'a pity.' If my will had given the man a different address, they would have been finely 'sold.'

When I arrived at Elstir's, a few minutes later, my first impression was that Mlle. Simonet was not in the studio. There was certainly a girl sitting there in a silk frock, bareheaded, but one whose marvellous hair, whose nose, meant nothing to me, in whom I did not recognise the human entity that I had formed out of a young cyclist strolling past, in a polo-cap, between myself and the sea. It was Albertine, nevertheless. But even when I knew it to be she, I gave her no thought. On entering any social gathering, when we are young, we lose consciousness of our old self, we become a different man, every drawing-room being a fresh universe, in which, coming under the sway of a new moral

perspective, we fasten our attention, as if they were to matter to us for all time, on people, dances, card-tables, all of which we shall have forgotten by the morning. Obliged to follow, if I was to arrive at the goal of conversation with Albertine, a road in no way of my own planning, which first brought me to a halt at Elstir, passed by other groups of guests to whom I was presented, then along the table, at which I was offered, and ate, a strawberry tart or two, while I listened, motionless, to the music that was beginning in another part of the room, I found myself giving to these various incidents the same importance as to my introduction to Mlle. Simonet, an introduction which was now nothing more than one among several such incidents, having entirely forgotten that it had been, but a few minutes since, my sole object in coming there that day. But is it not ever thus in the bustle of daily life, with every true happiness, every great sorrow? In a room full of other people we receive from her whom we love the answer, propitious or fatal, which we have been awaiting for the last year. But we must go on talking, ideas come, one after another, forming a smooth surface which is pricked, at the very most, now and then by a dull throb from within of the memory, deep-rooted enough but of very slender growth, that misfortune has come upon us. If, instead of misfortune, it is happiness, it may be that not until many years have elapsed will we recall that the most important event in our sentimental life occurred without our having time to give it any prolonged attention, or even to become aware of it almost, at a social gathering, it may have been, to which we had gone solely in expectation of that event.

When Elstir asked me to come with him so that he might introduce me to Albertine, who was sitting a little farther down the room, I first of all finished eating a coffee éclair and, with a show of keen interest, asked an old gentleman whose acquaintance I had just made (and thought that I might, perhaps, offer him the rose in my buttonhole which he had admired) to tell me more about the old Norman fairs. This is not to say that the introduction which followed did not give me any pleasure, nor assume a definite importance in my eyes. But so far as the pleasure was concerned, I was not conscious of it, naturally, until some time later, when, once more in the hotel, and in my room alone, I had become myself again. Pleasure in this respect is like photography. What we take, in the presence of the beloved object, is merely a negative film; we develop it later, when we are at home, and have once again found at our disposal that inner darkroom, the entrance to which is barred to us so long as we are with other people.

If my consciousness of the pleasure it had brought me was thus retarded by a few hours, the importance of this introduction I felt immediately. At such

moments of introduction, for all that we feel ourselves to have been suddenly enriched, to have been furnished with a pass that will admit us henceforward to pleasures which we have been pursuing for weeks past, but in vain, we realise only too clearly that this acquisition puts an end for us not merely to hours of toilsome search — a relief that could only fill us with joy — but also to the very existence of a certain person, her whom our imagination had wildly distorted, our anxious fear that we might never become known to her enlarged. At the moment when our name sounds on the lips of the person introducing us, especially if he amplifies it, as Elstir was now doing, with a flattering account of us — in that sacramental moment, as when in a fairy tale the magician commands a person suddenly to become someone else, she to whose presence we have been longing to attain vanishes; how could she remain the same when, for one thing — owing to the attention which the stranger is obliged to pay to the announcement of our name and the sight of our person — in the eyes that only yesterday were situated at an infinite distance (where we supposed that our eyes, wandering, uncontrolled, desperate, divergent, would never succeed in meeting them) the conscious gaze, the incommunicable thought which we have been seeking have been miraculously and quite simply replaced by our own image, painted in them as though behind the glass of a smiling mirror. If this incarnation of ourself in the person who seems to differ most from us is what does most to modify the appearance of the person to whom we have just been introduced, the form of that person still remains quite vague; and we are free to ask ourself whether she will turn out to be a god, a table or a basin. But, as nimble as the wax-modellers who will fashion a bust before our eyes in five minutes, the few words which the stranger is now going to say to us will substantiate her form, will give her something positive and final that will exclude all the hypotheses by which, a moment ago, our desire, our imagination were being tempted. Doubtless, even before her coming to this party, Albertine had ceased to be to me simply that sole phantom worthy to haunt our life which is what remains of a passing stranger, of whom we know nothing and have caught but the barest glimpse. Her relation to Mme. Bontemps had already restricted the scope of those marvellous hypotheses, by stopping one of the channels along which they might have spread. As I drew closer to the girl, and began to know her better, my knowledge of her underwent a process of subtraction, all the factors of imagination and desire giving place to a notion which was worth infinitely less, a notion to which, it must be admitted, there was added presently what was more or less the equivalent, in the domain of real life, of what joint stock companies

give one, after paying interest on one's capital, and call a bonus. Her name, her family connexions had been the original limit set to my suppositions. Her friendly greeting while, standing close beside her, I saw once again the tiny mole on her cheek, below her eye, marked another stage; last of all, I was surprised to hear her use the adverb 'perfectly' (in place of 'quite') of two people whom she mentioned, saying of one: "She is perfectly mad, but very nice for all that," and of the other, "He is a perfectly common man, a perfect bore." However little to be commended this use of 'perfectly' may be, it indicates a degree of civilisation and culture which I could never have imagined as having been attained by the bacchante with the bicycle, the frenzied muse of the golf-course. Nor did it mean that after this first transformation Albertine was not to change again for me, many times. The good and bad qualities which a person presents to us, exposed to view on the surface of his or her face, rearrange themselves in a totally different order if we approach them from another angle — just as, in a town, buildings that appear strung irregularly along a single line, from another aspect retire into a graduated distance, and their relative heights are altered. To begin with, Albertine now struck me as not implacable so much as almost frightened; she seemed to me rather respectably than ill bred, judging by the description, 'bad style,' 'a comic manner' which she applied to each in turn of the girls of whom I spoke to her; finally, she presented as a target for my line of sight a temple that was distinctly flushed and hardly attractive to the eye, and no longer the curious gaze which I had always connected with her until then. But this was merely a second impression and there were doubtless others through which I was successively to pass. Thus it can be only after one has recognised, not without having had to feel one's way, the optical illusions of one's first impression that one can arrive at an exact knowledge of another person, supposing such knowledge to be ever possible. But it is not; for while our original impression of him undergoes correction, the person himself, not being an inanimate object, changes in himself, we think that we have caught him, he moves, and, when we imagine that at last we are seeing him clearly, it is only the old impressions which we had already formed of him that we have succeeded in making clearer, when they no longer represent him.

And yet, whatever the inevitable disappointments that it must bring in its train, this movement towards what we have only half seen, what we have been free to dwell upon and imagine at our leisure, this movement is the only one that is wholesome for the senses, that whets the appetite. How dreary a monotony must pervade those people's lives who, from indolence or timidity, drive in their

carriages straight to the doors of friends whom they have got to know without having first dreamed of knowing them, without ever daring, on the way, to stop and examine what arouses their desire.

I returned home, my mind full of the party, the coffee éclair which I had finished eating before I let Elstir take me up to Albertine, the rose which I had given the old gentleman, all the details selected without our knowledge by the circumstances of the occasion, which compose in a special and quite fortuitous order the picture that we retain of a first meeting. But this picture, I had the impression that I was seeing it from a fresh point of view, a long way remote from myself, realising that it had not existed only for me, when some months later, to my great surprise, on my speaking to Albertine on the day on which I had first met her, she reminded me of the éclair, the flower that I had given away, all those things which I had supposed to have been — I will not say of importance only to myself but — perceived only by myself, and which I now found thus transcribed, in a version the existence of which I had never suspected, in the mind of Albertine. On this first day itself, when, on my return to the hotel, I was able to visualise the memory which I had brought away with me, I realised the consummate adroitness with which the sleight of hand had been performed, and how I had talked for a moment or two with a person who, thanks to the skill of the conjurer, without actually embodying anything of that other person whom I had for so long been following as she paced beside the sea, had been effectively substituted for her. I might, for that matter, have guessed as much in advance, since the girl of the beach was a fabrication invented by myself. In spite of which, as I had, in my conversations with Elstir, identified her with this other girl, I felt myself in honour bound to fulfil to the real the promises of love made to the imagined Albertine. We betroth ourselves by proxy, and think ourselves obliged, in the sequel, to marry the person who has intervened. Moreover, if there had disappeared, provisionally at any rate, from my life, an anguish that found adequate consolation in the memory of polite manners, of that expression ‘perfectly common’ and of the glowing temple, that memory awakened in me desire of another kind which, for all that it was placid and not at all painful, resembling rather brotherly love, might in the long run become fully as dangerous by making me feel at every moment a compelling need to kiss this new person, whose charming ways, shyness, unlooked-for accessibility, arrested the futile process of my imagination but gave birth to a sentimental gratitude. And then, since memory begins at once to record photographs independent of one another, eliminates every link, any kind of sequence from between the

scenes portrayed in the collection which it exposes to our view, the most recent does not necessarily destroy or cancel those that came before. Confronted with the commonplace though appealing Albertine to whom I had spoken that afternoon, I still saw the other, mysterious Albertine outlined against the sea. These were now memories, that is to say pictures neither of which now seemed to me any more true than the other. But, to make an end of this first afternoon of my introduction to Albertine, when trying to recapture that little mole on her cheek, just under the eye, I remembered that, looking from Elstir's window, when Albertine had gone by, I had seen the mole on her chin. In fact, whenever I saw her I noticed that she had a mole, but my inaccurate memory made it wander about the face of Albertine, fixing it now in one place, now in another.

Whatever my disappointment in finding in Mlle. Simonet a girl so little different from those that I knew already, just as my rude awakening when I saw Balbec Church did not prevent me from wishing still to go to Quimperlé, Pont-Aven and Venice, I comforted myself with the thought that through Albertine at any rate, even if she herself was not all that I had hoped, I might make the acquaintance of her comrades of the little band.

I thought at first that I should fail. As she was to be staying (and I too) for a long time still at Balbec, I had decided that the best thing was not to make my efforts to meet her too apparent, but to wait for an accidental encounter. But should this occur every day, even, it was greatly to be feared that she would confine herself to acknowledging my bow from a distance, and such meetings, repeated day after day throughout the whole season, would benefit me not at all.

Shortly after this, one morning when it had been raining and was almost cold, I was accosted on the 'front' by a girl wearing a close-fitting toque and carrying a muff, so different from the girl whom I had met at Elstir's party that to recognise in her the same person seemed an operation beyond the power of the human mind; mine was, nevertheless, successful in performing it, but after a momentary surprise which did not, I think, escape Albertine's notice. On the other hand, when I instinctively recalled the good breeding which had so impressed me before, she filled me with a converse astonishment by her rude tone and manners typical of the 'little band.' Apart from these, her temple had ceased to be the optical centre, on which the eye might comfortably rest, of her face, either because I was now on her other side, or because her toque hid it, or else possibly because its inflammation was not a constant thing. "What weather!" she began. "Really the perpetual summer of Balbec is all stuff and nonsense. You don't go in for anything special here, do you? We don't ever see

you playing golf, or dancing at the Casino. You don't ride, either. You must be bored stiff. You don't find it too deadly, staying about on the beach all day? I see, you just bask in the sun like a lizard; you enjoy that. You must have plenty of time on your hands. I can see you're not like me; I simply adore all sports. You weren't at the Sogne races! We went in the 'tram,' and I can quite believe you don't see the fun of going in an old 'tin-pot' like that. It took us two whole hours! I could have gone there and back three times on my bike." I, who had been lost in admiration of Saint-Loup when he, in the most natural manner in the world, called the little local train the 'crawler,' because of the ceaseless windings of its line, was positively alarmed by the glibness with which Albertine spoke of the 'tram,' and called it a 'tin-pot.' I could feel her mastery of a form of speech in which I was afraid of her detecting and scorning my inferiority. And yet the full wealth of the synonyms that the little band possessed to denote this railway had not yet been revealed to me. In speaking, Albertine kept her head motionless, her nostrils closed, allowing only the corners of her lips to move. The result of this was a drawling, nasal sound, into the composition of which there entered perhaps a provincial descent, a juvenile affectation of British phlegm, the teaching of a foreign governess and a congestive hypertrophy of the mucus of the nose. This enunciation which, as it happened, soon disappeared when she knew people better, giving place to a natural girlish tone, might have been thought unpleasant. But it was peculiar to herself, and delighted me. Whenever I had gone for several days without seeing her, I would refresh my spirit by repeating to myself: "We don't ever see you playing golf," with the nasal intonation in which she had uttered the words, point blank, without moving a muscle of her face. And I thought then that there could be no one in the world so desirable.

We formed that morning one of those couples who dotted the 'front' here and there with their conjunction, their stopping together for time enough just to exchange a few words before breaking apart, each to resume separately his or her divergent stroll. I seized the opportunity, while she stood still, to look again and discover once and for all where exactly the little mole was placed. Then, just as a phrase of Vinteuil which had delighted me in the sonata, and which my recollection allowed to wander from the andante to the finale, until the day when, having the score in my hands, I was able to find it, and to fix it in my memory in its proper place, in the scherzo, so this mole, which I had visualised now on her cheek, now on her chin, came to rest for ever on her upper lip, just below her nose. In the same way, too, do we come with amazement upon lines

that we know by heart in a poem in which we never dreamed that they were to be found.

At that moment, as if in order that against the sea there might multiply in freedom, in the variety of its forms, all the rich decorative whole which was the lovely unfolding of the train of maidens, at once golden and rosy, baked by sun and wind, Albertine's friends, with their shapely limbs, their supple figures, but so different one from another, came into sight in a cluster that expanded as it approached, advancing towards us, but keeping closer to the sea, along a parallel line. I asked Albertine's permission to walk for a little way with her. Unfortunately, all she did was to wave her hand to them in greeting. "But your friends will be disappointed if you don't go with them," I hinted, hoping that we might all walk together. A young man with regular features, carrying a bag of golf-clubs, sauntered up to us. It was the baccarat-player, whose fast ways so enraged the chief magistrate's wife. In a frigid, impassive tone, which he evidently regarded as an indication of the highest refinement, he bade Albertine good day. "Been playing golf, Octave?" she asked. "How did the game go? Were you in form?" "Oh, it's too sickening; I can't play for nuts," he replied. "Was Andrée playing?" "Yes, she went round in seventy-seven." "Why, that's a record!" "I went round in eighty-two yesterday." He was the son of an immensely rich manufacturer who was to take an important part in the organisation of the coming World's Fair. I was struck by the extreme degree to which, in this young man and in the other by no means numerous male friends of the band of girls, the knowledge of everything that pertained to clothes and how to wear them, cigars, English drinks, horses, a knowledge which he possessed in its minutest details with a haughty infallibility that approached the reticent modesty of the true expert, had been developed in complete isolation, unaccompanied by the least trace of any intellectual culture. He had no hesitation as to the right time and place for dinner-jacket or pyjamas, but neither had he any suspicion of the circumstances in which one might or might not employ this or that word, or even of the simplest rules of grammar. This disparity between the two forms of culture must have existed also in his father, the President of the Syndicate that 'ran' Balbec, for, in an open letter to the electors which he had recently had posted on all the walls, he announced: "I desired to see the Mayor, to speak to him of the matter; he would not listen to my righteous plaint." Octave, at the Casino, took prizes in all the dancing competitions, for bostons, tangos and what-not, an accomplishment that would entitle him, if he chose, to make a fine marriage in that seaside society where it

is not figuratively but in sober earnest that the young women ‘marry their dancing-partners.’ He lighted a cigar with a “D’you mind?” to Albertine, as one who asks permission to finish, while going on talking, an urgent piece of work. For he was one of those people who can never be ‘doing nothing,’ although there was nothing, for that matter, that he could ever be said to do. And as complete inactivity has the same effect on us, in the end, as prolonged overwork, and on the character as much as on the life of body and muscles, the unimpaired nullity of intellect that was enshrined behind Octave’s meditative brow had ended by giving him, despite his air of unruffled calm, ineffectual longings to think which kept him awake at night, for all the world like an overwrought philosopher.

Supposing that if I knew their male friends I should have more opportunities of seeing the girls, I had been on the point of asking for an introduction to Octave. I told Albertine this, as soon as he had left us, still muttering, “I couldn’t play for nuts!” I thought I would thus put into her head the idea of doing it next time. “But I can’t,” she cried, “introduce you to a tame cat like that. This place simply swarms with them. But what on earth would they have to say to you? That one plays golf quite well, and that’s all there is to it. I know what I’m talking about; you’d find he wasn’t at all your sort.” “Your friends will be cross with you if you desert them like this,” I repeated, hoping that she would then suggest my joining the party. “Oh, no, they don’t want me.” We ran into Bloch, who directed at me a subtle, insinuating smile, and, embarrassed by the presence of Albertine, whom he did not know, or, rather, knew ‘without knowing’ her, bent his head with a stiff, almost irritated jerk. “What’s he called, that Ostrogoth?” Albertine asked. “I can’t think why he should bow to me; he doesn’t know me. And I didn’t bow to him, either.” I had no time to explain to her, for, bearing straight down upon us, “Excuse me,” he began, “for interrupting you, but I must tell you that I am going to Don-cières to-morrow. I cannot put it off any longer without discourtesy; indeed, I ask myself, what must de Saint-Loup-en-Bray think of me. I just came to let you know that I shall take the two o’clock train. At your service.” But I thought now only of seeing Albertine again, and of trying to get to know her friends, and Doncières, since they were not going there, and my going would bring me back too late to see them still on the beach, seemed to me to be situated at the other end of the world. I told Bloch that it was impossible. “Oh, very well, I shall go alone. In the fatuous words of Master Arouet, I shall say to Saint-Loup, to beguile his clericalism:

‘My duty stands alone, by his in no way bound;
Though he should choose to fail, yet faithful I’ll be found.’”

“I admit he’s not a bad looking boy,” was Albertine’s comment, “but he makes me feel quite sick.” I had never thought that Bloch might be ‘not a bad looking boy’; and yet, when one came to think of it, so he was. With his rather prominent brow, very aquiline nose, and his air of extreme cleverness and of being convinced of his cleverness, he had a pleasing face. But he could not succeed in pleasing Albertine. This was perhaps due, to some extent, to her own disadvantages, the harshness, the want of feeling of the little band, its rudeness towards everything that was not itself. And later on, when I introduced them, Albertine’s antipathy for him grew no less. Bloch belonged to a section of society in which, between the free and easy customs of the ‘smart set’ and the regard for good manners which a man is supposed to shew who ‘does not soil his hands,’ a sort of special compromise has been reached which differs from the manners of the world and is nevertheless a peculiarly unpleasant form of worldliness. When he was introduced to anyone he would bow with a sceptical smile, and at the same time with an exaggerated show of respect, and, if it was to a man, would say: “Pleased to meet you, sir,” in a voice which ridiculed the words that it was uttering, though with a consciousness of belonging to some one who was no fool. Having sacrificed this first moment to a custom which he at once followed and derided (just as on the first of January he would greet you with a ‘Many happy!’) he would adopt an air of infinite cunning, and would ‘proffer subtle words’ which were often true enough but ‘got on’ Albertine’s nerves. When I told her on this first day that his name was Bloch, she exclaimed: “I would have betted anything he was a Jew-boy. Trust them to put their foot in it!” Moreover, Bloch was destined to give Albertine other grounds for annoyance later on. Like many intellectuals, he was incapable of saying a simple thing in a simple way. He would find some precious qualification for every statement, and would sweep from particular to general. It vexed Albertine, who was never too well pleased at other people’s shewing an interest in what she was doing, that when she had sprained her ankle and was keeping quiet, Bloch said of her: “She is outstretched on her chair, but in her ubiquity has not ceased to frequent simultaneously vague golf-courses and dubious tennis-courts.” He was simply being ‘literary,’ of course, but this, in view of the difficulties which Albertine felt that it might create for her with friends whose invitations she had declined on the plea that she was unable to move, was quite enough to disgust her with the face, the sound of the voice, of the young man who could say such things about her. We parted, Albertine and I, after promising to take a walk together later. I had talked to her without being any more conscious of where my words were falling,

of what became of them, than if I were dropping pebbles into a bottomless pit. That our words are, as a general rule, filled, by the person to whom we address them, with a meaning which that person derives from her own substance, a meaning widely different from that which we had put into the same words when we uttered them, is a fact which the daily round of life is perpetually demonstrating. But if we find ourselves as well in the company of a person whose education (as Albertine's was to me) is inconceivable, her tastes, her reading, her principles unknown, we cannot tell whether our words have aroused in her anything that resembles their meaning, any more than in an animal, although there are things that even an animal may be made to understand. So that to attempt any closer friendship with Albertine seemed to me like placing myself in contact with the unknown, if not the impossible, an occupation as arduous as breaking a horse, as reposeful as keeping bees or growing roses.

I had thought, a few hours before, that Albertine would acknowledge my bow but would not speak to me. We had now parted, after planning to make some excursion soon together. I vowed that when I next met Albertine I would treat her with greater boldness, and I had sketched out in advance a draft of all that I would say to her, and even (being now quite convinced that she was not strait-laced) of all the favours that I would demand of her. But the mind is subject to external influences, as plants are, and cells and chemical elements, and the medium in which its immersion alters it is a change of circumstances, or new surroundings. Grown different by the mere fact of her presence, when I found myself once again in Albertine's company, what I said to her was not at all what I had meant to say. Remembering her flushed temple, I asked myself whether she might not appreciate more keenly a polite attention which she knew to be disinterested. Besides, I was embarrassed by certain things in her look, in her smile. They might equally well signify a laxity of morals and the rather silly merriment of a girl who though full of spirits was at heart thoroughly respectable. A single expression, on a face as in speech, is susceptible of divers interpretations, and I stood hesitating like a schoolboy faced by the difficulties of a piece of Greek prose.

On this occasion we met almost immediately the tall one, Andrée, the one who had jumped over the old banker, and Albertine was obliged to introduce me. Her friend had a pair of eyes of extraordinary brightness, like, in a dark house, a glimpse through an open door of a room into which the sun is shining with a greenish reflexion from the glittering sea.

A party of five were passing, men whom I had come to know very well by

sight during my stay at Balbec. I had often wondered who they could be. “They’re nothing very wonderful,” said Albertine with a sneering laugh. “The little old one with dyed hair and yellow gloves has a fine touch; he knows how to draw all right, he’s the Balbec dentist; he’s a good sort. The fat one is the Mayor, not the tiny little fat one, you must have seen him before, he’s the dancing master; he’s rather a beast, you know; he can’t stand us, because we make such a row at the Casino; we smash his chairs, and want to have the carpet up when we dance; that’s why he never gives us prizes, though we’re the only girls there who can dance a bit. The dentist is a dear, I would have said how d’ye do to him, just to make the dancing master swear, but I couldn’t because they’ve got M. de Sainte-Croix with them; he’s on the General Council; he comes of a very good family, but he’s joined the Republicans, to make more money. No nice people ever speak to him now. He knows my uncle, because they’re both in the Government, but the rest of my family always cut him. The thin one in the waterproof is the bandmaster. You know him, of course. You don’t? Oh, he plays divinely. You haven’t been to *Cavalleria Rusticana*? I thought it too lovely! He’s giving a concert this evening, but we can’t go because it’s to be in the town hall. In the Casino it wouldn’t matter, but in the town hall, where they’ve taken down the crucifix. Andrée’s mother would have a fit if we went there. You’re going to say that my aunt’s husband is in the Government. But what difference does that make? My aunt is my aunt. That’s not why I’m fond of her. The only thing she has ever wanted has been to get rid of me. No, the person who has really been a mother to me, and all the more credit to her because she’s no relation at all, is a friend of mine whom I love just as much as if she was my mother. I will let you see her ‘photo.’” We were joined for a moment by the golf champion and baccarat plunger, Octave. I thought that I had discovered a bond between us, for I learned in the course of conversation that he was some sort of relative, and even more a friend of the Verdurins. But he spoke contemptuously of the famous Wednesdays, adding that M. Verdurin had never even heard of a dinner-jacket, which made it a horrid bore when one ran into him in a music-hall, where one would very much rather not be greeted with “Well, you young rascal,” by an old fellow in a frock coat and black tie, for all the world like a village lawyer. Octave left us, and soon it was Andrée’s turn, when we came to her villa, into which she vanished without having uttered a single word to me during the whole of our walk. I regretted her departure, all the more in that, while I was complaining to Albertine how chilling her friend had been with me, and was comparing in my mind this difficulty which Albertine seemed to find in making

me know her friends with the hostility that Elstir, when he might have granted my desire, seemed to have encountered on that first afternoon, two girls came by to whom I lifted my hat, the young Ambresacs, whom Albertine greeted also.

I felt that, in Albertine's eyes, my position would be improved by this meeting. They were the daughters of a kinswoman of Mme. de Ville-parisis, who was also a friend of Mme. de Luxembourg. M. and Mme. d'Ambresac, who had a small villa at Balbec and were immensely rich, led the simplest of lives there, and always went about dressed he in an unvarying frock coat, she in a dark gown. Both of them used to make sweeping bows to my grandmother, which never led to anything further. The daughters, who were very pretty, were dressed more fashionably, but in a fashion suited rather to Paris than to the seaside. With their long skirts and large hats, they had the look of belonging to a different race from Albertine. She, I discovered, knew all about them.

"Oh, so you know the little d'Ambresacs, do you? Dear me, you have some swagger friends. After all, they're very simple souls," she went on as though this might account for it. "They're very nice, but so well brought up that they aren't allowed near the Casino, for fear of us — we've such a bad tone. They attract you, do they? Well, it all depends on what you like. They're just little white rabbits, really. There may be something in that, of course. If little white rabbits are what appeals to you, they may supply a long-felt want. It seems, there must be some attraction, because one of them has got engaged already to the Marquis de Saint-Loup. Which is a cruel blow to the younger one, who is madly in love with that young man. I'm sure, the way they speak to you with their lips shut is quite enough for me. And then they dress in the most absurd way. Fancy going to play golf in silk frocks! At their age, they dress more showily than grown-up women who really know about clothes. Look at Mme. Elstir; there's a well dressed woman if you like." I answered that she had struck me as being dressed with the utmost simplicity. Albertine laughed. "She does put on the simplest things, I admit, but she dresses wonderfully, and to get what you call simplicity costs her a fortune." Mme. Elstir's gowns passed unnoticed by any one who had not a sober and unerring taste in matters of attire. This was lacking in me. Elstir possessed it in a supreme degree, or so Albertine told me. I had not suspected this, nor that the beautiful but quite simple objects which littered his studio were treasures long desired by him which he had followed from sale room to sale room, knowing all their history, until he had made enough money to be able to acquire them. But as to this Albertine, being as ignorant as myself, could not enlighten me. Whereas when it came to clothes, prompted by a coquettish

instinct, and perhaps by the regretful longing of a penniless girl who is able to appreciate with greater disinterestedness, more delicacy of feeling, in other, richer people the things that she will never be able to afford for herself, she expressed herself admirably on the refinement of Elstir's taste, so hard to satisfy that all women appeared to him badly dressed, while, attaching infinite importance to right proportions and shades of colour, he would order to be made for his wife, at fabulous prices, the sunshades, hats and cloaks which he had learned from Albertine to regard as charming, and which a person wanting in taste would no more have noticed than myself. Apart from this, Albertine, who had done a little painting, though without, she confessed, having any 'gift' for it, felt a boundless admiration for Elstir, and, thanks to his precept and example, shewed a judgment of pictures which was in marked contrast to her enthusiasm for Cavalleria Rusticana. The truth was, though as yet it was hardly apparent, that she was highly intelligent, and that in the things that she said the stupidity was not her own but that of her environment and age. Elstir's had been a good but only a partial influence. All the branches of her intelligence had not reached the same stage of development. The taste for pictures had almost caught up the taste for clothes and all forms of smartness, but had not been followed by the taste for music, which was still a long way behind.

Albertine might know all about the Ambresacs; but as he who can achieve great things is not necessarily capable of small, I did not find her, after I had bowed to those young ladies, any better disposed to make me known to her friends. "It's too good of you to attach any importance to them. You shouldn't take any notice of them; they don't count. What on earth can a lot of kids like them mean to a man like you? Now Andrée, I must say, is remarkably clever. She is a good girl, that, though she is perfectly fantastic at times, but the others are really dreadfully stupid." When I had left Albertine, I felt suddenly a keen regret that Saint-Loup should have concealed his engagement from me and that he should be doing anything so improper as to choose a wife before breaking with his mistress. And then, shortly afterwards, I met Andrée, and as she went on talking to me for some time I seized the opportunity to tell her that I would very much like to see her again next day, but she replied that this was impossible, because her mother was not at all well, and she would have to stay beside her. The next day but one, when I was at Elstir's, he told me how greatly Andrée had been attracted by me; on my protesting: "But it was I who was attracted by her from the start; I asked her to meet me again yesterday, but she could not." "Yes, I know; she told me all about that," was his reply, "she was very sorry, but she had

promised to go to a picnic, somewhere miles from here. They were to drive over in a break, and it was too late for her to get out of it." Albeit this falsehood (Andrée knowing me so slightly) was of no real importance, I ought not to have continued to seek the company of a person who was capable of uttering it. For what people have once done they will do again indefinitely, and if you go every year to see a friend who, the first time, was not able to meet you at the appointed place, or was in bed with a chill, you will find him in bed with another chill which he has just caught, you will miss him again at another meeting-place at which he has failed to appear, for a single and unalterable reason in place of which he supposes himself to have various reasons, drawn from the circumstances. One morning, not long after An-dree's telling me that she would be obliged to stay beside her mother, I was taking a short stroll with Albertine, whom I had found on the beach tossing up and catching again on a cord an oddly shaped implement which gave her a look of Giotto's 'Idolatry'; it was called, for that matter, 'Diabolo,' and is so fallen into disuse now that, when they come upon the picture of a girl playing with one, the critics of future generations will solemnly discuss, as it might be over one of the allegorical figures in the Arena, what it is that she is holding. A moment later their friend with the penurious and harsh appearance, the same one who on that first day had sneered so malevolently: "I do feel sorry for him, poor old man," when, she saw the old gentleman's head brushed by the flying feet of Andrée, came up to Albertine with "Good morning,'m I disturbing you?" She had taken off her hat, for comfort, and her hair, like a strange and fascinating-plant, lay over her brow, displaying all the delicate tracery of its foliation Albertine, perhaps because she resented seeing the other bare-headed, made-no reply, preserved a frigid silence in spite of which the girl stayed with us, kept apart from myself by Albertine, who arranged at one moment to be-alone with her, at another to walk with me leaving her to follow. I was obliged, to secure an introduction, to ask for it in the girl's hearing. Then, as Albertine was uttering my name, on the face and in the blue eyes of this girl, whose expression I had thought so cruel when I heard her say: "Poor old man, I do feel so sorry for him," I saw gather and gleam a cordial, friendly smile, and she held out her hand. Her hair was golden, and not her hair only; for if her cheeks were pink and her eyes blue it was like the still roseate morning sky which sparkles everywhere with dazzling points of gold.

At once kindled by her flame, I said to myself that this was a child who when in love grew shy, that it was for my sake, from love for me that she had remained with us, despite Albertine's rebuffs, and that she must have rejoiced in

the opportunity to confess to me at last, by that smiling, friendly gaze, that she would be as kind to me as she was terrible to other people. Doubtless she had noticed me on the beach, when I still knew nothing of her, and had been thinking of me ever since; perhaps it had been to win my admiration that she mocked at the old gentleman, and because she had not succeeded in getting to know me that on the following days she appeared so morose. From the hotel I had often seen her, in the evenings, walking by herself on the beach. Probably in the hope of meeting me. And now, hindered as much by Albertine's presence as she would have been by that of the whole band, she had evidently attached herself to us, braving the increasing coldness of her friend's attitude, only in the hope of outstaying her, of being left alone with me, when she might make an appointment with me for some time when she would find an excuse to slip away without either her family's or her friends' knowing that she had gone, and would meet me in some safe place before church or after golf. It was all the more difficult to see her because Andrée had quarrelled with her and now detested her. "I have put up far too long with her terrible dishonesty," she explained to me, "her baseness; I can't tell you all the vile insults she has heaped on me. I have stood it all because of the others. But her latest effort was really too much!" And she told me of some foolish thing that this girl had done, which might indeed have injurious consequences to Andrée herself.

But those private words promised me by Gisèle's confiding eyes for the moment when Albertine should have left us by ourselves, were destined never to be spoken, because after Albertine, stubbornly planted between us, had answered with increasing curtness, and finally had ceased to respond at all to her friend's remarks, Gisèle at length abandoned the attempt and turned back. I found fault with Albertine for having been so disagreeable. "It will teach her to be more careful how she behaves. She's not a bad kid, but she'd talk the head off a donkey. She's no business, either, to go poking her nose into everything. Why should she fasten herself on to us without being asked? In another minute, I'd have told her to go to blazes. Besides I can't stand her going about with her hair like that; it's such bad form." I gazed at Albertine's cheeks as she spoke, and asked myself what might be the perfume, the taste of them: this time they were not cool, but glowed with a uniform pink, violet-tinted, creamy, like certain roses whose petals have a waxy gloss. I felt a passionate longing for them such as one feels sometimes for a particular flower. "I hadn't noticed it," was all that I said. "You stared at her hard enough; anyone would have said you wanted to paint her portrait," she scolded, not at all softened by the fact that it was at herself that I

was now staring so fixedly. “I don’t believe you would care for her, all the same. She’s not in the least a flirt. You like little girls who flirt with you, I know. Anyhow, she won’t have another chance of fastening on to us and being sent about her business; she’s going off to-day to Paris.” “Are the rest of your friends going too?” “No; only she and ‘Miss,’ because she’s got an exam, coming; she’s got to stay at home and swot for it, poor kid. It’s not much fun for her, I don’t mind telling you. Of course, you may be set a good subject, you never know. But it’s a tremendous risk. One girl I know was asked: *Describe an accident that you have witnessed*. That was a piece of luck. But I know another girl who got: *State which you would rather have as a friend, Alceste or Philinte*. I’m sure I should have dried up altogether! Apart from everything else, it’s not a question to set to girls. Girls go about with other girls; they’re not supposed to have gentlemen friends.” (This announcement, which shewed that I had but little chance of being admitted to the companionship of the band, froze my blood.) “But in any case, supposing it was set to boys, what on earth would you expect them to say to a question like that? Several parents wrote to the *Gaulois*, to complain of the difficult questions that were being set. The joke of it is that in a collection of prize-winning essays they gave two which treated the question in absolutely opposite ways. You see, it all depends on which examiner you get. One would like you to say that Philinte was a flatterer and a scoundrel, the other that you couldn’t help admiring Alceste, but that he was too cantankerous, and that as a friend you ought to choose Philinte. How can you expect a lot of unfortunate candidates to know what to say when the professors themselves can’t make up their minds. But that’s nothing. They get more difficult every year. Gisèle will want all her wits about her if she’s to get through.” I returned to the hotel. My grandmother was not there. I waited for her for some time; when at last she appeared, I begged her to allow me, in quite unexpected circumstances, to make an expedition which might keep me away for a couple of days. I had luncheon with her, ordered a carriage and drove to the station. Gisèle would shew no surprise at seeing me there. After we had changed at Doncières, in the. Paris train, there would be a carriage with a corridor, along which, while the governess dozed, I should be able to lead Gisèle into dark corners, and make an appointment to meet her on my return to Paris, which I would then try to put forward to the earliest possible date. I would travel with her as far as Caen or Evreux, whichever she preferred, and would take the next train back to Balbec. And yet, what would she have thought of me had she known that I had hesitated for a long time between her and her friends, that quite as much as with her I had

contemplated falling in love with Albertine, with the bright-eyed girl, with Rosemonde. I felt a pang of remorse now that a bond of mutual affection was going to unite me with Gisèle. I could, moreover, truthfully have assured her that Albertine no longer interested me. I had seen her that morning as she swerved aside, almost turning her back on me, to speak to Gisèle. On her head, which was bent sullenly over her bosom, the hair that grew at the back, different from and darker even than the rest, shone as though she had just been bathing. “Like a dying duck in a thunderstorm!” I thought to myself, this view of her hair having let into Albertine’s body a soul entirely different from that implied hitherto by her glowing complexion and mysterious gaze. That shining cataract of hair at the back of her head had been for a moment or two all that I was able to see of her, and continued to be all that I saw in retrospect. Our memory is like a shop in the window of which is exposed now one, now another photograph of the same person. And as a rule the most recent exhibit remains for some time the only one to be seen. While the coachman whipped on his horse I sat there listening to the words of gratitude and affection which Gisèle was murmuring in my ear, born, all of them, of her friendly smile and outstretched hand, the fact being that in those periods of my life in which I was not actually, but desired to be in love, I carried in my mind not only an ideal form of beauty once seen, which I recognised at a glance in every passing stranger who kept far enough from me for her confused features to resist any attempt at identification, but also the moral phantom — ever ready to be incarnate — of the woman who was ‘going to fall in love with me, to take up her cues in the amorous comedy which I had had written out in my mind from my earliest boyhood, and in which every nice girl seemed to me to be equally desirous of playing, provided that she had also some of the physical qualifications required. In this play, whoever the new star might be whom I invited to create or to revive the leading part, the plot, the incidents, the lines themselves preserved an unalterable form.

Within the next few days, in spite of the reluctance that Albertine had shewn from introducing me to them, I knew all the little band of that first afternoon (except Gisèle, whom, owing to a prolonged delay at the level crossing by the station and a change in the time-table, I had not succeeded in meeting on the train, which had been gone some minutes before I arrived, and to whom as it happened I never gave another thought), and two or three other girls as well to whom at my request they introduced me. And thus, my expectation of the pleasure which I should find in a new girl springing from another girl through whom I had come to know her, the latest was like one of those new varieties of

rose which gardeners get by using first a rose of another kind. And as I passed from blossom to blossom along this flowery chain, the pleasure of knowing one that was different would send me back to her to whom I was indebted for it, with a gratitude in which desire was mingled fully as much as in my new expectation. Presently I was spending all my time among these girls.

Alas! in the freshest flower it is possible to discern those just perceptible signs which to the instructed mind indicate already what will be, by the desiccation or fructification of the flesh that is to-day in bloom, the ultimate form, immutable and already predestinate, of the autumnal seed. The eye rapturously follows a nose like a wavelet that deliriously curls the water's face at daybreak and seems not to move, to be capturable by the pencil, because the sea is so calm then that one does not notice its tidal flow. Human faces seem not to change while we are looking at them, because the revolution which they perform is too slow for us to perceive it. But we have only to see, by the side of any of those girls, her mother or her aunt, to realise the distance over which, obeying the gravitation of a type that is, generally speaking, deplorable, her features will have travelled in less than thirty years, and must continue to travel until the sunset hour, until her face, having vanished altogether below the horizon, catches the light no more. I knew that, as deep, as ineluctable as is their Jewish patriotism or Christian atavism in those who imagine themselves to be the most emancipated of their race, there dwelt beneath the rosy inflorescence of Albertine, Rosemonde, Andrée, unknown to themselves, held in reserve until the circumstances should arise, a coarse nose, a protruding jaw, a bust that would create a sensation when it appeared, but was actually in the wings, ready to "come on," just as it might be a burst of Dreyfusism, or clericalism, sudden, unforeseen, fatal, some patriotic, some feudal form of heroism emerging suddenly when the circumstances demand it from a nature anterior to that of the man himself, by means of which he thinks, lives, evolves, gains strength himself or dies, without ever being able to distinguish that nature from the successive phases which in turn he takes for it. Even mentally, we depend a great deal more than we think upon natural laws, and our mind possesses already, like some cryptogamous plant, every little peculiarity that we imagine ourselves to be selecting. For we can see only the derived ideas, without detecting the primary cause (Jewish blood, French birth or whatever it may be) that inevitably produced them, and which at a given moment we expose. And perhaps, while the former appear to us to be the result of deliberate thought, the latter that of an imprudent disregard for our own health, we take from our family, as the

papilionaceae take the form of their seed, as well the ideas by which we live as the malady from which we shall die.

As on a plant whose flowers open at different seasons, I had seen, expressed in the form of old ladies, on this Balbec shore, those shrivelled seed-pods, those flabby tubers which my friends would one day be. But what matter? For the moment it was their flowering-time. And so when Mme. de Villeparisis asked me to drive with her I sought an excuse to be prevented. I never went to see Elstir unless accompanied by my new friends. I could not even spare an afternoon to go to Doncières, to pay the visit I had promised Saint-Loup. Social engagements, serious discussions, even a friendly conversation, had they usurped the place allotted to my walks with these girls, would have had the same effect on me as if, when the luncheon bell rang, I had been taken not to a table spread with food but to turn the pages of an album. The men, the youths, the women, old or mature, whose society we suppose that we shall enjoy, are borne by us only on an unsubstantial plane surface, because we are conscious of them only by visual perception restricted to its own limits; whereas it is as delegates from our other senses that our eyes dart towards young girls; the senses follow, one after another, in search of the various charms, fragrant, tactile, savoury, which they thus enjoy even without the aid of fingers and lips; and able, thanks to the art of transposition, the genius for synthesis in which desire excels, to reconstruct beneath the hue of cheeks or bosom the feel, the taste, the contact that is forbidden them, they give to these girls the same honeyed consistency as they create when they stand rifling the sweets of a rose-garden, or before a vine whose clusters their eyes alone devour.

If it rained, although the weather had no power to daunt Albertine, who was often to be seen in her waterproof spinning on her bicycle through the driving showers, we would Spend the day in the Casino, where on such days it would have seemed to me impossible not to go. I had the greatest contempt for the young Ambresacs, who had never set foot in it. And I willingly joined my friends in playing tricks on the dancing master. As a rule we had to listen to admonition from the manager, or from some of his staff, usurping dictatorial powers, because my friends, even Andrée herself, whom on that account I had regarded when I first saw her as so dionysiac a creature, whereas in reality she was delicate, intellectual, and this year far from well, in spite of which her actions were controlled less by the state of her health than by the spirit of that age which overcomes every other consideration and confounds in a general gaiety the weak with the strong, could not enter the outer hall of the rooms

without starting to run, jumping over all the chairs, sliding back along the floor, their balance maintained by a graceful poise of their outstretched arms, singing the while, mingling all the arts, in that first bloom of youth, in the manner of those poets of ancient days for whom the different ‘kinds’ were not yet separate, so that in an epic poem they would introduce rules of agriculture with theological doctrine.

This Andrée who had struck me when I first saw them as the coldest of them all, was infinitely more refined, more loving, more sensitive than Albertine, to whom she displayed the caressing, gentle affection of an elder sister. At the Casino she would come across the floor to sit down by me, and knew instinctively, unlike Albertine, to refuse my invitation to dance, or even, if I was tired, to give up the Casino and come to me instead at the hotel. She expressed her friendship for me, for Albertine, in terms which were evidence of the most exquisite understanding of the things of the heart, which may have been partly due to the state of her health. She had always a merry smile of excuse for the childish behaviour of Albertine, who expressed with a crude violence the irresistible temptation held out to her by the parties and picnics to which she had not the sense, like Andrée, resolutely to prefer staying and talking with me. When the time came for her to go off to a luncheon party at the golf-club, if we were all three together she would get ready to leave us, then, coming up to Andrée: “Well, Andrée, what are you waiting for now? You know we are lunching at the golf-club.” “No; I’m going to stay and talk to him,” replied Andrée, pointing to me. “But you know, Mme. Durieux invited you,” cried Albertine, as if Andree’s intention to remain with me could be explained only by ignorance on her part where else and by whom she had been bidden. “Look here, my good girl, don’t be such an idiot,” Andrée chid her. Albertine did not insist, fearing a suggestion that she too should stay with me. She tossed her head. “Just as you like,” was her answer, uttered in the tone one uses to an invalid whose self-indulgence is killing him by inches, “I must fly; I’m sure your watch is slow,” and off she went. “She is a dear girl, but quite impossible,” said Andrée, bathing her friend in a smile at once caressing and critical. If in this craze for amusement Albertine might be said to echo something of the old original Gilberte, that is because a certain similarity exists, although the type evolves, between all the women we love, a similarity that is due to the fixity of our own temperament, which it is that chooses them, eliminating all those who would not be at once our opposite and our complement, fitted that is to say to gratify our senses and to wring our heart. They are, these women, a product of our

temperament, an image inversely projected, a negative of our sensibility. So that a novelist might, in relating the life of his hero, describe his successive love-affairs in almost exactly similar terms, and thereby give the impression not that he was repeating himself but that he was creating, since an artificial novelty is never so effective as a repetition that manages to suggest a fresh truth. He ought, moreover, to indicate in the character of the lover a variability which becomes apparent as the story moves into fresh regions, into different latitudes of life. And perhaps he would be stating yet another truth if while investing all the other persons of his story with distinct characters he refrained from giving any to the beloved. We understand the characters of people who do not interest us; how can we ever grasp that of a person who is an intimate part of our existence, whom after a little we no longer distinguish in any way from ourselves, whose motives provide us with an inexhaustible supply of anxious hypotheses which we perpetually reconstruct. Springing from somewhere beyond our understanding, our curiosity as to the woman whom we love overleaps the bounds of that woman's character, which we might if we chose but probably will not choose to stop and examine. The object of our uneasy investigation is something more essential than those details of character comparable to the tiny particles of epidermis whose varied combinations form the florid originality of human flesh. Our intuitive radiography pierces them, and the images which it photographs for us, so far from being those of any single face, present rather the joyless universality of a skeleton.

Andrée, being herself extremely rich while the other was penniless and an orphan, with real generosity lavished on Albertine the full benefit of her wealth. As for her feelings towards Gisèle, they were not quite what I had been led to suppose. News soon reached us of the young student, and when Albertine handed round the letter she had received, a letter intended by Gisèle to give an account of her journey and to report her safe arrival to the little band, pleading laziness as an excuse for not having written yet to the rest, I was surprised to hear Andrée (for I imagined an irreparable breach between them) say: "I shall write to her to-morrow, because if I wait for her to write I may have to wait for years, she's such a slacker." And, turning to myself, she added: "You saw nothing much in her, evidently; but she's a jolly nice girl, and besides I'm really very fond of her." From which I concluded that Andrée's quarrels were apt not to last very long.

Except on these rainy days, as we had always arranged to go on our bicycles along the cliffs, or on an excursion inland, an hour or so before it was time to

start I would go upstairs to make myself smart and would complain if Françoise had not laid out all the things that I wanted. Now even in Paris she would proudly, angrily straighten a back which the years had begun to bend, at the first word of reproach, she so humble, she so modest and charming when her self-esteem was flattered. As this was the mainspring of her life: her satisfaction, her good humour were in direct ratio to the difficulty of the tasks imposed on her. Those which she had to perform at Balbec were so easy that she shewed almost all the time a discontent which was suddenly multiplied an hundredfold, with the addition of an ironic air of offended dignity when I complained, on my way down to join my friends, that my hat had not been brushed or my ties sorted. She who was capable of taking such endless pains, without in consequence assuming that she had done anything at all, on my simply remarking that a coat was not in its proper place, not only did she boast of the care with which she had "put it past sooner than let it go gathering the dust," but, paying a formal tribute to her own labours, lamented that it was little enough of a holiday that she was getting at Balbec, and that we would not find another person in the whole world who would consent to put up with such treatment. "I can't think how anyone can leave things lying about the way you do; you just try and get anyone else to find what you want in such a mix-up. The devil himself would give it up as a bad job." Or else she would adopt a regal mien, scorching me with her fiery glance, and preserve a silence that was broken as soon as she had fastened the door behind her and was outside in the passage, which would then reverberate with utterances which I guessed to be insulting, though they remained as indistinct as those of characters in a play whose opening lines are spoken in the wings, before they appear on the stage. And even if nothing was missing and Françoise was in a good temper, still she made herself quite intolerable when I was getting ready to go out with my friends. For, drawing upon a store of stale witticisms at their expense which, in my need to be talking about the girls, I had made in her hearing, she put on an air of being about to reveal to me things of which I should have known more than she had there been any truth in her statements, which there never was, Françoise having misunderstood what she had heard. She had, like most people, her own ways; a person is never like a straight highway, but surprises us with the strange, unavoidable windings of his course through life, by which, though some people may not notice them, we find it a perpetual annoyance to be stopped and hindered. Whenever I arrived at the stage of "Where is my hat?" or uttered the name of Andrée or Albertine, I was forced by Françoise to stray into endless and absurd side-tracks which greatly delayed my

progress. So too when I asked her to cut me the sandwiches of cheese or salad, or sent her out for the cakes which I was to eat while we rested on the cliffs, sharing them with the girls, and which the girls "might very well have taken turns to provide, if they had not been so close," declared Françoise, to whose aid there came at such moments a whole heritage of atavistic peasant rapacity and coarseness, and for whom one would have said that the soul of her late enemy Eulalie had been broken into fragments and reincarnate, more attractively than it had ever been in Saint-Eloi's, in the charming bodies of my friends of the little band. I listened to these accusations with a dull fury at finding myself brought to a standstill at one of those places beyond which the well-trodden country path that was Françoise's character became impassable, though fortunately never for very long. Then, my hat or coat found and the sandwiches ready, I sailed out to find Albertine, Andrée, Rosemonde, and any others there might be, and on foot or on our bicycles we would start.

In the old days I should have preferred our excursion to be made in bad weather. For then I still looked to find in Balbec the 'Cimmerians' land,' and fine days were a thing that had no right to exist there, an intrusion of the vulgar summer of seaside holiday-makers into that ancient region swathed in eternal mist. But now, everything that I had hitherto despised, shut out of my field of vision, not only effects of sunlight upon sea and shore, but even the regattas, the race-meetings, I would have sought out with ardour, for the reason for which formerly I had wanted only stormy seas, which was that these were now associated in my mind, as the others had been, with an aesthetic idea. Because I had gone several times with my new friends to visit Elstir, and, on the days when the girls were there, what he had selected to shew us were drawings of pretty women in yachting dress, or else a sketch made on a race-course near Balbec. I had at first shyly admitted to Elstir that I had not felt inclined to go to the meetings that were being held there. "You were wrong," he told me, "it is such a pretty sight, and so well worth seeing. For one thing, that peculiar animal, the jockey, on whom so many eager eyes are fastened, who in the paddock there looks so grim, a colourless face between his brilliant jacket and cap, one body and soul with the prancing horse he rides, how interesting to analyse his professional movements, the bright splash of colour he makes, with the horse's coat blending in it, as they stream down the course. What a transformation of every visible object in that luminous vastness of a racecourse where one is constantly surprised by fresh lights and shades which one sees only there. How charming the women can look there, too! The first day's racing was quite

delightful, and there were women there exquisitely dressed, in the misty light of a Dutch landscape, in which one could feel rising to cloud the sun itself the penetrating coldness of the water. Never have I seen women arriving in carriages, or standing with glasses to their eyes in so extraordinary a light, which was due, I suppose, to the moisture from the sea. I should simply have loved to paint it. I came home from the races quite mad, and so keen to get to work! "After which he became more enthusiastic still over the yacht-races, and I realised that regattas, social fixtures where well-dressed women might be seen bathed in the greenish light of a marine race-course, might be for a modern artist as interesting a subject as were the revels which they so loved to depict for a Veronese or Carpaccio. When I suggested this to Elstir, "Your comparison is all the more true," he replied, "since, from the position of the city in which they painted, those revels were to a great extent aquatic. Except that the beauty of the shipping in those days lay as a rule in its solidity, in the complication of its structure. They had water-tournaments, as we have here, held generally in honour of some Embassy, such as Carpaccio shews us in his *Legend of Saint Ursula*. The vessels were massive, built up like architecture, and seemed almost amphibious, like lesser Venices set in the heart of the greater, when, moored to the banks by hanging stages decked with crimson satin and Persian carpets, they bore their freight of ladies in cherry-red brocade and green damask close under the balconies incrusted with many-coloured marbles from which other ladies leaned to gaze at them, in gowns with black sleeves slashed with white, stitched with pearls or bordered with lace. You cannot tell where the land ends and the water begins, what is still the palace or already the vessel, the caravel, the galeas, the Bucintoro." Albertine had listened with the keenest interest to these details of costume, these visions of elegance that Elstir was describing to us. "Oh, I should so like to see that lace you speak of; it's so pretty, the Venice-point," she cried. "Besides, I should love to see Venice." "You may, perhaps, before very long, be able," Elstir informed her, "to gaze upon the marvellous stuffs which they used to wear. Hitherto one has seen them only in the works of the Venetian painters, or very rarely among the treasures of old churches, except now and then when a specimen has come into the sale-room. But I hear that a Venetian artist, called Fortuny, has recovered the secret of the craft, and that before many years have passed women will be able to walk abroad, and better still to sit at home in brocades as sumptuous as those that Venice adorned, for her patrician daughters, with patterns brought from the Orient. But I don't know that I should much care for that, that it wouldn't be too much of an anachronism for the women of to-

day, even when they parade at regattas, for, to return to our modern pleasure-craft, the times have completely changed since ‘Venice, Queen of the Adriatic.’ The great charm of a yacht, of the furnishings of a yacht, of yachting dress, is their simplicity, as just things for the sea, and I do so love the sea. I must confess to you that I prefer the fashions of to-day to those of Veronese’s and even of Carpaccio’s time. What there is so attractive about our yachts — and the smaller yachts especially, I don’t like the huge ones, they’re too much like ships; yachts are like women’s hats, you must keep within certain limits — is the unbroken surface, simple, gleaming, grey, which under a cloudy, leaden sky takes on a creamy softness. The cabin in which we live ought to make us think of a little café. And women’s clothes on board a yacht are the same sort of thing; what really are charming are those light garments, uniformly white, of cloth or linen or nankeen or drill, which in the sunlight and against the blue of the sea shew up with as dazzling a whiteness as a spread sail. You very seldom see a woman, for that matter, who knows how to dress, and yet some of them are quite wonderful. At the races, Mlle. Léa had a little white hat and a little white sunshade, simply enchanting. I don’t know what I wouldn’t give for that little sunshade.” I should have liked very much to know in what respect this little sunshade differed from any other, and for other reasons, reasons of feminine vanity, Albertine was still more curious. But, just as Françoise used to explain the excellence of her *soufflés* by “It’s the way you do them,” so here the difference lay in the cut. “It was,” Elstir explained, “quite tiny, quite round, like a Chinese umbrella.” I mentioned the sunshades carried by various ladies, but it was not like any of them. Elstir found them all quite hideous. A man of exquisite taste, singularly hard to please, he would isolate some minute detail which was the whole difference between what was worn by three-quarters of the women he saw, and horrified him, and a thing which enchanted him by its prettiness; and — in contrast to its effect on myself, whose mind any display of luxury at once sterilised — stimulated his desire to paint “so as to make something as attractive.” “Here you see a young lady who has guessed what the hat and sunshade were like,” he said to me, pointing to Albertine whose eyes shone with envy. “How I should love to be rich, to have a yacht!” she said to the painter. “I should come to you to tell me how to run it. What lovely trips I’d take. And what fun it would be to go to Cowes for the races. And a motor-car! Tell me, do you think the ladies’ fashions for motoring pretty?” “No”; replied Elstir, “but that will come in time. You see, there are very few firms at present, one or two only, Callot — although they go in rather too freely for lace — Doucet, Cheruit,

Paquin sometimes. The others are all horrible." "Then, is there a vast difference between a Callot dress and one from any ordinary shop?" I asked Albertine. "Why, an enormous difference, my little man! I beg your pardon! Only, alas! what you get for three hundred francs in an ordinary shop will cost two thousand there. But there can be no comparison; they look the same only to people who know nothing at all about it." "Quite so," put in Elstir; "though I should not go so far as to say that it is as profound as the difference between a statue from Rheims Cathedral and one from Saint-Augustin. By the way, talking of cathedrals," he went on, addressing himself exclusively to me, because what he was saying had reference to an earlier conversation in which the girls had not taken part, and which for that matter would not have interested them at all, "I spoke to you the other day of Balbec Church as a great cliff, a huge breakwater built of the stone of the country; now look at this"; he handed me a water-colour. "Look at these cliffs (it's a sketch I did close to here, at the Creuniers); don't these rocks remind you of a cathedral?" And indeed one would have taken them for soaring red arches. But, painted on a roasting hot day, they seemed to have crumbled into dust, made volatile by the heat which had drunk up half the sea, distilled over the whole surface of the picture almost into a gaseous state. On this day on which the sunlight had, so to speak, destroyed reality, reality concentrated itself in certain dusky and transparent creatures which, by contrast, gave a more striking, a closer impression of life: the shadows. Ravening after coolness, most of them, deserting the scorched open spaces, had fled for shelter to the foot of the rocks, out of reach of the sun; others, swimming gently upon the tide, like dolphins, kept close under the sides of the moving vessels, whose hulls they extended upon the pale surface of the water with their glossy blue forms. It was perhaps the thirst for coolness which they conveyed that did most to give me the sensation of the heat of this day and made me exclaim how much I regretted not knowing the Creuniers. Albertine and Andrée were positive that I must have been there hundreds of times. If so I had been there without knowing it, never suspecting that one day the sight of these rocks was to inspire me with such a thirst for beauty, not perhaps exactly natural beauty such as I had been seeking hitherto among the cliffs of Balbec, but rather architectural. Above all, I who, having come here to visit the kingdom of the storm, had never found, on any of my drives with Mme. de Villeparisis, when often we saw it only from afar, painted in a gap between the trees, the ocean sufficiently real, sufficiently liquid, giving a sufficient impression that it was hurling its massed forces against the shore, and would have liked to see it lie motionless only under a wintry shroud

of fog, I could never have believed that I should now be dreaming of a sea which was nothing more than a whitish vapour that had lost both consistency and colour. But of such a sea Elstir, like the people who sat musing on board those vessels drowsy with the heat, had so intensely felt the enchantment that he had succeeded in transcribing, in fixing for all time upon the painted sheet the imperceptible reflux of the tide, the throb of one happy moment; and one suddenly became so enamoured, at the sight of this magic portrait, that one could think of nothing else than to range the world over, seeking to recapture the vanished day in its instantaneous, slumbering beauty.

So that if before these visits to Elstir, before I had set eyes on one of his sea-pictures in which a young woman in a dress of white serge or linen, on the deck of a yacht flying the American flag, had duplicated a white linen dress and coloured flag in my imagination which at once bred in me an insatiable desire to visit the spot and see there with my own eyes white linen dresses and flags against the sea, as though no such experience had ever yet befallen me, always until then I had taken care when I stood by the sea to expel from my field of vision, as well as the bathers in the foreground, the yachts with their too dazzling sails that were like seaside costumes, everything that prevented me from persuading myself that I was contemplating the immemorial flood of ocean which had been moving with the same mysterious life before the appearance of the human race; and had grudged even the days of radiant sunshine which seemed to me to invest with the trivial aspect of the world's universal summer this coast of fog and tempest, to mark simply an interruption, equivalent to what in music is known as a rest; now on the other hand it was the bad days that appeared to me to be some disastrous accident, a thing that could no longer find any place for itself in the world of beauty; I felt a keen desire to go out and recapture in reality what had so powerfully aroused my imagination, and I hoped that the weather would be propitious enough for me to see from the summit of the cliff the same blue shadows as were in Elstir's picture.

Nor, as I went along, did I still make a frame about my eyes with my hands as in the days when, conceiving nature to be animated by a life anterior to the first appearance of man, and inconsistent with all those wearisome perfections of industrial achievement which had hitherto made me yawn with boredom at Universal Exhibitions or in the milliners' windows, I endeavoured to include only that section of the sea over which there was no steamer passing, so that I might picture it to myself as immemorial, still contemporary with the ages in which it had been set apart from the land, or at least with the first dawn of life in

Greece, which enabled me to repeat in their literal meaning the lines of ‘Father Leconte’ of which Bloch was so fond:

‘Gone are the Kings, gone are their towering prows,
Vanished upon the raging deep, alas,
The long-haired warrior heroes of Hellas.’

I could no longer despise the milliners, now that Elstir had told me that the delicate touches by which they give a last refinement, a supreme caress to the ribbons or feathers of a hat after it is finished, would be as interesting to him to paint as the muscular action of the jockeys themselves (a statement which had delighted Albertine). But I must wait until I had returned — for milliners, to Paris — for regattas and races to Balbec, where there would be no more now until next year-. Even a yacht with women in white linen garments was not to be found.

Often we encountered Bloch’s sisters, to whom I was obliged to bow since I had dined with their father. My new friends did not know them. “I am not allowed to play with Israelites,” Albertine explained. Her way of pronouncing the word —’Issraelites’ instead of ‘Izraelites’— would in itself have sufficed to shew, even if one had not heard the rest of the sentence, that it was no feeling of friendliness towards the chosen race that inspired these young Frenchwomen, brought up in God-fearing homes, and quite ready to believe that the Jews were in the habit of massacring Christian children. “Besides, they’re shocking bad form, your friends,” said Andrée with a smile which implied that she knew very well that they were no friends of mine. “Like everything to do with the tribe,” went on Albertine, in the sententious tone of one who spoke from personal experience. To tell the truth, Bloch’s sisters, at once overdressed and half naked, with their languishing, bold, blatant, sluttish air did not create the best impression. And one of their cousins, who was only fifteen, scandalised the Casino by her unconcealed admiration for Mlle. Lea, whose talent as an actress M. Bloch senior rated very high, but whose tastes were understood to lead her not exactly in the direction of the gentlemen.

Some days we took our refreshment at one of the outlying farms which catered to visitors. These were the farms known as Les Ecorres, Marie-Thérèse, La Croix d’Heuland, Bagatelle, Californie and Marie-Antoinette. It was the last that had been adopted by the little band.

But at other times, instead of going to a farm, we would climb to the highest point of the cliff, and, when we had reached it and were seated on the grass, would undo our parcel of sandwiches and cakes. My friends preferred the

sandwiches, and were surprised to see me eat only a single chocolate cake, sugared with gothic tracery, or an apricot tart. This was because, with the sandwiches of cheese or of green-stuff, a form of food that was novel to me and knew nothing of the past, I had nothing in common. But the cakes understood, the tarts were gossips. There were in the former an insipid taste of cream, in the latter a fresh taste of fruit which knew all about Combray, and about Gilberte, not only the Gilberte of Combray but her too of Paris, at whose tea-parties I had found them again. They reminded me of those cake-plates of the Arabian Nights pattern, the subjects on which were such a distraction to my aunt Léonie when Françoise brought her up, one day, Aladdin or the Wonderful Lamp, another day Ali-Baba, or the Sleeper Awakes, or Sinbad the Sailor embarking at Bassorah with all his treasure. I should dearly have liked to see them again, but my grandmother did not know what had become of them, and thought moreover that they were just common plates that had been bought in the village. No matter, in that grey, midland Combray scene they and their pictures were set like many-coloured jewels, as in the dark church were the windows with their shifting radiance, as in the dusk of my bedroom were the projections cast by the magic-lantern, as in the foreground of the view of the railway-station and the little local line the buttercups from the Indies and the Persian lilacs, as were my great-aunt's shelves of old porcelain in the sombre dwelling of an elderly lady in a country town.

Stretched out on the cliff I would see before me nothing but grassy meadows and beyond them not the seven heavens of the Christian cosmogony but two stages only, one of a deeper blue, the sea, and over it another more pale. We ate our food, and if I had brought with me also some little keepsake which might appeal to one or other of my friends, joy sprang with such sudden violence into her translucent face, flushed in an instant, that her lips had not the strength to hold it in, and to allow it to escape parted in a shout of laughter. They had gathered close round me, and between their faces which were almost touching one another the air that separated them traced azure pathways such as might have been cut by a gardener wishing to clear the ground a little so as to be able himself to move freely through a thicket of roses.

When we had finished eating we would play games which until then I should have thought boring, sometimes such childish games as King of the Castle, or Who Laughs First; not for a kingdom would I have renounced them now; the rosy dawn of adolescence, with which the faces of these girls were still aglow, and from which I, young as I was, had already emerged, shed its light on

everything round about them and, like the fluid painting of some of the Primitives, brought out the most insignificant details of their daily lives in relief against a golden background. Even the faces of the girls were, for the most part, clouded with this misty effulgence of a dawn from which their actual features had not yet emerged. One saw only a charming sheet of colour beneath which what in a few years' time would be a profile was not discernible. The profile of to-day had nothing definite about it, and could be only a momentary resemblance to some deceased member of the family to whom nature had paid this commemorative courtesy. It comes so soon, the moment when there is nothing left to wait for, when the body is fixed in an immobility which holds no fresh surprise in store, when one loses all hope on seeing — as on a tree in the height of summer leaves already brown — round a face still young hair that is growing thin or turning grey; it is so short, that radiant morning time that one comes to like only the very youngest girls, those in whom the flesh, like a precious leaven, is still at work. They are no more yet than a stream of ductile matter, moulded ever afresh by the fleeting impression of the moment. You would say that each of them was in turn a little statuette of childish gaiety, of a child grown earnest, coaxing, surprised, taking its pattern from an expression frank and complete, but fugitive. This plasticity gives a wealth of variety and charm to the pretty attentions which a little girl pays to us. Of course, such attentions are indispensable in the woman also, and she whom we do not attract, or who fails to let us see that we have attracted her, tends to assume in our eyes a somewhat tedious uniformity. But even these pretty attentions, after a certain age, cease to send gentle ripples over a face which the struggle for existence has hardened, has rendered unalterably militant or ecstatic. One — owing to the prolonged strain of the obedience that subjects wife to husband — will seem not so much a woman's face as a soldier's; another, carved by the sacrifices which a mother has consented to make, day after day, for her children, will be the face of an apostle. A third is, after a stormy passage through the years, the face of an ancient mariner, upon a body of which its garments alone indicate the sex. Certainly the attentions that a woman pays us can still, so long as we are in love with her, scatter fresh charms over the hours that we spend in her company. But she is not then for us a series of different women. Her gaiety remains external to an unchanging face. Whereas adolescence is anterior to this complete solidification; and from this it follows that we feel, in the company of young girls, the refreshing sense that is afforded us by the spectacle of forms undergoing an incessant process of change, a play of unstable forces which

makes us think of that perpetual re-creation of the primordial elements of nature which we contemplate when we stand by the sea.

It was not merely a social engagement, a drive with Mme. de Villeparisis, that I would have sacrificed to the ‘Ferret’ or ‘Guessing Games’ of my friends. More than once, Robert de Saint-Loup had sent word that, since I was not coming to see him at Doncières, he had applied for twenty-four hours’ leave, which he would spend at Balbec. Each time I wrote back that he was on no account to come, offering the excuse that I should be obliged to be away myself that very day, when I had some duty call to pay with my grandmother on family friends in the neighbourhood. No doubt I fell in his estimation when he learned from his aunt in what the ‘duty call’ consisted, and who the persons were who combined to play the part of my grandmother. And yet I had not been wrong, perhaps, after all, in sacrificing not only the vain pleasures of the world but the real pleasure of friendship to that of spending the whole day in this green garden. People who enjoy the capacity — it is true that such people are artists, and I had long been convinced that I should never be that — are also under an obligation to live for themselves. And friendship is a dispensation from this duty, an abdication of self. Even conversation, which is the mode of expression of friendship, is a superficial digression which gives us no new acquisition. We may talk for a lifetime without doing more than indefinitely repeat the vacuity of a minute, whereas the march of thought in the solitary travail of artistic creation proceeds downwards, into the depths, in the only direction that is not closed to us, along which we are free to advance — though with more effort, it is true — towards a goal of truth. And friendship is not merely devoid of virtue, like conversation, it is fatal to us as well. For the sense of boredom which it is impossible not to feel in a friend’s company (when, that is to say, we must remain exposed on the surface of our consciousness, instead of pursuing our voyage of discovery into the depths) for those of us in whom the law of development is purely internal — that first impression of boredom our friendship impels us to correct when we are alone again, to recall with emotion the words uttered by our friend, to look upon them as a valuable addition to our substance, albeit we are not like buildings to which stones can be added from without, but like trees which draw from their own sap the knot that duly appears on their trunks, the spreading roof of their foliage. I was lying to myself, I was interrupting the process of growth in that direction in which I could indeed really be enlarged and made happy, when I congratulated myself on being liked, admired, by so good, so clever, so rare a creature as Saint-Loup, when I focussed

my mind, not upon my own obscure impressions which duty bade me unravel, but on the words uttered by my friend, in which, when I repeated them to myself — when I had them repeated to me by that other self who dwells in us and on to whom we are always so ready to transfer the burden of taking thought,— I strove to make myself find a beauty very different from that which I used to pursue in silence when I was really alone, but one that would enhance the merit of Robert, of myself, of my life. In the life which a friend like this provided for me, I seemed to myself to be comfortably preserved from solitude, nobly desirous of sacrificing myself for him, in fact quite incapable of realising myself. Among the girls, on the other hand, if the pleasure which I enjoyed was selfish, at least it was not based on the lie which seeks to make us believe that we are not irremediably alone, and which, when we talk to another person, prevents us from admitting that it is no longer we who speak, that we are fashioning ourselves in the likeness of strangers and not of our own ego, which is quite different from them. The words that passed between the girls of the little band and myself were not of any interest; they were, moreover, but few, broken by long spells of silence on my part. All of which did not prevent me from finding, in listening to them when they spoke to me, as much pleasure as in gazing at them, in discovering in the voice of each one of them a brightly coloured picture. It was with ecstasy that I caught their pipings. Love helps us to discern things, to discriminate. Standing in a wood, the lover of birds at once distinguishes the notes of the different species, which to ordinary people sound the same. The lover of girls knows that human voices vary even more. Each one possesses more notes than the richest instrument of music. And the combinations in which the voice groups those notes are as inexhaustible as the infinite variety of personalities. When I talked with any one of my friends I was conscious that the original, the unique portrait of her individuality had been skilfully traced, tyranically imposed on my mind as much by the inflexions of her voice as by those of her face, and that these were two separate spectacles which rendered, each in its own plane, the same single reality. No doubt the lines of the voice, like those of the face, were not yet definitely fixed; the voice had still to break, as the face to change. Just as children have a gland the secretion in which enables them to digest milk, a gland which is not found in grown men and women, so there were in the twitterings of these girls notes which women’s voices no longer contain. And on this instrument with its greater compass they played with their lips, shewing all the application, the ardour of Bellini’s little angel musicians, qualities which also are an exclusive appanage of youth. Later

on these girls would lose that note of enthusiastic conviction which gave a charm to their simplest utterances, whether it were Albertine who, in a tone of authority, repeated puns to which the younger ones listened with admiration, until that wild impulse to laugh caught them all with the irresistible violence of a sneeze, or Andrée who began to speak of their work in the schoolroom, work even more childish seemingly than the games they played, with a gravity essentially puerile; and their words changed in tone, like the lyrics of ancient times when poetry, still hardly differentiated from music, was declaimed upon the different notes of a scale. In spite of which, the girls' voices already gave a quite clear indication of the attitude that each of these little people had adopted towards life, an attitude so personal that it would be speaking in far too general terms to say of one: "She treats everything as a joke," of another: "She jumps from assertion to assertion," of a third: "She lives in a state of expectant hesitation." The features of our face are hardly more than gestures which force of habit has made permanent. Nature, like the destruction of Pompeii, like the metamorphosis of a nymph into a tree, has arrested us in an accustomed movement. Similarly, our intonations embody our philosophy of life, what a person says to himself about things at any given moment. No doubt these peculiarities were to be found not only in the girls. They were those of their parents. The individual is a part of something that is more generally diffused than himself. By this reckoning, our parents furnish us not only with those habitual gestures which are the outlines of our face and voice, but also with certain mannerisms in speech, certain favourite expressions, which, almost as unconscious as an intonation, almost as profound, indicate likewise a definite point of view towards life. It is quite true, since we are speaking of girls, that there are certain of these expressions which their parents do not hand on to them until they have reached a certain age, as a rule not before they are women. These are kept in reserve. Thus, for instance, if you were to speak of the pictures of one of Elstir's friends, Andrée, whose hair was still 'down,' could not yet make use, personally, of the expression which her mother and elder sister employed: "It appears, the man is quite charming!" But that would come in due course, when she was allowed to go to the Palais-Royal. And already, since her first communion, Albertine had begun to say, like a friend of her aunt: "I'm sure I should find that simply terrible!" She had also had given to her, as a little present, the habit of repeating whatever you had just been saying to her, so as to appear to be interested, and to be trying to form an opinion of her own. If you said that an artist's work was good, or his house nice, "Oh, his work is good, is

it?” “Oh, his house is nice, is it?” Last of all, and even more general than the family heritage, was the rich layer imposed by the native province from which they derived their voices and of which indeed their intonations smacked. When Andrée sharply struck a solemn note she could not prevent the Perigordian string of her vocal instrument from giving back a resonant sound quite in harmony, moreover, with the Meridional purity of her features; while to the incessant pranks of Rosemonde the substance of her North-Country face and voice responded, whatever her mood at the time, in the accent of their province. Between that province and the temperament of the little girl who dictated these inflexions, I caught a charming dialogue. A dialogue, not in any sense a discord. It would not have been possible to separate the girl herself and her native place. She was herself; she was still it also. Moreover this reaction of locally procured materials on the genius who utilises them and to whose work their reaction imparts an added freshness, does not make the work any less individual, and whether it be that of an architect, a cabinet-maker or a composer, it reflects no less minutely the most subtle shades of the artist’s personality, because he has been compelled to work in the millstone of Senlis or the red sandstone of Strasbourg, has respected the knots peculiar to the ash-tree, has borne in mind, when writing his score, the resources, the limitations, the volume of sound, the possibilities of flute or alto voice.

All this I realised, and yet we talked so little. Whereas with Mme. de Villeparisis or Saint-Loup I should have displayed by my words a great deal more pleasure than I should actually have felt, for I used always to be worn out when I parted from them; when, on the other hand, I was lying on the grass among all these girls, the plenitude of what I was feeling infinitely outweighed the paucity, the infrequency of our speech, and brimmed over from my immobility and silence in floods of happiness, the waves of which rippled up to die at the feet of these young roses.

For a convalescent who rests all day long in a flower-garden or orchard, a scent of flowers or fruit does not more completely pervade the thousand trifles that compose his idle hours than did for me that colour, that fragrance in search of which my eyes kept straying towards the girls, and the sweetness of which finally became incorporated in me. So it is that grapes grow sugary in sunshine. And by their slow continuity these simple little games had gradually wrought in me also, as in those who do nothing else all day but lie outstretched by the sea, breathing the salt air and growing sunburned, a relaxation, a blissful smile, a vague sense of dizziness that had spread from brain to eyes.

Now and then a pretty attention from one or another of them would stir in me vibrations which dissipated for a time my desire for the rest. Thus one day Albertine had suddenly asked: “Who has a pencil?” Andrée had provided one, Rosemonde the paper; Albertine had warned them: “Now, young ladies, you are not to look at what I write.” After carefully tracing each letter, supporting the paper on her knee, she had passed it to me with: “Take care no one sees.” Whereupon I had unfolded it and read her message, which was: “I love you.”

“But we mustn’t sit here scribbling nonsense,” she cried, turning impetuously, with a sudden gravity of demeanour, to Andrée and Rosemonde.

“I ought to shew you the letter I got from Gisèle this morning. What an idiot I am; I’ve had it all this time in my pocket — and you can’t think how important it may be to us.” Gisèle had been moved to copy out for her friend, so that it might be passed on to the others, the essay which she had written in her certificate examination. Albertine’s fears as to the difficulty of the subjects set had been more than justified by the two from which Gisèle had had to choose. The first was: “Sophocles, from the Shades, writes to Racine to console him for the failure of *Athalie*”; the other: “Suppose that, after the first performance of *Esther*, Mme. de Sévigné is writing to Mme. de La Fayette to tell her how much she regretted her absence.” Now Gisèle, in an excess of zeal which ought to have touched the examiners’ hearts, had chosen the former, which was also the more difficult of the two subjects, and had handled it with such remarkable skill that she had been given fourteen marks, and had been congratulated by the board. She would have received her ‘mention’ if she had not ‘dried up’ in the Spanish paper. The essay, a copy of which Gisèle had now sent her, was immediately read aloud to us by Albertine, for, having presently to pass the same examination, she was anxious to have an opinion from Andrée, who was by far the cleverest of them all and might be able to give her some good ‘tips.’ “She did have a bit of luck!” was Albertine’s comment.”It’s the very subject her French mistress made her swot up while she was here.” The letter from Sophocles to Racine, as drafted by Gisèle, ran as follows: “My dear friend, You must pardon me the liberty of addressing you when I have not the honour of your personal acquaintance, but your latest tragedy, Athalie, shews, does it not, that you have made the most thorough study of my own modest works. You have not only put poetry in the mouths of the protagonists, or principal persons of the drama, but you have written other, and, let me tell you without flattery, charming verses for the choruses, a feature which was not too bad, according to all one hears, in Greek Tragedy, but is a complete novelty in France. Nay more, your talent

always so fluent, so finished, so winning, so fine, so delicate, has here acquired an energy on which I congratulate you. Athalie, Joad — these are figures which your rival Corneille could have wrought no better. The characters are virile, the plot simple and strong. You have given us a tragedy in which love is not the keynote, and on this I must offer you my sincerest compliments. The most familiar proverbs are not always the truest. I will give you an example:

'This passion treat, which makes the poet's art
Fly, as on wings, straight to the listener's heart.'

You have shewn us that the religious sentiment in which your choruses are steeped is no less capable of moving us. The general public may have been puzzled at first, but those who are best qualified to judge must give you your due. I have felt myself impelled to offer you all my congratulations, to which I would add, my dear brother poet, an expression of my very highest esteem." Albertine's eyes, while she was reading this to us, had not ceased to sparkle. "Really, you'd think she must have cribbed it somewhere!" she exclaimed, as she reached the end. "I should never have believed that Gisèle could hatch out anything like as good! And the poetry she brings in! Where on earth can she have got that from?" Albertine's admiration, with a change, it is true, of object, but with no loss — an increase, rather — of intensity, combined with the closest attention to what was being said, continued to make her eyes 'start from her head' all the time that Andrée (consulted as being the biggest of the band and more knowledgeable than the others) first of all spoke of Gisèle's essay with a certain irony, then with a levity of tone which failed to conceal her underlying seriousness proceeded to reconstruct the letter in her own way. "It is not badly done," she told Albertine, "but if I were you and had the same subject set me, which is quite likely, as they do very often set that, I shouldn't do it in that way. This is how I would tackle it. Well, first of all, if I had been Gisèle, I should not have let myself get tied up, I should have begun by making a rough sketch of what I was going to write on a separate piece of paper. On the top line I should state the question and give an account of the subject, then the general ideas to be worked into the development. After that, appreciation, style, conclusion. In that way, with a summary to refer to, you know where you are. But at the very start, where she begins her account of the subject, or, if you like, Titine, since it's a letter we're speaking of, where she comes to the matter, Gisèle has gone off the rails altogether. Writing to a person of the seventeenth century, Sophocles ought never to have said, 'My dear friend.'" "Why, of course, she ought to have said, 'My dear Racine,'" came impetuously from Albertine. "That would have been

much better." "No," replied Andrée, with a trace of mockery in her tone, "she ought to have put 'Sir.' In the same way, to end up, she ought to have thought of something like, 'Suffer me, Sir,' (at the very most, 'Dear Sir') to inform you of the sense of high esteem with which I have the honour to be your servant.' Then again, Gisèle says that the choruses in *Athalie* are a novelty. She is forgetting *Esther*, and two tragedies that are not much read now but happen to have been analysed this year by the Professor himself, so that you need only mention them, since he's got them on the brain, and you're bound to pass. I mean *Les Juives*, by Robert Gamier, and Montchrestien's *L'Aman*." Andrée quoted these titles without managing quite to conceal a secret sense of benevolent superiority, which found expression in a smile, quite a delightful smile, for that matter. Albertine could contain herself no — longer. "Andrée, you really are a perfect marvel," she cried. "You must write down those names for me. Just fancy, what luck it would be if I got on to that, even in the oral, I should bring them in at once and make a colossal impression." But in the days that followed, every time that Albertine begged Andrée just to tell her again the names of those two plays so that she might write them down, her blue-stocking friend seemed most unfortunately to have forgotten them, and left her none the wiser. "And another thing," Andrée went on with the faintest note in her voice of scorn for companions so much younger than herself, though she relished their admiration and attached to the manner in which she herself would have composed the essay a greater importance than she wanted us to think, "Sophocles in the Shades must be kept well-informed of all that goes on. He must know, therefore, that it was not before the general public but before the King's Majesty and a few privileged courtiers that *Athalie* was first played. What Gisèle says in this connexion of the esteem of qualified judges is not at all bad, but she might have gone a little further. Sophocles, now that he is immortal, might quite well have the gift of prophecy and announce that, according to Voltaire,*Athalie* is to be the supreme achievement not of Racine merely but of the human mind." Albertine was drinking in every word. Her eyes blazed. And it was with the utmost indignation that she rejected Rosemonde's suggestion that they should begin to play. "And so," Andrée concluded, in the same easy, detached tone, blending a faint sneer with a certain warmth of conviction, "if Gisèle had noted down properly, first of all, the general ideas that she was going to develop, it might perhaps have occurred to her to do what I myself should have done, point out what a difference there is between the religious inspiration of Sophocles's choruses and Racine's. I should have made Sophocles remark that if Racine's choruses are

instinct with religious feeling like those of the Greek Tragedians, the gods are not the same. The God of Joad has nothing in common with the god of Sophocles. And that brings us quite naturally, when we have finished developing the subject, to our conclusion: What does it matter if their beliefs are different? Sophocles would hesitate to insist upon such a point. He would be afraid of wounding Racine's convictions, and so, slipping in a few appropriate words on his masters at Port-Royal, he prefers to congratulate his disciple on the loftiness of his poetic genius."

Admiration and attention had so heated Albertine that great drops were rolling down her cheeks. Andrée preserved the unruffled calm of a female dandy. "It would not be a bad thing either to quote some of the opinions of famous critics," she added, before they began their game. "Yes," put in Albertine, "so I've been told. The best ones to quote, on the whole, are Sainte-Beuve and Merlet, aren't they?" "Well, you're not absolutely wrong," Andrée told her, "Merlet and Sainte-Beuve are by no means bad. But you certainly ought to mention Deltour and Gascq-Desfossés." She refused, however, despite Albertine's entreaties, to write down these two unfamiliar names.

Meanwhile I had been thinking of the little page torn from a scribbling block which Albertine had handed me. "I love you," she had written. And an hour later, as I scrambled down the paths which led back, a little too vertically for my liking, to Balbec, I said to myself that it was with her that I would have my romance.

The state of being indicated by the presence of all the signs by which we are accustomed to recognise that we are in love, such as the orders which I left in the hotel not to awaken me whoever might ask to see me, unless it were one or other of the girls, the beating of my heart while I waited for her (whichever of them it might be that I was expecting) and on those mornings my fury if I had not succeeded in finding a barber to shave me, and must appear with the disfigurement of a hairy chin before Albertine, Rosemonde or Andrée, no doubt this state, recurring indifferently at the thought of one or another, was as different from what we call love as is from human life the life of the zoophytes, where an existence, an individuality, if we may term it, is divided up among several organisms. But natural history teaches us that such an organization of animal life is indeed to be observed, and that our own life, provided only that we have outgrown the first phase, is no less positive as to the reality of states hitherto unsuspected by us, through which we have to pass, and can then abandon them altogether. Such was for me this state of love divided among

several girls at once. Divided — say rather undivided, for more often than not what was so delicious to me, different from the rest of the world, what was beginning to become so precious to me that the hope of finding it again on the morrow was the greatest happiness in my life, was rather the whole of the group of girls, taken as they were all together on those afternoons on the cliffs, during those lifeless hours, upon that strip of grass on which were laid those forms, so exciting to my imagination, of Albertine, Rosemonde, Andrée; and that without my being able to say which of them it was that made those scenes so precious to me, which of them I was most anxious to love. At the start of a new love as at its ending, we are not exclusively attached to the object of that love, but rather the desire to be loving from which it will presently emerge (and, later on, the memory which it leaves behind) wanders voluptuously through a zone of interchangeable charms — simply natural charms, it may be, gratification of appetite, enjoyment of one's surroundings — which are so far harmonised among themselves that it does not in the presence of any one of them feel itself out of place. Besides, as my perception of them was not yet dulled by familiarity, I had still the faculty of seeing them, that is to say of feeling a profound astonishment every time that I found myself in their presence. No doubt this astonishment is to some extent due to the fact that the other person on such occasions presents himself in a fresh aspect; but so great is the multiformity of each of us, so abundant the wealth of lines of face and body, lines so few of which leave any trace, once we have parted from the other person, on the arbitrary simplicity of our memory. As our mind has selected some peculiarity that had struck us, has isolated it, exaggerated it, making of a woman who has appeared to us tall, a sketch in which her figure is absurdly elongated, or of a woman who has seemed to be pink-cheeked and golden-haired a pure 'Harmony in pink and gold,' so, the moment that woman is once again standing before us, all the other forgotten qualities which restore the balance of that one remembered feature at once assail us, in their confused complexity, diminishing her height, paling her cheeks, and substituting for what we have come to her solely to seek other peculiarities which we remember now that we did notice the first time, and fail to understand how we can so far have forgotten to look out for again. We thought we remembered; it was a peahen, surely; we go to see it and find a peony. And this inevitable astonishment is not the only one; for, side by side with it comes another, born of the difference, not now between the stereotyped forms of memory and reality, but between the person whom we saw last time and him who appears to us to-day from another angle and shews us

another aspect. The human face is indeed, like the face of the God of some Oriental theogony, a whole cluster of faces, crowded together but on different surfaces so that one does not see them all at once.

But to a great extent our astonishment springs from the other person's presenting to us also a face that is the same as before. It would require so immense an effort to reconstruct everything that has been imparted to us by things other than ourselves — were it only the taste of a fruit — that no sooner is the impression received than we begin imperceptibly to descend the slope of memory and, without noticing anything, in a very short time, we have come a long way from what we actually felt. So that every fresh encounter is a sort of rectification, which brings us back to what we really did see. We have no longer any recollection of this, to such an extent does what we call remembering a person consist really in forgetting him. But so long as we can still see at the moment when the forgotten aspect appears, we recognise it, we are obliged to correct the straying line; thus the perpetual and fruitful surprise which made so salutary and invigorating for me these daily outings with the charming damsels of the sea shore, consisted fully as much in recognition as in discovery. When there is added to this the agitation aroused by what these girls were to me, which was never quite what I had supposed, and meant that my expectancy of our next meeting resembled not so much my expectancy the time before as the still throbbing memory of our latest conversation, it will be realised that each of our excursions made a violent interruption in the course of my thoughts and moved them clean out of the direction which, in the solitude of my own room, I had been able to trace for them at my leisure. That plotted course was forgotten, had ceased to exist, when I returned home buzzing like a hive of bees with remarks which had disquieted me when I heard them and were still echoing in my brain. The other person is destroyed when we cease to see him; after which his next appearance means a fresh creation of him, different from that which immediately preceded it, if not from them all. For the minimum variation that is to be found in these creations is duality. If we have in mind a strong and searching glance, a bold manner, it is inevitably, next time, by a half-languid profile, a sort of dreamy gentleness, overlooked by us in our previous impression, that we shall be, on meeting him again, astonished, that is to say almost solely struck. In confronting our memory with the new reality it is this that will mark the extent of our disappointment or surprise, will appear to us like the revised version of an earlier reality warning us that we had not remembered it correctly. In its turn, the facial aspect neglected the time before, and for that very reason the most striking

this time, the most real, the most documentary, will become a matter for dreams and memories. It is a languorous and rounded profile, a gentle, dreamy expression which we shall now desire to see again. And then, next time, such resolution, such strength of character as there may be in the piercing eyes, the pointed nose, the tight lips, will come to correct the discrepancy between our desire and the object to which it has supposed itself to correspond. It is understood, of course, that this loyalty to the first and purely physical impressions which I formed afresh at each encounter with my friends did not involve only their facial appearance, since the reader has seen that I was sensible also of their voices, more disquieting still, perhaps (for not only does a voice offer the same strange and sensuous surfaces as a face, it issues from that unknown, inaccessible region the mere thought of which sets the mind swimming with unattainable kisses), their voices each like the unique sound of a little instrument into which the player put all her artistry and which was found only in her possession. Traced by a casual inflexion, a sudden deep chord in one of their voices would astonish me when I recognised after having forgotten it. So much so that the corrections which after every fresh meeting I was obliged to make so as to ensure absolute accuracy were as much those of a tuner or singing-master as a draughtsman's.

As for the harmonious cohesion in which had been neutralised for some time, by the resistance that each brought to bear against the expansion of the others, the several waves of sentiment set in motion in me by these girls, it was broken in Albertine's favour one afternoon when we were playing the game of 'ferret.' It was in a little wood on the cliff. Stationed between two girls, strangers to the little band, whom the band had brought in its train because we wanted that day to have a bigger party than usual, I gazed enviously at Albertine's neighbour, a young man, saying to myself that if I had been in his place I could have been touching my friend's hands all those miraculous moments which might perhaps never recur, and that this would have been but the first stage in a great advance. Already, by itself, and even without the consequences which it would probably have involved, the contact of Albertine's hands would have been delicious to me. Not that I had never seen prettier hands than hers. Even in the group of her friends, those of Andrée, slender hands and much more finely modelled, had as it were a private life of their own, obedient to the commands of their mistress, but independent, and used often to strain out before her like a leash of thoroughbred greyhounds, with lazy pauses, long dreams, sudden stretchings of a joint, seeing which Elstir had made a number of studies of these hands. And in one of them,

in which you saw Andrée warming her hands at the fire, they had, with the light behind them, the gilded transparency of two autumn leaves. But, plumper than these, the hands of Albertine would yield for a moment, then resist the pressure of the hand that clasped them, giving a sensation that was quite peculiar to themselves. The act of pressing Albertine's hand had a sensual sweetness which was in keeping somehow with the rosy, almost mauve colouring of her skin. That pressure seemed to allow you to penetrate into the girl's being, to plumb the depths of her senses, like the ringing sound of her laughter, indecent as may be the cooing of doves or certain animal cries. She was the sort of woman with whom shaking hands affords so much pleasure that one feels grateful to civilisation for having made of the handclasp a lawful act between young men and girls when they meet. If the arbitrary code of good manners had replaced the clasp of hands by some other gesture, I should have gazed, day after day, at the unattainable hands of Albertine with a curiosity to know the feel of them as ardent as was my curiosity to learn the savour of her cheeks. But in the pleasure of holding her hand unrestrictedly in mine, had I been next to her at 'ferret' I did not envisage that pleasure alone; what avowals, declarations silenced hitherto by my bashfulness, I could have conveyed by certain pressures of hand on hand; on her side, how easy it would have been for her, in responding by other pressures, to shew me that she accepted; what complicity, what a vista of happiness stood open! My love would be able to make more advance in a few minutes spent thus by her side than it had yet made in all the time that I had known her. Feeling that they would last but a short time, were rapidly nearing their end, since presumably we were not going on much longer with this game, and that once it was over I should be too late, I could not keep in my place for another moment. I let myself deliberately be caught with the ring, and, having gone into the middle, when the ring passed I pretended not to see it but followed its course with my eyes, waiting for the moment when it should come into the hands of the young man next to Albertine, who herself, pealing with helpless laughter, and in the excitement and pleasure of the game, was blushing like a rose. "Why, we really are in the Fairy Wood!" said Andrée to me, pointing to the trees that grew all round, with a smile in her eyes which was meant only for me and seemed to pass over the heads of the other players, as though we two alone were clever enough to double our parts, and make, in connexion with the game we were playing, a remark of a poetic nature. She even carried the delicacy of her fancy so far as to sing half-unconsciously: "The Ferret of the Wood has passed this way, Sweet Ladies; he has passed by this way, the Ferret of Fairy Wood!" like those people

who cannot visit Trianon without getting up a party in Louis XVI costume, or think in effective to have a song sung to its original setting. I should no doubt have been sorry that I could see no charm in this piece of mimicry, had I had time to think of it. But my thoughts were all elsewhere. The players began to shew surprise at my stupidity in never getting the ring. I was looking at Albertine, so pretty, so indifferent, so gay, who, though she little knew it, was to be my neighbour when at last I should catch the ring in the right hands, thanks to a stratagem which she did not suspect, and would certainly have resented if she had. In the heat of the game her long hair had become loosened, and fell in curling locks over her cheeks on which it served to intensify, by its dry brownness, the carnation pink. “You have the tresses of Laura Dianti, of Eleanor of Guyenne, and of her descendant so beloved of Chateaubriand. You ought always to wear your hair half down like that,” I murmured in her ear as an excuse for drawing close to her. Suddenly the ring passed to her neighbour. I sprang upon him at once, forced open his hands and seized it; he was obliged now to take my place inside the circle, while I took his beside Albertine. A few minutes earlier I had been envying this young man, when I saw that his hands as they slipped over the cord were constantly brushing against hers. Now that my turn was come, too shy to seek, too much moved to enjoy this contact, I no longer felt anything save the rapid and painful beating of my heart. At one moment Albertine leaned towards me, with an air of connivance, her round and rosy face, making a show of having the ring, so as to deceive the ferret, and keep him from looking in the direction in which she was just going to pass it. I realised at once that this was the sole object of Albertine’s mysterious, confidential gaze, but I was a little shocked to see thus kindle in her eyes the image — purely fictitious, invented to serve the needs of the game — of a secret, an understanding between her and myself which did not exist, but which from that moment seemed to me to be possible and would have been divinely sweet. While I was still being swept aloft by this thought, I felt a slight pressure of Albertine’s hand against mine, and her caressing finger slip under my finger along the cord, and I saw her, at the same moment, give me a wink which she tried to make pass unperceived by the others. At once, a mass of hopes, invisible hitherto by myself, crystallised within me. “She is taking advantage of the game to let me feel that she really does love me,” I thought to myself, in an acme of joy, from which no sooner had I reached it than I fell, on hearing Albertine mutter furiously: “Why can’t you take it? I’ve been shoving it at you for the last hour.” Stunned with grief, I let go the cord, the ferret saw that ring and swooped

down on it, and I had to go back into the middle, where I stood helpless, in despair, looking at the unbridled rout which continued to circle round me, stung by the jeering shouts of all the players, obliged, in reply, to laugh when I had so little mind for laughter, while Albertine kept on repeating: “People can’t play if they don’t pay attention, and spoil the game for the others. He shan’t be asked again when we’re going to play, Andrée; if he is, I don’t come.” Andrée, with a mind above the game, still chanting her ‘Fairy Wood’ which, in a spirit of imitation, Rosemonde had taken up too, but without conviction, sought to make a diversion from Albertine’s reproaches by saying to me: “We’re quite close to those old Creuniers you wanted so much to see. Look, I’ll take you there by a dear little path, and we’ll leave these silly idiots to go on playing like babies in the nursery.” As Andrée was extremely nice to me, as we went along I said to her everything about Albertine that seemed calculated to make me attractive to the latter. Andrée replied that she too was very fond of Albertine, thought her charming; in spite of which the compliments that I was paying to her friend did not seem altogether to please her. Suddenly, in the little sunken path, I stopped short, touched to the heart by an exquisite memory of my childhood. I had just recognised, by the fretted and glossy leaves which it thrust out towards me, a hawthorn-bush, flowerless, alas, now that spring was over. Around me floated the atmosphere of far-off Months of Mary, of Sunday afternoons, of beliefs, or errors long ago forgotten. I wanted to stay it in its passage. I stood still for a moment, and Andrée, with a charming divination of what was in my mind, left me to converse with the leaves of the bush. I asked them for news of the flowers, those hawthorn flowers that were like merry little girls, headstrong, provocative, pious. “The young ladies have been gone from here for a long time now,” the leaves told me. And perhaps they thought that, for the great friend of those young ladies that I pretended to be, I seemed to have singularly little knowledge of their habits. A great friend, but one who had never been to see them again for all these years, despite his promises. And yet, as Gilberte had been my first love among girls, so these had been my first love among flowers. “Yes, I know all that, they leave about the middle of June,” I answered, “but I am so delighted to see the place where they stayed when they were here. They came to see me, too, at Combray, in my room; my mother brought them when I was ill in bed. And we used to meet on Saturday evenings, too, at the Month of Mary devotions. Can they get to them from here?” “Oh, of course! Why, they make a special point of having our young ladies at Saint-Denis du Désert, the church near here.” “Then, if I want to see them now?” “Oh, not before May, next year.” “But I can be sure

that they will be here?" "They come regularly every year." "Only I don't know whether it will be easy to find the place." "Oh, dear, yes! They are so gay, the young ladies, they stop laughing only to sing hymns together, so that you can't possibly miss them, you can tell by the scent from the other end of the path."

I caught up Andrée, and began again to sing Albertine's praises. It was inconceivable to me that she would not repeat what I said to her friend, seeing the emphasis that I put into it. And yet I never heard that Albertine had been told. Andrée had, nevertheless, a far greater understanding of the things of the heart, a refinement of nice behaviour; finding the look, the word, the action that could most ingeniously give pleasure, keeping to herself a remark that might possibly cause pain, making a sacrifice (and making it as though it were no sacrifice at all) of an afternoon's play, or it might be an 'at home' or a garden party in order to stay beside a friend who was feeling sad, and thus shew him or her that she preferred the simple company of a friend to frivolous pleasures; these were her habitual delicacies. But when one knew her a little better one would have said that it was with her as with those heroic cravens who wish not to be afraid, and whose bravery is especially meritorious, one would have said that in her true character there was none of that generosity which she displayed at every moment out of moral distinction, or sensibility, or a noble desire to shew herself a true friend. When I listened to all the charming things she was saying to me about a possible affection between Albertine and myself it seemed as though she were bound to do everything in her power to bring it to pass. Whereas, by mere chance perhaps, not even of the least of the various minor opportunities which were at her disposal and might have proved effective in uniting me to Albertine did she ever make any use, and I would not swear that my effort to make myself loved by Albertine did not — if not provoke in her friend secret stratagems destined to bring it to nought — at any rate arouse in her an anger which however she took good care to hide and against which even, in her delicacy of feeling, she may herself have fought. Of the countless refinements of goodness which Andrée shewed Albertine would have been incapable, and yet I was not certain of the underlying goodness of the former as I was to be, later on, of the latter's. Shewing herself always tenderly indulgent to the exuberant frivolity of Albertine, Andrée would greet her with speeches, with smiles which were those of a friend, better still, she always acted towards her as a friend. I have seen her, day after day, in order to give the benefit of her own wealth, to bring some happiness to this penniless friend take, without any possibility of advantage to herself, more pains than a courtier would take who sought to win

his sovereign's favour. She was charmingly gentle always, charming in her choice of sweet, pathetic expressions, when you said to her what a pity it was that Albertine was so poor, and took infinitely more trouble on her behalf than she would have taken for a wealthy friend. But if anyone were to hint that Albertine was perhaps not quite so poor as people made out, a just discernible cloud would veil the light of Andrée's eyes and brow; she seemed out of temper. And if you went on to say that after all Albertine might perhaps be less difficult to marry off than people supposed, she would vehemently contradict you, repeating almost angrily: "Oh dear, no; she will never get married! I am quite certain of it; it is a dreadful worry to me!" In so far as I myself was concerned, Andrée was the only one of the girls who would never have repeated to me anything not very pleasant that might have been said about me by a third person; more than that, if it were I who told her what had been said she would make a pretence of not believing it, or would furnish some explanation which made the remark inoffensive; it is the aggregate of these qualities that goes by the name of tact. Tact is the attribute of those people who, if we have called a man out in a duel, congratulate us and add that there was no necessity, really; so as to enhance still further in our own eyes the courage of which we have given proof without having been forced to do lo. They are the opposite of the people who, in similar circumstances, say: "It must have been a horrid nuisance for you, fighting a duel, but on the other hand you couldn't possibly swallow an insult like that, there was nothing else to be done." But as there, is always something to be said on both sides, if the pleasure, or at least the indifference shewn by our friends in repeating something offensive that they have heard said about us, proves that they do not exactly put themselves in our skin at the moment of speaking, but thrust in the pin-point, turn the knife-blade as though it were gold-beater's skin and not human, the art of always keeping hidden from us what might be disagreeable to us in what they have heard said about our actions, or in the opinion which those actions have led the speakers themselves to form of us, proves that there is in the other kind of friends, in the friends who are so full of tact, a strong vein of dissimulation. It does no harm if indeed they are incapable of thinking evil, and if what is said by other people only makes them suffer as it would make us. I supposed this to be the case with Andrée, without, however, being absolutely sure.

We had left the little wood and had followed a network of overgrown paths through which Andrée managed to find her way with great skill. Suddenly, "Look now," she said to me, "there are your famous Creuniers, and, I say, you

are in luck, it's just the time of day, and the light is the same as when Elstir painted them." But I was still too wretched at having fallen, during the game of 'ferret,' from such a pinnacle of hopes. And so it was not with the pleasure which otherwise I should doubtless have felt that I caught sight, almost below my feet, crouching among the rocks, where they had gone for protection from the heat, of marine goddesses for whom Elstir had lain in wait and surprised them there, beneath a dark glaze as lovely as Leonardo would have painted, the marvellous Shadows, sheltered and furtive, nimble and voiceless, ready at the first glimmer of light to slip behind the stone, to hide in a cranny, and prompt, once the menacing ray had passed, to return to rock or seaweed beneath the sun that crumbled the cliffs and the colourless ocean, over whose slumbers they seemed to be watching, motionless lightfoot guardians letting appear on the water's surface their viscous bodies and the attentive gaze of their deep blue eyes.

We went back to the wood to pick up the other girls and go home together. I knew now that I was in love with Albertine; but, alas! I had no thought of letting her know it. This was because, since the days of our games in the Champs-Elysées, my conception of love had become different, even if the persons to whom my love was successively assigned remained practically the same. For one thing, the avowal, the declaration of my passion to her whom I loved no longer seemed to me one of the vital and necessary incidents of love, nor love itself an external reality, but simply a subjective pleasure. And as for this pleasure, I felt that Albertine would do everything necessary to furnish it, all the more since she would not know that I was enjoying it.

As we walked home the image of Albertine, bathed in the light that streamed from the other girls, was not the only one that existed for me. But as the moon, which is no more than a tiny white cloud of a more definite and fixed shape than other clouds during the day, assumes her full power as soon as daylight dies, so when I was once more in the hotel it was Albertine's sole image that rose from my heart and began to shine. My room seemed to me to have become suddenly a new place. Of course, for a long time past, it had not been the hostile room of my first night in it. All our lives we go on patiently modifying the surroundings in which we dwell; and gradually, as habit dispenses us from feeling them, we suppress the noxious elements of colour, shape and smell which were at the root of our discomfort. Nor was it any longer the room, still potent enough over my sensibility, not certainly to make me suffer, but to give me joy, the fount of summer days, like a marble basin in which, half way up

its polished sides, they mirrored an azure surface steeped in light over which glided for an instant, impalpable and white as a wave of heat, a shadowy and fleeting cloud; not the room, wholly aesthetic, of the pictorial evening hours; it was the room in which I had been now for so many days that I no longer saw it. And now I was just beginning again to open my eyes to it, but this time from the selfish angle which is that of love. I liked to feel that the fine big mirror across one corner, the handsome bookcases with their fronts of glass would give Albertine, if she came to see me, a good impression of myself. Instead of a place of transit in which I would stay for a few minutes before escaping to the beach or to Rivebelle, my room became real and dear to me, fashioned itself anew, for I looked at and appreciated each article of its furniture with the eyes of Albertine.

A few days after the game of 'ferret,' when, having allowed ourselves to wander rather too far afield, we had been fortunate in finding at Maine-ville a couple of little "tubs" with two seats in each which would enable us to be back in time for dinner, the keenness, already intense, of my love for Albertine, had the following effect, first of all, that it was Rosemonde and Andrée in turn that I invited to be my companion, and never once Albertine, after which, in spite of my manifest preference for Andrée or Rosemonde, I led everybody, by secondary considerations of time and distance, cloaks and so forth, to decide, as though against my wishes, that the most practical policy was that I should take Albertine, to whose company I pretended to resign myself for good or ill. Unfortunately, since love tends to the complete assimilation of another person, while other people are not comestible by way of conversation alone, Albertine might be (and indeed was) as friendly as possible to me on our way home; when I had deposited her at her own door she left me happy but more famished for her even than I had been at the start, and reckoning the moments that we had spent together as only à prelude, of little importance in itself, to those that were still to come. And yet this prelude had that initial charm which is not to be found again. I had not yet asked anything of Albertine. She could imagine what I wanted, but, not being certain of it, would suppose that I was tending only towards relations without any definite purpose, in which my friend would find that delicious vagueness, rich in surprising fulfilments of expectations, which is true romance.

In the week that followed I scarcely attempted to see Albertine. I made a show of preferring Andrée. Love is born; one would like to remain, for her whom one loves, the unknown whom she may love in turn, but one has need of her, one requires contact not so much with her body as with her attention, her heart. One slips into a letter some spiteful expression which will force the

indifferent reader to ask for some little kindness in compensation, and love, following an unvarying procedure, sets going with an alternating movement the machinery in which one can no longer either refrain from loving or be loved. I gave to Andrée the hours spent by the others at a party which I knew that she would sacrifice for my sake, with pleasure, and would have sacrificed even with reluctance, from a moral nicety, so as not to let either the others or herself think that she attached any importance to a relatively frivolous amusement. I arranged in this way to have her entirely to myself every evening, meaning not to make Albertine jealous, but to improve my position in her eyes, or at any rate not to imperil it by letting Albertine know that it was herself and not Andrée that I loved. Nor did I confide this to Andrée either, lest she should repeat it to her friend. When I spoke of Albertine to Andrée I affected a coldness by which she was perhaps less deceived that I by her apparent credulity. She made a show of believing in my indifference to Albertine, of desiring the closest possible union between Albertine and myself. It is probable that, on the contrary, she neither believed in the one nor wished for the other. While I was saying to her that I did not care very greatly for her friend, I was thinking of one thing only, how to become acquainted with Mme. Bontemps, who was staying for a few days near Balbec, and to whom Albertine was going presently on a short visit. Naturally I did not let Andrée become aware of this desire, and when I spoke to her of Albertine's people, it was in the most careless manner possible. Andrée's direct answers did not appear to throw any doubt on my sincerity. Why then did she blurt out suddenly, about that time: "Oh, guess who' I've just seen — Albertine's aunt!" It is true that she had not said in so many words: "I could see through your casual remarks all right that the one thing you were really thinking of was how you could make friends with Albertine's aunt." But it was clearly to the presence in Andrée's mind of some such idea which she felt it more becoming to keep from me that the word 'just' seemed to point. It was of a kind with certain glances, certain gestures which, for all that they have not a form that is logical, rational, deliberately calculated to match the listener's intelligence, reach him nevertheless in their true significance, just as human speech, converted into electricity in the telephone, is turned into speech again when it strikes the ear. In order to remove from Andree's mind the idea that I was interested in Mme. Bontemps, I spoke of her from that time onwards not only carelessly but with downright malice, saying that I had once met that idiot of a woman, and trusted I should never have that experience again. Whereas I was seeking by every means in my power to meet her.

I tried to induce Elstir (but without mentioning to anyone else that I had asked him) to speak to her about me and to bring us together. He promised to introduce me to her, though he seemed greatly surprised at my wishing it, for he regarded her as a contemptible woman, a born intriguer, as little interesting as she was disinterested. Reflecting that if I did see Mme. Bontemps, Andrée would be sure to hear of it sooner or later, I thought it best to warn her in advance. “The things one tries hardest to avoid are what one finds one cannot escape,” I told her. “Nothing in the world could bore me so much as meeting Mme. Bontemps again, and yet I can’t get out of it, Elstir has arranged to invite us together.” “I have never doubted it for a single instant,” exclaimed Andrée in a bitter tone, while her eyes, enlarged and altered by her annoyance, focussed themselves upon some invisible object. These words of Andree’s were not the most recent statement of a thought which might be expressed thus: “I know that you are in love with Albertine, and that you are working day and night to get in touch with her people.” But they were the shapeless fragments, easily pieced together again by me, of some such thought which I had exploded by striking it, through the shield of Andree’s self-control. Like her ‘just,’ these words had no meaning save in the second degree, that is to say they were words of the sort which (rather than direct affirmatives) inspires in us respect or distrust for another person, and leads to a rupture.

If Andrée had not believed me when I told her that Albertine’s relatives left me indifferent, that was because she thought that I was in love with Albertine. And probably she was none too happy in the thought.

She was generally present as a third party at my meetings with her friend. And yet there were days when I was to see Albertine by herself, days to which I looked forward with feverish impatience, which passed without bringing me any decisive result, without having, any of them, been that cardinal day whose part I immediately entrusted to the day that was to follow, which would prove no more apt to play it; thus there crumbled and collapsed, one after another, like waves of the sea, those peaks at once replaced by others.

About a month after the day on which we had played ‘ferret’ together, I learned that Albertine was going away next morning to spend a couple of days with Mme. Bontemps, and, since she would have to start early, was coming to sleep that night at the Grand Hotel, from which, by taking the omnibus, she would be able, without disturbing the friends with whom she was staying, to catch the first train in the morning. I mentioned this to Andrée. “I don’t believe a word of it,” she replied, with a look of annoyance. “Anyhow it won’t help you at

all, for I'm quite sure Albertine won't want to see you if she goes to the hotel by herself. It wouldn't be 'regulation,'" she added, employing an epithet which had recently come into favour with her, in the sense of 'what is done.' "I tell you this because I understand Albertine. What difference do you suppose it makes to me, whether you see her or not? Not the slightest, I can assure you!"

We were joined by Octave who had no hesitation in telling Andrée the number of strokes he had gone round in, the day before, at golf, then by Albertine, counting her diabolo as she walked along, like a nun telling her beads. Thanks to this pastime she could be left alone for hours on end without growing bored. As soon as she joined us I became conscious of the obstinate tip of her nose, which I had omitted from my mental pictures of her during the last few days; beneath her dark hair the vertical front of her brow controverted — and not for the first time — the indefinite image that I had preserved of her, while its whiteness made a vivid splash in my field of vision; emerging from the dust of memory, Albertine was built up afresh before my eyes. Golf gives one a taste for solitary pleasures. The pleasure to be derived from diabolo is undoubtedly one of these. And yet, after she had joined us, Albertine continued to toss up and catch her missile, just as a lady on whom friends have come to call does not on their account stop working at her crochet. "I hear that Mme. de Villeparisis," she remarked to Octave, "has been complaining to your father." I could hear, underlying the word, one of those notes that were peculiar to Albertine; always, just as I had made certain that I had forgotten them, I would be reminded of a glimpse caught through them before of Albertine's determined and typically Gallic mien. I might have been blind, and yet have detected certain of her qualities, alert and slightly provincial, from those notes, just as plainly as from the tip of her nose. These were equivalent and might have been substituted for one another, and her voice was like what we are promised in the photo-telephone of the future; the visual image was clearly outlined in the sound. "She's not written only to your father, either, she wrote to the Mayor of Balbec at the same time, to say that we must stop playing diabolo on the 'front' as somebody hit her in the face with one." "Yes, I was hearing about that. It's too silly. There's little enough to do here as it is." Andrée did not join in the conversation; she was not acquainted, any more than was Albertine or Octave, with Mme. de Villeparisis. She did, however, remark: "I can't think why this lady should make such a song about it. O'd Mme. de Cambremer got hit in the face, and she never complained." "I will explain the difference," replied Octave gravely, striking a match as he spoke. "It's my belief that Mme. de Cambremer is a woman of the

world, and Mme. de Villeparisis is just an upstart. Are you playing golf this afternoon?" And he left us, followed by Andrée. I was alone now with Albertine. "Do you see," she began, "I'm wearing my hair now the way you like — look at my ringlet. They all laugh at me and nobody knows who' I'm doing it for. My aunt will laugh at me too. But I shan't tell her why, either." I had a sidelong view of Albertine's cheeks, which often appeared pale, but, seen thus, were flushed with a coursing stream of blood which lighted them up, gave them that dazzling clearness which certain winter mornings have when the stones sparkling in the sun seem blocks of pink granite and radiate joy. The joy that I was drawing at this moment from the sight of Albertine's cheeks was equally keen, but led to another desire on my part, which was not to walk with her but to take her in my arms. I asked her if the report of her plans which I had heard were correct. "Yes," she told me, "I shall be sleeping at your hotel to-night, and in fact as I've got rather a chill, I shall be going to bed before dinner. You can come and sit by my bed and watch me eat, if you like, and afterwards we'll play at anything you choose. I should have liked you to come to the station to-morrow morning, but I'm afraid it might look rather odd, I don't say to Andrée, who is a sensible person, but to the others who will be there; if my aunt got to know, I should never hear the last of it. But we can spend the evening together, at any rate. My aunt will know nothing about that. I must go and say good-bye to Andrée. So long, then. Come early, so that we can have a nice long time together," she added, smiling. At these words I was swept back past the days in which I loved Gilberte to those in which love seemed to me not only an external entity but one that could be realised as a whole. Whereas the Gilberte whom I used to see in the Champs-Elysées was a different Gilberte from the one whom I found waiting inside myself when I was alone again, suddenly in the real Albertine, her whom I saw every day, whom I supposed to be stuffed with middle-class prejudices and entirely open with her aunt, there was incarnate the imaginary Albertine, she whom, when I still did not know her, I had suspected of casting furtive glances at myself on the 'front,' she who had worn an air of being reluctant to go indoors when she saw me making off in the other direction.

I went in to dinner with my grandmother. I felt within me a secret which she could never guess. Similarly with Albertine; to-morrow her friends would be with her, not knowing what novel experience she and I had in common; and when she kissed her niece on the brow Mme. Bontemps would never imagine that I stood between them, in that arrangement of Albertine's hair which had for its object, concealed from all the world, to give me pleasure, me who had until

then so greatly envied Mme. Bontemps because, being related to the same people as her niece, she had the same occasions to don mourning, the same family visits to pay; and now I found myself meaning more to Albertine than did the aunt herself. When she was with her aunt, it was of me that she would be thinking. What was going to happen that evening, I scarcely knew. In any event, the Grand Hotel, the evening, would no longer seem empty to me; they contained my happiness. I rang for the lift-boy to take me up to the room which Albertine had engaged, a room that looked over the valley. The slightest movements, such as that of sitting down on the bench in the lift, were satisfying, because they were in direct relation to my heart; I saw in the ropes that drew the cage upwards, in the few steps that I had still to climb, only a materialisation of the machinery, the stages of my joy. I had only two or three steps to take now along the corridor before coming to that room in which was enshrined the precious substance of that rosy form — that room which, even if there were to be done in it delicious things, would keep that air of permanence, of being, to a chance visitor who knew nothing of its history, just like any other room, which makes of inanimate things the obstinately mute witnesses, the scrupulous confidants, the inviolable depositaries of our pleasure. Those few steps from the landing to Albertine's door, those few steps which no one now could prevent my taking, I took with delight, with prudence, as though plunged into a new and strange element, as if in going forward I had been gently displacing the liquid stream of happiness, and at the same time with a strange feeling of absolute power, and of entering at length into an inheritance which had belonged to me from all time. Then suddenly I reflected that it was wrong to be in any doubt; she had told me to come when she was in bed. It was as clear as daylight; I pranced for joy, I nearly knocked over Françoise who was standing in my way, I ran, with glowing eyes, towards my friend's room. I found Albertine in bed. Leaving her throat bare, her white nightgown altered the proportions of her face, which, flushed by being in bed or by her cold or by dinner, seemed pinker than before; I thought of the colours which I had had, a few hours earlier, displayed beside me, on the 'front,' the savour of which I was now at last to taste; her cheek was crossed obliquely by one of those long, dark, curling tresses, which, to please me, she had undone altogether. She looked at me and smiled. Beyond her, through the window, the valley lay bright beneath the moon. The sight of Albertine's bare throat, of those strangely vivid cheeks, had so intoxicated me (that is to say had placed the reality of the world for me no longer in nature, but in the torrent of my sensations which it was all I could do to keep within

bounds), as to have destroyed the balance between the life, immense and indestructible, which circulated in my being, and the life of the universe, so puny in comparison. The sea, which was visible through the window as well as the valley, the swelling breasts of the first of the Maineville cliffs, the sky in which the moon had not yet climbed to the zenith, all of these seemed less than a featherweight on my eyeballs, which between their lids I could feel dilated, resisting, ready to bear very different burdens, all the mountains of the world upon their fragile surface. Their orbit no longer found even the sphere of the horizon adequate to fill it. And everything that nature could have brought me of life would have seemed wretchedly meagre, the sigh of the waves far too short a sound to express the enormous aspiration that was surging in my breast. I bent over Albertine to kiss her. Death might have struck me down in that moment; it would have seemed to me a trivial, or rather an impossible thing, for life was not outside, it was in me; I should have smiled pityingly had a philosopher then expressed the idea that some day, even some distant day, I should have to die, that the external forces of nature would survive me, the forces of that nature beneath whose godlike feet I was no more than a grain of dust; that, after me, there would still remain those rounded, swelling cliffs, that sea, that moonlight and that sky! How was that possible; how could the world last longer than myself, since it was it that was enclosed in me, in me whom it went a long way short of filling, in me, where, feeling that there was room to store so many other treasures, I flung contemptuously into a corner sky, sea and cliffs. “Stop that, or I’ll ring the bell!” cried Albertine, seeing that I was flinging myself upon her to kiss her. But I reminded myself that it was not for no purpose that a girl made a young man come to her room in secret, arranging that her aunt should not know — that boldness, moreover, rewards those who know how to seize their opportunities; in the state of exaltation in which I was, the round face of Albertine, lighted by an inner flame, like the glass bowl of a lamp, started into such prominence that, copying the rotation of a burning sphere, it seemed to me to be turning, like those faces of Michelangelo which are being swept past in the arrested headlong flight of a whirlwind. I was going to learn the fragrance, the flavour which this strange pink fruit concealed. I heard a sound, precipitous, prolonged, shrill. Albertine had pulled the bell with all her might.

***

I had supposed that the love which I felt for Albertine was not based on the

hope of carnal possession. And yet, when the lesson to be drawn from my experience that evening was, apparently, that such possession was impossible; when, after having had not the least doubt, that first day, on the beach, of Albertine's being unchaste, and having then passed through various intermediate assumptions, I seemed to have quite definitely reached the conclusion that she was absolutely virtuous; when, on her return from her aunt's, a week later, she greeted me coldly with: "I forgive you; in fact I'm sorry to have upset you, but you must never do it again,"— then, in contrast to what I had felt on learning from Bloch that one could always have all the women one liked, and as if, in place of a real girl, I had known a wax doll, it came to pass that gradually there aetached itself from her my desire to penetrate into her life, to follow her through the places in which she had spent her childhood, to be initiated by her into the athletic life; my intellectual curiosity to know what were her thoughts on this subject or that did not survive my belief that I might take her in my arms if I chose. My dreams abandoned her, once they had ceased to be nourished by the hope of a possession of which I had supposed them to be independent. Thenceforward they found themselves once more at liberty to transmit themselves, according to the attraction that I had found in her on any particular day, above all according to the chances that I seemed to detect of my being, possibly, one day, loved by her — to one or another of Albertine's friends, and to Andrée first of all. And yet, if Albertine had not existed, perhaps I should not have had the pleasure which I began to feel more and more strongly during the days that followed in the kindness that was shewn me by Andrée. Albertine told no one of the check which I had received at her hands. She was one of those pretty girls who, from their earliest youth, by their beauty, but especially by an attraction, a charm which remains somewhat mysterious and has its source perhaps in reserves of vitality to which others less favoured by nature come to quench their thirst, have always — in their home circle, among their friends, in society — proved more attractive than other more beautiful and richer girls; she was one of those people from whom, before the age of love and ever so much more after it is reached, one asks more than they ask in return, more even than they are able to give. From her childhood Albertine had always had round her in an adoring circle four or five little girl friends, among them Andrée who was so far her superior and knew it (and perhaps this attraction which Albertine exerted quite involuntarily had been the origin, had laid the foundations of the little band). This attraction was still potent even at a great social distance, in circles quite brilliant in comparison, where if there was a pavane to be danced, they

would send for Albertine rather than have it danced by another girl of better family. The consequence was that, not having a penny to her name, living a hard enough life, moreover, on the hands of M. Bontemps, who was said to be ‘on the rocks,’ and was anyhow anxious to be rid of her, she was nevertheless invited, not only to dine but to stay, by people who, in Saint-Loup’s sight, might not have had any distinction, but to Rosemonde’s mother or Andrée’s, women who though very rich themselves did not know these other and richer people, represented something quite incalculable. Thus Albertine spent a few weeks every year with the family of one of the Governors of the Bank of France, who was also Chairman of the Board of Directors of a great Railway Company. The wife of this financier entertained people of importance, and had never mentioned her ‘day’ to Andrée’s mother, who thought her wanting in politeness, but was nevertheless prodigiously interested in everything that went on in her house. Accordingly she encouraged Andrée every year to invite Albertine down to their villa, because, as she said, it was a real charity to offer a holiday by the sea to a girl who had not herself the means to travel and whose aunt did so little for her; Andrée’s mother was probably not prompted by the thought that the banker and his wife, learning that Albertine was made much of by her and her daughter, would form a high opinion of them both; still less did she hope that Albertine, good and clever as she was, would manage to get her invited, or at least to get Andrée invited, to the financier’s garden-parties. But every evening at the dinner-table, while she assumed an air of indifference slightly tinged with contempt, she was fascinated by Albertine’s accounts of everything that had happened at the big house while she was staying there, and the names of the other guests, almost all of them people whom she knew by sight or by name. True, the thought that she knew them only in this indirect fashion, that is to say did not know them at all (she called this kind of acquaintance knowing people ‘all my life’), gave Andrée’s mother a touch of melancholy while she plied Albertine with questions about them in a lofty and distant tone, speaking with closed lips, and might have left her doubtful and uneasy as to the importance of her own social position had she not been able to reassure herself, to return safely to the ‘realities of life,’ by saying to the butler: “Please tell the chef that he has not made the peas soft enough.” She then recovered her serenity. And she was quite determined that Andrée was to marry nobody but a man — of the best family, of course — rich enough for her too to be able to keep a chef and a couple of coachmen. This was the proof positive, the practical indication of ‘position.’ But the fact that Albertine had dined at the banker’s house in the

country with this or that great lady, and that the said great lady had invited the girl to stay with her next winter, did not invalidate a sort of special consideration which Albertine shewed towards Andrée's mother, which went very well with the pity, and even repulsion, excited by the tale of her misfortunes, a repulsion increased by the fact that M. Bontemps had proved a traitor to the cause (he was even, people said, vaguely Panamist) and had rallied to the Government. Not that this deterred Andrée's mother, in her passion for abstract truth, from withering with her scorn the people who appeared to believe that Albertine was of humble origin. "What's that you say? Why, they're one of the best families in the country. Simonet with a single 'n,' you know!" Certainly, in view of the class of society in which all this went on, in which money plays so important a part, and mere charm makes people ask you out but not marry you, a 'comfortable' marriage did not appear to be for Albertine a practical outcome of the so distinguished patronage which she enjoyed but which would not have been held to compensate for her poverty. But even by themselves, and with no prospect of any matrimonial consequence, Albertine's 'successes' in society excited the envy of certain spiteful mothers, furious at seeing her received like one of the family by the banker's wife, even by Andrée's mother, neither of whom they themselves really knew. They therefore went about telling common friends of those ladies and their own that both ladies would be very angry if they knew the facts, which were that Albertine repeated to each of them everything that the intimacy to which she was rashly admitted enabled her to spy out in the household of the other, a thousand little secrets which it must be infinitely unpleasant to the interested party to have made public. These envious women said this so that it might be repeated and might get Albertine into trouble with her patrons. But, as often happens, their machinations met with no success. The spite that prompted them was too apparent, and their only result was to make the women who had planned them appear rather more contemptible than before. Andrée's mother was too firm in her opinion of Albertine to change her mind about her now. She looked upon her as a 'poor wretch,' but the best-natured girl living, and one who would do anything in the world to give pleasure.

If this sort of select popularity to which Albertine had attained did not seem likely to lead to any practical result, it had stamped Andrée's friend with the distinctive marks of people who, being always sought after, have never any need to offer themselves, marks (to be found also, and for analogous reasons, at the other end of the social scale among the leaders of fashion) which consist in their not making any display of the successes they have scored, but rather keeping

them to themselves. She would never say to anyone: “So-and-so is anxious to meet me,” would speak of everyone with the greatest good nature, and as if it had been she who ran after, who sought to know other people, and not they. If you spoke of a young man who, a few minutes earlier, had been, in private conversation with her, heaping the bitterest reproaches upon her because she had refused him an assignation, so far from proclaiming this in public, or betraying any resentment she would stand up for him: “He is such a nice boy!” Indeed it quite annoyed her when she attracted people, because that compelled her to disappoint them, whereas her natural instinct was always to give pleasure. So much did she enjoy giving pleasure that she had come to employ a particular kind of falsehood, found among utilitarians and men who have ‘arrived.’ Existing besides in an embryonic state in a vast number of people, this form of insincerity consists in not being able to confine the pleasure arising out of a single act of politeness to a single person. For instance, if Albertine’s aunt wished her niece to accompany her to a party which was not very lively, Albertine might have found it sufficient to extract from the incident the moral profit of having given pleasure to her aunt. But being courteously welcomed by her host and hostess, she thought it better to say to them that she had been wanting to see them for so long that she had finally seized this opportunity and begged her aunt to take her to their party. Even this was not enough: at the same party there happened to be one of Albertine’s friends who was in great distress. “I did not like the idea of your being here by yourself. I thought it might do you good to have me with you. If you would rather come away from here, go somewhere else, I am ready to do anything you like; all I want is to see you look not so sad.”— Which, as it happened, was true also. Sometimes it happened however that the fictitious object destroyed the real. Thus, Albertine, having a favour to ask on behalf of one of her friends, went on purpose to see a certain lady who could help her. But on arriving at the house of this lady — a kind and sympathetic soul — the girl, unconsciously following the principle of utilising a single action in a number of ways, felt it to be more ingratiating to appear to have come there solely on account of the pleasure she knew she would derive from seeing the lady again. The lady was deeply touched that Albertine should have taken a long journey purely out of friendship for herself. Seeing her almost overcome by emotion, Albertine began to like the lady still better. Only, there was this awkward consequence: she now felt so keenly the pleasure of friendship which she pretended to have been her motive in coming, that she was afraid of making the lady suspect the genuineness of sentiments which were actually quite

sincere if she now asked her to do the favour, whatever it may have been, for her friend. The lady would think that Albertine had come for that purpose, which was true, but would conclude also that Albertine had no disinterested pleasure in seeing her, which was not. With the result that she came away without having asked the favour, like a man sometimes who has been so good to a woman, in the hope of winning her, that he refrains from declaring his passion in order to preserve for his goodness an air of nobility. In other instances it would be wrong to say that the true object was sacrificed to the subordinate and subsequently conceived idea, but the two were so far incompatible that if the person to whom Albertine endeared herself by stating the second had known of the existence of the first, his pleasure would at once have been turned into the deepest annoyance. At a much later point in this story, we shall have occasion to see this kind of incompatibility expressed in clearer terms. Let us say for the present, borrowing an example of a completely different order, that they occur very frequently in the most divergent situations that life has to offer. A husband has established his mistress in the town where he is quartered with his regiment. His wife, left by herself in Paris, and with an inkling of the truth, grows more and more miserable, and writes her husband letters embittered by jealousy. Very well; the mistress is obliged to go up to Paris for the day. The husband cannot resist her entreaties that he will go with her, and applies for short leave, which is granted. But as he is a good-natured fellow, and hates to make his wife unhappy, he goes to her and tells her, shedding a few quite genuine tears, that, driven to desperation by her letters, he has found the means of getting away from his duties to come to her, to console her in his arms. He has thus contrived by a single journey to furnish wife and mistress alike with proofs of his affection. But if the wife were to learn the reason for which he has come to Paris, her joy would doubtless be turned into grief, unless her pleasure in seeing the faithless wretch outweighed, in spite of everything, the pain that his infidelities had caused her. Among the men who have struck me as practising with most perseverance this system of what might be called killing any number of birds with one stone, must be included M. de Norpois. He would now and then agree to act as intermediary between two of his friends who had quarrelled, which led to his being called the most obliging of men. But it was not sufficient for him to appear to be doing a service to the friend who had come to him to demand it; he would represent to the other the steps which he was taking to effect a reconciliation as undertaken not at the request of the first friend but in the interest of the second, an attitude of the sincerity of which he had never any

difficulty in convincing a listener already influenced by the idea that he saw before him the ‘most serviceable of men.’ In this fashion, playing in two scenes turn about, what in stage parlance is called ‘doubling’ two parts, he never allowed his influence to be in the slightest degree imperilled, and the services which he rendered constituted not an expenditure of capital but a dividend upon some part of his credit. At the same time every service, seemingly rendered twice over, correspondingly enhanced his reputation as an obliging friend, and, better still, a friend whose interventions were efficacious, one who did not draw bows at a venture, whose efforts were always justified by success, as was shewn by the gratitude of both parties. This duplicity in rendering services was — allowing for disappointments such as are the lot of every human being — an important element of M. de Norpois’s character. And often at the Ministry he would make use of my father, who was a simple soul, while making him believe that it was he, M. de Norpois, who was being useful to my father. Attracting people more easily than she wished, and having no need to proclaim her conquests abroad, Albertine kept silence with regard to the scene with myself by her bedside, which a plain girl would have wished the whole world to know. And yet of her attitude during that scene I could not arrive at any satisfactory explanation. Taking first of all the supposition that she was absolutely chaste (a supposition with which I had originally accounted for the violence with which Albertine had refused to let herself be taken in my arms and kissed, though it was by no means essential to my conception of the goodness, the fundamentally honourable character of my friend), I could not accept it without a copious revision of its terms. It ran so entirely counter to the hypothesis which I had constructed that day when I saw Albertine for the first time. Then ever so many different acts, all acts of kindness towards myself (a kindness that was caressing, at times uneasy, alarmed, jealous of my predilection for Andrée) came up on all sides to challenge the brutal gesture with which, to escape from me, she had pulled the bell. Why then had she invited me to come and spend the evening by her bedside? Why had she spoken all the time in the language of affection? What object is there in your desire to see a friend, in your fear that he is fonder of another of your friends than of you; why seek to give him pleasure, why tell him, so romantically, that the others will never know that he has spent the evening in your room, if you refuse him so simple a pleasure and if to you it is no pleasure at all? I could not believe, all the same, that Albertine’s chastity was carried to such a pitch as that, and I had begun to ask myself whether her violence might not have been due to some reason of coquetry, a disagreeable odour, for instance,

which she suspected of lingering about her person, and by which she was afraid that I might be disgusted, or else of cowardice, if for instance she imagined, in her ignorance of the facts of love, that my state of nervous exhaustion was due to something contagious, communicable to her in a kiss. She was genuinely distressed by her failure to afford me pleasure, and gave me a little gold pencil-case, with that virtuous perversity which people shew who, moved by your supplications and yet not consenting to grant you what those supplications demand, are anxious all the same to bestow on you some mark of their affection; the critic, an article from whose pen would so gratify the novelist, asks him instead to dinner; the duchess does not take the snob with her to the theatre but lends him her box on an evening when she will not be using it herself. So far are those who do least for us, and might easily do nothing, driven by conscience to do something. I told Albertine that in giving me this pencil-case she was affording me great pleasure, and yet not so great as I should have felt if, on the night she had spent at the hotel, she had permitted me to embrace her. “It would have made me so happy; what possible harm could it have done you? I was simply astounded at your refusing to let me do it.” “What astounds me,” she retorted, “is that you should have thought it astounding. Funny sort of girls you must know if my behaviour surprises you.” “I am extremely sorry if I annoyed you, but even now I cannot say that I think I was in the wrong. What I feel is that all that sort of thing is of no importance, really, and I can’t understand a girl who could so easily give pleasure not consenting to do so. Let us be quite clear about it,” I went on, throwing a sop of sorts to her moral scruples, as I recalled how she and her friends had scarified the girl who went about with the actress Lea. “I don’t mean to say for a moment that a girl can behave exactly as she likes, or that there’s no such thing as immorality. Take, let me see now, yes, what you were saying the other day about a girl who is staying at Balbec and her relations with an actress; I call that degrading, so degrading that I feel sure it must all have been made up by the girl’s enemies, and that there can’t be any truth in the story. It strikes me as improbable, impossible. But to let a friend kiss you, and go farther than that even — since you say that I am your friend...” “So you are, but I have had friends before now, I have known lots of young men who were every bit as friendly, I can assure you. There wasn’t one of them would ever have dared to do a thing like that. They knew they’d get their ears boxed if they tried it on. Besides, they never dreamed of trying, we would shake hands in an open, friendly sort of way, like good pals, but there was never a word said about kissing, and yet we weren’t any the less friends for that. Why, if it’s my

friendship you are after, you've nothing to complain of; I must be jolly fond of you to forgive you. But I'm sure you don't care two straws about me, really. Own up now, it's Andrée you're in love with. After all, you're quite right; she is ever so much prettier than I am, and perfectly charming! Oh! You men!" Despite my recent disappointment, these words so frankly uttered, by giving me a great respect for Albertine, made a very pleasant impression on me. And perhaps this impression was to have serious and vexatious consequences for me later on, for it was round it that there began to form that feeling almost of brotherly intimacy, that moral core which was always to remain at the heart of my love for Albertine. A feeling of this sort may be the cause of the keenest pain. For in order really to suffer at the hands of a woman one must have believed in her completely. For the moment, that embryo of moral esteem, of friendship, was left embedded in me like a stepping-stone in a stream. It could have availed nothing, by itself, against my happiness if it had remained there without growing, in an inertia which it was to retain the following year, and still more during the final weeks of this first visit to Balbec. It dwelt in me like one of those foreign bodies which it would be wiser when all is said to expel, but which we leave where they are without disturbing them, so harmless for the present does their weakness, their isolation amid a strange environment render them.

My dreams were now once more at liberty to concentrate on one or another of Albertine's friends, and returned first of all to Andrée, whose kindnesses might perhaps have appealed to me less strongly had I not been certain that they would come to Albertine's ears. Undoubtedly the preference that I had long been pretending to feel for Andrée had furnished me — in the habit of conversation with her, of declaring my affection — with, so to speak, the material, prepared and ready, for a love of her which had hitherto lacked only the complement of a genuine sentiment, and this my heart being once more free was now in a position to supply. But for me really to love Andrée, she was too intellectual, too neurotic, too sickly, too much like myself. If Albertine now seemed to me to be void of substance, Andrée was filled with something which I knew only too well. I had thought, that first day, that what I saw on the beach there was the mistress of some racing cyclist, passionately athletic; and now Andrée told me that if she had taken up athletic pastimes, it was under orders from her doctor, to cure her neurasthenia, her digestive troubles, but that her happiest hours were those which she spent in translating one of George Eliot's novels. The misunderstanding, due to an initial mistake as to what Andrée was, had not, as a matter of fact, the slightest importance. But my mistake was one of the kind

which, if they allow love to be born, and are not recognised as mistakes until it has ceased to be under control, become a cause of suffering. Such mistakes — which may be quite different from mine with regard to Andrée, and even its exact opposite,— are frequently due (and this was especially the case here) to our paying too much attention to the aspect, the manners of what a person is not but would like to be, in forming our first impression of that person. To the outward appearance affectation, imitation, the longing to be admired, whether by the good or by the wicked, add misleading similarities of speech and gesture. These are cynicisms and cruelties which, when put to the test, prove no more genuine than certain apparent virtues and generosities. Just as we often discover a vain miser beneath the cloak of a man famed for his bountiful charity, so her flaunting of vice leads us to suppose a Messalina a respectable girl with middle-class prejudices. I had thought to find in Andrée a healthy, primitive creature, whereas she was merely a person in search of health, as were doubtless many of those in whom she herself had thought to find it, and who were in reality no more healthy than a burly arthritic with a red face and in white flannels is necessarily a Hercules. Now there are circumstances in which it is not immaterial to our happiness that the person whom we have loved because of what appeared to be so healthy about her is in reality only one of those invalids who receive such health as they possess from others, as the planets borrow their light, as certain bodies are only conductors of electricity.

No matter, Andrée, like Rosemonde and Gisèle, indeed more than they, was, when all was said, a friend of Albertine, sharing her life, imitating her conduct, so closely that, the first day, I had not at once distinguished them one from another. Over these girls, flowering sprays of roses whose principal charm was that they outlined themselves against the sea, the same undivided partnership prevailed as at the time when I did not know them, when the appearance of no matter which of them had caused me such violent emotion by its announcement that the little band was not far off. And even now the sight of one of them filled me with a pleasure into which there entered, to an extent which I should not have found it easy to define, the thought of seeing the others follow her in due course, and even if they did not come that day, speaking about them, and knowing that they would be told that I had been on the beach.

It was no longer simply the attraction of those first days, it was a regular love-longing which hesitated among them all, so far was each the natural substitute for the others. My bitterest grief would not have been to be thrown over by whichever of the girls I liked best, but I should at once have liked best,

because I should have fastened on to her the whole of the melancholy dream which had been floating vaguely among them all, her who had thrown me over. It would, moreover, in that event, be the loss of all her friends, in whose eyes I should speedily have forfeited whatever advantage I might possess, that I should, in losing her, have unconsciously regretted, having vowed to them that sort of collective love which the politician and the actor feel for the public for whose desertion of them after they have enjoyed all its favours they can never be consoled. Even those favours which I had failed to win from Albertine I would hope suddenly to receive from one or other who had parted from me in the evening with a word or glance of ambiguous meaning, thanks to which it was to her that, for the next day or so, my desire would turn. It strayed among them all the more voluptuously in that upon those volatile faces a comparative fixation of features had now begun, and had been carried far enough for the eye to distinguish — even if it were to change yet further — each malleable and floating effigy. To the differences that existed among them there was doubtless very little that corresponded in the no less marked differences in the length and breadth of those features, any of which might, perhaps, dissimilar as the girls appeared, almost have been lifted bodily from one face and imposed at random upon any other. But our knowledge of faces is not mathematical. In the first place, it does not begin with the measurement of the parts, it takes as its starting point an expression, a combination of the whole. In Andrée, for instance, the fineness of her gentle eyes seemed to go with the thinness of her nose, as slender as a mere curve which one could imagine as having been traced in order to produce along a single line the idea of delicacy divided higher up between the dual smile of her twin gaze. A line equally fine was engraved in her hair, pliant and deep as the line with which the wind furrows the sand. And in her it must have been hereditary; for the snow-white hair of Andrée's mother was driven in the same way, forming here a swelling, there a depression, like a snowdrift that rises or sinks according to the irregularities of the soil. Certainly, when compared with the fine delineation of Andrée's, Rosemonde's nose seemed to present broad surfaces, like a high tower raised upon massive foundations. Albeit expression suffices to make us believe in enormous differences between things that are separated by infinitely little — albeit that infinitely little may by itself create an expression that is absolutely unique, an individuality — it was not only the infinitely little of its lines and the originality of its expression that made each of these faces appear irreducible to terms of any other. Between my friends' faces their colouring established a separation wider still, not so much by

the varied beauty of the tones with which it provided them, so contrasted that I felt when I looked at Rosemonde — flooded with a sulphurous rose colour, with the further contrast of the greenish light in her eyes — and then at Andrée — whose white cheeks received such an austere distinction from her black hair — the same kind of pleasure as if I had been looking alternately at a geranium growing by a sunlit sea and a camellia in the night; but principally because the infinitely little differences of their lines were enlarged out of all proportion, the relations between one and another surface entirely changed by this new element of colour which, in addition to being a dispenser of tints, is great at restoring, or rather at altering, dimensions. So that faces which were perhaps constructed on not dissimilar lines, according as they were lighted by the flaming torch of an auburn poll or high complexion, or by the white glimmer of a dull pallor, grew sharper or broader, became something else, like those properties used in the Russian ballet, consisting sometimes, when they are seen in the light of day, of a mere disc of paper, out of which the genius of a Bakst, according to the blood-red or moonlit effect in which he plunges his stage, makes a hard incrustation, like a turquoise on a palace well, or a swooning softness, as of a Bengal rose in an eastern garden. And so when acquiring a knowledge of faces we take careful measurements, but as painters, not as surveyors.

So it was with Albertine as with her friends. On certain days, slim, with grey cheeks, a sullen air, a violet transparency falling obliquely from her such as we notice sometimes on the sea, she seemed to be feeling the sorrows of exile. On other days her face, more sleek, caught and glued my desires to its varnished surface and prevented them from going any farther; unless I caught a sudden glimpse of her from the side, for her dull cheeks, like white wax on the surface, were visibly pink beneath, which made me anxious to kiss them, to reach that different tint which thus avoided my touch. At other times happiness bathed her cheeks with a clarity so mobile that the skin, grown fluid and vague, gave passage to a sort of stealthy and subcutaneous gaze, which made it appear to be of another colour but not of another substance than her eyes; sometimes, instinctively, when one looked at her face punctuated with tiny brown marks among which floated what were simply two larger, bluer stains, it was like looking at the egg of a goldfinch — or often like an opalescent agate cut and polished in two places only, where, from the heart of the brown stone, shone like the transparent wings of a sky-blue butterfly her eyes, those features in which the flesh becomes a mirror and gives us the illusion that it allows us, more than through the other parts of the body, to approach the soul. But most often of all

she shewed more colour, and was then more animated; sometimes the only pink thing in her white face was the tip of her nose, as finely pointed as that of a mischievous kitten with which one would have liked to stop and play; sometimes her cheeks were so glossy that one's glance slipped, as over the surface of a miniature, over their pink enamel, which was made to appear still more delicate, more private, by the enclosing though half-opened case of her black hair; or it might happen that the tint of her cheeks had deepened to the violet shade of the red cyclamen, and, at times, even, when she was flushed or feverish, with a suggestion of un-healthiness which lowered my desire to something more sensual and made her glance expressive of something more perverse and unwholesome, to the deep purple of certain roses, a red that was almost black; and each of these Albertines was different, as in every fresh appearance of the dancer whose colours, form, character, are transmuted according to the innumerably varied play of a projected limelight. It was perhaps because they were so different, the persons whom I used to contemplate in her at this period, that later on I became myself a different person, corresponding to the particular Albertine to whom my thoughts had turned; a jealous, an indifferent, a voluptuous, a melancholy, a frenzied person, created anew not merely by the accident of what memory had risen to the surface, but in proportion also to the strength of the belief that was lent to the support of one and the same memory by the varying manner in which I appreciated it. For this is the point to which we must always return, to these beliefs with which most of the time we are quite unconsciously filled, but which for all that are of more importance to our happiness than is the average person whom we see, for it is through them that we see him, it is they that impart his momentary greatness to the person seen. To be quite accurate I ought to give a different name to each of the 'me's' who were to think about Albertine in time to come; I ought still more to give a different name to each of the Albertines who appeared before me, never the same, like — called by me simply and for the sake of convenience 'the sea'— those seas that succeeded one another on the beach, in front of which, a nymph likewise, she stood apart. But above all, in the same way as, in telling a story (though to far greater purpose here), one mentions what the weather was like on such and such a day, I ought always to give its name to the belief that, on any given day on which I saw Albertine, was reigning in my soul, creating its atmosphere, the appearance of people like that of seas being dependent on those clouds, themselves barely visible, which change the colour of everything by their concentration, their mobility, their dissemination, their flight — like that cloud

which Elstir had rent one evening by not introducing me to these girls, with whom he had stopped to talk, whereupon their forms, as they moved away, had suddenly increased in beauty — a cloud that had formed again a few days later when I did get to know the girls, veiling their brightness, interposing itself frequently between my eyes and them, opaque and soft, like Virgil's Leucothea.

No doubt, all their faces had assumed quite new meanings for me since the manner in which they were to be read had been to some extent indicated to me by their talk, talk to which I could ascribe a value all the greater in that, by questioning them, I could prompt it whenever I chose, could vary it like an experimenter who seeks by corroborative proofs to establish the truth of his theory. And it is, after all, as good a way as any of solving the problem of existence to approach near enough to the things that have appeared to us from a distance to be beautiful and mysterious, to be able to satisfy ourselves that they have neither mystery nor beauty. It is one of the systems of hygiene among which we are at liberty to choose our own, a system which is perhaps not to be recommended too strongly, but it gives us a certain tranquillity with which to spend what remains of life, and also — since it enables us to regref nothing, by assuring us that we have attained to the best, and that the best was nothing out of the common — with which to resign ourselves to death.

I had now substituted, in the brains of these girls, for their supposed contempt for chastity, their memories of daily 'incidents,' honest principles, liable, it might be, to relaxation, but principles which had hitherto kept unscathed the children who had acquired them in their own respectable homes. And yet, when one has been mistaken from the start, even in trifling details, when an error of assumption or recollection makes one seek for the author of a malicious slander, or for the place where one has lost something, in the wrong direction, it frequently happens that one discovers one's error only to substitute for it not the truth but a fresh error. I drew, so far as their manner of life and the proper way to behave with them went, all the possible conclusions from the word 'Innocence' which I had read, in talking familiarly with them, upon their faces. But perhaps I had been reading carelessly, with the inaccuracy born of a too rapid deciphering, and it was no more written there than was the name of Jules Ferry on the programme of the performance at which I had heard Berma for the first time, an omission which had not prevented me from maintaining to M. de Norpois that Jules Ferry, beyond any possibility of doubt, was a person who wrote curtain-raisers.

No matter which it might be of my friends of the little band, was not

inevitably the face that I had last seen the only face that I could recall, since, of our memories with respect to a person, the mind eliminates everything that does not agree with our immediate purpose of our daily relations (especially if those relations are quickened with an element of love which, ever unsatisfied, lives always in the moment that is about to come)? That purpose allows the chain of spent days to slip away, holding on only to the very end of it, often of a quite different metal from the links that have vanished in the night, and in the journey which we make through life, counts as real only in the place in which we at any given moment are. But all those earliest impressions, already so remote, could not find, against the blunting process that assailed them day after day, any remedy in my memory; during the long hours which I spent in talking, eating, playing with these girls, I did not remember even that they were the same ruthless, sensual virgins whom I had seen, as in a fresco, file past between me and the sea.

Geographers, archaeologists may conduct us over Calypso's island, may excavate the Palace of Minos. Only Calypso becomes then nothing more than a woman, Minos than a king with no semblance of divinity. Even the good and bad qualities which history teaches us to have been the attributes of those quite real personages, often differ widely from those which we had ascribed to the fabulous beings who bore the same names as they. Thus had there faded and vanished all the lovely mythology of Ocean which I had composed in those first days. But it is not altogether immaterial that we do succeed, at any rate now and then, in spending our time in familiar intercourse with what we have thought to be unattainable and have longed to possess. In our later dealings with people whom at first we found disagreeable there persists always, even among the artificial pleasure which we have come at length to enjoy in their society, the lingering taint of the defects which they have succeeded in hiding. But, in relations such as I was now having with Albertine and her friends, the genuine pleasure which was there at the start leaves that fragrance which no amount of skill can impart to hot-house fruits, to grapes that have not ripened in the sun. The supernatural creatures which for a little time they had been to me still introduced, even without any intention on my part, a miraculous element into the most commonplace dealings that I might have with them, or rather prevented such dealings from ever becoming commonplace at all. My desire had sought so ardently to learn the significance of the eyes which now knew and smiled to see me, but whose glances on the first day had crossed mine like rays from another universe; it had distributed so generously, so carefully, so minutely, colour and

fragrance over the carnation surfaces of these girls who now, outstretched on the cliff-top, were simply offering me sandwiches or guessing riddles, that often, in the afternoon, while I lay there among them, like those painters who seek to match the grandeurs of antiquity in modern life, give to a woman cutting her toe-nail the nobility of the *Spinario*, or, like Rubens, make goddesses out of women whom they know, to people some mythological scene; at those lovely forms, dark and fair, so dissimilar in type, scattered around me in the grass, I would gaze without emptying them, perhaps, of all the mediocre contents with which my everyday experience had filled them, and at the same time without expressly recalling their heavenly origin, as if, like young Hercules or young Telemachus, I had been set to play amid a band of nymphs.

Then the concerts ended, the bad weather began, my friends left Balbec; not all at once, like the swallows, but all in the same week. Albertine was the first to go, abruptly, without any of her friends understanding, then or afterwards, why she had returned suddenly to Paris whither neither her work nor any amusement summoned her. “She said neither why nor wherefore, and with that she left!” muttered Françoise, who, for that matter, would have liked us to leave as well. We were, she thought, inconsiderate towards the staff, now greatly reduced in number, but retained on account of the few visitors who were still staying on, and towards the manager who was ‘just eating up money.’ It was true that the hotel, which would very soon be closed for the winter, had long since seen most of its patrons depart, but never had it been so attractive. This view was not shared by the manager; from end to end of the rooms in which we sat shivering, and and at the doors of which no page now stood on guard, he paced the corridors, wearing a new frock coat, so well tended by the hairdresser that his insipid face appeared to be made of some composition in which, for one part of flesh, there were three of cosmetics, incessantly changing his neckties. (These refinements cost less than having the place heated and keeping on the staff, just as a man who is no longer able to subscribe ten thousand francs to a charity can still parade his generosity without inconvenience to himself by tipping the boy who brings him a telegram with five.) He appeared to be inspecting the empty air, to be seeking to give, by the smartness of his personal appearance, a provisional splendour to the desolation that could now be felt in this hotel where the season had not been good, and walked like the ghost of a monarch who returns to haunt the ruins of what was once his palace. He was particularly annoyed when the little local railway company, finding the supply of passengers inadequate, discontinued its trains until the following spring. “What is lacking

here," said the manager, "is the means of commotion." In spite of the deficit which his books shewed, he was making plans for the future on a lavish scale. And as he was, after all, capable of retaining an exact memory of fine language when it was directly applicable to the hotel-keeping industry and had the effect of enhancing its importance: "I was not adequately supported, although in the dining room I had an efficient squad," he explained; "but the pages left something to be desired. You will see, next year, what a phalanx I shall collect." In the meantime the suspension of the services of the B. C. B. obliged him to send for letters and occasionally to dispatch visitors in a light cart. I would often ask leave to sit by the driver, and in this way I managed to be out in all weathers, as in the winter that I had spent at Combray.

Sometimes, however, the driving rain kept my grandmother and me, the Casino being closed, in rooms almost completely deserted, as in the lowest hold of a ship when a storm is raging; and there, day by day, as in the course of a sea-voyage, a new person from among those in whose company we had spent three months without getting to know them, the chief magistrate from Caen, the leader of the Cherbourg bar, an American lady and her daughters, came up to us, started conversation, discovered some way of making the time pass less slowly, revealed some social accomplishment, taught us a new game, invited us to drink tea or to listen to music, to meet them at a certain hour, to plan together some of those diversions which contain the true secret of pleasure-giving, which is to aim not at giving pleasure but simply at helping us to pass the time of our boredom, in a word, formed with us, at the end of our stay at Balbec, ties of friendship which, in a day or two, their successive departures from the place would sever. I even made the acquaintance of the rich young man, of one of his pair of aristocratic friends and of the actress, who had reappeared for a few days; but their little society was composed now of three persons only, the other friend having returned to Paris. They asked me to come out to dinner with them at their restaurant. I think, they were just as well pleased that I did not accept. But they had given the invitation in the most friendly way imaginable, and albeit it came actually from the rich young man, since the others were only his guests, as the friend who was staying with him, the Marquis Maurice de Vaudémont, came of a very good family indeed, instinctively the actress, in asking me whether I would not come, said, to flatter my vanity: "Maurice will be so pleased."

And when in the hall of the hotel I met them all three together, it was M. de Vaudémont (the rich young man effacing himself) who said to me: "Won't you give us the pleasure of dining with us?"

On the whole I had derived very little benefit from Balbec, but this only strengthened my desire to return there. It seemed to me that I had not stayed there long enough. This was not what my friends at home were thinking, who wrote to ask whether I meant to stay there for the rest of my life. And when I saw that it was the name ‘Balbec’ which they were obliged to put on the envelope — just as my window looked out not over a landscape or a street but on to the plains of the sea, as I heard through the night its murmur to which I had before going to sleep entrusted my ship of dreams, I had the illusion that this life of promiscuity with the waves must effectively, without my knowledge, pervade me with the notion of their charm, like those lessons which one leams by heart while one is asleep.

The manager offered to reserve better rooms for me next year, but I had now become attached to mine, into which I went without ever noticing the scent of flowering grasses, while my mind, which had once found such difficulty in rising to fill its space had come now to take its measurements so exactly that I was obliged to submit it to a reverse process when I had to sleep in Paris, in my own room, the ceiling of which was low.

It was high time, indeed, to leave Balbec, for the cold and damp had become too penetrating for us to stay any longer in a hotel which had neither fireplaces in the rooms nor a central furnace. Moreover, I forgot almost immediately these last weeks of our stay. What my mind’s eye did almost invariably see when I thought of Balbec were the hours which, every morning during the fine weather, as I was going out in the afternoon with Albertine and her friends, my grandmother, following the doctor’s orders, insisted on my spending lying down, with the room darkened. The manager gave instructions that no noise was to be made on my landing, and came up himself to see that they were obeyed. Because the light outside was so strong, I kept drawn for as long as possible the big violet curtains which had adopted so hostile an attitude towards me the first evening. But as, in spite of the pins with which, so that the light should not enter, Françoise fastened them every night, pins which she alone knew how to unfasten; as in spite of the rugs, the red cretonne table-cover, the various fabrics collected here and there which she fitted in to her defensive scheme, she never succeeded in making them meet exactly, the darkness was not complete, and they allowed to spill over the carpet as it were a scarlet shower of anemone-petals, among which I could not resist the temptation to plunge my bare feet for a moment. And on the wall which faced the window and so was partially lighted, a cylinder of gold with no visible support was placed vertically and moved

slowly along like the pillar of fire which went before the Hebrews in the desert. I went back to bed; obliged to taste without moving, in imagination only, and all at once, the pleasures of games, bathing, walks which the morning prompted, joy made my heart beat thunderingly like a machine set going at full speed but fixed to the ground, which can spend its energy only by turning upon its own axis.

I knew that my friends were on the 'front,' but I did not see them as they passed before the links of the sea's uneven chain, far at the back of which, and nestling amid its bluish peaks like an Italian citadel, one could occasionally, in a clear moment, make out the little town of Rivebelle, drawn in minutest detail by the sun. I did not see my friends, but (while there mounted to my belvedere the shout of the newsboy, the 'journalists' as Françoise used to call them, the shouts of the bathers and of children at play, punctuating like the cries of sea-birds the sound of the gently breaking waves) I guessed their presence, I heard their laughter enveloped like the laughter of the Nereids in the smooth tide of sound that rose to my ears. "We looked up," said Albertine in the evening, "to see if you were coming down. But your shutters were still closed when the concert began." At ten o'clock, sure enough, it broke out beneath my windows. In the intervals in the blare of the instruments, if the tide were high, would begin again, slurred and continuous, the gliding surge of a wave which seemed to enfold the notes of the violin in its crystal spirals and to be spraying its foam over echoes of a submarine music. I grew impatient because no one had yet come with my things, so that I might rise and dress. Twelve o'clock struck, Françoise arrived at last. And for months on end, in this Balbec to which I had so looked forward because I imagined it only as battered by the storm and buried in fogs, the weather had been so dazzling and so unchanging that when she came to open the window I could always, without once being wrong, expect to see the same patch of sunlight folded in the corner of the outer wall, of an unalterable colour which was less moving as a sign of summer than depressing as the colour of a lifeless and composed enamel. And after Françoise had removed her pins from the mouldings of the window-frame, taken down her various cloths, and drawn back the curtains, the summer day which she disclosed seemed as dead, as immemorially ancient as would have been a sumptuously attired dynastic mummy from which our old servant had done no more than pre-cautionally unwind the linen wrappings before displaying it to my gaze, embalmed in its vesture of gold.

The Guermantes Way [Volume 3]

Le Côté de Guermantes (1925)
Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (1889-1930)

Chapter 1

The twittering of the birds at daybreak sounded insipid to Françoise. Every word uttered by the maids upstairs made her jump; disturbed by all their running about, she kept asking herself what they could be doing. In other words, we had moved. Certainly the servants had made no less noise in the attics of our old home; but she knew them, she had made of their comings and goings familiar events. Now she faced even silence with a strained attention. And as our new neighbourhood appeared to be as quiet as the boulevard on to which we had hitherto looked had been noisy, the song (distinct at a distance, when it was still quite faint, like an orchestral *motif*) of a passer-by brought tears to the eyes of a Françoise in exile. And so if I had been tempted to laugh at her in her misery at having to leave a house in which she was ‘so well respected on all sides’ and had packed her trunks with tears, according to the Use of Combray, declaring superior to all possible houses that which had been ours, on the other hand I, who found it as hard to assimilate new as I found it easy to abandon old conditions, I felt myself drawn towards our old servant when I saw that this installation of herself in a building where she had not received from the hall-porter, who did not yet know us, the marks of respect necessary to her moral wellbeing, had brought her positively to the verge of dissolution. She alone could understand what I was feeling; certainly her young footman was not the person to do so; for him, who was as unlike the Combray type as it was possible to conceive, packing up, moving, living in another district, were all like taking a holiday in which the novelty of one’s surroundings gave one the same sense of refreshment as if one had actually travelled; he thought he was in the country; and a cold in the head afforded him, as though he had been sitting in a draughty railway carriage, the delicious sensation of having seen the world; at each fresh sneeze he rejoiced that he had found so smart a place, having always longed to be with people who travelled a lot. And so, without giving him a thought, I went straight to Françoise, who, in return for my having laughed at her tears over a removal which had left me cold, now shewed an icy indifference to my sorrow, but because she shared it. The ‘sensibility’ claimed by neurotic people is

matched by their egotism; they cannot abide the flaunting by others of the sufferings to which they pay an ever increasing attention in themselves. Françoise, who would not allow the least of her own ailments to pass unnoticed, if I were in pain would turn her head from me so that I should not have the satisfaction of seeing my sufferings pitied, or so much as observed. It was the same as soon as I tried to speak to her about our new house. Moreover, having been obliged, a day or two later, to return to the house we had just left, to retrieve some clothes which had been overlooked in our removal, while I, as a result of it, had still a 'temperature,' and like a boa constrictor that has just swallowed an ox felt myself painfully distended by the sight of a long trunk which my eyes had still to digest, Françoise, with true feminine inconstancy, came back saying that she had really thought she would stifle on our old boulevard, it was so stuffy, that she had found it quite a day's journey to get there, that never had she seen such stairs, that she would not go back to live there for a king's ransom, not if you were to offer her millions — a pure hypothesis — and that everything (everything, that is to say, to do with the kitchen and 'usual offices') was much better fitted up in the new house. Which, it is high time now that the reader should be told — and told also that we had moved into it because my grandmother, not having been at all well (though we took care to keep this reason from her), was in need of better air — was a flat forming part of the Hôtel de Guermantes.

At the age when a Name, offering us an image of the unknowable which we have poured into its mould, while at the same moment it connotes for us also an existing place, forces us accordingly to identify one with the other to such a point that we set out to seek in a city for a soul which it cannot embody but which we have no longer the power to expel from the sound of its name, it is not only to towns and rivers that names give an individuality, as do allegorical paintings, it is not only the physical universe which they pattern with differences, people with marvels, there is the social universe also; and so every historic house, in town or country, has its lady or its fairy, as every forest has its spirit, as there is a nymph for every stream. Sometimes, hidden in the heart of its name, the fairy is transformed to suit the life of our imagination by which she lives; thus it was that the atmosphere in which Mme. de Guermantes existed in me, after having been for years no more than the shadow cast by a magic lantern slide or the light falling through a painted window, began to let its colours fade when quite other dreams impregnated it with the bubbling coolness of her flowing streams.

And yet the fairy must perish if we come in contact with the real person to whom her name corresponds, for that person the name then begins to reflect, and she has in her nothing of the fairy; the fairy may revive if we remove ourself from the person, but if we remain in her presence the fairy definitely dies and with her the name, as happened to the family of Lusignan, which was fated to become extinct on the day when the fairy Mélusine should disappear. Then the Name, beneath our successive 'restorations' of which we may end by finding, as their original, the beautiful portrait of a strange lady whom we are never to meet, is nothing more than the mere photograph, for identification, to which we refer in order to decide whether we know, whether or not we ought to bow to a person who passes us in the street. But let a sensation from a bygone year — like those recording instruments which preserve the sound and the manner of the various artists who have sung or played into them — enable our memory to make us hear that name with the particular ring with which it then sounded in our ears, then, while the name itself has apparently not changed, we feel the distance that separates the dreams which at different times its same syllables have meant to us. For a moment, from the clear echo of its warbling in some distant spring, we can extract, as from the little tubes which we use in painting, the exact, forgotten, mysterious, fresh tint of the days which we had believed ourself to be recalling, when, like a bad painter, we were giving to the whole of our past, spread out on the same canvas, the tones, conventional and all alike, of our unprompted memory. Whereas on the contrary, each of the moments that composed it employed, for an original creation, in a matchless harmony, the colour of those days which we no longer know, and which, for that matter, will still suddenly enrapture me if by any chance the name 'Guermantes,' resuming for a moment, after all these years, the sound, so different from its sound to-day, which it had for me on the day of Mile. Percepied's marriage, brings back to me that mauve — so delicate, almost too bright, too new — with which the billowy scarf of the young Duchess glowed, and, like two periwinkle flowers, growing beyond reach and blossoming now again, her two eyes, sunlit with an azure smile. And the name Guermantes of those days is also like one of those little balloons which have been filled wilh oxygen, or some such gas; when I come to explode it, to make it emit what it contains, I breathe the air of the Combray of that year, of that day, mingled with a fragrance of hawthorn blossom blown by the wind from the corner of the square, harbinger of rain, which now sent the sun packing, now let him spread himself over the red woollen carpet to the sacristy, steeping it in a bright geranium scarlet, with that, so to speak, Wagnerian

harmony in its gaiety which makes the wedding service always impressive. But even apart from rare moments such as these, in which suddenly we feel the original entity quiver and resume its form, carve itself out of the syllables now soundless, dead; if, in the giddy rush of daily life, in which they serve only the most practical purposes, names have lost all their colour, like a prismatic top that spins too quickly and seems only grey, when, on the other hand, in our musings we reflect, we seek, so as to return to the past, to slacken, to suspend the perpetual motion by which we are borne alcng, gradually we see once more appear, side by side, but entirely distinct from one another, the tints which in the course of our existence have been successively presented to us by a single name.

What form was assumed in my mind by this name Guermantes when my first nurse — knowing no more, probably, than I know to-day in whose honour it had been composed — sang me to sleep with that old ditty, *Gloire à la Marquise de Guermantes*, or when, some years later, the veteran Maréchal de Guermantes, making my nursery-maid's bosom swell with pride, stopped in the Champs-Elysées to remark: "A fine child that!" and gave me a chocolate drop from his comfit-box, I cannot, of course, now say. Those years of my earliest childhood are no longer a part of myself; they are external to me; I can learn nothing of them save as we learn things that happened before we were born — from the accounts given me by other people. But more recently I find in the period of that name's occupation of me seven or eight different shapes which it has successively assumed; the earliest were the most beautiful; gradually my musings, forced by reality to abandon a position that was no longer tenable, established themselves anew in one slightly less advanced until they were obliged to retire still farther. And, with Mme. de Guermantes, was transformed simultaneously her dwelling, itself also the offspring of that name, fertilised from year to year by some word or other that came to my ears and modulated the tone of my musings; that dwelling of hers reflected them in its very stones, which had turned to mirrors, like the surface of a cloud or of a lake. A dungeon keep without mass, no more indeed than a band of orange light from the summit of which the lord and his lady dealt out life and death to their vassals, had given place — right at the end of that 'Guermantes way' along which, on so many summer afternoons, I retraced with my parents the course of the Vivonne — to that land of bubbling streams where the Duchess taught me to fish for trout and to know the names of the flowers whose red and purple clusters adorned the walls of the neighbouring gardens; then it had been the ancient heritage, famous in song and story, from which the proud race of Guermantes, like a carved and

mellow tower that traverses the ages, had risen already over France when the sky was still empty at those points where, later, were to rise Notre Dame of Paris and Notre Dame of Chartres, when on the summit of the hill of Laon the nave of its cathedral had not yet been poised, like the Ark of the Deluge on the summit of Mount Ararat, crowded with Patriarchs and Judges anxiously leaning from its windows to see whether the wrath of God were yet appeased, carrying with it the types of the vegetation that was to multiply on the earth, brimming over with animals which have escaped even by the towers, where oxen grazing calmly upon the roof look down over the plains of Champagne; when the traveller who left Beauvais at the close of day did not yet see, following him and turning with his road, outspread against the gilded screen of the western sky, the black, ribbed wings of the cathedral. It was, this 'Guermantes,' like the scene of a novel, an imaginary landscape which I could with difficulty picture to myself and longed all the more to discover, set in the midst of real lands and roads which all of a sudden would become alive with heraldic details, within a few miles of a railway station; I recalled the names of the places round it as if they had been situated at the foot of Parnassus or of Helicon, and they seemed precious to me, as the physical conditions — in the realm of topographical science — required for the production of an unaccountable phenomenon. I saw again the escutcheons blazoned beneath the windows of Combray church; their quarters filled, century after century, with all the lordships which, by marriage or conquest, this illustrious house had brought flying to it from all the corners of Germany, Italy and France; vast territories in the North, strong cities in the South, assembled there to group themselves in Guermantes, and, losing their material quality, to inscribe allegorically their dungeon vert, or castle triple-towered argent upon its azure field. I had heard of the famous tapestries of Guermantes, I could see them, mediaeval and blue, a trifle coarse, detach themselves like a floating cloud from the legendary, amaranthine name at the foot of the ancient forest in which Childebert went so often hunting; and this delicate, mysterious background of their lands, this vista of the ages, it seemed to me that, as effectively as by journeying to see them, I might penetrate all their secrets simply by coming in contact for a moment in Paris with Mme. de Guermantes, the princess paramount of the place and lady of the lake, as if her face, her speech must possess the local charm of forest groves and streams, and the same secular peculiarities as the old customs recorded in her archives. But then I had met Saint-Loup; he had told me that the castle had borne the name of Guermantes only since the seventeenth century, when that family had acquired it. They had lived, until then, in the

neighbourhood, but their title was not taken from those parts. The village of Guermantes had received its name from the castle round which it had been built, and so that it should not destroy the view from the castle, a servitude, still in force, traced the line of its streets and limited the height of its houses. As for the tapestries, they were by Boucher, bought in the nineteenth century by a Guermantes with a taste for the arts, and hung, interspersed with a number of sporting pictures of no merit which he himself had painted, in a hideous drawing-room upholstered in ‘adrianople’ and plush. By these revelations Saint-Loup had introduced into the castle elements foreign to the name of Guermantes which made it impossible for me to continue to extract solely from the resonance of the syllables the stone and mortar of its walls. And so, in the heart of the name, was effaced the castle mirrored in its lake, and what now became apparent to me, surrounding Mme. de Guermantes as her dwelling, had been her house in Paris, the Hôtel de Guermantes, limpid like its name, for no material and opaque element intervened to interrupt and blind its transparence. As the word church signifies not only the temple but the assembly of the faithful also, this Hôtel de Guermantes comprised all those who shared the life of the Duchess, but these intimates on whom I had never set eyes were for me only famous and poetic names, and knowing exclusively persons who themselves also were names only, did but enhance and protect the mystery of the Duchess by extending all round her a vast halo which at the most declined in brilliance as its circumference increased.

In the parties which she gave, since I could not imagine the guests as having any bodies, any moustaches, any boots, as making any utterances that were commonplace, or even original in a human and rational way, this whirlpool of names, introducing less material substance than would a phantom banquet or a spectral ball, round that statuette in Dresden china which was Madame de Guermantes, kept for her palace of glass the transparence of a showcase. Then, after Saint-Loup had told me various anecdotes about his cousin’s chaplain, her gardener, and the rest, the Hôtel de Guermantes had become — as the Louvre might have been in days gone by — a kind of castle, surrounded, in the very heart of Paris, by its own domains, acquired by inheritance, by virtue of an ancient right that had quaintly survived, over which she still enjoyed feudal privileges. But this last dwelling itself vanished when we had come to live beside Mme. de Villeparisis in one of the flats adjoining that occupied by Mme. de Guermantes in a wing of the Hôtel. It was one of those old town houses, a few of which are perhaps still to be found, in which the court of honour —

whether they were alluvial deposits washed there by the rising tide of democracy, or a legacy from a more primitive time when the different trades were clustered round the overlord — is flanked by little shops and workrooms, a shoemaker's, for instance, or a tailor's, such as we see nestling between the buttresses of those cathedrals which the aesthetic zeal of the restorer has not swept clear of such accretions; a porter who also does cobbling, keeps hens, grows flowers, and, at the far end, in the main building, a 'Comtesse' who, when she drives out in her old carriage and pair, flaunting on her hat a few nasturtiums which seem to have escaped from the plot by the porter's lodge (with, by the coachman's side on the box, a footman who gets down to leave cards at every aristocratic mansion in the neighbourhood), scatters vague little smiles and waves her hand in greeting to the porter's children and to such of her respectable fellow-tenants as may happen to be passing, who, to her contemptuous affability and levelling pride, seem all the same.

In the house in which we had now come to live, the great lady at the end of the courtyard was a Duchess, smart and still quite young. She was, in fact, Mme. de Guermantes and, thanks to Françoise, I soon came to know all about her household. For the Guermantes (to whom Françoise regularly alluded as the people 'below,' or 'downstairs') were her constant preoccupation from the first thing in the morning when, as she did Mamma's hair, casting a forbidden, irresistible, furtive glance down into the courtyard, she would say: "Look at that, now; a pair of holy Sisters; that'll be for downstairs, surely;" or, "Oh! just look at the fine pheasants in the kitchen window; no need to ask where they came from, the Duke will have been out with his gun!"— until the last thing at night when, if her ear, while she was putting out my night-things, caught a few notes of a song, she would conclude: "They're having company down below; gay doings, I'll be bound;" whereupon, in her symmetrical face, beneath the arch of her now snow-white hair, a smile from her young days, sprightly but proper, would for a moment set each of her features in its place, arranging them in an intricate and special order, as though for a country-dance.

But the moment in the life of the Guermantes which excited the keenest interest in Françoise, gave her the most complete satisfaction and at the same time the sharpest annoyance was that at which, the two halves of the great gate having been thrust apart, the Duchess stepped into her carriage. It was generally a little while after our servants had finished the celebration of that sort of solemn passover which none might disturb, called their midday dinner, during which they were so far taboo that my father himself was not allowed to ring for them,

knowing moreover that none of them would have paid any more attention to the fifth peal than to the first, and that the discourtesy would therefore have been a pure waste of time and trouble, though not without trouble in store for himself. For Françoise (who, in her old age, lost no opportunity of standing upon her dignity) would without fail have presented him, for the rest of the day, with a face covered with the tiny red cuneiform hieroglyphs by which she made visible — though by no means legible — to the outer world the long tale of her griefs and the profound reasons for her dissatisfactions. She would enlarge upon them, too, in a running 'aside,' but not so that we could catch her words. She called this practice — which, she imagined, must be infuriating, 'mortifying' as she herself put it,'vexing' to us —'saying low masses all the blessed day.'

The last rites accomplished, Françoise, who was at one and the same time, as in the primitive church, the celebrant and one of the faithful, helped herself to a final glass, undid the napkin from her throat, folded it after wiping from her lips a stain of watered wine and coffee, slipped it into its ring, turned a doleful eye to thank 'her' young footman who, to shew his zeal in her service, was saying: "Come, ma'am, a drop more of the grape; it's d'licious to-day," and went straight across to the window, which she flung open, protesting that it was too hot to breathe in 'this wretched kitchen.' Dexterously casting, as she turned the latch and let in the fresh air, a glance of studied indifference into the courtyard below, she furtively elicited the conclusion that the Duchess was not ready yet to start, brooded for a moment with contemptuous, impassioned eyes over the waiting carriage, and, this meed of attention once paid to the things of the earth, raised them towards the heavens, whose purity she had already divined from the sweetness of the air and the warmth of the sun; and let them rest on a corner of the roof, at the place where, every spring, there came and built, immediately over the chimney of my bedroom, a pair of pigeons like those she used to hear cooing from her kitchen at Combray.

"Ah! Combray, Combray!" she cried. And the almost singing tone in which she declaimed this invocation might, taken with the Arlesian purity of her features, have made the onlooker suspect her of a Southern origin and that the lost land which she was lamenting was no more, really, than a land of adoption. If so, he would have been wrong, for it seems that there is no province that has not its own South-country; do we not indeed constantly meet Savoyards and Bretons in whose speech we find all those pleasing transpositions of longs and shorts that are characteristic of the Southerner? "Ah, Combray, when shall I look on thee again, poor land! When shall I pass the blessed day among thy

hawthorns, under our own poor lily-oaks, hearing the grasshoppers sing, and the Vivonne making a little noise like someone whispering, instead of that wretched bell from our young master, who can never stay still for half an hour on end without having me run the length of that wicked corridor. And even then he makes out I don't come quick enough; you'd need to hear the bell ring before he has pulled it, and if you're a minute late, away he flies into the most towering rage. Alas, poor Combray; maybe I shall see thee only in death, when they drop me like a stone into the hollow of the tomb. And so, nevermore shall I smell thy lovely hawthorns, so white and all. But in the sleep of death I dare say I shall still hear those three peals of the bell which will have driven me to damnation in this world."

Her soliloquy was interrupted by the voice of the waistcoat-maker downstairs, the same who had so delighted my grandmother once, long ago, when she had gone to pay a call on Mme. de Villeparisis, and now occupied no less exalted a place in Franchise's affections. Having raised his head when he heard our window open, he had already been trying for some time to attract his neighbour's attention, in order to bid her good day. The coquetry of the young girl that Françoise had once been softened and refined for M. Jupien the querulous face of our old cook, dulled by age, ill-temper and the heat of the kitchen fire, and it was with a charming blend of reserve, familiarity and modesty that she bestowed a gracious salutation on the waistcoat-maker, but without making any audible response, for if she did infringe Mamma's orders by looking into the courtyard, she would never have dared to go the length of talking from the window, which would have been quite enough (according to her) to bring down on her 'a whole chapter' from the Mistress. She pointed to the waiting carriage, as who should say: "A fine pair, eh!" though what she actually muttered was: "What an old rattle-trap!" but principally because she knew that he would be bound to answer, putting his hand to his lips so as to be audible without having to shout:

"*You* could have one too if you liked, as good as they have and better, I dare say, only you don't care for that sort of thing."

And Franoise, after a modest, evasive signal of delight, the meaning of which was, more or less: "Tastes differ, you know; simplicity's the rule in this house," shut the window again in case Mamma should come in. These 'you' who might have had more horses than the Guermantes were ourselves, but Jupien was right in saying 'you' since, except for a few purely personal gratifications, such as, when she coughed all day long without ceasing and everyone in the house

was afraid of catching her cold, that of pretending, with an irritating little titter, that she had not got a cold, like those plants that an animal to which they are wholly attached keeps alive with food which it catches, eats and digests for them and of which it offers them the ultimate and easily assimilable residue, Françoise lived with us in full community; it was we who, with our virtues, our wealth, our style of living, must take on ourselves the task of concocting those little sops to her vanity out of which was formed — with the addition of the recognised rights of freely practising the cult of the midday dinner according to the traditional custom, which included a mouthful of air at the window when the meal was finished, a certain amount of loitering in the street when she went out to do her marketing, and a holiday on Sundays when she paid a visit to her niece — the portion of happiness indispensable to her existence. And so it can be understood that Françoise might well have succumbed in those first days of our migration, a victim, in a house where my father's claims to distinction were not yet known, to a malady which she herself called 'wearying,' wearying in the active sense in which the word *ennui* is employed by Corneille, or in the last letters of soldiers who end by taking their own lives because they are wearying for their girls or for their native villages. Françoise's wearying had soon been cured by none other than Jupien, for he at once procured her a pleasure no less keen, indeed more refined than she would have felt if we had decided to keep a carriage. "Very good class, those Juliens," (for Françoise readily assimilated new names to those with which she was already familiar) "very worthy people; you can see it written on their faces." Jupien was in fact able to understand, and to inform the world that if we did not keep a carriage it was because we had no wish for one. This new friend of Françoise was very little at home, having obtained a post in one of the Government offices. A waistcoat-maker first of all, with the 'chit of a girl' whom my grandmother had taken for his daughter, he had lost all interest in the exercise of that calling after his assistant (who, when still little more than a child, had shewn great skill in darning a torn skirt, that day when my grandmother had gone to call on Mme. de Villeparisis) had turned to ladies' fashions and become a seamstress. A prentice hand, to begin with, in a dressmaker's workroom, set to stitch a seam, to fasten a flounce, to sew on a button or to press a crease, to fix a waistband with hooks and eyes, she had quickly risen to be second and then chief assistant, and having formed a connexion of her own among ladies of fashion now worked at home, that is to say in our courtyard, generally with one or two of her young friends from the workroom, whom she had taken on as apprentices. After this, Jupien's presence in the place had ceased to matter. No

doubt the little girl (a big girl by this time) had often to cut out waistcoats still. But with her friends to assist her she needed no one besides. And so Jupien, her uncle, had sought employment outside. He was free at first to return home at midday, then, when he had definitely succeeded the man whose substitute only he had begun by being, not before dinner-time. His appointment to the ‘regular establishment’ was, fortunately, not announced until some weeks after our arrival, so that his courtesy could be brought to bear on her long enough to help Françoise to pass through the first, most difficult phase without undue suffering. At the same time, and without underrating his value to Françoise as, so to speak, a sedative during the period of transition, I am bound to say that my first impression of Jupien had been far from favourable. At a little distance, entirely ruining the effect that his plump cheeks and vivid colouring would otherwise have produced, his eyes, brimming with a compassionate, mournful, dreamy gaze, led one to suppose that he was seriously ill or had just suffered a great bereavement. Not only was he nothing of the sort, but as soon as he opened his mouth (and his speech, by the way, was perfect) he was quite markedly cynical and cold. There resulted from this discord between eyes and lips a certain falsity which was not attractive, and by which he had himself the air of being made as uncomfortable as a guest who arrives in morning dress at a party where everyone else is in evening dress, or as a commoner who having to speak to a Royal Personage does not know exactly how he ought to address him and gets round the difficulty by cutting down his remarks to almost nothing. Jupien’s (here the comparison ends) were, on the contrary, charming. Indeed, corresponding possibly to this overflowing of his face by his eyes (which one ceased to notice when one came to know him), I soon discerned in him a rare intellect, and one of the most spontaneously literary that it has been my privilege to come across, in the sense that, probably without education, he possessed or had assimilated, with the help only of a few books skimmed in early life, the most ingenious turns of speech. The most gifted people that I had known had died young. And so I was convinced that Jupien’s life would soon be cut short. Kindness was among his qualities, and pity, the most delicate and the most generous feelings for others. But his part in the life of Françoise had soon ceased to be indispensable. She had learned to put up with understudies.

Indeed, when a tradesman or servant came to our door with a parcel or message, while seeming to pay no attention and merely pointing vaguely to an empty chair, Françoise so skilfully put to the best advantage the few seconds that he spent in the kitchen, while he waited for Mamma’s answer, that it was very

seldom that the stranger went away without having ineradicably engraved upon his memory the conviction that, if we ‘did not have’ any particular thing, it was because we had ‘no wish’ for it. If she made such a point of other people’s knowing that we ‘had money’ (for she knew nothing of what Saint-Loup used to call partitive articles, and said simply ‘have money,’ ‘fetch water’), of their realising that we were rich, it was not because riches with nothing else besides, riches without virtue, were in her eyes the supreme good in life; but virtue without riches was not her ideal either. Riches were for her, so to speak, a necessary condition of virtue, failing which virtue itself would lack both merit and charm. She distinguished so little between them that she had come in time to invest each with the other’s attributes, to expect some material comfort from virtue, to discover something edifying in riches.

As soon as she had shut the window again, which she did quickly — otherwise Mamma would, it appeared, have heaped on her ‘every conceivable insult’— Françoise began with many groans and sighs to put straight the kitchen table.

“There are some Guermantes who stay in the Rue de la Chaise,” began my father’s valet; “I had a friend who used to be with them; he was their second coachman. And I know a fellow, not my old pal, but his brother-in-law, who did his time in the Army with one of the Baron de Guermantes’s stud grooms. Does your mother know you’re out?” added the valet, who was in the habit, just as he used to hum the popular airs of the season, of peppering his conversation with all the latest witticisms.

Françoise, with the tired eyes of an ageing woman, eyes which moreover saw everything from Combray, in a hazy distance, made out not the witticism that underlay the words, but that there must be something witty in them since they bore no relation to the rest of his speech and had been uttered with considerable emphasis by one whom she knew to be a joker. She smiled at him, therefore, with an air of benevolent bewilderment, as who should say: “Always the same, that Victor!” And she was genuinely pleased, knowing that listening to smart sayings of this sort was akin — if remotely — to those reputable social pleasures for which, in every class of society, people make haste to dress themselves in their best and run the risk of catching cold. Furthermore, she believed the valet to be a friend after her own heart, for he never left off denouncing, with fierce indignation, the appalling measures which the Republic was about to enforce against the clergy. Françoise had not yet learned that our cruellest adversaries are not those who contradict and try to convince us, but

those who magnify or invent reports which may make us unhappy, taking care not to include any appearance of justification, which might lessen our discomfort, and perhaps give us some slight regard for a party which they make a point of displaying to us, to complete our torment, as being at once terrible and triumphant.

"The Duchess must be connected with all that lot," said Françoise, bringing the conversation back to the Guermantes of the Rue de la Chaise, as one plays a piece over again from the andante. "I can't recall who it was told me that one of them had married a cousin of the Duke. It's the same kindred, anyway. Ay, they're a great family, the Guermantes!" she added, in a tone of respect founding the greatness of the family at once on the number of its branches and the brilliance of its connexions, as Pascal founds the truth of Religion on Reason and on the Authority of the Scriptures. For since there was but the single word 'great' to express both meanings, it seemed to her that they formed a single idea, her vocabulary, like cut stones sometimes, shewing thus on certain of its facets a flaw which projected a ray of darkness into the recesses of her mind. "I wonder now if it wouldn't be them that have their castle at Guermantes, not a score of miles from Combray; then they must be kin to their cousin at Algiers, too." My mother and I long asked ourselves who this cousin at Algiers could be until finally we discovered that Françoise meant by the name 'Algiers' the town of Angers. What is far off may be more familiar to us than what is quite near. Françoise, who knew the name 'Algiers' from some particularly unpleasant dates that used to be given us at the New Year, had never heard of Angers. Her language, like the French language itself, and especially that of place-names, was thickly strewn with errors. "I meant to talk to their butler about it. What is it again you call him?" she interrupted herself as though putting a formal question as to the correct procedure, which she went on to answer with: "Oh, of course, it's Antoine you call him!" as though Antoine had been a title. "He's the one who could tell me, but he's quite the gentleman, he is, a great scholar, you'd say they'd cut his tongue out, or that he'd forgotten to learn to speak. He makes no response when you talk to him," went on Françoise, who used 'make response' in the same sense as Mme. de Sévigné. "But," she added, quite untruthfully, "so long as I know what's boiling in my pot, I don't bother my head about what's in other people's. Whatever he is, he's not a Catholic. Besides, he's not a courageous man." (This criticism might have led one to suppose that Françoise had changed her mind about physical bravery which, according to her, in Combray days, lowered men to the level of wild beasts. But it was not so.

‘Courageous’ meant simply a hard worker.) “They do say, too, that he’s thievish as a magpie, but it doesn’t do to believe all one hears. The servants never stay long there because of the lodge; the porters are jealous and set the Duchess against them. But it’s safe to say that he’s a real twister, that Antoine, and his Antoinesse is no better,” concluded Françoise, who, in furnishing the name ‘Antoine’ with a feminine ending that would designate the butler’s wife, was inspired, no doubt, in her act of word-formation by an unconscious memory of the words *chanoine* and*chanoinesse*. If so, she was not far wrong. There is still a street near Notre-Dame called Rue Chanoinesse, a name which must have been given to it (since it was never inhabited by any but male Canons) by those Frenchmen of olden days of whom Françoise was, properly speaking, the contemporary. She proceeded, moreover, at once to furnish another example of this way of forming feminine endings, for she went on: “But one thing sure and certain is that it’s the Duchess that has Guermantes Castle. And it’s she that is the Lady Mayoress down in those parts. That’s always something.”

“I can well believe that it is something,” came with conviction from the footman, who had not detected the irony.

“You think so, do you, my boy, you think it’s something? Why, for folk like them to be Mayor and Mayoress, it’s just thank you for nothing. Ah, if it was mine, that Guermantes Castle, you wouldn’t see me setting foot in Paris, I can tell you. I’m sure a family who’ve got something to go on with, like Monsieur and Madame here, must have queer ideas to stay on in this wretched town rather than get away down to Combray the moment they’re free to start, and no one hindering them. Why do they put off retiring? They’ve got everything they want. Why wait till they’re dead? Ah, if I had only a crust of dry bread to eat and a faggot to keep me warm in winter, a fine time I’d have of it at home in my brother’s poor old house at Combray. Down there you do feel you’re alive; you haven’t all these houses stuck up in front of you, there is so little noise at night-time, you can hear the frogs singing five miles off and more.”

“That must indeed be fine!” exclaimed the young footman with enthusiasm, as though this last attraction had been as peculiar to Combray as the gondola is to Venice. A more recent arrival in the household than my father’s valet, he used to talk to Françoise about things which might interest not himself so much as her. And Françoise, whose face wrinkled up in disgust when she was treated as a mere cook, had for the young footman, who referred to her always as the ‘housekeeper,’ that peculiar tenderness which Princes not of the blood royal feel towards the well-meaning young men who dignify them with a ‘Highness.’

“At any rate one knows what one’s about, there, and what time of year it is. It isn’t like here where you won’t find one wretched buttercup flowering at holy Easter any more than you would at Christmas, and I can’t hear so much as the tiniest angélus ring when I lift my old bones out of bed in the morning. Down there, you can hear every hour; there’s only the one poor bell, but you say to yourself: ‘My brother will be coming in from the field now,’ and you watch the daylight fade, and the bell rings to bless the fruits of the earth, and you have time to take a turn before you light the lamp. But here it’s daytime and it’s nighttime, and you go to bed, and you can’t say any more than the dumb beasts what you’ve been about all day.”

“I gather Méséglise is a fine place, too, Madame,” broke in the young footman, who found that the conversation was becoming a little too abstract for his liking, and happened to remember having heard us, at table, mention Méséglise.

“Oh! Méséglise, is it?” said Françoise with the broad smile which one could always bring to her lips by uttering any of those names — Méséglise, Combray, Tansonville. They were so intimate a part of her life that she felt, on meeting them outside it, on hearing them used in conversation, a hilarity more or less akin to that which a professor excites in his class by making an allusion to some contemporary personage whose name the students had never supposed could possibly greet their ears from the height of the academic chair. Her pleasure arose also from the feeling that these places were something to her which they were not for the rest of the world, old companions with whom one has shared many delights; and she smiled at them as if she found in them something witty, because she did find there a great part of herself.

“Yes, you may well say so, son, it is a pretty enough place is Méséglise;” she went on with a tinkling laugh, “but how did you ever come to hear tell of Méséglise?”

“How did I hear of Méséglise? But it’s a well-known place; people have told me about it — yes, over and over again,” he assured her with that criminal inexactitude of the informer who, whenever we attempt to form an impartial estimate of the importance that a thing which matters to us may have for other people, makes it impossible for us to succeed.

“I can tell you, it’s better down there, under the cherry trees, than standing before the fire all day.”

She spoke to them even of Eulalie as a good person. For since Eulalie’s death Françoise had completely forgotten that she had loved her as little in her

lifetime as she loved every one whose cupboard was bare, who was dying of hunger, and after that came, like a good for nothing, thanks to the bounty of the rich, to ‘put on airs.’ It no longer pained her that Eulalie had so skilfully managed, Sunday after Sunday, to secure her ‘trifle’ from my aunt. As for the latter, Françoise never left off singing her praises.

“But it was at Combray, surely, that you used to be, with a cousin of Madame?” asked the young footman.

“Yes, with Mme. Octave — oh, a dear, good, holy woman, my poor friends, and a house where there was always enough and to spare, and all of the very best, a good woman, you may well say, who had no pity on the partridges, or the pheasants, or anything; you might turn up five to dinner or six, it was never the meat that was lacking, and of the first quality too, and white wine, and red wine, and everything you could wish.” (Françoise used the word ‘pity’ in the sense given it by Labruyère.) “It was she that paid the damages, always, even if the family stayed for months and years.” (This reflection was not really a slur upon us, for Françoise belonged to an epoch when the words ‘damages’ was not restricted to a legal use and meant simply expense.) “Ah, I can tell you, people didn’t go empty away from that house. As his reverence the Curé has told us, many’s the time, if there ever was a woman who could count on going straight before the Throne of God, it was she. Poor Madame, I can hear her saying now, in the little voice she had: ‘You know, Françoise, I can eat nothing myself, but I want it all to be just as nice for the others as if I could.’ They weren’t for her, the victuals, you may be quite sure. If you’d only seen her, she weighed no more than a bag of cherries; there wasn’t that much of her. She would never listen to a word I said, she would never send for the doctor. Ah, it wasn’t in that house that you’d have to gobble down your dinner. She liked her servants to be fed properly. Here, it’s been just the same again to-day; we haven’t had time for so much as to break a crust of bread; everything goes like ducks and drakes.”

What annoyed her more than anything were the rusks of pulled bread that my father used to eat. She was convinced that he had them simply to give himself airs and to keep her ‘dancing.’ “I can tell you frankly,” the young footman assured her, “that I never saw the like.” He said it as if he had seen everything, and as if in him the range of a millennial experience extended over all countries and their customs, among which was not anywhere to be found a custom of eating pulled bread. “Yes, yes,” the butler muttered, “but that will all be changed; the men are going on strike in Canada, and the Minister told Monsieur the other evening that he’s clearing two hundred thousand francs out

of it." There was no note of censure in his tone, not that he was not himself entirely honest, but since he regarded all politicians as unsound the crime of peculation seemed to him less serious than the pettiest larceny. He did not even stop to ask himself whether he had heard this historic utterance aright, and was not struck by the improbability that such a thing would have been admitted by the guilty party himself to my father without my father's immediately turning him out of the house. But the philosophy of Combray made it impossible for Françoise to expect that the strikes in Canada could have any repercussion on the use of pulled bread. "So long as the world goes round, look, there'll be masters to keep us on the trot, and servants to do their bidding." In disproof of this theory of perpetual motion, for the last quarter of an hour my mother (who probably did not employ the same measures of time as Françoise in reckoning the duration of the latter's dinner) had been saying:

"What on earth can they be doing? They've been at least two hours at their dinner."

And she rang timidly three or four times. Françoise, 'her' footman, the butler, heard the bell ring, not as a summons to themselves, and with no thought of answering it, but rather like the first sounds of the instruments being tuned when the next part of a concert is just going to begin, and one knows that there will be only a few minutes more of interval. And so, when the peals were repeated and became more urgent, our servants began to pay attention, and, judging that they had not much time left and that the resumption of work was at hand, at a peal somewhat louder than the rest gave a collective sigh and went their several ways, the footman slipping downstairs to smoke a cigarette outside the door, Françoise, after a string of reflexions on ourselves, such as: "They've got the jumps to-day, surely," going up to put her things tidy in her attic, while the butler, having supplied himself first with note-paper from my bedroom, polished off the arrears of his private correspondence.

Despite the apparent stiffness of their butler, Françoise had been in a position, from the first, to inform me that the Guermantes occupied their mansion by virtue not of an immemorial right but of a quite recent tenancy, and that the garden over which it looked on the side that I did not know was quite small and just like all the gardens along the street; and I realised at length that there were not to be seen there pit and gallows or fortified mill, secret chamber, pillared dovecot, manorial bakehouse or tithe-barn, dungeon or drawbridge, or fixed bridge either for that matter, any more than toll-houses or pinnacles, charters, muniments, ramparts or commemorative mounds. But just as Elstir,

when the bay of Balbec, losing its mystery, had become for me simply a portion, interchangeable with any other, of the total quantity of salt water distributed over the earth's surface, had suddenly restored to it a personality of its own by telling me that it was the gulf of opal, painted by Whistler in his 'Harmonies in Blue and Silver,' so the name Guermantes had seen perish under the strokes of Françoise's hammer the last of the dwellings that had issued from its syllables when one day an old friend of my father said to us, speaking of the Duchess: "She is the first lady in the Faubourg Saint-Germain; hers is the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain." No doubt the most exclusive drawing-room, the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain was little or nothing after all those other mansions of which in turn I had dreamed. And yet in this one too (and it was to be the last of the series), there was something, however humble, quite apart from its material components, a secret differentiation.

And it became all the more essential that I should be able to explore in the drawing-room of Mme. de Guermantes, among her friends, the mystery of her name, since I did not find it in her person when I saw her leave the house in the morning on foot, or in the afternoon in her carriage. Once before, indeed, in the church at Combray, she had appeared to me in the blinding flash of a transfiguration, with cheeks irreducible to, impenetrable by, the colour of the name Guermantes and of afternoons on the banks of the Vivonne, taking the place of my shattered dream like a swan or willow into which has been changed a god or nymph, and which henceforward, subjected to natural laws, will glide over the water or be shaken by the wind. And yet, when that radiance had vanished, hardly had I lost sight of it before it formed itself again, like the green and rosy afterglow of sunset after the sweep of the oar has broken it, and in the solitude of my thoughts the name had quickly appropriated to itself my impression of the face. But now, frequently, I saw her at her window, in the courtyard, in the street, and for myself at least if I did not succeed in integrating in her the name Guermantes, I cast the blame on the impotence of my mind to accomplish the whole act that I demanded of it; but she, our neighbour, she seemed to make the same error, nay more to make it without discomfiture, without any of my scruples, without even suspecting that it was an error. Thus Mme. de Guermantes shewed in her dresses the same anxiety to follow the fashions as if, believing herself to have become simply a woman like all the rest, she had aspired to that elegance in her attire in which other ordinary women might equal and perhaps surpass her; I had seen her in the street gaze admiringly at a well-dressed actress; and in the morning, before she sallied forth on foot, as

if the opinion of the passers-by, whose vulgarity she accentuated by parading familiarly through their midst her inaccessible life, could be a tribunal competent to judge her, I would see her before the glass playing, with a conviction free from all pretence or irony, with passion, with ill-humour, with conceit, like a queen who has consented to appear as a servant-girl in theatricals at court, this part, so unworthy of her, of a fashionable woman; and in this mythological oblivion of her natural grandeur, she looked to see whether her veil was hanging properly, smoothed her cuffs, straightened her cloak, as the celestial swan performs all the movements natural to his animal species, keeps his eyes painted on either side of his beak without putting into them any glint of life, and darts suddenly after a bud or an umbrella, as a swan would, without remembering that he is a god. But as the traveller, disappointed by the first appearance of a strange town, reminds himself that he will doubtless succeed in penetrating its charm if he visits its museums and galleries, so I assured myself that, had I been given the right of entry into Mme. de Guermantes's house, were I one of her friends, were I to penetrate into her life, I should then know what, within its glowing orange-tawny envelope, her name did really, objectively enclose for other people, since, after all, my father's friend had said that the Guermantes set was something quite by itself in the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

The life which I supposed them to lead there flowed from a source so different from anything in my experience, and must, I felt, be so indissolubly associated with that particular house that I could not have imagined the presence, at the Duchess's parties, of people in whose company I myself had already been, of people who really existed. For not being able suddenly to change their nature, they would have carried on conversations there of the sort that I knew; their partners would perhaps have stooped to reply to them in the same human speech; and, in the course of an evening spent in the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, there would have been moments identical with moments that I had already lived. Which was impossible. It was thus that my mind was embarrassed by certain difficulties, and the Presence of Our Lord's Body in the Host seemed to me no more obscure a mystery than this leading house in the Faubourg, situated here, on the right bank of the river, and so near that from my bed, in the morning, I could hear its carpets being beaten. But the line of demarcation that separated me from the Faubourg Saint-Germain seemed to me all the more real because it was purely ideal. I felt clearly that it was already part of the Faubourg, when I saw the Guermantes doormat, spread out beyond that intangible Equator, of which my mother had made bold to say, having like

myself caught a glimpse of it one day when their door stood open, that it was a shocking state. For the rest, how could their dining-room, their dim gallery upholstered in red plush, into which I could see sometimes from our kitchen window, have failed to possess in my eyes the mysterious charm of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to form part of it in an essential fashion, to be geographically situated within it, since to have been entertained to dinner in that room was to have gone into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to have breathed its atmosphere, since the people who, before going to table, sat down by the side of Mme. de Guermantes on the leather-covered sofa in that gallery were all of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. No doubt elsewhere than in the Faubourg, at certain parties, one might see now and then, majestically enthroned amid the vulgar herd of fashion, one of those men who were mere names and varyingly assumed, when one tried to form a picture of them, the aspect of a tournament or of a royal forest. But here, in the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-German, in the drawing-room, in the dim gallery, there were only they. They were wrought of precious materials, the columns that upheld the temple. Indeed for quiet family parties it was from among them only that Mme. de Guermantes might select her guests, and in the dinners for twelve, gathered around the dazzling napery and plate, they were like the golden statues of the Apostles in the Sainte-Chapelle, symbolic, consecrative pillars before the Holy Table. As for the tiny strip of garden that stretched between high walls at the back of the house, where on summer evenings Mme. de Guermantes had liqueurs and orangeade brought out after dinner, how could I not have felt that to sit there of an evening, between nine and eleven, on its iron chairs — endowed with a magic as potent as the leathern sofa — without inhaling the breezes peculiar to the Faubourg Saint-Germain was as impossible as to take a siesta in the oasis of Figuig without thereby being necessarily in Africa. Only imagination and belief can differentiate from the rest certain objects, certain people, and can create an atmosphere. Alas, those picturesque sites, those natural accidents, those local curiosities, those works of art of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, never probably should I be permitted to set my feet among them. And I must content myself with a shiver of excitement as I sighted, from the deep sea (and without the least hope of ever landing there) like an outstanding minaret, like the first palm, like the first signs of some exotic industry or vegetation, the well-trodden doormat of its shore.

But if the Hôtel de Guermantes began for me at its hall-door, its dependencies must be regarded as extending a long way farther, according to the Duke, who, looking on all the other tenants as farmers, peasants, purchasers of

forfeited estates, whose opinion was of no account, shaved himself every morning in his nightshirt at the window, came down into the courtyard, according to the warmth or coldness of the day, in his shirtsleeves, in pyjamas, in a plaid coat of startling colours, with a shaggy nap, in little light-coloured coats shorter than the jackets beneath, and made one of his grooms lead past him at a trot some horse that he had just been buying. More than once, indeed, the horse broke the window of Jupien's shop, whereupon Jupien, to the Duke's indignation, demanded compensation. "If it were only in consideration of all the good that Madame la Duchesse does in the house, here, and in the parish," said M. de Guermantes, "it is an outrage on this fellow's part to claim a penny from us." But Jupien had stuck to his point, apparently not having the faintest idea what 'good' the Duchess had ever done. And yet she did do good, but — since one cannot do good to everybody at once — the memory of the benefits that we have heaped on one person is a valid reason for our abstaining from helping another, whose discontent we thereby make all the stronger. From other points of view than that of charity the quarter appeared to the Duke — and this over a considerable area — to be only an extension of his courtyard, a longer track for his horses. After seeing how a new acquisition trotted by itself he would have it harnessed and taken through all the neighbouring streets, the groom running beside the carriage holding the reins, making it pass to and fro before the Duke who stood on the pavement, erect, gigantic, enormous in his vivid clothes, a cigar between his teeth, his head in the air, his eyeglass scrutinous, until the moment when he sprang on the box, drove the horse up and down for a little to try it, then set off with his new turn-out to pick up his mistress in the Champs-Elysées. M. de Guermantes bade good day, before leaving the courtyard, to two couples who belonged more or less to his world; the first, some cousins of his who, like working-class parents, were never at home to look after their children, since every morning the wife went off to the Schola to study counterpoint and fugue, and the husband to his studio to carve wood and beat leather; and after them the Baron and Baronne de Norpois, always dressed in black, she like a pew-opener and he like a mute at a funeral, who emerged several times daily on their way to church. They were the nephew and niece of the old Ambassador who was our friend, and whom my father had, in fact, met at the foot of the staircase without realising from where he came; for my father supposed that so important a personage, one who had come in contact with the most eminent men in Europe and was probably quite indifferent to the empty distinctions of rank, was hardly likely to frequent the society of these obscure, clerical and narrow-

minded nobles. They had not been long in the place; Jupien, who had come out into the courtyard to say a word to the husband just as he was greeting M. de Guermantes, called him ‘M. Norpois,’ not being certain of his name.

“Monsieur Norpois, indeed! Oh, that really is good! Just wait a little! This individual will be calling you Comrade Norpois next!” exclaimed M. de Guermantes, turning to the Baron. He was at last able to vent his spleen against Jupien who addressed him as ‘Monsieur,’ instead of ‘Monsieur le Duc.’

One day when M. de Guermantes required some information upon a matter of which my father had professional knowledge, he had introduced himself to him with great courtesy. After that, he had often some neighbourly service to ask of my father and, as soon as he saw him begin to come downstairs, his mind occupied with his work and anxious to avoid any interruption, the Duke, leaving his stable-boys, would come up to him in the courtyard, straighten the collar of his great-coat, with the serviceable deftness inherited from a line of royal body-servants in days gone by, take him by the hand, and, holding it in his own, patting it even to prove to my father, with a courtesan’s or courtier’s shamelessness, that he, the Duc de Guermantes, made no bargain about my father’s right to the privilege of contact with the ducal flesh, lead him, so to speak, on leash, extremely annoyed and thinking only how he might escape, through the carriage entrance out into the street. He had given us a sweeping bow one day when we had come in just as he was going out in the carriage with his wife; he was bound to have told her my name; but what likelihood was there of her remembering it, or my face either? And besides, what a feeble recommendation to be pointed out simply as being one of her tenants! Another, more valuable, would have been my meeting the Duchess in the drawing-room of Mme. de Villeparisis, who, as it happened, had just sent word by my grandmother that I was to go and see her, and, remembering that I had been intending to go in for literature, had added that I should meet several authors there. But my father felt that I was still a little young to go into society, and as the state of my health continued to give him uneasiness he did not see the use of establishing precedents that would do me no good.

As one of Mme. de Guermantes’s footmen was in the habit of talking to Françoise, I picked up the names of several of the houses which she frequented, but formed no impression of any of them; from the moment in which they were a part of her life, of that life which I saw only through the veil of her name, were they not inconceivable?

“To-night there’s a big party with a Chinese shadow show at the Princesse

de Parme's," said the footman, "but we shan't be going, because at five o'clock Madame is taking the train to Chantilly, to spend a few days with the Due d'Aumale; but it'll be the lady's maid and valet that are going with her. I'm to stay here. She won't be at all pleased, the Princesse de Parme won't, that's four times already she's written to Madame la Duchesse."

"Then you won't be going down to Guermantes Castle this year?"

"It's the first time we shan't be going there: it's because of the Duke's rheumatics, the doctor says he's not to go there till the hot pipes are in, but we've been there every year till now, right on to January. If the hot pipes aren't ready, perhaps Madame will go for a few days to Cannes, to the Duchesse de Guise, but nothing's settled yet."

"And to the theatre, do you go, sometimes?"

"We go now and then to the Opéra, usually on the evenings when the Princesse de Parme has her box, that's once a week; it seems it's a fine show they give there, plays, operas, everything. Madame refused to subscribe to it herself, but we go all the same to the boxes Madame's friends take, one one night, another another, often with the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duke's cousin's lady. She's sister to the Duke of Bavaria. And so you've got to run upstairs again now, have you?" went on the footman, who, albeit identified with the Guermantes, looked upon masters in general as a political estate, a view which allowed him to treat Françoise with as much respect as if she too were in service with a duchess. "You enjoy good health, ma'am."

"Oh, if it wasn't for these cursed legs of mine! On the plain I can still get along" ('on the plain' meant in the courtyard or in the streets, where Françoise had no objection to walking, in other words 'on a plane surface') "but it's these stairs that do me in, devil take them. Good day to you, sir, see you again, perhaps, this evening."

She was all the more anxious to continue her conversations with the footman after he mentioned to her that the sons of dukes often bore a princely title which they retained until their fathers were dead. Evidently the cult of the nobility, blended with and accommodating itself to a certain spirit of revolt against it, must, springing hereditarily from the soil of France, be very strongly implanted still in her people. For Françoise, to whom you might speak of the genius of Napoleon or of wireless telegraphy without succeeding in attracting her attention, and without her slackening for an instant the movements with which she was scraping the ashes from the grate or laying the table, if she were simply to be told these idiosyncrasies of nomenclature, and that the younger son

of the Duc de Guermantes was generally called Prince d'Oléron, would at once exclaim: "That's fine, that is!" and stand there dazed, as though in contemplation of a stained window in church.

Françoise learned also from the Prince d'Agrigente's valet, who had become friends with her by coming often to the house with notes for the Duchess, that he had been hearing a great deal of talk in society about the marriage of the Marquis de Saint-Loup to Mlle. d'Ambresac, and that it was practically settled.

That villa, that opera-box, into which Mme. de Guermantes transfused the current of her life, must, it seemed to me, be places no less fairylike than her home. The names of Guise, of Parme, of Guermantes-Baviere, differentiated from all possible others the holiday places to which the Duchess resorted, the daily festivities which the track of her bowling wheels bound, as with ribbons, to her mansion. If they told me that in those holidays, in those festivities, consisted serially the life of Mme. de Guermantes, they brought no further light to bear on it. Each of them gave to the life of the Duchess a different determination, but succeeded only in changing the mystery of it, without allowing to escape any of its own mystery which simply floated, protected by a covering, enclosed in a bell, through the tide of the life of all the world. The Duchess might take her luncheon on the shore of the Mediterranean at Carnival time, but, in the villa of Mme. de Guise, where the queen of Parisian society was nothing more, in her white linen dress, among numberless princesses, than a guest like any of the rest, and on that account more moving still to me, more herself by being thus made new, like a star of the ballet who in the fantastic course of a figure takes the place of each of her humbler sisters in succession; she might look at Chinese shadow shows, but at a party given by the Princesse de Parme, listen to tragedy or opera, but from the box of the Princesse de Guermantes.

As we localise in the body of a person all the potentialities of that person's life, our recollections of the people he knows and has just left or is on his way to meet, if, having learned from Françoise that Mme. de Guermantes was going on foot to luncheon with the Princesse de Parme, I saw her, about midday, emerge from her house in a gown of flesh-coloured satin over which her face was of the same shade, like a cloud that rises above the setting sun, it was all the pleasures of the Faubourg Saint-Germain that I saw before me, contained in that small compass, as in a shell, between its twin valves that glowed with roseate nacre.

My father had a friend at the Ministry, one A. J. Moreau, who, to distinguish him from the other Moreaus, took care always to prefix both initials to his name, with the result that people called him, for short, 'A.J.' Well, somehow or other,

this A. J. found himself entitled to a stall at the Opéra-Comique on a gala night, he sent the ticket to my father, and as Berma, whom I had not been again to see since my first disappointment, was to give an act of *Phèdre*, my grandmother persuaded my father to pass it on to me.

To tell the truth, I attached no importance to this possibility of hearing Berma which, a few years earlier, had plunged me in such a state of agitation. And it was not without a sense of melancholy that I realized the fact of my indifference to what at one time I had put before health, comfort, everything. It was not that there had been any slackening of my desire for an opportunity to contemplate close at hand the precious particles of reality of which my imagination caught a broken glimpse. But my imagination no longer placed these in the diction of a great actress; since my visits to Elstir, it was on certain tapestries, certain modern paintings that I had brought to bear the inner faith I had once had in this acting, in this tragic art of Berma; my faith, my desire, no longer coming forward to pay incessant worship to the diction, the attitudes of Berma, the counterpart that I possessed of them in my heart had gradually perished, like those other counterparts of the dead in ancient Egypt which had to be fed continually in order to maintain their originals in eternal life. This art had become a feeble, tawdry thing. No deep-lying soul inhabited it any more.

That evening, as, armed with the ticket my father had received from his friend, I was climbing the grand staircase of the Opera, I saw in front of me a man whom I took at first for M. de Charlus, whose bearing he had; when he turned his head to ask some question of one of the staff I saw that I had been mistaken, but I had no hesitation in placing the stranger in the same class of society, from the way not only in which he was dressed but in which he spoke to the man who took the tickets and to the box-openers who were keeping him waiting. For, apart from personal details of similarity, there was still at this period between any smart and wealthy man of that section of the nobility and any smart and wealthy man of the world of finance or ‘big business’ a strongly marked difference. Where one of the latter would have thought he was giving proof of his exclusiveness by adopting a sharp, haughty tone in speaking to an inferior, the great gentleman, affable, pleasant, smiling, had the air of considering, practising an affectation of humility and patience, a pretence of being just one of the audience, as a privilege of his good breeding. It is quite likely that, on seeing him thus dissemble behind a smile overflowing with good nature the barred threshold of the little world apart which he carried in his person, more than one wealthy banker’s son, entering the theatre at that moment,

would have taken this great gentleman for a person of no importance if he had not remarked in him an astonishing resemblance to the portrait that had recently appeared in the illustrated papers of a nephew of the Austrian Emperor, the Prince of Saxony, who happened to be in Paris at the time. I knew him to be a great friend of the Guermantes. As I reached the attendant I heard the Prince of Saxony (or his double) say with a smile: “I don’t know the number; it was my cousin who told me I had only to ask for her box.”

He may well have been the Prince of Saxony; it was perhaps of the Duchesse de Guermantes (whom, in that event, I should be able to watch in the process of living one of those moments of her unimaginable life in her cousin’s box) that his eyes formed a mental picture when he referred to ‘my cousin who told me I had only to ask for her box,’ so much so that that smiling gaze peculiar to himself, those so simple words caressed my heart (far more gently than would any abstract meditation) with the alternative feelers of a possible happiness and a vague distinction. Whatever he was, in uttering this sentence to the attendant he grafted upon a commonplace evening in my everyday life a potential outlet into a new world; the passage to which he was directed after mentioning the word ‘box’ and along which he now proceeded was moist and mildewed and seemed to lead to subaqueous grottoes, to the mythical kingdom of the water-nymphs. I had before me a gentleman in evening dress who was walking away from me, but I kept playing upon and round him, as with a badly fitting reflector on a lamp, and without ever succeeding in making it actually coincide with him, the idea that he was the Prince of Saxony and was on his way to join the Duchesse de Guermantes. And, for all that he was alone, that idea, external to himself, impalpable, immense, unstable as the shadow projected by a magic lantern, seemed to precede and guide him like that deity, invisible to the rest of mankind, who stands beside the Greek warrior in the hour of battle.

I took my seat, striving all the time to recapture a line from Phèdre which I could not quite remember. In the form in which I repeated it to myself it had not the right number of feet, but as I made no attempt to count them, between its unwieldiness and a classical line of poetry it seemed as though no common measure could exist. It would not have surprised me to learn that I must subtract at least half a dozen syllables from that portentous phrase to reduce it to alexandrine dimensions. But suddenly I remembered it, the irremediable asperities of an inhuman world vanished as if by magic; the syllables of the line at once filled up the requisite measure, what there was in excess floated off with the ease, the dexterity of a bubble of air that rises to burst on the water’s brink.

And, after all, this excrescence with which I had been struggling consisted of but a single foot.

A certain number of orchestra stalls had been offered for sale at the box office and bought, out of snobbishness or curiosity, by such as wished to study the appearance of people whom they might not have another opportunity of seeing at close quarters. And it was indeed a fragment of their true social life, ordinarily kept secret, that one could examine here in public, for, the Princesse de Parme having herself distributed among her friends the seats in stalls, balconies and boxes, the house was like a drawing-room in which everyone changed his place, went to sit here or there wherever he caught sight of a woman whom he knew.

Next to me were some common people who, not knowing the regular subscribers, were anxious to shew that they were capable of identifying them and named them aloud. They went on to remark that these subscribers behaved there as though they were in their own drawing-rooms, meaning that they paid no attention to what was being played. Which was the exact opposite of what did happen. A budding genius who had taken a stall in order to hear Berma thinks only of not soiling his gloves, of not disturbing, of making friends with the neighbour whom chance has put beside him, of pursuing with an intermittent smile the fugitive — avoiding with apparent want of politeness the intercepted gaze of a person of his acquaintance whom he has discovered in the audience and to whom, after a thousand indecisions, he makes up his mind to go and talk just as the three hammer-blows from the stage, sounding before he has had time to reach his friend, force him to take flight, like the Hebrews in the Red Sea, through a heaving tide of spectators and spectatresses whom he has obliged to rise and whose dresses he tears as he passes, or tramples on their boots. On the other hand it was because the society people sat in their boxes (behind the general terrace of the balcony, as in so many little drawing-rooms, the fourth walls of which had been removed, or in so many little cafés, to which one might go for refreshment, without letting oneself be intimidated by the mirrors in gilt frames or the red plush seats, in the Neapolitan style, of the establishment), it was because they rested an indifferent hand on the gilded shafts of the columns which upheld this temple of the lyric art, it was because they remained unmoved by the extravagant honours which seemed to be being paid them by a pair of carved figures which held out towards the boxes branches of palm and laurel, that they and they only would have had minds free to listen to the play, if only they had had minds.

At first there was nothing visible but vague shadows, in which one suddenly struck — like the gleam of a precious stone which one cannot see — the phosphorescence of a pair of famous eyes, or, like a medallion of Henri IV on a dark background, the bent profile of the Due d'Aumale, to whom an invisible lady was exclaiming "Monseigneur must allow me to take his coat," to which the Prince replied, "Oh, come, come! Really, Madame d'Ambresac." She took it, in spite of this vague prohibition, and was envied by all the rest her being thus honoured.

But in the other boxes, everywhere almost, the white deities who inhabited those sombre abodes had flown for shelter against their shadowy walls and remained invisible. Gradually, however, as the performance went on, their vaguely human forms detached themselves, one by one, from the shades of night which they patterned, and, raising themselves towards the light, allowed their semi-nude bodies to emerge, and rose, and stopped at the limit of their course, at the luminous, shaded surface on which their brilliant faces appeared behind the gaily breaking foam of the feather fans they unfurled and lightly waved, beneath their hyacinthine locks begemmed with pearls, which the flow of the tide seemed to have caught and drawn with it; this side of them, began the orchestra stalls, abode of mortals for ever separated from the transparent, shadowy realm to which, at points here and there, served as boundaries, on its brimming surface, the limpid, mirroring eyes of the water-nymphs. For the folding seats on its shore, the forms of the monsters in the stalls were painted upon the surface of those eyes in simple obedience to the laws of optics and according to their angle of incidence, as happens with those two sections of external reality to which, knowing that they do not possess any soul, however rudimentary, that can be considered as analogous to our own, we should think ourselves mad if we addressed a smile or a glance of recognition: namely, minerals and people to whom we have not been introduced. Beyond this boundary, withdrawing from the limit of their domain, the radiant daughters of the sea kept turning at every moment to smile up at the bearded tritons who clung to the anfractuosities of the cliff, or towards some aquatic demi-god, whose head was a polished stone to which the tides had borne a smooth covering of seaweed, and his gaze a disc of rock crystal. They leaned towards these creatures, offering them sweetmeats; sometimes the flood parted to admit a fresh Nereid who, belated, smiling, apologetic, had just floated into blossom out of the shadowy depths; then, the act ended, having no further hope of hearing the melodious sounds of earth which had drawn them to the surface, plunging back all in a moment the several sisters

vanished into the night. But of all these retreats, to the thresholds of which their mild desire to behold the works of man brought the curious goddesses who let none approach them, the most famous was the cube of semi-darkness known to the world as the stage box of the Princesse de Guermantes.

Like a mighty goddess who presides from far aloft over the sports of lesser deities, the Princess had deliberately remained a little way back on a sofa placed sideways in the box, red as a reef of coral, beside a big, glassy splash of reflexion which was probably a mirror and made one think of the section cut by a ray of sunlight, vertical, clear, liquid, through the flashing crystal of the sea. At once plume and blossom, like certain subaqueous growths, a great white flower, downy as the wing of a bird, fell from the brow of the Princess along one of her cheeks, the curve of which it followed with a pliancy, coquettish, amorous, alive, and seemed almost to enfold it like a rosy egg in the softness of a halcyon's nest. Over her hair, reaching in front to her eyebrows and caught back lower down at the level of her throat, was spread a net upon which those little white shells which are gathered on some shore of the South Seas alternated with pearls, a marine mosaic barely emerging from the waves and at every moment plunged back again into a darkness in the depths of which even then a human presence was revealed by the ubiquitous flashing of the Princess's eyes. The beauty which set her far above all the other fabulous daughters of the dusk was not altogether materially and comprehensively inscribed on her neck, her shoulders, her arms, her figure. But the exquisite, unfinished line of the last was the exact starting point, the inevitable focus of invisible lines which the eye could not help prolonging, marvellous lines, springing into life round the woman like the spectrum of an ideal form projected upon the screen of darkness.

"That's the Princesse de Guermantes," said my neighbour to the gentleman beside her, taking care to begin the word 'Princesse' with a string of P's, to shew that a title like that was absurd. "She hasn't been sparing with her pearls. I'm sure, if I had as many as that, I wouldn't make such a display of them; it doesn't look at all well, not to my mind."

And yet, when they caught sight of the Princess, all those who were looking round to see who was in the audience felt springing up for her in their hearts the rightful throne of beauty. Indeed, with the Duchesse de Luxembourg, with Mme. de Morienval, with Mme. de Saint-Euverte, and any number of others, what enabled one to identify their faces would be the juxtaposition of a big red nose to a hare-lip, or of a pair of wrinkled cheeks to a faint moustache. These features were nevertheless sufficient in themselves to attract the eye, since having merely

the conventional value of a written document they gave one to read a famous and impressive name; but also they gave one, cumulatively, the idea that ugliness had about it something aristocratic, and that it was unnecessary that the face of a great lady, provided it was distinguished, should be beautiful as well. But like certain artists who, instead of the letters of their names, set at the foot of their canvas a form that is beautiful in itself, a butterfly, a lizard, a flower, so it was the form of a delicious face and figure that the Princess had put in the corner of her box, thereby shewing that beauty can be the noblest of signatures; for the presence there of Mme. de Guermantes-Bavière, who brought to the theatre only such persons as at other times formed part of her intimate circle, was in the eyes of specialists in aristocracy the best possible certificate of the authenticity of the picture which her box presented, a sort of evocation of a scene in the ordinary private life of the Princess in her palaces in Munich and in Paris.

Our imagination being like a barrel organ out of order, which always plays some other tune than that shewn on its card, every time that I had heard any mention of the Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière, a recollection of certain sixteenth-century masterpieces had begun singing in my brain. I was obliged to rid myself quickly of this association, now that I saw her engaged in offering crystallised fruit to a stout gentleman in a swallowtail coat. Certainly I was very far from the conclusion that she and her guests were mere human beings like the rest of the audience. I understood that what they were doing there was all only a game, and that as a prelude to the acts of their real life (of which, presumably, this was not where they spent the important part) they had arranged, in obedience to a ritual unknown to me, they were feigning to offer and decline sweetmeats, a gesture robbed of its ordinary significance and regulated beforehand like the step of a dancer who alternately raises herself on her toes and circles about an upheld scarf. For all I knew, perhaps at the moment of offering him her sweetmeats the goddess was saying, with that note of irony in her voice (for I saw her smile): “Do have one, won’t you?” What mattered that to me? I should have found a delicious refinement in the deliberate dryness, in the style of Mérimée or Meilhac, of such words addressed by a goddess to a demi-god who, conscious himself what were the sublime thoughts which they both had in their minds, in reserve, doubtless, until the moment when they would begin again to live their true life, consenting to join in the game, was answering with the same mysterious bitterness: “Thanks; I should like a cherry.” And I should have listened to this dialogue with the same avidity as to a scene from *Le Mari de la Débutante*, where the absence of poetry, of lofty thoughts, things so

familiar to me which, I suppose, Meilhac could easily, had he chosen, have put into it a thousand times over, seemed to me in itself a refinement, a conventional refinement and therefore all the more mysterious and instructive.

"That fat fellow is the Marquis de Ganançay," came in a knowing tone from the man next to me, who had not quite caught the name whispered in the row behind.

The Marquis de Palancy, his face bent downwards at the end of his long neck, his round bulging eye glued to the glass of his monocle, was moving with a leisurely displacement through the transparent shade and appeared no more to see the public in the stalls than a fish that drifts past, unconscious of the press of curious gazers, behind the glass wall of an aquarium. Now and again he paused, a venerable, wheezing monument, and the audience could not have told whether he was in pain, asleep, swimming, about to spawn, or merely taking breath. No one else aroused in me so much envy as he, on account of his apparent familiarity with this box and the indifference with which he allowed the Princess to hold out to him her box of sweetmeats; throwing him, at the same time, a glance from her fine eyes, cut in a pair of diamonds which at such moments wit and friendliness seemed to liquefy, whereas, when they were at rest, reduced to their purely material beauty, to their mineral brilliance alone, if the least reflected flash disturbed them ever so slightly, they set the darkness ablaze with inhuman horizontal splendid fires. But now, because the act of *Phèdre* in which Berma was playing was due to start, the Princess came to the front of the box; whereupon, as if she herself were a theatrical production, in the zone of light which she traversed, I saw not only the colour but the material of her adornments change. And in the box, dry now, emerging, a part no longer of the watery realm, the Princess, ceasing to be a Nereid, appeared turbanned in white and blue like some marvellous tragic actress dressed for the part of Zaïre, or perhaps of Orosmane; finally, when she had taken her place in the front row I saw that the soft halcyon's nest which tenderly shielded the rosy nacre of her cheeks was — downy, dazzling, velvety, an immense bird of paradise.

But now my gaze was diverted from the Princesse de Guermantes's box by a little woman who came in, ill-dressed, plain, her eyes ablaze with indignation, followed by two young men, and sat down a few places from me. At length the curtain went up. I could not help being saddened by the reflexion that there remained now no trace of my old disposition, at the period when, so as to miss nothing of the extraordinary phenomenon which I would have gone to the ends of the earth to see, I kept my mind prepared, like the sensitive plates which

astronomers take out to Africa, to the West Indies, to make and record an exact observation of a comet or an eclipse; when I trembled for fear lest some cloud (a fit of ill humour on the artist's part or an incident in the audience) should prevent the spectacle from presenting itself with the maximum of intensity; when I should not have believed that I was watching it in the most perfect conditions had I not gone to the very theatre which was consecrated to it like an altar, in which I then felt to be still a part of it, though an accessory part only, the officials with their white carnations, appointed by her, the vaulted balcony covering a pit filled with a shabbily dressed crowd, the women selling programmes that had her photograph, the chestnut trees in the square outside, all those companions, those confidants of my impressions of those days which seemed to me to be inseparable from them. Phèdre, the 'Declaration Scene,' Berma, had had then for me a sort of absolute existence. Standing aloof from the world of current experience they existed by themselves, I must go to meet them, I should penetrate what I could of them, and if I opened my eyes and soul to their fullest extent I should still absorb but a very little of them. But how pleasant life seemed to me: the triviality of the form of it that I myself was leading mattered nothing, no more than the time we spend on dressing, on getting ready to go out, since, transcending it, there existed in an absolute form, good and difficult to approach, impossible to possess in their entirety, those more solid realities,*Phèdre* and the way in which Berma spoke her part. Steeped in these dreams of perfection in the dramatic art (a strong dose of which anyone who had at that time subjected my mind to analysis at any moment of the day or even the night would have been able to prepare from it), I was like a battery that accumulates and stores up electricity. And a time had come when, ill as I was, even if I had believed that I should die of it, I should still have been compelled to go and hear Berma. But now, like a hill which from a distance seems a patch of azure sky, but, as we draw nearer, returns to its place in our ordinary field of vision, all this had left the world of the absolute and was no more than a thing like other things, of which I took cognisance because I was there, the actors were people of the same substance as the people I knew, trying to speak in the best possible way these lines of *Phèdre*, which themselves no longer formed a sublime and individual essence, distinct from everything else, but were simply more or less effective lines ready to slip back into the vast corpus of French poetry, of which they were merely a part. I felt a discouragement that was all the more profound in that, if the object of my headstrong and active desire no longer existed, the same tendencies, on the other hand, to indulge in a perpetual dream,

which varied from year to year but led me always to sudden impulses, regardless of danger, still persisted. The day on which I rose from my bed of sickness and set out to see, in some country house or other, a picture by Elstir or a mediaeval tapestry, was so like the day on which I ought to have started for Venice, or that on which I did go to hear Berma, or start for Balbec, that I felt before going that the immediate object of my sacrifice would, after a little while, leave me cold, that then I might pass close by the place without stopping even to look at that picture, those tapestries for which I would at this moment risk so many sleepless nights, so many hours of pain. I discerned in the instability of its object the vanity of my effort, and at the same time its vastness, which I had not before noticed, like a neurasthenic whose exhaustion we double by pointing out to him that he is exhausted. In the meantime my musings gave a distinction to everything that had any connexion with them. And even in my most carnal desires, magnetised always in a certain direction, concentrated about a single dream, I might have recognised as their primary motive an idea, an idea for which I would have laid down my life, at the innermost core of which, as in my day dreams while I sat reading all afternoon in the garden at Combray, lay the thought of perfection.

I no longer felt the same indulgence as on the former occasion towards the deliberate expressions of affection or anger which I had then remarked in the delivery and gestures of Aricie, Ismène and Hippolyte. It was not that the players — they were the same, by the way — did not still seek, with the same intelligent application, to impart now a caressing inflexion, or a calculated ambiguity to their voices, now a tragic amplitude, or a suppliant meekness to their movements. Their intonations bade the voice: “Be gentle, sing like a nightingale, caress and woo”; or else, “now wax furious,” and then hurled themselves upon it, trying to carry it off with them in their frenzied rush. But it, mutinous, independent of their diction, remained unalterably their natural voice with its material defects or charms, its everyday vulgarity or affectation, and thus presented a sum-total of acoustic or social phenomena which the sentiment contained in the lines they were repeating was powerless to alter.

Similarly the gestures of the players said to their arms, to their garments: “Be majestic.” But each of these unsubmissive members allowed to flaunt itself between shoulder and elbow a biceps which knew nothing of the part; they continued to express the triviality of everyday life and to bring into prominence, instead of fine shades of Racinian meaning, mere muscular attachments; and the draperies which they held up fell back again along vertical lines in which the

natural law that governs falling bodies was challenged only by an insipid textile pliancy. At this point the little woman who was sitting near me exclaimed:

"Not a hand! Did you ever see such a get-up? She's too old; she can't play the part; she ought to have retired ages ago."

Amid a sibilant protest from their neighbours the two young men with her succeeded in making her keep quiet and her fury raged now only in her eyes. This fury could, moreover, be prompted only by the thought of success, of fame, for Berma, who had earned so much money, was overwhelmed with debts. Since she was always making business or social appointments which she was prevented from keeping, she had messengers flying with apologies along every street in Paris, and what with rooms in hotels which she would never occupy engaged in advance, oceans of scent to bathe her dogs, heavy penalties for breaches of contract with all her managers, failing any more serious expense and being not so voluptuous as Cleopatra, she would have found the means of squandering on telegrams and jobmasters provinces and kingdoms. But the little woman was an actress who had never tasted success, and had vowed a deadly hatred against Berma. The latter had just corne on to the stage. And then — oh, the miracle — like those lessons which we laboured in vain to learn overnight, and find intact, got by heart, on waking up next morning, like, too, those faces of dead friends which the impassioned efforts of our memory pursue without recapturing them, and which, when we are no longer thinking of them, are there before our eyes just as they were in life — the talent of Berma, which had evaded me when I sought so greedily to seize its essential quality, now, after these years of oblivion, in this hour of indifference, imposed itself, with all the force of a thing directly seen, on my admiration. Formerly, in my attempts to isolate the talent, I deducted, so to speak, from what I heard the part itself, a part common to all the actresses who appeared as Phèdre, which I had myself studied beforehand so that I might be capable of subtracting it, of receiving in the strained residue only the talent of Mme. Berma. But this talent which I sought to discover outside the part itself was indissolubly one with it. So with a great musician (it appears that this was the case with Vinteuil when he played the piano), his playing is that of so fine a pianist that one cannot even be certain whether the performer is a pianist at all, since (not interposing all that mechanism of muscular effort, crowned here and there with brilliant effects, all that spattering shower of notes in which at least the listener who does not quite know where he is thinks that he can discern talent in its material, tangible objectivity) his playing is become so transparent, so full of what he is

interpreting, that himself one no longer sees and he is nothing now but a window opening upon a great work of art. The intentions which surrounded, like a majestic or delicate border, the voice and mimicry of Aricie, Ismène or Hippolyte I had been able to distinguish, but Phèdre had taken hers into herself, and my mind had not succeeded in wresting from her diction and attitudes, in apprehending in the miserly simplicity of their unbroken surfaces those treasures, those effects of which no sign emerged, so completely had they been absorbed. Berma's voice, in which not one atom of lifeless matter refractory to the mind remained undissolved, did not allow any sign to be discernible around it of that overflow of tears which one could feel, because they had not been able to absorb it in themselves, trickling over the marble voice of Aricie or Ismène, but had been brought to an exquisite perfection in each of its tiniest cells like the instrument of a master violinist, in whom one means, when one says that his music has a fine sound, to praise not a physical peculiarity but a superiority of soul; and, as in the classical landscape where in the place of a vanished nymph there is an inanimate waterspring, a clear and concrete intention had been transformed into a certain quality of tone, strangely, appropriately, coldly limpid. Berma's arms, which the lines themselves, by the same dynamic force that made the words issue from her lips, seemed to raise on to her bosom like leaves disturbed by a gush oî water; her attitude, on the stage, which she had gradually built up, which she was to modify yet further, and which was based upon reasonings of a different profundity from those of which traces might be seen in the gestures of her fellow-actors, but of reasonings that had lost their original deliberation, and had melted into a sort of radiance in which they sent throbbing, round the person of the heroine, elements rich and complex, but which the fascinated spectator took not as an artistic triumph but as a natural gift; those white veils themselves, which, tenuous and clinging, seemed to be of a living substance and to have been woven by the suffering, half-pagan, half-Jansenist, around which they drew close like a frail, shrinking chrysalis; all of them, voice, attitude, gestures, veils, were nothing more, round this embodiment of an idea, which a line of poetry is (an embodiment that, unlike our human bodies, covers the soul not with an opaque screen which prevents us from seeing it, but with a purified, a quickened garment through which the soul is diffused and we discover it), than additional envelopes which instead of concealing shewed up in greater splendour the soul that had assimilated them to itself and had spread itself through them, than layers of different substances, grown translucent, the interpolation of which has the effect only of causing a richer refraction of the

imprisoned, central ray that pierces through them, and of making more extensive, more precious and more fair the matter purified by fire in which it is enshrined. So Berma's interpretation was, around Racine's work, a second work, quickened also by the breath of genius.

My own impression, to tell the truth, though more pleasant than on the earlier occasion, was not really different. Only, I no longer put it to the test of a pre-existent, abstract and false idea of dramatic genius, and I understood now that dramatic genius was precisely this. It had just occurred to me that if I had not derived any pleasure from my first hearing of Berma, it was because, as earlier still when I used to meet Gilberte in the Champs-Elysées, I had come to her with too strong a desire. Between my two disappointments there was perhaps not only this resemblance, but another more profound. The impression given us by a person or a work (or a rendering, for that matter) of marked individuality is peculiar to that person or work. We have brought to it the ideas of 'beauty,' 'breadth of style,' 'pathos' and so forth which we might, failing anything better, have had the illusion of discovering in the commonplace show of a 'correct' face or talent, but our critical spirit has before it the insistent challenge of a form of which it possesses no intellectual equivalent, in which it must detect and isolate the unknown element. It hears a shrill sound, an oddly interrogative intonation. It asks itself: "Is that good? Is what I am feeling just now admiration? Is that richness of colouring, nobility, strength?" And what answers it again is a shrill voice, a curiously questioning tone, the despotic impression caused by a person whom one does not know, wholly material, in which there is no room left for 'breadth of interpretation.' And for this reason it is the really beautiful works that, if we listen to them with sincerity, must disappoint us most keenly, because in the storehouse of our ideas there is none that corresponds to an individual impression.

This was precisely what Berma's acting shewed me. This was what was meant by nobility, by intelligence of diction. Now I could appreciate the worth of a broad, poetical, powerful interpretation, or rather it was to this that those epithets were conventionally applied, but only as we give the names of Mars, Venus, Saturn to planets which have no place in classical mythology. We feel in one world, we think, we give names to things in another; between the two we can establish a certain correspondence, but not bridge the interval. It was quite narrow, this interval, this fault that I had had to cross when, that afternoon on which I went first to bear Berma, having strained my ears to catch every word, I had found some difficulty in correlating my ideas of 'nobility of interpretation,'

of ‘originality,’ and had broken out in applause only after a moment of unconsciousness and as if my applause sprang not from my actual impression but was connected in some way with my preconceived ideas, with the pleasure that I found in saying to myself: “At last I am listening to Berma.” And the difference that there is between a person, or a work of art which is markedly individual and the idea of beauty, exists just as much between what they make us feel and the idea of love, or of admiration. Wherefore we fail to recognise them. I had found no pleasure in listening to Berma (any more than, earlier still, in seeing Gilberte). I had said to myself: “Well, I do not admire this.” But then I was thinking only of mastering the secret of Berma’s acting, I was preoccupied with that alone, I was trying to open my mind as wide as possible to receive all that her acting contained. I understood now that all this amounted to nothing more nor less than admiration.

This genius of which Berma’s rendering of the part was only the revelation, was it indeed the genius of Racine and nothing more?

I thought so at first. I was soon to be undeceived when the curtain fell on the act from *Phèdre*, amid enthusiastic recalls from the audience, through which the old actress, beside herself with rage, drawing her little body up to its full height, turning sideways in her seat, stiffened the muscles of her face and folded her arms on her bosom to shew that she was not joining the others in their applause, and to make more noticeable a protest which to her appeared sensational though it passed unperceived. The piece that followed was one of those novelties which at one time I had expected, since they were not famous, to be inevitably trivial and of no general application, devoid as they were of any existence outside the performance that was being given of them at the moment. But I had not with them as with a classic the disappointment of seeing the infinity and eternity of a masterpiece occupy no more space or time than the width of the footlights and the length of a performance which would finish it as effectively as a piece written for the occasion. Besides, at every fresh passage which, I felt, had appealed to the audience and would onc day be famous, in place of the fame which it was prevented from having won in the past I added that which it would enjoy in the future, by a mental process the converse of that which consists in imagining masterpieces on the day of their first thin performance, when it seemed inconceivable that a title which no one had ever heard before could one day be set, bathed in the same mellow light, beside those of the author’s other works. And this part would be set one day in the list of her finest impersonations, next to that of Phèdre. Not that in itself it was not destitute of all

literary merit. But Berma was as sublime in one as in the other. I realised then that the work of the playwright was for the actress no more than the material, the nature of which was comparatively unimportant, for the creation of her masterpiece of interpretation, just as the great painter whom I had met at Balbec, Elstir, had found the inspiration for two pictures of equal merit in a school building without any character and a cathedral which was in itself a work of art. And as the painter dissolves houses, carts, people, in some broad effect of light which makes them all alike, so Berma spread out great sheets of terror or tenderness over words that were all melted together in a common mould, lowered or raised to one level, which a lesser artist would have carefully detached from one another. No doubt each of them had an inflexion of its own, and Berma's diction did not prevent one from catching the rhythm of the verse. Is it not already a first element of ordered complexity, of beauty, when, on hearing a rhyme, that is to say something which is at once similar to and different from the preceding rhyme, which was prompted by it, but introduces the variety of a new idea, one is conscious of two systems overlapping each other, one intellectual, the other prosodie? But Berma at the same time made her words, her lines, her whole speeches even, flow into lakes of sound vaster than themselves, at the margins of which it was a joy to see them obliged to stop, to break off; thus it is that a poet takes pleasure in making hesitate for a moment at the rhyming point the word which is about to spring forth, and a composer in merging the various words of his libretto in a single rhythm which contradicts, captures and controls them. Thus into the prose sentences of the modern playwright as into the poetry of Racine Berma managed to introduce those vast images of grief, nobility, passion, which were the masterpieces of her own personal art, and in which she could be recognised as, in the portraits which he has made of different sitters, we recognise a painter.

I had no longer any desire, as on the former occasion, to be able to arrest and perpetuate Berma's attitudes, the fine colour effect which she gave for a moment only in a beam of limelight which at once faded never to reappear, nor to make her repeat a single line a hundred times over. I realised that my original desire had been more exacting than the intentions of the poet, the actress, the great decorative artist who supervised her productions, and that that charm which floated over a line as it was spoken, those unstable poses perpetually transformed into others, those successive pictures were the transient result, the momentary object, the changing masterpiece which the art of the theatre undertook to create and which would perish were an attempt made to fix it for all

time by a too much enraptured listener. I did not even make a resolution to come back another day and hear Berma again. I was satisfied with her; it was when I admired too keenly not to be disappointed by the object of my admiration, whether that object were Gilberte or Berma, that I demanded in advance, of the impression to be received on the morrow, the pleasure that yesterday's impression had refused to afford me. Without seeking to analyse the joy which I had begun now to feel, and might perhaps have been turning to some more profitable use, I said to myself, as in the old days I might have said to one of my schoolfellows: "Certainly, I put Berma first!" not without a confused feeling that Berma's genius was not, perhaps, very accurately represented by this affirmation of my preference, or this award to her of a 'first' place, whatever the peace of mind that it might incidentally restore to me.

Just as the curtain was rising on this second play I looked up at Mme. de Guermantes's box. The Princess was in the act — by a movement that called into being an exquisite line which my mind pursued into the void — of turning her head towards the back of the box; her party were all standing, and also turning towards the back, and between the double hedge which they thus formed, with all the assurance, the grandeur of the goddess that she was, but with a strange meekness which so late an arrival, making every one else get up in the middle of the performance, blended with the white muslin in which she was attired, just as an adroitly compounded air of simplicity, shyness and confusion tempered her triumphant smile, the Duchesse de Guermantes, who had at that moment entered the box, came towards her cousin, made a profound obeisance to a young man with fair hair who was seated in the front row, and turning again towards the amphibian monsters who were floating in the recesses of the cavern, gave to these demi-gods of the Jockey Club — who at that moment, and among them all M. de Palancy in particular, were the men whom I should most have liked to be — the familiar 'good evening' of an old and intimate friend, an allusion to the daily sequence of her relations with them during the last fifteen years. I felt the mystery, but could not solve the riddle of that smiling gaze which she addressed to her friends, in the azure brilliance with which it glowed while she surrendered her hand to one and then to another, a gaze which, could I have broken up its prism, analysed its crystallisation, might perhaps have revealed to me the essential quality of the unknown form of life which became apparent in it at that moment. The Duc de Guermantes followed his wife, the flash of his monocle, the gleam of his teeth, the whiteness of his carnation or of his pleated shirt-front scattering, to make room for their light, the darkness of his eyebrows, lips and

coat; with a wave of his outstretched hand which he let drop on to their shoulders, vertically, without moving his head, he commanded the inferior monsters, who were making way for him, to resume their seats, and made a profound bow to the fair young man. One would have said that the Duchess had guessed that her cousin, of whom, it was rumoured, she was inclined to make fun for what she called her ‘exaggerations’ (a name which, from her own point of view, so typically French and restrained, would naturally be applied to the poetry and enthusiasm of the Teuton), would be wearing this evening one of those costumes in which the Duchess thought of her as ‘dressed up,’ and that she had decided to give her a lesson in good taste. Instead of the wonderful downy plumage which, from the crown of the Princess’s head, fell and swept her throat, instead of her net of shells and pearls, the Duchess wore in her hair only a simple aigrette, which, rising above her arched nose and level eyes, reminded one of the crest on the head of a bird. Her neck and shoulders emerged from a drift of snow-white muslin, against which fluttered a swansdown fan, but below this her gown, the bodice of which had for its sole ornament innumerable spangles (either little sticks and beads of metal, or possibly brilliants), moulded her figure with a precision that was positively British. But different as their two costumes were, after the Princess had given her cousin the chair in which she herself had previously been sitting, they could be seen turning to gaze at one another in mutual appreciation.

Possibly a smile would curve the lips of Mme. de Guermantes when next day she referred to the headdress, a little too complicated, which the Princess had worn, but certainly she would declare that it had been, all the same, quite lovely, and marvellously arranged; and the Princess, whose own tastes found something a little cold, a little austere, a little ‘tailor-made’ in her cousin’s way of dressing, would discover in this rigid sobriety an exquisite refinement. Moreover the harmony that existed between them, the universal and pre-established gravitation exercised by their upbringing, neutralised the contrasts not only in their apparel but in their attitude. By those invisible magnetic longitudes which the refinement of their manners traced between them the expansive nature of the Princess was stopped short, while on the other side the formal correctness of the Duchess allowed itself to be attracted and relaxed, turned to sweetness and charm. As, in the play which was now being performed, to realise how much personal poetry Berma extracted from it one had only to entrust the part which she was playing, which she alone could play, to no matter what other actress, so the spectator who should raise his eyes to the balcony

might see in two smaller boxes there how an ‘arrangement’ supposed to suggest that of the Princesse de Guermantes simply made the Baronne de Morienval appear eccentric, pretentious and ill-bred, while an effort, as painstaking as it must have been costly, to imitate the clothes and style of the Duchesse de Guermantes only made Mme. de Cambremer look like some provincial schoolgirl, mounted on wires, rigid, erect, dry, angular, with a plume of raven’s feathers stuck vertically in her hair. Perhaps the proper place for this lady was not a theatre in which it was only with the brightest stars of the season that the boxes (even those in the highest tier, which from below seemed like great hampers brimming with human flowers and fastened to the gallery on which they stood by the red cords of their plush-covered partitions) composed a panorama which deaths, scandals, illnesses, quarrels would soon alter, but which this evening was held motionless by attention, heat, giddiness, dust, smartness or boredom, in that so to speak everlasting moment of unconscious waiting and calm torpor which, in retrospect, seems always to have preceded the explosion of a bomb or the first flicker of a fire.

The explanation of Mme. de Cambremer’s presence on this occasion was that the Princesse de Parme, devoid of snobbishness as are most truly royal personages, and to make up for this devoured by a pride in and passion for charity which held an equal place in her heart with her taste for what she believed to be the Arts, had bestowed a few boxes here and there upon women like Mme. de Cambremer who were not numbered among the highest aristocratic society but with whom she was connected in various charitable undertakings. Mme. de Cambremer never took her eyes off the Duchesse and Princesse de Guermantes, which was all the simpler for her since, not being actually acquainted with either, she could not be suspected of angling for recognition. Inclusion in the visiting lists of these two great ladies was nevertheless the goal towards which she had been marching for the last ten years with untiring patience. She had calculated that she might reach it, possibly, in five years more. But having been smitten by a relentless malady, the inexorable character of which — for she prided herself upon her medical knowledge — she thought she knew, she was afraid that she might not live so long. This evening she was happy at least in the thought that all these women whom she barely knew would see in her company a man who was one of their own set, the young Marquis de Beausergent, Mme. d’Argencourt’s brother, who moved impartially in both worlds and with whom the women of the second were greatly delighted to bedizen themselves before the eyes of those of the first. He was seated behind

Mme. de Cambremer on a chair placed at an angle, so that he might rake the other boxes with his glasses. He knew everyone in the house, and, to greet his friends, with the irresistible charm of his beautifully curved figure, and fine fair head, he half rose from his seat, stiffening his body, a smile brightening his blue eyes, with a blend of deference and detachment, a picture delicately engraved, in its rectangular frame, and placed at an angle to the wall, like one of those old prints which portray a great nobleman in his courtly pride. He often accepted these invitations to go with Mme. de Cambremer to the play. In the theatre itself, and on their way out, in the lobby, he stood gallantly by her side in the thick of the throng of more brilliant friends whom he saw about him, and to whom he refrained from speaking, to avoid any awkwardness, just as though he had been in doubtful company. If at such moments there swept by him the Princesse de Guermantes, lightfoot and fair as Diana, letting trail behind her the folds of an incomparable cloak, turning after her every head and followed by every eye (and, most of all, by Mme. de Cambremer's), M. de Beausergent would become absorbed in conversation with his companion, acknowledging the friendly and dazzling smile of the Princess only with constraint, under compulsion, and with the well-bred reserve, the considerate coldness of a person whose friendliness might at the moment have been inconvenient.

Had not Mme. de Cambremer known already that the box belonged to the Princess, she could still have told that the Duchesse de Guermantes was the guest from the air of keener interest with which she was surveying the spectacle of stage and stalls, out of politeness to her hostess. But simultaneously with this centrifugal force, an equal and opposite force generated by the same desire to be sociable drew her attention back to her own attire, her plume, her necklace, her bodice and also to that of the Princess, whose subject, whose slave her cousin seemed thus to proclaim herself, come thither solely to see her, ready to follow her elsewhere should it have taken the fancy of the official occupant of the box to rise and leave, and regarding as composed merely of strangers, worth looking at simply as curiosities, the rest of the house, in which, nevertheless, she numbered many friends to whose boxes she regularly repaired on other evenings and with regard to whom she never failed on those occasions to demonstrate a similar loyalism, exclusive, conditional and hebdomadary. Mme. de Cambremer was surprised to see her there that evening. She knew that the Duchess was staying on very late at Guermantes, and had supposed her to be there still. But she had been told, also, that sometimes, when there was some special function in Paris which she considered it worth her while to attend, Mme. de Guermantes

would order one of her carriages to be brought round as soon as she had taken tea with the guns, and, as the sun was setting, start out at a spanking pace through the gathering darkness of the forest, then over the high road, to join the train at Combray and so be in Paris the same evening. “Perhaps she has come up from Guermantes on purpose to hear Berma,” thought Mme. de Cambremer, and marvelled at the thought. And she remembered having heard Swann say in that ambiguous jargon which he used in common with M. de Charlus: “The Duchess is one of the noblest souls in Paris, the cream of the most refined, the choicest society.” For myself, who derived from the names Guermantes, Bavaria and Condé what I imagined to be the life, the thoughts of the two cousins (I could no longer so ascribe their faces, having seen them), I would rather have had their opinion of *Phèdre* than that of the greatest critic in the world. For in his I should have found merely intellect, an intellect superior to my own but similar in kind. But what the Duchesse and Princesse de Guermantes might think, an opinion which would have furnished me with an invaluable clue to the nature of these two poetic creatures, I imagined with the aid of their names, I endowed with an irrational charm, and, with the thirst, the longing of a fever-stricken wretch, what I demanded that their opinion of *Phèdre* should yield to me was the charm of the summer afternoons that I had spent in wandering along the Guermantes way.

Mme. de Cambremer was trying to make out how exactly the cousins were dressed. For my own part, I never doubted that their garments were peculiar to themselves, not merely in the sense in which the livery with red collar or blue facings had belonged once exclusively to the houses of Guermantes and Condé, but rather as is peculiar to a bird the plumage which, as well as being a heightening of its beauty, is an extension of its body. The toilet of these two ladies seemed to me like a materialisation, snow-white or patterned with colour, of their internal activity, and, like the gestures which I had seen the Princesse de Guermantes make, with no doubt in my own mind that they corresponded to some idea latent in hers, the plumes which swept downward from her brow, and her cousin’s glittering spangled bodice seemed each to have a special meaning, to be to one or the other lady an attribute which was hers and hers alone, the significance of which I would eagerly have learned; the bird of paradise seemed inseparable from its wearer as her peacock is from Juno, and I did not believe that any other woman could usurp that spangled bodice, any more than the fringed and flashing aegis of Minerva. And when I turned my eyes to their box, far more than on the ceiling of the theatre, painted with cold and lifeless allegories, it was as though I had seen, thanks to a miraculous rending of the

clouds that ordinarily veiled it, the Assembly of the Gods in the act of contemplating the spectacle of mankind, beneath a crimsor canopy, in a clear lighted space, between two pillars of Heaven. I gazed on this brief transfiguration with a disturbance which was partly soothed by the feeling that I myself was unknown to these Immortals; the Duchess had indeed seen me once with her husband, but could surely have kept no memory of that, and it gave me no pain that she found herself, owing to the place that she occupied in the box, in a position to gaze down upon the nameless, collective madrepores of the public in the stalls, for I had the happy sense that my own personality had been dissolved in theirs, when, at the moment in which, by the force of certain optical laws, there must, I suppose, have come to paint itself on the impassive current of those blue eyes the blurred outline of the protozoon, devoid of any individual existence, which was myself, I saw a ray illumine them; the Duchess, goddess turned woman, and appearing in that moment a thousand times more lovely, raised, pointed in my direction the white-gloved hand which had been resting on the balustrade of the box, waved it at me in token of friendship; my gaze felt itself trapped in the spontaneous incandescence of the flashing eyes of the Princess, who had unconsciously set them ablaze merely by turning her head to see who it might be that her cousin was thus greeting, while the Duchess, who had remembered me, showered upon me the sparkling and celestial torrent of her smile.

And now every morning, long before the hour at which she would appear, I went by a devious course to post myself at the corner of the street along which she generally came, and, when the moment of her arrival seemed imminent, strolled homewards with an air of being absorbed in something else, looking the other way and raising my eyes to her face as I drew level with her, but as though I had not in the least expected to see her. Indeed, for the first few mornings, so as to be sure of not missing her, I waited opposite the house. And every time that the carriage gate opened (letting out one after another so many people who were none of them she for whom I was waiting) its grinding rattle continued in my heart in a series of oscillations which it took me a long time to subdue. For never was devotee of a famous actress whom he did not know, posting himself and patrolling the pavement outside the stage door, never was angry or idolatrous crowd, gathered to insult or to carry in triumph through the streets the condemned assassin or the national hero whom it believes to be on the point of coming whenever a sound is heard from the inside of the prison or the palace, never were these so stirred by their emotion as I was, awaiting the emergence of

this great lady who in her simple attire was able, by the grace of her movements (quite different from the gait she affected on entering a drawing-room or a box), to make of her morning walk — and for me there was no one in the world but herself out walking — a whole poem of elegant refinement and the finest ornament, the most curious flower of the season. But after the third day, so that the porter should not discover my stratagem, I betook myself much farther afield, to some point upon the Duchess's usual route. Often before that evening at the theatre I had made similar little excursions before luncheon when the weather was fine; if it had been raining, at the first gleam of sunshine I would hasten downstairs to take a turn, and if, suddenly, coming towards me, on the still wet pavement changed by the sun into a golden lacquer, in the transformation scene of a crossroads dusty with a grey mist which the sun tanned and gilded, I caught sight of a schoolgirl followed by her governess or of a dairy-maid with her white sleeves, I stood motionless, my hand pressed to my heart which was already leaping towards an unexplored form of life; I tried to bear in mind the street, the time, the number of the door through which the girl (whom I followed sometimes) had vanished and failed to reappear. Fortunately the fleeting nature of these cherished images, which I promised myself that I would make an effort to see again, prevented them from fixing themselves with any vividness in my memory. No matter, I was less sad now at the thought of my own ill health, of my never having summoned up courage to set to work, to begin a book, the world appeared to me now a pleasanter place to live in, life a more interesting experience now that I had learned that the streets of Paris, like the roads round Balbec, were aflower with those unknown beauties whom I had so often sought to evoke from the woods of Méséglise, each one of whom aroused a sensual longing which she alone appeared capable of assuaging.

On coming home from the Opéra-Comique I had added for next morning to the list of those which for some days past I had been hoping to meet again the form of Mme. de Guermantes, tall, with her high-piled crown of silky, golden hair; with the kindness promised me in the smile which she had directed at me from her cousin's box. I would follow the course which Françoise had told me that the Duchess generally took, and I would try at the same time, in the hope of meeting two girls whom I had seen a few days earlier, not to miss the break-up of their respective class and catechism. But in the mean time, ever and again, the scintillating smile of Mme. de Guermantes, the pleasant sensation it had given me, returned. And without exactly knowing what I was doing, I tried to find a place for them (as a woman studies the possible effect on her dress of some set

of jewelled buttons that have just been given her) beside the romantic ideas which I had long held and which Albertine's coldness, Gisèle's premature departure, ana before them my deliberate and too long sustained separation from Gilberte, had set free (the idea, for instance of being loved by a woman, of having a life in common with her); next, it had been the image of one or other of the two girls seen in the street that I brought into relation with those ideas, to which immediately afterwards I was trying to adapt my memory of the Duchess. Compared with those ideas my memory of Mme. de Guermantes at the Opéra-Comique was a very little thing, a tiny star twinkling beside the long tail of a blazing comet; moreover I had been quite familiar with the ideas long before I came to know Mme. de Guermantes; my memory of her, on the contrary, I possessed but imperfectly; every now and then it escaped me; it was during the hours when, from floating vaguely in my mind in the same way as the images of various other pretty women, it passed gradually into a unique and definite association — exclusive of every other feminine form — with those romantic ideas of so much longer standing than itself, it was during those few hours in which I remembered it most clearly that I ought to have taken steps to find out exactly what it was; but I did not then know the importance which it was to assume for me; it was pleasant merely as a first private meeting with Mme. de Guermantes inside myself, it was the first, the only accurate sketch, the only one taken from life, the only one that was really Mme. de Guermantes; during the few hours in which I was fortunate enough to retain it without having the sense to pay it any attention, it must all the same have been charming, that memory, since it was always to it, and quite freely moreover, to that moment, without haste, without strain, without the slightest compulsion or anxiety, that my ideas of love returned; then, as gradually those ideas fixed it more definitely, it acquired from them a proportionately greater strength but itself became more vague; presently I could no longer recapture it; and in my dreams I probably altered it completely, for whenever I saw Mme. de Guermantes I realised the difference — never twice, as it happened, the same — between what I had imagined and what I saw. And now every morning, certainly at the moment when Mme. de Guermantes emerged from her gateway at the top of the street I saw again her tall figure, her face with its bright eyes and crown of silken hair — all the things for which I was there waiting; but, on the other hand, a minute or two later, when, having first turned my eyes away so as to appear not to be waiting for this encounter which I had come out to seek, I raised them to look at the Duchess at the moment in which we converged, what I saw then were red

patches (as to which I knew not whether they were due to the fresh air or to a faulty complexion) on a sullen face which with the curtest of nods, a long way removed from the affability of the Phèdre evening, acknowledged my salute, which I addressed to her daily with an air of surprise, and which did not seem to please her. And yet, after a few days, during which the memory of the two girls fought against heavy odds for the mastery of my amorous feelings against that of Mme. de Guermantes, it was in the end the latter which, as though of its own accord, generally prevailed while its competitors withdrew; it was to it that I finally found myself, deliberately moreover, and as though by preference and for my own pleasure, to have transferred all my thoughts of love. I had ceased to dream of the little girls coming from their catechism, or of a certain dairy-maid; and yet I had also lost all hope of encountering in the street what I had come out to seek, either the affection promised to me, at the theatre, in a smile, or the profile, the bright face beneath its pile of golden hair which were so only when seen from afar. Now I should not even have been able to say what Mme. de Guermantes was like, by what I recognised her, for every day, in the picture which she presented as a whole, the face was different, as were the dress and the hat.

Why did I one morning, when I saw bearing down on me beneath a violet hood a sweet, smooth face whose charms were symmetrically arranged about a pair of blue eyes, a face in which the curve of the nose seemed to have been absorbed, gauge from a joyous commotion in my bosom that I was not going to return home without having caught a glimpse of Mme. de Guermantes; and on the next feel the same disturbance, affect the same indifference, turn away my eyes in the same careless manner as on the day before, on the apparition, seen in profile as she crossed from a side street and crowned by a navy-blue toque, of a beak-like nose bounding a flushed cheek chequered with a piercing eye, like some Egyptian deity? Once it was not merely a woman with a bird’s beak that I saw but almost the bird itself; the outer garments, even the toque of Mme. de Guermantes were of fur, and since she thus left no cloth visible, she seemed naturally furred, like certain vultures whose thick, smooth, dusky, downy plumage suggests rather the skin of a wild beast. From the midst of this natural plumage, the tiny head arched out its beak and the two eyes on its surface were piercing-keen and blue.

One day I had been pacing up and down the street for hours on end without a vestige of Mme. de Guermantes when suddenly, inside a pastrycook’s shop tucked in between two of the mansions of this aristocratic and plebeian quarter,

there appeared, took shape the vague and unfamiliar face of a fashionably dressed woman who was asking to see some little cakes, and, before I had had time to make her out, there shot forth at me like a lightning flash, reaching me sooner than its accompaniment of thunder, the glance of the Duchess; another time, having failed to meet her and hearing twelve strike, I realised that it was not worth my while to wait for her any longer, I Was sorrowfully making my way homewards; and, absorbed in my own disappointment, looking absently after and not seeing a carriage that had overtaken me, I realised suddenly that the movement of her head which I saw a lady make through the carriage window was meant for me, and that this lady, whose features, relaxed and pale, or it might equally be tense and vivid, composed, beneath a round hat which nestled at the foot of a towering plume, the face of a stranger whom I had supposed that I did not know, was Mme. de Guermantes, by whom I had let myself be greeted without so much as acknowledging her bow. And sometimes I came upon her as I entered the gate, standing outside the lodge where the detestable porter whose scrutinous eye I loathed and dreaded was in the act of making her a profound obeisance and also, no doubt, his daily report. For the entire staff of the Guermantes household, hidden behind the window curtains, were trembling as they watched a conversation which they were unable to overhear, but which meant as they very well knew that one or other of them would certainly have his ‘day out’ stopped by the Duchess to whom this Cerberus was betraying him. In view of the whole series of different faces which Mme. Guermantes displayed thus one after another, faces that occupied a relative and varying extent, contracted one day, vast the next, in her person and attire as a whole, my love was not attached to any one of those changeable and ever-changing elements of flesh and fabric which replaced one another as day followed day, and which she could modify, could almost entirely reconstruct without altering my disturbance because beneath them, beneath the new collar and the strange cheek, I felt that it was still Mme. de Guermantes. What I loved was the invisible person who set all this outward show in motion, her whose hostility so distressed me, whose approach set me trembling, whose life I would fain have made my own and driven out of it her friends. She might flaunt a blue feather or shew a fiery cheek without her actions’ losing their importance for me.

I should not myself have felt that Mme. de Guermantes was tired of meeting me day after day, had I not learned it indirectly by reading it on the face, stiff with coldness, disapproval and pity which Françoise shewed when she was helping me to get ready for these morning walks. The moment I asked her for

my outdoor things I felt a contrary wind arise in her worn and battered features. I made no attempt to win her confidence, for I knew that I should not succeed. She had, for at once discovering any unpleasant thing that might have happened to my parents or myself, a power the nature of which I have never been able to fathom. Perhaps it was not supernatural, but was to be explained by sourees of information that were open to her alone: as it may happen that the news which often reaches a savage tribe several days before the post has brought it to the European colony has really been transmitted to them not by telepathy but from hill-top to hill-top by a chain of beacon fires. So, in the particular instance of my morning walks, possibly Mme. de Guermantes's servants had heard their mistress say how tired she was of running into me every day without fail wherever she went, and had repeated her remarks to Françoise. My parents might, it is true, have attached some servant other than Françoise to my person, still I should have been no better off. Françoise was in a sense less of a servant than the others. In her way of feeling things, of being kind and pitiful, hard and distant, superior and narrow, of combining a white skin with red hands, she was still the village maiden whose parents had had 'a place of their own' but having come to grief had been obliged to put her into service. Her presence in our household was the country air, the social life of a farm of fifty years ago wafted to us by a sort of reversal of the normal order of travel whereby it is the place that comes to visit the person. As the glass cases in a local museum are filled with specimens of the curious handiwork which the peasants still carve or embroider or whatever it may be in certain parts of the country, so our flat in Paris was decorated with the words of Françoise, inspired by a traditional local sentiment and governed by extremely ancient laws. And she could in Paris find her way back as though by clues of coloured thread to the songbirds and cherry trees of her childhood, to her mother's deathbed, which she still vividly saw. But in spite of all this wealth of background, once she had come to Paris and had entered our service she had acquired — as, obviously, anyone else coming there in her place would have acquired — the ideas, the system of interpretation used by the servants on the other floors, compensating for the respect which she was obliged to shew to us by repeating the rude words that the cook on the fourth floor had used to her mistress, with a servile gratification so intense that, for the first time in our lives, feeling a sort of solidarity between ourselves and the detestable occupant of the fourth floor flat, we said to ourselves that possibly we too were 'employers' after all. This alteration in Françoise's character was perhaps inevitable. Certain forms of existence are so abnormal that they are

bound to produce certain characteristic faults; such was the life led by the King at Versailles among his courtiers, a life as strange as that of a Pharaoh or a Doge — and, far more even than his, the life of his courtiers. The life led by our servants is probably of an even more monstrous abnormality, which only its familiarity can prevent us from seeing. But it was actually in details more intimate still that I should have been obliged, if I had dismissed Françoise, to keep the same servant. For various others might, in years to come, enter my service; already furnished with the defects common to all servants, they underwent nevertheless a rapid transformation with me. As, in the rules of tactics, an attack in one sector compels a counter-attack in another, so as not to be hurt by the asperities of my nature, all of them effected in their own an identical resilience, always at the same points, and to make up for this took advantage of the gaps in my line to thrust out advanced posts. Of these gaps I knew nothing, any more than of the salients to which they gave rise, precisely because they were gaps. But my servants, by gradually becoming spoiled, taught me of their existence. It was from the defects which they invariably acquired that I learned what were my own natural and invariable shortcomings; their character offered me a sort of negative plate of my own. We had always laughed, my mother and I, at Mme. Sazerat, who used, in speaking of her servants, expressions like ‘the lower orders’ or ‘the servant class.’ But I am bound to admit that what made it useless to think of replacing Françoise by anyone else was that her successor would inevitably have belonged just as much to the race of servants in general and to the class of my servants in particular.

To return to Françoise, I never in my life experienced any humiliation without having seen beforehand on her face a store of condolences prepared and waiting; and if then in my anger at the thought of being pitied by her I tried to pretend that on the contrary I had scored a distinct success, my lies broke feebly on the wall of her respectful but obvious unbelief and the consciousness that she enjoyed of her own infallibility. For she knew the truth. She refrained from uttering it, and made only a slight movement with her lips as if she still bad her mouth full and was finishing a tasty morsel. She refrained from uttering it, or so at least I long believed, for at that time I still supposed that it was by means of words that one communicated the truth to others. Indeed the words that people used to me recorded their meaning so unalterably on the sensitive plate of my mind that I could no more believe it to be possible that anyone who had professed to love me did not love me than Françoise herself could have doubted when she had read it in a newspaper that some clergyman or gentleman was

prepared, on receipt of a stamped envelope, to furnish us free of charge with an infallible remedy for every known complaint or with the means of multiplying our income an hundredfold. (If, on the other hand, our doctor were to prescribe for her the simplest ointment to cure a cold in the head, she, so stubborn to endure the keenest suffering, would complain bitterly of what she had been made to sniff, insisting that it tickled her nose and that life was not worth living.) But she was the first person to prove to me by her example (which I was not to understand until, long afterwards, when it was given me afresh and to my greater discomfort, as will be found in the later volumes of this work, by a person who was dearer to me than Françoise) that the truth has no need to be uttered to be made apparent, and that one may perhaps gather it with more certainty, without waiting for words, without even bothering one's head about them, from a thousand outward signs, even from certain invisible phenomena, analogous in the sphere of human character to what in nature are atmospheric changes. I might perhaps have suspected this. since to myself at that time it frequently occurred that I said things in which there was no vestige of truth, while I made the real truth plain by all manner of involuntary confidences expressed by my body and in my actions (which were at once interpreted by Françoise); I ought perhaps to have suspected it, but to do so I should first have had to be conscious that I myself was occasionally untruthful and dishonest. Now untruthfulness and dishonesty were with me, as with most people; called into being in so immediate, so contingent a fashion, and in self-defence, by some particular interest, that my mind, fixed on some lofty ideal, allowed my character, in the darkness below, to set about those urgent, sordid tasks, and did net look down to observe them. When Françoise, in the evening, was polite to me, and asked my permission before sitting down in my room, it seemed as though her face became transparent and I could see the goodness and honesty that lay beneath. But Jupien, who had lapses into indiscretion of which I learned only later, revealed afterwards that she had told him that I was not worth the price of a rope to hang me, and that I had tried to insult her in every possible way. These words of Jupien set up at once before my eyes, in new and strange colours, a print of the picture of my relations with Françoise so different from that on which I used to like letting my eyes rest, and in which, without the least possibility of doubt, Françoise adored me and lost no opportunity of singing my praises, that I realised that it is not only the material world that is different from the aspect in which we see it; that all reality is perhaps equally dissimilar from what we think ourselves to be directly perceiving; that the trees, the sun and the sky would not

be the same as what we see if they were apprehended by creatures having eyes differently constituted from ours, or, better still, endowed for that purpose with organs other than eyes which would furnish trees and sky and sun with equivalents, though not visual. However that might be, this sudden outlet which Jupien threw open for me upon the real world appalled me. So far it was only Françoise that was revealed, and of her I barely thought. Was it the same with all one's social relations? And in what depths of despair might this not some day plunge me, if it were the same with love? That was the future's secret. For the present only Françoise was concerned. Did she sincerely believe what she had said to Jupien? Had she said it to embroil Jupien with me, possibly so that we should not appoint Jupien's girl as her successor? At any rate I realised the impossibility of obtaining any direct and certain knowledge of whether Françoise loved or lothed me. And thus it was she who first gave me the idea that a person does not (as I had imagined) stand motionless and clear before our eyes with his merits, his defects, his plans, his intentions with regard to ourself exposed on his surface, like a garden at which, with all its borders spread out before us, we gaze through a railing, but is a shadow which we can never succeed in penetrating, of which there can be no such thing as direct knowledge, with respect to which we form countless beliefs, based upon his words and sometimes upon his actions, though neither words nor actions can give us anything but inadequate and as it proves contradictory information — a shadow behind which we can alternately imagine, with equal justification, that there burns the flame of hatred and of love.

I was genuinely in love with Mme. de Guermantes. The greatest happiness that I could have asked of God would have been that He should overwhelm her under every imaginable calamity, and that ruined, despised, stripped of all the privileges that divided her from me, having no longer any home of her own or people who would condescend to speak to her, she should come to me for refuge. I imagined her doing so. And indeed on those evenings when some change in the atmosphere or in my own condition brought to the surface of my consciousness some forgotten scroll on which were recorded impressions of other days, instead of profiting by the refreshing strength that had been generated in me, instead of employing it to decipher in my own mind thoughts which as a rule escaped me, instead of setting myself at last to work, I preferred to relate aloud, to plan out in the third person, with a flow of invention as useless as was my declamation of it, a whole novel crammed with adventure, in which the Duchess, fallen upon misfortune, came to implore assistance from me — me who had become, by a

converse change of circumstances, rich and powerful. And when I had let myself thus for hours on end imagine the circumstances, rehearse the sentences with which I should welcome the Duchess beneath my roof, the situation remained unaltered; I had, alas, in reality, chosen to love the very woman who, in her own person, combined perhaps the greatest possible number of different advantages; in whose eyes, accordingly, I could not hope, myself, ever to cut any figure; for she was as rich as the richest commoner — and noble also; without reckoning that personal charm which set her at the pinnacle of fashion, made her among the rest a sort of queen.

I felt that I was annoying her by crossing her path in this way every morning; but even if I had had the courage to refrain, for two or three days consecutively, from doing so, perhaps that abstention, which would have represented so great a sacrifice on my part, Mme. de Guermantes would not have noticed, or would have set it down to some obstacle beyond my control. And indeed I could not have succeeded in making myself cease to track her down except by arranging that it should be impossible for me to do so, for the need incessantly reviving in me to meet her, to be for a moment the object of her attention, the person to whom her bow was addressed, was stronger than my fear of arousing her displeasure. I should have had to go away for some time; and for that I had not the heart. I did think of it more than once. I would then tell Françoise to pack my boxes, and immediately afterwards to unpack them. And as the spirit of imitation, the desire not to appear behind the times, alters the most natural and most positive form of oneself, Françoise, borrowing the expression from her daughter's vocabulary, used to remark that I was 'dippy.' She did not approve of this; she said that I was always 'balancing,' for she made use, when she was not aspiring to rival the moderns, of the language of Saint-Simon. It is true that she liked it still less when I spoke to her as master to servant. She knew that this was not natural to me, and did not suit me, a condition which she rendered in words as 'where there isn't a will.' I should never have had the heart to leave Paris except in a direction that would bring me closer to Mme. de Guermantes. This was by no means an impossibility. Should I not indeed find myself nearer to her than I was in the morning, in the street, solitary, abashed, feeling that not a single one of the thoughts which I should have liked to convey to her ever reached her, in that weary patrolling up and down of walks which might be continued, day after day, for ever without the slightest advantage to myself, if I were to go miles away from Mme. de Guermantes, but go to some one of her acquaintance, some one whom she knew

to be particular in the choice of his friends and who would appreciate my good qualities, would be able to speak to her about me, and if not to obtain it from her at least to make her know what I wanted, some one by means of whom, in any event, simply because I should discuss with him whether or not it would be possible for him to convey this or that message to her, I should give to my solitary and silent meditations a new form, spoken, active, which would seem an advance, almost a realisation. What she did during the mysterious daily life of the 'Guermantes' that she was — this was the constant object of my thoughts; and to break through the mystery, even by indirect means, as with a lever, by employing the services of a person to whom were not forbidden the town house of the Duchess, her parties, unrestricted conversation with her, would not that be a contact more distant but at the same time more effective than my contemplation of her every morning in the street?

The friendship, the admiration that Saint-Loup felt for me seemed to me undeserved and had hitherto left me unmoved. All at once I attached a value to them, I would have liked him to disclose them to Mme. de Guermantes, I was quite prepared even to ask him to do so. For when we are in love, all the trifling little privileges that we enjoy we would like to be able to divulge to the woman we love, as people who have been disinherited and bores of other kinds do to us in everyday life. We are distressed by her ignorance of them; we seek consolation in the thought that just because they are never visible she has perhaps added to the opinion which she already had of us this possibility of further advantages that must remain unknown.

Saint-Loup had not for a long time been able to come to Paris, whether, as he himself explained, on account of his military duties, or, as was more likely, on account of the trouble that he was having with his mistress, with whom he had twice now been on the point of breaking off relations. He had often told me what a pleasure it would be to him if I came to visit him at that garrison town, the name of which, a couple of days after his leaving Balbec, had caused me so much joy when I had read it on the envelope of the first letter I received from my friend. It was (not so far from Balbec as its wholly inland surroundings might have led one to think) one of those little fortified towns, aristocratic and military, set in a broad expanse of country over which on fine days there floats so often into the distance a sort of intermittent haze of sound which — as a screen of poplars by its sinuosities outlines the course of a river which one cannot see — indicates the movements of a regiment on parade, so that the very atmosphere of its streets, avenues and squares has been gradually tuned to a sort of perpetual

vibration, musical and martial, while the most ordinary note of cartwheel or tramway is prolonged in vague trumpet calls, indefinitely repeated, to the hallucinated ear, by the silence. It was not too far away from Paris for me to be able, if I took the express, to return, join my mother and grandmother and sleep in my own bed. As soon as I realised this, troubled by a painful longing, I had too little will power to decide not to return to Paris but rather to stay in this town; but also too little to prevent a porter from carrying my luggage to a cab and not to adopt, as I walked behind him, the unburdened mind of a traveller who is looking after his luggage and for whom no grandmother is waiting anywhere at home, to get into the carriage with the complete detachment of a person who, having ceased to think of what it is that he wants, has the air of knowing what he wants, and to give the driver the address of the cavalry barracks. I thought that Saint-Loup might come to sleep that night at the hotel at which I should be staying, so as to make less painful for me the first shock of contact with this strange town. One of the guard went to find him, and I waited at the barrack gate, before that huge ship of stone, booming with the November wind, out of which, every moment, for it was now six o'clock, men were emerging in pairs into the street, staggering as if they were coming ashore in some foreign port in which they found themselves temporarily anchored.

Saint-Loup appeared, moving like a whirlwind, his eyeglass spinning in the air before him; I had not given my name, I was eager to enjoy his surprise and delight. "Oh! What a bore!" he exclaimed, suddenly catching sight of me, and blushing to the tips of his ears. "I have just had a week's leave, and I shan't be off duty again for another week."

And, preoccupied by the thought of my having to spend this first night alone, for he knew better than anyone my bed-time agonies, which he had often remarked and soothed at Balbec, he broke off his lamentation to turn and look at me, coax me with little smiles, with tender though unsymmetrical glances, half of them coming directly from his eye, the other half through his eyeglass, but both sorts alike an allusion to the emotion that he felt on seeing me again, an allusion also to that important matter which I did not always understand but which concerned me now vitally, our friendship.

"I say! Where are you going to sleep? Really, I can't recommend the hotel where we mess; it is next to the Exhibition ground, where there's a show just starting; you'll find it beastly crowded. No, you'd better go to the Hôtel de Flandre; it is a little eighteenth-century palace with old tapestries. It 'makes' quite an 'old-world residence.'"

Saint-Loup employed in every connexion the word ‘makes’ for ‘has the air of,’ because the spoken language, like the written, feels from time to time the need of these alterations in the meanings of words, these refinements of expression. And just as journalists often have not the least idea from what school of literature come the ‘turns of speech’ that they borrow, so the vocabulary, the very diction of Saint-Loup were formed in imitation of three different aesthetes, none of whom he knew personally but whose way of speaking had been indirectly instilled into him. “Besides,” he concluded, “the hotel I mean is more or less adapted to your supersensitiveness of hearing. You will have no neighbours. I quite see that it is a slender advantage, and as, after all, another visitor may arrive to-morrow, it would not be worth your while to choose that particular hotel with so precarious an object in view. No, it is for its appeal to the eye that I recommend it. The rooms are quite attractive, all the furniture is old and comfortable; there is something reassuring about that.” But to me, less of an artist than Saint-Loup, the pleasure that an attractive house could give was superficial, almost non-existent, and could not calm my growing anguish, as painful as that which I used to feel long ago at Combray when my mother did not come upstairs to say good night, or that which I felt on the evening of my arrival at Balbec in the room with the unnaturally high ceiling, which smelt of flowering grasses. Saint-Loup read all this in my fixed gaze.

“A lot you care, though, about this charming palace, my poor fellow; you’re quite pale; and here am I like a great brute talking to you about tapestries which you won’t have the heart to look at, even. I know the room they’ll put you in; personally I find it most enlivening, but I can quite understand that it won’t have the same effect on you with your sensitive nature. You mustn’t think I don’t understand; I don’t feel the same myself, but I can put myself in your place.”

At that moment a serjeant who was exercising a horse on the square, entirely absorbed in making the animal jump, disregarding the salutes of passing troopers, but hurling volleys of oaths at such as got in his way, turned with a smile to Saint-Loup and, seeing that he had a friend with him, saluted us. But his horse at once reared. Saint-Loup flung himself at its head, caught it by the bridle, succeeded in quieting it and returned to my side.

“Yes,” he resumed; “I assure you that I fully understand; I feel for you as keenly as you do yourself. I am wretched,” he went on, laying his hand lovingly on my shoulder, “when I think that if I could have stayed with you to-night, I might have been able, if we talked till morning, to relieve you of a little of your unhappiness. I can lend you any number of books, but you won’t want to read if

you're feeling like that. And I shan't be able to get anyone else to take my duty here; I've been off now twice running because my girl came down to see me."

And he knitted his brows partly with vexation and also in the effort to decide, like a doctor, what remedy he might best apply to my disease.

"Run along and light the fire in my quarters," he called to a trooper who passed us. "Hurry up; get a move on!"

After which he turned once more to me, and his eyeglass and his peering, myopic gaze hinted an allusion to our great friendship.

"No! To see you here, in these barracks where I have spent so much time thinking about you, I can scarcely believe my eyes. I must be dreaming. And how are you? Better, I hope. You must tell me all about yourself presently. We'll go up to my room; we mustn't hang about too long on the square, there's the devil of a draught; I don't feel it now myself, but you aren't accustomed to it, I'm afraid of your catching cold. And what about your work; have you started yet? No? You are a quaint fellow! If I had your talent I'm sure I should be writing morning, noon and night. It amuses you more to do nothing? What a pity it is that it's the useless fellows like me who are always ready to work, and the ones who could if they wanted to, won't. There, and I've clean forgotten to ask you how your grandmother is. Her Proudhons are in safe keeping. I never part from them."

An officer, tall, handsome, majestic, emerged with slow and solemn gait from the foot of a staircase. Saint-Loup saluted him and arrested the perpetual instability of his body for the moment occupied in holding his hand against the peak of his cap. But he had flung himself into the action with so much force, straightening himself with so sharp a movement, and, the salute ended, let his hand fall with so abrupt a relaxation, altering all the positions of shoulder, leg, and eyeglass, that this moment was one not so much of immobility as of a throbbing tension in which were neutralised the excessive movements which he had just made and those on which he was about to embark. Meanwhile the officer, without coming any nearer us, calm, benevolent, dignified, imperial, representing, in short, the direct opposite of Saint-Loup, himself also, but without haste, raised his hand to the peak of his cap.

"I must just say a word to the Captain," whispered Saint-Loup. "Be a good fellow, and go and wait for me in my room. It's the second on the right, on the third floor; I'll be with you in a minute."

And setting off at the double, preceded by his eyeglass which fluttered in every direction, he made straight for the slow and stately Captain whose horse

had just been brought round and who, before preparing to mount, was giving orders with a studied nobility of gesture as in some historical painting, and as though he were setting forth to take part in some battle of the First Empire, whereas he was simply going to ride home, to the house which he had taken for the period of his service at Doncières, and which stood in a Square that was named, as though in an ironical anticipation of the arrival of this Napoleonid, Place de la République. I started to climb the staircase, nearly slipping on each of its nail-studded steps, catching glimpses of barrack-rooms, their bare walls edged with a double line of beds and kits. I was shewn Saint-Loup's room. I stood for a moment outside its closed door, for I could hear some one stirring; he moved something, let fall something else; I felt that the room was not empty, that there must be somebody there. But it was only the freshly lighted fire beginning to burn. It could not keep quiet, it kept shifting its faggots about, and very clumsily. I entered the room; it let one roll into the fender and set another smoking. And even when it was not moving, like an ill-bred person it made noises all the time, which, from the moment I saw the flames rising, revealed themselves to me as noises made by a fire, although if I had been on the other side of a wall I should have thought that they came from some one who was blowing his nose and walking about. I sat down in the room and waited. Liberty hangings and old German stuffs of the eighteenth century managed to rid it of the smell that was exhaled by the rest of the building, a coarse, insipid, mouldy smell like that of stale toast. It was here, in this banning room, that I could have dined and slept with a calm and happy mind Saint-Loup seemed almost to be present by reason of the text-books which littered his table, between his photographs, among which I could make out my own and that of the Duchesse de Guermantes, by the light of the fire which had at length grown accustomed to the grate, and, like an animal crouching in an ardent, noiseless, faithful watchfulness, let fall only now and then a smouldering log which crumbled into sparks, or licked with a tongue of flame the sides of the chimney. I heard the tick of Saint-Loup's watch, which could not be far away. This tick changed its place every moment 'for I could not see the watch; it seemed to come from behind, from in front of me, from my right, from my left, sometimes to die away as though at a great distance. Suddenly I caught sight of the watch on the table. Then I heard the tick in a fixed place from which it did not move again. That is to say, I thought I heard it at this place; I did not hear it there; I saw it there, for sounds have no position in space. Or rather we associate them with movements, and in that way they serve the purpose of warning us of those movements, of

appearing to make them necessary and natural. Certainly it happens commonly enough that a sick man whose ears have been stopped with cotton-wool ceases to hear the noise of a fire such as was crackling at that moment in Saint-Loup's fireplace, labouring at the formation of brands and cinders, which it then lets fall into the fender, nor would he hear the passage of the tramway-cars whose music took its flight, at regular intervals, over the Grand'place of Doncières. Let the sick man then read a book, and the pages will turn silently before him, as though they were moved by the fingers of a god. The dull thunder of a bath which is being filled becomes thin, faint and distant as the twittering of birds in the sky. The withdrawal of sound, its dilution, take from it all its power to hurt us; driven mad a moment ago by hammer-blows which seemed to be shattering the ceiling above our head, it is with a quiet delight that we now gather in their sound, light, caressing, distant, like the murmur of leaves playing by the roadside with the passing breeze. We play games of patience with cards which we do not hear, until we imagine that we have not touched them, that they are moving of their own accord, and, anticipating our desire to play with them, have begun to play with us. And in this connexion we may ask ourselves whether, in the case of love (to which indeed we may add the love of life and the love of fame, since there are, it appears, persons who are acquainted with these latter sentiments), we ought not to act like those who, when a noise disturbs them, instead of praying that it may cease, stop their ears; and, with them for our pattern, bring our attention, our defensive strength to bear on ourselves, give ourselves as an objective to capture not the 'other person' with whom we are in love but our capacity for suffering at that person's hands.

To return to the problem of sounds, we have only to thicken the wads which close the aural passages, and they confine to a pianissimo the girl who has just been playing a boisterous tune overhead; if we go farther, and steep the wad in grease, at once the whole household must obey its despotic rule; its laws extend even beyond our portals. Pianissimo is not enough; the wad instantly orders the piano to be shut, and the music lesson is abruptly ended; the gentleman who was walking up and down in the room above breaks off in the middle of his beat; the movement of carriages and tramways is interrupted as though a Sovereign were expected to pass. And indeed this attenuation of sounds sometimes disturbs our slumbers instead of guarding them. Only yesterday the incessant noise in our ears, by describing to us in a continuous narrative all that was happening in the street and in the house, succeeded at length in making us sleep, like L boring book; to-night, through the sheet of silence that is spread over our sleep a shock,

louder than the rest, manages to make itself heard, gentle as a sigh, unrelated to any other sound, mysterious; and the call for an explanation which it emits is sufficient to awaken us. Take away for a moment from the sick man the cotton-wool that has been stopping his ears and in a flash the full daylight, the sun of sound dawns afresh, dazzling him, is born again in his universe; in all haste returns the multitude of exiled sounds; we are present, as though it were the chanting of choirs of angels, at the resurrection of the voice. The empty streets are filled for a moment with the whirr of the swift, consecutive wings of the singing tramway-cars. In the bedroom itself, the sick man has created, not, like Prometheus, fire, but the sound of fire. And when we increase or reduce the wads of cottonwool, it is as though we were pressing alternately one and the other of the two pedals with which we have extended the resonant compass of the outer world.

Only there are also suppressions of sound which are not temporary. The man who has grown completely deaf cannot even heat a pan of milk by his bedside, but he must keep an eye open to watch, on the tilted lid, for the white, arctic reflexion, like that of a coming snowstorm, which is the warning sign which he is wise to obey, by cutting off (as Our Lord bade the waves be still) the electric current; for already the swelling, jerkily climbing egg of boiling milk-film is reaching its climax in a series of sidelong movements, has filled and set bellying the drooping sails with which the cream has skimmed its surface, sends in a sudden storm a scud of pearly substance flying overboard — sails which the cutting off of the current, if the electric storm is hushed in time, will fold back upon themselves and let fall with the ebbing tide, changed now to magnolia petals. But if the sick man should not be quick enough in taking the necessary precautions, presently, when his drowned books and watch are seen barely emerging from the milky tide, he will be obliged to call the old nurse who, though he be himself an eminent statesman or a famous writer, will tell him that he has no more sense than a child of five. At other times in the magic chamber, between us and the closed door, a person who was not there a moment ago makes his appearance; it is a visitor whom we did not hear coming in, and who merely gesticulates, like a figure in one of those little puppet theatres, so restful for those who have taken a dislike to the spoken tongue. And for this totally deaf man, since the loss of a sense adds as much beauty to the world as its acquisition, it is with ecstasy that he walks now upon an earth grown almost an Eden, in which sound has not yet been created. The highest waterfalls unfold for his eyes alone their ribbons of crystal, stiller than the glassy sea, like the

cascades of Paradise. As sound was for him before his deafness the perceptible form in which the cause of a movement was draped, objects moved without sound seemed to be being moved also without cause; deprived of all resonant quality, they shew a spontaneous activity, seem to be alive. They move, halt, become alight of their own accord. Of their own accord they vanish in the air like the winged monsters of prehistoric days. In the solitary and unneighboured home of the deaf man the service which, before his infirmity was complete, was already shewing an increased discretion, was being carried on in silence, is now assured him with a sort of surreptitious deftness, by mutes, as at the court of a fairy-tale king. And, as upon the stage, the building on which the deaf man looks from his window — be it barracks, church, or town hall — is only so much scenery. If one day it should fall to the ground, it may emit a cloud of dust and leave visible ruins; but, less material even than a palace on the stage, though it has not the same exiguity, it will subside in the magic universe without letting the fall of its heavy blocks of stone tarnish, with anything so vulgar as sound, the chastity of the prevailing silence.

The silence, though only relative, which reigned in the little barrack-room where I sat waiting was now broken. The door opened and Saint-Loup, dropping his eyeglass, dashed in.

“Ah, my dear Robert, you make yourself very comfortable here,” I said to him; “how jolly it would be if one were allowed to dine and sleep here.”

And to be sure, had it not been against the regulations, what repose untinged by sadness I could have tasted there, guarded by that atmosphere of tranquillity, vigilance and gaiety which was maintained by a thousand wills controlled and free from care, a thousand heedless spirits, in that great community called a barracks where, time having taken the form of action, the sad bell that tolled the hours outside was replaced by the same joyous clarion of those martial calls, the ringing memory of which was kept perpetually alive in the paved streets of the town, like the dust that floats in a sunbeam;— a voice sure of being heard, and musical because it was the command not only of authority to obedience but of wisdom to happiness.

“So you’d rather stay with me and sleep here, would you, than to go the hotel by yourself?” Saint-Loup asked me, smiling.

“Oh, Robert, it is cruel of you to be sarcastic about it,” I pleaded; “you know it’s not possible, and you know how wretched I shall be over there.”

“Good! You flatter me!” he replied. “It occurred to me just now that you would rather stay here to-night. And that is precisely what I stopped to ask the

Captain.”

“And he has given you leave?” I cried.

“He hadn’t the slightest objection.”

“Oh! I adore him!”

“No; that would be going too far. But now, let me just get hold of my batman and tell him to see about our dinner,” he went on, while I turned away so as to hide my tears.

We were several times interrupted by one or other of Saint-Loup’s friends’ coming in. He drove them all out again.

“Get out of here. Buzz off!”

I begged him to let them stay.

"No, really; they would bore you stiff; they are absolutely uncultured; all they can talk about is racing, or stables shop. Besides, I don't want them here either; they would spoil these precious moments I've been looking forward to. But you mustn't think, when I tell you that these fellows are brainless, that everything military is devoid of intellectuality. Far from it. We have a major here who is a splendid chap. He's given us a course in which military history is treated like a demonstration, like a problem in algebra. Even from the aesthetic point of view there is a curious beauty, alternately inductive and deductive, about it which you couldn't fail to appreciate."

"That's not the officer who's given me leave to stay here to-night?"

"No; thank God! The man you 'adore' for so very trifling a service is the biggest fool that ever walked the face of the earth. He is perfect at looking after messing, and at kit inspections; he spends hours with the serjeant major and the master tailor. There you have his mentality. Apart from that he has a vast contempt, like everyone here, for the excellent major I was telling you about. No one will speak to him because he's a freemason and doesn't go to confession. The Prince de Borodino would never have an outsider like that in his house. Which is pretty fair cheek, when all's said and done, from a man whose great-grandfather was a small farmer, and who would probably be a small farmer himself if it hadn't been for the Napoleonic wars. Not that he hasn't a lurking sense of his own rather ambiguous position in society, where he's neither flesh nor fowl. He hardly ever shews his face at the Jockey, it makes him feel so deuced awkward, this so-called Prince," added Robert, who, having been led by the same spirit of imitation to adopt the social theories of his teachers and the worldly prejudices of his relatives, had unconsciously wedded the democratic love of humanity to a contempt for the nobility of the Empire.

I was looking at the photograph of his aunt, and the thought that, since Saint-Loup had this photograph in his possession, he might perhaps give it to me, made me feel all the fonder of him and hope to do him a thousand services, which seemed to me a very small exchange for it. For this photograph was like one encounter more, added to all those that I had already had, with Mme. de Guermantes; better still, a prolonged encounter, as if, by some sudden stride forward in our relations, she had stopped beside me, in a garden hat, and had allowed me for the first time to gaze at my leisure at that plump cheek, that arched neck, that tapering eyebrow (veiled from me hitherto by the swiftness of

her passage, the bewilderment of my impressions, the imperfection of memory); and the contemplation of them, as well as of the bare bosom and arms of a woman whom I had never seen save in a high-necked and long-sleeved bodice, was to me a voluptuous discovery, a priceless favour. Those lines, which had seemed to me almost a forbidden spectacle, I could study there, as in a text-book of the only geometry that had any value for me. Later on, when I looked at Robert, I noticed that he too was a little like the photograph of his aunt, and by a mysterious process which I found almost as moving, since, if his face had not been directly created by hers, the two had nevertheless a common origin. The features of the Duchesse de Guermantes, which were pinned to my vision of Combray, the nose like a falcon's beak, the piercing eyes, seemed to have served also as a pattern for the cutting out — in another copy analogous and slender, with too delicate a skin — of Robert's face, which might almost be superimposed upon his aunt's. I saw in him, with a keen longing, those features characteristic of the Guermantes, of that race which had remained so individual in the midst of a world with which it was not confounded, in which it remained isolated in the glory of an ornithomorphic divinity, for it seemed to have been the issue, in the age of mythology, of the union of a goddess with a bird.

Robert, without being aware of its cause, was touched by my evident affection. This was moreover increased by the sense of comfort inspired in me by the heat of the fire and by the champagne which bedewed at the same time my brow with beads of sweat and my cheeks with tears; it washed down the partridges; I ate mine with the dumb wonder of a profane mortal of any sort when he finds in a form of life with which he is not familiar what he has supposed that form of life to exclude — the wonder, for instance, of an atheist who sits down to an exquisitely cooked dinner in a presbytery. And next morning, when I awoke, I rose and went to cast from Saint-Loup's window, which being at a great height overlooked the whole countryside, a curious scrutiny to make the acquaintance of my new neighbour, the landscape which I had not been able to distinguish the day before, having arrived too late, at an hour when it was already sleeping beneath the outspread cloak of night. And yet, early as it had awoken from its sleep, I could see the ground, when I opened the window and looked out, only as one sees it from the window of a country house, overlooking the lake, shrouded still in its soft white morning gown of mist which scarcely allowed me to make out anything at all. But I knew that, before the troopers who were busy with their horses in the square had finished grooming them, it would have cast its gown aside. In the meantime, I could see only a

meagre hill, rearing close up against the side of the barracks a back already swept clear of darkness, rough and wrinkled. Through the transparent curtain of frost I could not take my eyes from this stranger who, too, was looking at me for the first time. But when I had formed the habit of coming to the barracks, my consciousness that the hill was there, more real, consequently, even when I did not see it, than the hotel at Balbec, than our house in Paris, of which I thought as of absent — or dead — friends, that is to say without any strong belief in their existence, brought it about that, even although I was not aware of it myself, its reflected shape outlined itself on the slightest impressions that I formed at Doncières, and among them, to begin with this first morning, on the pleasing impression of warmth given me by the cup of chocolate prepared by Saint-Loup's batman in this comfortable room, which had the effect of being an optical centre from which to look out at the hill — the idea of there being anything else to do but just gaze at it, the idea of actually climbing it, being rendered impossible by this same mist. Imbibing the shape of the hill, associated with the taste of hot chocolate and with the whole web of my fancies at that particular time, this mist, without my having thought at all about it, succeeded in moistening all my subsequent thoughts about that period, just as a massive and unmelting lump of gold had remained allied to my impressions of Balbec, or as the proximity of the outside stairs of blackish sandstone gave a grey background to my impressions of Combray. It did not, however, persist late into the day; the sun began by hurling at it, in vain, a few darts which sprinkled it with brilliants before they finally overcame it. The hill might expose its grizzled rump to the sun's rays, which, an hour later, when I went down to the town, gave to the russet tints of the autumn leaves, to the reds and blues of the election posters pasted on the walls, an exaltation which raised my spirits also and made me stamp, singing as I went, on the pavements from which I could hardly keep myself from jumping in the air for joy.

But after that first night I had to sleep at the hotel. And I knew beforehand that I was doomed to find sorrow there. It was like an unbreathable aroma which all my life long had been exhaled for me by every new bedroom, that is to say by every bedroom; in the one which I usually occupied I was not present, my mind remained elsewhere, and in its place sent only the sense of familiarity. But I could not employ this servant, less sensitive than myself, to look after things for me in a new place, where I preceded him, where I arrived by myself, where I must bring into contact with its environment that 'Self' which I rediscovered only at year-long intervals, but always the same, having not grown at all since

Combray, since my first arrival at Balbec, weeping, without any possibility of consolation, on the edge of an unpacked trunk.

As it happened, I was mistaken. I had no time to be sad, for I was not left alone for an instant. The fact of the matter was that there remained of the old palace a superfluous refinement of structure and decoration, out of place in a modern hotel, which, released from the service of any practical purpose, had in its long spell of leisure acquired a sort of life: passages winding about in all directions, which one was continually crossing in their aimless wanderings, lobbies as long as corridors and as ornate as drawing-rooms, which had the air rather of being dwellers there themselves than of forming part of a dwelling, which could not be induced to enter and settle down in any of the rooms but wandered about outside mine and came up at once to offer me their company — neighbours of a sort, idle but never noisy, menial ghosts of the past who had been granted the privilege of staying, provided they kept quiet, by the doors of the rooms which were let to visitors, and who, every time that I came across them, greeted me with a silent deference. In short, the idea of a lodging, of simply a case for our existence from day to day which shields us only from the cold and from being overlooked by other people, was absolutely inapplicable to this house, an assembly of rooms as real as a colony of people, living, it was true, in silence, but things which one was obliged to meet, to avoid, to appreciate, as one came in. One tried not to disturb them, and one could not look without respect at the great drawing-room which had formed, far back in the eighteenth century, the habit of stretching itself at its ease, among its hangings of old gold and beneath the clouds of its painted ceiling. And one was seized with a more personal curiosity as to the smaller rooms which, without any regard for symmetry, ran all round it, innumerable, startled, fleeing in disorder as far as the garden, to which they had so easy an access down three broken steps.

If I wished to go out or to come in without taking the lift or being seen from the main staircase, a smaller private staircase, no longer in use, offered me its steps so skilfully arranged, one close above another, that there seemed to exist in their gradation a perfect proportion of the same kind as those which, in colours, scents, savours, often arouse in us a peculiar, sensuous pleasure. But the pleasure to be found in going up and downstairs I had had to come here to learn, as once before to a health resort in the Alps to find that the act — as a rule not noticed — of drawing breath could be a perpetual delight. I received that dispensation from effort which is granted to us only by the things to which long use has accustomed us, when I set my feet for the first time on those steps, familiar

before ever I knew them, as if they possessed, deposited on them, perhaps, embodied in them by the masters of long ago whom they used to welcome every day, the prospective charm of habits which I had not yet contracted and which indeed could only grow weaker once they had become my own. I looked into a room; the double doors closed themselves behind me, the hangings let in a silence in which I felt myself invested with a sort of exhilarating royalty; a marble mantelpiece with ornaments of wrought brass — of which one would have been wrong to think that its sole idea was to represent the art of the Directory — offered me a fire, and a little easy chair on short legs helped me to warm myself as comfortably as if I had been sitting on the hearthrug. The walls held the room in à close embrace, separating it from the rest of the world and, to let in, to enclose what made it complete, parted to make way for the bookcase, reserved a place for the bed, on either side of which a column airily upheld the raised ceiling of the alcove. And the room was prolonged in depth by two closets as large as itself, the latter of which had hanging from its wall, to scent the occasion on which one had recourse to it, a voluptuous rosary of orris-roots; the doors, if I left them open when I withdrew into this innermost retreat, were not content with tripling its dimensions without its ceasing to be well-proportioned, and not only allowed my eyes to enjoy the delights of extension after those of concentration, but added further to the pleasure of my solitude, which, while still inviolable, was no longer shut in, the sense of liberty. This closet looked out upon a courtyard, a fair solitary stranger whom I was glad to have for a neighbour when next morning my eyes fell on her, a captive between her high walls in which no other window opened, with nothing but two yellowing trees which were enough to give a pinkish softness to the pure sky above.

Before going to bed I decided to leave the room in order to explore the whole of my fairy kingdom. I walked down a long gallery which did me homage successively with all that it had to offer me if I could not sleep, an armchair placed waiting in a corner, a spinet, on a table against the wall, a bowl of blue crockery filled with cinerarias, and, in an old frame, the phantom of a lady of long ago whose powdered hair was starred with blue flowers, holding in her hand a bunch of carnations. When I came to the end, the bare wall in which no door opened said to me simply “Now you must turn and go back, but, you see, you are at home here, the house is yours,” while the soft carpet, not to be left out, added that if I did not sleep that night I could easily come in barefoot, and’ the unshuttered windows, looking out over the oper, country, assured me that they would hold a sleepless vigil and that, at whatever hour I chose to come in, I

need not be afraid of disturbing anyone. And behind a hanging curtain I surprised only a little closet which, stopped by the wall and unable to escape any farther, had hidden itself there with a guilty conscience and gave me a frightened stare from its little round window, glowing blue in the moonlight. I went to bed, but the presence of the eiderdown quilt, of the pillars, of the neat fireplace, by straining my attention to a pitch beyond that of Paris, prevented me from letting myself go upon my habitual train of fancies. And as it is this particular state of strained attention that enfolds our slumbers, acts upon them, modifies them, brings them into line with this or that series of past impressions, the images that filled my dreams that first night were borrowed from a memory entirely distinct from that on which I was in the habit of drawing. If I had been tempted while asleep to let myself be swept back upon my ordinary current of remembrance, the bed to which I was not accustomed, the comfortable attention which I was obliged to pay to the position of my various limbs when I turned over, were sufficient to correct my error, to disentangle and to keep running the new thread of my dreams. It is the same with sleep as with our perception of the external world. It needs only a modification in our habits to make it poetic, it is enough that while undressing we should have dozed off unconsciously upon the bed, for the dimensions of our dream-world to be altered and its beauty felt. We awake, look at our watch, see ‘four o’clock’; it is only four o’clock in the morning, but we imagine that the whole day has gone by, so vividly does this nap of a few minutes, unsought by us, appear to have come down to us from the skies, by virtue of some divine right, full-bodied, vast, like an Emperor’s orb of gold. In the morning, while worrying over the thought that my grandfather was ready, and was waiting for me to start on our walk along the Méséglise way, I was awakened by the blare of a regimental band which passed every day beneath my windows. But on several occasions — and I mention these because one cannot properly describe human life unless one shews it soaked in the sleep in which it plunges, which, night after night, sweeps round it as a promontory is encircled by the sea — the intervening layer of sleep was strong enough to bear the shock of the music and I heard nothing. On the other mornings it gave way for a moment; but, still velvety with the refreshment of having slept, my consciousness (like those organs by which, after a local anaesthetic, a cauterisation, not perceived at first, is felt only at the very end and then as a faint burning smart) was touched only gently by the shrill points of the fifes which caressed it with a vague, cool, matutinal warbling; and after this brief interruption in which the silence had turned to music it relapsed into my slumber

before even the dragoons had finished passing, depriving me of the latest opening buds of the sparkling clangorous nosegay. And the zone of my consciousness which its springing stems had brushed was so narrow, so circumscribed with sleep that later on, when Saint-Loup asked me whether I had heard the band, I was no longer ertain that the sound of its brasses had not been as imaginary as that which I heard during the day echo, after the slightest noise, from the paved streets of the town. Perhaps I had heard it only in a dream, prompted by my fear of being awakened, or else of not being awakened and so not seeing the regiment march past. For often, when I was still asleep at the moment when, on the contrary, I had supposed that the noise would awaken me, for the next hour I imagined that I was awake, while still drowsing, and I enacted to myself with tenuous shadow-shapes on the screen of my slumber the various scenes of which it deprived me but at which I had the illusion of looking on.

What one has meant to do during the day, as it turns out, sleep intervening, one accomplishes only in one's dreams, that is to say after it has been distorted by sleep into following another line than one would have chosen when awake. The same story branches off and has a different ending. When all is said, the world in which we live when we are asleep is so different that people who have difficulty in going to sleep seek first of all to escape from the waking world. After having desperately, for hours on end, with shut eyes, revolved in their minds thoughts similar to those which they would have had with their eyes open, they take heart again on noticing that the last minute has been crawling under the weight of an argument in formal contradiction of the laws of thought, and their realisation of this, and the brief 'absence' to which it points, indicate that the door is now open through which they will perhaps be able, presently, to escape from the perception of the real, to advance to a resting-place more or less remote on the other side, which will mean their having a more or less 'good' night. But already a great stride has been made when we turn our back on the real, when we reach the cave in which 'auto-suggestions' prepare — like witches — the hell-broth of imaginary maladies or of the recurrence of nervous disorders, and watch for the hour at which the storm that has been gathering during our unconscious sleep will break with sufficient force to make sleep cease.

Not far thence is the secret garden in which grow like strange flowers the kinds of sleep, so different one from another, the sleep induced by datura, by the multiple extracts of ether, the sleep of belladonna, of opium, of valerian, flowers whose petals remain shut until the day when the predestined visitor shall come and, touching them, bid them open, and for long hours inhale the aroma of their

peculiar dreams into a marvelling and bewildered being. At the end of the garden stands the convent with open windows through which we hear voices repeating the lessons learned before we went to sleep, which we shall know only at the moment of awakening; while, a presage of that moment, sounds the resonant tick of that inward alarum which our preoccupation has so effectively regulated that when our housekeeper comes in with the warning: “It is seven o’clock,” she will find us awake and ready. On the dim walls of that chamber which opens upon our dreams, within which toils without ceasing that oblivion of the sorrows of love whose task, interrupted and brought: to nought at times by a nightmare big with reminiscence, is ever speedily resumed, hang, even after we are awake, the memories of our dreams, but so overshadowed that often we catch sight of them for the first time only in the broad light of the afternoon when the ray of a similar idea happens by chance to strike them; some of them brilliant and harmonious while we slept, but already so distorted that, having failed to recognise them, we can but hasten to lay them in the earth like dead bodies too quickly decomposed or relics so seriously damaged, so nearly crumbling into dust that the most skilful restorer could not bring them back to their true form or make anything of them. Near the gate is the quarry to which our heavier slumbers repair in search of substances which coat the brain with so unbreakable a glaze that, to awaken the sleeper, his own will is obliged, even on a golden morning, to smite him with mighty blows like a young Siegfried. Beyond this, again, are the nightmares of which the doctors foolishly assert that they tire us more than does insomnia, whereas on the contrary they enable the thinker to escape from the strain of thought; those nightmares with their fantastic picture-books in which our relatives who are dead are shewn meeting with a serious accident which at the same time does not preclude their speedy recovery. Until then we keep them in a little rat-cage, in which they are smaller than white mice and, covered with big red spots, out of each of which a feather sprouts, engage us in Ciceronian dialogues. Next to this picture-book is the revolving disc of awakening, by virtue of which we submit for a moment to the tedium of having to return at once to a house which was pulled down fifty years ago, the memory of which is gradually effaced as sleep grows more distant by a number of others, until we arrive at that memory which the disc presents only when it has ceased to revolve and which coincides with what we shall see with opened eyes.

Sometimes I had heard nothing, being in one of those slumbers into which we fall as into a pit from which we are heartily glad to be drawn up a little later, heavy, overfed, digesting all that has been brought to us (as by the nymphs who

fed the infant Hercules) by those agile, vegetative powers whose activity is doubled while we sleep.

That kind of sleep is called ‘sleeping like lead,’ and it seems as though one has become, oneself, and remains for a few moments after such a sleep is ended, simply a leaden image. One is no longer a person. How then, seeking for one’s mind, one’s personality, as one seeks for a thing that is lost, does one recover one’s own self rather than any other? Why, when one begins again to think, is it not another personality than yesterday’s that is incarnate in one? One fails to see what can dictate the choice, or why, among the millions of human beings any one of whom one might be, it is on him who one was overnight that unerringly one lays one’s hand? What is it that guides us, when there has been an actual interruption — whether it be that our unconsciousness has been complete or our dreams entirely different from ourselves? There has indeed been death, as when the heart has ceased to beat and a rhythmical friction of the tongue revives us. No doubt the room, even if we have seen it only once before, awakens memories to which other, older memories cling. Or were some memories also asleep in us of which we now become conscious? The resurrection at our awakening — after that healing attack of mental alienation which is sleep — must after all be similar to what occurs when we recapture a name, a line, a refrain that we had forgotten. And perhaps the resurrection of the soul after death is to be conceived as a phenomenon of memory.

When I had finished sleeping, tempted by the sunlit sky — but discouraged by the chill — of those last autumn mornings, so luminous and so cold, in which winter begins, to get up and look at the trees on which the leaves were indicated now only by a few strokes, golden or rosy, which seemed to have been left in the air, on an invisible web, I raised my head from the pillow and stretched my neck, keeping my body still hidden beneath the bedclothes; like a chrysalis in the process of change I was a dual creature, with the different parts of which a single environment did not agree; for my eyes colour was sufficient, without warmth; my chest on the other hand was anxious for warmth and not for colour. I rose only after my fire had been lighted, and studied the picture, so delicate and transparent, of the pink and golden morning, to which I had now added by artificial means the element of warmth that it lacked, poking my fire which burned and smoked like a good pipe and gave me, as a pipe would have given me, a pleasure at once coarse because it was based upon a material comfort and delicate because beyond it was printed a pure vision. The walls of my dressing-room were covered with a paper on which a violent red background was

patterned with black and white flowers, to which it seemed that I should have some difficulty in growing accustomed. But they succeeded only in striking me as novel, in forcing me to enter not into conflict but into contact with them, in modulating the gaiety, the songs of my morning toilet, they succeeded only in imprisoning me in the heart of a sort of poppy, out of which to look at a world which I saw quite differently from in Paris, from the gay screen which was this new dwelling-place, of a different aspect from the house of my parents, and into which flowed a purer air. On certain days, I was agitated by the desire to see my grandmother again, or by the fear that she might be ill, or else it was the memory of some undertaking which I had left half-finished in Paris, and which seemed to have made no progress; sometimes again it was some difficulty in which, even here, I had managed to become involved. One or other of these anxieties had kept me from sleeping, and I was without strength to face my sorrow which in a moment grew to fill the whole of my existence. Then from the hotel I sent a messenger to the barracks, with a line to Saint-Loup: I told him that, should it be materially possible — I knew that it was extremely difficult for him — I should be most grateful if he would look in for a minute. An hour later he arrived; and on hearing his ring at the door I felt myself liberated from my obsessions. I knew that, if they were stronger than I, he was stronger than they, and my attention was diverted from them and concentrated on him who would have to settle them. He had come into the room, and already he had enveloped me in the gust of fresh air in which from before dawn he had been displaying so much activity, a vital atmosphere very different from that of my room, to which I at once adapted myself by appropriate reactions.

"I hope you weren't angry with me for bothering you; there is something that is worrying me, as you probably guessed."

"Not at all; I just supposed you wanted to see me, and I thought it very nice of you. I was delighted that you should have sent for me. But what is the trouble? Things not going well? What can I do to help?"

He listened to my explanations, and gave careful answers; but before he had uttered a word he had transformed me to his own likeness; compared with the important occupations which kept him so busy, so alert, so happy, the worries which, a moment ago, I had been unable to endure for another instant seemed to me as to him negligible; I was like a man who, not having been able to open his eyes for some days, sends for a doctor, who neatly and gently raises his eyelid, removes from beneath it and shews him a grain of sand; the sufferer is healed and comforted. All my cares resolved themselves into a telegram which Saint-

Loup undertook to dispatch. Life seemed to me so different, so delightful; I was flooded with such a surfeit of strength that I longed for action.

"What are you doing now?" I asked him.

"I must leave you, I'm afraid; we're going on a route march in three quarters of an hour, and I have to be on parade."

"Then it's been a great bother to you, coming here?"

"No, no bother at all, the Captain was very good about it; he told me that if it was for you I must go at once; but you understand, I don't like to seem to be abusing the privilege."

"But if I got up and dressed quickly and went by myself to the place where you'll be training, it would interest me immensely, and I could perhaps talk to you during the breaks."

"I shouldn't advise you to do that; you have been lying awake, racking your brains over a thing which, I assure you, is not of the slightest importance, but now that it has ceased to worry you, lay your head down on the pillow and go to sleep, which you will find an excellent antidote to the déminéralisation of your nerve-cells; only you mustn't go to sleep too soon, because our band-boys will be coming along under your windows; but as soon as they've passed I think you'll be left in peace, and we shall meet again this evening, at dinner."

But soon I was constantly going to see the regiment being trained in field operations, when I began to take an interest in the military theories which Saint-Loup's friends used to expound over the dinner-table, and when it had become the chief desire of my life to see at close quarters their various leaders, just as a person who makes music his principal study and spends his life in the concert halls finds pleasure in frequenting the cafés in which one mingles with the life of the members of the orchestra. To reach the training ground I used to have to take tremendously long walks. In the evening after dinner the longing for sleep made my head drop every now and then as in a swoon. Next morning I realised that I had no more heard the band than, at Balbec, after the evenings on which Saint-Loup had taken me to dinner at Rivebelle, I used to hear the concert on the beach. And at the moment when I wished to rise I had a delicious feeling of incapacity; I felt myself fastened to a deep, invisible ground by the articulations (of which my tiredness made me conscious) of muscular and nutritious roots. I felt myself full of strength; life seemed to extend more amply before me; this was because I had reverted to the good tiredness of my childhood at Combray on the mornings following days on which we had taken the Guermantes walk. Poets make out that we recapture for a moment the self that we were long ago when

we enter some house or garden in which we used to live in our youth. But these are most hazardous pilgrimages, which end as often in disappointment as in success. The fixed places, contemporary with different years, it is in ourselves that we should rather seek to find them. This is where the advantage comes in, to a certain extent, of great exhaustion followed by a good night's rest. Good nights, to make us descend into the most subterranean galleries of sleep, where no reflexion from overnight, no gleam of memory comes to lighten the inward monologue (if so be that it cease not also), turn so effectively the soil and break through the surface stone of our body that we discover there, where our muscles dive down and throw out their twisted roots and breathe the air of the new life, the garden in which as a child we used to play. There is no need to travel in order to see it again; we must dig down inwardly to discover it. What once covered the earth is no longer upon it but beneath; a mere excursion does not suffice for a visit to the dead city, excavation is necessary also. But we shall see how certain impressions, fugitive and fortuitous, carry us back even more effectively to the past, with a more delicate precision, with a flight more light-winged, more immaterial, more headlong, more unerring, more immortal than these organic dislocations.

Sometimes my exhaustion was greater still; I had, without any opportunity of going to bed, been following the operations for several days on end. How blessed then was my return to the hotel! As I got into bed I seemed to have escaped at last from the hands of enchanters, sorcerers like those who people the 'romances' beloved of our forebears in the seventeenth century. My sleep that night and the lazy morning that followed it were no more than a charming fairy tale. Charming; beneficent perhaps also. I reminded myself that the keenest sufferings have their place of sanctuary, that one can always, when all else fails, find repose. These thoughts carried me far.

On days when, although there was no parade, Saint-Loup had to stay in barracks, I used often to go and visit him there. It was a long way; I had to leave the town and cross the viaduct, from either side of which I had an immense view. A strong breeze blew almost always over this high ground, and filled all the buildings erected on three sides of the barrack-square, which howled incessantly like a cave of the winds. While I waited for Robert — he being engaged on some duty or other — outside the door of his room or in the mess, talking to some of his friends to whom he had introduced me (and whom later on I came now and then to see, even when he was not to be there), looking down from the window three hundred feet to the country below, bare now except where recently sown

fields, often still soaked with rain and glittering in the sun, shewed a few stripes of green, of the brilliance and translucent limpidity of enamel, I could hear him discussed by the others, and I soon learned what a popular favourite he was. Among many of the volunteers, belonging to other squadrons sons of rich business or professional men who looked at the higher aristocratic society only from outside and without penetrating its enclosure, the attraction which they naturally felt towards what they knew of Saint-Loup's character was reinforced by the distinction that attached in their eyes to the young man whom, on Saturday evenings, when they went on pass to Paris, they had seen supping in the Café de la Paix with the Duc d'Uzès and the Prince d'Orléans. And on that account, into his handsome face, his casual way of walking and saluting officers, the perpetual dance of his eyeglass, the affectation shewn in the cut of his service dress — the caps always too high, the breeches of too fine a cloth and too pink a shade — they had introduced the idea of a 'tone' which, they were positive, was lacking in the best turned-out officers in the regiment, even the majestic Captain to whom I had been indebted for the privilege of sleeping in barracks, who seemed, in comparison, too pompous and almost common.

One of them said that the Captain had bought a new horse. "He can buy as many horses as he likes. I passed Saint-Loup on Sunday morning in the Allée des Acacias; now he's got some style on a horse!" replied his companion, and knew what he was talking about, for these young fellows belonged to a class which, if it does not frequent the same houses and know the same people, yet, thanks to money and leisure, does not differ from the nobility in its experience of all those refinements of life which money can procure. At any rate their refinement had, in the matter of clothes, for instance, something about it more studied, more impeccable than that free and easy negligence which had so delighted my grandmother in Saint-Loup. It gave quite a thrill to these sons of big stockbrokers or bankers, as they sat eating oysters after the theatre, to see at an adjoining table Serjeant Saint-Loup. And what a tale there was to tell in barracks on Monday night, after a week-end leave, by one of them who was in Robert's squadron, and to whom he had said how d'ye do 'most civilly,' while another, who was not in the same squadron, was quite positive that, in spite of this, Saint-Loup had recognised him, for two or three times he had put up his eyeglass and stared in the speaker's direction.

"Yes, my brother saw him at the Paix," said another, who had been spending the day with his mistress; "my brother says his dress coat was cut too loose and didn't fit him."

“What was the waistcoat like?”

“He wasn’t wearing a white waistcoat; it was purple, with sort of palms on it; stunning!”

To the ‘old soldiers’ (sons of the soil who had never heard of the Jockey Club and simply put Saint-Loup in the category of ultra-rich non-commissioned officers, in which they included all those who, whether bankrupt or not, lived in a certain style, whose income or debts ran into several figures, and who were generous towards their men), the gait, the eyeglass, the breeches, the caps of Saint-Loup, even if they saw in them nothing particularly aristocratic, furnished nevertheless just as much interest and meaning. They recognised in these peculiarities the character, the style which they had assigned once and for all time to this most popular of the ‘stripes’ in the regiment, manners like no one’s else, scornful indifference to what his superior officers might think, which seemed to them the natural corollary of his goodness to his subordinates. The morning cup of coffee in the canteen, the afternoon ‘lay-down’ in the barrack-room seemed pleasanter, somehow, when some old soldier fed the hungering, lazy section with some savoury titbit as to a cap in which Saint-Loup had appeared on parade.

“It was the height of my pack.”

“Come off it, old chap, you don’t expect us to believe that; it couldn’t have been the height of your pack,” interrupted a young college graduate who hoped by using these slang terms not to appear a ‘learned beggar,’ and by venturing on this contradiction to obtain confirmation of a fact the thought of which enchanted him.

“Oh, so it wasn’t the height of my pack, wasn’t it? You measured it, I suppose! I tell you this much, the C. O. glared at it as if he’d have liked to put him in clink. But you needn’t think the great Saint-Loup felt squashed; no, he went and he came, and down with his head and up with his head, and that blinking glass screwed in his eye all the time. We’ll see what the ‘Capstan’ has to say when he hears. Oh, very likely he’ll say nothing, but you may be sure he won’t be pleased. But there’s nothing so wonderful about that cap. I hear he’s got thirty of ‘em and more at home, at his house in town.”

“Where did you hear that, old man? From our blasted corporal-dog?” asked the young graduate, pedantically displaying the new forms of speech which he had only recently acquired and with which he took a pride in garnishing his conversation.

“Where did I hear it? From his batman; what d’you think?”

“Ah! Now you’re talking. That’s a chap who knows when he’s well off!”

“I should say so! He’s got more in his pocket than I have, certain sure! And besides he gives him all his own things, and everything. He wasn’t getting his grub properly, he says. Along comes de Saint-Loup, and gives cooky hell: ‘I want him to be properly fed, d’you hear,’ he says, ‘and I don’t care what it costs.’”

The old soldier made up for the triviality of the words quoted by the emphasis of his tone, in a feeble imitation of the speaker which had an immense success.

On leaving the barracks I would take a stroll, and then, to fill up the time before I went, as I did every evening, to dine with Saint-Loup at the hotel in which he and his friends had established their mess, I made for my own, as soon as the sun had set, so as to have a couple of hours in which to rest and read. In the square, the evening light bedecked the pepper-pot turrets of the castle with little pink clouds which matched the colour of the bricks, and completed the harmony by softening the tone of the latter where it bathed them. So strong a current of vitality coursed through my nerves that no amount of movement on my part could exhaust it; each step I took, after touching a stone of the pavement, rebounded off it. I seemed to have growing on my heels the wings of Mercury. One of the fountains was filled with a ruddy glow, while in the other the moonlight had already begun to turn the water opalescent. Between them were children at play, uttering shrill cries, wheeling in circles, obeying some necessity of the hour, like swifts or bats. Next door to the hotel, the old National Courts and the Louis XVI orangery, in which were installed now the savings-bank and the Army Corps headquarters, were lighted from within by the palely gilded globes of their gas-jets which, seen in the still clear daylight outside, suited those vast, tall, eighteenth-century windows from which the last rays of the setting sun had not yet departed, as would have suited a complexion heightened with rouge a headdress of yellow tortoise-shell, and persuaded me to seek out my fireside and the lamp which, alone in the shadowy front of my hotel, was striving to resist the gathering darkness, and for the sake of which I went indoors before it was quite dark, for pleasure, as to an appetising meal. I kept, when I was in my room, the same fulness of sensation that I had felt outside. It gave such an apparent convexity of surface to things which as a rule seem flat and empty, to the yellow flame of the fire, the coarse blue paper on the ceiling, on which the setting sun had scribbled corkscrews and whirligigs, like a schoolboy with a piece of red chalk, the curiously patterned cloth on the round

table, on which a ream of essay paper and an inkpot lay in readiness for me, with one of Bergotte's novels, that ever since then these things have continued to seem to me to be enriched with a whole form of existence which I feel that I should be able to extract from them if it were granted me to set eyes on them again. I thought with joy of the barracks that I had just left and of their weather-cock turning with every wind that blew. Like a diver breathing through a pipe which rises above the surface of the water, I felt that I was in a sense maintaining contact with a healthy, open-air life when I kept as a baiting-place those barracks, that towering observatory, dominating a country-side furrowed with canals of green enamel, into whose various buildings I esteemed as a priceless privilege, which I hoped would last, my freedom to go whenever I chose, always certain of a welcome.

At seven o'clock I dressed myself and went out again to dine with Saint-Loup at the hotel where he took his meals. I liked to go there on foot. It was by now pitch dark, and after the third day of my visit there began to blow, as soon as night had fallen, an icy wind which seemed a harbinger of snow. As I walked, I ought not, strictly speaking, to have ceased for a moment to think of Mme. de Guermantes; it was only in the attempt to draw nearer to her that I had come to visit Robert's garrison. But a memory, a grief, are fleeting things. There are days when they remove so far that we are barely conscious of them, we think that they have gone for ever. Then we pay attention to other things. And the streets of this town had not yet become for me what streets are in the place where one is accustomed to live, simply means of communication between one part and another. The life led by the inhabitants of this unknown world must, it seemed to me, be a marvellous thing, and often the lighted windows of some dwelling-house kept me standing for a long while motionless in the darkness by laying before my eyes the actual and mysterious scenes of an existence into which I might not penetrate. Here the fire-spirit displayed to me in purple colouring the booth of a chestnut seller in which a couple of serjeants, their belts slung over the backs of chairs, were playing cards, never dreaming that a magician's wand was making them emerge from the night, like a transparency on the stage, and presenting them in their true lineaments at that very moment to the eyes of an arrested passerby whom they could not see. In a little curiosity shop a candle, burned almost to its socket, projecting its warm glow over an engraving reprinted it in sanguine, while, battling against the darkness, the light of the big lamp tanned a scrap of leather, inlaid a dagger with fiery spangles, on pictures which were only bad copies spread a priceless film of gold like the patina of

time or the varnish used by a master, made in fact of the whole hovel, in which there was nothing but pinchbeck rubbish, a marvellous composition by Rembrandt. Sometimes I lifted my gaze to some huge old dwelling-house on which the shutters had not been closed and in which amphibious men and women floated slowly to and fro in the rich liquid that after nightfall rose incessantly from the wells of the lamps to fill the rooms to the very brink of the outer walls of stone and glass, the movement of their bodies sending through it long unctuous golden ripples. I proceeded on my way, and often, in the dark alley that ran past the cathedral, as long ago on the road to Méséglise, the force of my desire caught and held me; it seemed that a woman must be on the point of appearing, to satisfy it; if, in the darkness, I felt suddenly brush past me a skirt, the violence of the pleasure which I then felt made it impossible for me to believe that the contact was accidental and I attempted to seize in my arms a terrified stranger. This gothic alley meant for me something so real that if I had been successful in raising and enjoying a woman there, it would have been impossible for me not to believe that it was the ancient charm of the place that was bringing us together, and even though she were no more than a common street-walker, stationed there every evening, still the wintry night, the strange place, the darkness, the mediaeval atmosphere would have lent her their mysterious glamour. I thought of what might be in store for me; to try to forget Mme. de Guermantes seemed to me a dreadful thing, but reasonable, and for the first time possible, easy perhaps even. In the absolute quiet of this neighbourhood I could hear ahead of me shouted words and laughter which must come from tipsy revellers staggering home. I waited to see them, I stood peering in the direction from which I had heard the sound. But I was obliged to wait for some time, for the surrounding silence was so intense that it allowed to travel with the utmost clearness and strength sounds that were still a long way off. Finally the revellers did appear; not, as I had supposed, in front of me, but ever so far behind. Whether the intersection of sidestreets, the interposition of buildings had, by reverberation, brought about this acoustic error, or because it is very difficult to locate a sound when the place from which it comes is not known, I had been as far wrong over direction as over distance.

The wind grew stronger. It was thick and bristling with coming snow. I returned to the main street and jumped on board the little tramway-car on which, from its platform, an officer, without apparently seeing them, was acknowledging the salutes of the loutish soldiers who trudged past along the pavement, their faces daubed crimson by the cold, reminding me, in this little

town which the sudden leap from autumn into early winter seemed to have transported farther north, of the rubicund faces which Breughel gives to his merry, junketing, frostbound peasants.

And sure enough at the hotel where I was to meet Saint-Loup and his friends and to which the fair now beginning had attracted a number of people from near and far, I found, as I hurried across the courtyard with its glimpses of glowing kitchens in which chickens were turning on spits, pigs were roasting, lobsters being flung, alive, into what the landlord called the 'everlasting fire,' an influx (worthy of some *Numbering of the People Before Bethlehem* such as the old Flemish masters used to paint) of new arrivals who assembled there in groups, asking the landlord or one of his staff (who, if he did not like the look of them, would recommend lodgings elsewhere in the town) whether they could have dinner and beds, while a scullion hurried past holding a struggling fowl by the neck. And similarly, in the big dining-room which I crossed the first day before coming to the smaller room in which my friend was waiting for me, it was of some feast in the Gospels portrayed with a mediaeval simplicity and an exaggeration typically Flemish that one was reminded by the quantity of fish, pullets, grouse, woodcock, pigeons, brought in dressed and garnished and piping hot by breathless waiters who slid over the polished floor to gain speed and set them down on the huge carving table where they were at once cut up but where — for most of the people had nearly finished dinner when I arrived — they accumulated untouched, as though their profusion and the haste of those who brought them in were due not so much to the requirements of the diners as to respect for the sacred text, scrupulously followed in the letter but quaintly illustrated by real details borrowed from local custom, and to an aesthetic and religious scruple for making evident to the eye the solemnity of the feast by the profusion of the victuals and the assiduity of the servers. One of these stood lost in thought at the far end of the room by a sideboard; and to find out from him, who alone appeared calm enough to be capable of answering me, in which room our table had been laid, making my way forward among the chafing-dishes that had been lighted here and there to keep the late comers' plates from growing cold (which did not, however, prevent the dessert, in the centre of the room, from being piled on the outstretched hands of a huge mannikin, sometimes supported on the wings of a duck, apparently of crystal, but really of ice, carved afresh every day with a hot iron by a sculptor-cook, quite in the Flemish manner), I went straight — at the risk of being knocked down by his colleagues — towards this servitor, in whom I felt that I recognised a character who is traditionally

present in all these sacred subjects, for he reproduced with scrupulous accuracy the blunt features, fatuous and ill-drawn, the musing expression, already half aware of the miracle of a divine presence which the others have not yet begun to suspect. I should add that, in view probably of the coming fair, this presentation was strengthened by a celestial contingent, recruited in mass, of cherubim and seraphim. A young angel musician, whose fair hair enclosed a fourteen-year-old face, was not, it was true, playing on any instrument, but stood musing before a gong or a pile of plates, while other less infantile angels flew swiftly across the boundless expanse of the room, beating the air with the ceaseless fluttering of the napkins which fell along the lines of their bodies like the wings in 'primitive' paintings, with pointed ends. Fleeing those ill-defined regions, screened by a hedge of palms through which the angelic servitors looked, from a distance, as though they had floated down out of the empyrean, I explored my way to the smaller room in which Saint-Loup's table was laid. I found there several of his friends who dined with him regularly, nobles except for one or two commoners in whom the young nobles had, in their school days, detected likely friends, and with whom they readily associated, proving thereby that they were not on principle hostile to the middle class, even though it were Republican, provided it had clean hands and went to mass. On the first of these evenings, before we sat down to dinner, I drew Saint-Loup into a corner and, in front of all the rest but so that they should not hear me, said to him:

"Robert, this is hardly the time or the place for what I am going to say, but I shan't be a second. I keep on forgetting to ask you when I'm in the barracks; isn't that Mme. de Guermantes's photograph that you have on your table?"

"Why, yes; my good aunt."

"Of course she is; what a fool I am; you told me before that she was; I'd forgotten all about her being your aunt. I say, your friends will be getting impatient, we must be quick, they're looking at us; another time will do; it isn't at all important."

"That's all right; go on as long as you like. They can wait."

"No, no; I do want to be polite to them; they're so nice; besides, it doesn't really matter in the least, I assure you."

"Do you know that worthy Oriane, then?"

This 'worthy Oriane,' as he might have said, 'that good Oriane,' did not imply that Saint-Loup regarded Mme. de Guermantes as especially good. In this instance the words 'good,' 'excellent,' 'worthy' are mere reinforcements of the demonstrative 'that,' indicating a person who is known to both parties and of

whom the speaker does not quite know what to say to someone outside the intimate circle. The word ‘good’ does duty as a stopgap and keeps the conversation going for a moment until the speaker has hit upon “Do you see much of her?” or “I haven’t set eyes on her for months,” or “I shall be seeing her on Tuesday,” or “She must be getting on, now, you know.”

“I can’t tell you how funny it is that it should be her photograph, because we’re living in her house now, in Paris, and I’ve been hearing the most astounding things” (I should have been hard put to it to say what) “about her, which have made me immensely interested in her, only from a literary point of view, don’t you know, from a — how shall I put it — from a Balzacian point of view; but you’re so clever you can see what I mean; I don’t need to explain things to you; but we must hurry up; what on earth will your friends think of my manners?”

“They will think absolutely nothing; I have told them that you are sublime, and they are a great deal more alarmed than you are.”

“You are too kind. But listen, what I want to say is this: I suppose Mme. de Guermantes hasn’t any idea that I know you, has she?”

“I can’t say; I haven’t seen her since the summer, because I haven’t had any leave since she’s been in town.”

“What I was going to say is this: I’ve been told that she looks on me as an absolute idiot.”

“That I do not believe; Oriane is not exactly an eagle, but all the same she’s by no means stupid.”

“You know that, as a rule, I don’t care about your advertising the good opinion you’re kind enough to hold of me; I’m not conceited. That’s why I’m sorry you should have said flattering things about me to your friends here (we will go back to them in two seconds). But Mme. de Guermantes is different; if you could let her know — if you would even exaggerate a trifle — what you think of me, you would give me great pleasure.”

“Why, of course I will, if that’s all you want me to do; it’s not very difficult; but what difference can it possibly make to you what she thinks of you? I suppose you think her no end of a joke, really; anyhow, if that’s all you want we can discuss it in front of the others or when we are by ourselves; I’m afraid of your tiring yourself if you stand talking, and it’s so inconvenient too, when we have heaps of opportunities of being alone together.”

It was precisely this inconvenience that had given me courage to approach Robert; the presence of the others was for me a pretext that justified my giving

my remarks a curt and incoherent form, under cover of which I could more easily dissemble the falsehood of my saying to my friend that I had forgotten his connexion with the Duchess, and also did not give him time to frame — with regard to my reasons for wishing that Mme. de Guermantes should know that I was his friend, was clever, and so forth — questions which would have been all the more disturbing in that I should not have been able to answer them.

"Robert, I'm surprised that a man of your intelligence should fail to understand that one doesn't discuss the things that will give one's friends pleasure; one does them. Now I, if you were to ask me no matter what, and indeed I only wish you would ask me to do something for you, I can assure you I shouldn't want any explanations. I may ask you for more than I really want; I have no desire to know Mme. de Guermantes, but just to test you I ought to have said that I was anxious to dine with Mme. de Guermantes; I am sure you would never have done it."

"Not only should I have done it, I will do it."

"When?"

"Next time I'm in Paris, three weeks from now, I expect."

"We shall see; I dare say she won't want to see me, though. I can't tell you how grateful I am."

"Not at all; it's nothing."

"Don't say that; it's everything in the world, because now I can see what sort of friend you are; whether what I ask you to do is important or not, disagreeable or not, whether I am really keen about it or ask you only as a test, it makes no difference; you say you will do it, and there you shew the fmeness of your mind and heart. A stupid friend would have started a discussion."

Which was exactly what he had just been doing; but perhaps I wanted to flatter his self-esteem; perhaps also I was sincere, the sole touchstone of merit seeming to me to be the extent to which a friend could be useful in respect of the one thing that seemed to me to have any importance, namely my love. Then I went on, perhaps from cunning, possibly from a genuine increase of affection inspired by gratitude, expectancy, and the copy of Mme. de Guermantes's very features which nature had made in producing her nephew Robert: "But, I say, we mustn't keep them waiting any longer, and I've mentioned only one of the two things I wanted to ask you, the less important; the other is more important to me, but I'm afraid you will never consent. Would it bore you if we were to call each other *tu*?"

"Bore me? My dear fellow! Joy! Tears of joy! Undreamed-of happiness!"

“Thank you — *tu* I mean; you begin first — ever so much. It is such a pleasure to me that you needn’t do anything about Mme. de Guermantes if you’d rather not, this is quite enough for me.”

“I can do both.”

“I say, Robert! Listen to me a minute,” I said to him later while we were at dinner. “Oh, it’s really too absurd the way our conversation is always being interrupted, I can’t think why — you remember the lady I was speaking to you about just now.”

“Yes.”

“You’re quite sure you know who’ I mean?”

“Why, what do you take me for, a village idiot?”

“You wouldn’t care to give me her photograph, I suppose?”

I had meant to ask him only for the loan of it. But when the time came to speak I felt shy, I decided that the request was indiscreet, and in order to hide my confusion I put the question more bluntly, and increased my demand, as if it had been quite natural.

“No; I should have to ask her permission first,” was his answer.

He blushed as he spoke. I could see that he had a reservation in his mind, that he credited me also with one, that he would give only a partial service to my love, under the restraint of certain moral principles, and for this I hated him.

At the same time I was touched to see how differently Saint-Loup behaved towards me now that I was no longer alone with him, and that his friends formed an audience. His increased affability would have left me cold had I thought that it was deliberately assumed; but I could feel that it was spontaneous and consisted only of all that he had to say about me in my absence and refrained as a rule from saying when we were together by ourselves. In our private conversations I might certainly suspect the pleasure that he found in talking to me, but that pleasure he almost always left unexpressed. Now, at the same remarks from me which, as a rule, he enjoyed without shewing it, he watched from the corner of his eye to see whether they produced on his friends the effect on which he had counted, an effect corresponding to what he had promised them beforehand. The mother of a girl in her first season could be no more unrelaxing in her attention to her daughter’s responses and to the attitude of the public. If I had made some remark at which, alone in my company, he would merely have smiled, he was afraid that the others might not have seen the point, and put in a “What’s that?” to make me repeat what I had said, to attract attention, and turning at once to his friends and making himself automatically, by facing them

with a hearty laugh, the fugleman of their laughter, presented me for the first time with the opinion that he actually held of me and must often have expressed to them. So that I caught sight of myself suddenly from without, like a person who reads his name in a newspaper or sees himself in a mirror.

It occurred to me, one of these evenings, to tell a mildly amusing story about Mme. Blandais, but I stopped at once, remembering that Saint-Loup knew it already, and that when I had tried to tell him it on the day following my arrival he had interrupted me with: “You told me that before, at Balbec.” I was surprised, therefore, to find him begging me to go on and assuring me that he did not know the story, and that it would amuse him immensely. “You’ve forgotten it for the moment,” I said to him, “but you’ll remember as I go on.” “No, really; I swear you’re mistaken. You’ve never told me. Do go on.” And throughout the story he fixed a feverish and enraptured gaze alternately on myself and on his friends. I realised only after I had finished, amid general laughter, that it had struck him that this story would give his friends a good idea of my wit, and that it was for this reason that he had pretended not to know it. Such is the stuff of friendship.

On the third evening, one of his friends, to whom I had not had an opportunity before of speaking, conversed with me at great length; and I overheard him telling Saint-Loup how much he had been enjoying himself. And indeed we sat talking together almost all evening, leaving our glasses of sauterne untouched on the table before us, isolated, sheltered from the others by the sumptuous curtains of one of those intuitive sympathies between man and man which, when they are not based upon any physical attraction, are the only kind that is altogether mysterious. Of such an enigmatic nature had seemed to me, at Balbec, that feeling which Saint-Loup had for me, which was not to be confused with the interest of our conversations, a feeling free from any material association, invisible, intangible, and yet a thing of the presence of which in himself, like a sort of inflammatory gas, he had been so far conscious as to refer to it with a smile. And yet there was perhaps something more surprising still in this sympathy born here in a single evening, like a flower that had budded and opened in a few minutes in the warmth of this little room. I could not help asking Robert when he spoke to me about Balbec whether it were really settled that he was to marry Mlle. d’Ambresac. He assured me that not only was it not settled, but there had never been any thought of such a match, he had never seen her, he did not know who she was. If at that moment I had happened to see any of the social gossipers who had told me of this coming event, they would promptly

have announced the betrothal of Mlle. d'Ambresac to some one who was not Saint-Loup and that of Saint-Loup to some one who was not Mlle. d'Ambresac. I should have surprised them greatly had I reminded them of their incompatible and still so recent predictions. In order that this little game may continue, and multiply false reports by attaching the greatest possible number to every name in turn, nature has furnished those who play it with a memory as short as their credulity is long.

Saint-Loup had spoken to me of another of his friends who was present also one with whom he was on particularly good terms just then, since they were the only two advocates in their mess of the retrial of Dreyfus.

Just as a brother of this friend of Saint-Loup, who had been trained at the Schola Cantorum, thought about every new musical work not at all what his father, his mother, his cousins, his club friends thought, but exactly what the other students thought at the Schola, so this non-commissioned nobleman (of whom Bloch formed an extraordinary opinion when I told him about him, because, touched to hear that he belonged to the same party as himself, he nevertheless imagined him on account of his aristocratic birth and religious and military upbringing to be as different as possible, endowed with the same romantic attraction as a native of a distant country) had a 'mentality,' as people were now beginning to say, analogous to that of the whole body of Dreyfusards in general and of Bloch in particular, on which the traditions of his family and the interests of his career could retain no hold whatever. Similarly one of Saint-Loup's cousins had married a young Eastern princess who was said to write poetry quite as fine as Victor Hugo's or Alfred de Vigny's, and in spite of this was supposed to have a different type of mind from what one would naturally expect, the mind of an Eastern princess immured in an Arabian Nights palace. For the writers who had the privilege of meeting her was reserved the disappointment or rather the joy of listening to conversation which gave the impression not of Scheherazade but of a person of genius of the type of Alfred de Vigny or Victor Hugo.

"That fellow? Oh, he's not like Saint-Loup, he's a regular devil," my new friend informed me; "he's not even straight about it. At first, he used to say: 'Just wait a little, there's a man I know well, a clever, kind-hearted fellow, General de Boisdeffre; you need have no hesitation in accepting his decision.' But as soon as he heard that Boisdeffre had pronounced Dreyfus guilty, Boisdeffre ceased to count: clericalism, staff prejudices, prevented his forming a candid opinion, although there is no one in the world (or was, rather, before this Dreyfus

business) half so clerical as our friend. Next he told us that now we were sure to get the truth, the case had been put in the hands of Saussier, and he, a soldier of the Republic (our friend coming of an ultra-monarchist family, if you please), was a man of bronze, a stern unyielding conscience. But when Saussier pronounced Esterhazy innocent, he found fresh reasons to account for the decision, reasons damaging not to Dreyfus but to General Saussier. It was the militarist spirit that blinded Saussier (and I must explain to you that our friend is just as much militarist as clerical, or at least he was; I don't know what to think of him now). His family are all brokenhearted at seeing him possessed by such ideas."

"Don't you think," I suggested, turning half towards Saint-Loup so as not to appear to be cutting myself off from him, as well as towards his friend, and so that we might all three join in the conversation, "that the influence we ascribe to environment is particularly true of intellectual environment. One is the man of one's idea. There are far fewer ideas than men, therefore all men with similar ideas are alike. As there is nothing material in an idea, so the people who are only materially neighbours of the man with an idea can do nothing to alter it."

At this point I was interrupted by Saint-Loup, because another of the young men had leaned across to him with a smile and, pointing to me, exclaimed: "Duroc! Duroc all over!" I had no idea what this might mean, but I felt the expression on the shy young face to be more than friendly. While I was speaking, the approbation of the party seemed to Saint-Loup superfluous; he insisted on silence. And just as a conductor stops his orchestra with a rap from his baton because some one in the audience has made a noise, so he rebuked the author of this disturbance: "Gibergue, you must keep your mouth shut when people are speaking. You can tell us about it afterwards." And to me: "Please go on."

I gave a sigh of relief, for I had been afraid that he was going to make me begin all over again.

"And as an idea," I went on, "is a thing that cannot participate in human interests and would be incapable of deriving any benefit from them, the men who are governed by an idea are not influenced by material considerations."

When I had finished, "That's one in the eye for you, my boys," exclaimed Saint-Loup, who had been following me with his gaze with the same anxious solicitude as if I had been walking upon a tight-rope. "What were you going to say, Gibergue?"

"I was just saying that your friend reminded me of Major Duroc. I seemed to

hear him speaking."

"Why, I've often thought so myself," replied Saint-Loup; "they have several points in common, but you'll find there are a thousand things in this fellow that Duroc hasn't got."

Saint-Loup was not satisfied with this comparison. In an ecstasy of joy, into which there no doubt entered the joy that he felt in making me shine before his friends, with extreme volubility, stroking me as though he were rubbing down a horse that had just come first past the post, he reiterated: "You're the cleverest man I know, do you hear?" He corrected himself, and added: "You and Elstir.— You don't mind my bracketing him with you, I hope. You understand — punctiliousness. It's like this: I say it to you as one might have said to Balzac: 'You are the greatest novelist of the century — you and Stendhal.' Excessive punctiliousness, don't you know, and at heart an immense admiration. No? You don't admit Stendhal?" he went on, with an ingenuous confidence in my judgment which found expression in a charming, smiling, almost childish glance of interrogation from his green eyes. "Oh, good! I see you're on my side; Bloch can't stand Stendhal. I think it's idiotic of him. The Chartreuse is after all an immense work, don't you think? I am so glad you agree with me. What is it you like best in the*Chartreuse*, answer me?" he appealed to me with a boyish impetuosity. And the menace of his physical strength made the question almost terrifying. "Mosca? Fabrice?" I answered timidly that Mosca reminded me a little of M. de Norpois. Whereupon peals of laughter from the young Siegfried Saint-Loup. And while I was going on to explain: "But Mosca is far more intelligent, not so pedantic," I heard Robert cry: "Bravo!" actually clapping his hands, and, helpless with laughter, gasp: "Oh, perfect! Admirable! You really are astounding."

I took a particular pleasure in talking to this young man, as for that matter to all Robert's friends and to Robert himself, about their barracks, the officers of the garrison, and the army in general. Thanks to the immensely enlarged scale on which we see the things, however petty they may be, in the midst of which we eat, and talk, and lead our real life; thanks to that formidable enlargement which they undergo, and the effect of which is that the rest of the world, not being present, cannot compete with them, and assumes in comparison the unsubstantiality of a dream, I had begun to take an interest in the various personalities of the barracks, in the officers whom I saw in the square when I went to visit Saint-Loup, or, if I was awake then, when the regiment passed beneath my windows. I should have liked to know more about the major whom

Saint-Loup so greatly admired, and about the course of military history which would have appealed to me “even from an aesthetic point of view.” I knew that with Robert the spoken word was, only too often, a trifle hollow, but at other times implied the assimilation of valuable ideas which he was fully capable of grasping. Unfortunately, from the military point of view Robert was exclusively preoccupied at this time with the case of Dreyfus. He spoke little about it, since he alone of the party at table was a Dreyfusard; the others were violently opposed to the idea of a fresh trial, except my other neighbour, my new friend, and his opinions appeared to be somewhat vague. A firm admirer of the colonel, who was regarded as an exceptionally competent officer and had denounced the current agitation against the Army in several of his regimental orders, which won him the reputation of being an anti-Dreyfusard, my neighbour had heard that his commanding officer had let fall certain remarks which had led to the supposition that he had his doubts as to the guilt of Dreyfus and retained his admiration for Picquart. In the latter respect, at any rate, the rumour of Dreyfusism as applied to the colonel was as ill-founded as are all the rumours, springing from none knows where, which float around any great scandal. For, shortly afterwards, this colonel having been detailed to interrogate the former Chief of the Intelligence Branch, had treated him with a brutality and contempt the like of which had never been known before. However this might be (and naturally he had not taken the liberty of going direct to the colonel for his information), my neighbour had paid Saint-Loup the compliment of telling him — in the tone in which a Catholic lady might tell a Jewish lady that her parish priest denounced the pogroms in Russia and might openly admire the generosity of certain Israelites — that their colonel was not, with regard to Dreyfusism — to a certain kind of Dreyfusism, at least — the fanatical, narrow opponent that he had been made out to be.

“I am not surprised,” was Saint-Loup’s comment; “for he’s a sensible man. But in spite of that he is blinded by the prejudices of his caste, and above all by his clericalism. Now,” he turned to me, “Major Duroc, the lecturer on military history I was telling you about; there’s a man who is whole-heartedly in support of our views, or so I’m told. And I should have been surprised to hear that he wasn’t, for he’s not only a brilliantly clever man, but a Radical-Socialist and a freemason.”

Partly out of courtesy to his friends, whom these expressions of Saint-Loup’s faith in Dreyfus made uncomfortable, and also because the subject was of more interest to myself, I asked my neighbour if it were true that this major

gave a demonstration of military history which had a genuine aesthetic beauty. “It is absolutely true.”

“But what do you mean by that?”

“Well, all that you read, let us say, in the narrative of a military historian, the smallest facts, the most trivial happenings, are only the outward signs of an idea which has to be analysed, and which often brings to light other ideas, like a palimpsest. So that you have a field for study as intellectual as any science you care to name, or any art, and one that is satisfying to the mind.”

“Give me an example or two, if you don’t mind.”

“It is not very easy to explain,” Saint-Loup broke in. “You read, let us say, that this or that Corps has tried... but before we go any further, the serial number of the Corps, its order of battle are not without their significance. If it is not the first time that the operation has been attempted, and if for the same operation we find a different Corps being brought up, it is perhaps a sign that the previous Corps have been wiped out or have suffered heavy casualties in the said operation; that they are no longer in a fit state to carry it through successfully. Next, we must ask ourselves what was this Corps which is now out of action; if it was composed of shock troops, held in reserve for big attacks, a fresh Corps of inferior quality will have little chance of succeeding where the first has failed. Furthermore, if we are not at the start of a campaign, this fresh Corps may itself be a composite formation of odds and ends withdrawn from other Corps, which throws a light on the strength of the forces the belligerent still has at his disposal and the proximity of the moment when his forces shall be definitely inferior to the enemy’s, which gives to the operation on which this Corps is about to engage a different meaning, because, if it is no longer in a condition to make good its losses, its successes even will only help mathematically to bring it nearer to its ultimate destruction. And then, the serial number of the Corps that it has facing it is of no less significance. If, for instance, it is a much weaker unit, which has already accounted for several important units of the attacking force, the whole nature of the operation is changed, since, even if it should end in the loss of the position which the defending force has been holding, simply to have held it for any length of time may be a great success if a very small defending force has been sufficient to disable highly important forces on the other side. You can understand that if, in the analysis of the Corps engaged on both sides, there are all these points of importance, the study of the position itself, of the roads, of the railways which it commands, of the lines of communication which it protects, is of the very highest. One must study what I may call the whole geographical

context," he added with a laugh. And indeed he was so delighted with this expression that, every time he employed it, even months afterwards, it was always accompanied by the same laugh. "While the operation is being prepared by one of the belligerents, if you read that one of his patrols has been wiped out in the neighbourhood of the position by the other belligerent, one of the conclusions which you are entitled to draw is that one side was attempting to reconnoitre the defensive works with which the other intended to resist his attack. An exceptional burst of activity at a given point may indicate the desire to capture that point, but equally well the desire to hold the enemy in check there, not to retaliate at the point at which he has attacked you; or it may indeed be only a feint, intended to cover by an increased activity the relief of troops in that sector. (Which was a classic feint in Napoleon's wars.) On the other hand, to appreciate the significance of any movement, its probable object, and, as a corollary, the other movements by which it will be accompanied or followed, it is not immaterial to consult, not so much the announcements issued by the Higher Command, which may be intended to deceive the enemy, to mask a possible check, as the manual of field operations in use in the country in question. We are always entitled to assume that the manoeuvre which an army has attempted to carry out is that prescribed by the rules that are applicable to the circumstances. If, for instance, the rule lays down that a frontal attack should be accompanied by a flank attack; if, after the flank attack has failed, the Higher Command makes out that it had no connexion with the main attack and was merely a diversion, there is a strong likelihood that the truth will be found by consulting the rules and not the reports issued from Headquarters. And there are not only the regulations governing each army to be considered, but their traditions, their habits, their doctrines; the study of diplomatic activities, with their perpetual action or reaction upon military activities, must not be neglected either. Incidents apparently insignificant, which at the time are not understood, will explain to you how the enemy, counting upon a support which these incidents shew to have been withheld, was able to carry out only a part of his strategic plan. So that, if you can read between the lines of military history, what is a confused jumble for the ordinary reader becomes a chain of reasoning as straightforward as a picture is for the picture-lover who can see what the person portrayed is wearing and has in his hands, while the visitor hurrying through the gallery is bewildered by a blur of colour which gives him a headache. But just as with certain pictures, in which it is not enough to observe that the figure is holding a chalice, but one must know why the painter chose to place a chalice in

his hands, what it is intended to symbolise, so these military operations, apart from their immediate object, are quite regularly traced, in the mind of the general responsible for the campaign, from the plans of earlier battles, which we may call the past experience, the literature, the learning, the etymology, the aristocracy (whichever you like) of the battles of to-day. Observe that I am not speaking for the moment of the local, the (what shall I call it?) spatial identity of battles. That exists also. A battle-field has never been, and never will be throughout the centuries, simply the ground upon which a particular battle has been fought. If it has been a battle-field, that was because it combined certain conditions of geographical position, of geological formation, drawbacks even, of a kind that would obstruct the enemy (a river, for instance, cutting his force in two), which made it a good field of battle. And so what it has been it will continue to be. A painter doesn't make a studio out of any old room; so you don't make a battle-field out of any old piece of ground. There are places set apart for the purpose. But, once again, this is not what I was telling you about; it was the type of battle which one follows, in a sort of strategic tracing, a tactical imitation, if you like. Battles like Ulm, Lodi, Leipzig, Cannae. I can't say whether there is ever going to be another war, or what nations are going to fight in it, but, if a war does come, you may be sure that it will include (and deliberately, on the commander's part) a Cannae, an Austerlitz, a Rosbach, a Waterloo. Some of our people say quite openly that Marshal von Schieffer and General Falkenhausen have prepared a Battle of Cannae against France, in the Hannibal style, pinning their enemy down along his whole front, and advancing on both flanks, especially through Belgium, while Bernhardi prefers the oblique order of Frederick the Great, Lenthen rather than Cannae. Others expound their views less crudely, but I can tell you one thing, my boy, that Beauconseil, the squadron commander I introduced you to the other day, who is an officer with a very great future before him, has swotted up a little Pratzen attack of his own; he knows it inside out, he is keeping it up his sleeve, and if he ever has an opportunity to put it into practice he will make a clean job of it and let us have it on a big scale. The break through in the centre at Rivoli, too; that's a thing that will crop up if there's ever another war. It's no more obsolete than the *Iliad*. I must add that we are practically condemned to make frontal attacks, because we can't afford to repeat the mistake we made in Seventy; we must assume the offensive, and nothing else. The only thing that troubles me is that if I see only the slower, more antiquated minds among us opposing this splendid doctrine, still, one of the youngest of my masters, who is a genius, I mean Mangin, would

like us to leave room, provisionally of course, for the defensive. It is not very easy to answer him when he cites the example of Austerlitz, where the defence was merely a prelude to attack and victory."

The enunciation of these theories by Saint-Loup made me happy. They gave me to hope that perhaps I was not being led astray, in my life at Doncières, with regard to these officers whom I used to hear being discussed while I sat sipping a sauterne which bathed them in its charming golden glint, by the same magnifying power which had swollen to such enormous proportions in my eyes while I was at Balbec the King and Queen of the South Sea Island, the little group of the four epicures, the young gambler, Legrandin's brother-in-law, now shrunken so in my view as to appear nonexistent. What gave me pleasure to-day would not, perhaps, leave me indifferent to-morrow, as had always happened hitherto; the creature that I still was at this moment was not, perhaps, doomed to immediate destruction since to the ardent and fugitive passion which I had felt on these few evenings for everything connected with military life, Saint-Loup, by what he had just been saying to me, touching the art of war, added an intellectual foundation, of a permanent character, capable of attaching me to itself so strongly that I might, without any attempt to deceive myself, feel assured that after I had left Doncières I should continue to take an interest in the work of my friends there, and should not be long in coming to pay them another visit. At the same time, so as to make quite sure that this art of war was indeed an art in the true sense of the word:

"You interest me — I beg your pardon, *tu* interest me enormously," I said to Saint-Loup, "but tell me, there is one point that puzzles me. I feel that I could be keenly thrilled by the art of strategy, but if so I must first be sure that it is not so very different from the other arts, that knowing the rules is not everything. You tell me that plans of battles are copied. I do find something aesthetic, just as you said, in seeing beneath a modern battle the plan of an older one, I can't tell you how attractive it sounds. But then, does the genius of the commander count for nothing? Does he really do no more than apply the rules? Or, in point of science, are there great generals as there are great surgeons, who, when the symptoms exhibited by two states of ill-health are identical to the outward eye, nevertheless feel, for some infinitesimal reason, founded perhaps on their experience, but interpreted afresh, that in one case they ought to do one thing, in another case another; that in one case it is better to operate, in another to wait?"

"I should just say so! You will find Napoleon not attacking when all the rules ordered him to attack, but some obscure divination warned him not to. For

instance, look at Austerlitz, or in 1806 take his instructions to Lannes. But you will find certain generals slavishly imitating one of Napoleon's movements and arriving at a diametrically opposite result. There are a dozen examples of that in 1870. But even for the interpretation of what the enemy *may* do, what he actually does is only a symptom which may mean any number of different things. Each of them has an equal chance of being the right thing, if one looks only to reasoning and science, just as in certain difficult cases all the medical science in the world will be powerless to decide whether the invisible tumour is malignant or not, whether or not the operation ought to be performed. It is his instinct, his divination — like Mme. de Thèbes (you follow me?)— which decides, in the great general as in the great doctor. Thus I've been telling you, to take one instance, what might be meant by a reconnaissance on the eve of a battle. But it may mean a dozen other things also, such as to make the enemy think you are going to attack him at one point whereas you intend to attack him at another, to put out a screen which will prevent him from seeing the preparations for your real operation, to force him to bring up fresh troops, to hold them, to immobilise them in a different place from where they are needed, to form an estimate of the forces at his disposal, to feel him, to force him to shew his hand. Sometimes, indeed, the fact that you employ an immense number of troops in an operation is by no means a proof that that is your true objective; for you may be justified in carrying it out, even if it is only a feint, so that your feint may have a better chance of deceiving the enemy. If I had time now to go through the Napoleonic wars from this point of view, I assure you that these simple classic movements which we study here, and which you will come and see us practising in the field, just for the pleasure of a walk, you young rascal — no, I know you're not well, I apologise!— well, in a war, when you feel behind you the vigilance, the judgment, the profound study of the Higher Command, you are as much moved by them as by the simple lamps of a lighthouse, only a material combustion, but an emanation of the spirit, sweeping through space to warn ships of danger. I may have been wrong, perhaps, in speaking to you only of the literature of war. In reality, as the formation of the soil, the direction of wind and light tell us which way a tree will grow, so the conditions in which a campaign is fought, the features of the country through which you march, prescribe, to a certain extent, and limit the number of the plans among which the general has to choose. Which means that along a mountain range, through a system of valleys, over certain plains, it is almost with the inevitability and the tremendous beauty of an avalanche that you can forecast the line of an army on the march."

“Now you deny me that freedom of choice in the commander, that power of divination in the enemy who is trying to discover his plan, which you allowed me a moment ago.”

“Not at all. You remember that book of philosophy we read together at Balbec, the richness of the world of possibilities compared with the real world. Very well. It is the same again with the art of strategy. In a given situation there will be four plans that offer themselves, one of which the general has to choose, as a disease may pass through various phases for which the doctor has to watch. And here again the weakness and greatness of the human elements are fresh causes of uncertainty. For of these four plans let us assume that contingent reasons (such as the attainment of minor objects, or time, which may be pressing, or the smallness of his effective strength and shortage of rations) lead the general to prefer the first, which is less perfect, but less costly also to carry out, is more rapid, and has for its terrain a richer country for feeding his troops. He may, after having begun with this plan, which the enemy, uncertain at first, will soon detect, find that success lies beyond his grasp, the difficulties being too great (that is what I call the element of human weakness), abandon it and try the second or third or fourth. But it may equally be that he has tried the first plan (and this is what I call human greatness) merely as a feint to pin down the enemy, so as to surprise him later at a point where he has not been expecting an attack. Thus at Ulm, Mack, who expected the enemy to advance from the west, was surrounded from the north where he thought he was perfectly safe. My example is not a very good one, as a matter of fact. And Ulm is a better type of enveloping battle, which the future will see reproduced, because it is not only a classic example from which generals will seek inspiration, but a form that is to some extent necessary (one of several necessities, which leaves room for choice, for variety) like a type of crystallisation. But it doesn’t much matter, really, because these conditions are after all artificial. To go back to our philosophy book; it is like the rules of logic or scientific laws, reality does conform to it more or less, but bear in mind that the great mathematician Poincaré is by no means certain that mathematics are strictly accurate. As to the rules themselves, which I mentioned to you, they are of secondary importance really, and besides they are altered from time to time. We cavalrymen, for instance, have to go by the *Field Service* of 1895, which, you may say, is out of date since it is based on the old and obsolete doctrine which maintains that cavalry warfare has little more than a moral effect, in the panic that the charge creates in the enemy. Whereas the more intelligent of our teachers, all the best brains in the cavalry,

and particularly the major I was telling you about, anticipate on the contrary that the decisive victory will be obtained by a real hand-to-hand encounter in which our weapons will be sabre and lance and the side that can hold out longer will win, not simply morally and by creating panic, but materially."

"Saint-Loup is quite right, and it is probable that the next *Field Service* will shew signs of this evolution," put in my other neighbour.

"I am not ungrateful for your support, for your opinions seem to make more impression upon my friend than mine," said Saint-Loup with a smile, whether because the growing attraction between his comrade and myself annoyed him slightly or because he thought it graceful to solemnise it with this official confirmation. "Perhaps I may have underestimated the importance of the rules; I don't know. They do change, that must be admitted. But in the meantime they control the military situation, the plans of campaign and concentration. If they reflect a false conception of strategy they may be the principal cause of defeat. All this is a little too technical for you," he remarked to me. "After all, you may say that what does most to accelerate the evolution of the art of war is wars themselves. In the course of a campaign, if it is at all long, you will see one belligerent profiting by the lessons furnished him by the successes and mistakes, perfecting the methods of the other, who will improve on him in turn. But all that is a thing of the past. With the terrible advance of artillery, the wars of the future, if there are to be any more wars, will be so short that, before we have had time to think of putting our lessons into practice, peace will have been signed."

"Don't be so touchy," I told Saint-Loup, reverting to the first words ol this speech. "I was listening to you quite eagerly."

"If you will kindly not fly into a passion, and will allow me to speak," his friend went on, "I shall add to what you have just been saying that if battles copy and coincide with one another it is not merely due to the mind of the commander. It may happen that a mistake on his part (for instance, his failure to appreciate the strength of the enemy) will lead him to call upon his men for extravagant sacrifices, sacrifices which certain units will make with an abnegation so sublime that their part in the battle will be analogous to that played by some other unit in some other battle, and these will be quoted in history as interchangeable examples: to stick to 1870, we have the Prussian Guard at Saint-Privat, and the Turcos at Froeschviller and Wissembourg."

"Ah! Interchangeable; very neat! Excellent! The lad has brains," was Saint-Loup's comment.

I was not unmoved by these last examples, as always when, beneath the

particular instance, I was afforded a glimpse of the general law. Still, the genius of the commander, that was what interested me, I was anxious to discover in what it consisted, what steps, in given circumstances, when the commander who lacked genius could not withstand the enemy, the inspired leader would take to re-establish his jeopardised position, which, according to Saint-Loup, was quite possible and had been done by Napoleon more than once. And to understand what military worth meant I asked for comparisons between the various generals whom I knew by name, which of them had most markedly the character of a leader, the gifts of a tactician; at the risk of boring my new friends, who however shewed no signs of boredom, but continued to answer me with an inexhaustible good nature.

I felt myself isolated, not only from the great, freezing night which extended far around us and in which we heard from time to time the whistle of a train which only rendered more keen the pleasure of being where we were, or the chime of an hour which, happily, was still a long way short of that at which these young men would have to buckle on their sabres and go, but also from all my external obsessions, almost from the memory of Mme. de Guermantes, by the hospitality of Saint-Loup, to which that of his friends, reinforcing it, gave, so to speak, a greater solidity; by the warmth also of this little dining-room, by the savour of the well-chosen dishes that were set before us. They gave as much pleasure to my imagination as to my appetite; sometimes the little piece of still life from which they had been taken, the rugged holy water stoup of the oyster in which lingered a few drops of brackish water, or the knotted stem, the yellow leaves of a bunch of grapes still enveloped them, inedible, poetic and remote as a landscape, and producing, at different points in the course of the meal, the impressions of rest in the shade of a vine and of an excursion out to sea; on other evenings it was the cook alone who threw into relief these original properties of our food, which he presented in its natural setting, like a work of art; and a fish cooked in wine was brought in on a long earthenware dish, on which, as it stood out in relief on a bed of bluish herbs, unbreakable now but still contorted from having been dropped alive into boiling water, surrounded by a circle of satellite creatures in their shells, crabs, shrimps and mussels, it had the appearance of being part of a ceramic design by Bernard Palissy.

“I am jealous, furious,” Saint-Loup attacked me, half smiling, half in earnest, alluding to the interminable conversations aside which I had been having with his friend. “Is it because you find him more intelligent than me; do you like him better than me? Well, I suppose he’s everything now, and no one

else is to have a look in!" Men who are enormously in love with a woman, who live in the society of woman-lovers, allow themselves pleasantries on which others, who would see less innocence in them, would never venture.

When the conversation became general, they avoided any reference to Dreyfus for fear of offending Saint-Loup. The following week, however, two of his friends were remarking what a curious thing it was that, living in so military an atmosphere, he was so keen a Dreyfusard, almost an anti-militarist. "The reason is," I suggested, not wishing to enter into details, "that the influence of environment is not so important as people think..." I intended of course to stop at this point, and not to reiterate the observations which I had made to Saint-Loup a few days earlier. Since, however, I had repeated these words almost textually, I proceeded to excuse myself by adding: "As, in fact, I was saying the other day..." But I had reckoned without the reverse side of Robert's polite admiration of myself and certain other persons. That admiration reached its fulfilment in so entire an assimilation of their ideas that, in the course of a day or two, he would have completely forgotten that those ideas were not his own. And so, in the matter of my modest theory, Saint-Loup, for all the world as though it had always dwelt in his own brain, and as though I were merely poaching on his preserves, felt it incumbent upon him to greet my discovery with warm approval.

"Why, yes; environment is of no importance."

And with as much vehemence as if he were afraid of my interrupting, or failing to understand him:

"The real influence is that of one's intellectual environment! One is the man of one's idea!"

He stopped for a moment, with the satisfied smile of one who has digested his dinner, dropped his eyeglass and, fixing me with a gimlet-like stare:

"All men with similar ideas are alike," he informed me, with a challenging air. Probably he had completely forgotten that I myself had said to him, only a few days earlier, what on the other hand he remembered so well.

I did not arrive at Saint-Loup's restaurant every evening in the same state of mind. If a memory, a sorrow that weigh on us are able to leave us so effectively that we are no longer aware of them, they can also return and sometimes remain with us for a long time. There were evenings when, as I passed through the town on my way to the restaurant, I felt so keen a longing for Mme. de Guermantes that I could scarcely breathe; you might have said that part of my breast had been cut open by a skilled anatomist, taken out, and replaced by an equal part of immaterial suffering, by an equivalent load of longing and love. And however

neatly the wound may have been stitched together, there is not much comfort in life when regret for the loss of another person is substituted for one's entrails, it seems to be occupying more room than they, one feels it perpetually, and besides, what a contradiction in terms to be obliged to *think* a part of one's body. Only it seems that we are worth more, somehow. At the whisper of a breeze we sigh, from oppression, but from weariness also. I would look up at the sky. If it were clear, I would say to myself: "Perhaps she is in the country; she is looking at the same stars; and, for all I know, when I arrive at the restaurant Robert may say to me: 'Good news! I have just heard from my aunt; she wants to meet you; she is coming down here.'" It was not in the firmament alone that I enshrined the thought of Mme. de Guermantes, A passing breath of air, more fragrant than the rest, seemed to bring me a message from her, as, long ago, from Gilberte in the cornfields of Méséglise. We do not change; we introduce into the feeling with which we regard a person many slumbering elements which that feeling revives but which are foreign to it. Besides, with these feelings for particular people, there is always something in us that is trying to bring them nearer to the truth, that is to say, to absorb them in a more general feeling, common to the whole of humanity, with which people and the suffering that they cause us are merely a means to enable us to communicate. What brought a certain pleasure into my grief was that I knew it to be a tiny fragment of the universal love. Simply because I thought that I recognised sorrows which I had felt on Gilberte's account, or else when in the evenings at Combray Mamma would not stay in any room, and also the memory of certain pages of Bergotte, in the agony I now felt, to which Mme. de Guermantes, her coldness, her absence, were not clearly linked, as cause is to effect in the mind of a philosopher, I did not conclude that Mme. de Guermantes was not the cause of that agony. Is there not such a thing as a diffused bodily pain, extending, radiating out into other parts, which, however, it leaves, to vanish altogether, if the practitioner lays his finger on the precise spot from which it springs? And yet, until that moment, its extension gave it for us so vague, so fatal a semblance that, powerless to explain or even to locate it, we imagined that there was no possibility of its being healed. As I made my way to the restaurant I said to myself: "A fortnight already since I last saw Mme. de Guermantes." A fortnight which did not appear so enormous an interval save to me, who, when Mme. de Guermantes was concerned, reckoned time by minutes. For me it was no longer the stars and the breeze merely, but the arithmetical divisions of time that assumed a dolorous and poetic aspect. Each day now was like the loose crest of a crumbling mountain, down one side of

which I felt that I could descend into oblivion, but down the other was borne by the necessity of seeing the Duchess again. And I was continually inclining one way or the other, having no stable equilibrium. One day I said to myself: “Perhaps there will be a letter to-night;” and on entering the dining-room I found courage to ask Saint-Loup:

“You don’t happen to have had any news from Paris?”

“Yes,” he replied gloomily; “bad news.”

I breathed a sigh of relief when I realised that it was only he who was unhappy, and that the news came from his mistress. But I soon saw that one of its consequences would be to prevent Robert, for ever so long, from taking me to see his aunt.

I learned that a quarrel had broken out between him and his mistress, through the post presumably, unless she had come down to pay him a flying visit between trains. And the quarrels, even when relatively slight, which they had previously had, had always seemed as though they must prove insoluble. For she was a girl of violent temper, who would stamp her foot and burst into tears for reasons as incomprehensible as those that make children shut themselves into dark cupboards, not come out for dinner, refuse to give any explanation, and only redouble their sobs when, our patience exhausted, we visit them with a whipping. To say that Saint-Loup suffered terribly from this estrangement would be an understatement of the truth, which would give the reader a false impression of his grief. When he found himself alone, the only picture in his mind being that of his mistress parting from him with the respect which she had felt for him at the sight of his energy, the anxieties which he had had at first gave way before the irreparable, and the cessation of an anxiety is so pleasant a thing that the rupture, once it was certain, assumed for him something of the same kind of charm as a reconciliation. What he began to suffer from, a little later, was a secondary and accidental grief, the tide of which flowed incessantly from his own heart, at the idea that perhaps she would be glad to make it up, that it was not inconceivable that she was waiting for a word from him, that in the mean time, to be avenged on him, she would perhaps on a certain evening, in a certain place, do a certain thing, and that he had only to telegraph to her that he was coming for it not to happen, that others perhaps were taking advantage of the time which he was letting slip, and that in a few days it would be too late to recapture her, for she would be already bespoke. Among all these possibilities he was certain of nothing; his mistress preserved a silence which wrought him up to such a frenzy of grief that he began to ask himself whether she might not be in hiding at Doncières, or have sailed for the Indies.

It has been said that silence is a force; in another and widely different sense it is a tremendous force in the hands of those who are loved. It increases the anxiety of the lover who has to wait. Nothing so tempts us to approach another person as what is keeping us apart; and what barrier is there so insurmountable

as silence? It has been said also that silence is a torture, capable of goading to madness him who is condemned to it in a prison cell. But what a torture — keener than that of having to keep silence — to have to endure the silence of the person one loves! Robert asked himself: “What can she be doing, never to send me a single word, like this? She hates me, perhaps, and will always go on hating me.” And he reproached himself. Thus her silence did indeed drive him mad with jealousy and remorse. Besides, more cruel than the silence of prisons, that kind of silence is in itself a prison. An immaterial enclosure, I admit, but impenetrable, this interposed slice of empty atmosphere through which, despite its emptiness, the visual rays of the abandoned lover cannot pass. Is there a more terrible illumination than that of silence which shews us not one absent love but a thousand, and shews us each of them in the act of indulging in some fresh betrayal? Sometimes, in an abrupt relaxation of his strain, Robert would imagine that this period of silence was just coming to an end, that the long expected letter was on its way. He saw it, it arrived, he started at every sound, his thirst was already quenched, he murmured: “The letter! The letter!” After this glimpse of a phantom oasis of affection, he found himself once more toiling across the real desert of a silence without end.

He suffered in anticipation, without a single omission, all the griefs and pains of a rupture which at other moments he fancied he might somehow contrive to avoid, like people who put all their affairs in order with a view to a migration abroad which they never make, whose minds, no longer certain where they will find themselves living next day, flutter helplessly for the time being, detached from them, like a heart that is taken out of a dying man and continues to beat, though disjoined from the rest of his body. Anyhow, this hope that his mistress would return gave him courage to persevere in the rupture, as the belief that one will return alive from the battle helps one to face death. And inasmuch as habit is, of all the plants of human growth, the one that has least need of nutritious soil in order to live, and is the first to appear upon what is apparently the most barren rock, perhaps had he begun by effecting their rupture as a feint he would in the end have grown genuinely accustomed to it. But his uncertainty kept him in a state of emotion which, linked with the memory of the woman herself, was akin to love. He forced himself, nevertheless, not to write to her, thinking perhaps that it was a less cruel torment to live without his mistress than with her in certain conditions, or else that, after the way in which they had parted, it was necessary to wait for excuses from her, if she was to keep what he believed her to feel for him in the way, if not of love, at any rate of esteem and

regard. He contented himself with going to the telephone, which had recently been installed at Doncières, and asking for news from, or giving instructions to a lady's maid whom he had procured and placed with his friend. These communications were, as it turned out, complicated and took up much of his time, since, influenced by what her literary friends preached to her about the ugliness of the capital, but principally for the sake of her animals, her dogs, her monkey, her canaries and her parrokeet, whose incessant din her Paris landlord had declined to tolerate for another moment, Robert's mistress had now taken a little house in the neighbourhood of Versailles. Meanwhile he, down at Doncières, no longer slept a wink all night. Once, in my room, overcome by exhaustion, he dozed off for a little. But suddenly he began to talk, tried to get up and run, to stop something from happening, said: "I hear her; you shan't... you shan't..." He awoke. He had been dreaming, he explained to me, that he was in the country with the serjeant-major. His host had tried to keep him away from a certain part of the house. Saint-Loup had discovered that the serjeant-major had staying with him a subaltern, extremely rich and extremely vicious, whom he knew to have a violent passion for his mistress. And suddenly in his dream he had distinctly heard the spasmodic, regular cries which his mistress was in the habit of uttering at the moment of gratification. He had tried to force the serjeant-major to take him to the room in which she was. And the other had held him back, to keep him from going there, with an air of annoyance at such a want of discretion in a guest which, Robert said, he would never be able to forget.

"It was an idiotic dream," he concluded, still quite breathless.

All the same I could see that, during the hour that followed, he was more than once on the point of telephoning to his mistress to beg for a reconciliation. My father had now had the telephone for some time at home, but I doubt whether that would have been of much use to Saint-Loup. Besides, it hardly seemed to me quite proper to make my parents, or even a mechanical instrument installed in their house, play pander between Saint-Loup and his mistress, ladylike and high-minded as the latter might be. His bad dream began to fade from his memory. With a fixed and absent stare, he came to see me on each of those cruel days which traced in my mind as they followed one after the other the splendid sweep of a staircase forged in hard metal on which Robert stood asking himself what decision his friend was going to take.

At length she wrote to ask whether he would consent to forgive her. As soon as he realised that a definite rupture had been avoided he saw all the disadvantages of a reconciliation. Besides, he had already begun to suffer less

acutely, and had almost accepted a grief the sharp tooth of which he would have, in a few months perhaps, to feel again if their intimacy were to be resumed. He did not hesitate for long. And perhaps he hesitated only because he was now certain of being able to recapture his mistress, of being able to do it and therefore of doing it. Only she asked him, so that she might have time to recover her equanimity, not to come to Paris at the New Year. Now he had not the heart to go to Paris without seeing her. On the other hand, she had declared her willingness to go abroad with him, bot for that he would need to make a formal application for leave, which Captain de Borodino was unwilling to grant.

"I'm sorry about it, because of your meeting with my aunt, which will have to be put off. I dare say I shall be in Paris at Easter."

"We shan't be able to call on Mme. de Guermantes then, because I shall have gone to Balbec. But, really, it doesn't matter in the least, I assure you."

"To Balbec? But you didn't go there till August."

"I know; but next year they're making me go there earlier, for my health."

All that he feared was that I might form a bad impression of his mistress, after what he had told me. "She is violent simply because she is too frank, too thorough in her feelings. But she is a sublime creature. You can't imagine what exquisite poetry there is in her. She goes every year to spend all Souls' Day at Bruges. 'Nice' of her, don't you think? If you ever do meet her you'll see what I mean; she has a greatness..." And, as he was infected with certain of the mannerisms used in the literary circles in which the lady moved: "There is something sidereal about her, in fact something bardic; you know what I mean, the poet merging into the priest."

I was searching all through dinner for a pretext which would enable Saint-Loup to ask his aunt to see me without my having to wait until he came to Paris. Now such a pretext was furnished by the desire that I had to see some more pictures by Elstir, the famous painter whom Saint-Loup and I had met at Balbec. A pretext behind which there was, moreover, an element of truth, for if, on my visits to Elstir, what I had asked of his painting had been that it should lead me to the comprehension and love of things better than itself, a real thaw, an authentic square in a country town, live women on a beach (all the more would I have commissioned from it the portraits of the realities which I had not been able to fathom, such as a lane of hawthorn-blossoms, not so much that it might perpetuate their beauty for me as that it might reveal that beauty to me), now, on the other hand, it was the originality, the seductive attraction of those paintings that aroused my desire, and what I wanted above anything else was to look at

other pictures by Elstir.

It seemed to me, also, that the least of his pictures were something quite different from the masterpieces even of greater painters than himself. His work was like a realm apart, whose frontiers were not to be passed, matchless in substance. Eagerly collecting the infrequent periodicals in which articles on him and his work had appeared, I had learned that it was only recently that he had begun to paint landscapes and still life, and that he had started with mythological subjects (I had seen photographs of two of these in his studio), and had then been for long under the influence of Japanese art.

Several of the works most characteristic of his various manners were scattered about the provinces. A certain house at les Andelys, in which there was one of his finest landscapes, seemed to me as precious, gave me as keen a desire to go there and see it as did a village in the Chartres district, among whose millstone walls was enshrined a glorious painted window; and towards the possessor of this treasure, towards the man who, inside his ugly house, on the main Street, closeted like an astrologer, sat questioning one of those mirrors of the world which Elstir's pictures were, and who had perhaps bought it for many thousands of francs, I felt myself borne by that instinctive sympathy which joins the very hearts, the inmost natures of those who think alike upon a vital subject. Now three important works by my favourite painter were described in one of these articles as belonging to Mme. de Guermantes. So that it was, after all, quite sincerely that, on the evening on which Saint-Loup told me of his lady's projected visit to Bruges, I was able, during dinner, in front of his friends, to let fall, as though on the spur of the moment:

"Listen, if you don't mind. Just one last word on the subject of the lady we were speaking about. You remember Elstir, the painter I met at Balbec?"

"Why, of course I do."

"You remember how much I admired his work?"

"I do, quite well; and the letter we sent him."

"Very well, one of the reasons — not one of the chief reasons, a subordinate reason — why I should like to meet the said lady — you do know who' I mean, don't you?"

"Of course I do. How involved you're getting."

"Is that she has in her house one very fine picture, at least, by Elstir."

"I say, I never knew that."

"Elstir will probably be at Balbec at Easter; you know he stays down there now all the year round, practically. I should very much like to have seen this

picture before I leave Paris. I don't know whether you're on sufficiently intimate terms with your aunt: but couldn't you manage, somehow, to give her so good an impression of me that she won't refuse, and then ask her if she'll let me come and see the picture without you, since you won't be there?"

"That's all right. I'll answer for her; I'll make a special point of it."

"Oh, Robert, you are an angel; I do love you."

"It's very nice of you to love me, but it would be equally nice if you were to call me *tu*, as you promised, and as you began to do."

"I hope it's not your departure that you two are plotting together," one of Robert's friends said to me. "You know, if Saint-Loup does go on leave, it needn't make any difference, we shall still be here. It will be less amusing for you, perhaps, but we'll do all we can to make you forget his absence." As a matter of fact, just as we had decided that Robert's mistress would have to go to Bruges by herself, the news came that Captain de Borodino, obdurate hitherto in his refusal, had given authority for Serjeant Saint-Loup to proceed on long leave to Bruges. What had happened was this. The Prince, extremely proud of his luxuriant head of hair, was an assiduous customer of the principal hairdresser in the town, who had started life as a boy under Napoleon III's barber. Captain de Borodino was on the best of terms with the hairdresser, being, in spite of his air of majesty, quite simple in his dealings with his inferiors. But the hairdresser, through whose books the Prince's account had been running without payment for at least five years, swollen no less by bottles of Portugal and Eau des Souverains, irons, razors, and strops, than by the ordinary charges for shampooing, haircutting and the like, had a greater respect for Saint-Loup, who always paid on the nail and kept several carriages and saddle-horses. Having learned of Saint-Loup's vexation at not being able to go with his mistress, he had spoken strongly about it to the Prince at a moment when he was trussed up in a white surplice with his head held firmly over the back of the chair and his throat menaced by a razor. This narrative of a young man's gallant adventures won from the princely captain a smile of Bonapartish indulgence. It is hardly probable that he thought of his unpaid bill, but the barber's recommendation tended to put him in as good a humour as one from a duke would have put him in a bad. While his chin was still smothered in soap, the leave was promised, and the warrant was signed that evening. As for the hairdresser, who was in the habit of boasting all day long of his own exploits, and in order to do so claimed for himself, shewing an astonishing faculty for lying, distinctions that were pure fabrications, having for once rendered this signal service to Saint-Loup, not only

did he refrain from publishing it broadcast, but, as if vanity were obliged to lie, and when there was no scope for lying gave place to modesty, he never mentioned the matter to Robert again.

All his friends assured me that, as long as I stayed at Doncières, or if I should come there again at any time, even although Robert were away, their horses, their quarters, their time would be at my disposal, and I felt that it was with the greatest cordiality that these young men put their comfort and youth and strength at the service of my weakness.

"Why on earth," they went on, after insisting that I should stay, "don't you come down here every year; you see how our quiet life appeals to you! Besides you're so keen about everything that goes on in the regiment; quite the old soldier."

For I continued my eager demands that they would classify the different officers whose names I knew according to the degree of admiration which they seemed to deserve, just as, in my schooldays, I used to make the other boys classify the actors of the Théâtre-Français. If, in the place of one of the generals whom I had always heard mentioned at the head of the list, such as Galliffet or Négrier, one of Saint-Loup's friends, with a contemptuous: "But Négrier is one of the feeblest of our general officers," put the new, intact, appetising name of Pau or Geslin de Bourgogne, I felt the same joyful surprise as long ago when the outworn name of Thiron or Febvre was sent flying by the sudden explosion of the unfamiliar name of Amaury. "Better even than Négrier? But in what respect; give me an example?" I should have liked there to exist profound differences even among the junior officers of the regiment, and I hoped in the reason for these differences to seize the essential quality of what constituted military superiority. The one whom I should have been most interested to hear discussed, because he was the one whom I had most often seen, was the Prince de Borodino. But neither Saint-Loup nor his friends, if they did justice to the fine officer who kept his squadron up to the supreme pitch of efficiency, liked the man. Without speaking of him, naturally, in the same tone as of certain other officers, rankers and freemasons, who did not associate much with the rest and had, in comparison, an uncouth, barrack-room manner, they seemed not to include M. de Borodino among the officers of noble birth, from whom, it must be admitted, he differed considerably in his attitude even towards Saint-Loup. The others, taking advantage of the fact that Robert was only an N.C.O., and that therefore his influential relatives might be grateful were he invited to the houses of superior officers on whom ordinarily they would have looked down, lost no

opportunity of having him to dine when any bigwig was expected who might be of use to a young cavalry serjeant. Captain de Borodino alone confined himself to his official relations (which, for that matter, were always excellent) with Robert. The fact was that the Prince, whose grandfather had been made a Marshal and a Prince-Duke by the Emperor, with whose family he had subsequently allied himself by marriage, while his father had married a cousin of Napoleon III and had twice been a Minister after the Coup d'Etat, felt that in spite of all this he did not count for much with Saint-Loup and the Guermantes connexion, who in turn, since he did not look at things from the same point of view as they, counted for very little with him. He suspected that, for Saint-Loup, he himself was — he, a kinsman of the Hohenzollern — not a true noble but the grandson of a farmer, but at the same time he regarded Saint-Loup as the son of a man whose Countship had been confirmed by the Emperor — one of what were known in the Faubourg Saint-Germain as 'touched-up' Counts — and who had besought him first for a Prefecture, then for some other post a long way down the list of subordinates to His Highness the Prince de Borodino, Minister of State, who was styled on his letters 'Monseigneur' and was a nephew of the Sovereign.

Something more than a nephew, possibly. The first Princesse de Borodino was reputed to have bestowed her favours on Napoleon I, whom she followed to the Isle of Elba, and the second hers on Napoleon III. And if, in the Captain's placid countenance, one caught a trace of Napoleon I— if not in his natural features, at least in the studied majesty of the mask — the officer had, particularly in his melancholy and kindly gaze, in his drooping moustache, something that reminded one also of Napoleon III; and this in so striking a fashion that, having asked leave, after Sedan, to join the Emperor in captivity, and having been sent away by Bismarck, before whom he had been brought, the latter, happening to look up at the young man who was preparing to leave the room, was at once impressed by the likeness and, reconsidering his decision, recalled him and gave him the authorisation which he, in common with every one else, had just been refused.

If the Prince de Borodino was not prepared to make overtures to Saint-Loup nor to the other representatives of Faubourg Saint-Germain society that there were in the regiment (while he frequently invited two subalterns of plebeian origin who were pleasant companions) it was because, looking down upon them all from the height of his Imperial grandeur, he drew between these two classes of inferiors the distinction that one set consisted of inferiors who knew

themselves to be such and with whom he was delighted to spend his time, being beneath his outward majesty of a simple, jovial humour, and the other of inferiors who thought themselves his superiors, a claim which he could not allow. And so, while all the other officers of the regiment made much of Saint-Loup, the Prince de Borodino, to whose care the young man had been recommended by Marshal X——, confined himself to being obliging with regard to the military duties which Saint-Loup always performed in the most exemplary fashion, but never had him to his house except on one special occasion when he found himself practically compelled to invite him, and when, as this occurred during my stay at Doncières, he asked him to bring me to dinner also. I had no difficulty that evening, as I watched Saint-Loup sitting at his Captain's table, in distinguishing, in their respective manners and refinements, the difference that existed between the two aristocracies: the old nobility and that of the Empire. The offspring of a caste the faults of which, even if he repudiated them with all the force of his intellect, had been absorbed into his blood, a caste which, having ceased to exert any real authority for at least a century, saw nothing more now in the protective affability which formed part of its regular course of education, than an exercise, like horsemanship or fencing, cultivated without any serious purpose, as a sport; on meeting representatives of that middle class on which the old nobility so far looked down as to believe that they were nattered by its intimacy and would be honoured by the informality of its tone, Saint-Loup would take the hand of no matter who might be introduced to him, though he had failed perhaps to catch the stranger's name, in a friendly grip, and as he talked to him (crossing and uncrossing his legs all the time, flinging himself back in his chair in an attitude of absolute unconstraint, one foot in the palm of his hand) call him 'my dear fellow.' Belonging o the other hand to a nobility whose titles still preserved their original meaning, provided that their holders still possessed the splendid emoluments given in reward for glorious services and bringing to mind the record of high offices in which one is in command of numberless men and must know how to deal with men, the Prince de Borodino — not perhaps very distinctly or with any clear personal sense of superiority, but at any rate in his body, which revealed it by its attitudes and behaviour generally — regarded his own rank as a prerogative that was still effective; those same commoners whom Saint-Loup would have slapped on the shoulder and taken by the arm he addressed with a majestic affability, in which a reserve instinct with grandeur tempered the smiling good-fellowship that came naturally to him, in a tone marked at once by a genuine kindliness and a stiffness

deliberately assumed. This was due, no doubt, to his being not so far removed from the great Embassies, and the Court itself, at which his father had held the highest posts, whereas the manners of Saint-Loup, the elbow on the table, the foot in the hand, would not have been well received there; but principally it was due to the fact that he looked down less upon the middle classes because they were the inexhaustible source from which the first Emperor had chosen his marshals and his nobles and in which the second had found a Rouher and a Fould.

Son, doubtless, or grandson of an Emperor, who had nothing more important to do than to command a squadron, the preoccupations of his putative father and grandfather could not, for want of an object on which to fasten themselves, survive in any real sense in the mind of M. de Borodino. But as the spirit of an artist continues to model, for many years after he is dead, the statue which he carved, so they had taken shape in him, were materialised, incarnate in him, it was they that his face reflected. It was with, in his voice, the vivacity of the first Emperor that he worded a reprimand to a corporal, with the dreamy melancholy of the second that he puffed out the smoke of a cigarette. When he passed in plain clothes through the streets of Doncières, a certain sparkle in his eyes escaping from under the brim of the bowler hat sent radiating round this captain of cavalry a regal incognito; people trembled when he strode into the serjeant-major's office, followed by the adjutant and the quartermaster, as though by Berthier and Masséna. When he chose the cloth for his squadron's breeches, he fastened on the master-tailor a gaze capable of baffling Talleyrand and deceiving Alexander; and at times, in the middle of an inspection, he would stop, let his handsome blue eyes cloud with dreams, twist his moustache, with the air of one building up a new Prussia and a new Italy. But a moment later, reverting from Napoleon III to Napoleon I, he would point out that the equipment was not properly polished, and would insist on tasting the men's rations. And at home, in his private life, it was for the wives of middle class officers (provided that their husbands were not freemasons) that he would bring out not only a dinner service of royal blue Sèvres, fit for an Ambassador (which had been given to his father by Napoleon, and appeared even more priceless in the commonplace house on a provincial street in which he was living, like those rare porcelains which tourists admire with a special delight in the rustic china-cupboard of some old manor that has been converted into a comfortable and prosperous farmhouse), but other gifts of the Emperor also: those noble and charming manners, which too would have won admiration in some diplomatic post abroad, if, for some men, it did not

mean a lifelong condemnation to the most unjust form of ostracism, merely to be well born; his easy gestures, his kindness, his grace, and, embedding beneath an enamel that was of royal blue, also glorious images, the mysterious, illuminated, living reliquary of his gaze. And, in treating of the social relations with the middle classes which the Prince had at Doncières, it may be as well to add these few words. The lieutenant-colonel played the piano beautifully; the senior medical officer's wife sang like a Conservatoire medallist. This latter couple, as well as the lieutenant-colonel and his wife, used to dine every week with M. de Borodino. They were flattered, unquestionably, knowing that when the Prince went to Paris on leave he dined with Mme. de Pourtalès, and the Murats, and people like that. "But," they said to themselves, "he's just a captain, after all; he's only too glad to get us to come. Still, he's a real friend, you know." But when M. de Borodino, who had long been pulling every possible wire to secure an appointment for himself nearer Paris, was posted to Beauvais, he packed up and went, and forgot as completely the two musical couples as he forgot the Doncières theatre and the little restaurant to which he used often to send out for his luncheon, and, to their great indignation, neither the lieutenant-colonel nor the senior medical officer, who had so often sat at his table, ever had so much as a single word from him for the rest of their lives. One morning, Saint-Loup confessed to me that he had written to my grandmother to give her news of me, with the suggestion that, since there was telephonic connexion between Paris and Doncières, she might make use of it to speak to me. In short, that very day she was to give me a call, and he advised me to be at the post office at about a quarter to four. The telephone was not yet at that date as commonly in use as it is to-day. And yet habit requires so short a time to divest of their mystery the sacred forces with which we are in contact, that, not having had my call at once, the only thought in my mind was that it was very slow, and badly managed, and I almost decided to lodge a complaint. Like all of us nowadays I found not rapid enough for my liking in its abrupt changes the admirable sorcery for which a few moments are enough to bring before us, invisible but present, the person to whom we have been wishing to speak, and who, while still sitting at his table, in the town in which he lives (in my grandmother's case, Paris), under another sky than ours, in weather that is not necessarily the same, in the midst of circumstances and worries of which we know nothing, but of which he is going to inform us, finds himself suddenly transported hundreds of miles (he and all the surroundings in which he remains immured) within reach of our ear, at the precise moment which our fancy has ordained. And we are like the person in the

fairy-tale to whom a sorceress, on his uttering the wish, makes appear with supernatural clearness his grandmother or his betrothed in the act of turning over a book, of shedding tears, of gathering flowers, quite close to the spectator and yet ever so remote, in the place in which she actually is at the moment. We need only, so that the miracle may be accomplished, apply our lips to the magic orifice and invoke — occasionally for rather longer than seems to us necessary, I admit — the Vigilant Virgins to whose voices we listen every day without ever coming to know their faces, and who are our Guardian Angels in the dizzy realm of darkness whose portals they so jealously keep; the All Powerful by whose intervention the absent rise up at our side, without our being permitted to set eyes on them; the Danaids of the Unseen who without ceasing empty, fill, transmit the urns of sound; the ironic Furies who, just as we were murmuring a confidence to a friend, in the hope that no one was listening, cry brutally: “I hear you!”; the ever infuriated servants of the Mystery, the umbrageous priestesses of the Invisible, the Young Ladies of the Telephone.

And, the moment our call has sounded, in the night filled with phantoms to which our ears alone are unsealed, a tiny sound, an abstract sound — the sound of distance overcome — and the voice of the dear one speaks to us.

It is she, it is her voice that is speaking, that is there. But how remote it is! How often have I been unable to listen without anguish, as though, confronted by the impossibility of seeing, except after long hours of journeying, her whose voice has been so close to my ear, I felt more clearly the sham and illusion of meetings apparently most pleasant, and at what a distance we may be from the people we love at the moment when it seems that we have only to stretch out our hand to seize and hold them. A real presence indeed that voice so near — in actual separation. But a premonition also of an eternal separation! Over and again, as I listened in this way, without seeing her who spoke to me from so far away, it has seemed to me that the voice was crying to me from depths out of which one does not rise again, and I have known the anxiety that was one day to wring my heart when a voice should thus return (alone, and attached no longer to a body which I was never more to see), to murmur, in my ear, words I would fain have kissed as they issued from lips for ever turned to dust.

This afternoon, alas, at Doncières, the miracle did not occur. When I reached the post office, my grandmother’s call had already been received; I stepped into the box; the line was engaged; some one was talking who probably did not realise that there was nobody to answer him, for when I raised the receiver to my ear, the lifeless block began squeaking like Punchinello; I silenced it, as one

silences a puppet, by putting it back on its hook, but, like Punchinello, as soon as I took it again in my hand, it resumed its gabbling. At length, giving it up as hopeless, by hanging up the receiver once and for all, I stifled the convulsions of this vociferous stump which kept up its chatter until the last moment, and went in search of the operator, who told me to wait a little; then I spoke, and, after a few seconds of silence, suddenly I heard that voice which I supposed myself, mistakenly, to know so well; for always until then, every time that my grandmother had talked to me, I had been accustomed to follow what she was saying on the open score of her face, in which the eyes figured so largely; but her voice itself I was hearing this afternoon for the first time. And because that voice appeared to me to have altered in its proportions from the moment that it was a whole, and reached me in this way alone and without the accompaniment of her face and features, I discovered for the first time how sweet that voice was; perhaps, too, it had never oeen so sweet, for my grandmother, knowing me to be alone and unhappy, felt that she might let herself go in the outpouring of an affection which, on her principle of education, she usually restrained and kept hidden. It was sweet, but also how sad it was, first of all on account of its very sweetness, a sweetness drained almost — more than any but a few human voices can ever have been — of every element of resistance to others, of all selfishness; fragile by reason of its delicacy it seemed at every moment ready to break, to expire in a pure flow of tears; then, too, having it alone beside me, seen, without the mask of her face, I noticed for the first time the sorrows that had scarred it in the course of a lifetime.

Was it, however, solely the voice that, because it was alone, gave me this new impression which tore my heart? Not at all; it was rather that this isolation of the voice was like a symbol, a presentation, a direct consequence of another isolation, that of my grandmother, separated, for the first time in my life, from myself. The orders or prohibitions which she addressed to me at every moment in the ordinary course of my life, the tedium of obedience or the fire of rebellion which neutralised the affection that I felt for her were at this moment eliminated, and indeed might be eliminated for ever (since my grandmother no longer insisted on having me with her under her control, was in the act of expressing her hope that I would stay at Doncières altogether, or would at any rate extend my visit for as long as possible, seeing that both my health and my work seemed likely to benefit by the change); also, what I held compressed in this little bell that was ringing in my ear was, freed from the conflicting pressures which had, every day hitherto, given it a counterpoise, and from this moment irresistible,

carrying me altogether away, our mutual affection. My grandmother, by telling me to stay, filled me with an anxious, an insensate longing to return. This freedom of action which for the future she allowed me and to which I had never dreamed that she would consent, appeared to me suddenly as sad as might be my freedom of action after her death (when I should still love her and she would for ever have abandoned me). “Granny!” I cried to her, “Granny!” and would fain have kissed her, but I had beside me only that voice, a phantom, as impalpable as that which would come perhaps to revisit me when my grandmother was dead. “Speak to me!” but then it happened that, left more solitary still, I ceased to catch the sound of her voice. My grandmother could no longer hear me; she was no longer in communication with me; we had ceased to stand face to face, to be audible to one another; I continued to call her, sounding the empty night, in which I felt that her appeals also must be straying. I was shaken by the same anguish which, in the distant past, I had felt once before, one day when, a little child, in a crowd, I had lost her, an anguish due less to my not finding her than to the thought that she must be searching for me, must be saying to herself that I was searching for her; an anguish comparable to that which I was to feel on the day when we speak to those who can no longer reply and whom we would so love to have hear all the things that we have not told them, and our assurance that we are not unhappy. It seemed as though it were already a beloved ghost that I had allowed to lose herself in the ghostly world, and, standing alone before the instrument, I went on vainly repeating: “Granny, Granny!” as Orpheus, left alone, repeats the name of his dead wife, is decided to leave the post office, to go and find Robert at his restaurant, in order to tell him that, as I was half expecting a telegram which would oblige me to return to Paris, I wished at all costs to find out at what times the trains left. And yet, before reaching this decision, I felt I must make one attempt more to invoke the Daughters of the Night, the Messengers of the Word, the Deities without form or feature; but the capricious Guardians had not deigned once again to unclose the miraculous portals, or more probably, had not been able; in vain might they untiringly appeal, as was their custom, to the venerable inventor of printing and the young prince, collector of impressionist paintings and driver of motor-cars (who was Captain de Borodino’s nephew); Gutenberg and Wagram left their supplications unanswered, and I came away, feeling that the Invisible would continue to turn a deaf ear.

When I came among Robert and his friends, I withheld the confession that my heart was no longer with them, that my departure was now irrevocably fixed.

Saint-Loup appeared to believe me, but I learned afterwards that he had from the first moment realised that my uncertainty was feigned and that he would not see me again next day. And while, letting their plates grow cold, his friends joined him in searching through the time-table for a train which would take me to Paris, and while we heard in the cold, starry night the whistling of the engines on the line, I certainly felt no longer the same peace of mind which on all these last evenings I had derived from the friendship of the former and the latter's distant passage. And yet they did not fail me this evening, performing the same office in a different way. My departure overpowered me less when I was no longer obliged to think of it by myself, when I felt that there was concentrated on what was to be done the more normal, more wholesome activity of my strenuous friends, Robert's brothers in arms, and of those other strong creatures, the trains, whose going and coming, night and morning, between Doncières and Paris, broke up in retrospect what had been too compact and insupportable in my long isolation from my grandmother into daily possibilities of return.

"I don't doubt the truth of what you're saying, or that you aren't thinking of leaving us just yet," said Saint-Loup, smiling; "but pretend you are going, and come and say good-bye to me to-morrow morning; early, otherwise there's a risk of my not seeing you; I'm going out to luncheon, I've got leave from the Captain; I shall have to be back in barracks by two, as we are to be on the march all afternoon. I suppose the man to whose house I'm going, a couple of miles out, will manage to get me back in time."

Scarcely had he uttered these words when a messenger came for me from my hotel; the telephone operator had sent to find me. I ran to the post office, for it was nearly closing time. The word 'trunks' recurred incessantly in the answers given me by the officiais. I was in a fever of anxiety, for it was my grandmother who had asked for me. The office was closing for the night. Finally I got my connexion. "Is that you, Granny?" A woman's voice, with a strong English accent, answered: "Yes, but I don't know your voice." Neither did I recognise the voice that was speaking to me; besides, my grandmother called me *tu*, and not *vous*. And then all was explained. The young man for whom his grandmother had called on the telephone had a name almost identical with my own, and was staying in an annex of my hotel. This call coming on the very day on which I had been telephoning to my grandmother, I had never for a moment doubted that it was she who was asking for me. Whereas it was by pure coincidence that the post office and the hotel had combined to make a twofold error.

The following morning I rose late, and failed to catch Saint-Loup, who had

already started for the country house where he was invited to luncheon. About half past one, I had decided to go in any case to the barracks, so as to be there before he arrived, when, as I was crossing one of the avenues on the way there, I noticed, coming behind me in the same direction as myself, a tilbury which, as it overtook me, obliged me to jump out of its way; an N.C.O. was driving it, wearing an eyeglass; it was Saint-Loup. By his side was the friend whose guest he had been at luncheon, and whom I had met once before at the hotel where we dined. I did not dare shout to Robert since he was not alone, but, in the hope that he would stop and pick me up, I attracted his attention by a sweeping wave of my hat, which might be regarded as due to the presence of a stranger. I knew that Robert was short-sighted; still, I should have supposed that, provided he saw me at all, he could not fail to recognise me; he did indeed see my salute, and returned it, but without stopping; driving on at full speed, without a smile, without moving a muscle of his face, he confined himself to keeping his hand raised for a minute to the peak of his cap, as though he were acknowledging the salute of a trooper whom he did not know personally. I ran to the barracks, but it was a long way; when I arrived, the regiment was parading on the square, on which I was not allowed to stand, and I was heart-broken at not having been able to say good-bye to Saint-Loup; I went up to his room, but he had gone; I was reduced to questioning a group of sick details, recruits who had been excused route-marches, the young graduate, one of the ‘old soldiers,’ who were watching the regiment parade.

“You haven’t seen Serjeant Saint-Loup, have you, by any chance?” I asked.

“He’s gone on parade, sir,” said the old soldier.

“I never saw him,” said the graduate.

“You never saw him,” exclaimed the old soldier, losing all interest in me, “you never saw our famous Saint-Loup, the figure he’s cutting with his new breeches! When the Capstan sees that, officer’s cloth, my word!”

“Oh, you’re a wonder, you are; officer’s cloth,” replied the young graduate, who, reported ‘sick in quarters,’ was excused marching and tried, not without some misgivings, to be on easy terms with the veterans. “This officer’s cloth you speak of is cloth like that, is it?”

“Sir?” asked the old soldier angrily.

He was indignant that the young graduate should throw doubt on the breeches’ being made of officer’s cloth, but, being a Breton, coming from a village that went by the name of Penguern-Stereden, having learned French with as much difficulty as if it had been English or German, whenever he felt himself

overcome by emotion he would go on saying ‘Sir?’ to give himself time to find words, then, after this preparation, let loose his eloquence, confining himself to the repetition of certain words which he knew better than others, but without haste, taking every precaution to gloss over his unfamiliarity with the pronunciation.

“Ah! It is cloth like that,” he broke out, with a fury the intensity of which increased as the speed of his utterance diminished. “Ah! It is cloth like that; when I tell you that it is, officer’s cloth, when-I-tell-you-a-thing, if-I-tell-you-a-thing, it’s because I know, I should think.”

“Very well, then;” replied the young graduate, overcome by the force of this argument. “Keep your hair on, old boy.”

“There, look, there’s the Capstan coming along. No, but just look at Saint-Loup; the way he throws his leg out; and his head. Would you call that a non-com? And his eyeglass; oh, he’s hot stuff, he is.”

I asked these troopers, who did not seem at all embarrassed by my presence, whether I too might look out of the window. They neither objected to my doing so nor moved to make room for me. I saw Captain de Borodino go majestically by, putting his horse into a trot, and apparently under the illusion that he was taking part in the Battle of Austerlitz. A few loiterers had stopped by the gate to see the regiment file out. Erect on his charger, his face inclined to plumpness, his cheeks of an Imperial fulness, his eye lucid, the Prince must have been the victim of some hallucination, as I was myself whenever, after the tramway-car had passed, the silence that followed its rumble seemed to me to throb and echo with a vaguely musical palpitation. I was wretched at not having said good-bye to Saint-Loup, but I went nevertheless, for my one anxiety was to return to my grandmother; always until then, in this little country town, when I thought of what my grandmother must be doing by herself, I had pictured her as she was when with me, suppressing my own personality but without taking into account the effects of such a suppression; now, I had to free myself, at the first possible moment, in her arms, from the phantom, hitherto unsuspected and suddenly called into being by her voice, of a grandmother really separated from me, resigned, having, what I had never yet thought of her as having, a definite age, who had just received a letter from me in an empty house, as I had once before imagined Mamma in a house by herself, when I had left her to go to Balbec.

Alas, this phantom was just what I did see when, entering the drawing-room before my grandmother had been told of my return, I found her there, reading. I was in the room, or rather I was not yet in the room since she was not aware of

my presence, and, like a woman whom one surprises at a piece of work which she will lay aside if anyone comes in, she had abandoned herself to a train of thoughts which she had never allowed to be visible by me. Of myself — thanks to that privilege which does not last but which one enjoys during the brief moment of return, the faculty of being a spectator, so to speak, of one's own absence,— there was present only the witness, the observer, with a hat and travelling coat, the stranger who does not belong to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which one will never see again. The process that mechanically occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother was indeed a photograph. We never see the people who are dear to us save in the animated system, the perpetual motion of our incessant love for them, which before allowing the images that their faces present to reach us catches them in its vortex, flings them back upon the idea that we have always had of them, makes them adhere to it, coincide with it. How, since into the forehead, the cheeks of my grandmother I had been accustomed to read all the most delicate, the most permanent qualities of her mind; how, since every casual glance is an act of necromancy, each face that we love a mirror of the past, how could I have failed to overlook what in her had become dulled and changed, seeing that in the most trivial spectacles of our daily life, our eye, charged with thought, neglects, as would a classical tragedy, every image that does not assist the action of the play and retains only those that may help to make its purpose intelligible. But if, in place of our eye, it should be a purely material object, a photographic plate, that has watched the action, then what we shall see, in the courtyard of the Institute, for example, will be, instead of the dignified emergence of an Academician who is going to hail a cab, his staggering gait, his precautions to avoid tumbling upon his back, the parabola of his fall, as though he were drunk, or the ground frozen over. So is it when some casual sport of chance prevents our intelligent and pious affection from coming forward in time to hide from our eyes what they ought never to behold, when it is forestalled by our eyes, and they, arising first in the field and having it to themselves, set to work mechanically, like films, and shew us, in place of the loved friend who has long ago ceased to exist but whose death our affection has always hitherto kept concealed from us, the new person whom a hundred times daily that affection has clothed with a dear and cheating likeness. And, as a sick man who for long has not looked at his own reflexion, and has kept his memory of the face that he never sees refreshed from the ideal image of himself that he carries in his mind, recoils on catching sight in the glass, in the midst of an arid waste of cheek, of

the sloping red structure of a nose as huge as one of the pyramids of Egypt, I, for whom my grandmother was still myself, I who had never seen her save in my own soul, always at the same place in the past, through the transparent sheets of contiguous, overlapping memories, suddenly in our drawing-room which formed part of a new world, that of time, that in which dwell the strangers of whom we say "He's begun to age a good deal," for the first time and for a moment only, since she vanished at once, I saw, sitting on the sofa, beneath the lamp, red-faced, heavy and common, sick, lost in thought, following the lines of a book with eyes that seemed hardly sane, a dejected old woman whom I did not know.

My request to be allowed to inspect the Elstirs in Mme. de Guermantes's collection had been met by Saint-Loup with: "I will answer for her." And indeed, as ill luck would have it, it was he and he alone who did answer. We answer readily enough for other people when, setting our mental stage with the little puppets that represent them, we manipulate these to suit our fancy. No doubt even then we take into account the difficulties due to another person's nature being different from our own, and we do not fail to have recourse to some plan of action likely to influence that nature, an appeal to his material interest, persuasion, the rousing of emotion, which will neutralise contrary tendencies on his part. But these differences from our own nature, it is still our own nature that is imagining them, these difficulties, it is we that are raising them; these compelling motives, it is we that are applying them. And so with the actions which before our mind's eye we have made the other person rehearse, and which make him act as we choose; when we wish to see him perform them in real life, the case is altered, we come up against unseen resistances which may prove insuperable. One of the strongest is doubtless that which may be developed in a woman who is not in love with him by the disgust inspired in her, a fetid, insurmountable loathing, by the man who is in love with her; during the long weeks in which Saint-Loup still did not come to Paris, his aunt, to whom I had no doubt of his having written begging her to do so, never once asked me to call at her house to see the Elstirs.

I perceived signs of coldness on the part of another occupant of the building. This was Jupien. Did he consider that I ought to have gone in and said how d'ye do to him, on my return from Doncières, before even going upstairs to our own flat? My mother said no, that there was nothing unusual about it. Françoise had told her that he was like that, subject to sudden fits of ill humour, without any cause. These invariably passed off after a little time.

Meanwhile the winter was drawing to an end. One morning, after several

weeks of showers and storms, I heard in my chimney — instead of the wind, formless, elastic, sombre, which convulsed me with a longing to go to the sea — the cooing of the pigeons that were nesting in the wall outside; shimmering, unexpected, like a first hyacinth, gently tearing open its fostering heart that there might shoot forth, purple and satin-soft, its flower of sound, letting in like an opened window into my bedroom still shuttered and dark the heat, the dazzling brightness, the fatigue of a first fine day. That morning, I was surprised to find myself humming a music-hall tune which had never entered my head since the year in which I had been going to Florence and Venice. So profoundly does the atmosphere, as good days and bad recur, act on our organism and draw from dim shelves where we had forgotten them, the melodies written there which our memory rould not decipher. Presently a more conscious dreamer accompanied this musician to whom I was listening inside myself, without having recognised at first what he was playing.

I quite realised that it was not for any reason peculiar to Balbec that on my arrival there I had failed to find in its church the charm which it had had for me before I knew it; that at Florence or Parma or Venice my imagination could no more take the place of my eyes when I looked at the sights there. I realised this. Similarly, one New Year's afternoon, as night fell, standing before a column of playbills, I had discovered the illusion that lies in our thinking that certain solemn holidays differ essentially from the other days in the calendar. And yet I could not prevent my memory of the time during which I had looked forward to spending Easter in Florence from continuing to make that festival the atmosphere, so to speak, of the City of Flowers, to give at once to Easter Day something Florentine and to Florence something Paschal. Easter was still a long way off; but in the range of days that stretched out before me the days of Holy Week stood out more clearly at the end of those that merely came between. Touched by a far-flung ray, like certain houses in a village which one sees from a distance when the rest are in shadow, they had caught and kept all the sun.

The weather had now become milder. And my parents themselves, by urging me to take more exercise, gave me an excuse for resuming my morning walks. I had meant to give them up, since they meant my meeting Mme. de Guermantes. But it was for this very reason that I kept thinking all the time of those walks, which led to my finding, every moment, a fresh reason for taking them, a reason that had no connexion with Mme. de Guermantes and no difficulty in convincing me that, had she never existed, I should still have taken a walk, without fail, at that hour every morning.

Alas, if to me meeting any person other than herself would not have mattered, I felt that to her meeting anyone in the world except myself would have been endurable. It happened that, in the course of her morning walks, she received the salutations of plenty of fools whom she regarded as such. But the appearance of these in her path seemed to her, if not to hold out any promise of pleasure, to be at any rate the result of mere accident. And she stopped them at times, for there are moments in which one wants to escape from oneself, to accept the hospitality offered by the soul of another person, provided always that the other, however modest and plain it may be, is a different soul, whereas in my heart she was exasperated to feel that what she would have found was herself. And so, even when I had, for taking the same way as she, another reason than my desire to see her, I trembled like a guilty man as she came past; and sometimes, so as to neutralise anything extravagant that there might seem to have been in my overtures, I would barely acknowledge her bow, or would fasten my eyes on her face without raising my hat, and succeed only in making her angrier than ever, and begin to regard me as insolent and ill-bred besides.

She was now wearing lighter, or at any rate brighter, clothes, and would come strolling down the street in which already, as though it were spring, in front of the narrow shops that were squeezed in between the huge fronts of the old aristocratic mansions, over the booths of the butter-woman and the fruit-woman and the vegetable-woman, awnings were spread to protect them from the sun. I said to myself that the woman whom I could see far off, walking, opening her sunshade, crossing the street, was, in the opinion of those best qualified to judge, the greatest living exponent of the art of performing those movements and of making out of them something exquisitely lovely. Meanwhile she was advancing towards me, unconscious of this widespread reputation, her narrow, stubborn body, which had absorbed none of it, was bent stiffly forward under a scarf of violet silk; her clear, sullen eyes looked absently in front of her, and had perhaps caught sight of me; she was biting her lip; I saw her straighten her muff, give alms to a beggar, buy a bunch of violets from a flower-seller, with the same curiosity that I should have felt in watching the strokes of a great painter’s brush. And when, as she reached me, she gave me a bow that was accompanied sometimes by a faint smile, it was as though she had sketched in colour for me, adding a personal inscription to myself, a drawing that was a masterpiece of art. Each of her gowns seemed to me her natural, necessary surroundings, like the projection around her of a particular aspect of her soul. On one of these Lenten mornings, when she was on her way out to luncheon, I met her wearing a gown

of bright red velvet, cut slightly open at the throat. The face of Mme. de Guermantes appeared to be dreaming, beneath its pile of fair hair. I was less sad than usual because the melancholy of her expression, the sort of claustration which the startling hue of her gown set between her and the rest of the world, made her seem somehow lonely and unhappy, and this comforted me. The gown struck me as being the materialisation round about her of the scarlet rays of a heart which I did not recognise as hers and might have been able, perhaps, to console; sheltered in the mystical light of the garment with its gently flowing folds, she made me think of some Saint of the early ages of Christianity. After which I felt ashamed of afflicting with the sight of myself this holy martyr. “But, after all, the streets are public.”

The streets are public, I reminded myself, giving a different meaning to the words, and marvelling that indeed in the crowded thoroughfare often soaked with rain, which made it beautiful and precious as a street sometimes is in the old towns of Italy, the Duchesse de Guermantes mingled with the public life of the world moments of her own secret life, shewing herself thus to all and sundry, jostled by every passer-by, with the splendid gratuitousness of the greatest works of art. As I had been out in the morning, after staying awake all night, in the afternoon my parents would tell me to lie down for a little and try to sleep. There is no need, when one is trying to find sleep, to give much thought to the quest, but habit is very useful, and even freedom from thought. But in these afternoon hours both were lacking. Before going to sleep, I devoted so much time to thinking that I should not be able to sleep, that even after I was asleep a little of my thought remained. It was no more than a glimmer in the almost total darkness, but it was bright enough to cast a reflexion in my sleep, first of the idea that I could not sleep, and then, a reflexion of this reflexion, that it was in my sleep that I had had the idea that I was not asleep, then, by a further refraction, my awakening... to a fresh doze in which I was trying to tell some friends who had come into my room that, a moment earlier, when I was asleep, I had imagined that I was not asleep. These shades were barely distinguishable; it would have required a keen — and quite useless — delicacy of perception to seize them all. Similarly, in later years, at Venice, long after the sun had set, when it seemed to be quite dark, I have seen, thanks to the echo, itself imperceptible, of a last note of light, held indefinitely on the surface of the canals, as though some optical pedal were being pressed, the reflexion of the palaces unfurled, as though for all time, in a darker velvet, on the crepuscular greyness of the water. One of my dreams was the synthesis of what my

imagination had often sought to depict, in my waking hours, of a certain seagirt place and its mediaeval past. In my sleep I saw a gothic fortress rising from a sea whose waves were stilled as in a painted window. An arm of the sea cut the town in two; the green water stretched to my feet; it bathed on the opposite shore the foundations of an oriental church, and beyond it houses which existed already in the fourteenth century, so that to go across to them would have been to ascend the stream of time. This dream in which nature had learned from art, in which the sea had turned gothic, this dream in which I longed to attain, in which I believed that I was attaining to the impossible, it seemed to me that I had often dreamed it before. But as it is the property of what we imagine in our sleep to multiply itself in the past, and to appear, even when novel, familiar, I supposed that I was mistaken. I noticed, however, that I did frequently have this dream.

The limitations, too, that are common to all sleep were reflected in mine, but in a symbolical manner; I could not in the darkness make out the faces of the friends who were in the room, for we sleep with our eyes shut. I, who could carry on endless arguments with myself while I dreamed, as soon as I tried to speak to these friends felt the words stick in my throat, for we do not speak distinctly in our sleep; I wanted to go to them, and I could not move my limbs, for we do not walk when we are asleep either; and suddenly I was ashamed to be seen by them, for we sleep without our clothes. So, my eyes blinded, my lips sealed, my limbs fettered, my body naked, the figure of sleep which my sleep itself projected had the appearance of those great allegorical figures (in one of which Giotto has portrayed Envy with a serpent in her mouth) of which Swann had given me photographs.

Saint-Loup came to Paris for a few hours only. He came with assurances that he had had no opportunity of mentioning me to his aunt. “She’s not being at all nice just now, Oriane isn’t,” he explained, with innocent self-betrayal. “She’s not my old Oriane any longer, they’ve gone and changed her. I assure you, it’s not worth while bothering your head about her. You pay her far too great a compliment. You wouldn’t care to meet my cousin Poictiers?” he went on, without stopping to reflect that this could not possibly give me any pleasure. “Quite an intelligent young woman, she is; you’d like her. She’s married to my cousin, the Duc de Poictiers, who is a good fellow, but a bit slow for her. I’ve told her about you. She said I was to bring you to see her. She’s much better looking than Oriane, and younger, too. Really a nice person, don’t you know, really a good sort.” These were expressions recently — and all the more ardently — taken up by Robert, which meant that the person in question had a delicate

nature. “I don’t go so far as to say she’s a Dreyfusard, you must remember the sort of people she lives among; still, she did say to me: ‘If he is innocent, how ghastly for him to be shut up on the Devil’s Isle.’ You see what I mean, don’t you? And then she’s the sort of woman who does a tremendous lot for her old governesses; she’s given orders that they’re never to be sent in by the servants’ stair, when they come to the house. She’s a very good sort, I assure you. The real reason why Oriane doesn’t like her is that she feels she’s the cleverer of the two.”

Although completely absorbed in the pity which she felt for one of the Guermantes footmen — who had no chance of going to see his girl, even when the Duchess was out, for it would immediately have been reported to her from the lodge,— Françoise was heartbroken at not having been in the house at the moment of Saint-Loup’s visit, but this was because now she herself paid visits also. She never failed to go out on the days when I most wanted her. It was always to see her brother, her niece and, more particularly, her own daughter, who had recently come to live in Paris. The intimate nature of these visits itself increased the irritation that I felt at being deprived of her services, for I had a foreboding that she would speak of them as being among those duties from which there was no dispensation, according to the laws laid down at Saint-André-des-Champs.

And so I never listened to her excuses without an ill humour which was highly unjust to her, and was brought to a climax by the way Françoise had of saying not: “I have been to see my brother,” or “I have been to see my niece,” but “I have been to see the brother,” “I just looked in as I passed to bid good day to the niece” (or “to my niece the butcheress”). As for her daughter, Françoise would have been glad to see her return to Combray. But this recent Parisian, making use, like a woman of fashion, of abbreviations, though hers were of a vulgar kind, protested that the week she was going shortly to spend at Combray would seem quite long enough without so much as a sight of “the *Intran*.” She was still less willing to go to Franchise’s sister, who lived in a mountainous country, for “mountains,” said the daughter, giving to the adjective a new and terrible meaning, “aren’t really interesting.” She could not make Up her mind to go back to Méséglise, where “the people are so stupid,” where in the market the gossips at their stalls would call cousins with her, and say “Why, it’s never poor Bazireau’s daughter?” She would sooner die than go back and bury herself down there, now that she had “tasted the life of Paris,” and Françoise, traditionalist as she was, smiled complacently nevertheless at the spirit of innovation that was

incarnate in this new Parisian when she said: “Very well, mother, if you don’t get your day out, you have only to send me a pneu.”

The weather had turned chilly again. “Go out? What for? To catch your death?” said Françoise, who preferred to remain in the house during the week which her daughter and brother and the butcher-niece had gone to spend at Combray. Being, moreover, the last surviving adherent of the sect in whom persisted obscurely the doctrine of my aunt Léonie — a natural philosopher — Françoise would add, speaking of this unseasonable weather: “It is the remnant of the wrath of God!” But I responded to her complaints only in a languid smile; all the more indifferent to these predictions, in that whatever befell it would be fine for me; already I could see the morning sun shine on the slope of Fiesole, I warmed myself in its rays; their strength obliged me to half open, half shut my eyelids, smiling the while, and my eyelids, like alabaster lamps, were filled with a rosy glow. It was not only the bells that came from Italy, Italy had come with them. My faithful hands would not lack flowers to honour the anniversary of the pilgrimage which I ought to have made long ago, for since, here in Paris, the weather had turned cold again as in another year at the time of our preparations for departure at the end of Lent, in the liquid, freezing air which bathed the chestnuts and planes on the boulevards, the tree in the courtyard of our house, there were already opening their petals, as in a bowl of pure water, the narcissi, the jonquils, the anemones of the Ponte Vecchio.

My father had informed us that he now knew, from his friend A. J., where M. de Norpois was going when he met him about the place.

“It’s to see Mme. de Villeparisis, they are great friends; I never knew anything about it. It seems she’s a delightful person, a most superior woman. You ought to go and call on her,” he told me. “Another thing that surprised me very much. He spoke to me of M. de Guermantes as quite a distinguished man; I had always taken him for a boor. It seems, he knows an enormous amount, and has perfect taste, only he’s very proud of his name and his connexions. But for that matter, according to Norpois, he has a tremendous position, not only here but all over Europe. It appears, the Austrian Emperor and the Tsar treat him just like one of themselves. Old Norpois told me that Mme. de Villeparisis had taken quite a fancy to you, and that you would meet all sorts of interesting people in her house. He paid a great tribute to you; you will see him if you go there, and he may have some good advice for you even if you are going to be a writer. For you’re not likely to do anything else; I can see that. It might turn out quite a good career; it’s not what I should have chosen for you, myself; but you’ll be a

man in no time now, we shan't always be here to look after you, and we mustn't prevent you from following your vocation."

If only I had been able to start writing! But whatever the conditions in which I approached the task (as, too, alas, the undertakings not to touch alcohol, to go to bed early, to sleep, to keep fit), whether it were with enthusiasm, with method, with pleasure, in depriving myself of a walk, or postponing my walk and keeping it in reserve as a reward of industry, taking advantage of an hour of good health, utilising the inactivity forced on me by a day of illness, what always emerged in the end from all my effort was a virgin page, undefiled by any writing, ineluctable as that forced card which in certain tricks one invariably is made to draw, however carefully one may first have shuffled the pack. I was merely the instrument of habits of not working, of not going to bed, of not sleeping, which must find expression somehow, cost what it might; if I offered them no resistance, if I contented myself with the pretext they seized from the first opportunity that the day afforded them of acting as they chose, I escaped without serious injury, I slept for a few hours after all, towards morning, I read a little, I did not over-exert myself; but if I attempted to thwart them, if I pretended to go to bed early, to drink only water, to work, they grew restive, they adopted strong measures, they made me really ill, I was obliged to double my dose of alcohol, did not lie down in bed for two days and nights on end, could not even read, and I vowed that another time I would be more reasonable, that is to say less wise, like the victim of an assault who allows himself to be robbed for fear, should he offer resistance, of being murdered.

My father, in the meantime, had met M. de Guermantes once or twice, and, now that M. de Norpois had told him that the Duke was a remarkable man, had begun to pay more attention to what he said. As it happened, they met in the courtyard and discussed Mme. de Villeparisis. "He tells me, she's his aunt; 'Viparisi,' he pronounces it. He tells me, too, she's an extraordinarily able woman. In fact he said she kept a School of Wit," my father announced to us, impressed by the vagueness of this expression, which he had indeed come across now and then in volumes of memoirs, but without attaching to it any definite meaning. My mother, so great was her respect for him, when she saw that he did not dismiss as of no importance the fact that Mme. de Villeparisis kept a School of Wit, decided that this must be of some consequence. Albeit from my grandmother she had known all the time the exact amount of the Marquise's intellectual worth, it was immediately enhanced in her eyes. My grandmother, who was not very well just then, was not in favour at first of the suggested visit,

and afterwards lost interest in the matter. Since we had moved into our new flat, Mme. de Villeparisis had several times asked my grandmother to call upon her. And invariably my grandmother had replied that she was not going out just at present, in one of those letters which, by a new habit of hers which we did not understand, she no longer sealed herself, but employed Françoise to lick the envelopes for her. As for myself, without any very clear picture in my mind of this School of Wit, I should not have been greatly surprised to find the old lady from Balbec installed behind a desk, as, for that matter, I eventually did.

My father would have been glad to know, into the bargain, whether the Ambassador's support would be worth many votes to him at the Institute, for which he had thoughts of standing as an independent candidate. To tell the truth, while he did not venture to doubt that he would have M. de Norpois's support, he was by no means certain of it. He had thought it merely malicious gossip when they assured him at the Ministry that M. de Norpois, wishing to be himself the only representative there of the Institute, would put every possible obstacle in the way of my father's candidature, which besides would be particularly awkward for him at that moment, since he was supporting another candidate already. And yet, when M. Leroy-Beaulieu had first advised him to stand, and had reckoned up his chances, my father had been struck by the fact that, among the colleagues upon whom he could count for support, the eminent economist had not mentioned M. de Norpois. He dared not ask the Ambassador point-blank, but hoped that I should return from my call on Mme. de Villeparisis with his election as good as secured. This call was now imminent. That M. de Norpois would carry on propaganda calculated to assure my father the votes of at least two thirds of the Academy seemed to him all the more probable since the Ambassador's willingness to oblige was proverbial, those who liked him least admitting that no one else took such pleasure in being of service. And besides, at the Ministry, his protective influence was extended over my father far more markedly than over any other official.

My father had also another encounter about this time, but one at which his extreme surprise ended in equal indignation. In the street one day he ran into Mme. Sazerat, whose life in Paris her comparative poverty restricted to occasional visits to a friend. There was no one who bored my father quite so intensely as did Mme. Sazerat, so much so that Mamma was obliged, once a year, to intercede with him in sweet and suppliant tones: "My dear, I really must invite Mme. Sazerat to the house, just once; she won't stay long;" and even: "Listen, dear, I am going to ask you to make a great sacrifice; do go and call

upon Mme. Sazerat. You know I hate bothering you, but it would be so nice of you." He would laugh, raise various objections, and go to pay the call. And so, for all that Mme. Sazerat did not appeal to him, on catching sight of her in the street my father went towards her, hat in hand; but to his profound astonishment Mme. Sazerat confined her greeting to the frigid bow enforced by politeness towards a person who is guilty of some disgraceful action or has been condemned to live, for the future, in another hemisphere. My father had come home speechless with rage. Next day my mother met Mme. Sazerat in some one's house. She did not offer my mother her hand, but only smiled at her with a vague and melancholy air as one smiles at a person with whom one used to play as a child, but with whom one has since severed all one's relations because she has led an abandoned life, has married a convict or (what is worse still) a co-respondent. Now, from all time my parents had accorded to Mme. Sazerat, and inspired in her, the most profound respect. But (and of this my mother was ignorant) Mme. Sazerat, alone of her kind at Combray, was a Dreyfusard. My father, a friend of M. Méline, was convinced that Dreyfus was guilty. He had flatly refused to listen to some of his colleagues who had asked him to sign a petition demanding a fresh trial. He never spoke to me for a week, after learning that I had chosen to take a different line. His opinions were well known. He came near to being looked upon as a Nationalist. As for my grandmother, in whom alone of the family a generous doubt was likely to be kindled, whenever anyone spoke to her of the possible innocence of Dreyfus, she gave a shake of her head, the meaning of which we did not at the time understand, but which was like the gesture of a person who has been interrupted while thinking of more serious things. My mother, torn between her love for my father and her hope that I might turn out to have brains, preserved an impartiality which she expressed by silence. Finally my grandfather, who adored the Army (albeit his duties with the National Guard had been the bugbear of his riper years), could never, at Combray, see a regiment go by the garden railings without baring his head as the colonel and the colours passed. All this was quite enough to make Mme. Sazerat, who knew every incident of the disinterested and honourable careers of my father and grandfather, regard them as pillars of Injustice. We pardon the crimes of individuals, but not their participation in a collective crime. As soon as she knew my father to be an anti-Dreyfusard she set between him and herself continents and centuries. Which explains why, across such an interval of time and space, her bow had been imperceptible to my father, and why it had not occurred to her to hold out her hand, or to say a few words which would never

have carried across the worlds that lay between.

Saint-Loup, who was coming anyhow to Paris, had promised to take me to Mme. de Villeparisis's, where I hoped, though I had not said so to him, that we might meet Mme. de Guermantes. He invited me to luncheon in a restaurant with his mistress, whom we were afterwards to accompany to a rehearsal. We were to go out in the morning and call for her at her home on the outskirts of Paris.

I had asked Saint-Loup that the restaurant to which we went for luncheon (in the lives of young noblemen with money to spend the restaurant plays as important a part as do bales of merchandise in Arabian stories), might, if possible, be that to which Aimé had told me that he would be going as head waiter until the Balbec season started. It was a great attraction to me who dreamed of so many expeditions and made so few to see again some one who formed part not merely of my memories of Balbec but of Balbec itself, who went there year after year, who when ill health or my studies compelled me to stay in Paris would be watching, just the same, through the long July afternoons while he waited for the guests to come in to dinner, the sun creep down the sky and set in the sea, through the glass panels of the great dining-room, behind which, at the hour when the light died, the motionless wings of vessels, smoky blue in the distance, looked like exotic and nocturnal moths in a show-case. Himself magnetised by his contact with the strong lodestone of Balbec, this head waiter became in turn a magnet attracting me. I hoped by talking to him to get at once into communication with Balbec, to have realised here in Paris something of the delights of travel.

I left the house early, with Françoise complaining bitterly because the footman who was engaged to be married had once again been prevented, the evening before, from going to see his girl. Françoise had found him in tears; he had been itching to go and strike the porter, but had restrained himself, for he valued his place.

Before reaching Saint-Loup's, where he was to be waiting for me at the door, I ran into Legrandin, of whom we had lost sight since our Combray days, and who, though now grown quite grey, had preserved his air of youthful candour. Seeing me, he stopped:

"Ah! So it's you," he exclaimed, "a man of fashion, and in a frock coat too! That is a livery in which my independent spirit would be ill at ease. It is true that you are a man of the world, I suppose, and go out paying calls! To go and dream, as I do, before some half ruined tomb, my flowing tie and jacket are not out of place. You know how I admire the charming quality of your soul; that is why I

tell you how deeply I regret that you should go forth and deny it among the Gentiles. By being capable of remaining for a moment in the nauseating atmosphere — which I am unable to breathe — of a drawing-room, you pronounce on your own future the condemnation, the damnation of the Prophet. I can see it all, you frequent the 'light hearts,' the houses of the great, that is the vice of our middle class to-day. Ah! Those aristocrats! The Terror was greatly to blame for not cutting the heads off every one of them. They are all sinister debauchees, when they are not simply dreary idiots. Still, my poor boy, if that sort of thing amuses you! While you are on your way to your tea-party your old friend will be more fortunate than you, for alone in an outlying suburb he will be watching the pink moon rise in a violet sky. The truth is that I scarcely belong to this Earth upon which I feel myself such an exile; it takes all the force of the law of gravity to hold me here, to keep nie from escaping into another sphere. I belong to a different planet. Goodbye; do not take amiss the old-time frankness of the peasant of the Vivonne, who has also remained a peasant of the Danube. To prove to you that I am your sincere well-wisher, I am going to send you my last novel. But you will not care for it; it is not deliquescent enough, not *fin de siècle* enough for you; it is too frank, too honest; what you want is Bergotte, you have confessed it, high game for the jaded palates of pleasure-seeking epicures. I suppose I am looked upon, in your set, as an old campaigner; I do wrong to put my heart into what I write, that is no longer done; besides, the life of the people is not distinguished enough to interest your little snobbicules. Go, get you gone, try to recall at times the words of Christ: 'Do this and ye shall live.' Farewell, Friend."

It was not with any particular resentment against Legrandin that I parted from him. Certain memories are like friends in common, they can bring about reconciliations; set down amid fields starred with buttercups, upon which were piled the ruins of feudal greatness, the little wooden bridge still joined us, Legrandin and me, as it joined the two banks of the Vivonne.

After coming out of a Paris in which, although spring had begun, the trees on the boulevards had hardly put on their first leaves, it was a marvel to Saint-Loup and myself, when the circle train had set us down at the suburban village in which his mistress was living, to see every cottage garden gay with huge festal altars of fruit trees in blossom. It was like one of those peculiar, poetical, ephemeral, local festivals which people travel long distances to attend on certain fixed occasions, only this one was held by Nature. The bloom of the cherry tree is stuck so close to its branches, like a white sheath, that from a distance, among

the other trees that shewed as yet scarcely a flower or leaf, one might have taken it, on this day of sunshine that was still so cold, for snow, melted everywhere else, which still clung to the bushes. But the tall pear trees enveloped each house, each modest courtyard in a whiteness more vast, more uniform, more dazzling, as if all the dwellings, all the enclosed spaces in the village were on their way to make, on one solemn date, their first communion.

It had been a country village, and had kept its old mayor's office sunburned and brown, in front of which, in the place of maypoles and streamers, three tall pear trees were, as though for some civic and local festival, gallantly beflagged with white satin. These villages in the environs of Paris still have at their gates parks of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which were the 'follies' of the stewards and favourites of the great. A fruit-grower had utilised one of these which was sunk below the road for his trees, or had simply, perhaps, preserved the plan of an immense orchard of former days. Laid out in quincunxes, these pear trees, less crowded and not so far on as those that I had seen, formed great quadrilaterals — separated by low walls — of snowy blossom, on each side of which the light fell differently, so that all these airy roofless chambers seemed to belong to a Palace of the Sun, such as one might unearth in Crete or somewhere; and made one think also of the different ponds of a reservoir, or of those parts of the sea which man, for some fishery, or to plant oyster-beds, has subdivided, when one saw, varying with the orientation of the boughs, the light fall and play upon their trained arms as upon water warm with spring, and coax into unfolding here and there, gleaming amid the open, azure-panelled trellis of the branches, the foaming whiteness of a creamy, sunlit flower.

Never had Robert spoken to me so tenderly of his friend as he did during this walk. She alone had taken root in his heart; his future career in the Army, his position in society, his family, he was not, of course, indifferent altogether to these, but they were of no account compared with the veriest trifle that concerned his mistress. That alone had any importance in his eyes, infinitely more importance than the Guermantes and all the kings of the earth put together. I do not know whether he had formulated the doctrine that she was of a superior quality to anyone else, but I do know that he considered, took trouble only about what affected her. Through her and for her he was capable of suffering, of being happy, perhaps of doing murder. There was really nothing that interested, that could excite him except what his mistress wished, was going to do, what was going on, discernible at most in fleeting changes of expression, in the narrow expanse of her face and behind her privileged brow. So nice-minded in all else,

he looked forward to the prospect of a brilliant marriage, solely in order to be able to continue to maintain her, to keep her always. If one had asked oneself what was the value that he set on her, I doubt whether one could ever have imagined a figure high enough. If he did not marry her, it was because a practical instinct warned him that as soon as she had nothing more to expect from him she would leave him, or would at least live as she chose, and that he must retain his hold on her by keeping her in suspense from day to day. For he admitted the possibility that she did not love him. No doubt the general affection called love must have forced him — as it forces all men — to believe at times that she did. But in his heart of hearts he felt that this love which she felt for him did not exhaust the possibility of her remaining with him only on account of his money, and that on the day when she had nothing more to expect from him she would make haste (the dupe of her friends and their literary theories, and loving him all the time, really — he thought) to leave him. “If she is nice to me to-day,” he confided to me, “I am going to give her something that she’ll like. It’s a necklace she saw at Boucheron’s. It’s rather too much for me just at present — thirty thousand francs. But, poor puss, she gets so little pleasure out of life. She will be jolly pleased with it, I know. She mentioned it to me and told me she knew somebody who would perhaps give it to her. I don t believe that is true, really, but I wasn’t taking any risks, so I’ve arranged with Boucheron, who is our family jeweller, to keep it for me. I am glad to think that you’re going to meet her; she’s nothing so very wonderful to look at, you know,” (I could see that he thought just the opposite and had said this only so as to make me, when I did see her, admire her all the more) “what she has got is a marvellous judgment; she’ll perhaps be afraid to talk much before you, but, by Jove! the things she’ll say to me about you afterwards, you know she says things one can go on thinking about for hours; there’s really something about her that’s quite Pythian.”

On our way to her house we passed by a row of little gardens, and I was obliged to stop, for they were all aflower with pear and cherry blossoms; as empty, no doubt, and lifeless only yesterday as a house that no tenant has taken, they were suddenly peopled and adorned by these newcomers, arrived during the night, whose lovely white garments we could see through the railings along the garden paths.

“Listen; I can see you’d rather stop and look at that stuff, and grow poetical about it,” said Robert, “so just wait for me here, will you; my friend’s house is quite close, I will go and fetch her.”

While I waited I strolled up and down the road, past these modest gardens.

If I raised my head I could see, now and then, girls sitting in the windows, but outside, in the open air, and at the height of a half-landing, here and there, light and pliant, in their fresh pink gowns, hanging among the leaves, young lilac-clusters were letting themselves be swung by the breeze without heeding the passer-by who was turning his eyes towards their green mansions. I recognised in them the platoons in violet uniform posted at the entrance to M. Swann's park, past the little white fence, in the warm afternoons of spring, like an enchanting rustic tapestry. I took a path which led me into a meadow. A cold wind blew keenly along it, as at Combray, but from the midst of the rich, moist, country soil, which might have been on the bank of the Vivonne, there had nevertheless arisen, punctual at the trysting place like all its band of brothers, a great white pear tree which waved smilingly in the sun's face, like a curtain of light materialised and made palpable, its flowers shaken by the breeze but polished and frosted with silver by the sun's rays.

Suddenly Saint-Loup appeared, accompanied by his mistress, and then, in this woman who was for him all the love, every possible delight in life, whose personality, mysteriously enshrined in a body as in a Tabernacle, was the object that still occupied incessantly the toiling imagination of my friend, whom he felt that he would never really know, as to whom he was perpetually asking himself what could be her secret self, behind the veil of eyes and flesh, in this woman I recognised at once 'Rachel when from the Lord,' her who, but a few years since — women change their position so rapidly in that world, when they do change — used to say to the procuress: "To-morrow evening, then, if you want me for anyone, you will send round, won't you?"

And when they had 'come round' for her, and she found herself alone in the room with the 'anyone,' she had known so well what was required of her that after locking the door, as a prudent woman's precaution or a ritual gesture, she would begin to take off all her things, as one does before the doctor who is going to sound one's chest, never stopping in the process unless the 'some one,' not caring for nudity, told her that she might keep on her shift, as specialists do sometimes who, having an extremely fine ear and being afraid of their patient's catching a chill, are satisfied with listening to his breathing and the beating of his heart through his shirt. On this woman whose whole life, all her thoughts, all her past, all the men who at one time or another had had her were to me so utterly unimportant that if she had begun to tell me about them I should have listened to her only out of politeness, and should barely have heard what she said, I felt that the anxiety, the torment, the love of Saint-Loup had been concentrated in such a

way as to make — out of what was for me a mechanical toy, nothing more — the cause of endless suffering, the very object and reward of existence. Seeing these two elements separately (because I had known ‘Rachel when from the Lord’ in a house of ill fame), I realised that many women for the sake of whom men live, suffer, take their lives, may be in themselves or for other people what Rachel was for me. The idea that any one could be tormented by curiosity with regard to her life stupefied me. I could have told Robert of any number of her unchastities, which seemed to me the most uninteresting things in the world. And how they would have pained him! And what had he not given to learn them, without avail!

I realised also then all that the human imagination can put behind a little scrap of face, such as this girl’s face was, if it is the imagination that was the first to know it; and conversely into what wretched elements, crudely material and utterly without value, might be decomposed what had been the inspiration of countless dreams if, on the contrary, it should be so to speak controverted by the slightest actual acquaintance. I saw that what had appeared to me to be not worth twenty francs when it had been offered to me for twenty francs in the house of ill fame, where it was then for me simply a woman desirous of earning twenty francs, might be worth more than a million, more than one’s family, more than all the most coveted positions in life if one had begun by imagining her to embody a strange creature, interesting to know, difficult to seize and to hold. No doubt it was the same thin and narrow face that we saw, Robert and I. But we had arrived at it by two opposite ways, between which there was no communication, and we should never both see it from the same side. That face, with its stares, its smiles, the movements of its lips, I had known from outside as being simply that of a woman of the sort who for twenty francs would do anything that I asked. And so her stares, her smiles, the movements of her lips had seemed to me significant merely of the general actions of a class without any distinctive quality. And beneath them I should not have had the curiosity to look for a person. But what to me had in a sense been offered at the start, that consenting face, had been for Robert an ultimate goal towards which he had made his way through endless hopes and doubts, suspicions, dreams. He gave more than a million francs in order to have for himself, in order that there might not be offered to others what had been offered to me, as to all and sundry, for a score. That he too should not have enjoyed it at the lower price may have been due to the chance of a moment, the instant in which she who seemed ready to yield herself makes off, having perhaps an assignation elsewhere, some reason which makes her more difficult of access that day. Should the man be a

sentimentalist, then, even if she has not observed it, but infinitely more if she has, the direst game begins. Unable to swallow his disappointment, to make himself forget about the woman, he starts afresh in pursuit, she flies him, until a mere smile for which he no longer ventured to hope is bought at a thousand times what should have been the price of the last, the most intimate favours. It happens even at times in such a case, when one has been led by a mixture of simplicity in one's judgment and cowardice in the face of suffering to commit the crowning folly of making an inaccessible idol of a girl, that these last favours, or even the first kiss one is fated never to obtain, one no longer even ventures to ask for them for fear of destroying one's chances of Platonic love. And it is then a bitter anguish to leave the world without having ever known what were the embraces of the woman one has most passionately loved. As for Rachel's favours, however, Saint-Loup had by mere accident succeeded in winning them all. Certainly if he had now learned that they had been offered to all the world for a louis, he would have suffered, of course, acutely, but would still have given a million francs for the right to keep them, for nothing that he might have learned could have made him emerge — since that is beyond human control and can be brought to pass only in spite of it by the action of some great natural law — from the path he was treading, from which that face could appear to him only through the web of the dreams that he had already spun. The immobility of that thin face, like that of a sheet of paper subjected to the colossal pressure of two atmospheres, seemed to me to be being maintained by two infinities which abutted on her without meeting, for she held them apart. And indeed, when Robert and I were both looking at her we did not both see her from the same side of the mystery.

It was not 'Rachel when from the Lord'— who seemed to me a small matter — it was the power of the human imagination, the illusion on which were based the pains of love; these I felt to be vast. Robert noticed that I appeared moved. I turned my eyes to the pear and cherry trees of the garden opposite, so that he might think that it was their beauty that had touched me. And it did touch me in somewhat the same way; it also brought close to me things of the kind which we not only see with our eyes but feel also in our hearts. These trees that I had seen in the garden, likening them in my mind to strange deities, had not my mistake been like the Magdalene's when, in another garden, she saw a human form and 'thought it was the gardener.' Treasurers of our memories of the age of gold, keepers of the promise that reality is not what we suppose, that the splendour of Poetry, the wonderful radiance of innocence may shine in it and may be the

recompense which we strive to earn, these great white creatures, bowed in a marvellous fashion above the shade propitious for rest, for angling or for reading, were they not rather angels? I exchanged a few words with Saint-Loup's mistress. We cut across the village. Its houses were sordid. But by each of the most wretched, of those that looked as though they had been scorched and branded by a rain of brimstone, a mysterious traveller, halting for a day in the accursed city, a resplendent angel stood erect, extending broadly over it the dazzling protection of the wings of flowering innocence: it was a pear tree. Saint-Loup drew me a little way in front to explain.

"I should have liked it if you and I could have been alone together, in fact I would much rather have had luncheon just with you, and stayed with you until it was time to go to my aunt's. But this poor girl of mine here, it is such a pleasure to her, and she is so decent to me, don't you know, I hadn't the heart to refuse her. You'll like her, however, she's literary, you know, a most sensitive nature, and besides it's such a pleasure to be with her in a restaurant, she is so charming, so simple, always delighted with every, thing."

I fancy nevertheless that, on this same morning, and then probably for the first and last time, Robert did detach himself for a moment from the woman whom out of successive layers of affection he had gradually created, and beheld suddenly at some distance from himself another Rachel, outwardly the double of his but entirely different, who was nothing more or less than a little light of love. We had left the blossoming orchard and were making for the train which was to take us to Paris when, at the station, Rachel, who was walking by herself, was recognised and accosted by a pair of common little 'tarts' like herself, who first of all, thinking that she was alone, called out: "Hello, Rachel, you come with us; Lucienne and Germaine are in the train, and there's room for one more. Come on. We're all going to the rink," and were just going to introduce to her two counter-jumpers, their lovers, who were escorting them, when, noticing that she seemed a little uneasy, they looked up and beyond her, caught sight of us, and with apologies bade her a good-bye to which she responded in a somewhat embarrassed, but still friendly tone. They were two poor little 'tarts' with collars of sham otter skin, looking more or less as Rachel must have looked when Saint-Loup first met her. He did not know them, or their names even, and seeing that they appeared to be extremely intimate with his mistress he could not help wondering whether she too might not once have had, had not still perhaps her place in a life of which he had never dreamed, utterly different from the life she led with him, a life in which one had women for a louis apiece, whereas he was

giving more than a hundred thousand francs a year to Rachel, He caught only a fleeting glimpse of that life, but saw also in the thick of it a Rachel other than her whom he knew, a Rachel like the two little ‘tarts’ in the train, a twenty-franc Rachel. In short, Rachel had for the moment duplicated herself in his eyes, he had seen, at some distance from his own Rachel, the little ‘tart’ Rachel, the real Rachel, assuming that Rachel the ‘tart’ was more real than the other. It may then have occurred to Robert that from the hell in which he was living, with the prospect of a rich marriage, of the sale of his name, to enable him to go on giving Rachel a hundred thousand francs every year, he might easily perhaps have escaped, and have enjoyed the favours of his mistress, as the two counter-jumpers enjoyed those of their girls, for next to nothing. But how was it to be done? She had done nothing to forfeit his regard. Less generously rewarded she would be less kind to him, would stop saying and writing the things that so deeply moved him things which he would quote, with a touch of ostentation, to his friends, taking care to point out how nice it was of her to say them, but omitting to mention that he was maintaining her in the most lavish fashion, or even that he ever gave her anything at all, that these inscriptions on photographs, or greetings at the end of telegrams were but the conversion into the most exiguous, the most precious of currencies of a hundred thousand francs. If he took care not to admit that these rare kindnesses on Rachel’s part were handsomely paid for by himself, it would be wrong to say — and yet, by a crude piece of reasoning, we do say it, absurdly, of every lover who pays in cash for his pleasure, and of a great many husbands — that this was from self-esteem or vanity. Saint-Loup had enough sense to perceive that all the pleasures which appeal to vanity he could have found easily and without cost to himself in society, on the strength of his historic name and handsome face, and that his connexion with Rachel had rather, if anything, tended to ostracise him, led to his being less sought after. No; this self-esteem which seeks to appear to be receiving gratuitously the outward signs of the affection of her whom one loves is simply a consequence of love, the need to figure in one’s own eyes and in other people’s as loved in return by the person whom one loves so well. Rachel rejoined us, leaving the two ‘tarts’ to get into their compartment; but, no less than their sham otter skins and the self-conscious appearance of their young men, the names Lucienne and Germaine kept the new Rachel alive for a moment longer. For a moment Robert imagined a Place Pigalle existence with unknown associates, sordid love affairs, afternoons spent in simple amusements, excursions or pleasure-parties, in that Paris in which the sunny brightness of the

streets from the Boulevard de Clichy onwards did not seem the same as the solar radiance in which he himself strolled with his mistress, but must be something different, for love, and suffering which is one with love, have, like intoxication, the power to alter for us inanimate things. It was almost an unknown Paris in the heart of Paris itself that he suspected, his connexion appeared to him like the exploration of a strange form of life, for if when with him Rachel was somewhat similar to himself, it was nevertheless a part of her real life that she lived with him, indeed the most precious part, in view of his reckless expenditure on her, the part that made her so greatly envied by her friends and would enable her one day to retire to the country or to establish herself in the leading theatres, when she had made her pile. Robert longed to ask her who Lucienne and Germaine were, what they would have said to her if she had joined them in their compartment, how they would all have spent a day which would have perhaps ended, as a supreme diversion, after the pleasures of the rink, at the Olympia Tavern, if Robert and I had not been there. For a moment the purlieus of the Olympia, which until then had seemed to him merely deadly dull, aroused curiosity in him and pain, and the sunshine of this spring day beating upon the Rue Caumartin where, possibly, if she had not known Robert, Rachel might have gone in the course of the evening and nave earned a louis, filled him with a vague longing. But what use was it to ply Rachel with questions when he already knew that her answer would be merely silence, or a lie, or something extremely painful for him to hear, which would yet explain nothing. The porters were shutting the doors; we jumped into a first-class carriage; Rachel's magnificent pearls reminded Robert that she was a woman of great price, he caressed her, restored her to her place in his heart where he could contemplate her, internalised, as he had always done hitherto — save during this brief instant in which he had seen her in the Place Pigalle of an impressionist painter — and the train began to move.

It was, by the way, quite true that she was 'literary.' She never stopped talking to me about books, new art and Tolstoyism except to rebuke Saint-Loup for drinking so much wine:

"Ah! If you could live with me for a year, we'd see a fine change. I should keep you on water and you'd be ever so much better."

"Right you are. Let's begin now."

"But you know quite well I have to work all day!" For she took her art very seriously. "Besides, what would your people say?"

And she began to abuse his family to me in terms which for that matter

seemed to me highly reasonable, and with which Saint-Loup, while disobeying her orders in the matter of champagne, entirely concurred. I, who was so much afraid of the effect of wine on him, and felt the good influence of his mistress, was quite prepared to advise him to let his family go hang. Tears sprang to the young woman's eyes; I had been rash enough to refer to Dreyfus.

"The poor martyr!" she almost sobbed; "it will be the death of him in that dreadful place."

"Don't upset yourself, Zézette, he will come back, he will be acquitted all right, they will admit they've made a mistake."

"But long before then he'll be dead! Oh, well at any rate his children will bear a stainless name. But just think of the agony he must be going through; that's what makes my heart bleed. And would you believe that Robert's mother, a pious woman, says that he ought to be left on the Devil's Isle, even if he is innocent; isn't it appalling?"

"Yes, it's absolutely true, she does say that," Robert assured me. "She's my mother, I've no fault to find with her, but it's quite clear she hasn't got a sensitive nature, like Zézette."

As a matter of fact these luncheons which were said to be 'such a pleasure' always ended in trouble. For as soon as Saint-Loup found himself in a public place with his mistress, he would imagine that she was looking at every other man in the room, and his brow would darken; she would remark his ill-humour, which she may have thought it amusing to encourage, or, as was more probable, by a foolish piece of conceit preferred, feeling wounded by his tone, not to appear to be seeking to disarm; and would make a show of being unable to take her eyes off some man or other, not that this was always a mere pretence. In fact, the gentleman who, in theatre or café, happened to sit next to them, or, to go no farther, the driver of the cab they had engaged need only have something attractive about him, no matter what, and Robert, his perception quickened by jealousy, would have noticed it before his mistress; he would see in him immediately one of those foul creatures whom he had denounced to me at Balbec, who corrupted and dishonoured women for their own amusement, would beg his mistress to take her eyes off the man, thereby drawing her attention to him. And sometimes she found that Robert had shewn such good judgment in his suspicion that after a little she even left off teasing him in order that he might calm down and consent to go off by himself on some errand which would give her time to begin conversation with the stranger, often to make an assignation, sometimes even to bring matters quickly to a head. I could see as soon as we

entered the restaurant that Robert was looking troubled. The fact of the matter was that he had at once remarked, what had escaped our notice at Balbec, namely that, standing among his coarser colleagues, Aimé, with a modest brilliance, emitted, quite unconsciously of course, that air of romance which emanates until a certain period in life from fine hair and a Grecian nose, features thanks to which he was distinguishable among the crowd of waiters. The others, almost all of them well on in years, presented a series of types, extraordinarily ugly and criminal, of hypocritical priests, sanctimonious confessors, more numerously of comic actors of the old school, whose sugar-loaf foreheads are scarcely to be seen nowadays outside the collections of portraits that hang in the humbly historic green-rooms of little, out of date theatres, where they are represented in the parts of servants or high priests, though this restaurant seemed, thanks to a selective method of recruiting and perhaps to some system of hereditary nomination, to have preserved their solemn type in a sort of College of Augurs. As ill luck would have it, Aimé having recognised us, it was he who came to take our order, while the procession of operatic high priests swept past us to other tables. Aimé inquired after my grandmother’s health; I asked for news of his wife and children. He gave it with emotion, being a family man. He had an intelligent, vigorous, but respectful air. Robert’s mistress began to gaze at him with a strange attentiveness. But Aimé’s sunken eyes, in which a slight short-sightedness gave one the impression of veiled depths, shewed no sign of consciousness in his still face. In the provincial hotel in which he had served for many years before coming to Balbec, the charming sketch, now a trifle discoloured and faded, which was his face, and which, for all those years, like some engraved portrait of Prince Eugène, had been visible always at the same place, at the far end of a dining-room that was almost always empty, could not have attracted any very curious gaze. He had thus for long remained, doubtless for want of sympathetic admirers, in ignorance of the artistic value of his face, and but little inclined for that matter to draw attention to it, for he was temperamentally cold. At the most, some passing Parisian, stopping for some reason in the town, had raised her eyes to his, had asked him perhaps to bring something to her in her room before she left for the station, and in the pellucid, Monotonous, deep void of this existence of a faithful husband and servant in a country town had hidden the secret of a caprice without sequel which no one would ever bring to light. And yet Aimé must have been conscious of the insistent emphasis with which the eyes of the young actress were fastened upon him now. Anyhow, it did not escape Robert beneath whose skin I saw gathering

a flush, not vivid like that which burned his cheeks when he felt any sudden emotion, but faint, diffused.

"Anything specially interesting about that waiter, Zézette?" he inquired, after sharply dismissing Aimé. "One would think you were studying the part."

"There you are, beginning again; I knew it was coming."

"Beginning what again, my dear girl? I may have been mistaken; I haven't said anything, I'm sure. But I have at least the right to warn you against the fellow, seeing that I knew him at Balbec (otherwise I shouldn't give a damn), and a bigger scoundrel doesn't walk the face of the earth."

She seemed anxious to pacify Robert and began to engage me in a literary conversation in which he joined. I found that it did not bore me to talk to her, for she had a thorough knowledge of the books that I most admired, and her opinion of them agreed more or less with my own; but as I had heard Mme. de Villeparisis declare that she had no talent, I attached but little importance to this evidence of culture. She discoursed wittily on all manner of topics, and would have been genuinely entertaining had she not affected to an irritating extent the jargon of the sets and studios. She applied this, moreover, to everything under the sun; for instance, having acquired the habit of saying of a picture, if it were impressionist, or an opera, if Wagnerian, "Ah! That is *good*!" one day when a young man had kissed her on the ear, and, touched by her pretence of being thrilled, had affected modesty, she said: "Yes, as a sensation I call it distinctly *good*." But what more surprised me was that the expressions peculiar to Robert (which, moreover, had come to him, perhaps, from literary men whom she knew) were used by her to him and by him to her as though they had been a necessary form of speech, and without any conception of the pointlessness of an originality that is universal.

In eating, she managed her hands so clumsily that one assumed that she must appear extremely awkward upon the stage. She recovered her dexterity only when making love, with that touching prescience latent in women who love the male body so intensely that they immediately guess what will give most pleasure to that body, which is yet so different from their own.

I ceased to take part in the conversation when it turned upon the theatre, for on that topic Rachel was too malicious for my liking. She did, it was true, take up in a tone of commiseration — against Saint-Loup, which proved that he was accustomed to hearing Rachel attack her — the defence of Berma, saying: "Oh, no, she's a wonderful person, really. Of course, the things she does no longer appeal to us, they don't correspond quite to what we are looking for, but one

must think of her at the period to which she belongs; we owe her a great deal. She has done good work, you know. And besides she's such a fine woman, she has such a good heart; naturally she doesn't care about the things that interest us, but she has had in her time, with a rather impressive face, a charming quality of mind." (Our ringers, by the way, do not play the same accompaniment to all our aesthetic judgments. If it is a picture that is under discussion, to shew that it is a fine work with plenty of paint, it is enough to stick out one's thumb. But the 'charming quality of mind' is more exacting. It requires two fingers, or rather two fingernails, as though one were trying to flick off a particle of dust.) But, with this single exception, Saint-Loup's mistress referred to the best-known actresses in a tone of ironical superiority which annoyed me because I believed — quite mistakenly, as it happened — that it was she who was inferior to them. She was clearly aware that I must regard her as an indifferent actress, and on the other hand have a great regard for those she despised. But she shewed no resentment, because there is in all great talent while it is still, as hers was then, unrecognised, however sure it may be of itself, a vein of humility, and because we make the consideration that we expect from others proportionate not to our latent powers but to the position to which we have attained. (I was, an hour or so later, at the theatre, to see Saint-Loup's mistress shew great deference towards those very artists against whom she was now bringing so harsh a judgment to bear.) And so, in however little doubt my silence may have left her, she insisted nevertheless on our dining together that evening, assuring me that never had anyone's conversation delighted her so much as mine. If we were not yet in the theatre, to which we were to go after luncheon, we had the sense of being in a green-room hung with portraits of old members of the company, so markedly were the waiters' faces those which, one thought, had perished with a whole generation of obscure actors of the Palais-Royal; they had a look, also, of Academicians; stopping before a side table one of them was examining a dish of pears with the expression of detached curiosity that M. de Jussieu might have worn. Others, on either side of him, were casting about the room that gaze instinct with curiosity and coldness which Members of the Institute, who have arrived early, throw at the public, while they exchange a few murmured words which one fails to catch. They were faces well known to all the regular guests. One of them, however, was being pointed out, a newcomer with distended nostrils and a smug upper lip, who looked like a cleric; he was entering upon his duties there for the first time, and everyone gazed with interest at this newly elected candidate. But presently, perhaps to drive Robert away so that she might

be alone with Aimé, Rachel began to make eyes at a young student, who was feeding with another man at a neighbouring table.

"Zézette, let me beg you not to look at that young man like that," said Saint-Loup, on whose face the hesitating flush of a moment ago had been gathered now into a scarlet tide which dilated and darkened his swollen features, "if you must make a scene here, I shall simply finish eating by myself and join you at the theatre afterwards."

At this point a messenger came up to tell Aimé that he was wanted to speak to a gentleman in a carriage outside. Saint-Loup, ever uneasy, and afraid now that it might be some message of an amorous nature that was to be conveyed to his mistress, looked out of the window and saw there, sitting up in his brougham, his hands tightly buttoned in white gloves with black seams, a flower in his buttonhole, M. de Charlus.

"There; you see!" he said to me in a low voice, "my family hunt me down even here. Will you, please — I can't very well do it myself, but you can, as you know the head waiter so well and he's certain to give us away — ask him not to go to the carriage. He can always send some other waiter who doesn't know me. I know my uncle; if they tell him that I'm not known here, he'll never come inside to look for me, he loathes this sort of place. Really, it's pretty disgusting that an old petticoat-chaser like him, who is still at it, too, should be perpetually lecturing me and coming to spy on me!"

Aimé on receiving my instructions sent one of his underlings to explain that he was busy and could not come out at the moment, and (should the gentleman ask for the Marquis de Saint-Loup) that they did not know any such person. But Saint-Loup's mistress, who had failed to catch our whispered conversation and thought that it was still about the young man at whom Robert had been finding fault with her for making eyes, broke out in a torrent of rage.

"Oh, indeed! So it's the young man over there, now, is it? Thank you for telling me; it's a real pleasure to have this sort of thing with one's meals! Don't listen to him, please; he's rather cross to-day, and, you know," she went on, turning to me, "he just says it because he thinks it smart, that it's the gentlemanly thing to appear jealous always."

And she began with feet and fingers to shew signs of nervous irritation.

"But, Zézette, it is I who find it unpleasant. You are making us all ridiculous before that gentleman, who will begin to imagine you're making overtures to him, and an impossible bounder he looks, too."

"Oh, no, I think he's charming; for one thing, he's got the most adorable

eyes, and a way of looking at women — you can feel he must love them."

"You can at least keep quiet until I've left the room, if you have lost your senses," cried Robert. "Waiter, my things."

I did not know whether I was expected to follow him.

"No, I want to be alone," he told me in the same tone in which he had just been addressing his mistress, and as if he were quite furious with me. His anger was like a single musical phrase to which in an opera several lines are sung which are entirely different from one another, if one studies the words, in meaning and character, but which the music assimilates by a common sentiment. When Robert had gone, his mistress called Aimé and asked him various questions. She then wanted to know what I thought of him.

"An amusing expression, hasn't he? Do you know what I should like; it would be to know what he really thinks about things, to have him wait on me often, to take him travelling. But that would be all. If we were expected to love all the people who attract us, life would be pretty ghastly, wouldn't it? It's silly of Robert to get ideas like that. All that sort of thing, it's only just what comes into my head, that's all; Robert has nothing to worry about." She was still gazing at Aimé. "Do look, what dark eyes he has. I should love to know what there is behind them."

Presently came a message that Robert was waiting for her in a private room, to which he had gone to finish his luncheon, by another door, without having to pass through the restaurant again. I thus found myself alone, until I too was summoned by Robert. I found his mistress stretched out on a sofa laughing under the kisses and caresses that he was showering on her. They were drinking champagne. "Hallo, you!" she cried to him, having recently picked up this formula which seemed to her the last word in playfulness and wit. I had fed badly, I was extremely uncomfortable, and albeit Legrandin's words had had no effect on me I was sorry to think that I was beginning in a back room of a restaurant and should be finishing in the wings of a theatre this first afternoon of spring. Looking first at the time to see that she was not making herself late, she offered me a glass of champagne, handed me one of her Turkish cigarettes and unpinned a rose for me from her bodice. Whereupon I said to myself: "I have nothing much to regret, after all; these hours spent in this young woman's company are not wasted, since I have had from her, charming gifts which could not be bought too dear, a rose, a scented cigarette and a glass of champagne." I told myself this because I felt that it endowed with an aesthetic character and thereby justified, saved these hours of boredom. I ought perhaps to have

reflected that the very need which I felt of a reason that would console me for my boredom was sufficient to prove that I was experiencing no aesthetic sensation. As for Robert and his mistress, they appeared to have no recollection of the quarrel which had been raging between them a few minutes earlier, or of my having been a witness to it. They made no allusion to it, sought no excuse for it any more than for the contrast with it which their present conduct formed. By dint of drinking champagne with them, I began to feel a little of the intoxication that used to come over me at Rivebelle, though probably not quite the same. Not only every kind of intoxication, from that which the sun or travelling gives us to that which we get from exhaustion or wine, but every degree of intoxication — and each must have a different figure, like the numbers of fathoms on a chart — lays bare in us exactly at the depth to which it reaches a different kind of man. The room which Saint-Loup had taken was small, but the mirror which was its sole ornament was of such a kind that it seemed to reflect thirty others in an endless vista; and the electric bulb placed at the top of the frame must at night, when the light was on, followed by the procession of thirty flashes similar to its own, give to the drinker, even when alone, the idea that the surrounding space was multiplying itself simultaneously with his sensations heightened by intoxication, and that, shut up by himself in this little cell, he was reigning nevertheless over something far more extensive in its indefinite luminous curve than a passage in the Jardin de Paris. Being then myself at this moment the said drinker, suddenly, looking for him in the glass, I caught sight of him, hideous, a stranger, who was staring at me. The joy of intoxication was stronger than my disgust; from gaiety or bravado I smiled at him, and simultaneously ne smiled back at me. And I felt myself so much under the ephemeral and Potent sway of the minute in which our sensations are so strong, that I am not sure whether my sole regret was not at the thought that this hideous self of whom I had just caught sight in the glass was perhaps there for the last time on earth, and that I should never meet the stranger again in the whole course of my life.

Robert was annoyed only because I was not being more brilliant before his mistress.

“What about that fellow you met this morning, who combines snobbery with astronomy; tell her about him, I’ve forgotten the story,” and he watched her furtively.

“But, my dear boy, there’s nothing more than what you’ve just said.”

“What a bore you are. Then tell her about Françoise in the Champs-Elysées. She’ll enjoy that.”

“Oh, do! Bobby is always talking about Françoise.” And taking Saint-Loup by the chin, she repeated, for want of anything more original, drawing the said chin nearer to the light: “Hallo, you!”

Since actors had ceased to be for me exclusively the depositaries, in their diction and playing, of an artistic truth, they had begun to interest me in themselves; I amused myself, pretending that what I saw before me were the characters in some old humorous novel, by watching, struck by the fresh face of the young man who had just come into the stalls, the heroine listen distractedly to the declaration of love which the juvenile lead in the piece was addressing to her, while he, through the fiery torrent of his impassioned speech, still kept a burning gaze fixed on an old lady seated in a stage box, whose magnificent pearls had caught his eye; and thus, thanks especially to the information that Saint-Loup gave me as to the private lives of the players, I saw another drama, mute but expressive, enacted beneath the words of the spoken drama which in itself, although of no merit, interested me also; for I could feel in it that there were budding and opening for an hour in the glare of the footlights, created out of the agglutination on the face of an actor of another face of grease paint and pasteboard, on his own human soul the words of a part.

These ephemeral vivid personalities which the characters are in a play that is entertaining also, whom one loves, admires, pities, whom one would like to see again after one has left the theatre, but who by that time are already disintegrated into a comedian who is no longer in the position which he occupied in the play, a text which no longer shews one the comedian’s face, a coloured powder which a handkerchief wipes off, who have returned in short to elements that contain nothing of them, since their dissolution, effected so soon after the end of the show, make us — like the dissolution of a dear friend — begin to doubt the reality of our ego and meditate on the mystery of death.

One number in the programme I found extremely trying. A young woman whom Rachel and some of her friends disliked was, with a set of old songs, to make a first appearance on which she had based all her hopes for the future of herself and her family. This young woman was blessed with unduly, almost grotesquely prominent hips and a pretty but too slight voice, weakened still farther by her excitement and in marked contrast to her muscular development. Rachel had posted among the audience a certain number of friends, male and female, whose business it was by their sarcastic comments to put the novice, who was known to be timid, out of countenance, to make her lose her head so that her turn should prove a complete failure, after which the manager would

refuse to give her a contract. At the first notes uttered by the wretched woman, several of the male audience, recruited for that purpose, began pointing to her backward profile with jocular comments, several of the women, also in the plot, laughed out loud, each flute-like note from the stage increased the deliberate hilarity, which grew to a public scandal. The unhappy woman, sweating with anguish through her grease-paint, tried for a little longer to hold out then stopped and looked round the audience with an appealing gaze of misery and anger which succeeded only in increasing the uproar. The instinct to imitate others, the desire to shew their own wit and daring added to the party several pretty actresses who had not been forewarned but now threw at the others glances charged with malicious connivance, and sat convulsed with laughter which rang out in such violent peals that at the end of the second song, although there were still five more on the programme, the stage manager rang down the curtain. I tried to make myself pay no more heed to the incident than I had paid to my grandmother's sufferings when my great-aunt, to tease her, used to give my grandfather brandy, the idea of deliberate wickedness being too painful for me to bear. And yet, just as our pity for misfortune is perhaps not very exact since in our imagination we recreate a whole world of grief by which the unfortunate who has to struggle against it has no time to think of being moved to self-pity, so wickedness has probably not in the mind of the wicked man that pure and voluptuous cruelty which it so pains us to imagine. Hatred inspires him, anger gives him an ardour, an activity in which there is no great joy; he must be a sadist to extract any pleasure from it; ordinarily, the wicked man supposes himself to be punishing the wickedness of his victim; Rachel imagined certainly that the actress whom she was making suffer was far from being of interest to any one, and that anyhow, in having her hissed off the stage, she was herself avenging an outrage on good taste and teaching an unworthy comrade a lesson. Nevertheless, I preferred not to speak of this incident since I had had neither the courage nor the power to prevent it, and it would have been too painful for me, by saying any good of their victim, to approximate to a gratification of the lust for cruelty the sentiments which animated the tormentors who had strangled this career in its infancy.

But the opening scene of this afternoon's performance interested me in quite another way. It made me realise in part the nature of the illusion of which Saint-Loup was a victim with regard to Rachel, and which had set a gulf between the images that he and I respectively had in mind of his mistress, when we beheld her that morning among the blossoming pear trees. Rachel was playing a part

which involved barely more than her walking on in the little play. But seen thus, she was another woman. She had one of those faces to which distance — and not necessarily that between stalls and stage, the world being in this respect only a larger theatre — gives form and outline and which, seen close at hand, dissolve back into dust. Standing beside her one saw only a nebula, a milky way of freckles, of tiny spots, nothing more. At a proper distance, all this ceased to be visible and, from cheeks that withdrew, were reabsorbed into her face, rose like a crescent moon a nose so fine, so pure that one would have liked to be object of Rachel's attention, to see her again as often as one chose, to her close to one, provided that one had not already seen her differently and at close range. This was not my case but it had been Saint-Loup's when he first saw her on the stage. Then he had asked himself how he might approach her, how come to know her, there had opened in him a whole fairy realm — that in which she lived — from which emanated an exquisite radiance but into which he might not penetrate. He had left the theatre telling himself that it would be madness to write to her, that she would not answer his letter, quite prepared to give his fortune and his name for the creature who was living in him in a world so vastly superior to those too familiar realities, a world made beautiful by desire and dreams of happiness, when at the back of the theatre, a little old building which had itself the air of being a piece of scenery, from the stage door he saw debouch the gay and daintily hatted band of actresses who had just been playing. Young men who knew them were waiting for them outside. The number of pawns on the human chessboard being less than the number of combinations that they are capable of forming, in a theatre from which are absent all the people we know and might have expected to find, there turns up one whom we never imagined that we should see again and who appears so opportunely that the coincidence seems to us providential, although no doubt some other coincidence would have occurred in its stead had we been not in that place but in some other, where other desires would have been aroused and we should have met some other old acquaintance to help us to satisfy them. The golden portals of the world of dreams had closed again upon Rachel before Saint-Loup saw her emerge from the theatre, so that the freckles and spots were of little importance. They vexed him nevertheless, especially as, being no longer alone, he had not now the same opportunity to dream as in the theatre. But she, for all that he could no longer see her, continued to dictate his actions, like those stars which govern us by their attraction even during the hours in which they are not visible to our eyes. And so his desire for the actress with the fine features which had no place now even in Robert's

memory had the result that, dashing towards the old friend whom chance had brought to the spot, he insisted upon an introduction to the person with no features and with freckles, since she was the same person, telling himself that later on he would take care to find out which of the two this same person really was. She was in a hurry, she did not on this occasion say a single word to Saint-Loup, and it was only some days later that he finally contrived, by inducing her to leave her companions, to escort her home. He loved her already. The need for dreams, the desire to be made happy by her of whom one has dreamed, bring it about that not much time is required before one entrusts all one's chances of happiness to her who a few days since was but a fortuitous apparition, unknown, unmeaning, upon the boards of the theatre.

When, the curtain having fallen, we moved on to the stage, alarmed at finding myself there for the first time, I felt the need to begin a spirited conversation with Saint-Loup. In this way my attitude, as I did not know what one ought to adopt in a setting that was strange to me, would be entirely dominated by our talk, and people would think that I was so absorbed in it, so unobservant of my surroundings, that it was quite natural that I should not shew the facial expressions proper to a place in which, to judge by what I appeared to be saying, I was barely conscious of standing; and seizing, to make a beginning, upon the first topic that came to my mind:

"You know," I said, "I did come to say good-bye to you the day I left Doncières; I've not had an opportunity to mention it. I waved to you in the street."

"Don't speak about it," he replied, "I was so sorry. I passed you just outside the barracks, but I couldn't stop because I was late already. I assure you, I felt quite wretched about it."

So he had recognised me! I saw again in my mind the wholly impersonal salute which he had given me, raising his hand to his cap, without a glance to indicate that he knew me, without a gesture to shew that he was sorry he could not stop. Evidently this fiction, which he had adopted at that moment, of not knowing me must have simplified matters for him greatly. But I was amazed to find that he had been able to compose himself to it so swiftly and without any instinctive movement to betray his original impression. I had already observed at Balbec that, side by side with that childlike sincerity of his face, the skin of which by its transparence rendered visible the sudden tide of certain emotions, his body had been admirably trained to perform a certain number of well-bred dissimulations, and that, like a consummate actor, he could, in his regimental and

in his social life, play alternately quite different parts. In one of his parts he loved me tenderly, he acted towards me almost as if he had been my brother; my brother he had been, he was now again, but for a moment that day he had been another person who did not know me and who, holding the reins, his glass screwed to his eye, without a look or a smile had lifted his disengaged hand to the peak of his cap to give me correctly the military salute.

The stage scenery, still in its place, among which I was passing, seen thus at close range and without the advantage of any of those effects of lighting and distance on which the eminent artist whose brush had painted it had calculated, was a depressing sight, and Rachel, when I came near her, was subjected to a no less destructive force. The curves of her charming nose had stood out in perspective, between stalls and stage, like the relief of the scenery. It was no longer herself, I recognised her only thanks to her eyes, in which her identity had taken refuge. The form, the radiance of this young star, so brilliant a moment ago, had vanished. On the other hand — as though we came close to the moon and it ceased to present the appearance of a disk of rosy gold — on this face, so smooth a surface until now, I could distinguish only protuberances, discolourations, cavities. Despite the incoherence into which were resolved at close range not only the feminine features but the painted canvas, I was glad to be there to wander among the scenery, all that setting which at one time my love of nature had prompted me to dismiss as tedious and artificial until the description of it by Goethe in Wilhelm Meister had given it a sort of beauty in my eyes; and I had already observed with delight, in the thick of a crowd of journalists or men of friends of the actresses, who were greeting one another, talking, smoking, as though in a public thoroughfare, a young man in a black velvet cap and hortensia-coloured skirt, his cheeks chalked in red like a page from a Watteau album, who with his smiling lips, his eyes raised to the ceiling, as he sprang lightly into the air, seemed so entirely of another species than the rational folk in everyday clothes, in the midst of whom he was pursuing like a madman the course of his ecstatic dream, so alien to the preoccupations of their life, so anterior to the habits of their civilisation, so enfranchised from all the laws of nature, that it was as restful and as fresh a spectacle as watching a butterfly straying along a crowded street to follow with one’s eyes, between the strips of canvas, the natural arabesques traced by his winged capricious painted oscillations. But at that moment Saint-Loup conceived the idea that his mistress was paying undue attention to this dancer, who was engaged now in practising for the last time the figure of fun with which he was going to take the stage, and

his face darkened.

"You might look the other way," he warned her gloomily. "You know that none of those dancer-fellows is worth the rope they can at least fall off and break their necks, and they're the sort of people who go about afterwards boasting that you've taken notice of them. Besides, you know very well you've been told to go to your dressing-room and change. You'll be missing your call again."

A group of men — journalists — noticing the look of fury on Saint-Loup's face, came nearer, amused, to listen to what we were saying. And as the stage-hands had just set up some scenery on our other side we were forced into close contact with them.

"Oh, but I know him; he's a friend of mine," cried Saint-Loup's mistress, her eyes still fixed on the dancer. "Look how well made he is, do watch those little hands of his dancing away by themselves like his whole body!"

The dancer turned his head towards her, and his human person appeared beneath the sylph that he was endeavouring to be, the clear grey jelly of his eyes trembled and sparkled between eyelids stiff with paint, and a smile extended the corners of his mouth into cheeks plastered with rouge; then, to amuse the girl, like a singer who hums to oblige us the air of the song in which we have told her that we admired her singing, he began to repeat the movement of his hands, counterfeiting himself with the fineness of a parodist and the good humour of a child.

"Oh, that's too lovely, the way he copies himself," she cried, clapping her hands.

"I implore you, my dearest girl," Saint-Loup broke in, in a tone of utter misery, "do not make a scene here, I can't stand it; I swear, if you say another word I won't go with you to your room, I shall walk straight out; come, don't be so naughty.... You oughtn't to stand about in the cigar smoke like that, it'll make you ill," he went on, to me, with the solicitude he had shewn for me in our Balbec days.

"Oh! What a good thing it would be if you did go."

"I warn you, if I do I shan't come back."

"That's more than I should venture to hope."

"Listen; you know, I promised you the necklace if you behaved nicely to me, but the moment you treat me like this...."

"Ah! Well, that doesn't surprise me in the least. You gave me your promise; I ought to have known you'd never keep it. You want the whole world to know you're made of money, but I'm not a money-grubber like you. You can keep

your blasted necklace; I know some one else who'll give it to me."

"No one else can possibly give it to you; I've told Boucheron he's to keep it for me, and I have his promise not to let anyone else have it."

"There you are, trying to blackmail me, you've arranged everything, I see. That's what they mean by Marsantes, *Mater Semita*, it smells of the race," retorted Rachel quoting an etymology which was founded on a wild misinterpretation, for *Semita* means 'path' and not 'Semite,' but one which the Nationalists applied to Saint-Loup on account of the Dreyfusard views for which, so far as that went, he was indebted to the actress. She was less entitled than anyone to apply the word 'Jew' to Mme. de Marsantes, in whom the ethnologists of society could succeed in finding no trace of Judaism apart from her connexion with the Lévy-Mirepoix family. "But this isn't the last of it, I can tell you. An agreement like that isn't binding. You have acted treacherously towards me. Boucheron shall be told of it and he'll be paid twice as much for his necklace. You'll hear from me before long; don't you worry."

Robert was in the right a hundred times over. But circumstances are always so entangled that the man who is in the right a hundred times may have been once in the wrong. And I could not help recalling that unpleasant and yet quite innocent expression which he had used at Balbec: "In that way I keep a hold over her."

"You don't understand what I mean about the necklace. I made no formal promise: once you start doing everything you possibly can to make me leave you, it's only natural, surely, that I shouldn't give it to you; I fail to understand what treachery you can see in that, or what my ulterior motive is supposed to be. You can't seriously maintain that I brag about my money, I'm always telling you that I'm only a poor devil without a cent to my name. It's foolish of you take it in that way, my dear. What possible interest can I have in hurting you? You know very well that my one interest in life is yourself."

"Oh, yes, yes, please go on," she retorted ironically, with the sweeping gesture of a barber wielding his razor. And turning to watch the dancer:

"Isn't he too wonderful with his hands. A woman like me couldn't do the things he's doing now." She went closer to him and, pointing to Robert's furious face: "Look, he's hurt," she murmured, in the momentary elation of a sadic impulse to cruelty totally out of keeping with the genuine feelings of affection for Saint-Loup.

"Listen, for the last time, I swear to you it doesn't matter what you do — in a week you'll be giving anything to get me back — I shan't come; it's a clean

cut, do you hear, it's irrevocable; you will be sorry one day, when it's too late."

Perhaps he was sincere in saying this, and the torture of leaving his mistress may have seemed to him less cruel than that of remaining with her in certain circumstances.

"But, my dear boy," he went on, to me, "you oughtn't to stand about here, I tell you, it will make you cough."

I pointed to the scenery which barred my way. He touched his hat and said to one of the journalists:

"Would you mind, sir, throwing away your cigar; the smoke is bad for my friend."

His mistress had not waited for him to accompany her; on her way to her dressing-room she turned round and:

"Do they do those tricks with women too, those nice little hands?" she flung to the dancer from the back of the stage, in an artificially melodious tone of girlish innocence. "You look just like one yourself, I'm sure I could have a wonderful time with you and a girl I know."

"There's no rule against smoking that I know of; if people aren't well, they have only to stay at home," said the journalist.

The dancer smiled mysteriously back at the actress.

"Oh! Do stop! You'll make me quite mad," she cried to him. "Then there will be trouble."

"In any case, sir, you are not very civil," observed Saint-Loup to the journalist, still with a courteous suavity, in the deliberate manner of a man judging retrospectively the rights and wrongs of an incident that is already closed.

At that moment I saw Saint-Loup raise his arm vertically above his head as if he had been making a signal to some one whom I could not see, or like the conductor of an orchestra, and indeed — without any greater transition than when, at a simple wave of the baton, in a symphony or a ballet, violent rhythms succeed a graceful andante — after the courteous words that he had just uttered he brought down his hand with a resounding smack upon the journalist's cheek.

Now that to the measured conversations of the diplomats, to the smiling arts of peace had succeeded the furious onthrust of war, since blows lead to blows, I should not have been surprised to see the combatants swimming in one another's blood. But what I could not understand (like people who feel that it is not according to the rules when a war breaks out between two countries after some question merely of the rectification of a frontier, or when a sick man dies after

nothing more serious than a swelling of the liver) was how Saint-Loup had contrived to follow up those words, which implied a distinct shade of friendliness, with an action which in no way arose out of them, which they had not, so to speak, announced, that action of an arm raised in defiance not only of the rights of man but of the law of cause and effect, that action created *ex nihilo*. Fortunately the journalist who, staggering back from the violence of the blow, had turned pale and hesitated for a moment, did not retaliate. As for his friends, one of them had promptly turned away his head and was looking fixedly into the wings for some one who evidently was not there; the second pretended that a speck of dust had got into his eye, and began rubbing and squeezing his eyelid with every sign of being in pain; while the third had rushed off, exclaiming: "Good heavens, I believe the curtain's going up; we shan't get into our seats."

I wanted to speak to Saint-Loup, but he was so full of his indignation with the dancer that it adhered exactly to the surface of his eyeballs; like a subcutaneous structure it distended his cheeks with the result that, his internal agitation expressing itself externally in an entire immobility, he had not even the power of relaxation, the 'play' necessary to take in a word from me and to answer it. The journalist's friends, seeing that the incident was at an end, gathered round him again, still trembling. But, ashamed of having deserted him, they were absolutely determined that be should be made to suppose that they had noticed nothing. And so they dilated, one upon the speck of dust in his eye, one upon his false alarm when he had thought that the curtain was going up, the third upon the astonishing resemblance between a man who had just gone by and the speaker's brother. Indeed they seemed quite to resent their friend's not having shared their several emotions.

"What, didn't it strike you? You must be going blind."

"What I say is that you're a pack of curs," growled the journalist whom Saint-Loup had punished.

Forgetting the poses they had adopted, to be consistent with which they ought — but they did not think of it — to have pretended not to understand what he meant, they fell back on certain expressions traditional in the circumstances: "What's all the excitement? Keep your hair on, old chap. Don't take the bit in your teeth."

I had realised that morning beneath the pear blossom how illusory were the grounds upon which Robert's love for 'Rachel when from the Lord' was based; I was bound now to admit how very real were the sufferings to which that love gave rise. Gradually the feeling that had obsessed him for the last hour, without a

break, began to diminish, receded into him, an unoccupied pliable zone appeared in his eyes. I had stopped for a moment at a corner of the Avenue Gabriel from which I had often in the past seen Gilberte appear. I tried for a few seconds to recall those distant impressions, and was hurrying at a ‘gymnastic’ pace to overtake Saint-Loup when I saw that a gentleman, somewhat shabbily attired, appeared to be talking to him confidentially. I concluded that this was a personal friend of Robert; at the same time they seemed to be drawing even closer to one another; suddenly, as a meteor flashes through the sky, I saw a number of ovoid bodies assume with a giddy swiftness all the positions necessary for them to form, before Saint-Loup’s face and body, a flickering constellation. Flung out like stones from a catapult, they seemed to me to be at the very least seven in number. They were merely, however, Saint-Loup’s pair of fists, multiplied by the speed with which they were changing their places in this — to all appearance ideal and decorative — arrangement. But this elaborate display was nothing more than a pummelling which Saint-Loup was administering, the true character of which, aggressive rather than aesthetic, was first revealed to me by the aspect of the shabbily dressed gentleman who appeared to be losing at once his self-possession, his lower jaw and a quantity of blood. He gave fictitious explanations to the people who came up to question him, turned his head and, seeing that Saint-Loup had made off and was hastening to rejoin me, stood gazing after him with an offended, crushed, but by no means furious expression on his face. Saint-Loup, on the other hand, was furious, although he himself had received no blow, and his eyes were still blazing with anger when he reached me. The incident was in no way connected (as I had supposed) with the assault in the theatre. It was an impassioned loiterer who, seeing the fine looking young soldier that Saint-Loup was, had made overtures to him. My friend could not get over the audacity of this ‘clique’ who no longer even waited for the shades of night to cover their operations, and spoke of the suggestion that had been made to him with the same indignation as the newspapers use in reporting an armed assault and robbery, in broad daylight, in the centre of Paris. And yet the recipient of his blow was excusable in one respect, for the trend of the downward slope brings desire so rapidly to the point of enjoyment that beauty by itself appears to imply consent. Now, that Saint-Loup was beautiful was beyond dispute. Castigation such as he had just administered has this value, for men of the type that had accosted him, that it makes them think seriously of their conduct, though never for long enough to enable them to amend their ways and thus escape correction at the hands of the law. And so, although Saint-Loup’s

arm had shot out instinctively, without any preliminary thought, all such punishments, even when they reinforce the law, are powerless to bring about any uniformity in morals.

These incidents, particularly the one that was weighing most on his mind, seemed to have prompted in Robert a desire to be left alone for a while. After a moment's silence he asked me to leave him, and to go by myself to call on Mme. de Villeparisis. He would join me there, but preferred that we should not enter the room together, so that he might appear to have only just arrived in Paris, instead of having spent half the day already with me.

As I had supposed before making the acquaintance of Mme. de Villeparisis at Balbec, there was a vast difference between the world in which she lived and that of Mme. de Guermantes. Mme. de Villeparisis was one of those women who, born of a famous house, entering by marriage into another no less famous, do not for all that enjoy any great position in the social world, and, apart from a few duchesses who are their nieces or sisters-in-law, perhaps even a crowned head or two, old family friends, see their drawing-rooms filled only by third-rate people, drawn from the middle classes or from a nobility either provincial or tainted in some way, whose presence there has long since driven away all such smart and snobbish folk as are not obliged to come to the house by ties of blood or the claims of a friendship too old to be ignored. Certainly I had no difficulty after the first few minutes in understanding how Mme. de Villeparisis, at Balbec, had come to be so well informed, better than ourselves even, as to the smallest details of the tour through Spain which my father was then making with M. de Norpois. Even this, however, did not make it possible to rest content with the theory that the intimacy — of more than twenty years' standing — between Mme. de Villeparisis and the Ambassador could have been responsible for the lady's loss of caste in a world where the smartest women boasted the attachment of lovers far less respectable than he not to mention that it was probably years since he had been anything more to the Marquise than just an old friend. Had Mme. de Villeparisis then had other adventures in days gone by? Being then of a more passionate temperament than now, in a calm and religious old age which nevertheless owed some of its mellow colouring to those ardent, vanished years, had she somehow failed, in the country neighbourhood where she had lived for so long, to avoid certain scandals unknown to the younger generation who simply took note of their effect in the unequal and defective composition of a visiting list bound, otherwise, to have been among the purest of any taint of mediocrity? That 'sharp tongue' which her nephew ascribed to her, had it in

those far-off days made her enemies? Had it driven her into taking advantage of certain successes with men so as to avenge herself upon women? All this was possible; nor could the exquisitely sensitive way in which — giving so delicate a shade not merely to her words but to her intonation — Mme. de Villeparisis spoke of modesty or generosity be held to invalidate this supposition; for the people who not only speak with approval of certain virtues but actually feel their charm and shew a marvellous comprehension of them (people in fact who will, when they come to write their memoirs, present a worthy picture of those virtues) are often sprung from but not actually part of the silent, simple, artless generation which practised them. That generation is reflected in them but is not continued. Instead of the character which it possessed we find a sensibility, an intelligence which are not conducive to action. And whether or not there had been in the life of Mme. de Villeparisis any of those scandals, which (if there had) the lustre of her name would have blotted out, it was this intellect, resembling rather that of a writer of the second order than that of a woman of position, that was undoubtedly the cause of her social degradation.

It is true that they were not specially elevating, the qualities, such as balance and restraint, which Mme. de Villeparisis chiefly extolled; but to speak of restraint in a manner that shall be entirely adequate, the word ‘restraint’ is not enough, we require some of the qualities of authorship which presuppose a quite unrestrained exaltation; I had remarked at Balbec that the genius of certain great artists was completely unintelligible to Mme. de Villeparisis; and that all she could do was to make delicate fun of them and to express her incomprehension in a graceful and witty form. But this wit and grace, at the point to which she carried them, became themselves — on another plane, and even although they were employed to belittle the noblest masterpieces — true artistic qualities. Now the effect of such qualities on any social position is a morbid activity of the kind which doctors call elective, and so disintegrating that the most firmly established pillars of society are hard put to it to hold out for any length of time. What artists call intellect seems pure presumption to the fashionable world which, unable to place itself at the sole point of view from which they, the artists, look at and judge things, incapable of understanding the particular attraction to which they yield when they choose an ex-Pression or start a friendship, feel in their company an exhaustion, an irritation, from which antipathy very shortly springs. And yet in her conversation, and the same may be said of the *Memoirs* which she afterwards published, Mme. de Villeparisis shewed nothing but a sort of grace that was eminently social. Having passed by great works without mastering

sometimes without even noticing them, she had preserved from the period in which she had lived and which, moreover, she described with great aptness and charm, little more than the most frivolous of the gifts that they had had to offer her. But a narrative of this sort, even when it treats exclusively of subjects that are not intellectual, is still a work of the intellect, and to give in a book or in conversation, which is almost the same thing, a deliberate impression of frivolity, a serious touch is required which a purely frivolous person would be incapable of supplying. In a certain book of reminiscences written by a woman and regarded as a masterpiece, the phrase that people quote as a model of airy grace has always made me suspect that, in order to arrive at such a pitch of lightness, the author must originally have had a rather stodgy education, a boring culture, and that as a girl she probably appeared to her friends an insufferable prig. And between certain literary qualities and social failure the connexion is so inevitable that when we open Mme. de Villeparisis's *Memoirs* to-day, on any page a fitting epithet, a sequence of metaphors will suffice to enable the reader to reconstruct the deep but icy bow which must have been bestowed on the old Marquise on the staircases of the Embassies by a snob like Mme. Leroi, who perhaps may have left a card on her when she went to call on the Guermantes, but never set foot in her house for fear of losing caste among all the doctors' or solicitors' wives whom she would find there. A bluestocking Mme. de Villeparisis had perhaps been in her earliest youth, and, intoxicated with the ferment of her own knowledge, had perhaps failed to realise the. importance of not applying to people in society, less intelligent and less educated than herself, those cutting strokes which the injured party never forgets.

Moreover, talent is not a separate appendage which one artificially attaches to those qualities which make for social success, in order to create from the whole what people in society call a 'complete woman.' It is the living product of a certain moral complexion, from which as a rule many moral qualities are lacking and in which there predominates a sensibility of which other manifestations such as we do not notice in a book may make themselves quite distinctly felt in the course of a life, certain curiosities for instance, certain whims, the desire to go to this place or that for one's own amusement and not with a view to the extension, the maintenance or even the mere exercise of one's social relations. I had seen at Balbec Mme. de Villeparisis hemmed in by a bodyguard of her own servants without even a glance, as she passed, at the people sitting in the hall of the hotel. But I had had a presentiment that this abstention was due not to indifference, and it seemed that she had not always

confined herself to it. She would get a sudden craze to know some one or other because she had seen him and thought him good-looking, or merely because she had been told that he was amusing, or because he had struck her as different from the people she knew, who at this period, when she had not yet begun to appreciate them because she imagined that they would never fail her, belonged, all of them, to the purest cream of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. To the bohemian, the humble middle-class gentleman whom she had marked out with her favour she was obliged to address invitations the importance of which he was unable to appreciate, with an insistence which began gradually to depreciate her in the eyes of the snobs who were in the habit of estimating the smartness of a house by the people whom its mistress excluded rather than by those whom she entertained. Certainly, if at a given moment in her youth Mme. de Villeparisis, surfeited with the satisfaction of belonging to the fine flower of the aristocracy, had found a sort of amusement in scandalising the people among whom she lived, and in deliberately impairing her own position in society, she had begun to attach its full importance to that position once it was definitely lost. She had wished to shew the Duchesses that she was better than they, by saying and doing all the things that they dared not say or do. But now that they all, save such as were closely related to her, had ceased to call, she felt herself diminished, and sought once more to reign, but with another sceptre than that of wit. She would have liked to attract to her house all those women whom she had taken such pains to drive away. How many women's lives, lives of which little enough is known (for we all live in different worlds according to our ages, and the discretion of their elders prevents the young from forming any clear idea of the past and so completing the cycle), have been divided in this way into contrasted periods, the last being entirely devoted to the reconquest of what in the second has been so light-heartedly flung on the wind. Flung on the wind in what way? The young people are all the less capable of imagining it, since they see before them an elderly and respectable Marquise de Villeparisis and have no idea that the grave diarist of the present day, so dignified beneath her pile of snowy hair, can ever have been a gay midnight-reveller who was perhaps the delight in those days, devoured the fortunes perhaps of men now sleeping in their graves; that she should also have set to work, with a persevering and natural industry, to destroy the position which she owed to her high birth does not in the least imply that even at that remote period Mme. de Villeparisis did not attach great importance to her position. In the same way the web of isolation, of inactivity in which a neurasthenic lives may be woven by him from morning to night without

therefore seeming endurable, and while he is hastening to add another mesh to the net which holds him captive, it is possible that he is dreaming only of dancing, sport and travel. We are at work every moment upon giving its form to our life, but we do so by copying unintentionally, like the example in a book, the features of the person that we are and not of him who we should like to be. The disdainful bow of Mme. Leroi might to some extent be expressive of the true nature of Mme. de Villeparisis; it in no way corresponded to her ambition.

No doubt at the same moment at which Mme. Leroi was — to use an expression beloved of Mme. Swann —'cutting' the Marquise, the latter could seek consolation in remembering how Queen Marie-Amélie had once said to her: "You are just like a daughter to me." But such marks of royal friendship, secret and unknown to the world, existed for the Marquise alone, dusty as the diploma of an old Conservatoire medalist. The only true social advantages are those that create life, that can disappear without the person who has benefited by them needing to try to keep them or to make them public, because on the same day a hundred others will take their place. And for all that she could remember the Queen's using those words to her, she would nevertheless have bartered them gladly for the permanent faculty of being asked everywhere which Mme. Leroi possessed as in a restaurant a great but unknown artist whose genius is written neither in the lines of his bashful face nor in the antiquated cut of his threadbare coat, would willingly be even the young stock-jobber, of the lowest grade of society, who is sitting with a couple of actresses at a neighbouring table to which in an obsequious and incessant chain come hurrying manager, head waiter, pages and even the scullions who file out of the kitchen to salute him, as in the fairy-tales, while the wine waiter advances, dust-covered like his bottles, limping and dazed, as if on his way up from the cellar he had twisted his foot before emerging into the light of day.

It must be remarked, however, that in Mme. de Villeparisis's drawing-room the absence of Mme. Leroi, if it distressed the lady of the house, passed unperceived by the majority of her guests. They were entirely ignorant of the peculiar position which Mme. Leroi occupied, a: position known only to the fashionable world, and never doubted that Mme. de Villeparisis's receptions were, as the readers of her *Memoirs* to-day are convinced that they must have been, the most brilliant in Paris.

On the occasion of this first call which, after leaving Saint-Loup, I went to pay on Mme. Villeparisis, following the advice given by M. de Norpois to my father, I found her in her drawing-room hung with yellow silk, against which the

sofas and the admirable armchairs upholstered in Beauvais tapestry stood out with the almost purple redness of ripe raspberries. Side by side with the Guermantes and Villeparisis portraits one saw those — gifts from the sitters themselves — of Queen Marie-Amélie, the Queen of the Belgians, the Prince de Joinville and the Empress of Austria. Mme. de Villeparisis herself, capped with an old-fashioned bonnet of black lace (which she preserved with the same instinctive sense of local or historical colour as a Breton inn-keeper who, however Parisian his customers may have become, feels it more in keeping to make his maids dress in coifs and wide sleeves), was seated at a little desk on which in front of her, as well as her brushes, her palette and an unfinished flower-piece in water-colours, were arranged in glasses, in saucers, in cups, moss-roses, zinnias, maidenhair ferns, which on account of the sudden influx of callers she had just left off painting, and which had the effect of being piled on a florist's counter in some eighteenth-century mezzotint. In this drawing-room, which had been slightly heated on purpose because the Marquise had caught cold on the journey from her house in the country, there were already when I arrived a librarian with whom Mme. de Villeparisis had spent the morning in selecting the autograph letters to herself from various historical personages which were to figure in facsimile as documentary evidence in the *Memoirs* which she was preparing for the press, and a historian, solemn and tongue-tied, who hearing that she had inherited and still possessed a portrait of the Duchesse de Montmorency, had come to ask her permission to reproduce it as a plate in his work on the Fronde; a party strengthened presently by the addition of my old friend Bloch, now a rising dramatist, upon whom she counted to secure the gratuitous services of actors and actresses at her next series of afternoon parties. It was true that the social kaleidoscope was in the act of turning and that the Dreyfus case was shortly to hurl the Jews down to the lowest rung of the social ladder. But, for one thing, the anti-Dreyfus cyclone might rage as it would, it is not in the first hour of a storm that the waves are highest. In the second place, Mme. de Villeparisis, leaving a whole section of her family to fulminate against the Jews, had hitherto kept herself entirely aloof from the Case and never gave it a thought. Lastly, a young man like Bloch, whom no one knew, might pass unperceived, whereas leading Jews, representatives of their party, were already threatened. He had his chin pointed now by a goat-beard, wore double glasses and a long frock coat, and carried a glove like a roll of papyrus in his hand. The Rumanians, the Egyptians, the Turks may hate the Jews. But in a French drawing-room the differences between those peoples are not so apparent, and an

Israelite making his entry as though he were emerging from the heart of the desert, his body crouching like a hyaena's, his neck thrust obliquely forward, spreading himself in profound 'salaams,' completely satisfies a certain taste for the oriental. Only it is essential that the Jew should not be actually 'in' society, otherwise he will readily assume the aspect of a lord and his manners become so Gallicised that on his face a rebellious nose, growing like a nasturtium in any but the right direction, will make one think rather of Mascarille's nose than of Solomon's. But Bloch, not having been rendered supple by the gymnastics of the Faubourg, nor ennobled by a crossing with England or Spain, remained for a lover of the exotic as strange and savoury a spectacle, in spite of his European costume, as one of Decamps's Jews. Marvellous racial power which from the dawn of time thrusts to the surface, even in modern Paris, on the stage of our theatres, behind the pigeonholes of our public offices, at a funeral, in the street, a solid phalanx, setting their mark upon our modern ways of hairdressing, absorbing, making us forget, disciplining the frock coat which on them remains not at all unlike the garment in which Assyrian scribes are depicted in ceremonial attire on the frieze of a monument at Susa before the gates of the Palace of Darius. (Later in the afternoon Bloch might have imagined that it was out of anti-semitic malice that M. de Charlus inquired whether his first name was Jewish, whereas it was simply from aesthetic interest and love of local colour.) But, to revert for a moment, when we speak of racial persistence we do not accurately convey the impression we receive from Jews, Greeks, Persians, all those peoples whom it is better to leave with their differences. We know from classical paintings the faces of the ancient Greeks, we have seen Assyrians on the walls of a palace at Susa. And so we feel, on encountering in a Paris drawing-room Orientals belonging to one or another group, that we are in the presence of creatures whom the forces of necromancy must have called to life. We knew hitherto only a superficial image; behold it has gained depth, it extends into three dimensions, it moves. The young Greek lady, daughter of a rich banker and the latest favourite of society, looks exactly like one of those dancers who in the chorus of a ballet at once historical and aesthetic symbolise in flesh and blood the art of Hellas; and yet in the theatre the setting makes these images somehow trite; the spectacle, on the other hand, to which the entry into a drawing-room of a Turkish lady or a Jewish gentleman admits us, by animating their features makes them appear stranger still, as if they really were creatures evoked by the effort of a medium. It is the soul (or rather the pigmy thing to which — up to the present, at any rate — the soul is reduced in this sort of

materialisation), it is the soul of which we have caught glimpses hitherto in museums alone, the soul of the ancient Greeks, of the ancient Hebrews, torn from a life at once insignificant and transcendental, which seems to be enacting before our eyes this disconcerting pantomime. In the young Greek lady who is leaving the room what we seek in vain to embrace is the figure admired long ago on the side of a vase. I felt that if I had in the light of Mme. de Villeparisis's drawing-room taken photographs of Bloch, they would have furnished of Israel the same image — so disturbing because it does not appear to emanate from humanity, so deceiving because all the same it is so strangely like humanity — which we find in spirit photographs. There is nothing, to speak more generally, not even the insignificance of the remarks made by the people among whom we spend our lives, that does not give us a sense of the supernatural, in our everyday world where even a man of genius from whom we expect, gathered as though around a turning-table, to learn the secret of the Infinite utters only these words — the same that had just issued from the lips of Bloch: "Take care of my top hat."

"Oh, Ministers, my dear sir," Mme. de Villeparisis was saying, addressing herself specially to my friend, and picking up the thread of a conversation which had been broken by my arrival: "nobody ever wanted to see them. I was only a child at the time, but I can remember so well the King begging my grandfather to invite M. Decazes to a rout at which my father was to dance with the Duchesse de Berry. 'It will give me pleasure, Florimond,' said the King. My grandfather, who was a little deaf, thought he had said M. de Castries, which seemed a perfectly natural thing to ask. When he understood that it was M. Decazes, he was furious at first, but he gave in, and wrote a note the same evening to M. Decazes, begging him to pay my grandfather the compliment and give him the honour of his presence at the ball which he was giving the following week. For we were polite, sir, in those days, and no hostess would have dreamed of simply sending her card and writing on it 'Tea' or 'Dancing' or 'Music.' But if we understood politeness we were not incapable of impertinence either. M. Decazes accepted, but the day before the ball it was given out that my grandfather felt indisposed and had cancelled his invitations. He had obeyed the King, but he had not had M. Decazes at his ball.... Yes, sir, I remember M. Mole very well, he was a clever man — he shewed that in his reception of M. de Vigny at the Academy — but he was very pompous, and I can see him now coming downstairs to dinner in his own house with his tall hat in his hand."

"Ah! that is typically suggestive of what must have been a pretty

perniciously philistine epoch, for it was no doubt a universal habit to carry one's hat in one's hand in one's own house," observed Bloch, anxious to make the most of so rare an opportunity of learning from an eyewitness details of the aristocratic life of another day, while the librarian, who was a sort of intermittent secretary to the Marquise, gazed at her tenderly as though he were saying to the rest of us: "There, you see what she's like, she knows everything, she has met everybody, you can ask her anything you like, she's quite amazing."

"Oh, dear, no," replied Mme. de Villeparisis, drawing nearer to her as she spoke the glass containing the maidenhair which presently she would begin again to paint, "it was a habit M. Mole had; that was all. I never saw my father carry his hat in the house, except of course when the King came, because the King being at home wherever he is the master of the house is only a visitor then in his own drawing-room."

"Aristotle tells us in the second chapter of..." ventured M. Pierre, the historian of the Fronde, but so timidly that no one paid any attention. Having been suffering for some weeks from a nervous insomnia which resisted every attempt at treatment, he had given up going to bed, and, half-dead with exhaustion, went out only whenever his work made it imperative. Incapable of repeating at all often these expeditions which, simple enough for other people, cost him as much effort as if, to make them, he was obliged to come down from the moon, he was surprised to be brought up so frequently against the fact that other people's lives were not organised on a constant and permanent basis so as to furnish the maximum utility to the sudden outbursts of his own. He sometimes found the doors shut of a library which he had reached only after setting himself artificially on his feet and in a frock coat like some automaton in a story by Mr. Wells. Fortunately he had found Mme. de Villeparisis at home and was going to be shewn the portrait.

Meanwhile he was cut short by Bloch. "Indeed," the latter remarked, referring to what Mme. de Villeparisis had said as to the etiquette for royal visits. "Do you know, I never knew that," as though it were strange that he should not have known it always.

"Talking of that sort of visit, you heard the stupid joke my nephew Basin played on me yesterday morning?" Mme. de Villeparisis asked the librarian. "He told my people, instead of announcing him, to say that it was the Queen of Sweden who had called to see me."

"What! He made them tell you just like that! I say, he must have a nerve," exclaimed Bloch with a shout of laughter, while the historian smiled with a

stately timidity.

"I was quite surprised, because I had only been back from the country a few days; I had specially arranged, just to be left in peace for a little, that no one was to be told that I was in Paris, and I asked myself how the Queen of Sweden could have heard so soon," went on Mme. de Villeparisis, leaving her guests amazed to find that a visit from the Queen of Sweden was in itself nothing out of the common to their hostess.

Earlier in the day Mme. de Villeparisis might have been collaborating with the librarian in arranging the illustrations to her *Memoirs*; now she was, quite unconsciously, trying their effect on an average public typical of that from which she would eventually have to enlist her readers. Hers might be different in many ways from a really fashionable drawing-room in which you would have been struck by the absence of a number of middle dass ladies to whom Mme. de Villeparisis was 'at home,' and would have noticed instead such brilliant leaders of fashion as Mme. Leroi had in course of time managed to secure, but this distinction is not perceptible in her *Memoirs*, from which certain unimportant friendships of the author have disappeared because there is never any occasion to refer to them; while the absence of those who did not come to see her leaves no gap because, in the necessarily restricted space at the author's disposal, only a few persons can appear, and if these persons are royal personages, historic personalities, then the utmost impression of distinction which any volume of memoirs can convey to the public is achieved. In the opinion of Mme. Leroi, Mme. de Villeparisis's parties were third-rate; and Mme. de Villeparisis felt the sting of Mme. Leroi's opinion. But hardly anyone to-day remembers who Mme. Leroi was, her opinions have vanished into thin air, and it is the drawing-room of Mme. de Villeparisis, frequented as it was by the Queen of Sweden, and as it had been by the Due d'Aumale, the Duc de Broglie, Thiers, Montalembert, Mgr. Dupanloup, which will be looked upon as one of the most brilliant of the nineteenth century by that posterity which has not changed since the days of Homer and Pindar, and for which the enviable things are exalted birth, royal or quasi-royal, and the friendship of kings, the leaders of the people and other eminent men.

Now of all this Mme. de Villeparisis had her share in the people who still came to her house and in the memories — sometimes slightly 'touched up'— by means of which she extended her social activity into the past. And then there was M. de Norpois who, while unable to restore his friend to any substantial position in society, did indeed bring to her house such foreign or French

statesmen as might have need of his services and knew that the only effective method of securing them was to pay court to Mme. de Villeparisis. Possibly Mme. Leroi also knew these European celebrities. But, as a well-mannered woman who avoids anything that suggests the bluestocking, she would as little have thought of mentioning the Eastern question to her Prime Ministers as of discussing the nature of love with her novelists and philosophers. “Love?” she had once replied to a pushing lady who had asked her: “What are your views on love?”—”Love? I make it, constantly, but I never talk about it.” When she had any of these literary or political lions in her house she contented herself, as did the Duchesse de Guermantes, with setting them down to play poker. They often preferred this to the serious conversations on general ideas in which Mme. de Villeparisis forced them to engage. But these conversations, ridiculous as in the social sense they may have been, have furnished the Memoirs of Mme. de Villeparisis with those admirable passages, those dissertations on politics which read so well in volumes of autobiography, as they do in Corneille’s tragedies. Furthermore, the parties of the Villeparisis of this world are alone destined to be handed down to posterity, because the rerois of this world cannot write, and, if they could, would not have the time. And if the literary bent of the Villeparisis is the cause of the Lerois’ disdain, the disdain of the Lerois does, in its turn, a singular service to the literary bent of the Villeparisis by affording the bluestockings that leisure which the career of letters requires. God, Whose Will it is that there should be a few books in the world well written, breathes with that purpose such disdain into the hearts of the Lerois, for He knows that if these should invite the Villeparisis to dinner the latter would at once rise from their writing tables and order their carriages to be round at eight.

Presently there came into the room, with slow and solemn step, an oid lady of tall stature who, beneath the raised brim of her straw hat, revealed a monumental pile of snowy hair in the style of Marie-Antoinette. I did not then know that she was one of three women who were still to be seen in Parisian society and who, like Mme. de Villeparisis, while all of the noblest birth, had been reduced, for reasons which were IKJW lost in the night of time and could have been told us only by some old gallant of their period, to entertaining only certain of the dregs of society who were not sought after elsewhere. Each of these ladies had her own ‘Duchesse de Guermantes,’ the brilliant niece who came regularly to pay her respects, but none of them could have succeeded in attracting to her house the ‘Duchesse de Guermantes’ of either of the others. Mme. de Villeparisis was on the best of terms with these three ladies, but she did

not like them. Perhaps the similarity between their social position and her own gave her an impression of them which was not pleasing. Besides, soured bluestockings as they were, seeking by the number and frequency of the drawing-room comedies which they arranged in their houses to give themselves the illusion of a regular salon, there had grown up among them a rivalry which the decay of her fortune in the course of a somewhat tempestuous existence reduced for each of them, when it was a question of securing the kind assistance of a professional actor or actress, into a sort of struggle for life. Furthermore, the lady with the Mark-Antoinette hair, whenever she set eyes on Mme. de Villeparisis, could not help being reminded of the fact that the Duchesse de Guermantes did not come to her Fridays. Her consolation was that at these same Fridays she could always count on having, blood being thicker than water, the Princesse de Poix, who was her own personal Guermantes, and who never went near Mme. de Villeparisis, albeit Mme. de Poix was an intimate friend of the Duchess.

Nevertheless from the mansion on the Quai Malaquais to the drawing-rooms of the Rue de Tournon, the Rue de la Chaise and the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, a bond as compelling as it was hateful united the three fallen goddesses, as to whom I would fain have learned by searching in some dictionary of social mythology through what gallant adventure, what sacrilegious presumption, they had incurred their punishment. Their common brilliance of origin, the common decay of their present state entered largely, no doubt, into the necessity which compelled them, while hating one another, to frequent one another's society. Besides, each of them found in the others a convenient way of being polite to her own guests. How should these fail to suppose that they had scaled the most inaccessible peak of the Faubourg when they were introduced to a lady with a string of titles whose sister was married to a Duc de Sagan or a Prince de Ligne? Especially as there was infinitely more in the newspapers about these sham salons than about the genuine ones. Indeed these old ladies' 'men about town' nephews — and Saint-Loup the foremost of them — when asked by a friend to introduce him to people, would answer at once "I will take you to see my aunt Villeparisis," (or whichever it was) "you meet interesting people there." They knew very well that this would mean less trouble for themselves than trying to get the said friends invited by the smart nieces or sisters-in-law of these ladies. Certain very old men and young women who had heard it from those men, told me that if these ladies were no longer received in society it was because of the extraordinary irregularity of their conduct, which, when I objected that irregular

conduct was not necessarily a barrier to social success, was represented to me as having gone far beyond anything that we know to-day. The misconduct of these solemn dames who held themselves so erect assumed on the lips of those who hinted at it something that I was incapable of imagining, proportionate to the magnitude of prehistoric days, to the age of the mammoth. In a word, these three Parcae with their white or blue or red locks had spun the fatal threads of an incalculable number of gentlemen. I felt that the people of to-day exaggerated the vices of those fabulous times, like the Greeks who created Icarus, Theseus, Heracles out of men who had been but little different from those who long afterwards deified them. But one does not tabulate the sum of a person's vices until he has almost ceased to be in a fit state to practise them, when from the magnitude of his social punishment, which is then nearing the completion of its term and which alone one can estimate, one measures, one imagines, one exaggerates that of the crime that has been committed. In that gallery of symbolical figures which is 'society,' the really light women, the true Messalinas, invariably present the solemn aspect of a lady of at least seventy, with an air of lofty distinction, who entertains everyone she can but not everyone she would like to have, to whose house women will never consent to go whose own conduct falls in any way short of perfection, to whom the Pope regularly sends his Golden Rose, and who as often as not has written — on the early days of Lamartine — an essay that has been crowned by the French Academy. "How d'ye do, Alix?" Mme. de Villeparisis greeted the Marie-Antoinette lady, which lady cast a searching glance round the assembly to see whether there was not in this drawing-room any item that might be a valuable addition to her own, in which case she would have to discover it for herself, for Mme. de Villeparisis, she was sure, would be spiteful enough to try to keep it from her. Thus Mme. de Villeparisis took good care not to introduce Bloch to the old lady for fear of his being asked to produce the same play that he was arranging for her in the drawing-room of the Quai Malaquais. Besides it was only tit for tat. For, the evening before, the old lady had had Mme. Ristori, who had recited, and had taken care that Mme. de Villeparisis, from whom she had filched the Italian artist, should not hear of this function until it was over. So that she should not read it first in the newspapers and feel annoyed, the old lady had come ill nerson to tell her about it, shewing no sense of guilt. Mme. de Villeparisis, considering that an introduction of myself was not likely to have the same awkward results as that of Bloch, made me known to the Marie-Antoinette of the Quai Malaquais. The latter, who sought, by making the fewest possible movements, to

preserve in her old age those lines, as of a Coysevox goddess, which had years ago charmed the young men of fashion and which spurious poets still celebrated in rhymed charades — and had acquired the habit of a lofty and compensating stiffness common to all those whom a personal degradation obliges to be continually making advances — just perceptibly lowered her head with a frigid majesty, and, turning the other way, took no more notice of me than if I had not existed. By this crafty attitude she seemed to be assuring Mme. de Villeparisis: "You see, I'm nowhere near him; please understand that I'm not interested — in any sense of the word, you old cat — in little boys." But when, twenty minutes later, she left the room, taking advantage of the general conversation, she slipped into my ear an invitation to come to her box the following Friday with another of the three, whose high-sounding name — she had been born a Choiseul, moreover — had a prodigious effect on me.

"I understand, sir, that you are thinkin' of writin' somethin' about Mme. la Duchesse de Montmorency," said Mme. de Villeparisis to the historian of the Fronde in that grudging tone which she allowed, quite unconsciously, to spoil the effect of her great and genuine kindness, a tone due to the shrivelling crossness, the sense of grievance that is a physiological accompaniment of age, as well as to the affectation of imitating the almost rustic speech of the old nobility: "I'm goin' to let you see her portrait, the original of the copy they have in the Louvre."

She rose, laying down her brushes beside the flowers, and the little apron which then came into sight at her waist, and which she wore so as not to stain her dress with paints, added still further to the impression of an old peasant given by her bonnet and her big spectacles, and offered a sharp contrast to the luxury of her appointments, the butler who had brought in the tea and cakes, the liveried footman for whom she now rang to light up the portrait of the Duchesse de Montmorency, Abbess of one of the most famous Chapters in the East of France. Everyone had risen. "What is rather amusin'," said our hostess, "is that in these Chapters where our great-aunts were so often made Abbesses, the daughters of the King of France would not have been admitted. They were very close corporations." "Not admit the King's daughters," cried Bloch in amazement, "why ever not?" "Why, because the House of France had not enough quartering after that low marriage." Bloch's bewilderment increased. "A low marriage? The House of France? When was that?" "Why, when they married into the Medicis," replied Mme. de Villeparisis in the most natural manner. "It's a fine picture, ain't it, and in a perfect state of preservation," she added.

‘My dear,” put in the Marie-Antoinette lady, “surely you remember that when I brought Liszt to see you he said that it was this one that was the copy.”

“I should bow to any opinion of Liszt on music, but not on painthe Besides, he was quite off his head then, and I don’t remember his ever saying anything of the sort. But it wasn’t you that brought him here. I had met him any number of times at dinner at Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein’s.”

Alix’s shot had missed fire; she stood silent, erect and motionless. Plastered with layers of powder, her face had the appearance of a face of stone. And, as the profile was noble, she seemed, on a triangular and moss-grown pedestal hidden by her cape, the time-worn stucco goddess of a park.

“Ah, I see another fine portrait,” began the historian.

The door opened and the Duchesse de Guermantes entered the room.

“Well, how are you?” Mme. de Villeparisis greeted her without moving her head, taking from her apron-pocket a hand which she held out to the newcomer; and then ceasing at once to take any notice of her niece, in order to return to the historian: “That is the portrait of the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld...”

A young servant with a bold manner and a charming face (but so finely chiselled, to ensure its perfection, that the nose was a little red and the rest of the skin slightly flushed as though they were still smarting from the recent and sculptural incision) came in bearing a card on a salver.

“It is that gentleman who has been several times to see Mme. la Marquise.”

“Did you tell him I was at home?”

“He heard the voices.”

“Oh, very well then, shew him in. It’s a man who was introduced to me,” she explained. “He told me he was very anxious to come to the house. I certainly never said he might. But here he’s taken the trouble to call five times now; it doesn’t do to hurt people’s feelings. Sir,” she went on to me, “and you, Sir,” to the historian of the Fronde, “let me introduce my niece, the Duchesse de Guermantes.”

The historian made a low bow, as I did also, and since he seemed to suppose that some friendly remark ought to follow this salute, his eyes brightened and he was preparing to open his mouth when he was once more frozen by the sight of Mme. de Guermantes who had taken advantage of the independence of her torso to throw it forward with an exaggerated politeness and bring it neatly back to a position of rest without letting face or eyes appear to have noticed that anyone was standing before them; after breathing a gentle sigh she contented herself with manifesting the nullity of the impression that had been made on her by the

sight of the historian and myself by performing certain movements of her nostrils with a precision that testified to the absolute inertia of her unoccupied attention.

The importunate visitor entered the room, making straight for Mme. de Villeparisis with an ingenuous, fervent air: it was Legrandin.

“Thank you so very much for letting me come and see you,” he began, laying stress on the word ‘very.’ “It is a pleasure of a quality altogether rare and subtle that you confer on an old solitary; I assure you that its repercussion...” He stopped short on catching sight of me.

“I was just shewing this gentleman a fine portrait of the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, the wife of the author of the *Maxims*; it’s a family picture.”

Mme. de Guermantes meanwhile had greeted Alix, with apologies for not having been able, that year as in every previous year, to go and see her. “I hear all about you from Madeleine,” she added.

“She was at luncheon with me to-day,” said the Marquise of the Quai Malaquais, with the satisfying reflexion that Mme. de Villeparisis could never say that.

Meanwhile I had been talking to Bloch, and fearing, from what I had been told of his father’s change of attitude towards him, that he might be envying my life, I said to him that his must be the happier of the two. My remark was prompted solely by my desire to be friendly. But such friendliness readily convinces those who cherish a high opinion of themselves of their own good fortune, or gives them a desire to convince other people. “Yes, I do lead a delightful existence,” Bloch assured me with a beatified smile. “I have three great friends; I do not wish for one more; an adorable mistress; I am infinitely happy. Rare is the mortal to whom Father Zeus accords so much felicity.” I fancy that he was anxious principally to extol himself and to make me envious. Perhaps too there was some desire to shew originality in his optimism. It was evident that he did not wish to reply in the commonplace phraseology that everybody uses: “Oh, it was nothing, really,” and so forth, when, to my question: “Was it a good show?” put with regard to an afternoon dance at his house to which I had been prevented from going, he replied in a level, careless tone, as if the dance had been given by some one else: “Why, yes, it was quite a good show, couldn’t have been better. It was really charming!”

“What you have just told us interests me enormously,” said Legrandin to Mme. de Villeparisis, “for I was saying to myself only the other day that you shewed a marked likeness to him in the clear-cut turn of your speech, in a quality

which I will venture to describe by two contradictory terms, monumental rapidity and immortal instantaneousness. I should have liked this afternoon to take down all the things you say; but I shall remember them. They are, in a phrase which comes, I think, from Joubert, friends of the memery. You have never read Joubert? Oh! he would have admired you so! I will take the liberty this evening of sending you a set of him, it is a privilege to make you a present of his mind. He had not your strength. But he had a great deal of charm all the same."

I would have gone up to Legrandin at once and spoken to him, but he kept as far away from me as he could, no doubt in the hope that I might not overhear the stream of flattery which, with a remarkable felicity of expression, he kept pouring out, whatever the topic, to Mme. de Villeparisis.

She shrugged her shoulders, smiling, as though he had been trying to make fun of her, and turned to the historian.

"And this is the famous Marie de Rohan, Duchesse de Chevreuse, who was married first of all to M. de Luynes."

"My dear, speaking of Mme. de Luynes reminds me of Yolande; she came to me yesterday evening, and if I had known that you weren't engaged I'd have sent round to ask you to come. Mme. Ristori turned up quite by chance, and recited some poems by Queen Carmen Sylva in the author's presence. It was too beautiful!"

"What treachery!" thought Mme. de Villeparisis. "Of course that was what she was whispering about the other day to Mme. de Beaulaincourt and Mme. de Chaponay. I had no engagement," she replied, "but I should not have come. I heard Ristori in her great days, she's a mere wreck now. Besides I detest Carmen Sylva's poetry. Ristori came here once, the Duchess of Aosta brought her, to recite a canto of the *Inferno*, by Dante. In that sort of thing she's incomparable."

Alix bore the blow without flinching. She remained marble. Her gaze was piercing and blank, her nose proudly arched. But the surface of one cheek was scaling. A faint, strange vegetation, green and pink, was invading her chin. Perhaps another winter would level her with the dust.

"Now, sir, if you are fond of painting, look at the portrait of Mme, de Montmorency," Mme. de Villeparisis said to Legrandin, to stop the flow of compliments which was beginning again.

Seizing her opportunity, while his back was turned, Mme. de Guermantes pointed to him, with an ironical, questioning look at her aunt.

"It's M. Legrandin," murmured Mme. de Villeparisis, "he has a sister called

Mme. de Cambremer, not that that conveys any more to you than it does to me."

"What! Oh, but I know her quite well!" exclaimed Mme. de Guermantes, and put her hand over her lips. "That is to say, I don't know her, but for some reason or other Basin, who meets the husband heaven knows where, took it into his head to tell the wretched woman she might call on me. And she did. I can't tell you what it was like. She informed me that she had been to London, and gave me a complete catalogue of all the things in the British Museum. And this very day, the moment I leave your house, I'm going, just as you see me now, to drop a card on the monster. And don't for a moment suppose that it's an easy thing to do. On the pretence that she's dying of some disease she's always at home, it doesn't matter whether you arrive at seven at night or nine in the morning, she's ready for you with a dish of strawberry tarts.

"No, but seriously, you know, she is a monstrosity," Mme. de Guermantes replied to a questioning glance from her aunt. "She's an impossible person, she talks about 'plumitives' and things like that." "What does 'plumitive' mean?" asked Mme. de Villeparisis. "I haven't the slightest idea!" cried the Duchess in mock indignation. "I don't want to know. I don't speak that sort of language." And seeing that her aunt really did not know what a plumitive was, to give herself the satisfaction of shewing that she was a scholar as well as a purist, and to make fun of her aunt, now, after making fun of Mme. de Cambremer: "Why, of course," she said, with a half-laugh which the last traces of her pretended ill humour kept in check, "everybody knows what it means; a plumitive is a writer, a person who holds a pen. But it's a dreadful word. It's enough to make your wisdom teeth drop out. Nothing will ever make me use words like that.

"And so that's the brother, is it? I hadn't realized that yet. But after all it's not inconceivable. She has the same doormat docility and the same mass of information like a circulating library. She's just as much of a flatterer as he is, and just as boring. Yes, I'm beginning to see the family likeness now quite plainly."

"Sit down, we're just going to take a dish of tea," said Mme. de Villeparisis to her niece. "Help yourself; you don't want to look at the pictures of your great-grandmothers, you know them as well as I do."

Presently Mme. de Villeparisis sat down again at her desk and went on with her painting. The rest of the party gathered round her, and I took the opportunity to go up to Legrandin and, seeing no harm myself in his presence in Mme. de Villeparisis's drawing-room and never dreaming how much my words would at once hurt him and make him believe that I had deliberately intended to hurt him,

say: “Well, sir, I am almost excused for coming to a tea-party when I find you here too.” M. Legrandin concluded from this speech (at least this was the opinion which he expressed of me a few days later) that I was a thoroughly spiteful little wretch who delighted only in doing mischief.

“You might at least have the civility to begin by saying how d’ye do to me,” he replied, without offering me his hand and in a coarse and angry voice which I had never suspected him of possessing, a voice which bearing no traceable relation to what he ordinarily said did bear another more immediate and striking relation to something that he was feeling at the moment. What happens is that since we are determined always to keep our feelings to ourselves, we have never given any thought to the manner in which we should express them. And suddenly there is within us a strange and obscene animal making its voice heard, the tones of which may inspire as much terror in the listener who receives the involuntary elliptical irresistible communication of our defect or vice as would the sudden avowal indirectly and uncouthly proffered by a criminal who can no longer refrain from confessing a murder of which one had never imagined him to be guilty. I knew, of course, that idealism, even subjective idealism, did not prevent great philosophers from still having hearty appetites or from presenting themselves with untiring perseverance for election to the Academy. But really Legrandin had no occasion to remind people so often that he belonged to another planet when all his convulsive movements of anger or affability were governed by the desire to occupy a good position on this.

“Naturally, when people pester me twenty times on end to go anywhere,” he went on in lower tones, “although I am perfectly free to do what I choose, still I can’t behave like an absolute boor.”

Mme. de Guermantes had sat down. Her name, accompanied as it was by her title, added to her corporeal dimensions the duchy which projected itself round about her and brought the shadowy, sun-splashed coolness of the woods of Guermantes into this drawing-room, to surround the tuffet on which she was sitting. I felt surprised only that the likeness of those woods was not more discernible on the face of the Duchess, about which there was nothing suggestive of vegetation, and at the most the ruddy discolouration of her cheeks — which ought rather, surely, to have been emblazoned with the name Guermantes — was the effect, but did not furnish a picture of long gallops in the open air. Later on, when she had ceased to interest me, I came to know many of the Duchess’s peculiarities, notably (to speak for the moment only of that one of which I already at this time felt the charm though without yet being able to discover what

it was) her eyes, in which was held captive as in a picture the blue sky of an afternoon in France, broadly expansive, bathed in light even when no sun shone; and a voice which one would have thought, from its first hoarse sounds, to be almost plebeian, through which there trailed, as over the steps of the church at Combray or the pastry-cook's in the square, the rich and lazy gold of a country sun. But on this first day I discerned nothing, the warmth of my attention volatilised at once the little that I might otherwise have been able to extract from her, in which I should have found some indication of the name Guermantes. In any case, I told myself that it was indeed she who was designated for all the world by the title Duchesse de Guermantes: the inconceivable life which that name signified, this body did indeed contain; it had just introduced that life into a crowd of different creatures, in this room which enclosed it on every side and on which it produced so violent a reaction that I thought I could see, where the extent of that mysterious life ceased, a fringe of effervescence outline its frontiers: round the circumference of the circle traced on the carpet by the balloon of her blue pekin skirt, and in the bright eyes of the Duchess at the point of intersection of the preoccupations, the memories, the incomprehensible, scornful, amused and curious thoughts which filled them from within and the outside images that were reflected on their surface. Perhaps I should have been not quite so deeply stirred had I met her at Mme. de Villeparisis's at an evening party, instead of seeing her thus on one of the Marquise's 'days,' at one of those tea-parties which are for women no more than a brief halt in the course of their afternoon's outing, when, keeping on the hats in which they have been driving through the streets, they waft into the close atmosphere of a drawing-room the quality of the fresh air outside, and give one a better view of Paris in the late afternoon than do the tall, open windows through which one can hear the bowling wheels of their victorias: Mme. de Guermantes wore a boating-hat trimmed with cornflowers, and what they recalled to me was not, among the tilled fields round Combray where I had so often gathered those flowers, on the slope adjoining the Tansonville hedge, the suns of bygone years; it was the scent and dust of twilight as they had been an hour ago, when Mme. de Guermantes drove through them, in the Rue de la Paix. With a smiling, disdainful, vague air, and a grimace on her pursed lips, with the point of her sunshade, as with the extreme tip of an antenna of her mysterious life, she was tracing circles on the carpet; then, with that indifferent attention which begins by eliminating every point of contact with what one is actually studying, her gaze fastened upon each of us in turn; then inspected the sofas and armchairs, but softened this time by

that human sympathy which is aroused by the presence, however insignificant, of a thing one knows, a thing that is almost a person; these pieces of furniture were not like us, they belonged vaguely to her world, they were bound up with the life of her aunt; then from the Beauvais furniture her gaze was carried back to the person sitting on it, and resumed then the same air of perspicacity and that same disapproval which the respect that Mme. de Guermantes felt for her aunt would have prevented her from expressing in words, but which she would obviously have felt had she discovered on the chairs, instead of our presence, that of a spot of grease or a layer of dust.

That admirable writer G—— entered the room; he had come to pay a call on Mme. de Villeparisis which he regarded as a tiresome duty. The Duchess, although delighted to see him again, gave him no sign of welcome, but instinctively he made straight for her, the charm that she possessed, her tact, her simplicity making him look upon her as a woman of exceptional intelligence. He was bound, moreover, in common politeness to go and talk to her, for, since he was a pleasant and a distinguished man, Mme. de Guermantes frequently invited him to luncheon even when there were only her husband and herself besides, or in the autumn to Guermantes, making use of this intimacy to have him to dinner occasionally with Royalties who were curious to meet him. For the Duchess liked to entertain certain eminent men, on condition always that they were bachelors, a condition which, even when married, they invariably fulfilled for her, for, as their wives, who were bound to be more or less common, would have been a blot on a drawing-room in which there were never any but the most fashionable beauties in Paris, it was always without them that their husbands were invited; and the Duke, to avoid hurting any possible susceptibility, used to explain to these involuntary widowers that the Duchess never had women in the house, could not endure feminine society, almost as though this had been under doctor’s orders, and as be might have said that she could not stay in a room in which there were smells, or eat salt food, or travel with her back to the engine, or wear stays. It was true that these eminent men used to see at the Guermantes’ the Princesse de Parme, the Princesse de Sagan (whom Françoise, hearing her constantly mentioned, had taken to calling, in the belief that this feminine, ending was required by the laws of accidence, ‘the Sagante’), and plenty more, but their presence was accounted for by the explanation that they were relatives, or such very old friends that it was impossible to exclude them. Whether or not they were convinced by the explanations which the Due de Guermantes had given of the singular malady that made it impossible for the Duchess to associate

with other women, the great men duly transmitted them to their wives. Some of these thought that this malady was only an excuse to cloak her jealousy, because the Duchess wished to reign alone over a court of worshippers. Others more simple still thought that perhaps the Duchess had some peculiar habit, a scandalous past it might be, that women did not care to go to her house and that she gave the name of a whim to what was stern necessity. The better among them, hearing their husbands expatiate on the Duchess's marvellous brain, assumed that She must be so far superior to the rest of womankind that she found their Society boring since they could not talk intelligently about anything. And it was true that the Duchess was bored by other women, if their princely rank did not render them specially interesting. But the excluded wives were mistaken when they imagined that she chose to entertain men alone in order to be free to discuss with them literature, science and philosophy. For she never referred to these, at least with the great intellectuals. If, by virtue of a family tradition such as makes the daughters of great soldiers preserve, in the midst of their most frivolous distractions a respect for military matters, she, the granddaughter of women who had been on terms of friendship with Thiers, Mérimée and Augier, felt that a place must always be kept in her drawing-room for men of intellect, she had on the other hand derived from the manner, at once condescending and intimate, in which those famous men had been received at Guermantes the foible of looking on men of talent as family friends whose talent does not dazzle one, to whom one does not speak of their work, and who would not be at all interested if one did. Moreover the type of mind illustrated by Mérimée and Meilhac and Halévy, which was hers also, led her by reaction from the verbal sentimentality of an earlier generation to a style in conversation that rejects everything to do with fine language and the expression of lofty thoughts, so that she made it a sort of element of good breeding when she was with a poet or a musician to talk only of the food that they were eating or the game of cards to which they would afterwards sit down. This abstention had, on a third person not conversant with her ways, a disturbing effect which amounted to mystification. Mme. de Guermantes having asked him whether it would amuse him to come to luncheon to meet this or that famous poet, devoured by curiosity he would arrive at the appointed hour. The Duchess was talking to the poet about the weather. They sat down to luncheon. "Do you like this way of doing eggs?" she asked the poet. On hearing his approval, which she shared, for everything in her own house appeared to her exquisite, including a horrible cider which she imported from Guermantes: "Give Monsieur some more eggs," she would tell

the butler, while the anxious fellow-guest sat waiting for what must surely have been the object of the party, since they had arranged to meet, in spite of every sort of difficulty, before the Duchess, the poet and he himself left Paris. But the meal went on, one after another the courses were cleared away, not without having first provided Mme. de Guermantes with opportunities for clever witticisms or apt stories. Meanwhile the poet went on eating, and neither Duke nor Duchess shewed any sign of remembering that he was a poet. And presently the luncheon came to an end and the party broke up, without a word having been said about the poetry which, for all that, everyone admired but to which, by a reserve analogous to that of which Swann had given me a foretaste, no one might refer. This reserve was simply a matter of good form. But for the fellow-guest, if he thought at all about the matter, there was something strangely melancholy about it all, and these meals in the Guermantes household made him think of the hours which timid lovers often spend together in talking trivialities until it is time to part, without — whether from shyness, from audacity or from awkwardness — the great secret which they would have been happier had they confessed ever succeeding in passing from their hearts to their lips. It must, however, be added that this silence with regard to the serious matters which one was always waiting in vain to see approached, if it might pass as characteristic of the Duchess, was by no means constant with her. Mme. de Guermantes had spent her girlhood in a society somewhat different, equally aristocratic but less brilliant and above all less futile than that in which she now lived, and one of wide culture. It had left beneath her present frivolity a sort of bed-rock of greater solidity, invisibly nutritious, to which indeed the Duchess would repair in search (very rarely, though, for she detested pedantry) of some quotation from Victor Hugo or Lamartine which, extremely appropriate, uttered with a look of true feeling from her fine eyes, never failed to surprise and charm her audience. Sometimes, even, without any pretence of authority, pertinently and quite simply, she would give some dramatist and Academician a piece of sage advice, would make him modify a situation or alter an ending.

If, in the drawing-room of Mme. de Villeparisis, just as in the church at Combray, on the day of Mlle. Percepied's wedding, I had difficulty in discovering, in the handsome, too human face of Mme. de Guermantes the unknown element of her name, I at least thought that, when she spoke, her conversation, profound, mysterious, would have a strangeness as of a mediaeval tapestry or a gothic window. But in order that I should not be disappointed by the words which I should hear uttered by a person who called herself Mme. de

Guermantes, even if I had not been in love with her, it would not have sufficed that those words were fine, beautiful and profound, they would have had to reflect that amaranthine colour of the closing syllable of her name, that colour which I had on my first sight of her been disappointed not to find in her person and had driven to take refuge in her mind. Of course I had already heard Mme. de Villeparisis, Saint-Loup, people whose intelligence was in no way extraordinary, pronounce without any precaution this name Guermantes, simply as that of a person who was coming to see them or with whom they had promised to dine, without seeming to feel that there were latent in her name the glow of yellowing woods in autumn and a whole mysterious tract of country. But this must have been an affectation on their part, as when the classic poets give us no warning of the profound purpose which they had, all the same, in writing, an affectation which I myself also strove to imitate, saying in the most natural tone: "The Duchesse de Guermantes," as though it were a name that was just like other names. And then everybody assured me that she was a highly intelligent woman, a clever talker, that she was one of a little group of most interesting people: words which became accomplices of my dream. For when they spoke of an intelligent group, of clever talk, it was not at all the sort of intelligence that I knew that I imagined, not even that of the greatest minds, it was not at all with men like Bergotte that I peopled this group. No, by intelligence I understood an ineffable faculty gilded by the sun, impregnated with a sylvan coolness. Indeed, had she made the most intelligent remarks (in the sense in which I understood the word when it was used of a philosopher or critic), Mme. de Guermantes would perhaps have disappointed even more keenly my expectation of so special a faculty than if, in the course of a trivial conversation, she had confined herself to discussing kitchen recipes or the furnishing of a country house, to mentioning the names of neighbours and relatives of her own, which would have given me a picture of her life.

"I thought I should find Basin here, he was meaning to come and see you to-day," said Mme. de Guermantes to her aunt.

"I haven't set eyes on your husband for some days," replied Mme. de Villeparisis in a somewhat nettled tone. "In fact, I haven't seen him.' well, I have seen him once, perhaps — since that charming joke he played on me of making my servants announce him as the Queen of Sweden."

Mme. de Guermantes formed a smile by contracting the corners of her mouth as though she were biting her veil,

"We met her at dinner last night at Blanche Leroi's. You wouldn't know her

now, she's positively enormous; I'm sure she must have something the matter with her."

"I was just telling these gentlemen that you said she looked like a frog,"

Mme. de Guermantes uttered a sort of raucous sound intended to signify that she acknowledged the compliment.

"I don't remember making such a charming comparison, but if she was one before, now she's the frog that has succeeded in swelling to the size of the ox. Or rather, it isn't quite that, because all her swelling is concentrated in front of her waist, she's more like a frog in an interesting condition."

"Ah, that is quite clever," said Mme. de Villeparisis, secretly proud that her guests should be witnessing this display of her niece's wit.

"It is purely *arbitrary*, though," answered Mme. de Guermantes, ironically detaching this selected epithet, as Swann would have done, "for I must admit I never saw a frog in the family way. Anyhow, the frog in question, who, by the way, is not asking for a king, for I never saw her so skittish as she's been since her husband died, is coming to dine with us one day next week. I promised I'd let you know in good time."

Mme. de Villeparisis gave vent to a confused growl, from which emerged: "I know she was dining with the Mecklenburgs the night before last. Hannibal de Bréauté was there. He came and told me about it, and was quite amusing, I must say."

"There was a man there who's a great deal wittier than Babal," said Mme. de Guermantes who, in view of her close friendship wi**h M. de Bréàuté-Consalvi, felt that she must advertise their intimacy by the use of this abbreviation. "I mean M. Bergotte."**

I had never imagined that Bergotte could be regarded as witty; in fact, I thought of him always as mingling with the intellectual section of humanity, that is to say infinitely remote from that mysterious realm of which I had caught a glimpse through the purple hangings of a theatre box, behind which, making the Duchess smile, M. de Bréauté was holding with her, in the language of the gods, that unimaginable thing, a conversation between people of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. I was stupefied to see the balance upset, and Bergotte rise above M. de Bréauté. But above all I was dismayed to think that I had avoided Bergotte on the evening of *Phèdre*, that I had not gone up and spoken to him, when I heard Mme. de Guermantes say to Mme. de Villeparisis:

"He is the only person I have any wish to know," went on the Duchess, in whom one could always, as at the turn of a mental tide, see the flow of curiosity

with regard to well-known intellectuals sweep over the ebb of her aristocratic snobbishness. “It would be such a pleasure.”

The presence of Bergotte by my side, which it would have been so easy for we to secure but which I had thought liable to give Mme. de Guermantes a bad impression of myself, would no doubt, on the contrary, have had the result that she would have signalled to me to join her in her box, and would have invited me to bring the eminent writer, one day, to luncheon.

“I gather that he didn’t behave very well, he was presented to M. de Cobourg, and never uttered a word to him,” said Mme. de Guermantes, dwelling on this odd characteristic as she might have recounted that a Chinaman had blown his nose on a sheet of paper. “He never once said ‘Monseigneur’ to him,” she added, with an air of amusement at this detail, as important to her mind as the refusal of a Protestant, during an audience with the Pope, to go on his knees before his Holiness.

Interested by these idiosyncrasies of Bergotte, she did not, however, appear to consider them reprehensible, and seemed rather to find a certain merit in them, though she would have been put to it to say of what sort. Despite this unusual mode of appreciating Bergotte’s originality, it was a fact which I was later oh not to regard as wholly negligible that Mme. de Guermantes, greatly to the surprise of many of her friends, did consider Bergotte more witty than M. de Bréauté. Thus it is that such judgments, subversive, isolated, and yet after all just, are delivered in the world of fashion by those rare minds that are superior to the rest. And they sketch then the first rough outlines of the hierarchy of values as the next generation will establish it, instead of abiding eternally by the old standards.

The Comte d’Argencourt, Chargé d’Affaires at the Belgian Legation and a remote connexion of Mme. de Villeparisis, came limping in, followed presently by two young men, the Baron de Guermantes and H. H. the Due de Châtellerault, whom Mme. de Guermantes greeted with: “How d’ye do, young Châtellerault,” in a careless tone and without moving from her tuffet, for she was a great friend of the young Duke’s mother, which had given him a deep and lifelong respect for her. Tall, slender, with golden hair and sunny complexions, thoroughly of the Guermantes type, these two young men looked like a condensation of the light of the spring evening which was flooding the spacious room. Following a custom which was the fashion at that time they laid their silk hats on the floor, by their feet. The historian of the Fronde thought that they were embarrassed, like a peasant coming into the mayor’s office and not knowing what to do with his hat. Feeling that he ought in charity to come to the rescue of

the awkwardness and timidity which he ascribed to them:

"No, no," he said, "don't leave them on the floor, they'll be trodden on."

A glance from the Baron de Guermantes, tilting the plane of his pupils, shot suddenly from them a wave of pure and piercing azure which froze the well-meaning historian.

"What is that person's name?" I was asked by the Baron, who had just been introduced to me by Mme. de Villeparisis.

"M. Pierre," I whispered.

"Pierre what?"

"Pierre: it's his name, he's a historian, a most distinguished man."

"Really? You don't say so."

"No, it's a new fashion with these young men to put their hats on the floor," Mme. de Villeparisis explained. "I'm like you, I can never get used to it. Still, it's better than my nephew Robert, who always leaves his in the hall. I tell him when I see him come in that he looks just like a clock-maker, and I ask him if he's come to wind the clocks."

"You were speaking just now, Madame la Marquise, of M. Mole's hat; we shall soon be able, like Aristotle, to compile a chapter on hats," said the historian of the Fronde, somewhat reassured by Mme. de Villeparisis's intervention, but in so faint a voice that no one but myself overheard him.

"She really is astonishing, the little Duchess," said M. d'Argencourt, pointing to Mme. de Guermantes who was talking to G——. "Whenever there's a famous man in the room you're sure to find him sitting with her. Evidently that must be the lion of the party over there. It can't always be M. de Borelli, of course, or M. Schlumberger or M. d'Avenel. But then it's bound to be M. Pierre Loti or M. Edmond Rostand. Yesterday evening at the Doudeauvilles', where by the way she was looking splendid in her emerald tiara and a pink dress with a long train, she had M. Deschanel on one side and the German Ambassador on the other: she was holding forth to them about China; the general public, at a respectful distance where they couldn't hear what was being said, were wondering whether there wasn't going to be war. Really, you'd have said she was a Queen, holding her circle."

Everyone had gathered round Mme. de Villeparisis to watch her painting.

"Those flowers are a truly celestial pink," said Legrandin, "I should say sky-pink. For there is such a thing as sky-pink just as there is sky-blue. But," he lowered his voice in the hope that he would not be heard by anyone but the Marquise, "I think I shall still give my vote to the silky, living flesh tint of your

rendering of them. You leave Pisanello and Van Huysun a long way behind, with their laborious, dead herbals."

An artist, however modest, is always willing to hear himself preferred to his rivals, and tries only to see that justice is done them.

"What makes you think that is that they painted the flowers of their period, which we don't have now, but they did it with great skill."

"Ah! The flowers of their period! That is a most ingenious theory," exclaimed Legrandin.

"I see you're painting some fine cherry blossoms — or are they may-flowers?" began the historian of the Fronde, not without hesitation as to the flower, but with a note of confidence in his voice, for he was beginning to forget the incident of the hats.

"No; they're apple blossom," said the Duchesse de Guermantes, addressing her aunt.

"Ah! I see you're a good countrywoman like me; you can tell one flower from another."

"Why yes, so they are! But I thought the season for apple blossom was over now," said the historian, seeking wildly to cover his mistake.

"Oh dear, no; far from it, it's not out yet; the trees won't be in blossom for another fortnight, not for three weeks perhaps," said the librarian who, since he helped with the management of Mme. de Villeparisis's estates, was better informed upon country matters.

"At least three weeks," put in the Duchess; "even round Paris, where they're very far forward. Down in Normandy, don't you know, at his father's place," she went on, pointing to the young Duc de Châtellerault, "where they have some splendid apple trees close to the seashore, like a Japanese screen, they're never really pink until after the twentieth of May."

"I never see them," said the young Duke, "because they give me hay fever. Such a bore."

"Hay fever? I never heard of that before," said the historian.

"It's the fashionable complaint just now," the librarian informed him.

"That all depends, you won't get it at all, probably, if it's a good year for apples. You know Le Normand's saying: 'When it's a good year for apples...'," put in M. d'Argencourt who, not being really French, was always trying to give himself a Parisian air.

"You're quite right," Mme. de Villeparisis told her niece, "these are from the South. It was a florist who sent them round and asked me to accept them as a

present. You're surprised, I dare say, Monsieur Valmère," she turned to the librarian, "that a florist should make me a present of apple blossom. Well, I may be an old woman, but I'm not quite on the shelf yet, I have still a few friends," she went on with a smile that might have been taken as a sign of her simple nature but meant rather, I could not help feeling, that she thought it effective to pride herself on the friendship of a mere florist when she moved in such distinguished circles.

Bloch rose and went over to look at the flowers which Mme. de Villeparisis was painting.

"Never mind, Marquise," said the historian, sitting down again, "even though we should have another of those Revolutions which have stained so many pages of our history with blood — and, upon my soul, in these days one can never tell," he added, with a circular and circumspect glance, as though to make sure that there was no 'disaffected' person in the room, though he had not the least suspicion that there actually was, "with a talent like yours and your five languages you would be certain to get on all right." The historian of the Fronde was feeling quite refreshed, for he had forgotten his insomnia. But he suddenly remembered that he had not slept for the last six nights, whereupon a crushing weariness, born of his mind, paralysed his limbs, made him bow his shoulders, and his melancholy face began to droop like an old man's.

Bloch tried to express his admiration in an appropriate gesture, but only succeeded in knocking over with his elbow the glass containing the spray of apple blossom, and all the water was spilled on the carpet.

"Really, you have the fingers of a fairy," went on (to the Marquise) the historian who, having his back turned to me at that moment, had not noticed Bloch's clumsiness.

But Bloch took this for a sneer at himself, and to cover his shame in insolence retorted: "It's not of the slightest importance; I'm not wet."

Mme. de Villeparisis rang the bell and a footman came to wipe the carpet and pick up the fragments of glass. She invited the two young men to her theatricals, and also Mme. de Guermantes, with the injunction:

"Remember to tell Gisèle and Berthe" (the Duchesses d'Auberjon and de Portefin) "to be here a little before two to help me," as she might have told the hired waiters to come early to arrange the tables.

She treated her princely relatives, as she treated M. de Norpois, without any of the little courtesies which she shewed to the historian, Cottard, Bloch and myself, and they seemed to have no interest for her beyond the possibility of

serving them up as food for our social curiosity. This was because she knew that she need not put herself out to entertain people for whom she was not a more or less brilliant woman but the touchy old sister — who needed and received tactful handling — of their father or uncle. There would have been no object in her trying to shine before them, she could never have deceived them as to the strength and weakness of her position, for they knew (none so well) her whole history and respected the illustrious race from which she sprang. But, above all, they had ceased to be anything more for her than a dead stock which would not bear fruit again, they would not let her know their new friends, or share their pleasures. She could obtain from them only their occasional presence, or the possibility of speaking of them, at her five o'clock tea-parties as, later on, in her *Memoirs*, of which these parties were only a sort of rehearsal, a preliminary reading aloud of the manuscript before a selected audience. And the society which all these noble kinsmen and kinswomen served to interest, to dazzle, to enthral, the society of the Cottards, of the Blochs, of the dramatists who were in the public eye at the moment, of the historians of the Fronde and such matters; it was in this society that there existed for Mme. de Villeparisis — failing that section of the fashionable world which did not call upon her — the movement, the novelty, all the entertainment of life, it was from people like these that she was able to derive social benefits (which made it well worth her while to let them meet, now and then, though without ever coming to know her, the Duchesse de Guermantes), dinners with remarkable men whose work had interested her, a light opera or a pantomime staged complete by its author in her drawing-room, boxes for interesting shows. Bloch got up to go. He had said aloud that the incident of the broken flower-glass was of no importance, but what he said to himself was different, more different still what he thought: "If people can't train their servants to put flowers where they won't be knocked over and wet their guests and probably cut their hands, it's much better not to go in for such luxuries," he muttered angrily. He was one of those susceptible, highly strung persons who cannot bear to think of themselves as having made a blunder which, though they do not admit even to themselves that they have made it, is enough to spoil their whole day. In a black rage, he was just making up his mind never to go into society again. He had reached the point at which some distraction was imperative. Fortunately in another minute Mme. de Villeparisis was to press him to stay. Either because she was aware of the general feeling among her friends, and had noticed the tide of anti-semitism that was beginning to rise, or simply from carelessness, she had not introduced him to any of the

people in the room. He, however, being little used to society, felt bound before leaving the room to take leave of them all, to shew his manners, but without any friendliness; he lowered his head several times, buried his bearded chin in his collar, scrutinised each of the party in turn through his glasses with a cold, dissatisfied glare. But Mme. de Villeparisis stopped him; she had still to discuss with him the little play which was to be performed in her house, and also she did not wish him to leave before he had had the pleasure of meeting M. de Norpois (whose failure to appear puzzled her), although as an inducement to Bloch this introduction was quite superfluous, he having already decided to persuade the two actresses whose names he had mentioned to her to come and sing for nothing in the Marquise's drawing-room, to enhance their own reputations, at one of those parties to which all that was best and noblest in Europe thronged. He had even offered her, in addition, a tragic actress 'with pure eyes, fair as Hera,' who would recite lyrical prose with a sense of plastic beauty. But On hearing this lady's name Mme. de Villeparisis had declined, for it was that of Saint-Loup's mistress.

"I have better news," she murmured in my ear. "I really believe he's quite cooled off now, and that before very long they'll be parted — in spite of an officer who has played an abominable part in the whole business," she added. For Robert's family were beginning to look with a deadly hatred on M. de Borodino, who had given him leave, at the hairdresser's instance, to go to Bruges, and accused him of giving countenance to an infamous intrigue. "It's really too bad of him," said Mme. de Villeparisis with that virtuous accent common to all the Guermantes, even the most depraved. "Too, too bad," she repeated, giving the word a trio of t's. One felt that she had no doubt of the Prince's being present at all their orgies. But, as kindness of heart was the old lady's dominant quality, her expression of frowning severity towards the horrible captain, whose name she articulated with an ironical emphasis: "The Prince de Borodino!"— speaking as a woman for whom the Empire simply did not count, melted into a gentle smile at myself with a mechanical twitch of the eyelid indicating a vague understanding between us.

"I have a great admiration for de Saint-Loup-en-Bray," said Bloch, "dirty dog as he is, because he's so extremely well-bred. I have a great admiration, not for him but for well-bred people, they're so rare," he went on, without thinking, since he was himself so extremely ill-bred, what offence his words were giving. "I will give you an example which I consider most striking of his perfect breeding. I met him once with a young gentleman just as he was about to spring

into his wheeled chariot, after he himself had buckled their splendid harness on a pair of steeds, whose mangers were heaped with oats and barley, who had no need of the flashing whip to urge them on. He introduced us, but I did not catch the gentleman's name; one never does catch people's names when one's introduced to them," he explained with a laugh, this being one of his father's witticisms. "De Saint-Loup-en-Bray was perfectly calm, made no fuss about the young gentleman, seemed absolutely at his ease. Well, I found out, by pure chance, a day or two later, that the young gentleman was the son of Sir Rufus Israels!"

The end of this story sounded less shocking than its preface, for it remained quite incomprehensible to everyone in the room. The fact was that Sir Rufus Israels, who seemed to Bloch and his father an almost royal personage before whom Saint-Loup ought to tremble, was in the eyes of the Guermantes world a foreign upstart, tolerated in society, on whose friendship nobody would ever have dreamed of priding himself, far from it.

"I learned this," Bloch informed us, "from the person who holds Sir Rufus's power of attorney; he is a friend of my father, and quite an extraordinary man. Oh, an absolutely wonderful individual," he assured us with that affirmative energy, that note of enthusiasm which one puts only into those convictions that did not originate with oneself.

"Tell me," Bloch went on, lowering his voice, to myself, "how much do you suppose Saint-Loup has? Not that it matters to me in the least, you quite understand, don't you. I'm interested from the Balzacian point of view. You don't happen to know what it's in, French stocks, foreign stocks, or land or what?"

I could give him no information whatsoever. Suddenly raising his voice, Bloch asked if he might open the windows, and without waiting for an answer, went across the room to do so. Mme. de Villeparisis protested that he must not, that she had a cold. "Of course, if it's bad for you!" Bloch was downcast. "But you can't say it's not hot in here." And breaking into a laugh he put into the gaze with which he swept the room an appeal for support against Mme. de Villeparisis. He received none, from these well-bred people. His blazing eyes, having failed to seduce any of the guests from their allegiance, faded with resignation to their normal gravity of expression; he acknowledged his defeat with: "What's the temperature? Seventy-two, at least, I should say. I'm not surprised. I'm simply dripping. And I have not, like the sage Antenor, son of the river Aipheus, the power to plunge myself in the paternal wave to stanch my

sweat before laying my body in a bath of polished marble and anointing my limbs with fragrant oils." And with that need which people feel to outline for the use of others medical theories the application of which would be beneficial to their own health: "Well, if you believe it's good for you! I must say, I think you're quite wrong. It's exactly what gives you your cold."

Bloch was overjoyed at the idea of meeting M. de Norpois. He would like, he told us, to get him to talk about the Dreyfus case. "There's a mentality at work there which I don't altogether understand, and it would be quite sensational to get an interview out of this eminent diplomat," he said in a tone of sarcasm, so as not to appear to be rating himself below the Ambassador.

Mme. de Villeparisis was sorry that he had said this so loud, but minded less when she saw that the librarian, whose strong Nationalist views kept her, so to speak, on leash, was too far off to have overheard. She was more shocked to hear Bloch, led on by that demon of ill-breeding which made him permanently blind to the consequences of what he said, inquiring, with a laugh at the paternal pleasantry: "Haven't I read a learned treatise by him in which he sets forth a string of irrefutable arguments to prove that the Japanese war was bound to end in a Russian victory and a Japanese defeat? He's fairly paralytic now, isn't he? I'm sure he's the old boy I've seen taking aim at his chair before sliding across the room to it, as if he was on wheels."

"Oh, dear, no! Not in the least like that! Just wait a minute," the Marquise went on, "I don't know what he can be doing."

She rang the bell and, when the servant had appeared, as she made no secret, and indeed liked to advertise the fact that her old friend spent the greater part of his time in her house: "Go and tell M. de Norpois to come in" she ordered him, "he is sorting some papers in my library; he said he would be twenty minutes, and I've been waiting now for an hour and three-quarters. He will tell you about the Dreyfus case, anything you want to know," she said gruffly to Bloch. "He doesn't approve much of the way things are going."

For M. de Norpois was not on good terms with the Government of the day, and Mme. de Villeparisis, although he had never taken the liberty of bringing any actual Ministers to her house (she still preserved all the unapproachable dignity of a great lady, and remained outside and above the political relations which he was obliged to cultivate), was kept well informed by him of everything that went on. Then, too, the politicians of the day would never have dared to ask M. de Norpois to introduce them to Mme. de Villeparisis. But several of them had gone down to see him at her house in the country when they needed his

advice or help at critical conjectures. One knew the address. One went to the house. One did not see its mistress. But at dinner that evening she would say:

"I hear they've been down here bothering you. I trust things are going better."

"You are not in a hurry?" she now asked Bloch.

"No, not at all. I wanted to go because I am not very well; in fact there is some talk of my taking a cure at Vichy for my biliary ducts," he explained, articulating the last words with a fiendish irony.

"Why, that's where my nephew Châtellerault's got to go, you must fix it up together. Is he still in the room? He's a nice boy, you know," said Mme. de Villeparisis, and may quite well have meant what she said, feeling that two people whom she knew had no reason not to be friends with each other.

"Oh, I dare say he wouldn't care about that — I don't really know him — at least I barely know him. He is sitting over there," stammered Bloch in ecstasy of confusion.

The butler could not have delivered his mistress's message properly, for M. de Norpois, to make believe that he had just come in from the street, and had not yet seen his hostess, had picked up the first hat that he had found in the hall, and came forward to kiss Mme. de Villeparisis's hand with great ceremony, asking after her health with all the interest that people shew after a long separation. He was not aware that the Marquise had already destroyed any semblance of reality in this charade, which she cut short by taking M. de Norpois and Bloch into an adjoining room. Bloch, who had observed all the courtesy that was being shewn to a person whom he had not yet discovered to be M. de Norpois, had said to me, trying to seem at his ease: "Who is that old idiot?" Perhaps, too, all this bowing and scraping by M. de Norpois had really shocked the better element in Bloch's nature, the freer and more straightforward manners of a younger generation, and he was partly sincere in condemning it as absurd. However that might be, it ceased to appear absurd, and indeed delighted him the moment it was himself, Bloch, to whom the salutations were addressed.

"Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," said Mme. de Villeparisis, "I should like you to know this gentleman. Monsieur Bloch, Monsieur le Marquis de Norpois." She made a point, despite her casual usage of M. de Norpois, of addressing him always as "Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," as a social convention as well as from an exaggerated respect for his Ambassadorial rank, a respect which the Marquis had inculcated in her, and also with an instinctive application to him of the special manner, less familiar and more ceremonious, in relation to one particular man —

which, in the house of a distinguished woman, in contrast to the liberties that she takes with her other guests, marks that man out instantly as her lover.

M. de Norpois drowned his azure gaze in his white beard, bent his tall body deep down as though he were bowing before all the famous and (to him) imposing connotations of the name Bloch, and murmured: “I am delighted...” whereat his young listener, moved, but feeling that the illustrious diplomat was going too far, hastened to correct him, saying: “Not at all! On the contrary, it is I who am delighted.” But this ceremony, which M. de Norpois, in his friendship for Mme. de Villeparisis, repeated for the benefit of every fresh person that his old friend introduced to him, did not seem to her adequate to the deserts of Bloch, to whom she said:

“Just ask him anything you want to know; take him into the other room if it’s more convenient; he will be delighted to talk to you. I think you wished to speak to him about the Dreyfus case,” she went on, no more considering whether this would suit M. de Norpois than she would have thought of asking leave of the Duchesse de Montmorency’s portrait before having it lighted up for the historian, or of the tea before pouring it into a cup.

“You must speak loud,” she warned Bloch, “he’s a little deaf, but he will tell you anything you want to know; he knew Bismarck very well, and Cavour. That is so, isn’t it;” she raised her voice, “you knew Bismarck well?”

“Have you got anything on the stocks?” M. de Norpois asked me with a knowing air as he shook my hand warmly. I took the opportunity to relieve him politely of the hat which he had felt obliged to bring ceremonially into the room, for I saw that it was my own which he had inadvertently taken. “You shewed me a somewhat laboured little thing in which you went in for a good deal of hair-splitting. I gave you my opinion quite frankly; what you had written was literally not worth the trouble of putting it on paper. Are you thinking of letting us have anything else? You were greatly smitten with Bergotte, if I remember rightly.” “You’re not to say anything against Bergotte,” put in the Duchess. “I don’t dispute his talent as a painter; no one would, Duchess. He understands all about etching, if not brush-work on a large scale like M. Cherbuliez. But it seems to me that in these days we have a tendency to confuse the arts, and forget that the novelist’s business is rather to weave a plot and edify his readers than to fiddle away at producing a frontispiece or tailpiece in drypoint. I shall be seeing your father on Sunday at our good friend A. J.’s,” he went on, turning again to myself.

I had hoped for a moment, when I saw him talking to Mme. de Guermantes, that he would perhaps afford me, for getting myself asked to her house, the help

he had refused me for getting to Mme. Swann's. "Another of my great favourites," I told him, "is Elstir. It seems the Duchesse de Guermantes has some wonderful examples of his work, particularly that admirable *Bunch of Radishes* which I remember at the Exhibition and should so much like to see again; what a masterpiece that is!" And indeed, if I had been a prominent person and had been asked to state what picture I liked best, I should have named this *Bunch of Radishes*. "A masterpiece?" cried M. de Norpois with a surprised and reproachful air. "It makes no pretence of being even a picture, it is merely a sketch." (He was right.) "If you label a clever little thing of that sort 'masterpiece,' what have you got to say about Hébert's *Virgin* or Dagnan-Bouveret?"

"I heard you refusing to let him bring Robert's woman," said Mme. de Guermantes to her aunt, after Bloch had taken the Ambassador aside. "I don't think you'll miss much, she's a perfect horror, as you know, without a vestige of talent, and besides she's grotesquely ugly."

"Do you mean to say, you know her, Duchess?" asked M. d'Argencourt.

"Yes, didn't you know that she performed in my house before the whole of Paris, not that that's anything for me to be proud of," explained Mme. de Guermantes with a laugh, glad nevertheless, since the actress was under discussion, to let it be known that she herself had had the first fruits of her foolishness. "Hallo, I suppose I ought to be going now," she added, without moving.

She had just seen her husband enter the room, and these words were an allusion to the absurdity of their appearing to be paying a call together, like a newly married couple, rather than to the often strained relations that existed between her and the enormous fellow she had married, who, despite his increasing years, still led the life of a gay bachelor. Ranging over the considerable party that was gathered round the tea-table the genial, cynical gaze — dazzled a little by the brightness of the setting sun — of the little round pupils lodged in the exact centre of his eyes, like the 'bulls' which 'the excellent marksman that he was could always hit with such perfect aim and precision, the Duke came forward with a bewildered cautious slowness as though, alarmed by so brilliant a gathering, he was afraid of treading on ladies' skirts and interrupting conversations. A permanent smile — suggesting a 'Good King of Yvetot'— slightly pompous, a half-open hand floating like a shark's fin by his side, which he allowed to be vaguely clasped by his old friends and by the strangers who were introduced to him, enabled him, without his having to make

a single movement, or to interrupt his genial, lazy, royal progress, to reward the assiduity of them all by simply murmuring: “How do, my boy; how do, my dear friend; charmed, Monsieur Bloch; how do, Argencourt;” and, on coming to myself, who was the most highly favoured, when he had been told my name: “How do, my young neighbour, how’s your father? What a splendid fellow he is!” He made no great demonstration except to Mme. de Villeparisis, who gave him good-day with a nod of her head, drawing one hand from a pocket of her little apron.

Being formidably rich in a world where everyone was steadily growing poorer, and having secured the permanent attachment to his person of the idea of this enormous fortune, he displayed all the vanity of the great nobleman reinforced by that of the man of means, the refinement and breeding of the former just managing to control the latter’s self-sufficiency. One could understand, moreover, that his success with women, which made his wife so unhappy, was not due merely to his name and fortune, for he was still extremely good looking, and his profile retained the purity, the firmness of outline of a Greek god’s.

“Do you mean to tell me she performed in your house?” M. d’Argencourt asked the Duchess.

“Well, don’t you see, she came to recite, with a bunch of lilies in her hand, and more lilies on her *dress*.” Mme. de Guermantes shared her aunt’s affectation of pronouncing certain words in an exceedingly rustic fashion, but never rolled her r’s like Mme. de Villeparisis.

Before M. de Norpois, under constraint from his hostess, had taken Bloch into the little recess where they could talk more freely, I went up to the old diplomat for a moment and put in a word about my father’s Academic chair. He tried first of all to postpone the conversation to another day. I pointed out that I was going to Balbec. “What? Going again to Balbec? Why, you’re a regular globe-trotter.” He listened to what I had to say. At the name of Leroy-Beaulieu, he looked at me suspiciously. I conjectured that he had perhaps said something disparaging to M. Leroy-Beaulieu about my father and was afraid of the economist’s having repeated it to him. All at once he seemed animated by a positive affection for my father. And after one of those opening hesitations out of which suddenly a word explodes as though in spite of the speaker, whose irresistible conviction prevails over his half-hearted efforts at silence: “No, no,” he said to me with emotion, “your father *must not* stand. In his own interest he must not; it is not fair to himself; he owes a certain respect to his own really

great merits, which would be compromised by such an adventure. He is too big a man for that. If he should be elected, he will have everything to lose and nothing to gain. He is not an orator, thank heaven. And that is the one thing that counts with my dear colleagues, even if you only talk platitudes. Your father has an important goal in life; he should march straight ahead towards it, and not allow himself to turn aside to beat bushes, even the bushes (more thorny for that matter than flowery) of the grove of Academe. Besides, he would not get many votes. The Academy likes to keep a postulant waiting for some time before taking him to its bosom. For the present, there is nothing to be done. Later on, I don't say. But he must wait until the Society itself comes in quest of him. It makes a practice; not a very fortunate practice, a fetish rather, of the farà da sè of our friends across the Alps. Leroy-Beaulieu spoke to me about all this in a way I did not at all like. I pointed out to him, a little sharply perhaps, that a man accustomed as he is to dealing with colonial imports and metals could not be expected to understand the part played by the imponderables, as Bismarck used to say. But, whatever happens, your father must on no account put himself forward as a candidate, *Principis obsta*. His friends would find themselves placed in a delicate position if he suddenly called upon them for their votes. Indeed," he broke forth, with an air of candour, fixing his blue eyes on my face, "I am going to say a thing that you will be surprised to hear coming from me, who am so fond of your father. Well, simply because I am fond of him (we are known as the inseparables —*Arcades ambo*), simply because I know the immense service that he can still render to his country, the reefs from which he can steer her if he remains at the helm; out of affection, out of high regard for him, out of patriotism, I should not vote for him. I fancy, moreover, that I have given him to understand that I should not." (I seemed to discern in his eyes the stern Assyrian profile of Leroy-Beaulieu.) "So that to give him my vote now would be a sort of recantation on my part." M. de Norpois repeatedly dismissed his brpther Academicians as old fossils. Other reasons apart, every member of a club or academy likes to ascribe to his fellow members the type of character that is the direct converse of his own, less for the advantage of being able to say: "Ah! If it only rested with me!" than for the satisfaction of making the election which he himself has managed to secure seem more difficult, a greater distinction. "I may tell you," he concluded, "that in the best interests of you all, I should prefer to see your father triumphantly elected in ten or fifteen years' time." Words which I assumed to have been dictated if not by jealousy, at any rate by an utter lack of any willingness to oblige, and which later on I was to

recall when the course of events had given them a different meaning.

"You haven't thought of giving the Institute an address on the price of bread during the Fronde, I suppose," the historian of that movement timidly inquired of M. de Norpois. "You could make a considerable success of a subject like that," (which was to say, "you would give me a colossal advertisement,") he added, smiling at the Ambassador pusillanimously, but with a warmth of feeling which made him raise his eyelids and expose a double horizon of eye. I seemed to have seen this look before, and yet I had met the historian for the first time this afternoon. Suddenly I remembered having seen the same expression in the eyes of a Brazilian doctor who claimed to be able to cure choking fits of the kind from which I suffered by some absurd inhalation of the essential oils of plants. When, in the hope that he would pay more attention to my case, I had told him that I knew Professor Cottard, he had replied, as though speaking in Cotterd's interest: "Now this treatment of mine, if you were to tell him about it, would give him the material for a most sensational paper for the Academy of Medicine!" He had not ventured to press the matter but had stood gazing at me with the same air of interrogation, timid, anxious, appealing, which it had just puzzled me to see on the face of the historian of the Fronde. Obviously the two men were not acquainted and had little nothing in common, but psychological like physical laws have a more or less general application. And the requisite conditions are the same; an identical expression lights the eyes of different human animals, as a single sunrise lights different places, a long way apart, which have no connexion with one another. I did not hear the Ambassador's reply, for the whole party, with a good deal of noise, had again gathered round Mme. de Villeparisis to watch her at work.

"You know who' we're talking about, Basin?" the Duchess asked her husband.

"I can make a pretty good guess," said the Duke.

"Ah! As an actress she's not, I'm afraid, in what one would call the great tradition."

"You can't imagine," went on Mme. de Guermantes to M. d'Argencourt "anything more ridiculous."

"In fact, it was drolatic," put in M. de Guermantes, whose odd vocabulary enabled people in society to declare that he was no fool and literary people, at the same time, to regard him as a complete imbecile.

"What I fail to understand," resumed the Duchess, "is how in the world Robert ever came to fall in love with her. Oh, of course I know one mustn't

discuss that sort of thing," she added, with the charming pout of a philosopher and sentimentalist whose last illusion had long been shattered. "I know that anybody may fall in love with anybody else. And," she went on, for, though she might still laugh at modern literature, it, either by its dissemination through the popular press or else in the course of conversation, had begun to percolate into her mind, "that is the really nice thing about love, because it's what makes it so 'mysterious.'"

"Mysterious! Oh, I must confess, cousin, that's a bit beyond me," said the Comte d'Argencourt.

"Oh dear, yes, it's a very mysterious thing, love," declared the Duchess, with the sweet smile of a good-natured woman of the world, but also with the rooted conviction with which a Wagnerian assures a bored gentleman from the Club that there is something more than just noise in the *Walküre*. "After all, one never does know what makes one person fall in love with another; it may not be at all what we think," she added with a smile, repudiating at once by this interpretation the idea she had just suggested. "After all, one never knows anything, does one?" she concluded with an air of weary scepticism. "Besides, one understands, doesn't one; one simply can't explain other people's choices in love."

But having laid down this principle she proceeded at once to abandon it and to criticise Saint-Loup's choice.

"All the same, don't you know, it is amazing to me that a man can find any attraction in a person who's simply silly."

Bloch, hearing Saint-Loup's name mentioned and gathering that he was in Paris, promptly made a remark about him so outrageous that everybody was shocked. He was beginning to nourish hatreds, and one felt that he would stop at nothing to gratify them. Once he had established the principle that he himself was of great moral worth and that the sort of people who frequented La Boulie (an athletic club which he supposed to be highly fashionable) deserved penal servitude, every blow he could get against them seemed to him praiseworthy. He went so far once as to speak of a lawsuit which he was anxious to bring against one of his La poulie friends. In the course of the trial he proposed to give certain evidence which would be entirely untrue, though the defendant would be unable to impugn his veracity. In this way Bloch (who, incidentally, never put his plan into action) counted on baffling and infuriating his antagonist. What harm could there be in that, since he whom he sought to injure was a man who thought only of doing the 'right thing,' a La Boulie man, and against people like that any

weapon was justified, especially in the hands of a Saint, such as Bloch himself?

"I say, though, what about Swann?" objected M. d'Argencourt, who having at last succeeded in understanding the point of his cousin's speech, was impressed by her accuracy of observation, and was racking his brains for instances of men who had fallen in love with women in whom he himself had seen no attraction.

"Oh, but Swann's case was quite different," the Duchess protested. "It was a great surprise, I admit, because she's just a well-meaning idiot, but she was never silly, and she was at one time good looking."

"Oh, oh!" muttered Mme. de Villeparisis.

"You never thought so? Surely, she had some charming points, very fine eyes, good hair, she used to dress, and does still dress, wonderfully. Nowadays, I quite agree, she's horrible, but she has been a lovely woman in her time. Not that that made me any less sorry when Charles married her, because it was so unnecessary." The Duchess had not intended to say anything out of the common, but as M. d'Argencourt began to laugh she repeated these last words — either because she thought them amusing or because she thought it nice of him to laugh — and looked up at him with a coaxing smile, to add the enchantment of her femininity to that of her wit. She went on: "Yes, really, it wasn't worth the trouble, was it; still, after all, she did have some charm and I can quite understand anybody's falling in love with her, but if you saw Robert's girl, I assure you, you'd simply die of laughter. Oh, I know somebody's going to quote Augier at me: 'What matters the bottle so long as one gets drunk?' Well, Robert may have got drunk, all right, but he certainly hasn't shewn much taste in his choice of a bottle! First of all, would you believe that she actually expected me to fit up a staircase right in the middle of my drawing-room. Oh, a mere nothing — what?— and she announced that she was going to lie flat on her stomach on the steps. And then, if you'd heard the things she recited, I only remember one scene, but I'm sure nobody could imagine anything like it; it was called the *Seven Princesses*."

"*Seven Princesses*! Dear, dear, what a snob she must be!" cried M. d'Argencourt. "But, wait a minute, why, I know the whole play. The author sent a copy to the King, who couldn't understand a word of it and called on me to explain it to him."

"It isn't by any chance, from the Sar Peladan?" asked the historian of the Fronde, meaning to make a subtle and topical allusion, but in so low a tone that his question passed unnoticed.

“So you know the *Seven Princesses*, do you?” replied the Duchess, “I congratulate you! I only know one, but she’s quite enough; I have no wish to make the acquaintance of the other six. If they are all like the one I’ve seen!”

“What a goose!” I thought to myself. Irritated by the coldness of her greeting, I found a sort of bitter satisfaction in this proof of her complete inability to understand Maeterlinck. “To think that’s the woman I walk miles every morning to see. Really, I’m too kind. Well, it’s my turn now not to want to see her.” Thus I reasoned with myself; but my words ran counter to my thoughts; they were purely conversational words such as we say to ourselves at those moments when, too much excited to remain quietly alone, we feel the need, for want of another listener, to talk to ourselves, without meaning what we say, as we talk to a stranger.

“I can’t tell you what it was like,” the Duchess went on; “you simply couldn’t help laughing. Not that anyone tried; rather the other way, I’m sorry to say, for the young person was not at all pleased and Robert has never really forgiven me. Though I can’t say I’m sorry, actually, because if it had been a success the lady would perhaps have come again, and I don’t quite see Marie-Aynard approving of that.”

This was the name given in the family to Robert’s mother, Mme. de Marsantes, the widow of Aynard de Saint-Loup, to distinguish her from her cousin, the Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière, also a Marie, to whose Christian name her nephews and cousins and brothers-in-law added, to avoid confusion, either that of her husband or another of her own, making her Marie-Gilbert or Marie-Hedwige.

“To begin with, there was a sort of rehearsal the night before, which was a wonderful affair!” went on Mme. de Guermantes in ironical pursuit of her theme. “Just imagine, she uttered a sentence, no, not so much, not a quarter of a sentence, and then she stopped; she didn’t open her mouth — I’m not exaggerating — for a good five minutes.”

“Oh, I say,” cried M. d’Argencourt.

“With the utmost politeness I took the liberty of hinting to her that this might seem a little unusual. And she said — I give you her actual words —’One ought always to repeat a thing as though one were just composing it oneself.’ When you think of it, that really is monumental.”

“But I understood she wasn’t at all bad at reciting poetry,” said one of the two young men.

“She hasn’t the ghost of a notion what poetry is,” replied Mme. de

Guermantes. “However, I didn’t need to listen to her to tell that. It was quite enough to see her come in with her lilies. I knew at once that she couldn’t have any talent when I saw those lilies!”

Everybody laughed.

“I hope, my dear aunt, you aren’t angry with me, over my little joke the other day about the Queen of Sweden. I’ve come to ask your forgiveness.’

“Oh, no, I’m not at all angry, I even give you leave to eat at my table, if you’re hungry.— Come along, M. Valmère, you’re the daughter of the house,” Mme. de Villeparisis went on to the librarian, repeating a time-honoured pleasantry.

M de Guermantes sat upright in the armchair in which he had come to anchor his hat on the carpet by his side, and examined with a satisfied smile the plate of little cakes that was being held out to him.

“This gentleman makes you an admirable daughter,” commented M. d’Argencourt, whom the spirit of imitation prompted to keep Mme. de Villeparisis’s little joke in circulation.

The librarian handed the plate of cakes to the historian of the Fronde.

“You perform your functions admirably,” said the latter, startled into speech, and hoping also to win the sympathy of the crowd. At the same time he cast a covert glance of connivance at those who had anticipated him.

“Tell me, my dear aunt,” M. de Guermantes inquired of Mme. de Villeparisis, “who was that rather good-looking man who was going out just now as I came in? I must know him, because he gave me a sweeping bow, but I couldn’t place him at all; you know I never can remember names, it’s such a nuisance,” he added, in a tone of satisfaction.

“M. Legrandin.”

“Oh, but Oriane has a cousin whose mother, if I’m not mistaken, was a Grandin. Yes, I remember quite well, she was a Grandin de l’Epervier.”

“No,” replied Mme. de Villeparisis, “no relation at all. These are plain Grandins. Grandins of nothing at all. But they’d be only too glad to be Grandins of anything you chose to name. This one has a sister called Mme. de Cambremer.”

“Why, Basin, you know quite well who’ my aunt means,” cried the Duchess indignantly. “He’s the brother of that great graminivorous creature you had the weird idea of sending to call on me the other day. She stayed a solid hour; I thought I should go mad. But I began by thinking it was she who was mad when I saw a person I didn’t know come browsing into the room looking exactly like a

cow."

"Listen, Oriane; she asked me what afternoon you were at home; I couldn't very well be rude to her; and besides, you do exaggerate so, she's not in the least like a cow," he added in a plaintive tone, though not without a quick smiling glance at the audience.

He knew that his wife's lively wit needed the stimulus of contradiction, the contradiction of common sense which protests that one cannot (for instance) mistake a woman seriously for a cow; by this process Mme. de Guermantes, enlarging upon her original idea, had been inspired to produce many of her most brilliant sayings. And the Duke in his innocent fashion helped her, without seeming to do so, to bring off her effects like, in a railway carriage, the unacknowledged partner of the three-card player.

"I admit she doesn't look like *a* cow, she looks like a dozen," exclaimed Mme. de Guermantes. "I assure you, I didn't know what to do when I saw a herd of cattle come marching into my drawing-room in a hat and heard them ask me how I was. I had half a mind to say: 'Please, herd of cattle, you must be making a mistake, you can't possibly know me, because you're a herd of cattle,' but after racking my brains over her I came to the conclusion that your Cambremer woman must be the Infanta Dorothea who had said she was coming to see me one day, and is rather bovine also, so that I was just on the point of saying: 'Your Royal Highness' and using the third person to a herd of cattle. The cut of her dewlap reminded me rather, too, of the Queen of Sweden. But this massed attack had been prepared for by long range artillery fire, according to all the rules of war. For I don't know how long before, I was bombarded with her cards; I used to find them lying about all over the house, on all the tables and chairs like prospectuses. I couldn't think what they were supposed to be advertising. You saw nothing in the house but 'Marquis et Marquise de Cambremer' with some address or other which I've forgotten; you may be quite sure nothing will ever take me there."

"But it's a great distinction to look like a Queen," said the historian of the Fronde.

"Gad, sir, Kings and Queens, in these days, don't amount to much," said M. de Guermantes, partly because he liked to be thought broad-minded and modern, and also so as not to seem to attach any importance to his own royal friendships, which he valued highly.

Bloch and M. de Norpois had returned from the other room and came towards us.

“Well, sir,” asked Mme. de Villeparisis, “have you been talking to him about the Dreyfus case?”

M. de Norpois raised his eyes to the ceiling, but with a smile, as though calling on heaven to witness the monstrosity of the caprices to which his Dulcinea compelled him to submit. Nevertheless he spoke to Bloch with great affability of the terrible, perhaps fatal period through which France was passing. As this presumably meant that M. de Norpois (to whom Bloch had confessed his belief in the innocence of Dreyfus) was an ardent anti-Dreyfusard, the Ambassador’s geniality, his air of tacit admission that his listener was in the right, of never doubting that they were both of the same opinion, of being prepared to join forces with him to overthrow the Government, flattered Bloch’s vanity and aroused his curiosity. What were the important points which M. de Norpois never specified but on which he seemed implicitly to affirm that he was in agreement with Bloch; what opinion, then, did he hold of the case, that could bring them together? Bloch was all the more astonished at the mysterious unanimity which seemed to exist between him and M. de Norpois, in that it was not confined to politics, Mme. de Villeparisis having spoken at some length to M. de Norpois of Bloch’s literary work.

“You are not of your age,” the former Ambassador told him, “and I congratulate you upon that. You are not of this age in which disinterested work no longer exists, in which writers offer the public nothing but obscenities or ineptitudes. Efforts such as yours ought to be encouraged, and would be, if we had a Government.”

Bloch was flattered by this picture of himself swimming alone amid a universal shipwreck. But here again he would have been glad of details, would have liked to know what were the ineptitudes to which M. de Norpois referred. Bloch had the feeling that he was working along the same lines as plenty of others; he had never supposed himself to be so exceptional. He returned to the Dreyfus case, but did not succeed in elucidating M. de Norpois’s own views. He tried to induce him to speak of the officers whose names were appearing constantly in the newspapers at that time; they aroused more curiosity than the politicians who were involved also, because they were not, like the politicians, well known already, but, wearing a special garb, emerging from the obscurity of a different kind of life and a religiously guarded silence, simply stood up and spoke and disappeared again, like Lohengrin landing from a skiff drawn by a swan. Bloch had been able, thanks to a Nationalist lawyer of his acquaintance, to secure admission to several hearings of the Zola trial. He would arrive there in

the morning and stay until the court rose, with a packet of sandwiches and a flask of coffee, as though for the final examination for a degree, and this change of routine stimulating a nervous excitement which the coffee and the emotional interest of the trial worked up to a climax, he would come out so enamoured of everything that had happened in court that, in the evening, as he sat at home, he would long to immerse himself again in that beautiful dream and would hurry out, to a restaurant frequented by both parties, in search of friends with whom he would go over interminably the whole of the day's proceedings, and make up, by a supper ordered in an imperious tone which gave him the illusion of power, for the hunger and exhaustion of a day begun so early and unbroken by any interval for luncheon. The human mind, hovering perpetually between the two planes of experience and imagination, seeks to fathom the ideal life of the people it knows and to know the people whose life it has had to imagine. To Bloch's questions M. de Norpois replied:

"There are two officers involved in the case now being tried of whom I remember hearing some time ago from a man in whose judgment I felt great confidence, and who praised them both highly — I mean M. de Miribel. They are Lieutenant-Colonel Henry and Lieutenant-Colonel Picquart."

"But," exclaimed Bloch, "the divine Athena, daughter of Zeus, has put in the mind of one the opposite of what is in the mind of the other. And they are fighting against one another like two lions. Colonel Picquart had a splendid position in the Army, but his Moira has led him to the side that was not rightly his. The sword of the Nationalists will carve his tender flesh, and he will be cast out as food for the beasts of prey and the birds that wax fat upon the bodies of men."

M. de Norpois made no reply.

"What are those two palavering about over there?" M. de Guermantes asked Mme. de Villeparisis, indicating M. de Norpois and Bloch.

"The Dreyfus case."

"The devil they are. By the way, do you know who is a red-hot supporter of Dreyfus? I give you a thousand guesses. My nephew Robert! I can tell you that, at the Jockey, when they heard of his goings on, there was a fine gathering of the clans, a regular hue and cry. And as he's coming up for election next week..."

"Of course," broke in the Duchess, "if they're all like Gilbert, who keeps on saying that all the Jews ought to be sent back to Jerusalem."

"Indeed; then the Prince de Guermantes is quite of my way of thinking," put in M. d'Argencourt.

The Duke made a show of his wife, but did not love her. Extremely self-centred, he hated to be interrupted, besides he was in the habit, at home of treating her brutally. Convulsed with the twofold rage of a bad husband when his wife speaks to him, and a good talker where he is not listened to, he stopped short and transfixed the Duchess with a glare which made everyone feel uncomfortable.

"What makes you think we want to hear about Gilbert and Jerusalem? It's nothing to do with that. But," he went on in a gentler tone, "you will agree that if one of our family were to be pilled at the Jockey, especially Robert, whose father was chairman for ten years, it would be a pretty serious matter. What can you expect, my dear, it's got 'em on the raw, those fellows; they're all over it. I don't blame them, either; personally, you know that I have no racial prejudice, all that sort of thing seems to me out of date, and I do claim to move with the times; but damn it all, when one goes by the name of 'Marquis de Saint-Loup' one isn't a Dreyfusard; what more can I say?"

M. de Guermantes uttered the words: "When one goes by the name of Marquis de Saint-Loup," with some emphasis. He knew very well that it was a far greater thing to go by that of Duc de Guermantes. But if his self-esteem had a tendency to exaggerate if anything the superiority of the title Duc de Guermantes over all others, it was perhaps not so much the rules of good taste as the laws of imagination that urged him thus to attenuate it. Each of us sees in the brightest colours what he sees at a distance, what he sees in other people. For the general laws which govern perspective in imagination apply just as much to dukes as to ordinary mortals. And not only the laws of imagination, but those of speech. Now, either of two laws of speech may apply here, one being that which makes us express ourselves like others of our mental category and not of our caste. Under this law M. de Guermantes might be, in his choice of expressions, even when he wished to talk about the nobility, indebted to the humblest little tradesman, who would have said: "When one goes by the name of Duc de Guermantes," whereas an educated man, a Swann, a Legrandin would not have said it. A duke may write novels worthy of a grocer, even about life in high society, titles and pedigrees being of no help to him there, and the epithet 'aristocratic' be earned by the writings of a plebeian. Who had been, in this instance, the inferior from whom M. de Guermantes had picked up 'when one goes by the name,' he had probably not the least idea. But another law of speech is that, from time to time, as there appear and then vanish diseases of which nothing more is ever heard, there come into being, no one knows how,

spontaneously perhaps or by an accident like that which introduced into France a certain weed from America, the seeds of which, caught in the wool of a travelling rug, fell on a railway embankment, forms of speech which one hears in the same decade on the lips of people who have not in any way combined together to use them. So, just as in a certain year I heard Bloch say, referring to himself, that "the most charming people, the most brilliant, the best known, the most exclusive had discovered that there was only one man in Paris whom they felt to be intelligent, pleasant, whom they could not do without — namely Bloch," and heard the same phrase used by countless other young men who did not know him and varied it only by substituting their own names for his, so I was often to hear this 'when one goes by the name.'

"What can one expect," the Duke went on, "with the influence he's come under; it's easy to understand."

"Still it is rather comic," suggested the Duchess, "when you think of his mother's attitude, how she bores us to tears with her Patrie Française, morning, noon and night."

"Yes, but there's not only his mother to be thought of, you can't humbug us like that. There's a damsel, too, a fly-by-night of the worst type; she has far more influence over him than his mother, and she happens to be a compatriot of Master Dreyfus. She has passed on her state of mind to Robert."

"You may not have heard, Duke, that there is a new word to describe that sort of mind," said the librarian, who was Secretary to the Anti-revisionist Committee. "They say 'mentality.' It means exactly the same thing, but it has this advantage that nobody knows what you're talking about. It is the very latest expression just now, the 'last word' as people say." Meanwhile, having heard Bloch's name, he was watching him question M. de Norpois with misgivings which aroused others as strong though of a different order in the Marquise. Trembling before the librarian, and always acting the anti-Dreyfusard in his presence, she dreaded what he would say were he to find out that she had asked to her house a Jew more or less affiliated to the 'Syndicate.'

"Indeed," said the Duke, "'mentality,' you say; I must make a note of that; I shall use it some day." This was no figure of speech, the Duke having a little pocketbook filled with such 'references' which he used to consult before dinner-parties. "I like 'mentality.' There are a lot of new words like that which people suddenly start using, but they never last. I read somewhere the other day that some writer was 'talentuous.' You may perhaps know what it means; I don't. And since then I've never come across the word again."

“But ‘mentality’ is more widely used than ‘talentuous,’” the historian of the Fronde made his way into the conversation. “I am on a Committee at the Ministry of Education at which I have heard it used several times, as well as at my Club, the Volney, and indeed at dinner at M. Emile Ollivier’s.”

“I, who have not the honour to belong to the Ministry of Education,” replied the Duke with a feigned humility but with a vanity so intense that his lips could not refrain from curving in a smile, nor his eyes from casting round his audience a glance sparkling with joy, the ironical scorn in which made the poor historian blush, “I who have not the honour to belong to the Ministry of Education,” he repeated, relishing the sound of his words, “nor to the Volney Club (my only clubs are the Union and the Jockey — you aren’t in the Jockey, I think, sir?” he asked the historian, who, blushing a still deeper red, scenting an insult and failing to understand it, began to tremble in every limb), “I, who am not even invited to dine with M. Emile Ollivier, I must confess that I had never heard ‘mentality.’ I’m sure you’re in the same boat, Argencourt.

“You know,” he went on, “why they can’t produce the proofs of Dreyfus’s guilt. Apparently it’s because the War Minister’s wife was his mistress, that’s what people are saying.”

“Ah! I thought it was the Prime Minister’s wife,” said M. d’Argencourt.

“I think you’re all equally tiresome about this wretched case,” said the Duchesse de Guermantes, who, in the social sphere, was always anxious to shew that she did not allow herself to be led by anyone. “It can’t make any difference to me, so far as the Jews are concerned, for the simple reason that I don’t know any of them, and I intend to remain in that state of blissful ignorance. But on the other hand I do think it perfectly intolerable that just because they’re supposed to hold ‘sound’ views and don’t deal with Jewish tradesmen, or have ‘Down with the Jews’ printed on their sunshades, we should have a swarm of Durands and Dubois and so forth, women we should never have known but for this business, forced down our throats by Marie-Aynard or Victurnienne. I went to see Marie-Aynard a couple of days ago. It used to be so nice there. Nowadays one finds all the people one has spent one’s life trying to avoid, on the pretext that they’re against Dreyfus, and others of whom you have no idea who they can be.”

“No; it was the War Minister’s wife; at least, that’s the bedside rumour,” went on the Duke, who liked to flavour his conversation with certain expressions which he imagined to be of the old school. “Personally, of course, as everyone knows, I take just the opposite view to my cousin Gilbert. I am not feudal like him. I would go about with a Negro if he was a friend of mine, and I shouldn’t

care two straws what anybody thought; still after all you will agree with me that when one goes by the name of Saint-Loup one doesn't amuse oneself by running clean against the rails of public opinion, which has more sense than Voltaire or even my nephew. Nor does one go in for what I may be allowed to call these acrobatics of conscience a week before one comes up for a club. It is a bit stiff, really! No, it is probably that little wench of his that has put him on his high horse. I expect she told him that he would be classed among the 'intellectuals.' The intellectuals, they're the very cream of those gentry. It's given rise, by the way, to a rather amusing pun, though a very naughty one."

And the Duke murmured, lowering his voice, for his wife's and M. d'Argencourt's benefit, "Mater Semita," which had already made its way into the Jockey Club, for, of all the flying seeds in the world, that to which are attached the most solid wings, enabling it to be disseminated at the greatest distance from its parent branch, is still a joke.

"We might ask this gentleman, who has a *nerudite* air, to explain it to us," he went on, indicating the historian. "But it is better not to repeat it, especially as there's not a vestige of truth in the suggestion. I am not so ambitious as my cousin Mirepoix, who claims that she can trace the descent of her family before Christ to the Tribe of Levi, and I will undertake to prove that there has never been a drop of Jewish blood in our family. Still there is no good in our shutting our eyes to the fact, you may be sure that my dear nephew's highly original views are liable to make a considerable stir at Landerneau. Especially as Fezensac is ill just now, and Duras will be running the election; you know how he likes to make nuisances," concluded the Duke, who had never succeeded in learning the exact meaning of certain phrases, and supposed 'making nuisances' to mean 'making difficulties.'

Bloch tried to pin M. de Norpois down on Colonel Picquart.

"There can be no two opinions;" replied M. de Norpois, "his evidence had to be taken. I am well aware that, by maintaining this attitude, I have drawn screams of protest from more than one of my colleagues, but to my mind the Government were bound to let the Colonel speak. One can't dance lightly out of a blind alley like that, or if one does there's always the risk of falling into a ditch. As for the officer himself, his statement gave one, at the first hearing, a most excellent impression. When one saw him, looking so well in that smart Chasseur uniform, come into court and relate in a perfectly simple and frank tone what he had seen and what he had deduced, and say: 'On my honour as a soldier'" (here M. de Norpois's voice shook with a faint patriotic throb) "'such is

my conviction,' it is impossible to deny that the impression he made was profound."

"There; he is a Dreyfusard, there's not the least doubt of it," thought Bloch.

"But where he entirely forfeited all the sympathy that he had managed to attract was when he was confronted with the registrar, Gribelin. When one heard that old public servant, a man who had only one answer to make," (here M. de Norpois began to accentuate his words with the energy of his sincere convictions) "when one listened to him, when one saw him look his superior officer in the face, not afraid to hold his head up to him, and say to him in a tone that admitted of no response: 'Colonel, sir, you know very well that I have never told a lie, you know that at this moment, as always, I am speaking the truth,' the wind changed; M. Picquart might move heaven and earth at the subsequent hearings; he made a complete fiasco."

"No; evidently he's an anti-Dreyfusard; it's quite obvious," said Bloch to himself. "But if he considers Picquart a traitor and a liar, how can he take his revelations seriously, and quote them as if he found them charming and believed them to be sincere. And if, on the other hand, he sees in him an honest man easing his conscience, how can he suppose him to have been lying when he was confronted with Gribelin?"

"In any case, if this man Dreyfus is innocent," the Duchess broke in, "he hasn't done much to prove it. What idiotic, raving letters he writes from that island. I don't know whether M. Esterhazy is any better, but he does shew some skill in his choice of words, a different tone altogether. That can't be very pleasant for the supporters of M. Dreyfus. What a pity for them there's no way of exchanging innocents." Everybody laughed. "You heard what Oriane said?" the Duc de Guermantes inquired eagerly of e. de Villeparisis. "Yes; I think it most amusing." This was not enough for the Duke. "Well, I don't know, I can't say that I thought it amusing; or rather it doesn't make the slightest difference to me whether a thing is amusing or not. I don't care about wit." M. d'Argencourt protested. "It is probably because I've been a Member of Parliament, where I have listened to brilliant speeches that meant absolutely nothing. I learned there to value, more than anything, logic. That's probably why they didn't elect me again. Amusing things leave me cold." "Basin, don't play the heavy father like that, my child, you know quite well that no one admires wit more than you do." "Please let me finish. It is just because I am unmoved by a certain type of humour, that I am often struck by my wife's wit. For you will find it based, as a rule, upon sound observation. She reasons like a man; she states her case like a

writer."

Possibly the explanation of M. de Norpois's speaking in this way to Bloch, as though they had been in agreement, may have lain in the fact that he himself was so keen an anti-Dreyfusard that, finding the Government not anti-Dreyfusard enough, he was its enemy just as much as the Dreyfusards. Perhaps because the object to which he devoted himself in politics was something more profound, situated on another plane, from which Dreyfusism appeared as an unimportant modality which did not deserve the attention of a patriot interested in large questions of foreign policy. Perhaps, rather, because the maxims of his political wisdom being applicable only to questions of form, of procedure, of expediency, they were as powerless to solve questions of fact as in philosophy pure logic is powerless to tackle the problems of existence; or else because that very wisdom made him see danger in handling such subjects and so, in his caution, he preferred to speak only of minor incidents. But where Bloch made a mistake was in thinking that M. de Norpois, even had he been less cautious by nature and of a less exclusively formal cast of mind, could (supposing he would) have told him the truth as to the part played by Henry, Picquart or du Paty de Clam, or as to any of the different aspects of the case. The truth, indeed, as to all these matters Bloch could not doubt that M. de Norpois knew. How could he fail to know it seeing that he was a friend of all the Ministers? Naturally, Bloch thought that the truth in politics could be approximately reconstructed by the most luminous minds, but he imagined, like the man in the street, that it resided permanently, beyond the reach of argument and in a material form, in the secret files of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, who imparted it to their Cabinet. Now, even when a political truth does take the form of written documents, it is seldom that these have any more value than a radiographic plate on which the layman imagines that the patient's disease is inscribed in so many words, when, as a matter of fact, the plate furnishes simply one piece of material for study, to be combined with a number of others, which the doctor's reasoning powers will take into consideration as a whole and upon them found his diagnosis. So, too, the truth in politics, when one goes to well-informed men and imagines that one is about to grasp it, eludes one. Indeed, later on (to confine ourselves to the Dreyfus case), when so startling an event occurred as Henry's confession, followed by his suicide, this fact was at once interpreted in opposite ways by the Dreyfusard Ministers, and by Cavaignac and Cuignet who had themselves made the discovery of the forgery and conducted the examination; still more so among the Dreyfusard Ministers themselves, men of the same shade

of Dreyfusism, judging not only from the same documents but in the same spirit, the part played by Henry was explained in two entirely different ways, one set seeing in him an accomplice of Esterhazy, the others assigning that part to du Paty de Clam, thus rallying in support of a theory of their opponent Cuignet and in complete opposition to their supporter Reinach. All that Bloch could elicit from M. de Norpois was that if it were true that the Chief of Staff, M. de Boisdeffre, had had a secret communication sent to M. Rochefort, it was evident that a singularly regrettable irregularity had occurred.

"You may be quite sure that the War Minister must (*in petto* at any rate) be consigning his Chief of Staff to the infernal powers. An official disclaimer would not have been (to my mind) a work of supererogation. But the War Minister expresses himself very bluntly on the matter *inter pocula*. There are certain subjects, moreover, about which it is highly imprudent to create an agitation over which one cannot retain control afterwards."

"But those documents are obviously forged," put in Bloch.

M. de Norpois made no reply to this, but announced that he did not approve of the manifestations that were being made by Prince Henri d'Orléans.

"Besides, they can only ruffle the calm of the pretorium, and encourage agitations which, looked at from either point of view, would be deplorable. Certainly we must put a stop to the anti-militarist conspiracy, but we cannot possibly tolerate, either, a brawl encouraged by those elements on the Right who instead of serving the patriotic ideal themselves are hoping to make it serve them. Heaven be praised, France is not a South American Republic, and the need has not yet been felt here for a military pronunciamento."

Bioch could not get him to speak on the question of Dreyfus's guilt, nor would he utter any forecast as to the judgment in the civil trial then proceeding. On the other hand, M. de Norpois seemed only too ready to indicate the consequences of this judgment.

"If it is a conviction," he said, "it will probably be quashed, for it is seldom that, in a case where there has been such a number of witnesses, there is not some flaw in the procedure which counsel can raise on appeal. To return to Prince Henri's outburst, I greatly doubt whether it has met with his father's approval."

"You think Chartres is for Dreyfus?" asked the Duchess with a smile, her eyes rounded, her cheeks bright, her nose buried in her plate, her whole manner deliciously scandalised.

"Not at all; I meant only that there runs through the whole family, on that

side, a political sense which we have seen, in the admirable Princesse Clémentine, carried to its highest power, and which her son, Prince Ferdinand, has kept as a priceless inheritance. You would never have found the Prince of Bulgaria clasping Major Esterhazy to his bosom."

"He would have preferred a private soldier," murmured Mme. de Guermantes, who often met the Bulgarian monarch at dinner at the Prince de Joinville's, and had said to him once, when he asked if she was not envious: "Yes, Sir, of your bracelets."

"You aren't going to Mme. de Sagan's ball this evening?" M. de Norpois asked Mme. de Villeparisis, to cut short his conversation with Bloch. My friend had not failed to interest the Ambassador, who told us afterwards, not without a quaint simplicity, thinking no doubt of the traces that survived in Bloch's speech of the neo-Homeric manner which he had on the whole outgrown: "He is rather amusing, with that way of speaking, a trifle old fashioned, a trifle solemn. You expect him to come out with 'The Learned Sisters,' like Lamartine or Jean-Baptiste Rousseau. It has become quite uncommon in the youth of the present day, as it was indeed in the generation before them. We ourselves were inclined to be romantic." But however exceptional his companion may have seemed to him, M. de Norpois decided that the conversation had lasted long enough.

"No, sir, I don't go to balls any more," she replied with a charming grandmotherly smile. "You're going, all of you, I suppose? You're the right age for that sort of thing," she added, embracing in a comprehensive glance M. de Châtellerault, his friend and Bloch. "Still, I was asked," she went on, pretending, just for fun, to be flattered by the distinction. "In fact, they came specially to ask me." ('They' being the Princesse de Sagan.)

"I haven't had a card," said Bloch, thinking that Mme. de Villeparisis would at once offer to procure him one, and that Mme. de Sagan would be glad to see at her ball the friend of a woman whom she had called in person to invite.

The Marquise made no reply, and Bloch did not press the point, for he had another, more serious matter to discuss with her, and, with that in view, had already asked her whether he might call again in a couple of days. Having heard the two young men say that they had both just resigned from the Rue Royale Club, which was letting in every Tom, Dick and Harry, he wished to ask Mme. de Villeparisis to arrange for his election there.

"Aren't they rather bad form, rather stuck-up snobs, these Sagans?" he inquired in a tone of sarcasm.

"Not at all, they're the best we can do for you in that line," M.

d'Argencourt, who adopted all the catch-words of Parisian society, assured him.

"Then," said Bloch, still half in irony, "I suppose it's one of the solemnities, the great social fixtures of the season."

Mme. de Villeparisis turned merrily to Mme. de Guermantes.

"Tell us, is it a great social solemnity, Mme. de Sagan's ball?"

"It's no good asking me," answered the Duchess, "I have never yet succeeded in finding out what a social solemnity is. Besides, society isn't my strong point."

"Indeed; I thought it was just the other way," said Bloch, who supposed Mme. de Guermantes to be speaking seriously.

He continued, to the desperation of M. de Norpois, to ply him with questions about the Dreyfus case. The Ambassador declared that, looking at it from outside, he got the impression from du Paty de Clam of a somewhat cloudy brain, which had perhaps not been very happily chosen to conduct that delicate operation, which required so much coolness and discernment, a judicial inquiry.

"I know that the Socialist Party are crying aloud for his head on a charger, as well as for the immediate release of the prisoner from the Devil's Isle. But I think that we are not yet reduced to the necessity of passing the Caudine Forks of MM. Gérault-Richard and Company. So far, the whole case has been an utter mystery, I don't say that on one side just as much as on the other there has not been some pretty dirty work to be hushed up. That certain of your client's more or less disinterested protectors may have the best intentions I will not attempt to deny, but you know that heaven is paved with such things," he added, with a look of great subtlety. "It is essential that the Government should give the impression that they are not in the hands of the factions of the Left, and that they are not going to surrender themselves, bound hand and foot, at the demand of some pretorian guard or other, which, believe me, is not the same thing as the Army. It stands to reason that, should any fresh evidence come to light, a new trial would be ordered. And what follows from that? Obviously, that to demand a new trial is to force an open door. When the day comes, the Government will speak with no uncertain voice or will let fall into abeyance what is their essential prerogative. Cock and bull stories will no longer be enough. We must appoint judges to try Dreyfus. And that will be an easy matter because, although we have acquired the habit, in our sweet France, where we love to belittle ourselves, of thinking or letting it be thought that, in order to hear the words Truth and Justice, it is necessary to cross the Channel, which is very often only a roundabout way of reaching the Spree, there are judges to be found outside Berlin. But once the

machinery of Government has been set in motion, will you have ears for the voice of authority? When it bids you perform your duty as a citizen will you have ears for its voice, will you take your stand in the ranks of law and order? When its patriotic appeal sounds, will you have the wisdom not to turn a deaf ear but to answer: 'Present!'?"

M. de Norpois put these questions to Bloch with a vehemence which, while it alarmed my friend, flattered him also; for the Ambassador spoke to him with the air of one addressing a whole party, questioned him as though he had been in the confidence of that party and might be held responsible for the decisions which it would adopt. "Should you fail to disarm," M. de Norpois went on, without waiting for Bloch's collective answer, "should you, before even the ink had dried on the decree ordering the fresh trial of the case, obeying it matters not what insidious word of command, fail, I say, to disarm, and band yourselves, rather, in a sterile opposition which seems to some minds the *ultima ratio* of policy, should you retire to your tents and burn your boats, you would be doing so to your own, damnation. Are you the prisoners of those who foment disorder? Have you given them pledges?" Bloch was in doubt how to answer. M. de Norpois gave him no time. "If the negative be true, as I should like to think, and if you have a little of what seems to me to be lamentably lacking in certain of your leaders and your friends, namely political sense, then, on the day when the Criminal Court assembles, if you do not allow yourselves to be dragooned by the fishers in troubled waters, you will have won your battle. I do not guarantee that the whole of the General Staff is going to get away unscathed, but it will be so much to the good if some of them at least can save their faces without setting the heather on fire.

"It stands to reason, moreover, that it is with the Government that it rests to pronounce judgment, and to close the list — already too long — of unpunished crimes, not certainly at the bidding of Socialist agitators, nor yet of any obscure military mouthpiece," he added, looking Bloch boldly in the face, perhaps with the instinct that leads all Conservatives to establish support for themselves in the enemy's camp. "Government action is not to be dictated by the highest bidder, from wherever the bid may come. The Government are not, thank heaven, under the orders of Colonel Driant, nor, at the other end of the scale, under M. Clemenceau's. We must curb the professional agitators and prevent them from raising their heads again. France, the vast majority here in France, desires only to be allowed to work in orderly conditions. As to that, there can be no question whatever. But we must not be afraid to enlighten public opinion; and if a few

sheep, of the kind our friend Rabelais knew so well, should dash headlong into the water, it would be as well to point out to them that the water in question was troubled, that it had been troubled deliberately by an agency not within our borders, in order to conceal the dangers lurking in its depths. And the Government ought not to give the impression that they are emerging from their passivity in self-defence when they exercise the right which is essentially their own, I mean that of setting the wheels of justice in motion. The Government will accept all your suggestions. If it is proved that there has been a judicial error, they can be sure of an overwhelming majority which would give them room to act with freedom."

"You, sir," said Bloch, turning to M. d'Argencourt, to whom he had been made known, with the rest of the party, on that gentleman's arrival, "you are a Dreyfusard, of course; they all are, abroad."

"It is a question that concerns only the French themselves, don't you think?" replied M. d'Argencourt with that peculiar form of insolence which consists in ascribing to the other person an opinion which one must, obviously, know that he does not hold since he has just expressed one directly its opposite.

Bloch coloured; M. d'Argencourt smiled, looking round the room, and if this smile, so long as it was directed at the rest of the company, was charged with malice at Bloch's expense, it became tempered with cordiality when finally it came to rest on the face of my friend, so as to deprive him of any excuse for annoyance at the words which he had heard uttered, though those words remained just as cruel. Mme. de Guermantes murmured something to M. d'Argencourt which I could not hear, but which must have referred to Bloch's religion, for there flitted at that moment over the face of the Duchess that expression to which one's fear of being noticed by the person of whom one is speaking gives a certain hesitancy and unreality, while there is blended with it the inquisitive, malicious amusement inspired in one by a group of human beings to which one feels oneself to be fundamentally alien. To retrieve himself, Bloch turned to the Duc de Châtellerault. "You, sir, as a Frenchman, you must be aware that people abroad are all Dreyfusards, although everyone pretends that in prance we never know what is going on abroad. Anyhow, I know Ï can talk freely to you; Saint-Loup told me so." But the young Duke, who felt that every one was turning against Bloch, and was a coward as people often are in society, employing a mordant and precious form of wit which he seemed, by a sort of collateral atavism, to have inherited from M. de Charlus, replied: "You must not ask me, sir, to discuss the Dreyfus case with you; it is a subject which, on

principle, I never mention except to Japhetics." Everyone smiled, except Bloch, not that he was not himself in the habit of making scathing references to his Jewish origin, to that side of his ancestry which came from somewhere near Sinai. But instead of one of these epigrams (doubtless because he had not one ready) the operation of the internal machine brought to Bloch's lips something quite different. And we caught only: "But how on earth did you know? Who told you?" as though he had been the son of a convict. Whereas, given his name, which had not exactly a Christian sound, and his face, his surprise argued a certain simplicity of mind.

What M. de Norpois had said not having completely satisfied him, he went up to the librarian and asked him whether Mme. de Villeparisis did not sometimes have in her house M. du Paty de Clam or M. Joseph Reinach. The librarian made no reply; he was a Nationalist, and never ceased preaching to the Marquise that the social revolution might break out at any moment, and that she ought to shew more caution in the choice of her friends. He asked himself whether Bloch might not be a secret emissary of the Syndicate, come to collect information, and went off at once to repeat to Mme. de Villeparisis the questions that Bloch had put to him. She decided that, at the best, he was ill-bred and might be in a position to compromise M. de Norpois. Also, she wished to give satisfaction to the librarian, the only person of whom she went in fear, by whom she was being indoctrinated, though without any marked success (every morning he read her M. Judet's article in the *Petit Journal*). She decided, therefore, to make it plain to Bloch that he need not come to the house again, and had no difficulty in finding, among her social repertory, the scene by which a great lady shows anyone her door, a scene which does not in any way involve the raised finger and blazing eyes that people imagine. As Bloch came up to her to say good-bye, buried in her deep armchair, she seemed only half-awakened from a vague somnolence. Her sunken eyes gleamed with only the feeble though charming light of a pair of pearls. Bloch's farewell, barely pencilling on the Marquise's face a languid smile, drew from her not a word, nor did she offer him her hand. This scene left Bloch in utter bewilderment, but as he was surrounded by a circle of spectators he felt that it could not be prolonged without disadvantage to himself, and, to force the Marquise, the hand which she had made no effort to take he himself thrust out at her. Mme. de Villeparisis was startled. But doubtless, while still bent upon giving an immediate satisfaction to the librarian and the anti-Dreyfusard clan, she wished at the same time to provide for the future, and so contented herself with letting her eyelids droop

over her closing eyes.

“I believe she’s asleep,” said Bloch to the librarian who, feeling that he had the support of the Marquise, assumed an indignant air. “Good-bye madame,” snouted Bloch.

The old lady made the slight movement with her lips of a dying woman who wants to open her mouth but whose eye can no longer recognise people. Then she turned, overflowing with a restored vitality, to M. d’Argencourt, while Bloch left the room, convinced that she must be ‘soft’ in the head. Full of curiosity and anxious to have more light thrown upon so strange an incident, he came to see lier again a few days later. She received him in the most friendly fashion, because she was a good-natured woman, because the librarian was not there, because she had in mind the little play which Bloch was going to produce for her, and finally because she had acted once and for all the little scene of the indignant lady that she had wished to act, a scene that had been universally admired and discussed the same evening in various drawing-rooms, but in a version which had already ceased to bear any resemblance to the truth.

“You were speaking just now of the *Seven Princesses*, Duchess; you know (not that it’s anything to be proud of) that the author of that — what shall I call it?— that production is a compatriot of mine,” said M. d’Argencourt with a fine scorn blended with satisfaction at knowing more than anyone else in the room about the author of a work which had been under discussion. “Yes, he’s a Belgian, by nationality,” he went on.

“Indeed! No, we don’t accuse you of any responsibility for the *Seven Princesses*. Fortunately for yourself and your compatriots you are not like the author of that absurdity. I know several charming Belgians, yourself, your King, who is inclined to be shy, but full of wit, my Ligne cousins, and heaps of others, but you, I am thankful to say, do not speak the same language as the author of the *Seven Princesses*. Besides, if you want to know, it’s not worth talking about, because really there is absolutely nothing in it. You know the sort of people who are always trying to seem obscure, and even plan to make themselves ridiculous to conceal the fact that they have not an idea in their heads. If there was anything behind it all, I may tell you that I’m not in the least afraid of a little daring,” she added in a serious tone, “provided that there is some idea in it. I don’t know if you’ve seen Borelli’s piece. Some people seem to have been shocked by it, but I must say, even if they stone me through the streets for saying it,” she went on, without stopping to think that she ran no very great risk of such a punishment, “I found it immensely interesting. But the*Seven Princesses*! It’s all very well, one

of them having a fondness for my nephew, I cannot carry family feeling quite...”

The Duchess broke off abruptly, for a lady came in who was the Comtesse de Marsantes, Robert’s mother. Mme. de Marsantes was regarded in the Faubourg Saint-Germain as a superior being, of a goodness, a resignation that were positively angelic. So I had been told, and had had no particular reason to feel surprised, not knowing at the same time that she was the sister of the Duc de Guermantes. Later, I have always been taken aback, whenever I have learned that such women, melancholy, pure, victimised, venerated like the ideal forms of saints in church windows, had flowered from the same genealogical stem as brothers brutal, debauched and vile. Brothers and sisters, when they are closely alike in features as were the pue de Guermantes and Mme. de Marsantes, ought (I felt) to have a single intellect in common, the same heart, as a person would have who might vary between good and evil moods but in whom one could not, for all that, expect to find a vast breadth of outlook if he had a narrow mind, or a sublime abnegation if his heart was hard.

Mme. de Marsantes attended Brunetière’s lectures. She fascinated the Faubourg Saint-Germain and, by her saintly life, edified it as well. But the morphological link of handsome nose and piercing gaze led one, nevertheless, to classify Mme. de Marsantes in the same intellectual and moral family as her brother the Duke. I could not believe that the mere fact of her being a woman, and perhaps those of her having had an unhappy life and won everyone’s sympathy, could make a person be so different from the rest of her family, as in the old romances, where all the virtues and graces are combined in the sister of wild and lawless brothers. It seemed to me that nature, less unconventional than the old poets, must make use almost exclusively of the elements common to the family, and I was unable to credit her with enough power of invention to construct, out of materials analogous to those that composed a fool and clod, a lofty mind without the least strain of clownishness, a saint unsoiled by any brutality. Mme. de Marsantes was wearing a gown of white surah embroidered with large palms, on which stood out flowers of a different material, these being black. This was because, three weeks earlier, she had lost her cousin, M. de Montmorency, a bereavement which did not prevent her from paying calls or even from going to small dinners, but always in mourning. She was a great lady. Atavism had filled her with the frivolity of generations of life at court, with all the superficial, rigorous duties that that implies. Mme. de Marsantes had not had the strength of character to regret for any length of time the death of her father and mother, but she would not for anything in the world have appeared in

colours in the month following that of a cousin. She was more than pleasant to me, both because I was Robert's friend and because I did not move in the same world as he. This pleasantness was accompanied by a pretence of shyness, by that sort of intermittent withdrawal of the voice, the eyes, the mind which a woman draws back to her like a skirt that has indiscreetly spread, so as not to take up too much room, to remain stiff and erect even in her suppleness, as a good upbringing teaches. A good upbringing which must not, however, be taken too literally, many of these ladies passing very swiftly into a complete dissolution of morals without ever losing the almost childlike correctness of their manners. Mme. de Marsantes was a trifle irritating in conversation since, whenever she had occasion to speak of a plebeian, as for instance Bergotte or Elstir, she would say, isolating the word, giving it its full value, intoning it on two different notes with a modulation peculiar to the Guermantes: "I have had the *honour*, the great *hon*-our of meeting Monsieur Bergotte," or "of making the acquaintance of Monsieur Elstir" whether that her hearers might marvel at her humility or from the sam tendency that Mme. de Guermantes shewed to revert to the use of obsolete forms, as a protest against the slovenly usages of the present day, in which people never professed themselves sufficiently 'honoured.' Whichever Of these was the true reason, one felt that when Mme. de Marsantes said: "I have had the *honour*, the great *hon*-our," she felt she was playing an important part and shewing that she could take in the names of distinguished men as she would have welcomed the men themselves at her home in the country, had they happened to be in the neighbourhood. On the other hand as her family connexion was numerous, as she was devoted to all her relatives, as, slow in speech and fond of explaining things at length, she was always trying to make clear the exact degree of kinship, she found herself (without any desire to create an effect and without really caring to talk about anyone except touching peasants and sublime gamekeepers) referring incessantly to all the mediatised houses in Europe, a failing which people less brilliantly connected than herself could not forgive, and, if they were at all intellectual, derided as a sign of stupidity.

In the country, Mme. de Marsantes was adored for the good that she did, but principally because the purity of a strain of blood into which for many generations there had flowed only what was greatest in the history of France had taken from her manner everything that the lower orders call 'manners,' and had given her a perfect simplicity. She never shrank from kissing a poor woman who was in trouble, and would tell her to come up to the castle for a cartload of wood. She was, people said, the perfect Christian. She was determined to find an

immensely rich wife for Robert. Being a great lady means playing the great lady, that is to say, to a certain extent, playing at simplicity. It is a pastime which costs an extremely high price, all the more because simplicity charms people only on condition that they know that you are not bound to live simply, that is to say that you are very rich. Some one said to me afterwards, when I had told him of my meeting her: “You saw of course that she must have been lovely as a young woman.” But true beauty is so individual, so novel always, that one does not recognise it as beauty. I said to myself this afternoon only that she had a tiny nose, very blue eyes, a long neck and a sad expression.

“Listen,” said Mme. de Villeparisis to the Duchesse de Guermantes, “I’m expecting a woman at any moment whom you don’t wish to know. I thought I’d better warn you, to avoid any unpleasantness. But you needn’t be afraid, I shall never have her here again, only I was obliged to let her come to-day. It’s Swann’s wife.”

Mme. Swann, seeing the dimensions that the Dreyfus case had begun to assume, and fearing that her husband’s racial origin might be used against herself, had besought him never again to allude to the prisoner’s innocence. When he was not present she went farther and used to profess the most ardent Nationalism; in doing which she was only following the example of Mme. Verdurin, in whom a middle-class anti-semitism, latent hitherto, had awakened and grown to a positive fury. Mme. Swann had won by this attitude the privilege of membership in several of the women’s leagues that were beginning to be formed in anti-semitic society, and had succeeded in making friends with various members of the aristocracy. It may seem strange that, so far from following their example, the Duchesse de Guermantes, so close a friend of Swann, had on the contrary always resisted his desire, which he had not concealed from her, to introduce to her his wife. But we shall see in due course that this arose from the peculiar nature of the Duchess, who held that she was not ‘bound to’ do things, and laid down with despotic force what had been decided by her social ‘free will,’ which was extremely arbitrary.

“Thank you for telling me,” said the Duchess. “It would indeed be most unpleasant. But as I know her by sight I shall be able to get away in time.”

“I assure you, Oriane, she is really quite nice; an excellent woman,” said Mme. de Marsantes.

“I have no doubt she is, but I feel no need to assure myself of it.”

“Have you been invited to Lady Israels’s?” Mme. de Villeparisis asked the Duchess, to change the conversation.

“Why, thank heaven, I don’t know the woman,” replied Mme. de Guermantes. “You must ask Marie-Aynard. She knows her. I never could make out why.”

“I did indeed know her at one time,” said Mme. de Marsantes. “I confess my faults. But I have decided not to know her any more. It seems she’s one of the very worst of them, and makes no attempt to conceal it. Besides, we have all been too trusting, too hospitable. I shall never go near anyone of that race again. While we had old friends, country cousins, people of our own flesh and blood on whom we shut our doors, we threw them open to Jews. And now we see what thanks we get from them. But I’ve no right to speak; I have an adorable son, and, like a young fool, he says and does all the maddest things you can imagine,” she went on, having caught some allusion by M. d’Argencourt to Robert. “But, talking of Robert, haven’t you seen him?” she asked Mme. de Villeparisis; “being Saturday, I thought he’d be coming to Paris on leave, and in that case he would be sure to pay you a visit.”

As a matter of fact Mme. de Marsantes thought that her son would not obtain leave that week; but knowing that, even if he did, he would never dream of coming to see Mme. de Villeparisis, she hoped, by making herself appear to have expected to find him in the room, to procure his forgiveness from her susceptible aunt for all the visits that he had failed to pay her.

“Robert here! But I have never had a single word from him; I don’t think I’ve seen him since Balbec.”

“He is so busy; he has so much to do,” pleaded Mme. de Marsantes.

A faint smile made Mme. de Guermantes’s eyelashes quiver as she studied the circle which, with the point of her sunshade, she was tracing on the carpet. Whenever the Duke had been too openly unfaithful to his wife, Mme. de Marsantes had always taken up the cudgels against her own brother on her sister-in-law’s behalf. The latter had a grateful and bitter memory of this protection, and was not herself seriously shocked by Robert’s pranks. At this point the door opened again and Robert himself entered the room.

“Well, talk of the Saint!” said Mme. de Guermantes.

Mme. de Marsantes, who had her back to the door, had not seen her son come in. When she did catch sight of him, her motherly bosom was convulsed with joy, as by the beating of a wing, her body half rose her seat, her face quivered and she fastened on Robert eyes big astonishment.

“What! You’ve come! How delightful! What a surprise!”

“Ah! *Talk of the Saint*!— I see,” cried the Belgian diplomat, with a shout of

laughter.

"Delicious, ain't it?" came tartly from the Duchess, who hated puns and had ventured on this one only with a pretence of making fun of herself.

"Good afternoon, Robert," she said, "I believe he's forgotten his aunt."

They talked for a moment, probably about myself, for as Saint-Loup was leaving her to join his mother Mme. de Guermantes turned to me:

"Good afternoon; how are you?" was her greeting.

She allowed to rain on me the light of her azure gaze, hesitated for a moment, unfolded and stretched towards me the stem of her arm, leaned forward her body which sprang rapidly backwards like a bush that has been pulled down to the ground and, on being released, returns to its natural position. Thus she acted under the fire of Saint-Loup's eyes, which kept her under observation and were making frantic efforts to obtain some further concession still from his aunt. Fearing that our conversation might fail altogether, he joined in, to stimulate it, and answered for me:

"He's not very well just now, he gets rather tired; I think he would be a great deal better, by the way, if he saw you more often, for I can't help telling you that he admires you immensely."

"Oh, but that's very nice of him," said Mme. de Guermantes in a deliberately casual tone, as if I had brought her her cloak. "I am most flattered."

"Look, I must go and talk to my mother for a minute; take my chair," said Saint-Loup, thus forcing me to sit down next to his aunt.

We were both silent.

"I see you sometimes in the morning," she said, as though she were telling me something that I did not know, and I for my part had never seen her. "It's so good for one, a walk."

"Oriane," began Mme. de Marsantes in a low tone, "you said you were going on to Mme. de Saint-Ferréol's; would you be so very kind as to tell her not to expect me to dinner, I shall stay at home now that I've got Robert. And one other thing, but I hardly like to ask you, if you would leave word as you pass to tell them to send out at once for a box of the cigars Robert likes. 'Corona,' they're called. I've none in the house."

Robert came up to us; he had caught only the name of Mme. de Saint-Ferréol.

"Who in the world is Mme. de Saint-Ferréol?" he inquired, in a surprised but decisive tone, for he affected a studied ignorance of everything to do with society.

“But, my dear boy, you know quite well,” said his mother. “She’s Vermandois’s sister. It was she gave you that nice billiard table you liked so much.”

“What, she’s Vermandois’s sister, I had no idea of that. Really, my family are amazing,” he went on, turning so as to include me in the conversation and adopting unconsciously Bloch’s intonation just as he borrowed his ideas, “they know the most unheard-of people, people called Saint-Ferréol” (emphasising the final consonant of each word) “and names like that; they go to balls, they drive in victorias, they lead a fabulous existence. It’s prodigious.”

Mme. de Guermantes made in her throat a slight, short, sharp sound, as of an involuntary laugh which one chokes back, meaning thereby to shew that she paid just as much tribute as the laws of kinship imposed on her to her nephew’s wit. A servant came in to say that the Prince von Faffenheim-Munsterburg-Weinigen had sent word to M. de Norpois that he was waiting.

“Bring him in, sir,” said Mme. de Villeparisis to the old Ambassador, who started in quest of the German Minister.

“Stop, sir; do you think I ought to shew him the miniature of the Empress Charlotte?”

“Why, I’m sure he’ll be delighted,” said the Ambassador in a tone of conviction, and as though he were envying the fortunate Minister the favour that was in store for him.

“Oh, I know he’s very *sound*,” said Mme. de Marsantes, “and that is so rare among foreigners. But I’ve found out all about him. He is anti-semitism personified.”

The Prince’s name preserved in the boldness with which its opening syllables were — to borrow an expression from music — attacked, and in the stammering repetition that scanned them, the impulse, the mannered simplicity, the heavy delicacies of the Teutonic race, projected like green boughs over the ‘heim’ of dark blue enamel which glowed with the mystic light of a Rhenish window behind the pale and finely wrought gildings of the German eighteenth century. This name included, among the several names of which it was composed, that of a little German watering-place to which as a child I had gone with my grandmother, at the foot of a mountain honoured by the feet of Goethe, from the vineyards of which we used to drink, at the Kurhof, their illustrious vintages with elaborate and sonorous names, like the epithets which Homer applies to his heroes. And so, scarcely had I heard the Prince’s name spoken than, before I had recalled the watering-place, the name itself seemed to shrink,

to grow rich with humanity, to find large enough a little place in my memory to which it clung, familiar, earth to earth, picturesque, savoury, light, with something about it, too, that was authorised, prescribed. And then, M. de Guermantes, in explaining who the Prince was, quoted a number of his titles, and I recognised the name of a village threaded by the river on which, every evening, my cure finished for the day, I used to go in a boat amid the mosquitoes, and that of a forest so far away that the doctor would not allow me to make the excursion to it. And indeed it was comprehensible that the suzerainty of the lord extended to the surrounding places and associated afresh in the enumeration of his titles the names which one could read, close together, upon a map. Thus beneath the visor of the Prince of the Holy Roman Empire and Knight of Franconia it was the face of a dear and smiling land, on which had often lingered for me the light of the six-o'clock sun, that I saw, at any rate before the Prince, Rheingraf and Elector Palatine had entered the room. For I speedily learned that the revenues which he drew from the forest and river, peopled with gnomes and undines, and from the enchanted mountain on which rose the ancient Burg that cherished memories of Luther and Lewis the Germanic, he employed in keeping five Charron motor-cars, a house in Paris and one in London, a box on Mondays at the Opera and another for the 'Tuesdays' at the 'Français.' He did not seem to me, nor did he seem to regard himself as different from other men of similar fortune and age who had a less poetic origin. He had their culture, their ideals, he was proud of his rank, but purely on account of the advantages it conferred on him, and had now only one ambition in life, to be elected a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, which was the reason of his coming to see Mme. de Villeparisis. If he, whose wife was a leader of the most exclusive set in Berlin, had begged to be introduced to the Marquise, it was not the result of any desire on his part for her acquaintance. Devoured for years past by this ambition to be elected to the Institute, he had unfortunately never been in a position to reckon above five the number of Academicians who seemed prepared to vote for him. He knew that M. de Norpois could by himself dispose of at least ten others, a number which he was capable, by skilful negotiations, of increasing still further. And so the Prince, who had known him in Russia when they were both there as Ambassadors, had gone to see him and had done everything in his power to win him over. But in vain might he multiply his friendly overtures, procure for the Marquis Russian decorations, quote him in articles on foreign politics; he had had before him an ingrate, a man in whose eyes all these attentions appeared to count as nothing, who had not advanced the

prospects of his candidature one inch, had not even promised him his own vote. No doubt M. de Norpois received him with extreme politeness, indeed begged that he would not put himself out and “take the trouble to come so far out of his way,” went himself to the Prince’s residence, and when the Teutonic Knight had launched his: “I should like immensely to be your colleague,” replied in a tone of deep emotion: “Ah! I should be most happy!” And no doubt a simpleton, a Dr. Cottard would have said to himself: “Well, here he is in my house; it was he who insisted on coming, because he regards me as a more important person than himself; he tells me that he would be happy to see me in the Academy; words do have some meaning after all, damn it, probably if he doesn’t offer to vote for me it is because it hasn’t occurred to him. He lays so much stress on my great influence; presumably he imagines that larks drop into my mouth ready roasted, that I have all the support I want, and that is why he doesn’t offer me his; but I have only got to get him with his back to the wall, and just say to him quietly: ‘Very well, vote for me, will you?’ and he will be obliged to do it.”

But Prince von Faffenheim was no simpleton. He was what Dr. Cottard would have called ‘a fine diplomat’ and he knew that M. de Norpois was no less fine a one than himself, nor a man who would have failed to realise without needing to be told that he could confer a favour on a candidate by voting for him. The Prince, in his Embassies and as Foreign Minister, had conducted, on his country’s behalf instead of, as in the present instance, his own, many of those conversations in which one knows beforehand just bow far one is prepared to go and at what point one will decline to commit oneself. He was not unaware that, in this diplomatic language, to talk meant to offer. And it was for this reason that he had arranged for M. de Norpois to receive the Cordon of Saint Andrew. But if he had had to report to his Government the conversation which he had subsequently had with M. de Norpois, he would have stated in his dispatch: “I realised that I had gone the wrong way to work.” For as soon as he had returned to the subject of the Institute, M. de Norpois had repeated:

“I should like nothing better; nothing could be better, for my colleagues. They ought, I consider, to feel genuinely honoured that you should have thought of them. It is a really interesting candidature, a little outside our ordinary course. As you know, the Academy is very conventional, it takes fright at everything which has at all a novel sound. Personally, I deplore this. How often have I had occasion to say as much to my colleagues! I cannot be sure, God forgive me, that I did not even once let the word ‘hidebound’ escape me,” he added, in an undertone, with a scandalised smile, almost aside, as in a scene on the stage,

casting at the Prince a rapid, sidelong glance from his blue eyes, like a veteran actor studying the effect on his audience. “You understand, Prince, that I should not care to allow a personality so eminent as yourself to embark on a venture which was hopeless from the start. So long as my colleagues’ ideas linger so far behind the times, I consider that the wiser course will be to abstain. But you may rest assured that if I were ever to discern a mind that was a little more modern, a little more alive, shewing itself in that college, which is tending to become a mausoleum, if I could reckon upon any possible chance of your success, I should be the first to inform you of it.”

“The Cordon was a mistake,” thought the Prince; “the negotiations have not advanced in the least; that is not what he wanted. I have not yet laid my hand on the right key.”

This was a kind of reasoning of which M. de Norpois, formed in the same school as the Prince, would also have been capable. One may mock at the Pedantic silliness with which diplomats of the Norpois type go into ecstasies over some piece of official wording which is, for all practical purposes, meaningless. But their childishness has this compensation; diplomats know that, in the loaded scales which assure that European or other equilibrium which we call peace, good feeling, sounding speeches, earnest entreaties weigh very little; and that the heavy weight, the true determinant consists in something else, in the possibility which the adversary does (if he is strong enough) or does not enjoy of satisfying, in exchange for what one oneself wants, a desire. With this order of truths, which an entirely disinterested person, such as my grandmother for instance, would not have understood M. de Norpois and Prince von Faffenheim had frequently had to deal. Chargé d’Affaires in countries with which we had been within an ace of going to war, M. de Norpois, in his anxiety as to the turn which events were about to take, knew very well that it was not by the word ‘Peace,’ nor by the word ‘War’ that it would be revealed to him, but by some other, apparently commonplace word, a word of terror or blessing, which the diplomat, by the aid of his cipher, would immediately read and to which, to safeguard the honour of France, he would respond in another word, quite as commonplace, but one beneath which the Minister of the enemy nation would at once see written: ‘War.’ Moreover, in accordance with a time-honoured custom, analogous to that which gave to the first meeting between two young people promised to one another in marriage the form of a chance encounter at a performance in the Théâtre du Gymnase, the dialogue in the course of which destiny was to dictate the word ‘War’ or the word ‘Peace’ was held, as a rule, not

in the ministerial sanctum but on a bench in a Kurgarten where the Minister and M. de Norpois went independently to a thermal spring to drink at its source their little tumblers of some curative water. By a sort of tacit convention they met at the hour appointed for their cure, began by taking together a short stroll which, beneath its innocent appearance, each of the speakers knew to be as tragic as an order for mobilisation. And so, in a private matter like this nomination for election to the Institute, the Prince had employed the same system of induction which had served him in his public career, the same method of reading beneath superimposed symbols.

And certainly it would be wrong to pretend that my grandmother and the few who resembled her would have been alone in their failure to understand this kind of calculation. For one thing, the average human being, practising a profession the lines of which have been laid down for him from the start, comes near, by his want of intuition, to the ignorance which my grandmother owed to her lofty disinterestedness. Often one has to come down to ‘kept’ persons, male or female, before one finds the hidden spring of actions or words apparently of the most innocent nature in self-interest, in the bare necessity to keep alive. What man does not know that when a woman whom he is going to pay says to him: “Don’t let’s talk about money,” the speech must be regarded as what is called in music ‘a silent beat’ and that if, later on, she declares: “You are far too much trouble; you are always keeping things from me; I’ve done with you,” he must interpret this as: “Some one else has been offering me more.” And yet this is only the language of a lady of easy virtue, not so far removed from the ladies in society. The *apache* furnishes more striking examples. But M. as Norpois and the German Prince, if *apaches* and their ways were unknown to them, had been accustomed to living on the same plane as nations, which are also, despite their greatness, creatures of selfishness and cunning, kept in order only by force, by consideration of their material interests which may drive them to murder, a murder that is often symbolic also, since its mere hesitation or refusal to fight may spell for a nation the word ‘Perish. But inasmuch as all this is not set forth in Yellow and otherwise coloured Books, the people as a whole are naturally pacific; should they be warlike, it is instinctively, from hatred, from a sense of injury, not for the reasons which have made up the mind of their ruler, on the advice of his Norpois.

The following winter the Prince was seriously ill; he recovered, but his heart was permanently affected.

“The devil!” he said to himself, “I can’t afford to lose any time over the

Institute. If I wait too long, I may be dead before they elect me. That really would be unpleasant."

He composed, on the foreign politics of the last twenty years, an essay for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in which he referred more than once, and in the most flattering terms, to M. de Norpois. The French diplomat called upon him to thank him. He added that he did not know how to express his gratitude. The Prince said to himself, like a man who has been trying to fit various keys into a stubborn lock: "Still not the right one!" and, feeling somewhat out of breath as he shewed M. de Norpois to the door, thought: "Damn it, these fellows will see me in my grave before letting me in. We must hurry up."

That evening, he met M. de Norpois again at the Opera.

"My dear Ambassador," he began to him, "you told me to-day that you did not know what you could do to prove your gratitude; it was a great exaggeration, for you owe me none, but I am going to be so indelicate as to take you at your word."

M. de Norpois had no less high an esteem for the Prince's tact than the Prince had for his. He understood at once that it was not a request that Prince von Faffenheim was about to present to him, but an offer, and with a radiant affability made ready to hear it.

"Well now, you will think me highly indiscreet. There are two people to whom I am greatly attached — in quite different ways, as you will understand in a moment — two people both of whom have recently settled in Paris, where they intend to remain for the future: my wife, and the Grand Duchess John. They are thinking of giving a few dinners, chiefly in honour of the King and Queen of England, and what they would have liked more than anything in the world would have been to be able to offer their guests the company of a person for whom, without knowing her, they both of them feel a great admiration. I confess that I did not know how I was going to gratify their wish when I learned just now, by the most extraordinary accident, that you were a friend of this person. I know that she lives a most retired life, and sees only a very few people —'happy few,' as Stendhal would say — but if you were to give me your backing, with the generosity that you have always shewn me, I am sure that she would allow you to present me to her and to convey to her the wishes of both the Grand Duchess and the Princess. Perhaps she would consent to dine with us, when the Queen of England comes, and then (one never knows) if we don't bore her too much, to spend the Easter holidays with us at Beaulieu, at the Grand Duchess John's. The person I allude to is called the Marquise de Villeparisis. I confess that the hope

of becoming one of the frequenters of such a school of wit would console me, would make me contemplate without regret the abandoning of my attempt at the Institute. For in her house, too, I understand, there is a regular flow of intellect and brilliant talk."

With an inexpressible sense of pleasure the Prince felt that the lock no longer resisted, and that at last the key was turning.

"Such an alternative is wholly unnecessary, my dear Prince," replied M. de Norpois; "nothing is more in harmony with the Institute than the house you speak of, which is a regular hotbed of Academicians. I shall convey your request to Mme. la Marquise de Villeparisis: she will undoubtedly be flattered. As for her dining with you, she goes out very little and that will perhaps be more difficult to arrange. But I shall present you to her and you can plead your cause in person. You must on no account give up the Academy; to-morrow fortnight, as it happens, I shall be having luncheon, before going on with him to an important meeting, at Leroy-Beaulieu's, without whom nobody can be elected; I had already allowed myself in conversation with him to let fall your name, with which, naturally, he was perfectly familiar. He raised certain objections. But it so happens that he requires the support of my group at the next election, and I fully intend to return to the charge; I shall tell him quite openly of the wholly cordial ties that unite us, I shall not conceal from him that, if you were to stand, I should ask all my friends to vote for you," (here the Prince breathed a deep sigh of relief) "and he knows that I have friends. I consider that if I were to succeed in obtaining his assistance your chances would become very strong. Come that evening, at six, to Mme. de Villeparisis's; I will introduce you to her and I can give you an account then of my conversation with him."

Thus it was that Prince von Faffenheim had been led to call upon Mme. de Villeparisis. My profound disillusionment occurred when he spoke. It had never struck me that, if an epoch in history has features both particular and general which are stronger than those of a nationality, so that in a biographical dictionary with illustrations, which go so far as to include an authentic portrait of Minerva, Leibniz with his wig and ruff differs little from Marivaux or Samuel Bernard, a nationality has particular features stronger than those of a caste. In the present instance these were rendered before me not by a discourse in which I had expected, before I saw him, to hear the rustling of the elves and the dance of the kobolds, but by a transposition which certified no less plainly that poetic origin: the fact that, as he bowed, short, red, corpulent, over the hand of Mme. de Villeparisis, the Rheingraf said to her: "Aow to you too, Matame la Marquise,"

in the accent of an Alsatian porter.

“Won’t you let me give you a cup of tea or a little of this cake; it is so good?” Mme. de Guermantes asked me, anxious to have shewn herself as friendly as possible. “I do the honours in this house just as if it was mine,” she explained in an ironical tone which gave a slightly guttural sound to her voice, as though she were trying to stifle a hoarse laugh.

“Sir,” said Mme. de Villeparisis to M. de Norpois, “you won’t forget that you have something to say to the Prince about the Academy?”

Mme. de Guermantes lowered her eyes and gave a semicircular turn to her wrist to look at the time.

“Gracious! I must fly at once if I’m to get to Mme. de Saint-Ferréol’s, and I’m dining with Mme. Leroi.”

And she rose without bidding me good-bye. She had just caught sight of Mme. Swann, who appeared considerably embarrassed at finding me in the room. She remembered, doubtless, that she had been the first to assure me that she was convinced of Dreyfus’s innocence.

“I don’t want my mother to introduce me to Mme. Swann,” Saint-Loup said to me. “She’s an ex-whore. Her husband’s a Jew, and she comes here to pose as a Nationalist. Hallo, here’s Uncle Palamède.”

The arrival of Mme. Swann had a special interest for me, due to an incident which had occurred a few days earlier and which I am obliged to record on account of the consequences which it was to have at a much later date, as the reader will learn in due course. Well, a few days before this visit to Mme. de Villeparisis, I had myself received a visitor whom I little expected, namely Charles Morel, the son (though I had never heard of his existence) of my great-uncle's old servant. This great-uncle (he in whose house I had met the lady in pink) had died the year before. His servant had more than once expressed his intention of coming to see me; I had no idea of the object of his visit, but should have been glad to see him for I had learned from Françoise that he had a genuine veneration for my uncle's memory and made a pilgrimage regularly to the cemetery in which he was buried. But, being obliged, for reasons of health, to retire to his home in the country, where he expected to remain for some time, he delegated the duty to his son. I was surprised to see come into my room a handsome young fellow of eighteen, dressed with expensive rather than good taste, but looking, all the same, like anything in the world except the son of a gentleman's servant. He made a point, moreover, at the start of our conversation, of severing all connexion with the domestic class from which he sprang, by informing me, with a smile of satisfaction, that he had won the first prize at the Conservatoire. The object of his visit to me was as follows: his father, when going through the effects of my uncle Adolphe, had set aside some which, he felt, could not very well be sent to my parents but were at the same time of a nature likely to interest a young man of my age. These were the photographs of the famous actresses, the notorious courtesans whom my uncle had known, the last fading pictures of that gay life of a man about town which he divided by a watertight compartment from his family life. While young Morel was shewing them to me, I noticed that he addressed me as though he were speaking to an equal. He derived from saying 'you' to me as often, and 'sir' as seldom, as possible the pleasure natural in one whose father had never ventured, when addressing my parents, upon anything but the third person. Almost all these photographs bore an inscription such as: "To my best friend." One actress, less grateful and more circumspect than the rest, had written: "To the best of friends," which enabled her (so I was assured) to say afterwards that my uncle was in no sense and had never been her best friend but was merely the friend who had done the most little services for her, the friend she made use of, a good, kind man, in other words an old fool. In vain might young Morel seek to divest

himself of his lowly origin, one felt that the shade of my uncle Adolphe, venerable and gigantic in the eyes of the old servant, had never ceased to hover, almost a holy vision, over the childhood and boyhood of the son. While I was turning over the photographs Charles Morel examined my room. And as I was looking for some place in which I might keep them, “How is it,” he asked me (in a tone in which the reproach had no need to find expression, so im, plicit was it in the words themselves), “that I don’t see a single photograph of your uncle in your room?” I felt the blood rise to my cheeks and stammered: “Why, I don’t believe I have such a thing.” “What, you haven’t one photograph of your uncle Adolphe, who was so devoted to you! I— will send you one of my governor’s — he has quantities of them — and I hope you will set it up in the place of honour above that chest of drawers, which came to you from your uncle.” It is true that, as I had not even a photograph of my father or mother in my room, there was nothing so very shocking in there not being one of my uncle Adolphe. But it was easy enough to see that for old Morel, who had trained his son in the same way of thinking, my uncle was the important person in the family, my parents only reflecting a diminished light from his. I was in higher favour, because my uncle used constantly to say that I was going to turn out a sort of Racine, or Vaulabelle, and Morel regarded me almost as an adopted son, as a child by election of my uncle. I soon discovered that this young man was extremely ‘pushing.’ Thus at this first meeting he asked me, being something of a composer as well and capable of setting short poems to music, whether I knew any poet who had a good position in society. I mentioned one. He did not know the work of this poet and had never heard his name, of which he made a note. Well, I found out that shortly afterwards he wrote to the poet telling him that, a fanatical admirer of his work, he, Morel, had composed a musical setting for one of his sonnets and would be grateful if the author would arrange for its performance at the Comtesse So-and-So’s. This was going a little too fast, and exposing his hand. The poet, taking offence, made no reply.

For the rest, Charles Morel seemed to have, besides his ambition, a strong leaning towards more concrete realities. He had noticed, as he came through the courtyard, Jupien’s niece at work upon a waistcoat, and although he explained to me only that he happened to want a fancy waistcoat at that very moment, I felt that the girl had made a vivid impression on him. He had no hesitation about asking me to come downstairs and introduce him to her, “but not as a connexion of your family, you follow me, I rely on your discretion not to drag in my father, say just a distinguished artist of your acquaintance, you know how important it is

to make a good impression on tradespeople." Albeit he had suggested to me that, not knowing him well enough to call him, he quite realised,'dear friend,' I might address him, before the girl, in some such terms as "not dear master, of course... although... well, if you like, dear distinguished artist," once in the shop, I avoided 'qualifying' him, as Saint-Simon would have expressed it, and contented myself with reiterating his 'you.' He picked out from several patterns of velvet one of the brightest red imaginable and so loud that, for all his bad taste, he was never able to wear the waistcoat when it was made. The girl settled down to work again with her two 'apprentices,' but it struck me that the impression had been mutual, and that Charles Morel, whom she regarded as of her own 'station' (only smarter and richer), had proved singularly attractive to her. As I had been greatly surprised to find among the photographs which his father had sent me one of the portrait of Miss Sacripant (otherwise Odette) by Elstir, I said to Charles Morel as I went with him to the outer gate: "I don't suppose you can tell me, but did my uncle know this lady well? I don't see at what stage in his life I can fit her in exactly; and it interests me, because of M. Swann..." "Why, if I wasn't forgetting to tell you that my father asked me specially to draw your attention to that lady's picture. As a matter of fact, she was 'lunching' with your uncle the last time you ever saw him. My father was in two minds whether to let you in. It seems you made a great impression on the wench, and she hoped to see more of you. But just at that time there was some trouble in the family, by what my father tells me, and you never set eyes on your uncle again." He broke off with a smile of farewell, across the courtyard, at Jupien's niece. She was watching him and admiring, no doubt, his thin face and regular features, his fair hair and sparkling eyes. I, as I gave him my hand, was thinking of Mme. Swann and saying to myself with amazement, so far apart, so different were they in my memory, that I should have henceforth to identify her with the 'Lady in pink.'

M. de Charlus was not long in taking his place by the side of Mme. Swann. At every social gathering at which he appeared and, contemptuous towards the men, courted by the women, promptly attached himself to the smartest of the latter, whose garments he seemed almost to put on as an ornament to his own, the Baron's frock coat or swallowtails made one think of a portrait by some great painter of a man dressed in black but having by his side, thrown over a chair, the brilliantly coloured cloak which he is about to wear at some costume ball. This partnership, generally with some royal lady, secured for M. de Charlus various privileges which he liked to enjoy. For instance, one result of it was that his hostesses, at theatricals or concerts, allowed the Baron alone to have a front seat,

in a row of ladies, while the rest of the men were crowded together at the back of the room. And then besides, completely absorbed, it seemed, in repeating, at the top of his voice, amusing stories to the enraptured lady, M. de Charlus was dispensed from the necessity of going to shake hands with any of the others, was set free, in other words, from all social duties. Behind the scented barrier in which the beauty of his choice enclosed him, he was isolated amid a crowded drawing-room, as, in a crowded theatre or concert-hall, behind the rampart of a box; and when anyone came up to greet him, through, so to speak, the beauty of his companion, it was permissible for him to reply quite curtly and without interrupting his business of conversation with a lady. Certainly Mme. Swann was scarcely of the rank of the people with whom he liked thus to flaunt himself. But he professed admiration for her, friendship for Swann, he knew that she would be flattered by his attentions and was himself flattered at being compromised by the prettiest woman in the room.

Mme. de Villeparisis meanwhile was not too well pleased to receive a visit from M. de Charlus. He, while admitting serious defects in his aunt's character, was genuinely fond of her. But every now and then, carried away by anger, by an imaginary grievance, he would sit down and write to her without making any attempt to resist his impulse, letters full of the most violent abuse, in which in made the most of trifling incidents which until then he seemed never even to have noticed. Among other examples I may instance the following, which my stay at Balbec brought to my knowledge-Mme. de Villeparisis, fearing that she had not brought enough money with her to Balbec to enable her to prolong her holiday there, and not caring since she was of a thrifty disposition and shrank from unnecessary expenditure, to have money sent to her from Paris, had borrowed three thousand francs from M. de Charlus. A month later, annoyed, for some trivial reason, with his aunt, he asked her to repay him this sum by telegraph. He received two thousand nine hundred and ninety-odd francs. Meeting his aunt a few days later in Paris, in the course of a friendly conversation, he drew her attention, with the utmost politeness, to the mistake that her banker had made when sending the money. "But there was no mistake," replied Mme. de Villeparisis, "the money order cost six francs seventy-five." "Oh, of course, if it was intentional, it is all right," said M. de Charlus, "I mentioned it only in case you didn't know, because in that case, if the bank had done the same thing with anyone who didn't know you as well as I do, it might have led to unpleasantness." "No, no, there was no mistake." "After all, you were quite right," M. de Charlus concluded easily, stooping to kiss his aunt's

hand. And in fact he bore no resentment and was only amused at this little instance of her thrift. But some time afterwards, imagining that, in a family matter, his aunt had been trying to get the better of him and had ‘worked up a regular conspiracy’ against him, as she took shelter, foolishly enough, behind the lawyers with whom he suspected her of having plotted to undo him, he had written her a letter boiling over with insolence and rage. “I shall not be satisfied with having my revenge,” he added as a postscript; “I shall take care to make you a laughing-stock. Tomorrow I shall tell everyone the story of the money order and the six francs seventy-five you kept back from me out of the three thousand I lent you; I shall disgrace you publicly.” Instead of so doing, he had gone to his aunt the next day to beg her pardon, having already regretted a letter in which he had used some really terrible language. But apart from this, to whom could he have told the story of the money order? Seeking no longer vengeance but a sincere reconciliation, now was the time for him to keep silence. But already he had repeated the story everywhere, while still on the best of terms with his aunt; he had told it without any malice, as a joke, and because he was the soul of indiscretion. He had repeated the story, but without Mme. de Villeparisis’s knowledge. With the result that, having learned from his letter that he intended to disgrace her by making public a transaction in which he had told her with his own lips that she had acted rightly, she concluded that he had been deceiving her from the first, and had lied when he pretended to be fond of her. This storm had now died down, but neither of them knew what opinion exactly the other had of her or him. This sort of intermittent quarrel is of course somewhat exceptional. Of a different order were the quarrels of Bloch and his friends. Of a different order again were those of M. de Charlus, as we shall presently see, with people wholly unlike Mme. de Villeparisis. In spite of which we must bear in mind that the opinions which we hold of one another, our relations with friends and kinsfolk, are in no sense permanent, save in appearance, but are as eternally fluid as the sea itself. Whence all the rumours of divorce between couples who have always seemed so perfectly united and will soon afterwards speak of one another with affection, hence all the terrible things said by one friend of another from whom we supposed him to be inseparable and with whom we shall find him once more reconciled before we have had time to recover from our surprise; all the ruptures of alliances, after so short a time, between nations.

“I say, my uncle and Mme. Swann are getting warm over there!” remarked Saint-Loup. “And look at Mamma in the innocence of her heart going across to

disturb them. To the pure all things are pure, I suppose!”

I studied M. de Charlus. The tuft of his grey hair, his eye, the brow of which was raised by his monocle to emit a smile, the red flowers in his buttonhole formed, so to speak, the three mobile apices of a convulsive and striking triangle. I had not ventured to bow to him, for he had given me no sign of recognition. And yet, albeit he had not turned his head in my direction, I was convinced that he had seen me; while he repeated some story to Mme. Swann, whose sumptuous, pansy-coloured cloak floated actually over the Baron’s knee, his roving eye, like that of a street hawker who is watching all the time for the ‘tecs’ to appear, had certainly explored every corner of the room and taken note of all the people who were in it. M. de Châtellerault came up to bid him good day without any indication on M. de Charlus’s face that he had seen the young Duke until he was actually standing in front of him. In this way, in fairly numerous gatherings such as this, M. de Charlus kept almost continuously on show a smile without any definite direction or particular object, which, pre-existing before the greetings of new arrivals, found itself, when these entered its zone, devoid of any indication of friendliness towards them. Nevertheless, it was obviously my duty to go across and speak to Mme. Swann. But as she was not certain whether I already knew Mme. de Marsantes and M. de Charlus, she was distinctly cold, fearing no doubt that I might ask her to introduce me to them. I then made my way to M. de Charlus, and at once regretted it, for though he could not have helped seeing me he shewed no sign whatsoever. As I stood before him and bowed I found standing out from his body, which it prevented me from approaching by the full length of his outstretched arm, a finger widowed, one would have said, of an episcopal ring, of which he appeared to be offering, for the kiss of the faithful, the consecrated site, and I was made to appear to have penetrated, without leave from the Baron and by an act of trespass for which he would hold me permanently responsible, the anonymous and vacant dispersion of his smile. This coldness was hardly of a kind to encourage Mme. Swann to melt from hers.

“How tired and worried you look,” said Mme. de Marsantes to her son who had come up to greet M. de Charlus.

And indeed the expression in Robert’s eyes seemed every minute to reach a depth from which it rose at once like a diver who has touched bottom This bottom which hurt Robert so when he touched it that he left it at once, to return to it a moment later, was the thought that he had quarrelled with his mistress.

“Never mind,” his mother went on, stroking his cheek, “never mind; it’s

good to see my little boy again."

But this show of affection seeming to irritate Robert, Mme. de Marsantes led her son away to the other end of the room where in an alcove hung with yellow silk a group of Beauvais armchairs massed their violet-hued tapestries like purple irises in a field of buttercups. Mme. Swann, finding herself alone and having realised that I was a friend of Saint-Loup, beckoned to me to come and sit beside her. Not having seen her for so long I did not know what to talk to her about. I was keeping an eye on my hat, among the crowd of hats that littered the carpet, and I asked myself with a vague curiosity to whom one of them could belong which was not that of the Duc de Guermantes and yet in the lining of which a capital 'G' was surmounted by a ducal coronet. I knew who everyone in the room was, and could not think of anyone whose hat this could possibly be.

"What a pleasant man M. de Norpois is," I said to Mme. Swann, looking at the Ambassador. "It is true, Robert de Saint-Loup says he's a pest, but..."

"He is quite right," she replied.

Seeing from her face that she was thinking of something which she was keeping from me, I plied her with questions. For the satisfaction of appearing to be greatly taken up by some one in this room where she knew hardly anyone, she took me into a corner.

"I am sure this is what M. de Saint-Loup meant," she began, "but you must never tell him I said so, for he would think me indiscreet, and I value his esteem very highly; I am an 'honest Injun,' don't you know. The other day, Charlus was dining at the Princesse de Guermantes's; I don't know how it was, but your name was mentioned. M. de Norpois seems to have told them — it's all too silly for words, don't go and worry yourself to death over it, nobody paid any attention, they all knew only too well the mischievous tongue that said it — that you were a hypocritical little flatterer."

I have recorded a long way back my stupefaction at the discovery that a friend of my father, such as M. de Norpois was, could have expressed himself thus in speaking of me. I was even more astonished to learn that my emotion on that evening long ago when I had asked him about Mme. Swann and Gilberte was known to the Princesse de Guermantes, whom I imagined never to have heard of my existence. Each of our actions, our words, our attitudes is cut off from the 'world,' from the people who have not directly perceived it, by a medium the permeability of which is of infinite variation and remains unknown to ourselves; having learned by experience that some important utterance which we eagerly hoped would be disseminated (such as those so enthusiastic speeches

which I used at one time to make to all comers and on every occasion on the subject of Mme. Swann) has found itself, often simply on account of our anxiety, immediately hidden under a bushel, how immeasurably less do we suppose that some tiny word, which we ourselves have forgotten, or else a word never ottered by us but formed on its course by the imperfect refraction of a different word, can be transported without ever halting for any obstacle to infinite distances — in the present instance to the Princesse de Guermantes — and succeed in diverting at our expense the banquet of the gods. What we actually recall of our conduct remains unknown to our nearest neighbour; what we have forgotten that we ever said, or indeed what we never did say, flies to provoke hilarity even in another planet, and the image that other people form of our actions and behaviour is no more like that which we form of them ourselves, than is like an original drawing a spoiled copy in which, at one point, for a black line, we find an empty gap, and for a blank space an unaccountable contour. It may be, all the same, that what has not been transcribed is some non-existent feature which we behold merely in our purblind self-esteem, and that what seems to us added is indeed a part of ourselves, but so essential a part as to have escaped our notice. So that this strange print which seems to us to have so little resemblance to ourselves bears sometimes the same stamp of truth, scarcely flattering, indeed, but profound and useful, as a photograph taken by X-rays. Not that that is any reason why we should recognise ourselves in it. A man who is in the habit of smiling in the glass at his handsome face and stalwart figure, if you shew him their radiograph, will have, face to face with that rosary of bones, labelled as being the image of himself, the same suspicion of error as the visitor to an art gallery who, on coming to the portrait of a girl, reads in his catalogue: “Dromedary resting.” Later on, this discrepancy between our portraits, according as it was our own hand that drew them or another, I was to register in the case of others than myself, living placidly in the midst of a collection of photographs which they themselves had taken while round about them grinned frightful faces, invisible to them as a rule, but plunging them in stupor if an accident were to reveal them with the warning: “This is you.”

A few years earlier I should have been only too glad to tell Mme. Swann in what connexion I had fawned upon M. de Norpois, since the connexion had been my desire to know her. But I no longer felt this desire, I was no longer in love with Gilberte. On the other hand I had not succeeded in identifying Mme. Swann with the lady in pink of my childhood. Accordingly I spoke of the woman who was on my mind at the moment.

“Did you see the Duchesse de Guermantes just now?” I asked Mme. Swann.

But since the Duchess did not bow to Mme. Swann when they met, the latter chose to appear to regard her as a person of no importance, whose presence in a room one did not even remark.

“I don’t know; I didn’t *realise* her,” she replied sourly, using an expression borrowed from England.

I was anxious nevertheless for information with regard not only to Mme. de Guermantes but to all the people who came in contact with her, and (for all the world like Bloch), with the tactlessness of people who seek in their conversation not to give pleasure to others but to elucidate, from sheer egoism, facts that are interesting to themselves, in my effort to form an exact idea of the life of Mme. de Guermantes I questioned Mme de Villeparisis about Mme. Leroi.

“Oh, yes, I know who’ you mean,” she replied with an affectation of contempt, “the daughter of those rich timber people. I’ve heard that she’s begun to go about quite a lot lately, but I must explain to you that I am rather old now to make new acquaintances. I have known such interesting such delightful people in my time that really I do not believe Mme. Lerol would be any addition to what I already have.” Mme. de Marsantes, who was playing lady in waiting to the Marquise, presented me to the Prince and, while she was still doing so, M. de Norpois also presented me in the most glowing terms. Perhaps he found it convenient to do me a courtesy which could in no way damage his credit since I had just been presented, perhaps it was because he thought that a foreigner, even so distinguished a foreigner, was unfamiliar with French society and might think that he was having introduced to him a young man of fashion, perhaps to exercise one of his prerogatives, that of adding the weight of his personal recommendation as an Ambassador, or in his taste for the archaic to revive in the Prince’s honour the old custom, flattering to his rank, that two sponsors were necessary if one wished to be presented.

Mme. de Villeparisis appealed to M. de Norpois, feeling it imperative that I should have his assurance that she had nothing to regret in not knowing Mme. Leroi.

“Am I not right, M. l’Ambassadeur, Mme. Leroi is quite uninteresting, isn’t she, quite out of keeping with the people who come here; I was quite right not to make friends with her, wasn’t I?”

Whether from independence or because he was tired, M. de Norpois replied merely in a bow full of respect but devoid of meaning.

“Sir,” went on Mme. de Villeparisis with a laugh, “there are some absurd

people in the world. Would you believe that I had a visit this afternoon from a gentleman who tried to persuade me that he found more pleasure in kissing my hand than a young woman's?"

I guessed at once that this was Legrandin. M. de Norpois smiled with a slight quiver of the eyelid, as though such a remark had been prompted by a concupiscence so natural that one could not find fault with the person who had uttered it, almost as though it were the beginning of a romance which he was prepared to forgive, if not to encourage, with the perverse indulgence of a Voisenon or the younger Crébillon.

"Many young women's hands would be incapable of doing what I see there," said the Prince, pointing to Mme. de Villeparisis's unfinished water-colours. And he asked her whether she had seen the flower paintings by Fantin-Latour which had recently been exhibited.

"They are of the first order, and indicate, as people say nowadays, a fine painter, one of the masters of the palette," declared M. de Norpois; "I consider, all the same, that they stand no comparison with these, in which I find it easier to recognise the colouring of the flower."

Even supposing that the partiality of an old lover, the habit of flattering people, the critical standard admissible in a small circle, had dictated this speech to the ex-Ambassador, it proved upon what an absolute vacuum of true taste the judgment of people in society is based, so arbitrary that the smallest trifle can make it rush to the wildest absurdities, on the way to which it is stopped, held up by no genuinely felt impression.

"I claim no credit for knowing about flowers, I've lived all my life among the fields," replied Mme. de Villeparisis modestly. "But," she added graciously, turning to the Prince, "if I did, when I was quite a girl, form a rather more serious idea of them than children generally do in the country, I owe that to a distinguished fellow-countryman of yours, Herr von Schlegel. I met him at Broglie, when I was staying there once with my aunt Cordelia (Marshal de Castellane's wife, don't you know?). I remember so well M. Lebrun, M. de Salvandy, M. Doudan, getting him to talk about flowers. I was only a little girl, I wasn't able to follow all he said. But he liked playing with me, and when he went back to your country he sent me a beautiful botany book to remind me of a drive we took together in a phaeton to the Val Richer, when I fell asleep on his knee. I have got the book still, and it taught me to observe many things about flowers which I should not have noticed otherwise. When Mme. de Barante published some of Mme. de Broglie's letters, charming and affected like herself,

I hoped to find among them some record of those conversations with Herr von Schlegel. But she was a woman who looked for nothing from nature but arguments in support of religion."

Robert called me away to the far end of the room where he and his mother were.

"You have been good to me," I said, "how can I thank you? Can we dine together to-morrow?"

"To-morrow? Yes, if you like, but it will have to be with Bloch. I met him just now on the doorstep; he was rather stiff with me at first because I had quite forgotten to answer his last two letters. (At least, he didn't tell me that that was what had annoyed him, but I guessed it.) But after that he was so friendly to me that I simply can't disappoint him. Between ourselves, on his side at least, I can feel it's a life and death friendship." Nor do I consider that Robert was altogether mistaken. Furious detraction was often, with Bloch, the effect of a keen affection which he had supposed to be unreturned. And as he had little power of imagining the lives of other people, and never dreamed that one might have been ill, or away from home, or otherwise occupied, a week's silence was at once interpreted by him as meaning a deliberate coldness. And so I have never believed that his most violent outbursts as a friend, or in later years as a writer, went very deep. They rose to a paroxysm if one replied to them with an icy dignity, or by a platitude which encouraged him to redouble his onslaught, but yielded often to a warmly sympathetic attitude. "As for being good," went on Saint-Loup, "you say I have been to you, but I haven't been good at all, my aunt tells me that it's you who avoid her, that you never said a word to her. She wondered whether you had anything against her."

Fortunately for myself, if I had been taken in by this speech, our departure, which I believed to be imminent, for Balbec would have prevented my making any attempt to see Mme. Guermantes again, to assure her that I had nothing against her, and so to put her under the necessity of proving that it was she who had something against me. But I had only to remind myself that she had not even offered to let me see her Elstirs. Besides, this was not a disappointment; I had never expected her to begin talking to me about them; I knew that I did not appeal to her, that I need have no hope of ever making her like me; the most that I had been able to look forward to was that, thanks to her kindness, I might there and then receive, since I should not be seeing her again before I left Paris, an entirely pleasing impression, which I could take with me to Balbec indefinitely prolonged, intact, instead of a memory broken by anxiety and sorrow.

Mme. de Marsantes kept on interrupting her conversation with Robert to tell me how often he had spoken to her about me, how fond he was of me; she treated me with a deference which almost hurt me because I felt it to be prompted by her fear of being embroiled, on my account, with this son whom she had not seen all day, with whom she was eager to be alone, and over whom she must accordingly have supposed that the influence which she wielded was not equal to and must conciliate mine. Having heard me, earlier in the afternoon, make some reference to Bloch's uncle, M. Nissim Bernard, Mme. de Marsantes inquired whether it was he who had at one time lived at Nice.

"In that case, he knew M. de Marsantes there before our marriage," she told me. "My husband used often to speak of him as an excellent man, with such a delicate, generous nature."

"To think that for once in his life he wasn't lying! It's incredible," would have been Bloch's comment.

All this time I should have liked to explain to Mme. de Marsantes that Robert felt infinitely more affection for her than for myself, and that had she shewn any hostility towards me it was not in my nature to attempt to set him against her, to detach him from her. But now that Mme. de Guermantes had left the room, I had more leisure to observe Robert, and I noticed then for the first time that, once again, a sort of flood of anger seemed to be coursing through him, rising to the surface of his stern and sombre features. I was afraid lest, remembering the scene in the theatre that afternoon, he might be feeling humiliated in my presence at having allowed himself to be treated so harshly by his mistress without making any rejoinder.

Suddenly he broke away from his mother, who had put her arm round his neck, and, coming towards me, led me behind the little flower-strewn counter at which Mme. de Villeparisis had resumed her seat, making a sign to me to follow him into the smaller room. I was hurrying after him when M. de Charlus, who must have supposed that I was leaving the house, turned abruptly from Prince von Faffenheim, to whom he had been talking, and made a rapid circuit which brought him face to face with me. I saw with alarm that he had taken the hat in the lining of which were a capital 'G' and a ducal coronet. In the doorway into the little room he said, without looking at me:

"As I see that you have taken to going into society, you must do me the pleasure of coming to see me. But it's a little complicated," he went on with a distracted, calculating air, as if the pleasure had been one that he was afraid of not securing again once he had let slip the opportunity of arranging with me the

means by which it might be realised. “I am very seldom at home; you will have to write to me. But I should prefer to explain things to you more quietly. I am just going. Will you walk a short way with me? I shall only keep you a moment.”

“You’d better take care, sir,” I warned him; “you have picked up the wrong hat by mistake.”

“Do you want to stop me taking my own hat?” I assumed, a similar mishap having recently occurred to myself, that someone else having taken his hat he had seized upon one at random, so as not to go home bare-headed, and that I had placed him in a difficulty by exposing his stratagem. I told him that I must say a few words to Saint-Loup. “He is still talking to that idiot the Duc de Guermantes,” I added. “That really is charming; I shall tell my brother.” “Oh! you think that would interest M. de Charlus?” (I imagined that, if he had a brother, that brother must be called Charlus also. Saint-Loup had indeed explained his family tree to me at Balbec, but I had forgotten the details.) “Who has been talking to you about M. de Charlus?” replied the Baron in an arrogant tone. “Go to Robert.”

“I hear,” he went on, “that you took part this morning in one of those orgies that he has with a woman who is disgracing him. You would do well to use your influence with him to make him realise the pain he is causing his poor mother, and all of us, by dragging our name in the dirt.”

I should have liked to reply that at this degrading luncheon the conversation had been entirely about Emerson, Ibsen and Tolstoy, and that the young woman had lectured Robert to make him drink nothing but water. In the hope of bringing some balm to Robert, whose pride had, I felt, been wounded, I sought to find an excuse for his mistress. I did not know that at that moment, in spite of his anger with her, it was on himself that he was heaping reproaches. But it always happens, even in quarrels between a good man and a worthless woman, and when the right is all on one side, that some trifle crops up which enables the woman to appear not to have been in the wrong on one point. And as she ignores all the other points, the moment the man begins to feel the need of her company, or is demoralised by separation from her, his weakness will make his conscience more exacting, he will remember the absurd reproaches that have been flung at him and will ask himself whether they have not some foundation in fact.

“I’ve come to the conclusion I was wrong about that matter of the necklace,” Robert said to me. “Of course, I never meant for a moment to do anything wrong, but, I know very well, other people don’t look at things in the same way as oneself. She had a very hard time when she was young. In her eyes,

I was bound to appear just the rich man who thinks he can get anything he wants with his money, and with whom a poor person cannot compete, whether in trying to influence Boucheron or in a lawsuit. Of course she has been horribly cruel to me, when I have never thought of anything but her good. But I do see clearly, she believes that I wanted to make her feel that one could keep a hold on her with money, and that's not true. And she's so fond of me; what must she be thinking of me? Poor darling, if you only knew, she has such charming ways, I simply can't tell you, she has often done the most adorable things for me. How wretched she must be feeling now! In any case, whatever happens in the long run, I don't want to let her think me a cad; I shall dash off to Boucheron's and get the necklace. You never know; very likely when she sees me with it, she will admit that she's been in the wrong. Don't you see, it's the idea that she is suffering at this moment that I can't bear. What one suffers oneself one knows; that's nothing. But with her — to say to oneself that she's suffering and not to be able to form any idea of what she feels — I think I shall go mad in a minute — I'd much rather never see her again than let her suffer. She can be happy without me, if she must; that's all I ask. Listen; you know, to me everything that concerns her is enormously important, it becomes something cosmic; I shall run to the jeweller's and then go and ask her to forgive me. But until I get down there what will she be thinking of me? If she could only know that I was on my way! What about your going down there and telling her? For all we know, that might settle the whole business. Perhaps," he went on with a smile, as though he hardly ventured to believe in so idyllic a possibility, "we can all three dine together in the country. But we can't tell yet. I never know how to handle her. Poor child. I shall perhaps only hurt her more than ever. Besides, her decision may be irrevocable."

Robert swept me back to his mother.

"Good-bye," he said to her. "I've got to go now. I don't know when I shall get leave again. Probably not for a month. I shall write as soon as I know myself."

Certainly Robert was not in the least of the type of son who, when he goes out with his mother, feels that an attitude of exasperation towards her ought to balance the smiles and bows which he bestows on strangers. Nothing is more common than this odious form of vengeance on the part of those who appear to believe that rudeness to one's own family is the natural complement to one's ceremonial behaviour. Whatever the wretched mother may say, her son, as though he had been taken to the house against his will and wished to make her

pay dearly for his presence, refutes immediately, with an ironical, precise, cruel contradiction, the timidly ventured assertion; the mother at once conforms, though without thereby disarming him, to the opinion of this superior being of whom she will continue to boast to everyone, when he is not present, as having a charming nature, and who all the same spares her none of his keenest thrusts. Saint-Loup was not at all like this; but the anguish which Rachel's absence provoked in him brought it about that, for different reasons, he was no less harsh with his mother than the sons I have been describing are with theirs. And as she listened to him I saw the same throb, like that of a mighty wing, which Mme. de Marsantes had been unable to repress when her son first entered the room, convulse her whole body once again; but this time it was an anxious face, eyes wide with grief that she fastened on him.

"What, Robert, you're going away? Seriously? My little son! The one day I've seen anything of you!"

And then quite softly, in the most natural tone, in a voice from which she strove to banish all sadness so as not to inspire her son with a pity which would perhaps have been painful to him, or else useless and might serve only to irritate him, like an argument prompted by plain common sense she added:

"You know, it's not at all nice of you."

But to this simplicity she added so much timidity, to shew him that she was not trespassing on his freedom, so much affection, so that he should not reproach her with spoiling his pleasures, that Saint-Loup could not fail to observe in himself as it were the possibility of a similar wave of affection, that was to say an obstacle to his spending the evening with his lady. And so he grew angry.

"It's unfortunate, but, nice or not, that's how it is."

And he heaped on his mother the reproaches which no doubt he felt that he himself perhaps deserved; thus it is that egoists have always the last word; having laid down at the start that their determination is unshakeable, the more the sentiment in them to which one appeals to make them abandon it is touched, the more fault they find, not with themselves who resist the appeal but with those persons who put them under the necessity of resisting it, with the result that their own firmness may be carried to the utmost degree of cruelty, which only aggravates all the more in their eyes the culpability of the person who is so indelicate as to be hurt, to be in the right, and to cause them thus treacherously the pain of acting against their natural instinct of pity. But of her own accord Mme. de Marsantes ceased to insist, for she felt that she would not be able to keep him.

“I shall leave you here,” he said to me, “but you’re not to keep him long, Mamma, because he’s got to go somewhere else in a minute.”

I was fully aware that my company could not afford any pleasure to Mme. de Marsantes, but I preferred, by not going with Robert, not to let her suppose that I was involved in these pleasures which deprived her of him. I should have liked to find some excuse for her son’s conduct, less from affection for him than from pity tor her. But it was she who spoke first.

“Poor boy,” she began, “I am sure I must have hurt him dreadfully. You see, Sir, mothers are such selfish creatures, after all he hasn’t many pleasures, he comes so little to Paris. Oh, dear, if he hadn’t gone already I should have liked to stop him, not to keep him of course, but just to tell him that I’m not vexed with him, that I think he was quite right. Will you excuse me if I go and look over the staircase?”

I accompanied her there.

“Robert! Robert!” she called. “No; he’s gone; we are too late.”

At that moment I would as gladly have undertaken a mission to make Robert break with his mistress as, a few hours earlier, to make him go and live with her altogether. In one case Saint-Loup would have regarded me as a false friend, in the other his family would have called me his evil genius. Yet I was the same man, at an interval of a few hours.

We returned to the drawing-room. Seeing that Saint-Loup was not with us, Mme. de Villeparisis exchanged with M. de Norpois that dubious, derisive and not too pitying glance with which people point out to one another an over-jealous wife or an over-loving mother (spectacles which to outsiders are amusing), as much as to say: “There now, there’s been trouble.”

Robert went to his mistress, taking with him the splendid ornament which, after what had been said on both sides, he ought not to have given her. But it came to the same thing, for she would not look at it, and even after their reconciliation he could never persuade her to accept it. Certain of Robert’s friends thought that these proofs of disinterestedness which she furnished were deliberately planned to draw him closer to her. And yet she was not greedy about money, except perhaps to be able to spend it without thought. I have seen her bestow recklessly on people whom she believed to be in need the most insensate charity. “At this moment,” Robert’s friends would say to him, seeking to balance by their malicious words a disinterested action on Rachel’s part, “at this moment she will be in the promenade at the Folies-Bergères. She’s an enigma, that girl is, a regular sphinx.” After all, how many women who are not disinterested, since

they are kept by men, have we not seen, with a delicacy that flowers from their sordid existence, set with their own hands a thousand little limits to the generosity of their lovers?

Robert knew of scarcely any of the infidelities of his mistress, and tortured his mind over what were mere nothings compared with the real life of Rachel, a life which began every day only after he had left her. He knew of scarcely any of these infidelities. One could have told him of them without shaking his confidence in Rachel. For it is a charming law of nature which manifests itself in the heart of the most complex social organisms, that we live in perfect ignorance of those we love. On one side of the mirror the lover says to himself: “She is an angel, she will never yield herself to me, I may as well die — and yet she does care for me; she cares so much that perhaps — but no, it can never possibly happen.” And in the exaltation of his desire, in the anguish of waiting, what jewels he flings at the feet of this woman, how he runs to borrow money to save her from inconvenience; meanwhile, on the other side of the screen, through which their conversation will no more carry than that which visitors exchange outside the glass wall of an aquarium, the public are saying: “You don’t know her? I congratulate you, she has robbed, in fact ruined I don’t know how many men. There isn’t a worse girl in Paris. She’s a common swindler. And cunning isn’t the word!” And perhaps the public are not entirely wrong in their use of the last epithet, for indeed the sceptical man who is not really in love with the woman and whom she merely attracts says to his friends: “No, no, my dear fellow, she is not in the least a prostitute; I don’t say she hasn’t had an adventure or two in her time, but she’s not a woman one pays, she’d be a damned sight too expensive if she was. With her it’s fifty thousand francs or nothing.” Well, he has spent fifty thousand francs on her, he has had her once, but she (finding, moreover, a willing accomplice in the man himself) has managed to persuade him that he is one of those who have had her for nothing. Such is society, in which every one of us has two aspects, in which the most obvious, the most notorious faults will never be known by a certain other person save embedded in, under the protection of a shell, a smooth cocoon, a delicious curiosity of nature. There were in Paris two thoroughly respectable men to whom Saint-Loup no longer bowed, and could not refer without a tremor in his voice, calling them exploiters of women: this was because they had both been ruined by Rachel.

“I blame myself for one thing only,” Mme. de Marsantes murmured in my ear, “and that was my telling him that he wasn’t nice to me. He, such an adorable, unique son, there’s no one else like him in the world, the only time I

see him, to have told him he wasn't nice to me, I would far rather he'd beaten me, because I am sure that whatever pleasure he may be having this evening, and he hasn't many, will be spoiled for him by that unfair word. But, Sir, I mustn't keep you, since you're in a hurry."

Anxiously, Mme. de Marsantes bade me good-bye. These sentiments bore upon Robert; she was sincere. But she ceased to be, to become a great lady once more.

"I have been so *interested*, so *glad* to have this little talk with you. Thank you! Thank you!"

And with a humble air she fastened on me a look of gratitude, of exhilaration, as though my conversation were one of the keenest pleasures that she had experienced in her life. These charming glances went very well with the black flowers on her white skirt; they were those of a great lady who knew her business.

"But I am in no hurry," I replied; "besides, I must wait for M. de Charlus; I am going with him."

Mme. de Villeparisis overheard these last words. They appeared to vex her. Had the matter in question not been one which could not possibly give rise to such a sentiment, it might have struck me that what seemed to be at that moment alarmed in Mme. de Villeparisis was her modesty. But this hypothesis never even entered my mind. I was delighted with Mme. de Guermantes, with Saint-Loup, with Mme. de Marsantes, with M. de Charlus, with Mme. de Villeparisis; I did not stop to reflect, and I spoke light-heartedly and at random.

"You're going from here with my nephew Palamède?" she asked me.

Thinking that it might produce a highly favourable impression on Mme. de Villeparisis if she learned that I was on intimate terms with a nephew whom she esteemed so greatly, "He has asked me to go home with him," I answered blithely. "I am so glad. Besides, we are greater friends than you think, and I've quite made up my mind that we're going to be better friends still."

From being vexed, Mme. de Villeparisis seemed to have grown anxious. "Don't wait for him," she said to me, with a preoccupied air. "He is talking to M. de Faffenheim. He's certain to have forgotten what he said to you. You'd much better go, now, quickly, while his back is turned."

The first emotion shewn by Mme. de Villeparisis would have suggested, but for the circumstances, offended modesty. Her insistence, her opposition might well, if one had studied her face alone, have appeared to be dictated by virtue. I was not, myself, in any hurry to join Robert and his mistress. But Mme. de

Villeparisis seemed to make such a point of my going that, thinking perhaps that she had some important business to discuss with her nephew, I bade her good-bye. Next to her M. de Guermantes, superb and Olympian, was ponderously seated. One would have said that the notion omnipresent in all his members, of his vast riches gave him a particular high density, as though they had been melted in a crucible into a single human ingot to form this man whose value was so immense. At the moment of my saying good-bye to him he rose politely from his seat, and I could feel the dead weight of thirty millions which his old-fashioned French breeding set in motion, raised, until it stood before me. I seemed to be looking at that statue of Olympian Zeus which Phidias is said to have cast in solid gold. Such was the power that good breeding had over M. de Guermantes over the body of M. de Guermantes at least, for it had not an equal mastery over the ducal mind. M. de Guermantes laughed at his own jokes, but did not unbend to other people's.

As I went downstairs I heard behind me a voice calling out to me:

"So this is how you wait for me, is it?"

It was M. de Charlus.

"You don't mind if we go a little way on foot?" he asked dryly, when we were in the courtyard. "We can walk until I find a cab that suits me."

"You wished to speak to me about something, Sir?"

"Oh yes, as a matter of fact there were some things I wished to say to you, but I am not so sure now whether I shall. As far as you are concerned, I am sure that they might be the starting-point which would lead you to inestimable benefits. But I can see also that they would bring into my existence, at an age when one begins to value tranquillity, a great loss of time, great inconvenience. I ask myself whether you are worth all the pains that I should have to take with you, and I have not the pleasure of knowing you well enough to be able to say. Perhaps also to you yourself what I could do for you does not appear sufficiently attractive for me to give, myself so much trouble, for I repeat quite frankly that for me it can only be trouble."

I protested that, in that case, he must not dream of it. This summary end to the discussion did not seem to be to his liking.

"That sort of politeness means nothing," he rebuked me coldly. "There is nothing so pleasant as to give oneself trouble for a person who is worth one's while. For the best of us, the study of the arts, a taste for old things, collections, gardens are all mere *ersatz*, *succedanea*, alibis. In the heart of our tub, like Diogenes, we cry out for a man. We cultivate begonias, we trim yews, as a last

resort, because yews and begonias submit to treatment. But we should like to give our time to a plant of human growth, if we were sure that he was worth the trouble. That is the whole question: you must know something about yourself. Are you worth my trouble or not?"

"I would not for anything in the world, Sir, be a cause of anxiety to you," I said to him, "but so far as I am concerned you may be sure that everything which comes to me from you will be a very great pleasure to me. I am deeply touched that you should be so kind as to take notice of me in this way and try to help me."

Greatly to my surprise, it was almost with effusion that he thanked me for this speech, slipping his arm through mine with that intermittent familiarity which had already struck me at Balbec, and was in such contrast to the coldness of his tone.

"With the want of consideration common at your age," he told me, "you are liable to say things at times which would open an unbridgeable gulf between us. What you have said just now, on the other hand, is exactly the sort of thing that touches me, and makes me want to do a great deal for you."

As he walked arm in arm with me and uttered these words, which, albeit tinged with contempt, were so affectionate, M. de Charlus now fastened his gaze on me with that intense fixity which had struck me the first morning, when I saw him outside the casino at Balbec, and indeed many years before that, through the pink hawthorns, standing beside Mme. Swann, whom I supposed then to be his mistress, in the park at Tansonville; now let it stray around him and examine the cabs which at this time of the day were passing in considerable numbers on the way to their stables, looking so determinedly at them that several stopped, the drivers supposing that he wished to engage them. But M. de Charlus immediately dismissed them.

"They're not what I want," he explained to me, "it's all a question of the colour of their lamps, and the direction they're going in. I hope, Sir," he went on, "that you will not in any way misinterpret the purely disinterested and charitable nature of the proposal which I am going to make to you."

I was struck by the similarity of his diction to Swann's, closer now than at Balbec.

"You have enough intelligence, I suppose, not to imagine that it is from want of society, from any fear of solitude and boredom that I have recourse to you. I do not, as a rule, care to talk about myself, but you may possibly have heard — it was alluded to in a leading article in *The Times*, which made a

considerable impression — that the Emperor of Austria, who has always honoured me with his friendship, and is good enough to insist on keeping up terms of cousinship with me, declared the other day in an interview which was made public that if the Comte de Chambord had had by his side a man as thoroughly conversant with the undercurrents of European politics as myself he would be King of France to-day. I have often thought, Sir, that there was in me, thanks not to my own humble talents but to circumstances which you may one day have occasion to learn, a sort of secret record of incalculable value, of which I have not felt myself at liberty to make use, personally, but which would be a priceless acquisition to a young man to whom I would hand over in a few months what it has taken me more than thirty years to collect, what I am perhaps alone in possessing. I do not speak of the intellectual enjoyment which you would find in learning certain secrets which a Michelet of our day would give years of his life to know, and in the light of which certain events would assume for him an entirely different aspect. And I do not speak only of events that have already occurred, but of the chain of circumstances." (This was a favourite expression with M. de Charlus, and often, when he used it, he joined his hands as if in prayer, but with his fingers stiffened, as though to illustrate by their complexity the said circumstances, which he did not specify, and the chain that linked them.) "I could give you an explanation that no one has dreamed of, not only of the past but of the future." M. de Charlus broke off to question me about Bloch, whom he had heard discussed, though without appearing to be listening, in his aunt's drawing-room. And with that ironical accent he so skilfully detached what he was saying that he seemed to be thinking of something else altogether and to be speaking mechanically, simply out of politeness. He asked if my friend was young, good looking and so forth. Bloch, if he had heard him would have been more puzzled even than with M. de Norpois, but for very different reasons, to know whether M. de Charlus was for or against Drey, fus. "It is not a bad idea, if you wish to learn about life," went on M. de Charlus when he had finished questioning me, "to include among your friends an occasional foreigner." I replied that Bloch was French. "Indeed," said M. de Charlus, "I took him to be a Jew." His assertion of this incompatibility made me suppose that M. de Charlus was more anti-Dreyfusard than anyone I had met. He protested, however, against the charge of treason levelled against Dreyfus. But his protest took this form: "I understand the newspapers to say that Dreyfus has committed a crime against his country — so I understand, I pay no attention to the newspapers, I read them as I wash my hands, without finding that it is worth

my while to take any interest in what I am doing. In any case, the crime is non-existent, your friend's compatriot would have committed a crime if he had betrayed Judaea, but what has he to do with France?" I pointed out that if there should be a war the Jews would be mobilised just as much as anyone else. "Perhaps so, and I am not sure that it would not be an imprudence. If we bring over Senegalese and Malagasies, I hardly suppose that their hearts will be in the task of defending France, which is only natural. Your Dreyfus might rather be convicted of a breach of the laws of hospitality. But we need not discuss that. Perhaps you could ask your friend to allow me to be present at some great festival in the Temple, at a circumcision, with Jewish chants. He might perhaps take a hall, and give me some biblical entertainment, as the young ladies of Saint-Cyr performed scenes taken from the Psalms by Racine, to amuse Louis XIV. You might even arrange parties to give us a good laugh. For instance a battle between your friend and his father, in which he would smite him as David smote Goliath. That would make quite an amusing farce. He might even, while he was about it, deal some stout blows at his hag (or, as my old nurse would say, his 'haggart') of a mother. That would be an excellent show, and would not be unpleasing to us, eh, my young friend, since we like exotic spectacles, and to thrash that non-European creature would be giving a well-earned punishment to an old camel." As he poured out this terrible, almost insane language, M. de Charlus squeezed my arm until it ached. I reminded myself of all that his family had told me of his wonderful kindness to this old nurse, whose Molièresque vocabulary he had just quoted, and thought to myself that the connexions, hitherto, I felt, little studied, between goodness and wickedness in the same heart, various as they might be, would be an interesting subject for research.

I warned him that, anyhow, Mme. Bloch no longer existed, while as for M. Bloch, I questioned to what extent he would enjoy a sport which might easily result in his being blinded. M. de Charlus seemed annoyed. "That," he said, "is a woman who made a great mistake in dying. As for blinding him, surely the Synagogue is blind, it does not perceive the truth of the Gospel. In any case, think, at this moment, when all these unhappy Jews are trembling before the stupid fury of the Christians, what an honour it would be for him to see a man like myself condescend to be amused by their sports." At this point I caught sight of M. Bloch senior, who was coming towards us, probably on his way to meet his son. He did not see us but I offered to introduce him to M. de Charlus. I had no conception of the torrent of rage which my words were to let loose. "Introduce him to me! But you must have singularly little idea of social values!

People do not get to know me as easily as that. In the present instance, the awkwardness would be twofold, on account of the youth of the introducer and the unworthiness of the person introduced. At the most, if I am ever permitted to enjoy the Asiatic spectacle which I suggested to you, I might address to the horrible creature a few words indicative of generous feeling. But on condition that he allows himself to be thoroughly thrashed by his son, I might go so far as to express my satisfaction." As it happened, M. Bloch paid no attention to us. He was occupied in greeting Mme. Sazerat with a series of sweeping bows, which were very favourably received. I was surprised at this, for in the old days at Combray she had been indignant at my parents for having young Bloch in the house, so anti-semitic was she then. But Dreyfusism, like a strong gust of wind, had, a few days before this, wafted M. Bloch to her feet. My father's friend had found Mme. Sazerat charming and was particularly gratified by the anti-semitism of the lady, which he regarded as a proof of the sincerity of her faith and the soundness of her Dreyfusard opinions, and also as enhancing the value of the call which she had authorised him to pay her. He had not even been offended when she had said to him stolidly: "M. Drumont has the impudence to put the Revisionists in the same bag as the Protestants and the Jews. A delightful promiscuity!" "Bernard," he had said with pride, on reaching home, to M. Nissim Bernard, "you know, she has that prejudice!" But M. Nissim Bernard had said nothing, only raising his eyes to heaven in an angelic gaze. Saddened by the misfortunes of the Jews, remembering his old friendships with Christians, grown mannered and precious with increasing years, for reasons which the reader will learn in due course, he had now the air of a pre-Raphaelite ghost on to which hair had been incongruously grafted, like threads in the heart of an opal. "All this Dreyfus business," went on the Baron, still clasping me by the arm, "has only one drawback. It destroys society (I do not say polite society; society has long ceased to deserve that laudatory epithet) by the influx of Mr. and Mrs. Camels and Camelfies and Camelyards, astonishing creatures whom I find even in the houses of my own cousins, because they belong to the Patrie Française, or the Anti-Jewish, or some such league, as if a political opinion entitled one to any social qualification." This frivolity in M. de Charlus brought out his family likeness to the Duchesse de Guermantes.

I remarked to him on the resemblance. As he appeared to think that I did not know her, I reminded him of the evening at the Opera when he had seemed to be trying to avoid me. He assured me with such insistence that he had never even seen me there that I should have begun to believe him, if presently a trifling

incident had not led me to think that M. de Charlus, in his excessive pride perhaps, did not care to be seen with me.

"Let us return to yourself," he said, "and my plans for you. There exists among certain men, Sir, a freemasonry of which I cannot now say more than that it numbers in its ranks four of the reigning sovereigns of Europe Now, the courtiers of one of these are trying to cure him of his fancy. That is a very serious matter, and may bring us to war. Yes, Sir, that is a fact You remember the story of the man who believed that he had the Princess of China shut up in a bottle. It was a form of insanity. He was cured of it, But as soon as he ceased to be mad he became merely stupid. There are maladies which we must not seek to cure because they alone protect us from others that are more serious. A cousin of mine had trouble with his stomach; he could not digest anything. The most learned specialists on the stomach treated him, with no effect. I took him to a certain doctor (another highly interesting man, by the way, of whom I could tell you a great deal). He guessed at once that the trouble was nervousness; he persuaded his patient, ordered him to eat whatever he liked quite boldly and assured him that his digestion would stand it. But my cousin had nephritis also. What the stomach can digest perfectly well the kidneys cease, after a time, to eliminate, and my cousin, instead of living to a good old age with an imaginary disease of the stomach which obliged him to keep to a diet, died at forty with his stomach cured but his kidneys ruined. Given a very considerable advantage over people of your age, for all one knows, you will perhaps become what some eminent man of the past might have been if a good angel had revealed to him, in the midst of a humanity that knew nothing of them, the secrets of steam and electricity. Do not be foolish, do not refuse from discretion. Understand that, if I do you a great service, I expect my reward from you to be no less great. It is many years now since people in society ceased to interest me. I have but one passion left, to seek to redeem the mistakes of my life by conferring the benefit of my knowledge on a soul that is still virgin and capable of being inflamed by virtue. I have had great sorrows, Sir, of which I may tell you perhaps some day; I have lost my wife, who was the loveliest, the noblest, the most perfect creature that one could dream of seeing. I have young relatives who are not — I do not say worthy, but who are not capable of accepting the moral heritage of which I have been speaking. For all I know, you may be he into whose hands it is to pass, he whose life I shall be able to direct and to raise to so lofty a plane. My own would gain in return. Perhaps in teaching you the great secrets of diplomacy I might recover a taste for them myself, and begin at last to do things of real

interest in which you would have an equal share. But before I can tell I must see you often, very often, every day."

I was thinking of taking advantage of this unexpected kindness on M. de Charlus's part to ask him whether he could not arrange for me to meet his sister-in-law when, suddenly, I felt my arm violently jerked, as though by an electric shock. It was M. de Charlus who had hurriedly withdrawn his arm from mine. Although as he talked he had allowed his eyes to wander in all directions he had only just caught sight of M. d'Argencourt, who was coming towards us from a side street. On seeing us, M. d'Argencourt appeared worried, cast at me a look of distrust, almost that look intended for a creature of another race than one's own with which Mme. de Guermantes had quizzed Bloch, and tried to avoid us. But one would have said that M. de Charlus was determined to shew him that he was not at all anxious not to be seen by him, for he called to him, simply to tell him something that was of no importance. And fearing perhaps that M. d'Argencourt had not recognised me, M. de Charlus informed him that I was a great friend of Mme. de Villeparisis, of the Duchesse de Guermantes, of Robert de Saint-Loup, and that he himself, Charlus, was an old friend of my grandmother, and glad to be able to shew her grandson a little of the affection that he felt for her. Nevertheless I observed that M. d'Argencourt, albeit I had barely been introduced to him at Mme. de Villeparisis's, and M. de Charlus had now spoken to him at great length about my family, was distinctly colder to me than he had been in the afternoon; and for a long time he shewed the same aloofness whenever we met. He watched me now with a curiosity in which there was no sign of friendliness, and seemed even to have to overcome an instinctive repulsion when, on leaving us, after a moment's hesitation, he held out a hand to me which he at once withdrew.

"I am sorry about that," said M. de Charlus. "That fellow Argencourt, well born but ill bred, more than feeble as a diplomat, an impossible husband, always running after women like a person in a play, is one of those men who are incapable of understanding but perfectly capable of destroying the things in life that are really great. I hope that our friendship will be one of them, if it is ever to be formed, and I hope also that you will honour me by keeping it — as I shall — well clear of the heels of any of those donkeys who, from idleness or clumsiness or deliberate wickedness trample upon what would seem to have been made to endure. Unfortunately, that is the mould in which most of the men one meets have been cast."

"The Duchesse de Guermantes seems to be very clever. We were talking this

afternoon about the possibility of war. It appears that she is specially well informed on that subject."

"She is nothing of the sort," replied M. de Charlus tartly. "Women, and most men, for that matter, understand nothing of what I was going to tell you. My sister-in-law is a charming woman who imagines that we are still living in the days of Balzac's novels, when women had an influence on Politics. Going to her house could at present have only a bad effect on you, as for that matter going anywhere. That was one of the very things I was just going to tell you when that fool interrupted me. The first sacrifice that you must make for me — I shall claim them from you in proportion to the gifts I bestow on you — is to give up going into society. It distressed me this afternoon to see you at that idiotic tea-party. You may remind me that I Was there myself, but for me it was not a social gathering, it was simply a family visit. Later on, when you have established your position, if it amuses you to step down for a little into that sort of thing, it may perhaps, do no harm. And then, I need not point out how invaluable I can be to you. The 'Open Sesame' to the Guermantes house and any others that it is worth while throwing open the doors of to you, rests with me I shall be the judge, and intend to remain master of the situation."

I thought I would take advantage of what M. de Charlus had said about my call on Mme. de Villeparisis to try to find out what position exactly she occupied in society, but the question took another form on my lips than I had intended, and I asked him instead what the Villeparisis family was.

"That is absolutely as though you had asked me what the Nobody family was," replied M. de Charlus. "My aunt married, for love, a M Thirion, who was extremely rich, for that matter, and whose sisters had married surprisingly well; and from that day onwards he called himself Marquis de Villeparisis. It did no harm to anyone, at the most a little to himself, and very little! What his reason was I cannot tell; I suppose he was actually a 'Monsieur de Villeparisis,' a gentleman born at Villeparisis, which as you know is the name of a little place outside Paris. My aunt tried to make out that there was such a Marquisate in the family, she wanted to put things on a proper footing; I can't tell you why. When one takes a name to which one has no right it is better not to copy the regular forms."

Mme. de Villeparisis being merely Mme. Thirion completed the fall which had begun in my estimation of her when I had seen the composite nature of her party. I felt it to be unfair that a woman whose title and name were of quite recent origin should be able thus to impose upon her contemporaries, with the

prospect of similarly imposing upon posterity, by virtue of her friendships with royal personages. Now that she had become once again what I had supposed her to be in my childhood, a person who had nothing aristocratic about her, these distinguished kinsfolk who gathered round her seemed to remain alien to her. She did not cease to be charming to us all. I went occasionally to see her and she sent me little presents from time to time. But I had never any impression that she belonged to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and if I had wanted any information about it she would have been one of the last people to whom I should have applied.

"At present," went on M. de Charlus, "by going into society, you will only damage your position, warp your intellect and character. Also, you must be particularly careful in choosing your friends. Keep mistresses, if your family have no objection, that doesn't concern me, indeed I can only advise it, you young rascal, young rascal who will soon have to start shaving," he rallied me, passing his fingers over my chin. "But the choice of your men friends is more important. Eight out of ten young men are little scoundrels, little wretches capable of doing you an injury which you will never be able to repair. Wait, now, my nephew Saint-Loup is quite a suitable companion for you, at a pinch. As far as your future is concerned, he can be of no possible use to you, but for that I am sufficient. And really when all's said and done, as a person to go about with, at times when you have had enough of me, he does not seem to present any serious drawback that I know of. At any rate he is a man, not one of those effeminate creatures one sees so many of nowadays, who look like little renters, and at any moment may bring their innocent victims to the gallows." I did not know the meaning of this slang word 'renter'; anyone who had known it would have been as greatly surprised by his use of it as myself. People in society always like talking slang, and people against whom certain things may be hinted like to shew that they are not afraid to mention them. A proof of innocence in their eyes. But they have lost their sense of proportion, they are no longer capable of realising the point at which a certain pleasantry will become too technical, too shocking, will be a proof rather of corruption than of simplicity. "He is not like the rest of them; he has nice manners; he is really serious."

I could not help smiling at this epithet 'serious,' to which the intonation that M. de Charlus gave to it seemed to impart the sense of 'virtuous,' of 'steady,' as one says of a little shop-girl that she is 'serious.' At this moment a cab passed, zigzagging along the street; a young cabman, who had deserted his box, was driving it from inside, where he lay sprawling upon the cushions, apparently half

drunk. M. de Charlus instantly stopped him. The driver began to argue.

"Which way are you going?"

"Yours." This surprised me, for M. de Charlus had already refused several cabs with similarly coloured lamps.

"Well, I don't want to get up on the box. D'you mind if I stay down here?"

"No; but you must put down the hood. Well, think over my proposal," said M. de Charlus, preparing to leave me, "I give you a few days to consider my offer; write to me. I repeat, I shall need to see you every day, and to receive from you guarantees of loyalty, of discretion which, for that matter, you do appear, I must say, to furnish. But in the course of my life I have been so often taken in by appearances that I never wish to trust them again. Damn it, it's the least you can expect that before giving up a treasure I should know into what hands it is going to pass. Very well, bear in mind what I'm offering you; you are like Hercules' (though, unfortunately for yourself, you do not appear to me to have quite his muscular development) at the parting of the ways. Try not to have to regret all your life not having chosen the way that leads to virtue. Hallo!" he turned to the cabman, "haven't you put the hood down? I'll do it myself. I think, too, I'd better drive, seeing the state you appear to be in."

He jumped in beside the cabman, took the reins, and the horse trotted off.

As for myself, no sooner had I turned in at our gate than I found the pendant to the conversation which I had heard exchanged that afternoon between Bloch and M. de Norpois, but in another form, brief, inverted and cruel. This was a dispute between our butler, who believed in Dreyfus, and the Guermantes', who was an anti-Dreyfusard. The truths and counter-truths which came in conflict above ground, among the intellectuals of the rival Leagues, the Patrie Française and the Droits de l'Homme, were fast spreading downwards into the subsoil of popular opinion. M. Reinach was manipulating, by appeals to sentiment, people whom he had never seen, while for himself the Dreyfus case simply presented itself to his reason as an incontrovertible theory which he proved in the sequel by the most astonishing victory for rational policy (a victory against France, according to some) that the world has ever seen. In two years he replaced a Billot by a Clemenceau Ministry, revolutionised public opinion from top to bottom, took Picquart from his prison to install him, ungrateful, in the Ministry of War. Perhaps this rationalist manipulator of crowds was himself the puppet of his ancestry. When we find that the systems of philosophy which contain the most truths were dictated to their authors, in the last analysis, by reasons of sentiment, how are we to suppose that in a simple affair of politics like the

Dreyfus case reasons of this order may not, unknown to the reasoner, have controlled his reason. Bloch believed himself to have been led by a logical sequence to choose Dreyfusism, yet he knew that his nose, skin and hair had been imposed on him by his race. Doubtless the reason enjoys more freedom; yet it obeys certain laws which it has not prescribed for itself. The case of the Guermantes' butler and our own was peculiar. The waves of the two currents of Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism which now divided France from end to end were, on the whole, silent, but the occasional echoes which they emitted were sincere. When you heard anyone in the middle of a conversation which was being deliberately kept off the Case announce furtively some piece of political news, generally false, but always with a hopefulness of its truth, you could induce from the nature of his predictions where his heart lay. Thus there came into conflict on certain points, on one side a timid apostolate, on the other a righteous indignation. The two butlers whom I heard arguing as I came in furnished an exception to the rule. Ours let it be understood that Dreyfus was guilty, the Guermantes' butler that he was innocent. This was done not to conceal their personal convictions, but from cunning, and in the keenness of their rivalry. Our butler, being uncertain whether the fresh trial would be ordered, wished beforehand, in the event of failure, to deprive the Duke's butler of the joy of seeing a just cause vanquished. The Duke's butler thought that, in the event of a refusal, ours would be more indignant at the detention on the Devil's Isle of an innocent man. The porter looked on. I had the impression that it was not he who was the cause of dissension in the Guermantes household.

I went upstairs, and found my grandmother not so well. For some time past, without knowing exactly what was wrong, she had been complaining of her health. It is in moments of illness that we are compelled to recognise that we live not alone but chained to a creature of a different kingdom, whole worlds apart, who has no knowledge of us and by whom it is impossible to make ourselves understood: our body. Say that we met a brigand by the way; we might yet convince him by an appeal to his personal interest, if not to our own plight. But to ask pity of our body is like discoursing before an octopus, for which our words can have no more meaning than the sound of the tides, and with which we should be appalled to find ourselves condemned to live. My grandmother's attacks passed, often enough-unnoticed by the attention which she kept always diverted to ourselves. When the pain was severe, in the hope of curing it, she would try in vain to understand what the trouble was. If the morbid phenomena of which her body was the theatre remained obscure and beyond the reach of her

mind, they were clear and intelligible to certain creatures belonging to the same natural kingdom as themselves, creatures to which the human mind has learned gradually to have recourse in order to understand what the body is saying to it, as when a foreigner accosts us we try to find some one belonging to his country who will act as interpreter. These can talk to our body, and tell us if its anger is serious or will soon be appeased. Cottard, whom we had called in to see my grandmother, and who had infuriated us by asking with a dry smile, the moment we told him that she was ill: “Ill? You’re sure it’s not what they call a diplomatic illness?” He tried to soothe his patient’s restlessness by a milk diet. But incessant bowls of milk soup gave her no relief, because my grandmother sprinkled them liberally with salt (the toxic effects of which were as yet, Widal not having made his discoveries, unknown). For, medicine being a compendium of the successive and contradictory mistakes of medical practioners, when we summon the wisest of them to our aid, the chances are that we may be relying on a scientific truth the error of which will be recognised in a few years’ time. So that to believe in medicine would be the height of folly, if not to believe in it were not greater folly still, for from this mass of errors there have emerged in the course of time many truths. Cottard had told us to take her temperature. A thermometer was fetched. Throughout almost all its length it was clear of mercury. Scarcely could one make out, crouching at the foot of the tube, in its little cell, the silver salamander. It seemed dead. The glass reed was slipped into my grandmother’s mouth. We had no need to leave it there for long; the little sorceress had not been slow in casting her horoscope. We found her motionless, perched half-way up her tower, and declining to move, shewing us with precision the figure that we had asked of her, a figure with which all the most careful examination that my grandmother’s mind could have devoted to herself would have been incapable of furnishing her: 101 degrees. For the first time we felt some anxiety. We shook the thermometer well, to erase the ominous line, as though we were able thus to reduce the patient’s fever simultaneously with the figure shewn on the scale. Alas, it was only too clear that the little sibyl, unreasoning as she was, had not pronounced judgment arbitrarily, for the next day, scarcely had the thermometer been inserted between my grandmother’s lips when almost at once, as though with a single bound, exulting in her certainty and in her intuition of a fact that to us was imperceptible, the little prophetess had come to a halt at the same point, in an implacable immobility, and pointed once again to that figure 101 with the tip of her gleaming wand. Nothing more did she tell us; in vain might we long, seek, pray, she was deaf to our entreaties; it seemed as though this were her final

utterance, a warning and a menace. Then, in an attempt to constrain her to modify her response, we had recourse to another creature of the same kingdom, but more potent, which is not content with questioning the body but can command it, a febrifuge of the same order as the modern aspirin, which had not then come into use. We had not shaken the thermometer down below 99.5, and hoped that it would not have to rise from there. We made my grandmother swallow this drug and then replaced the thermometer in her mouth. Like an implacable warder to whom one presents a permit signed by a higher authority whose protecting influence one has sought and who, finding it to be in order, replies: “Very well; I have nothing to say; if it’s like that you may pass,” this time the watcher in the tower dirt not move. But sullenly she seemed to be saying: “What use will that be to you? Since you are friends with quinine, she may give me the order not to go up, once, ten times, twenty times. And then she will grow tired of telling me, I know her; get along with you. This won’t last for ever. And then you’ll be a lot better off.” Thereupon my grandmother felt the presence within her of a creature which knew the human body better than herself, the presence of a contemporary of the races that have vanished from the earth, the presence of earth’s first inhabitant — long anterior to the creation of thinking man — she felt that aeonial ally who was sounding her, a little roughly even, in the head, the heart, the elbow; he found out the weak places, organised everything for the prehistoric combat which began at once to be fought. In a moment a trampled Python, the fever, was vanquished by the potent chemical substance to which my grandmother, across the series of kingdoms, reaching out beyond all animal and vegetable life, would fain have been able to give thanks. And she remained moved by this glimpse which she had caught, through the mists of so many centuries, of a climate anterior to the creation even of plants. Meanwhile the thermometer, like a Weird Sister momentarily vanquished by some more ancient god, held motionless her silver spindle. Alas! other inferior creatures which man has trained to the chase of the mysterious quarry which he cannot pursue within the pathless forest of himself, reported cruelly to us every day a certain quantity of albumen, not large, but constant enough for it also to appear to bear relation to some persistent malady which we could not detect. Bergotte had shocked that scrupulous instinct in me which made me subordinate my intellect when he spoke to me of Dr. du Boulbon as of a physician who would not bore me, who would discover methods of treatment which, however strange they might appear, would adapt themselves to the singularity of my mind. But ideas transform themselves in us, they overcome the resistance with

which we at first meet them, and feed upon rich intellectual reserves which we did not know to have been prepared for them. So, as happens whenever anything we have heard said about some one whom we do not know has had the faculty of awakening in us the idea of great talent, of a sort of genius, in my inmost mind I gave Dr. du Boulbon the benefit of that unlimited confidence which he inspires in us who with an eye more penetrating than other men's perceives the truth. I knew indeed that he was more of a specialist in nervous diseases, the man to whom Charcot before his death had predicted that he would reign supreme in neurology and psychiatry. "Ah! I don't know about that. It's quite possible," put in Françoise, who was in the room and heard Charcot's name, as she heard du Boulbon's, for the first time But this in no way prevented her from saying "It's possible." Her 'possibles,' her 'perhapses,' her 'I don't knows' were peculiarly irritating at such a moment. One wanted to say to her: "Naturally you don't know, since you haven't the faintest idea of what we are talking about, how can you even say whether it's possible or not; you know nothing about it. Anyhow, you can't say now that you don't know what Charcot said to du Boulbon. You do know because we have just told you, and your 'perhapses' and 'possibles' don't come in, because it's a fact."

In spite of this more special competence in cerebral and nervous matters, as I knew that du Boulbon was a great physician, a superior man, of a profound and inventive intellect, I begged my mother to send for him, and the hope that, by a clear perception of the malady, he might perhaps cure it, carried the day finally over the fear that we had of (if we called in a specialist) alarming my grandmother. What decided my mother was the fact that, encouraged unconsciously by Cottard, my grandmother no longer went out of doors, and scarcely rose from her bed. In vain might she answer us in the words of Mme. de Sévigné's letter on Mme. de la Fayette: "Everyone said she was mad not to wish to go out. I said to these persons, so headstrong in their judgment: 'Mme. de la Fayette is not mad!' and I stuck to that. It has taken her death to prove that she was quite right not to go out." Du Boulbon when he came decided against — if not Mme. de Sévigné, whom we did not quote to him — my grandmother, at any rate. Instead of sounding her chest, fixing on her steadily his wonderful eyes, in which there was perhaps the illusion that he was making a profound scrutiny of his patient, or the desire to give her that illusion, which seemed spontaneous but must be mechanically produced, or else not to let her see that he was thinking of something quite different, or simply to obtain the mastery over her, he began talking about Bergotte.

“I should think so, indeed, he’s magnificent, you are quite right to admire him. But which of his books do you prefer? Indeed! Well, perhaps that is the best after all. In any case it is the best composed of his novels. Claire is quite charming in it; of his male characters which appeals to you most?”

I supposed at first that he was making her talk like this about literature because he himself found medicine boring, perhaps also to display his breadth of mind and even, with a more therapeutic aim, to restore confidence to his patient, to shew her that he was not alarmed, to take her mind from the state of her health. But afterwards I realised that, being distinguished particularly as an alienist and by his work on the brain, he had been seeking to ascertain by these questions whether my grandmother’s memory was in good order. As though reluctantly he began to inquire about her past life, fixing a stern and sombre eye on her. Then suddenly, as though catching sight of the truth and determined to reach it at all costs, with a preliminary rubbing of his hands, which he seemed to have some difficulty in wiping dry of the final hesitations which he himself might feel and of all the objections which we might have raised, looking down at my grandmother with a lucid eye, boldly and as though he were at last upon solid ground, punctuating his words in a quiet, impressive tone, every inflexion of which bore the mark of intellect, he began. (His voice, for that matter, throughout this visit remained what it naturally was, caressing. And under his bushy brows his ironical eyes were full of kindness.)

“You will be quite well, Madame, on the day — when it comes, and it rests entirely with you whether it comes to-day — on which you realise that there is nothing wrong with you, and resume your ordinary life. You tell me that you have not been taking your food, not going out?”

“But, Sir, I have a temperature.”

He laid a finger on her wrist.

“Not just now, at any rate. Besides, what an excuse! Don’t you know that we keep out in the open air and overfeed tuberculous patients with temperatures of 102?”

“But I have a little albumen as well.”

“You ought not to know anything about that. You have what I have had occasion to call ‘mental albumen.’ We have all of us had, when we have not been very well, little albuminous phases which our doctor has done his best to make permanent by calling our attention to them. For one disorder that doctors cure with drugs (as I am told that they do occasionally succeed in doing) they produce a dozen others in healthy subjects by inoculating them with that pathogenic

agent a thousand times more virulent than all the microbes in the world, the idea that one is ill. A belief of that sort, which has a disturbing effect on any temperament, acts with special force on neurotic people. Tell them that a shut window is open behind their back, they will begin to sneeze; make them believe that you have put magnesia in their soup, they will be seized with colic; that their coffee is stronger than usual, they will not sleep a wink all night. Do you imagine, Madame, that I needed to do any more than look into your eyes, listen to the way in which you express yourself, look, if I may say so, at this lady, your daughter, and at your grandson, who takes so much after you, to learn what was the matter with you?" "Your grandmother might perhaps go and sit, if the Doctor allows it, in some quiet path in the Champs-Elysées, near that laurel shrubbery where you used to play when you were little," said my mother to me, thus indirectly consulting Dr. du Boulbon, her voice for that reason assuming a tone of timid deference which it would not have had if she had been addressing me alone. The Doctor turned to my grandmother and, being apparently as well-read in literature as in science, adjured her as follows: "Go to the Champs-Elysées, Madame, to the laurel shrubbery which your grandson loves. The laurel you will find health-giving. It purifies. After he had exterminated the serpent Python, it was with a bough of laurel in his hand that Apollo made his entry into Delphi. He sought thus to guard himself from the deadly germs of the venomous monster. So you see that the laurel is the most ancient, the most venerable and, I will add — what is of therapeutic as well as of prophylactic value — the most beautiful of antiseptics."

Inasmuch as a great part of what doctors know is taught them by the sick, they are easily led to believe that this knowledge which patients exhibit is common to them all, and they pride themselves on taking the patient of the moment by surprise with some remark picked up at a previous bedside. Thus it was with the superior smile of a Parisian who, in conversation with a peasant, might hope to surprise him by using suddenly a word of the local dialect that Dr. du Boulbon said to my grandmother: "Probably a windy night will make you sleep when the strongest soporifics would have no effect." "On the contrary, Sir, when the wind blows I can never sleep at all." But doctors are touchy people. "Ach!" muttered du Boulbon, knitting his brows, as if some one had trodden on his toe, or as if my grandmother's sleeplessness on stormy nights were a personal insult to himself. He had not, however, an undue opinion of himself, and since, in his character as a 'superior' person, he felt himself bound not to put any faith in medicine, he quickly recovered his philosophic serenity.

My mother, in her passionate longing for reassurance from Bergotte'S friend, added in support of his verdict that a first cousin of my grandmother, who suffered from a nervous complaint, had lain for seven years cloistered in her bedroom at Combray, without leaving her bed more than once or twice a week.

"You see, Madame, I didn't know that, and yet I could have told you."

"But, Sir, I am not in the least like her; on the contrary, my doctor complains that he cannot get me to stay in bed," said my grandmother, whether because she was a little annoyed by the doctor's theories, or was anxious to submit to him any objections that might be raised to them, in the hope that he would refute these and that, after he had gone, she would no longer find any doubt lurking in her own mind as to the accuracy of his encouraging diagnosis.

"Why, naturally, Madame, you cannot have all the forms of — if you'll excuse my saying so — mania at once; you have others, but not that particular one. Yesterday I visited a home for neurasthenics. In the garden, I saw a man standing on a seat, motionless as a fakir, his neck bent in a position which must have been highly uncomfortable. On my asking him what he was doing there, he replied, without turning his head, or moving a muscle: 'You see, Doctor, I am extremely rheumatic and catch cold very easily; I have just been taking a lot of exercise, and while I was getting hot, like a fool, my neck was touching my flannels. If I move it away from my flannels now before letting myself cool down, I am certain to get a stiff neck, and possibly bronchitis.' Which he would, in fact, have done. 'You're a fine specimen of neurasthenia, that's what you are,' I told him. And do you know what argument he advanced to prove that I was mistaken? It was this; that while all the other patients in the place had a mania for testing their weight, so much so that the weighing machine had to be padlocked so that they should not spend the whole day on it, he had to be lifted on to it bodily, so little did he care to be weighed. He prided himself on not sharing the mania of the others without thinking that he had also one of his own, and that it was this which saved him from the other. You must not be offended by the comparison, Madame, for the man who dared not turn his neck for fear of catching a chill is the greatest poet of our day. That poor maniac is the most lofty intellect that I know. Submit to being called a neurotic. You belong to that splendid and pitiable family which is the salt of the earth. All the greatest things We know have come to us from neurotics. It is they and they only who have founded religions and created great works of art. Never will the world be conscious of how much it owes to them, nor above all of what they have suffered in order to bestow their gifts on it. We enjoy fine music, beautiful pictures, a

thousand exquisite things, but we do not know what they cost those who wrought them in sleeplessness, tears, spasmodic laughter, rashes, asthma, epilepsy a terror of death which is worse than any of these, and which you perhaps have felt, Madame," he added with a smile at my grandmother, "for confess now, when I came into the room, you were not feeling very confident You thought that you were ill; dangerously ill, perhaps. Heaven only knows what the disease was of which you thought you had detected the symptoms. And you were not mistaken; they were there. Neurosis has an absolute genius for malingering. There is no illness which it cannot counterfeit perfectly. It will produce life-like imitations of the dilatations of dyspepsia, the sicknesses of pregnancy, the broken rhythm of the cardiac, the feverishness of the consumptive. If it is capable of deceiving the doctor how should it fail to deceive the patient? No, no; you mustn't think I'm making fun of your sufferings. I should not undertake to heal them unless I understood them thoroughly. And, well, they say there's no good confession unless it's mutual. I have told you that without nervous trouble there can be no great artist. What is more," he added, raising a solemn forefinger, "there can be no great scientist either. I will go further, and say that, unless he himself is subject to nervous trouble, he is not, I won't say a good doctor, but I do say the right doctor to treat nervous troubles. In nervous pathology a doctor who doesn't say too many foolish things is a patient half-cured, just as a critic is a poet who has stopped writing verse and a policeman a burglar who has retired from practice. I, Madame, I do not, like you, fancy myself to be suffering from albuminuria, I have not your nervous fear of food, nor of fresh air, but I can never go to sleep without getting out of bed at least twenty times to see if my door is shut. And in that home where I found the poet yesterday who would not move his neck, I had gone to secure a room, for — this is between ourselves — I spend my holidays there looking after myself when I have increased my own trouble by wearing myself out in the attempt to cure other people."

"But do you want me to take a cure like that, Sir?" came to a frightened voice from my grandmother.

"It is not necessary, Madame. The symptoms which you describe will vanish at my bidding. Besides, you have with you a very efficient person whom I appoint as your doctor from now onwards. That is your trouble itself, the super-activity of your nerves. Even if I knew how to cure you of that, I should take good care not to. All I need do is to control it. I see on your table there one of Bergotte's books. Cured of your neurosis you would no longer care for it. Well, I

might feel it my duty to substitute for the joys that it procures for you a nervous stability which would be quite incapable of giving you those joys. But those joys themselves are a strong remedy, the strongest of all perhaps. No; I have nothing to say against your nervous energy. All I ask is that it should listen to me; I leave you in its charge. It must reverse its engines. The force which it is now using to prevent you from getting up, from taking sufficient food, let it employ in making you eat, in making you read, in making you go out, and in distracting you in every possible way. You needn't tell me that you are fatigued. Fatigue is the organic realisation of a preconceived idea. Begin by not thinking it. And if ever you have a slight indisposition, which is a thing that may happen to anyone, it will be just as if you hadn't it, for your nervous energy will have endowed you with what M. de Talleyrand, in an expression full of meaning, called 'imaginary health.' See, it has begun to cure you already, you have been sitting up in bed listening to me without once leaning back on your pillows; your eye is bright, your complexion is good, I have been talking to you for half an hour by the clock and you have never noticed the time. Well, Madame, I shall now bid you good-day."

When, after seeing Dr. du Boulbon to the door, I returned to the room in which my mother was by herself, the oppression that had been weighing on me for the last few weeks lifted, I felt that my mother was going to break out with a cry of joy and would see my joy, I felt that inability to endure the suspense of the coming moment at which a person is going to be overcome with emotion in our presence, which in another category is a little like the thrill of fear that goes through one when one knows that somebody is going to come in and startle one by a door that is still closed; I tried to speak to Mamma but my voice broke, and, bursting into tears, I stayed for a long time, my head on her shoulder, crying, tasting, accepting, relishing my grief, now that I knew that it had departed from my life, as we like to exalt ourselves by forming virtuous plans which circumstances do not permit us to put into execution. Françoise annoyed me by her refusal to share in our joy. She was quite overcome because there had just been a terrible scene between the lovesick footman and the tale-bearing porter. It had required the Duchess herself, in her unfailing benevolence, to intervene, restore an apparent calm to the household and forgive the footman. For she was a good mistress, and that would have been the ideal 'place' if only she didn't listen to 'stories.'

During the last few days people had begun to hear of my grandmother's illness and to inquire for news of her. Saint-Loup had written to me: "I do not

wish to take advantage of a time when your dear grandmother is unwell to convey to you what is far more than mere reproaches, on a matter with which she has no concern. But I should not be speaking the truth were I to say to you, even out of politeness, that I shall ever forget the perfidy of your conduct, or that there can ever be any forgiveness for so scoundrelly a betrayal." But some other friends, supposing that my grandmother was not seriously ill (they may not even have known that she was ill at all), had asked me to meet them next day in the Champs-Elysées, to go with them from there to pay a call together, ending up with a dinner in the country, the thought of which appealed to me. I had no longer any reason to forego these two pleasures. When my grandmother had been told that it was now imperative, if she was to obey Dr. du Boulbon's orders, that she should go out as much as possible, she had herself at once suggested the Champs-Elysées. It would be easy for me to escort her there; and, while she sat reading, to arrange with my friends where I should meet them later; and I should still be in time, if I made haste, to take the train with them to Ville d'Avray. When the time came, my grandmother did not want to go out; she felt tired. But my mother, acting on du Boulbon's instructions, had the strength of mind to be firm and to insist on obedience. She was almost in tears at the thought that my grandmother was going to relapse again into her nervous weakness, which she might never be able to shake off. Never again would there be such a fine, warm day for an outing. The sun as it moved through the sky interspersed here and there in the broken solidity of the balcony its unsubstantial muslins, and gave to the freestone ledge a warm epidermis, an indefinite halo of gold. As Françoise had not had time to send a 'tube' to her daughter, she left us immediately after luncheon. She very kindly consented, however, to call first at Jupien's, to get a stitch put in the cloak which my grandmother was going to wear. Returning at that moment from my morning walk I accompanied her into the shop. "Is it your young master who brings you here," Jupien asked Françoise, "is it you who are bringing him to see me or is it some good wind and fortune that bring you both?" For all his want of education, Jupien respected the laws of grammar as instinctively as M. de Guermantes, in spite of every effort, broke them. With Françoise gone and the cloak mended, it was time for my grandmother to get ready. Having obstinately refused to let Mamma stay in the room with her, she took, left to herself, an endless time over her dressing, and now that I knew her to be quite well, with that strange indifference which we feel towards our relatives so long as they are alive, which makes us put everyone else before them, I felt it to be very selfish of her to take so long, to risk making me late

when she knew that I had an appointment with my friends and was dining at Ville d'Avray. In my impatience I finally went downstairs without waiting for her, after I had twice been told that she was just ready. At last she joined me, without apologising to me, as she generally did, for having kept me waiting, flushed and bothered like a person who has come to a place in a hurry and has forgotten half her belongings, just as I was reaching the half-opened glass door which, without warming them with it in the least, let in the liquid, throbbing, tepid air from the street (as though the sluices of a reservoir had been opened) between the frigid walls of the passage.

"Oh, dear, if you're going to meet your friends I ought to have put on another cloak. I look rather poverty-stricken in this one."

I was startled to see her so flushed, and supposed that having begun by making herself late she had had to hurry over her dressing. When we left the cab at the end of the Avenue Gabriel, in the Champs-Elysées, I saw my grandmother, without a word to me, turn aside and make her way to the little old pavilion with its green trellis, at the door of which I had once waited for Françoise. The same park-keeper who had been standing there then was still talking to Françoise's 'Marquise' when, following my grandmother who, doubtless because she was feeling sick, had her hand in front of her mouth, I climbed the steps of that little rustic theatre, erected there among the gardens. At the entrance, as in those circus booths where the clown, dressed for the ring and smothered in flour, stands at the door and takes the money himself for the seats, the 'Marquise,' at the receipt of custom, was still there in her place with her huge, uneven face smeared with a coarse plaster and her little bonnet of red flowers and black lace surmounting her auburn wig. But I do not suppose that she recognised me. The park-keeper, abandoning his watch over the greenery, with the colour of which his uniform had been designed to harmonise, was talking to her, on a chair by her side.

"So you're still here?" he was saying. "You don't think of retiring?"

"And what have I to retire for, Sir? Will you kindly tell me where I shall be better off than here, where I should live more at my ease, and with every comfort? And then there's all the coming and going, plenty of distraction; my little Paris, I call it; my customers keep me in touch with everything that's going on. Just to give you an example, there's one of them who went out not more than five minutes ago; he's a magistrate, in the very highest position there is. Very well, Sir," she cried with ardour, as though prepared to maintain the truth of this assertion by violence, should the agent of civic authority shew any sign of

challenging its accuracy, “for the last eight years, do you follow me, every day God has made, regularly on the stroke of three he’s been here, always polite, never saying one word louder than another, never making any mess; and he stays half an hour and more to read his papers and do his little jobs. There was one day he didn’t come. I never noticed it at the time, but that evening, all of a sudden I said to myself: ‘Why, that gentleman never came to-day; perhaps he’s dead!’ And that gave me a regular turn, you know, because, of course, I get quite fond of people when they behave nicely. And so I was very glad when I saw him come in again next day, and I said to him, I did: ‘I hope there was nothing wrong yesterday, Sir?’ Then he told me that it was his wife that had died, and he’d been so put out, poor gentleman, what with one thing and another, he hadn’t been able to come. He had that really sad look, you know, people have when they’ve been married five-and-twenty years, and then the parting, but he seemed pleased, all the same, to be back here. You could see that all his little habits had been quite upset. I did what I could to make him feel at home. I said to him: ‘Y’ mustn’t let go of things, Sir. Just come here the same as before, it will be a little distraction for you in your sorrow.’”

The ‘Marquise’ resumed a gentler tone, for she had observed that the guardian of groves and lawns was listening to her complacently and with no thought of contradiction, keeping harmlessly in its scabbard a sword which looked more like a horticultural implement or some symbol of a garden-god.

“And besides,” she went on, “I choose my customers, I don’t let everyone into my little parlours, as I call them. And doesn’t the place just look like a parlour with all my flowers? Such friendly customers I have; there’s always some one or other brings me a spray of nice lilac, or jessamine or roses; my favourite flowers, roses are.”

The thought that we were perhaps despised by this lady because we never brought any sprays of lilac or fine roses to her bower made me redden, and in the hope of making a bodily escape — or of being condemned only by default — from an adverse judgment, I moved towards the exit. But it is not always in this world the people who bring us fine roses to whom we are most friendly, for the ‘Marquise,’ thinking that I was bored, turned to me.

“You wouldn’t like me to open a little place for you?”

And, on my declining:

“No? You’re sure you won’t?” she persisted, smiling. “Well, just as you please. You’re welcome to it, but I know quite well, not having to pay for a thing won’t make you want to do it if you don’t want to.”

At this moment a shabbily dressed woman hurried into the place who seemed to be feeling precisely the want in question. But she did not belong to the ‘Marquise’s’ world, for the latter, with the ferocity of a snob, flung at her:

“I’ve nothing disengaged, Ma’am.”

“Will they be long?” asked the poor lady, reddening beneath the yellow flowers in her hat.

“Well, Ma’am, if you’ll take my advice, you’ll try somewhere else; you see, there are still these two gentlemen waiting, and I’ve only one closet; the others are out of order.”

“Not much money there,” she explained when the other had gone. “It’s not the sort we want here, either; they’re not clean, don’t treat the place with respect, it would be your humble here that would have to spend the next hour cleaning up after her ladyship. I’m not sorry to lose her penny.”

Finally my grandmother emerged, and feeling that she probably would not seek to atone by a lavish gratuity for the indiscretion that she had shewn by remaining so long inside, I beat a retreat, so as not to have to share in the scorn which the ‘Marquise’ would no doubt heap on her, and began strolling along a path, but slowly, so that my grandmother should not have to hurry to overtake me; as presently she did. I expected her to begin: “I am afraid I’ve kept you waiting; I hope you’ll still be in time for your friends,” but she did not utter a single word, so much so that, feeling a little hurt, I was disinclined to speak first; until looking up at her I noticed that as she walked beside me she kept her face turned the other way. I was afraid that her heart might be troubling her again. I studied her more carefully and was struck by the disjointedness of her gait. Her hat was crooked, her cloak stained; she had the confused and worried look, the flushed, slightly dazed face of a person who has just been knocked down by a carriage or pulled out of a ditch.

“I was afraid you were feeling sick, Grandmamma; are you feeling better now?” I asked her.

Probably she thought that it would be impossible for her, without alarming me, not to make some answer.

“I heard the whole of her conversation with the keeper,” she told me. “Could anything have been more typical of the Guermantes, or the Verdurins and their little circle? Heavens, what fine language she put it all in!” And she quoted, with deliberate application, this sentence from her own special Marquise, Mme. de Sévigné: “As I listened to them I thought that they were preparing for me the pleasures of a farewell.”

Such was the speech that she made me, a speech into which she had put all her critical delicacy, her love of quotations, her memory of the classics more thoroughly even than she would naturally have done, and as though to prove that she retained possession of all these faculties. But I guessed rather than heard what she said, so inaudible was the voice in which she muttered her sentences, clenching her teeth more than could be accounted for by the fear of being sick again.

"Come!" I said lightly, so as not to seem to be taking her illness too seriously, "since your heart is bothering you, shall we go home now? I don't want to trundle a grandmother with indigestion about the Champs-Elysées."

"I didn't like to suggest it, because of your friends," she replied. "Poor boy! But if you don't mind, I think it would be wiser."

I was afraid of her noticing the strange way in which she uttered these words.

"Come!" I said to her sharply, "you mustn't tire yourself talking; if your heart is bad, it's silly; wait till we get home."

She smiled at me sorrowfully and gripped my hand. She had realised that there was no need to hide from me what I had at once guessed, that she had had a slight stroke.

We made our way back along the Avenue Gabriel, through the strolling crowd. I left my grandmother to rest on a seat and went in search of a cab. She, in whose heart I always placed myself when I had to form an opinion of the most unimportant person, she was now closed to me, had become part of the world outside, and, more than from any casual passerby, I was obliged to keep from her what I thought of her condition, to say no word of my uneasiness. I could not have spoken of it to her in greater confidence than to a stranger. She had suddenly handed back to me the thoughts, the griefs which, from the days of my infancy, I had entrusted for all time to her keeping. She was not yet dead. I was already alone. And even those allusions which she had made to the Guermantes, to Mme. de Sévigné, to our conversations about the little clan, assumed an air of being without point or occasion, fantastic, because they sprang from the nullity of this very being who to-morrow possibly would have ceased to exist, for whom they would no longer have any meaning, from that nullity, incapable of conceiving them, which my grandmother would shortly be.

"Well, Sir, I don't like to say no, but you have not made an appointment, you have no time fixed. Besides, this is not my day for seeing patients. You surely have a doctor of your own. I cannot interfere with his practice, unless he

were to call me in for a consultation. It's a question of professional etiquette..."

Just as I was signalling to a cabman, I had caught sight of the famous Professor E——, almost a friend of my father and grandfather, acquainted at any rate with them both, who lived in the Avenue Gabriel, and, with a sudden inspiration, had stopped him just as he was entering his house, thinking that he would perhaps be the very person to advise my grandmother. But he was evidently in a hurry and, after calling for his letters, seemed anxious to get rid of me, so that my only chance of speaking to him lay in going up with him in the lift, of which he begged me to allow him to work the switches himself, this being a mania with him.

"But, Sir, I am not asking you to see my grandmother here; you will realise from what I am trying to tell you that she is not in a fit state to come; what I am asking is that you should call at our house in half an hour's time, when I have taken her home."

"Call at your house! Really, Sir, you must not expect me to do that. I am dining with the Minister of Commerce. I have a call to pay first. I must change at once, and to make matters worse I have torn my coat and my' other one has no buttonholes for my. decorations. I beg you, please, to oblige me by not touching the switches. You don't know how the lift works; one can't be too careful. Getting that buttonhole made means more delay. Well, as I am a friend of your people, if your grandmother comes here at once I will see her. But I warn you that I shall be able to give her exactly a quarter of an hour, nor a moment more."

I had started off at once, without even getting out of the lift which Professor E—— had himself set in motion to take me down again, casting a suspicious glance at me as he did so.

We may, indeed, say that the hour of death is uncertain, but when we say so we represent that hour to ourselves as situated in a vague and remote expanse of time, it never occurs to us that it can have any connexion with the day that has already dawned, or may signify that death — or its first assault and partial possession of us, after which it will never leave hold of us again — may occur this very afternoon, so far from uncertain, this afternoon every hour of which has already been allotted to some occupation. You make a point of taking your drive every day so that in a month's time you will have had the full benefit of the fresh air; you have hesitated over which cloak you will take, which cabman to call, you are in the cab, the whole day lies before you, short because you have to be at home early, as a friend is coming to see you; you hope that it will be as fine again to-morrow; and you have no suspicion that death, which has been making

its way towards you along another plane, shrouded in an impenetrable darkness, has chosen precisely this day of all days to make its appearance, in a few minutes' time, more or less, at the moment when the carriage has reached the Champs-Elysées. Perhaps those who are haunted as a rule by the fear of the utter strangeness of death will find something reassuring in this kind of death — in this kind of first contact with death — because death thus assumes a known, familiar guise of everyday life. A good luncheon has preceded it, and the same outing that people take who are in perfect health. A drive home in an open carriage comes on top of its first onslaught; ill as my grandmother was, there were, after all, several people who could testify that at six o'clock, as we came home from the Champs-Elysées, they had bowed to her as she drove past in an open carriage, in perfect weather. Legrandin, making his way towards the Place de la Concorde, raised his hat to us, stopping to look after us with an air of surprise. I, who was not yet detached from life, asked my grandmother if she had acknowledged his greeting, reminding her of his readiness to take offence. My grandmother, thinking me no doubt very frivolous, raised her hand in the air as though to say: "What does it matter? It is not of the least importance."

Yes, one might have said that, a few minutes earlier, when I was looking for a cab, my grandmother was resting on a seat in the Avenue Gabriel, and that a little later she had driven past in an open carriage. But would that have been really true? The seat, for instance, to maintain its position at the side of an avenue — for all that it may be subjected also to certain conditions of equilibrium — has no need of energy. But in order that a living person may be stable, even when supported by a seat or in a carriage, there is required a tension of forces which we do not ordinarily perceive any more than we perceive (because its action is universal) atmospheric pressure. Possibly if we were to be hollowed out and then left to support the pressure of the air we might feel, in the moment that preceded our extinction, that terrible weight which there was nothing left in us to neutralise. Similarly when the abyss of sickness and death opens within us and we have no longer any resistance to offer to the tumult with which the world and our own body rush upon us, then to endure even the tension of our own muscles, the shudder that freezes us to the marrow, then even to keep ourselves motionless in what we ordinarily regard as nothing but the simple negative position of a lifeless thing requires, if we wish our head to remain erect and our eyes calm, an expense of vital energy and becomes the object of an exhausting struggle.

And if Legrandin had looked back at us with that astonished air, it was

because to him, as to the other people who passed us then, in the cab in which my grandmother was apparently seated she had seemed to be foundering, sliding into the abyss, clinging desperately to the cushions which could barely arrest the downward plunge of her body, her hair in disorder, her eye wild, unable any longer to face the assault of the images which its pupil was not strong enough now to bear. She had appeared to them, although I was still by her side, submerged in that unknown world somewhere in which she had already received the blows, traces of which she still bore when I looked up at her a few minutes earlier in the Champs-Elysées, her hat, her face, her cloak left in disorder by the hand of the invisible angel with whom she had wrestled. I have thought, since, that this moment of her stroke cannot have altogether surprised my grandmother, that indeed she had perhaps foreseen it a long time back, had lived in expectation of it. She had not known, naturally, when this fatal moment would come, had never been certain, any more than those lovers whom a similar doubt leads alternately to found unreasonable hopes and unjustified suspicions on the fidelity of their mistresses. But it is rarely that these grave maladies, like that which now at last had struck her full in the face, do not take up their abode in the sick man for a long time before killing him, during which time they make haste, like a ‘sociable’ neighbour or tenant, to introduce themselves to him. A terrible acquaintance, not so much from the sufferings that it causes as from the strange novelty of the definite restriction which it imposes upon life. A woman sees herself dying, in these cases not at the actual moment of death but months, sometimes years before, when death has hideously come to dwell in her. The sufferer makes the acquaintance of the stranger whom she hears coming and going in her brain. She does not know him by sight, it is true, but from the sounds which she hears him regularly make she can form an idea of his habits. Is he a criminal? One morning, she can no longer hear him. He has gone. Ah! If it were only for ever! In the evening he has returned. What are his plans? Her specialist, put to the question, like an adored mistress, replies with avowals that one day are believed, another day fail to convince her. Or rather it is not the mistress’s part but that of the servants one interrogates that the doctor plays. They are only third parties. The person whom we press for an answer, whom we suspect of being about to play us false, is life itself, and although we feel her to be no longer the same we believe in her still or at least remain undecided until the day on which she finally abandons us.

I helped my grandmother into Professor E——’s lift and a moment later he came to us and took us into his consulting room. But there, busy as he was, his

bombastic manner changed, such is the force of habit; for his habit was to be friendly, that is to say lively with his patients. Since he knew that my grandmother was a great reader, and was himself one also, he devoted the first few minutes to quoting various favourite passages of poetry appropriate to the glorious summer weather. He had placed her in an armchair and himself with his back to the light so as to have a good view of her. His examination was minute and thorough, even obliging me at one moment to leave the room. He continued it after my return, then, having finished, went on, although the quarter of an hour was almost at an end, repeating various quotations to my grandmother. He even made a few jokes, which were witty enough, though I should have preferred to hear them on some other occasion, but which completely reassured me by the tone of amusement in which he uttered them. I then remembered that M. Fallières, the President of the Senate, had, many years earlier, had a false seizure, and that to the consternation of his political rivals he had returned a few days later to his duties and had begun, it was said, his preparations for a more or less remote succession to the Presidency of the Republic. My confidence in my grandmother's prompt recovery was all the more complete in that, just as I was recalling the example of M. Fallières, I was distracted from following up the similarity by a shout of laughter, which served as conclusion to one of the Professor's jokes. After which he took out his watch, wrinkled his brows petulantly on seeing that he was five minutes late, and while he bade us good-bye rang for his other coat to be brought to him at once. I waited until my grandmother had left the room, closed the door and asked him to tell me the truth.

"There is not the slightest hope," he informed me. "It is a stroke brought on by uraemia. In itself, uraemia is not necessarily fatal, but this case seems to me desperate. I need not tell you that I hope I am mistaken. Anyhow, you have Cottard, you're in excellent hands. Excuse me," he broke off as a maid came into the room with his coat over her arm. "I told you, I'm dining with the Minister of Commerce, and I have a call to pay first. Ah! Life is not all a bed of roses, as one is apt to think at your age."

And he graciously offered me his hand. I had shut the door behind me, and a footman was shewing us into the hall when we heard a loud shout of rage. The maid had forgotten to cut and hem the buttonhole for the decorations. This would take another ten minutes. The Professor continued to storm while I stood on the landing gazing at a grandmother for whom there was not the slightest hope. Each of us is indeed alone. We started for home.

The sun was sinking, it burnished an interminable wall along which our cab had to pass before reaching the street in which we lived, a wall against which the shadow cast by the setting sun of horse and carriage stood out in black on a ruddy background, like a funeral car on some Pompeian terra-cotta. At length we arrived at the house. I made the invalid sit at the foot of the staircase in the hall, and went up to warn my mother. I told her that my grandmother had come home feeling slightly unwell, after an attack of giddiness. As soon as I began to speak, my mother's face was convulsed by the paroxysm of a despair which was yet already so resigned that I realised that for many years she had been holding herself quietly in readiness for an uncalendared but final day. She asked me no question; it seemed that, just as malevolence likes to exaggerate the sufferings of other people, so in her devotion she would not admit that her mother was seriously ill, especially with a disease which might affect the brain. Mamma shuddered, her eyes wept without tears, she ran to give orders for the doctor to be fetched at once; but when Françoise asked who was ill she could not reply, her voice stuck in her throat. She came running downstairs with me struggling to banish from her face the sob that contracted it. My grandmother was waiting below on the sofa in the hall, but, as soon as she heard us coming, drew herself together, stood up, and waved her hand cheerfully at Mamma. I had partially wrapped her head in a white lace shawl, telling her that it was so that she should not catch cold on the stairs. I had hoped that my mother would not notice the change in her face, the distortion of her mouth; my precaution proved unnecessary; my mother went up to my grandmother, kissed her hand as though it were that of her God, raised her up, carried her to the lift with infinite precautions in which there was, with the fear of hurting her by any clumsy movement, the humility of one who felt herself unworthy to touch the most precious thing, to her, in the world, but never once did she raise her eyes, nor look at the sufferer's face. Perhaps this was in order that my grandmother might not be saddened by the thought that the sight of her could alarm her daughter. Perhaps from fear of a grief so piercing that she dared not face it. Perhaps from reverence, because she did not feel it permissible to herself, without impiety, to remark the trace of any mental weakening on those venerated features. Perhaps to be better able to preserve intact in her memory the image of the true face of my grandmother, radiant with wisdom and goodness. So they went up side by side, my grandmother half hidden by her shawl, my mother turning away her eyes.

Meanwhile there was one person who never took hers from what could be

made out of my grandmother's altered features, at which her daughter dared not look, a person who fastened on them a gaze wondering, indiscreet and of evil omen: this was Françoise. Not that she was not sincerely attached to my grandmother (indeed she had been disappointed and almost scandalised by the coldness shewn by Mamma, whom she would have liked to see fling herself weeping into her mother's arms), but she had a certain tendency always to look at the worse side of things, she had retained from her childhood two peculiarities which would seem to be mutually exclusive, but which when combined strengthened one another: the want of restraint common among people of humble origin who make no attempt to conceal the impression, in other words the painful alarm, aroused in them by the sight of a physical change which it would be in better taste to appear not to notice, and the unfeeling coarseness of the peasant who begins by tearing the wings off dragon-flies until she is allowed to wring the necks of chickens, and lacks that modesty which would make her conceal the interest that she feels in the sight of suffering flesh.

When, thanks to the faultless ministrations of Françoise, my grandmother had been put to bed, she discovered that she could speak much more easily, the little rupture or obstruction of a blood-vessel which had produced the uraemia having apparently been quite slight. And at once she was anxious not to fail Mamma in her hour of need, to assist her in the most cruel moments through which she had yet had to pass.

"Well, my child," she began, taking my mother's hand in one of her own, and keeping the other in front of her lips, so as to account for the slight difficulty which she still found in uttering certain words. "So this is all the pity you shew your mother! You look as if you thought that indigestion was quite a pleasant thing!"

Then for the first time my mother's eyes gazed passionately into those of my grandmother, not wishing to see the rest of her face, and she replied, beginning the list of those false promises which we swear but are unable to fulfil:

"Mamma, you will soon be quite well again, your daughter will see to that."

And embodying all her dearest love, all her determination that her mother should recover, in a kiss to which she entrusted them, and which she followed with her mind, with her whole being until it flowered upon her lips, she bent down to lay it humbly, reverently upon the precious brow. My grandmother complained of a sort of alluvial deposit of bedclothes which kept gathering all the time in the same place, over her left leg, and from which she could never manage to free herself. But she did not realise that she was herself the cause of

this (so that day after day she accused Françoise unjustly of not ‘doing’ her bed properly). By a convulsive movement she kept flinging to that side the whole flood of those billowing blankets of fine wool, which gathered there like the sand in a bay which is very soon transformed into a beach (unless the inhabitants construct a breakwater) by the successive deposits of the tide.

My mother and I (whose falsehood was exposed before we spoke by the obnoxious perspicacity of Françoise) would not even admit that my grandmother was seriously ill, as though such an admission might give pleasure to her enemies (not that she had any) and it was more loving to feel that she was not so bad as all that, in short from the same instinctive sentiment which had led me to suppose that Andrée was too sorry for Al-bertine to be really fond of her. The same individual phenomena are reproduced in the mass, in great crises. In a war, the man who does not love his country says nothing against it, but regards it as lost, commiserates it, sees everything in the darkest colours.

Françoise was of infinite value to us owing to her faculty of doing without sleep, of performing the most arduous tasks. And if, when she had gone to bed after several nights spent in the sick-room, we were obliged to call her a quarter of an hour after she had fallen asleep, she was so happy to be able to do the most tiring duties as if they had been the simplest things in the world that, so far from looking cross, her face would light up with a satisfaction tinged with modesty. Only when the time came for mass, or for breakfast, then, had my grandmother been in her death agony, still Françoise would have quietly slipped away so as not to make herself late. She neither could nor would let her place be taken by her young footman. It was true that she had brought from Combray an extremely exalted idea of everyone’s duty towards ourselves; she would not have tolerated that any of our servants should ‘fail’ us. This doctrine had made her so noble, so imperious, so efficient an instructor that there had never come to our house any servants, however corrupted who had not speedily modified, purified their conception of life so far as to refuse to touch the usual commissions from tradesmen and to come rushing — however little they might previously have sought to oblige — to take from my hands and not let me tire myself by carrying the smallest package. But at Combray Françoise had contracted also — and had brought with her to Paris — the habit of not being able to put up with any assistance in her work. The sight of anyone coming to help her seemed to her like receiving a deadly insult, and servants had remained for weeks in the house without receiving from her any response to their morning greeting, had even gone off on their holidays without her bidding them good-bye or their guessing

her reason, which was simply and solely that they had offered to do a share of her work on some day when she had not been well. And at this moment when my grandmother was so ill Françoise's duties seemed to her peculiarly her own. She would not allow herself, she, the official incumbent, to be done out of her part in the ritual of these festal days. And so her young footman, sent packing by her, did not know what to do with himself, and not content with having copied the butler's example and supplied himself with note-paper from my desk had begun as well to borrow volumes of poetry from my bookshelves. He sat reading them for a good half of the day, out of admiration for the poets who had written them, but also so as, during the rest of his time, to begem with quotations the letters which he wrote to his friends in his native village. Naturally he expected these to dazzle them. But as there was little sequence in his ideas he had formed the notion that these poems, picked out at random from my shelves, were matters of common knowledge, to which it was customary to refer. So much so that in writing to these peasants, whose stupefaction he discounted, he interspersed his own reflexions with lines from Lamartine, just as he might have said "Who laughs last, laughs longest!" or merely "How are you keeping?"

To ease her pain my grandmother was given morphine. Unfortunately, if this relieved her in other ways, it increased the quantity of albumen. The blows which we aimed at the wicked ogre who had taken up his abode in my grandmother were always wide of the mark, and it was she, her poor interposed body that had to bear them, without her ever uttering more than a faint groan by way of complaint. And the pain that we caused her found no compensation in a benefit which we were unable to give her. The savage ogre whom we were anxious to exterminate we barely succeeded in touching, and all we did was to enrage him still further, and possibly hasten the moment at which he would devour his luckless captive. On certain days when the discharge of albumen had been excessive Cottard, after some hesitation, stopped the morphine. In this man, so insignificant, so common, there was, in these brief moments in which he deliberated, in which the relative dangers of one and another course of treatment presented themselves alternately to his mind until he arrived at a decision, the same sort of greatness as in a general who, vulgar in all the rest of his life, is a great strategist, and in an hour of peril, after a moment's reflexion, decides upon what is from the military point of view the wisest course, and gives the order: "Advance eastwards." Medically, however little hope there might be of setting any limit to this attack of uraemia, it did not do to tire the kidneys. But, on the other hand, when my grandmother did not have morphine, her pain became

unbearable; she perpetually attempted a certain movement which it was difficult for her to perform without groaning. To a great extent, suffering is a sort of need felt by the organism to make itself familiar with a new state, which makes it uneasy, to adapt its sensibility to that state. We can discern this origin of pain in the case of certain inconveniences which are not such for everyone. Into a room filled with a pungent smoke two men of a coarse fibre will come and attend to their business; a third, more highly strung, will betray an incessant discomfort. His nostrils will continue to sniff anxiously the odour he ought, one would say, to try not to notice but will keep on attempting to attach, by a more exact apprehension of it, to his troubled sense of smell. One consequence of which may well be that his intense preoccupation will prevent him from complaining of a toothache. When my grandmother was in pain the sweat trickled over the pink expanse of her brow, glueing to it her white locks, and if she thought that none of us was in the room she would cry out: “Oh, it’s dreadful!” but if she caught sight of my mother, at once she employed all her energy in banishing from her face every sign of pain, or — an alternative stratagem — repeated the same plaints, accompanying them with explanations which gave a different sense, retrospectively, to those which my mother might have overheard.

“Oh! My dear, it’s dreadful to have to stay in bed on a beautiful sunny day like this when one wants to be out in the air; I am crying with rage at your orders.”

But she could not get rid of the look of anguish in her eyes, the sweat on her brow, the convulsive start, checked at once, of her limbs.

“There is nothing wrong. I’m complaining because I’m not lying very comfortably. I feel my hair is untidy, my heart is bad, I knocked myself against the wall.”

And my mother, at the foot of the bed, riveted to that suffering form, as though, by dint of piercing with her gaze that pain-bedewed brow, that body which hid the evil thing within it, she could have succeeded in reaching that evil thing and carrying it away, my mother said:

“No, no, Mamma dear, we won’t let you suffer like that, we will find something to take it away, have patience just for a moment; let me give you a kiss, darling — no, you’re not to move.”

And stooping over the bed, with bended knees, almost kneeling on the ground, as though by an exercise of humility she would have a better chance of making acceptable the impassioned gift of herself, she lowered towards my grandmother her whole life contained in her face as in a ciborium which she

extended over her, adorned in relief with dimples and folds so passionate, so sorrowful, so sweet that one knew not whether they had been carved by the chisel of a kiss, a sob or a smile. My grandmother also, tried to lift up her face to Mamma's. It was so altered that probably' had she been strong enough to go out, she would have been recognised only by the feather in her hat. Her features, like the clay in a sculptor's hands seemed to be straining, with an effort which distracted her from everything else, to conform to some particular model which we failed to identify. This business of modelling was now almost finished, and if my grandmother's face had shrunk in the process it had at the same time hardened. The veins that ran beneath its surface seemed those not of a piece of marble but of some more rugged stone. Constantly thrust forwards by the difficulty that she found in breathing and as constantly forced back on to her pillow by exhaustion, her face, worn, diminished, terribly expressive, seemed like, in a primitive, almost prehistoric carving, the rude, flushed, purplish, desperate face of some savage guardian of a tomb. But the whole task was not yet accomplished. Next, her resistance must be overcome, and that tomb, the entrance to which she had so painfully guarded, with that tense contraction, entered.

In one of those moments in which, as the saying goes, one does not know what saint to invoke, as my grandmother was coughing and sneezing a good deal, we took the advice of a relative who assured us that if we sent for the specialist X —— he would get rid of all that in a couple of days. People say that sort of thing about their own doctors, and their friends believe them just as Françoise always believed the advertisements in the newspapers. The specialist came with his bag packed with all the colds and coughs of his other patients, like Aeolus's bottle. My grandmother refused point-blank to let herself be examined. And we, out of consideration for the doctor, who had had his trouble for nothing, deferred to the desire that he expressed to inspect each of our noses in turn, albeit there was nothing the matter with any of them. According to him, however, there was; everything, whether headache or colic, heart-disease or diabetes, was a disease of the nose that had been wrongly diagnosed. To each of us he said: "I should like to have another look at that little cornea. Don't put it off too long. I can soon get rid of it for you with a hot needle." We were, of course, thinking of something quite different. And yet we asked ourselves: "Get rid of what?" In a word, every one of our noses was diseased; his mistake lay only in his use of the present tense. For by the following day his examination and provisional treatment had taken effect. Each of us had his or her catarrh.

And when in the street he ran into my father doubled up with a cough, he smiled to think that an ignorant layman might suppose the attack to be due to his intervention. He had examined us at a moment when we were already ill.

My grandmother's illness gave occasion to various people to manifest an excess or deficiency of sympathy which surprised us quite as much as the sort of chance which led one or another of them to reveal to us connecting links of circumstances, or of friendship for that matter, which we had never suspected. And the signs of interest shewn by the people who called incessantly at the house to inquire revealed to us the gravity of an illness which, until then, we had not sufficiently detached from the countless painful impressions that we received in my grandmother's room. Summoned by telegram, her sisters declined to leave Combray. They had discovered a musician there who gave them excellent chamber concerts, in listening to which they thought that they could find, better than by the invalid's bedside, food for thought, a melancholy exaltation the form of which was, to say the least of it, unusual. Mme. Sazerat wrote to Mamma, but in the tone of a person whom the sudden breaking off of a betrothal (the cause of the rupture being her Dreyfusism) has parted from one for ever. Bergotte, on the other hand, came every day and spent several hours with me.

He had always made a habit of going regularly for some time to the same house, where, accordingly, he need not stand on ceremony. But formerly it had been in order that he might talk without being interrupted; now it was so that he might sit for as long as he chose in silence, without being expected to talk. For he was very ill, some people said with albuminuria, like my grandmother. According to another version, he had a tumour. He grew steadily weaker; it was with difficulty that he came up our staircase, with greater difficulty still that he went down it. Even though he held on to the banisters he often stumbled, and he would, I believe, have stayed at home had he not been afraid of losing altogether the habit of going out, the capacity to go out, he, the 'man with the little beard' whom I had seen so alert, not very long since. He was now quite blind and even his speech was frequently obstructed.

But at the same time, by a directly opposite process, the body of his work, known only to a few literary people at the period when Mme. Swann used to patronise their timid efforts to disseminate it, now grown in stature and strength before the eyes of all, had acquired an extraordinary power of expansion among the general public. The general rule is, no doubt, that only after his death does a writer become famous. But it was while he still lived, and during his slow progress towards a death that he had not yet reached that this writer was able to

watch the progress of his works towards Renown. A dead writer can at least be illustrious without any strain on himself. The effulgence of his name is stopped short by the stone upon his grave. In the deafness of the eternal sleep he is not importuned by Glory. But for Bergotte the antithesis was still incomplete. He existed still sufficiently to suffer from the tumult. He was moving still, though with difficulty, while his books, bounding about him, like daughters whom one loves but whose impetuous youthfulness and noisy pleasures tire one, brought day after day, to his very bedside, a crowd of fresh admirers.

The visits which he now began to pay us came for me several years too late, for I had no longer the same admiration for him as of old. Which is not in any sense incompatible with the growth of his reputation. A man's work seldom becomes completely understood and successful before that of another writer, still obscure, has begun in the minds of certain people more difficult to please to substitute a fresh cult for one that has almost ceased to command observance. In the books of Bergotte which I constantly reread, his sentences stood out as clearly before my eyes as my own thoughts the furniture in my room and the carriages in the street. All the details were quite easily seen, not perhaps precisely as one had always seen them but at any rate as one was accustomed to see them now. But a new writer had recently begun to publish work in which the relations between things were so different from those that connected them for me that I could understand hardly anything of what he wrote. He would say, for instance: "The hose-pipes admired the smart upkeep of the roads" (and so far it was simple, I followed him smoothly along those roads) "which started every five minutes from Briand and Claudel." At that point I ceased to understand, because I had expected the name of a place and was given that of a person instead. Only I felt that it was not the sentence that was badly constructed but I myself that lacked the strength and ability necessary to reach the end. I would start afresh striving tooth and nail to climb to the pinnacle from which I would see things in their novel relations. And each time, after I had got about halfway through the sentence, I would fall back again, as later on, when I joined the Army, in my attempts at the exercise known as the 'bridge-ladder.' I felt nevertheless for the new writer the admiration which an awkward boy who never receives any marks for gymnastics feels when he watches another more nimble. And from then onwards I felt less admiration for Bergotte, whose limpidity began to strike me as insufficient. There was a time at which people recognised things quite easily in pictures when it was Fromentin who had painted them, and could not recognise them at all when it was Renoir.

People of taste and refinement tell us nowadays that Renoir is one of the great painters of the last century. But in so saying they forget the element of Time, and that it took a great deal of time, well into the present century, before Renoir was hailed as a great artist. To succeed thus in gaining recognition, the original painter, the original writer proceeds on the lines adopted by oculists. The course of treatment they give us by their painting or by their prose is not always agreeable to us. When it is at an end the operator says to us: “Now look!” And, lo and behold, the world around us (which was not created once and for all, but is created afresh as often as an original artist is born) appears to us entirely different from the; old world, but perfectly clear. Women pass in the street, different from what they used to be, because they are Renoirs, those Renoir types which we persistently refused to see as women. The carriages, too, are Renoirs, and the water, and the sky: we feel tempted to go for a walk in the forest which reminds us of that other which when we first saw it looked like anything in the world except a forest, like for instance a tapestry of innumerable shades but lacking precisely the shades proper to forests. Such is the new and perishable universe which has just been created. It will last until the next geological catastrophe is precipitated by a new painter or writer of original talent.

This writer who had taken Bergotte’s place in my affections wearied me not by the incoherence but by the novelty of associations — perfectly coherent — which my mind was not trained to follow. The fact that it was always at the same point that I felt myself relinquish my grasp pointed to a common character in the efforts that I had always to make. Moreover, when once in a thousand times I did succeed in following the writer to the end of his sentence, what I saw there was always of a humour, a truth, a charm similar to those which I had found long ago in reading Bergotte, only more delightful. I reflected that it was not so many years since a similar reconstruction of the world, like that which I was waiting now for his successor to produce, had been wrought for me by Bergotte himself. Until I was led to ask myself whether there was indeed any truth in the distinction which we are always making between art, which is no more advanced now than in Homer’s day, and science with its continuous progress. Perhaps, on the contrary, art was in this respect like science; each new writer seemed to me to have advanced beyond the stage of his immediate predecessor; and how was I to know that in twenty years’ time, when I should be able to accompany without strain or effort the newcomer of to-day, another might not appear at whose approach he in turn would be packed off to the limbo to which his own coming would have consigned Bergotte?

I spoke to the latter of the new writer. He gave me a distaste for him not so much when he said that his art was uncouth, easy and vacuous, as when he told me that he had seen him, and had almost mistaken him (so strong was the likeness) for Bloch. From that moment my friend's features outlined themselves on the printed pages, and I no longer felt any obligation to make the effort necessary to understand them. If Bergotte had decried him to me it was less, I fancy, out of jealousy for a success that was yet to come than out of ignorance of his work. He read scarcely anything. The bulk of his thought had long since passed from his brain into his books. He had grown thin, as though they had been extracted from him by surgical operations. His reproductive instinct no longer impelled him to any activity, now that he had given an independent existence to almost all his thoughts. He led the vegetative life of a convalescent, of a woman after childbirth; his fine eyes remained motionless, vaguely dazed, like the eyes of a man who lies on the seashore and in a vague daydream sees only each little breaking wave. However, if it was less interesting to talk to him now than I should once have found it, I felt no compunction for that. He was so far a creature of habit that the simplest habits, like the most elaborate, once he had formed them, became indispensable to him for a certain length of time. I do not know what made him come to our house first of all, but after that every day it was simply because he had been there the day before. He would come to the house as he might have gone to a café, so that no one should talk to him, so that he might — very rarely — talk himself; one might in short have found in his conduct a sign that he was moved to sympathise with us in our anxiety, or that he enjoyed my company, had one sought to draw any conclusion from such an assiduity in calling. It did not fail to impress my mother, sensitive to everything that might be regarded as an act of homage to her invalid. And every day she reminded me: "See that you don't forget to thank him nicely."

We had also — a discreet feminine attention like the refreshments that are brought to us in the studio, between sittings, by a painter's mistress — a courteous supplement to those which her husband paid us professionally, a visit from Mme. Cottard. She came to offer us her 'waiting-woman,' or, if we preferred the services of a man, she would 'scour the country' for one, and, best of all, on our declining, said that she did hope this was not just a 'put-off on our part, a word which in her world signifies a false pretext for not accepting an invitation. She assured us that the Professor, who never referred to his patients when he was at home, was as sad about it as if it had been she herself who was ill. We shall see in due course that even if this had been true it would have been

at once a very small and a considerable admission on the part of the most faithless and the most attentive of husbands.

Offers as helpful and infinitely more touching owing to the form in which they were couched (which was a blend of the highest intelligence, the warmest sympathy, and a rare felicity of expression) were addressed to me by the Hereditary Grand Duke of Luxembourg. I had met him at Balbec where he had come on a visit to one of his aunts, the Princesse de Luxembourg, being himself at that time merely Comte de Nassau. He had married, some months later, the charming daughter of another Luxembourg Princess, extremely rich, because she was the only daughter of a Prince who was the proprietor of an immense flour-mill. Whereupon the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, who had no children of his own and was devoted to his nephew Nassau, had obtained the approval of his Chamber to his declaring the young man his heir. As with all marriages of this nature, the origin of the bride's fortune was the obstacle as it was also the deciding factor. I remembered this Comte de Nassau as one of the most striking young men I had ever met, already devoured, at that time, by a dark and blazing passion for his betrothed. I was deeply touched by the letters which he wrote me, day after day, during my grandmother's illness, and Mamma herself, in her emotion, quoted sadly one of her mother's expressions: "Sévigné would not have put it better."

On the sixth day Mamma, yielding to my grandmother's entreaties, left her for a little and pretended to go and lie down. I should have liked (so that my grandmother might go to sleep) Françoise to sit quite still and not disturb her by moving. In spite of my supplications, she got up and left the room; she was genuinely devoted to my grandmother; with her uncanny insight and her natural pessimism she regarded her as doomed. She would therefore have liked to pay her every possible attention. But word had just come that an electrician was in the house, one of the oldest servants of his firm, the head of which was his brother-in-law, highly esteemed throughout the building, where he had worked for many years, and especially by Jupien. This man had been ordered to come before my grandmother's illness. It seemed to me that he might have been sent away again, or told to wait. But Franchise's code of manners would not permit of this; it would have been a want of courtesy towards this worthy man; my grandmother's condition ceased at once to matter. When, after waiting a quarter of an hour, I lost my patience and went to look for her in the kitchen, I found her talking to him on the landing of the back staircase, the door of which stood open, a device which had the advantage, should any of us come on the scene, of letting

it be thought that they were just saying goodbye, but had also the drawback of sending a terrible draught through the house. Françoise tore herself from the workman, not without turning to shout down after him various greetings, forgotten in her haste, to his wife and brother-in-law. A typical Combray scruple, not to be found wanting in politeness, which Françoise extended even to foreign politics. People foolishly imagine that the vast dimensions of social phenomena afford them an excellent opportunity to penetrate farther into the human soul; they ought, on the contrary, to realise that it is by plumbing the depths of a single personality that they might have a chance of understanding those phenomena. A thousand times over Françoise told the gardener at Combray that war was the most senseless of crimes, that life was the only thing that mattered. Yet, when the Russo-Japanese war broke out, she was quite ashamed, when she thought of the Tsar, that we had not gone to war also to help the 'poor Russians,' "since," she reminded us, "we're allianced to them." She felt this abstention to be not quite polite to Nicholas II, who had always "said such nice things about us"; it was a corollary of the same code which would have prevented her from refusing a glass of brandy from Jupien, knowing that it would 'upset' her digestion, and which brought it about that now, with my grandmother lying at death's door, the same meanness of which she considered France guilty in remaining neutral with regard to Japan she would have had to admit in herself, had she not gone in person to make her apologies to this good electrician who had been put to so much trouble.

Luckily for ourselves, we were soon rid of Françoise's daughter, who was obliged to be away for some weeks. To the regular stock of advice which people at Combray gave to the family of an invalid: "You haven't tried taking him away for a little... the change of air, you know... pick up an appetite... etc?" she had added the almost unique idea, which she had specially created in her own imagination, and repeated accordingly whenever we saw her, without fail, as though hoping by dint of reiteration to force it through the thickness of people's heads: "She ought to have taken herself in hand *radically* from the first." She did not recommend any one cure rather than another, provided that it were 'radical.' As for Françoise herself, she noticed that we were not giving my grandmother many medicines. Since, according to her, they only destroyed the stomach, she was quite glad of this, but at the same time even more humiliated. She had, in the South of France, some cousins — relatively well-to-do — whose daughter, after falling ill just as she was growing up, had died at twenty-three; for several years the father and mother had ruined themselves on drugs, on different doctors,

on pilgrimages from one watering-place to another, until her decease. Now all this seemed to Françoise, for the parents in question, a kind of luxury, as though they had owned racehorses, or a Place in the country. They themselves, in the midst of their affliction, derived a certain gratification from the thought of such lavish expenditure. They had now nothing left, least of all their most precious possession, their child, but they did enjoy telling people how they had done as much for her and more than the richest in the land. The ultra-violet rays to the action of which, several times a day for months on end, the poor girl had been subjected, delighted them more than anything. The father, elated in his grief by the glory of it all, was led to speak of his daughter at times as of an operatic star for whose sake he had ruined himself. Françoise was not unmoved by this wealth of scenic effect; that which framed my grandmother's sickbed seemed to her a trifle meagre, suited rather to an illness on the stage of a small provincial theatre.

There came a time when her uraemic trouble affected my grandmother's eyes. For some days she could not see at all. Her eyes were not at all like those of a blind person, but remained just the same as before. And I gathered that she could see nothing only from the strangeness of a certain smile of welcome which she assumed the moment one opened the door, until one had come up to her and taken her hand, a smile which began too soon and remained stereotyped on her lips, fixed, but always full-faced, and endeavouring to be visible from all points, because she could no longer rely upon her sight to regulate it, to indicate the right moment, the proper direction, to bring it to the point, to make it vary according to the change of position or of facial expression of the person who had come in; because it was left isolated, without the accompanying smile in her eyes which would have distracted a little from it the attention of the visitor, it assumed in its awkwardness an undue importance, giving one the impression of an exaggerated friendliness. Then her sight was completely restored; from her eyes the wandering affliction passed to her ears. For several days my grandmother was deaf. And as she was afraid of being taken by surprise by the sudden entry of some one whom she would not have heard come in, all day long, albeit she was lying with her face to the wall, she kept turning her head sharply towards the door. But the movement of her neck was clumsy, for one cannot adapt oneself in a few days to this transposition of faculties, so as, if not actually to see sounds, to listen with one's eyes. Finally her pain grew less, but the impediment of her speech increased. We were obliged to ask her to repeat almost everything that she said.

And now my grandmother, realising that we could no longer understand her,

gave up altogether the attempt to speak and lay perfectly still. When she caught sight of me she gave a sort of convulsive start like a person who suddenly finds himself unable to breathe, but could make no intelligible sound. Then, overcome by her sheer powerlessness, she let her head drop on to the pillows, stretched herself out flat in her bed, her face grave, like a face of marble, her hands motionless on the sheet or occupied in some purely physical action such as that of wiping her fingers with her handkerchief. She made no effort to think. Then came a state of perpetual agitation. She was incessantly trying to get up. But we restrained her so far as we could from doing so, for fear of her discovering how paralysed she was. One day when she had been left alone for a moment I found her standing on the floor in her nightgown trying to open the window.

At Balbec, once, when a widow who had jumped into the sea had been rescued against her will, my grandmother had told me (moved perhaps by one of those presentiments which we discern at times in the mystery — so obscure, for all that — of the organic life around us, in which nevertheless it seems that our own future is foreshadowed) that she could think of nothing so cruel as to tear a poor wretch from the death that she had deliberately sought and restore her to her living martyrdom.

We were just in time to catch my grandmother, she put up an almost violent resistance to my mother, then, overpowered, seated forcibly in an armchair, she ceased to wish for death, to regret being alive, her face resumed its impassivity and she began laboriously to pick off the hairs that had been left on her nightgown by a fur cloak which somebody had thrown over her shoulders.

The look in her eyes changed completely; often uneasy, plaintive, haggard, it was no longer the look we knew, it was the sullen expression of a doddering old woman....

By dint of repeatedly asking her whether she would not like her hair done, Françoise managed to persuade herself that the request had come from my grandmother. She armed herself with brushes, combs, eau de Cologne, a wrapper. “It can’t hurt Madame Amédée,” she said to herself, “if I just comb her; nobody’s ever too ill for a good combing.” In other words, one was never too weak for another person to be able, for her own satisfaction, to comb one. But when I came into the room I saw between the cruel hands of Françoise, as blissfully happy as though she were in the act of restoring my grandmother to health, beneath a thin rain of aged tresses which had not the strength to resist the action of the comb, a head which, incapable of maintaining the position into which it had been forced, was rolling to and fro with a ceaseless swirling motion

in which sheer debility alternated with spasms of pain. I felt that the moment at which Françoise would have finished her task was approaching, and I dared not hasten it by suggesting to her: “That is enough,” for fear of her disobeying me. But I did forcibly intervene when, in order that my grandmother might see whether her hair had been done to her liking, Françoise, with innocent savagery, brought her a glass. I was glad for the moment that I had managed to snatch it from her in time, before my grandmother, whom we had carefully kept without a mirror, could catch even a stray glimpse of a face unlike anything she could have imagined. But, alas, when, a moment later, I leaned over her to kiss that dear forehead which had been so harshly treated, she looked up at me with a puzzled, distrustful, shocked expression: she did not know me.

According to our doctor, this was a symptom that the congestion of her brain was increasing. It must be relieved in some way.

Cottard was in two minds. Françoise hoped at first that they were going to apply ‘clarified cups.’ She looked for the effects of this treatment in my dictionary, but could find no reference to it. Even if she had said ‘scarified’ instead of ‘clarified’ she still would not have found any reference to this adjective, since she did not look any more for it under ‘S’ than under ‘C’; she did indeed say ‘clarified’ but she wrote (and consequently assumed that the printed word was) ‘esclarified.’ Cottard, to her disappointment, gave the preference, though without much hope, to leeches. When, a few hours later, I went into my grandmother’s room, fastened to her neck, her temples, her ears, the tiny black serpents were writhing among her bloodstained locks, as on the head of Medusa. But in her pale and peaceful entirely motionless face I saw wide open, luminous and calm, her own beautiful eyes, as in days gone by (perhaps even more charged with the light of intelligence than they had been before her illness, since, as she could not speak and must not move, it was to her eyes alone that she entrusted her thought, that thought which at one time occupies an immense place in us, offering us undreamed-of treasures, at another time seems reduced to nothing, then may be reborn, as though by spontaneous generation, by the withdrawal of a few drops of blood), her eyes, soft and liquid like two pools of oil in which the rekindled fire that was now burning lighted before the face of the invalid a reconquered universe. Her calm was no longer the wisdom of despair, but that of hope. She realised that she was better, wished to be careful, not to move, and made me the present only of a charming smile so that I should know that she was feeling better, as she gently pressed my hand.

I knew the disgust that my grandmother felt at the sight of certain animals,

let alone being touched by them. I knew that it was in consideration of a higher utility that she was enduring the leeches. And so it infuriated me to hear Françoise repeating to her with that laugh which people use to a baby, to make it crow: “Oh, look at the little beasties running about on Madame.” This was, moreover, treating our patient with a want of respect, as though she were in her second childhood. But my grandmother, whose face had assumed the calm fortitude of a stoic, did not seem even to hear her.

Alas! No sooner had the leeches been taken off than the congestion returned and grew steadily worse. I was surprised to find that at this stage, when my grandmother was so ill, Françoise was constantly disappearing. The fact was that she had ordered herself a mourning dress, and did not wish to keep her dressmaker waiting. In the lives of most women, everything, even the greatest sorrow, resolves itself into a question of ‘trying-on.’

A few days later, when I was in bed and sleeping, my mother came to call me in the early hours of the morning. With that tender consideration which, in great crises, people who are crushed by grief shew even for the slightest discomfort of others:

“Forgive me for disturbing your sleep,” she said to me.

“I was not asleep,” I answered as I awoke.

I said this in good faith. The great modification which the act of awakening effects in us is not so much that of introducing us to the clear life of consciousness, as that of making us lose all memory of that other, rather more diffused light in which our mind has been resting, as in the opaline depths of the sea. The tide of thought, half veiled from our perception, over which we were drifting still a moment ago, kept us in a state of motion perfectly sufficient to enable us to refer to it by the name of wakefulness. But then our actual awakenings produce an interruption of memory. A little later we describe these states as sleep because we no longer remember them. And when shines that bright star which at the moment of waking illuminates behind the sleeper the whole expanse of his sleep, it makes him imagine for a few moments that this was not a sleeping but a waking state; a shooting star, it must be added, which blots out with the fading of its light not only the false existence but the very appearance of our dream, and merely enables him who has awoken to say to himself: “I was asleep.”

In a voice so gentle that she seemed to be afraid of hurting me, my mother asked whether it would tire me too much to get out of bed, and, stroking my hands, went on:

“My poor boy, you have only your Papa and Mamma to help you now.”

We went into the sickroom. Bent in a semicircle on the bed a creature other than my grandmother, a sort of wild beast which was coated with her hair and couched amid her bedclothes lay panting, groaning, making the blankets heave with its convulsions. The eyelids were closed, and it was because the one nearer me did not shut properly, rather than because it opened at all that it left visible a chink of eye, misty, filmed, reflecting the dimness both of an organic sense of vision and of a hidden, internal pain. All this agitation was not addressed to us, whom she neither saw nor knew. But if this was only a beast that was stirring there, where coulel my grandmother be? Yes, I could recognise the shape of her nose, which bore no relation now to the rest of her face, but to the corner of which a beauty spot still adhered, and the hand that kept thrusting the blankets aside with a gesture which formerly would have meant that those blankets were pressing upon her, but now meant nothing.

Mamma asked me to go for a little vinegar and water with which to sponge my grandmother’s forehead. It was the only thing that refreshed her, thought Mamma, who saw that she was trying to push back her hair. But now one of the servants was signalling to me from the doorway. The news that my grandmother was in the last throes had spread like wildfire through the house. One of those ‘extra helps’ whom people engage at exceptional times to relieve the strain on their servants (a practice which gives deathbeds an air of being social functions) had just opened the front door to the Duc de Guermantes, who was now waiting in the hall and had asked for me: I could not escape him.

“I have just, my dear Sir, heard your tragic news. I should like, as a mark of sympathy, to shake hands with your father.” I made the excuse that I could not very well disturb him at the moment. M. de Guermantes was like a caller who turns up just as one is about to start on a journey. But he felt so intensely the importance of the courtesy he was shewing us that it blinded him to all else, and he insisted upon being taken into the drawing-room. As a general rule, he made a point of going resolutely through the formalities with which he had decided to honour anyone, and took little heed that the trunks were packed or the coffin ready.

“Have you sent for Dieulafoy? No? That was a great mistake. And if you had only asked me, I would have got him to come, he never refuses me anything, although he has refused the Duchesse de Chartres before now. You see, I set myself above a Princess of the Blood. However, in the presence of death we are all equal,” he added, not that he meant to suggest that my grandmother was

becoming his equal, but probably because he felt that a prolonged discussion of his power over Dieulafoy and his pre-eminence over the Duchesse de Chartres would not be in very good taste.

This advice did not in the least surprise me. I knew that, in the Guermantes set, the name of Dieulafoy was regularly quoted (only with slightly more respect) among those of other tradesmen who were ‘quite the best’ in their respective lines. And the old Duchesse de Mortemart *née*Guermantes (I never could understand, by the way, why, the moment one speaks of a Duchess, one almost invariably says: “The old Duchess of So-and-so” or, alternatively, in a delicate Watteau tone, if she is still young: “The little Duchess of So-and-so,”) would prescribe almost automatically, with a droop of the eyelid, in serious cases: “Dieulafoy, Dieulafoy!” as, if one wanted a place for ices, she would advise: ‘Poiré Blanche,’ or for small pastry ‘Rebattet, Rebattet.’ But I was not aware that my father had, as a matter of fact, just sent for Dieulafoy.

At this point my mother, who was waiting impatiently for some cylinders of oxygen which would help my grandmother to breathe more easily, came out herself to the hall where she little expected to find M. de Guermantes. I should have liked to conceal him, had that been possible. But convinced in his own mind that nothing was more essential, could be more gratifying to her or more indispensable to the maintenance of his reputation as a perfect gentleman, he seized me violently by the arm and, although I defended myself as against an assault with repeated protestations of “Sir, Sir, Sir,” dragged me across to Mamma, saying: “Will you do me the great honour of presenting me to your mother?” letting go a little as he came to the last word. And it was so plain to him that the honour was hers that he could not help smiling at her even while he was composing a grave face. There was nothing for it but to mention his name, the sound of which at once started him bowing and scraping, and he was just going to begin the complete ritual of salutation. He apparently proposed to enter into conversation, but my mother, overwhelmed by her grief, told me to come at once and did not reply to the speeches of M. de Guermantes who, expecting to be received as a visitor and finding himself instead left alone in the hall, would have been obliged to retire had he not at that moment caught sight of Saint-Loup who had arrived in Paris that morning and had come to us in haste to inquire for news. “I say, this is a piece of luck!” cried the Duke joyfully, catching his nephew by the sleeve, which he nearly tore off, regardless of the presence of my mother who was again crossing the hall. Saint-Loup was not sorry, I fancy, despite his genuine sympathy, at having missed seeing me, considering his

attitude towards myself. He left the house, carried off by his uncle who,—having had something very important to say to him and having very nearly gone down to Doncières on purpose to say it, was beside himself with joy at being able to save himself so much exertion. “Upon my soul, if anybody had told me I had only to cross the courtyard and I should find you here, I should have thought it a huge joke; as your friend M. Bloch would say, it’s a regular farce.” And as he disappeared down the stairs with Robert whom he held by the shoulder: “All the same,” he went on, “it’s quite clear I must have touched the hangman’s rope or something; I do have the most astounding luck.” Not that the Duc de Guermantes was ill-bred; far from it. But he was one of those men who are incapable of putting themselves in the place of other people, who resemble in that respect undertakers and the majority of doctors, and who, after composing their faces and saying: “This is a very painful occasion,” after, if need be, embracing you and advising you to rest, cease to regard a deathbed or a funeral as anything but a social gathering of a more or less restricted kind at which, with a joviality that has been checked for a moment only, they scan the room in search of the person whom they can tell about their own little affairs, or ask to introduce them to some one else, or offer a ‘lift’ in their carriage when it is time to go home. The Duc de Guermantes, while congratulating himself on the ‘good wind’ that had blown him into the arms of his nephew, was still so surprised at the reception — natural as it was — that had been given him by my mother, that he declared later on that she was as disagreeable as my father was civil, that she had ‘absent fits’ during which she seemed literally not to hear a word you said to her, and that in his opinion she had no self-possession and perhaps even was not quite ‘all there.’ At the same time he had been quite prepared (according to what I was told) to put this state of mind down, in part at any rate, to the circumstances, and declared that my mother had seemed to him greatly ‘affected’ by the sad event. But he had still stored up in his limbs all the residue of bows and reverences which he had been prevented from using up, and had so little idea of the real nature of Mamma’s sorrow that he asked me, the day before the funeral, if I was not doing anything to distract her.

A half-brother of my grandmother, who was in religion, and whom I had never seen, had telegraphed to Austria, where the head of his Order was, and having as a special privilege obtained leave, arrived that day. Bowed down with grief, he sat by the bedside reading prayers and meditations from a book, without, however, taking his gimlet eyes from the invalid’s face. At one point, when my grandmother was unconscious, the sight of this cleric’s grief began to

upset me, and I looked at him tenderly. He appeared surprised by my pity, and then an odd thing happened. He joined his hands in front of his face, like a man absorbed in painful meditation, but, on the assumption that I would then cease to watch him, left, as I observed, a tiny chink between his fingers. And at the moment when my gaze left his face, I saw his sharp eye, which had been making use of its vantage-point behind his hands to observe whether my sympathy were sincere. He was hidden there as in the darkness of a confessional. He saw that I was still looking and at once shut tight the lattice which he had left ajar. I have met him again since then, but never has any reference been made by either of us to that minute. It was tacitly agreed that I had not noticed that he was spying on me. In the priest as in the alienist, there is always an element of the examining magistrate. Besides, what friend is there, however cherished, in whose and our common past there has not been some such episode which we find it convenient to believe that he must have forgotten?

The doctor gave my grandmother an injection of morphine, and to make her breathing less troublesome ordered cylinders of oxygen. My mother, the doctor, the nursing sister held these in their hands; as soon as one was exhausted another was put in its place. I had left the room for a few minutes. When I returned I found myself face to face with a miracle. Accompanied on a muted instrument by an incessant murmur, my grandmother seemed to be greeting us with a long and blissful chant, which filled the room, rapid and musical. I soon realized that this was scarcely less unconscious, that it was as purely mechanical as the hoarse rattle that I had heard before leaving the room. Perhaps to a slight extent it reflected some improvement brought about by the morphine. Principally it was the result (the air not passing quite in the same way through the bronchial tubes) of a change in the register of her breathing. Released by the twofold action of the oxygen and the morphine, my grandmother’s breath no longer laboured, panted, groaned, but, swift and light, shot like a skater along the delicious stream. Perhaps with her breath, unconscious like that of the wind in the hollow stem of a reed, there were blended in this chant some of those more human sighs which, liberated at the approach of death, make us imagine impressions of suffering or happiness in minds which already have ceased to feel, and these sighs came now to add a more melodious accent, but without changing its rhythm, to that long phrase which rose, mounted still higher, then declined, to start forth afresh, from her unburdened bosom in quest of the oxygen. Then, having risen to so high a pitch, having been sustained with so much vigour, the chant, mingled with a murmur of supplication from the midst of her ecstasy, seemed at times to stop

altogether like a spring that has ceased to flow.

Françoise, in any great sorrow, felt the need but did not possess the art — as simple as that need was futile — of giving it expression. Regarding my grandmother's case as quite hopeless, it was her own personal impressions that she was impelled to communicate to us. And all that she could do was to repeat: "It makes me feel all queer," in the same tone in which she would say, when she had taken too large a plateful of cabbage broth: "It's like a load on my stomach," sensations both of which were more natural than she seemed to think. Though so feebly expressed, her grief was nevertheless very great, and was aggravated moreover by her annoyance that her daughter, detained at Combray (to which this young Parisian now referred as 'the Cambrousse' and where she felt herself growing '*pétrousse*,' in other words fossilised), would not, presumably, be able to return in time for the funeral ceremony, which was certain, Françoise felt, to be a superb spectacle. Knowing that we were not inclined to be expansive, she made Jupien promise at all costs to keep every evening in the week free. She knew that he would be engaged elsewhere at the hour of the funeral. She was determined at least to 'go over it all' with him on his return.

For several nights now my father, my grandfather and one of our cousins had been sitting up, and never left the house during the day. Their continuous devotion ended by assuming a mask of indifference, and their interminable leisure round the deathbed made them indulge in that small talk which is an inseparable accompaniment of prolonged confinement in a railway carriage. Anyhow this cousin (a nephew of my great-aunt) aroused in me an antipathy as strong as the esteem which he deserved and generally enjoyed. He was always 'sent for' in times of great trouble, and was so assiduous in his attentions to the dying that their mourning families, on the pretext that he was in delicate health, despite his robust appearance, his bass voice and bristling beard, invariably besought him, with the customary euphemisms, not to come to the cemetery. I could tell already that Mamma, who thought of others in the midst of the most crushing grief, would soon be saying to him, in a very different form of words, what he was in the habit of hearing said on all such occasions:

"Promise me that you won't come 'to-morrow.' Please, for 'her sake.' At any rate, you won't go 'all the way.' It's what she would have wished."

But there was nothing for it; he was always the first to arrive 'at the house,' by reason of which he had been given, among another set, the nickname (unknown to us) of 'No flowers by request.' And before attending everything he had always 'attended to everything,' which entitled him to the formula: "We

don’t know how to thank you.”

“What’s that?” came in a loud voice from my grandfather, who had grown rather deaf and had failed to catch something which our cousin had just said to my father.

“Nothing,” answered the cousin. “I was just saying that I’d heard from Combray this morning. The weather is appalling down there, and here we’ve got too much sun.”

“Yet the barometer is very low,” put in my father.

“Where did you say the weather was bad?” asked my grandfather.

“At Combray.”

“Ah! I’m not surprised; whenever it’s bad here it’s fine at Combray, and vice versa. Good gracious! Talking of Combray, has anyone remembered to tell Legrandin?”

“Yes, don’t worry about that, it’s been done,” said my cousin, whose cheeks, bronzed by an irrepressible growth of beard, dimpled faintly with the satisfaction of having ‘remembered’ it.

At this point my father hurried from the room. I supposed that a sudden change, for better or worse, had occurred. It was simply that Dr. Dieulafoy had just arrived. My father went to receive him in the drawing-room, like the actor who is to come next on the stage. We had sent for him not to cure but to certify, in almost a legal capacity. Dr. Dieulafoy might indeed be a great physician, a marvellous professor; to these several parts, in which he excelled, he added a third, in which he remained for forty years without a rival, a part as original as that of the arguer, the scaramouch or the noble father, which consisted in coming to certify an agony or a death. The mere sound of his name foreshadowed the dignity with which he would sustain the part, and when the servant announced: “M. Dieulafoy,” one imagined oneself at a play by Molière. To the dignity of his attitude was added, without being conspicuous, the suppleness of a perfect figure. A face in itself too good-looking was toned down by the convention due to distressing circumstances. In the sable majesty of his frock coat the Professor entered the room, melancholy without affectation, uttered not the least word of condolence, which might have been thought insincere, nor was he guilty of the slightest infringement of the rules of tact. At the foot of a deathbed it was he and not the Duc de Guermantes who was the great gentleman Having examined my grandmother, but not so as to tire her, and with ari excess of reserve which was an act of courtesy to the doctor who was treating the case, he murmured a few words to my father, bowed respectfully to my mother to whom I felt that my

father had positively to restrain himself from saying: “Professor Dieulafoy.” But already our visitor had turned away, not wishing to seem to be soliciting an introduction, and left the room in the most polished manner conceivable, simply taking with him the sealed envelope that was slipped into his hand. He had not appeared to see it, and we ourselves were left wondering for a moment whether we had really given it to him, such a conjurer’s nimbleness had he put into the act of making it vanish without thereby losing anything of the gravity — which was increased rather — of the great consultant in his long frock coat with its silken lapels, and his handsome head full of a noble commiseration. The slowness and vivacity of his movements shewed that, even if he had a hundred other visits to pay and patients waiting, he refused to appear hurried. For he was the embodiment of tact, intelligence and kindness. That eminent man is no longer with us. Other physicians, other professors may have rivalled, may indeed have surpassed him. But the ‘capacity’ in which his knowledge, his physical endowments, his distinguished manners made him triumph exists no longer for want of any successor capable of taking his place. Mamma had not even noticed M. Dieulafoy, everything that was not my grandmother having no existence for her. I remember (and here I anticipate) that at the cemetery, where we saw her, like a supernatural apparition, go up timidly to the grave and seem to be gazing in the wake of a flying form that was already far away, my father having remarked to her: “Old Norpois came to the house and to the church and on here; he gave up a most important committee meeting to come; you ought really to say a word to him, he’ll be so gratified if you do,” my mother, when the Ambassador stood before her and bowed, could do no more than gently incline a face that shewed no tears. A couple of days earlier — to anticipate once again before returning to where we were just now by the bed on which my grandmother lay dying — while they were watching by the body, Françoise, who, not disbelieving entirely in ghosts, was terrified by the least sound, had said: “I believe that’s her.” But in place of fear it was an ineffable sweetness that her words aroused in my mother, who would have been so glad that the dead should return, to have her mother with her sometimes still.

To return now to those last hours, “You heard about the telegram her sisters sent us?” my grandfather asked the cousin.

“Yes, Beethoven, they told me about it, it’s worth framing; still, I’m not surprised.”

“My poor wife, who was so fond of them, too,” said my grandfather, wiping away a tear. “We mustn’t blame them. They’re stark mad, both of them, as I’ve

always said. What's the matter now; aren't you going on with the oxygen?"

My mother spoke: "Oh, but then Mamma will be having more trouble with her breathing."

The doctor reassured her: "Oh, no! The effect of the oxygen will last a good while yet; we can begin it again presently."

It seemed to me that he would not have said this of a dying woman, that if this good effect were to last it meant that we could still do something to keep her alive. The hiss of the oxygen ceased for a few moments, But the happy plaint of her breathing poured out steadily, light, troubled, unfinished, without end, beginning afresh. Now and then it seemed that all was over, her breath stopped, whether owing to one of those transpositions to another octave that occur in the breathing of a sleeper, or else from a natural interruption, an effect of unconsciousness, the progress of asphyxia, some failure of the heart. The doctor stooped to feel my grandmother's pulse, but already, as if a tributary were pouring its current into the dried river-bed, a fresh chant broke out from the interrupted measure. And the first was resumed in another pitch with the same inexhaustible force. Who knows whether, without indeed my grandmother's being conscious of them, a countless throng of happy and tender memories compressed by suffering were not escaping from her now, like those lighter gases which had long been compressed in the cylinders? One would have said that everything thai she had to tell us was pouring out, that it was to us that she was addressing herself with this prolixity, this earnestness, this effusion. At the foot of the bed, convulsed by every gasp of this agony, not weeping but now and then drenched with tears, my mother presented the unreasoning desolation of a leaf which the rain lashes and the wind twirls on its stem. They made me dry my eyes before I went up to kiss my grandmother.

"But I thought she couldn't see anything now?" said my father.

"One can never be sure," replied the doctor.

When my lips touched her face, my grandmother's hands quivered, a long shudder ran through her whole body, reflex perhaps, perhaps because certain affections have their hyperaesthesia which recognises through the veil of unconsciousness what they barely need senses to enable them to love. Suddenly my grandmother half rose, made a violent effort, as though struggling to resist an attempt on her life. Françoise could not endure this sight and burst out sobbing. Remembering what the doctor had just said I tried to make her leave the room. At that moment my grandmother opened her eyes. I thrust myself hurriedly in front of Françoise to hide her tears, while my parents were speaking to the

sufferer. The sound of the oxygen had ceased; the doctor moved away from the bedside. My grandmother was dead.

An hour or two later Françoise was able for the last time, and without causing them any pain, to comb those beautiful tresses which had only begun to turn grey and hitherto had seemed not so old as my grandmother herself. But now on the contrary it was they alone that set the crown of age on a face grown young again, from which had vanished the wrinkles, the contractions, the swellings, the strains, the hollows which in the long course of years had been carved on it by suffering. As at the far-off time when her parents had chosen for her a bridegroom, she had the features delicately traced by purity and submission, the cheeks glowing with a chaste expectation, with a vision of happiness, with an innocent gaiety even which the years had gradually destroyed. Life in withdrawing from her had taken with it the disillusionments of life. A smile seemed to be hovering on my grandmother’s lips. On that funeral couch, death, like a sculptor of the middle ages, had laid her in the form of a young maiden.

Chapter 2

Albeit it was simply a Sunday in autumn, I had been born again, life lay intact before me, for that morning, after a succession of mild days, there had been a cold mist which had not cleared until nearly midday. A change in the weather is sufficient to create the world and oneself anew. Formerly, when the wind howled in my chimney, I would listen to the blows which it struck on the iron trap with as keen an emotion as if, like the famous bow-taps with which the C Minor Symphony opens, they had been the irresistible appeal of a mysterious destiny. Every change in the aspect of nature offers us a similar transformation by adapting our desires so as to harmonise with the new form of things. The mist, from the moment of my awakening, had made of me, instead of the centrifugal being which one is on fine days, a self-centred man, longing for the chimney corner and the nuptial couch, a shivering Adam in quest of a sedentary Eve, in this different world.

Between the soft grey tint of a morning landscape and the taste of a cup of chocolate I tried to account for all the originality of the physical, intellectual and moral life which I had taken with me, about a year earlier, to Doncières, and which, blazoned with the oblong form of a bare hillside — always present even when it was invisible — formed in me a series of pleasures entirely distinct from all others, incommunicable to my friends, in the sense that the impressions, richly interwoven with one another, which gave them their orchestral accompaniment were a great deal more characteristic of them, to my subconscious mind, than any facts that I might have related. From this point of view the new world in which the mist of this morning had immersed me was a world already known to me (which only made it more real) and forgotten for some time (which restored all its novelty). And I was able to look at several of the pictures of misty landscapes which my memory had acquired, notably a series of ‘Mornings at Doncières,’ including my first morning there in barracks and another, in a neighbouring country house, where I had gone with Saint-Loup to spend the night: in which from the windows, whose curtains I had drawn back at daybreak, before getting into bed again, in the first a trooper, in the second (on

the thin margin of a pond and a wood all the rest of which was engulfed in the uniform and liquid softness of the mist) a coachman busy polishing a strap had appeared to me like those rare figures, scarcely visible to the eye obliged to adapt itself to the mysterious vagueness of their half-lights, which emerge from an obliterated fresco.

It was from my bed that I was looking this afternoon at these pictorial memories, for I had gone back to bed to wait until the hour came at which, taking advantage of the absence of my parents, who had gone for a few days to Combray, I proposed to get up and go to a little play which was being given that evening in Mme. de Villeparisis's drawing-room. Had they been at home I should perhaps not have ventured to go out; my mother in the delicacy of her respect for my grandmother's memory, wished the tokens of regret that were paid to it to be freely and sincerely given; she would not have forbidden me this outing, she would have disapproved of it. From Combray, on the other hand, had I consulted her wishes, she would not have replied in a melancholy: "Do just as you like; you are old enough now to know what is right or wrong," but, reproaching herself for having left me alone in Paris, and measuring my grief by her own, would have wished for it distractions of a sort which she would have refused to herself, and which she persuaded herself that my grandmother, solicitous above all things for my health and the preservation of my nervous balance, would have advised me to take.

That morning the furnace of the new steam heater had for the first time been lighted. Its disagreeable sound — an intermittent hiccough — had no part whatsoever in my memories of Doncières. But its prolonged encounter, in me this afternoon, with them was to give it so lasting an affinity with them that whenever, after succeeding more or less in forgetting it, I heard the central heater hiccough again it reminded me of them.

There was no one else in the house but Françoise. The grey light, falling like a fine rain on the earth, wove without ceasing a transparent web through which the Sunday holiday-makers appeared in a silvery sheen. I had flung to the foot of my bed the *Figaro*, for which I had been sending out religiously every morning, ever since I had sent in an article which it had not yet printed; despite the absence of the sun, the intensity of the daylight was an indication that we were still only half-way through the afternoon. The tulle window-curtains, vaporous and friable as they would not have been on a fine day, had that same blend of beauty and fragility that dragon flies' wings have, and Venetian glass. It depressed me all the more that I should be spending this Sunday by myself

because I had sent a note that morning to Mlle, de Stermaria. Robert de Saint-Loup, whom his mother had at length succeeded in parting — after painful and abortive attempts — from his mistress, and who immediately afterwards had been sent to Morocco in the hope of his there forgetting one whom he had already for some little time ceased to love, had sent me a line, which had reached me the day before, announcing his arrival, presently, in France for a short spell of leave. As he would only be passing through Paris (where his family were doubtless afraid of seeing him renew relations with Rachel), he informed me, to shew me that he had been thinking of me, that he had met at Tangier Mile, or rather Mme. (for she had divorced her husband three months after their marriage) de Stermaria. And Robert, remembering what I had told him at Balbec, had asked her, on my behalf, to arrange a meeting. She would be delighted to dine with me, she had told him, on one of the evenings which, before her return to Brittany, she would be spending in Paris. He warned me to lose no time in writing to Mme. de Stermaria, for she would certainly have arrived before I got his letter. This had corne as no surprise to me, even although I had had no news of him since, at the time of my grandmother's last illness, he had accused me of perfidy and treachery. It had then been quite easy to see what must have happened. Rachel, who liked to provoke his jealousy — she had other reasons also for wishing me harm — had persuaded her lover that I had made a dastardly attempt to have relations with her in his absence. It is probable that he continued to believe in the truth of this allegation, but he had ceased to be in love with her, which meant that its truth or falsehood had become a matter of complete indifference to him, and our friendship alone remained. When, on meeting him again, I attempted to speak to him about his attack on me his sole answer was a cordial and friendly smile, which gave him the air of begging my pardon; then he turned the conversation to something else. All this was not to say that he did not, a little later, see Rachel occasionally when he was in Paris. The fellow-creatures who have played a leading part in one's life very rarely disappear from it suddenly with any finality. They return to take their old place in it at odd moments (so much so as to lead people to believe in a renewal of old love) before leaving it for ever. Saint-Loup's breach with Rachel had very soon become less painful to him, thanks to the soothing pleasure that was given him by her incessant demands for money. Jealousy, which prolongs the course of love, is not capable of containing many more ingredients than are the other forms of imagination. If one takes with one, when one starts on a journey, three or four images which incidentally one is sure to lose on the way (such as the

lilies and anemones heaped on the Ponte Vecchio, or the Persian church shrouded in mist), one's trunk is already pretty full. When one parts from a mistress one would be just as glad, until one has begun to forget her, that she should not become the property of three or four potential protectors whom one has in one's mind's eye, of whom, that is to say, one is jealous: all those whom one does not so picture count for nothing. Now frequent demands for money from a cast-off mistress no more give one a complete idea of her life than charts shewing a high temperature would of her illness. But the latter would at any rate be an indication that she was ill, and the former furnish a presumption, vague enough, it is true, that the forsaken one, or forsaker (whichever she be) cannot have found anything very remarkable in the way of rich protectors. And so each demand is welcomed with the joy which a lull produces in the jealous one's sufferings, while he responds to it at once by dispatching money, for naturally he does not like to think of her being in want of anything, except lovers (one of the three lovers he has in his mind's eye), until time has enabled him to regain his composure and he can learn without the slightest emotion the name of his successor. Sometimes Rachel came in so late at night that she could ask her former lover's permission to lie down beside him until the morning. This was a great comfort to Robert, for it refreshed his memory of how they had, after all, lived in intimacy together merely to see that even if he took the greater part of the bed for himself it did not in the least interfere with her sleep. He realised that she was more comfortable, lying close to his body, than she would have been elsewhere, that she felt herself, by his side — even in an hotel — to be in a bedroom known of old, in which the force of habit prevails and one sleeps better. He felt that his shoulders, his limbs, all of him were for her, even when he was unduly restless, from sleeplessness or from having to get up in the night things so entirely usual that they could not disturb her, and that the perception of them added still further to her sense of repose.

To revert to where we were, I had been all the more disquieted by Robert's letter in that I could read between the lines what he had not ventured to write more explicitly. "You can most certainly ask her to dine in a private room," he told me. "She is a charming young person, a delightful nature you will get on splendidly with her, and I am sure you will have a capital evening together." As my parents were returning at the end of the week on Saturday or Sunday, and as after that I should be forced to dine every evening at home, I had written at once to Mme. de Stermaria, proposing any evening that might suit her, up to Friday. A message was brought back that I should hear from her in writing the same

evening, about eight o'clock. The time would have passed quickly enough if I had had, during the afternoon that separated me from her letter, the help of a visit from anyone else. When the hours pass wrapped in conversation one ceases to count, or indeed to notice them, they vanish, and suddenly it is a long way beyond the point at which it escaped you that there reappears the nimble truant time. But if we are alone, our preoccupation, by bringing before us the still distant and incessantly awaited moment with the frequency and uniformity of a ticking pendulum, divides, or rather multiplies the hours by all the minutes which, had we been with friends, we should not have counted. And confronted, by the incessant return of my desire, with the ardent pleasure which I was going to taste — not for some days though, alas!— in Mme. de Stermaria's company, this afternoon, which I should have to spend by myself, seemed to me very empty and very melancholy.

Every now and then I heard the sound of the lift coming up, but it was followed by a second sound, not that for which I was hoping, namely the sound of its coming to a halt at our landing, but another very different sound which the lift made in continuing its progress to the floors above and which, because it so often meant the desertion of my floor when I was expecting a visitor, remained for me at other times, even when I had no wish to see anyone, a sound lugubrious in itself, in which there echoed, as it were, a sentence of solitary confinement. Weary, resigned, busy for several hours still over its immemorial task, the grey day stitched its shimmering needlework of light and shade, and it saddened me to think that I was to be left alone with a thing that knew me no more than would a seamstress who, installed by the window so as to see better while she finished her work, paid no attention to the person present with her in the room. Suddenly, although I had heard no bell, Françoise opened the door to let in Albertine, who came forward smiling, silent, plump, containing in the fulness of her body, made ready so that I might continue living them, come in search of me, the days we had spent together at that Balbec to which I had never since returned. No doubt, whenever we see again a person with whom our relations — however trivial they may have been — are altered, it is like a juxtaposition of two different periods. For this, we do not require that a former mistress should come to call upon us as a friend, all that we need is the visit to Paris of a person whom we had known in the daily round of some particular kind of life, and that this life should have ceased for us, were it no more than a week ago. On each of Albertine's smiling, questioning, blushing features I could read the questions: "And Madame de Villeparisis? And the dancing-master? And the

pastry-cook?" When she sat down her back seemed to be saying: "Gracious! There's no cliff here; you don't mind if I sit down beside you, all the same, as I used to do at Balbec?" She was like an enchantress handing me a mirror that reflected time. In this she was like all the people whom we seldom see now but with whom at one time we lived on more intimate terms. With Al-bertine, however, there was something more than this. Certainly, even at Balbec, in our daily encounters, I had always been surprised when she came in sight, so variable was her appearance from day to day. But now it was difficult to recognise her. Cleared of the pink vapour that used to bathe them, her features had emerged like those of a statue. She had another face, or rather she had a face at last; her body too had grown. There remained scarcely anything now of the shell in which she had been enclosed and on the surface of which, at Balbec, her future outline had been barely visible.

This time, Albertine had returned to Paris earlier than usual. As a rule she came only in the spring, which meant that, already disturbed for some weeks past by the storms that were beating down the first flowers, I did not distinguish, in the elements of the pleasure that I felt, the return of Albertine from that of the fine weather. It was enough that I should be told that she was in Paris and that she had called at the house, for me to see her again like a rose flowering by the sea. I cannot say whether it was the desire for Balbec or for herself that overcame me at such moments; possibly my desire for her was itself a lazy, cowardly, and incomplete method of possessing Balbec, as if to possess a thing materially, to take up one's abode in a town, were equivalent to possessing it spiritually. Besides, even materially, when she was no longer posed by my imagination before a horizon of sea, but sitting still in a room with me, she seemed to me often a very poor specimen of a rose, so poor, indeed, that I would gladly have shut my eyes in order not to observe this or that blemish of its petals, and to imagine instead that I was inhaling the salt air on the beach.

I must say it at this point, albeit I was not then aware of what was to happen only later on. Certainly, it is more reasonable to devote one's life to women than to postage stamps or old snuff-boxes, even to pictures or statues. Only the example of other collectors should be a warning to us to make changes, to have not one woman only but several. Those charming suggestions in which a girl abounds of a sea-beach, of the braided hair of a statue in church, of an old print, of everything that makes one see and admire in her, whenever she appears, a charming composition, those suggestions are not very stable. Live with a woman altogether and you will soon cease to see any of the things that made you love

her; though I must add that these two sundered elements can be reunited by jealousy. If, after a long period of life in common, I was to end by seeing nothing more in Albertine than an ordinary woman, an intrigue between her and some person whom she had loved at Balbec would still suffice, perhaps, to reincorporate in her, to amalgamate the beach and the unrolling of the tide. Only, as these secondary suggestions no longer captivate our eyes, it is to the heart that they are perceptible and fatal. We cannot, under so dangerous a form, regard the repetition of the miracle as a thing to be desired. But I am anticipating the course of years. And here I need only state my regret that I did not have the sense simply to have kept my collection of women as people keep their collections of old quizzing glasses, never so complete, in their cabinet, that there is not room always for another and rarer still.

Departing from the customary order of her holiday movements, this year she had come straight from Balbec, where furthermore she had not stayed nearly so late as usual. It was a long time since I had seen her, and as I did not know even by name the people with whom she was in the habit of mixing in Paris, I could form no impression of her during the periods in which she abstained from coming to see me. These lasted often for quite a time. Then, one fine day, in would burst Albertine whose rosy apparitions and silent visits left me little if any better informed as to what she might have been doing in an interval which remained plunged in that darkness of her hidden life which my eyes felt little anxiety to pierce.

This time, however, certain signs seemed to indicate that some new experience must have entered into that life. And yet, perhaps, all that one was entitled to conclude from them was that girls change very rapidly at the age which Albertine had now reached. For instance, her intellect was now more in evidence, and on my reminding her of the day when she had insisted with so much ardour on the superiority of her idea of making Sophocles write: “My dear Racine,” she was the first to laugh, quite wholeheartedly, at her own stupidity. “Andrée was quite right; it was stupid of me,” she admitted. “Sophocles ought to have begun: ‘Sir.’” I replied that the ‘Sir,’ and ‘Dear Sir,’ of Andrée were no less comic than her own ‘My dear Racine,’ or Gisèle’s ‘My dear Friend,’ but that after all the really stupid people were the Professors who still went on making Sophocles write letters to Racine. Here, however, Albertine was unable to follow me. She could not see in what the silliness consisted; her intelligence was dawning, but had not fully developed. There were other more attractive novelties in her; I felt, in this same pretty girl who had just sat down by my bed,

something that was different; and in those lines which, in one's eyes and other features, express one's general attitude towards life, a change of front, a partial conversion, as though there had now been shattered those resistances against which I had hurled my strength in vain at Balbec, one evening, now remote in time, on which we formed a couple symmetrical with but the converse of our present arrangement, since then it had lieen she who was lying down and I who sat by her bedside. Wishing and not venturing to make certain whether now she would let herself be kissed, every time that she rose to go I asked her to stay beside me a little longer. This was a concession not very easy to obtain, for albeit she had nothing to do (otherwise she would have rushed from the house) she was a person methodical in her habits and moreover not very gracious towards me, scarcely to be at ease in my company, and yet each time, after looking at her watch, she sat down again at my request until finally she had spent several hours with me without my having asked her for anything; the things I was saying to her followed logically those that I had said during the hours before, and bore no relation to what I was thinking about, what I desired from her, remained indefinitely parallel. There is nothing like desire for preventing the thing one says from bearing any resemblance to what one has in one's mind. Time presses, and yet it seems as though we were seeking to gain time by speaking of subjects absolutely alien to that by which we are obsessed. We then arrange that the sentence which we should like to utter shall be accompanied, or rather preluded, by a gesture, supposing that is to say that we have not to give ourselves the pleasure of an immediate demonstration and to gratify the curiosity we feel as to the reactions which will follow it, without a word said, without even a 'By your leave,' already made this gesture. Certainly I was not in the least in love with Albertine; child of the mists outside, she could merely content the imaginative desire which the change of weather had awakened in me and which was midway between the desires that are satisfied by the arts of the kitchen and of monumental sculpture respectively, for it made me dream simultaneously of mingling with my flesh a substance different and warm, and of attaching at some point to my outstretched body a body divergent, as the body of Eve barely holds by the feet to the side of Adam, to whose body hers is almost perpendicular, in those romanesque bas-reliefs on the church at Balbec which represent in so noble and so reposeful a fashion, still almost like a classical frieze, the Creation of Woman; God in them is everywhere followed, as by two ministers, by two little angels in whom the visitor recognises — like winged, swarming summer creatures which winter has surprised and spared — cupids from Herculaneum,

still surviving well into the thirteenth century, and winging their last slow flight, weary but never failing in the grace that might be expected of them, over the whole front of the porch.

As for this pleasure which by accomplishing my desire would have set me free from these meditations and which I should have sought quite as readily from any other pretty woman, had I been asked upon what — in the course of this endless flow of talk throughout which I took care to keep from Albertine the one thing that was in my mind — was based my optimistic hypothesis with regard to her possible complaisances, I should perhaps have answered that this hypothesis was due (while the forgotten outlines of Albertine's voice retraced for me the contour of her personality) to the apparition of certain words which did not form part of her vocabulary, or at least not in the acceptation which she now gave them. Thus she said to roe that Elstir was stupid, and, on my protesting:

"You don't understand," she replied, smiling, "I mean that it was stupid of him to behave like that; of course I know he's quite a distinguished Person, really."

Similarly, wishing to say of the Fontainebleau golf club that it was smart, she declared: "They are quite a selection."

Speaking of a duel that I had fought, she said of my seconds: "What very choice seconds," and looking at my face confessed that she would like to see me 'wear a moustache.' She even went so far (and my chance appeared then enormous) as to announce, in a phrase of which I would have sworn that she was ignorant a year earlier, that since she had last seen Gisèle there had passed a certain 'lapse of time.' This was not to say that Albertine had not already possessed, when I was at Balbec, a quite adequate assortment of those expressions which reveal at once that one's people are in easy circumstances, and which, year by year, a mother passes on to her daughter just as she bestows on her, gradually, as the girl grows up, on important occasions, her own jewels. It was evident that Albertine had ceased to be a little girl when one day, to express her thanks for a present which a strange lady had given her, she had said: "I am quite confused." Mme. Bontemps could not help looking across at her husband whose comment was:

"Gad, she's old for fourteen."

The approach of nubility had been more strongly marked still when Albertine, speaking of another girl whose tone was bad, said: "One can't even tell whether she's pretty, she paints her face a foot thick." Finally, though still a schoolgirl, she already displayed the manner of a grown woman of her

upbringing and station when she said, of some one whose face twitched: “I can’t look at him, because it makes me want to do the same,” or, if some one else were being imitated: “The absurd thing about it is that when you imitate her voice you look exactly like her.” All these are drawn from the social treasury. But it did not seem to me possible that Albertine’s natural environment could have supplied her with ‘distinguished,’ used in the sense in which my father would say of a colleague whom he had not actually met, but whose intellectual attainments he had heard praised: “It appears he’s quite a distinguished person.” ‘Selection,’ even when used of a golf club, seemed to me as incompatible with the Simonet family as it would be if preceded by the adjective ‘Natural,’ with a text published centuries before the researches of Darwin. ‘Lapse of time’ struck me as being of better augury still. Finally there appeared the evidence of certain upheavals, the nature of which was unknown to me, but sufficient to justify me in all my hopes when Albertine announced, with the satisfaction of a person whose opinion is by no means to be despised:

“To my mind, that is the best thing that could possibly happen. I regard it as the best solution, the stylish way out.”

This was so novel, so manifestly an alluvial deposit giving one to suspect such capricious wanderings over soil hitherto unknown to her, that on hearing the words ‘to my mind’ I drew Albertine towards me, and at ‘I regard’ made her sit on the side of my bed.

No doubt it does happen that women of moderate culture, on marrying well-read men, receive such expressions as part of their paraphernalia. And shortly after the metamorphosis which follows the wedding night, when they begin to pay calls, and talk shyly to the friends of their girlhood, one notices with surprise that they have turned into matrons if, in deciding that some person is intelligent, they sound both l’s in the word; but that is precisely the sign of a change of state, and I could see a difference when I thought of the vocabulary of the Albertine I had known of old — a vocabulary in which the most daring flights were to say of any unusual person: ‘He’s a type,’ or, if you suggested a game of cards to her: ‘I’ve no money to lose,’ or again, if any of her friends were to reproach her, in terms which she felt to be undeserved: ‘That really is magnificent!’ an expression dictated in such cases by a sort of middle-class tradition almost as old as the *Magnificat* itself, and one which a girl slightly out of temper and confident that she is in the right employs, as the saying is, ‘quite naturally,’ that is to say because she has learned the words from her mother, just as she has learned to say her prayers or to greet a friend. All these expressions Mme. Bontemps had

imparted to her at the same time as her hatred of the Jews and her feeling for black, which was always suitable and becoming, indeed without any formal instruction, but as the piping of the parent goldfinches serves as a model for that of the young ones, recently hatched, so that they in turn grow into true goldfinches also. But when all was said, ‘selection’ appeared to me of alien growth and ‘I regard’ encouraging. Albertine was no longer the same; which meant that she would not perhaps act, would not react in the same way.

Not only did I no longer feel any love for her, but I had no longer to consider, as I should have had at Balbec, the risk of shattering in her an affection for myself, which no longer existed. There could be no doubt that she had long since become quite indifferent to me. I was well aware that to her I was in no sense a member now of the ‘little band’ into which I had at one time so anxiously sought and had then been so happy to have secured admission. Besides, as she had no longer even, as in Balbec days, an air of frank good nature, I felt no serious scruples: still I believe that what made me finally decide was another philological discovery. As, continuing to add fresh links to the external chain of talk behind which I hid my intimate desire, I spoke, having Albertine secure now on the corner of my bed, of one of the girls of the little band, one smaller than the rest, whom, nevertheless, I had thought quite pretty, “Yes,” answered Albertine, “she reminds me of a little *mousmé*.” There had been nothing in the world to shew, when I first knew Albertine, that she had ever heard the word*mousmé*. It was probable that, had things followed their normal course, she would never have learned it, and for my part I should have seen no cause for regret in that, for there is no more horrible word in the language. The mere sound of it makes one’s teeth ache as they do when one has put too large a spoonful of ice in one’s mouth. But coming from Albertine, as she sat there looking so pretty, not even ‘*mousmé*’ could strike me as unpleasant. On the contrary, I felt it to be a revelation, if not of an outward initiation, at any rate of an inward evolution. Unfortunately it was now time for me to bid her good-bye if I wished her to reach home in time for her dinner, and myself to be out of bed and dressed in time for my own. It was Françoise who was getting it ready; she did not like having to keep it back, and must already have found it an infringement of one of the articles of her code that Albertine, in the absence of my parents, should be paying me so prolonged a visit, and one which was going to make everything late. But before ‘*mousmé*’ all these arguments fell to the ground and I hastened to say:

“Just fancy; I’m not in the least ticklish; you can go on tickling me for an

hour on end and I won't even feel it."

"Really?"

"I assure you."

She understood, doubtless, that this was the awkward expression of a desire on my part, for, like a person who offers to give you an introduction for which you have not ventured to ask him, though what you have said has shewn him that it would be of great service to you.

"Would you like me to try?" she inquired, with womanly meekness.

"Just as you like, but you would be more comfortable if you lay down properly on the bed."

"Like that?"

"No; get right on top."

"You're sure I'm not too heavy?"

As she uttered these words the door opened and Françoise, carrying a lamp, came in. Albertine had just time to fling herself back upon her chair. Perhaps Françoise had chosen this moment to confound us, having been listening at the door or even peeping through the keyhole. But there was no need to suppose anything of the sort; she might have scorned to assure herself, by the use of her eyes, of what her instinct must plainly enough have detected, for by dint of living with me and my parents her fears, her prudence, her alertness, her cunning had ended by giving her that instinctive and almost prophetic knowledge of us all that the mariner has of the sea, the quarry of the hunter, and, of the malady, if not the physician, often at any rate the patient. The amount of knowledge that she managed to acquire would have astounded a stranger, and with as good reason as does the advanced state of certain arts and sciences among the ancients, seeing that there was practically no source of information open to them. (Her sources were no larger. They were a few casual remarks forming barely a twentieth part of our conversation at dinner, caught on the wing by the butler and inaccurately transmitted to the kitchen.) Again, her mistakes were due, like theirs, like the fables in which Plato believed, rather to a false conception of the world and to preconceived ideas than to the insufficiency of the materials at her disposal. Only the other day, has it not been possible for the most important discoveries as to the habits of insects to be made by a scientist who had access to no laboratory and used no instruments of any sort? But if the drawbacks arising from her menial position had not prevented her from acquiring a stock of learning indispensable to the art which was its ultimate goal — and which consisted in putting us to confusion by communicating to us the results of her

discoveries — the limitations under which she worked had done more; in this case the impediment, not content with merely not paralysing the flight of her imagination, had greatly strengthened it. Of course Françoise never let slip any artificial device, those for example of diction and attitude. Since (if she never believed what we said to her, hoping that she would believe it) she admitted without any shadow of doubt the truth of anything that any person of her own condition in life might tell her, however absurd, which might at the same time prove shocking to our ideas, just as her way of listening to our assertions bore witness to her incredulity, so the accents in which she reported (the use of indirect speech enabling her to hurl the most deadly insults at us with impunity) the narrative of a cook who had told her how she had threatened her employers, and won from them, by treating them before all the world like dirt, any number of privileges and concessions, shewed that the story was to her as gospel. Françoise went so far as to add: “I’m sure, if I had been the mistress I should have been quite vexed.” In vain might we, despite our scant sympathy at first with the lady on the fourth floor, shrug our shoulders, as though at an unlikely fable, at this report of so shocking an example; in making it the teller was able to speak with the crushing, the lacerating force of the most unquestionable, most irritating affirmation.

But above all, just as great writers often attain to a power of concentration from which they would have been dispensed under a system of political liberty or literary anarchy, when they are bound by the tyranny of a monarch or of a school of poetry, by the severity of prosodie laws or of a state religion, so Françoise, not being able to reply to us in an explicit fashion, spoke like Tiresias and would have written like Tacitus. She managed to embody everything that she could not express directly in a sentence for which we could not find fault with her without accusing ourselves, indeed in less than a sentence, in a silence, in the way in which she placed a thing in a room.

Thus when I happened to leave, by accident, on my table, among a pile of other letters, one which it was imperative that she should not see, because, let us say, it referred to her with a dislike which afforded a presumption of the same feeling towards her in the recipient as in the writer, that evening, if I came home with a troubled conscience and went straight to my room, there on top of my letters, neatly arranged in a symmetrical pile, the compromising document caught my eye as it could not possibly have failed to catch the eye of Françoise, placed by her right at the top, almost separated from the rest, in a prominence that was a form of speech, that had an eloquence all its own, and, as I stood in

the doorway, made me shudder like a cry. She excelled in the preparation of these scenic effects, intended so to enlighten the spectator, in her absence, that he already knew that she knew everything when in due course she made her appearance. She possessed, for thus making an inanimate object speak, the art, at once inspired and painstaking, of Irving or Frédéric Lemaître. On this occasion, holding over Albertine and myself the lighted lamp whose searching beams missed none of the still visible depressions which the girl's body had hollowed in the counterpane, Françoise made one think of a picture of 'Justice throwing light upon Crime.' Albertine's face did not suffer by this illumination. It revealed on her cheeks the same sunny burnish that had charmed me at Balbec. This face of Albertine, the general effect of Which sometimes was, out of doors, a sort of milky pallor, now shewed, according as the lamp shone on them, surfaces so dazzlingly, so uniformly coloured, so firm, so glowing that one might have compared them to the sustained flesh tints of certain flowers. Taken aback meanwhile by the unexpected entry of Françoise, I exclaimed:

"What? The lamp already? I say, the light is strong!"

My object, as may be imagined, was by the second of these ejaculations to account for my confusion, by the first to excuse my lateness in rising. Françoise replied with a cruel ambiguity:

"Do you want me to extinglish it?"

"— guish!" Albertine slipped into my ear, leaving me charmed by the familiar vivacity with which, taking me at once for teacher and for accomplice, she insinuated this psychological affirmation as though asking a grammatical question. When Françoise had left the room and Albertine was seated once again on my bed:

"Do you know what I'm afraid of?" I asked her. "It is that if we go on like this I may not be able to resist the temptation to kiss you."

"That would be a fine pity."

I did not respond at once to this invitation, which another man might even have found superfluous, for Albertine's way of pronouncing her words was so carnal, so seductive that merely in speaking to you she seemed to be caressing you. A word from her was a favour, and her conversation covered you with kisses. And yet it was highly attractive to me, this invitation. It would have been so, indeed, coming from any pretty girl of Albertine's age; but that Albertine should be now so accessible to me gave me more than pleasure, brought before my eyes a series of images that bore the stamp of beauty. I recalled the original Albertine standing between me and the beach, almost painted upon a background

of sea, having for me no more real existence than those figures seen on the stage, when one knows not whether one is looking at the actress herself who is supposed to appear, at an understudy who for the moment is taking her principal's part, or at a mere projection from a lantern. Then the real woman had detached herself from the luminous mass, had come towards me, with the sole result that I had been able to see that she had nothing in real life of that amorous facility which one supposed to be stamped upon her in the magic pictures. I had learned that it was not possible to touch her, to embrace her, that one might only talk to her, that' for me she was no more a woman than the jade grapes, an inedible decoration at one time in fashion on dinner tables, are really fruit. And now she was appearing to me in a third plane, real as in the second experience that I had had of her but facile as in the first; facile, and all the more deliciously so in that I had so long imagined that she was not. My surplus knowledge of life (of a life less uniform, less simple than I had at first supposed it to be) inclined me provisionally towards agnosticism. What can one positively affirm, when the thing that one thought probable at first has then shewn itself to be false and in the third instance turns out true? And alas, I was not yet at the end of my discoveries with regard to Albertine. In any case, even if there had not been the romantic attraction of this disclosure of a greater wealth of planes revealed one after another by life (an attraction the opposite of that which Saint-Loup had felt during our dinners at Rivebelle on recognising beneath the mask with which the course of existence had overlaid them, in a calm face, features to which his lips had once been pressed), the knowledge that to kiss Albertine's cheeks was a possible thing was a pleasure perhaps greater even than that of kissing them. What a difference between possessing a woman to whom one applies one's body alone, because she is no more than a piece of flesh, and possessing the girl whom one used to see on the beach with her friends on certain days without even knowing why one saw her on those days and not on others, which made one tremble to think that one might not see her again. Life had obligingly revealed to one in its whole extent the romance of this little girl, had lent one, for the study of her, first one optical instrument, then another, and had added to one's carnal desire an accompaniment which multiplied it an hundredfold and diversified it with those other desires, more spiritual and less easily assuaged, which do not emerge from their torpor, leaving carnal desire to move by itself, when it aims only at the conquest of a piece of flesh, but which to gain possession of a whole tract of memories, whence they have felt the wretchedness of exile, rise in a tempest round about it, enlarge, extend it, are unable to follow it to the

accomplishment, the assimilation, impossible in the form in which it is looked for, of an immaterial reality, but wait for this desire halfway and at the moment of recollection, of return furnish it afresh with their escort; to kiss, instead of the cheeks of the first comer, however cool and fresh they might be, but anonymous, with no secret, with no distinction, those of which I had so long been dreaming, would be to know the taste, the savour of a colour on which I had endlessly gazed. One has seen a woman, a mere image in the decorative setting of life, like Albertine, outlined against the sea, and then one has been able to take that image, to detach it, to bring it close to oneself, gradually to discern its solidity, its colours, as though one had placed it behind the glasses of a stereoscope. It is for this reason that the women who are a little difficult, whose resistance one does not at once overcome, of whom one does not indeed know at first whether one ever will overcome it, are alone interesting. For to know them, to approach them, to conquer them is to make fluctuate in form, in dimensions, in relief the human image, is an example of relativity in the appreciation of an image which it is delightful to see afresh when it has resumed the slender proportions of a silhouette in the setting of one's life. The women one meets first of all in a brothel are of no interest because they remain invariable.

In addition, Albertine preserved, inseparably attached to her, all my impressions of a series of seascapes of which I was particularly fond. I felt that it was possible for me, on the girl's two cheeks, to kiss the whole of the beach at Balbec.

"If you really don't mind my kissing you, I would rather put it off for a little and choose a good moment. Only you mustn't forget that you've said I may. I shall want a voucher: 'Valid for one kiss.'"

"Shall I have to sign it?"

"But if I took it now, should I be entitled to another later on?"

"You do make me laugh with your vouchers; I shall issue a new one every now and then."

"Tell me; just one thing more. You know, at Balbec, before I had been introduced to you, you used often to have a hard, calculating look; you can't tell me what you were thinking about when you looked like that?"

"No; I don't remember at all."

"Wait; this may remind you: one day your friend Gisèle put her feet together and jumped over the chair an old gentleman was sitting in. Try to remember what was in your mind at that moment."

"Gisèle was the one we saw least of; she did belong to the band, I suppose,

but not properly. I expect I thought that she was very ill-bred and common."

"Oh, is that all?"

I should certainly have liked, before kissing her, to be able to fill her afresh with the mystery which she had had for me on the beach before I knew her, to find latent in her the place in which she had lived earlier still; for that, at any rate, if I knew nothing of it, I could substitute all my memories of our life at Balbec, the sound of the waves rolling up and breaking beneath my window, the shouts of the children. But when I let my eyes glide over the charming pink globe of her cheeks, the gently curving surfaces of which ran up to expire beneath the first foothills of her piled black tresses which ran in undulating mountain chains, thrust out escarped ramparts and moulded the hollows of deep valleys, I could not help saying to myself: "Now at last, after failing at Balbec, I am going to learn the fragrance of the secret rose that blooms in Albertine's cheeks, and, since the cycles through which we are able to make things and people pass in the course of our existence are comparatively few, perhaps I ought now to regard mine as nearing its end when, having made to emerge from its remoteness the flowering face that I had chosen from among all others, I shall have brought it into this new plane in which I shall at last acquire a tactual experience of it with my lips." I told myself this because I believed that there was such a thing as knowledge acquired by the lips; I told myself that I was going to know the taste of this fleshly rose, because I had never stopped to think that man, a creature obviously less rudimentary in structure than the sea-urchin or even the whale, is nevertheless still unprovided with a certain number of essential organs, and notably possesses none that will serve for kissing. The place of this absent organ he supplies with his lips, and thereby arrives perhaps at a slightly more satisfying result than if he were reduced to caressing the beloved with a horny tusk. But a pair of lips, designed to convey to the palate the taste of whatever whets the appetite, must be content, without ever realising their mistake or admitting their disappointment, with roaming over the surface and with coming to a halt at the barrier of the impenetrable but irresistible cheek. Besides, at such moments, at the actual contact between flesh and flesh, the lips, even supposing them to become more expert and better endowed, could taste no better probably the savour which nature prevents their ever actually grasping, for in that desolate zone in which they are unable to find their proper nourishment, they are alone; the sense of sight, then that of smell have long since deserted them. To begin with, as my mouth began gradually to approach the cheeks which my eyes had suggested to it that it should kiss, my eyes, changing their position,

saw a different pair of cheeks; the throat, studied at closer range and as though through a magnifying glass shewed in its coarse grain a robustness which modified the character of the face.

Apart from the most recent applications of the art of photography — which set crouching at the foot of a cathedral all the houses which, time and again, when we stood near them, have appeared to us to reach almost to the height of the towers, drill and deploy like a regiment, in file, in open order, in mass, the same famous and familiar structures, bring into actual contact the two columns on the Piazzetta which a moment ago were so far apart, thrust away the adjoining dome of the Salute, and in a pale and toneless background manage to include a whole immense horizon within the span of a bridge, in the embrasure of a window, among the leaves of a tree that stands in the foreground and is portrayed in a more vigorous tone, give successively as setting to the same church the arched walls of all the others — I can think of nothing that can so effectively as a kiss evoke from what we believe to be a thing with one definite aspect, the hundred other things which it may equally well be since each is related to a view of it no less legitimate. In short, just as at Balbec Albertine had often appeared to me different, so now, as if, wildly accelerating the speed of the changes of aspect and changes of colouring which a person presents to us in the course of our various encounters, I had sought to contain them all in the space of a few seconds so as to reproduce experimentally the phenomenon which diversifies the individuality of a fellow creature, and to draw out one from another, like a nest of boxes, all the possibilities that it contains, in this brief passage of my lips towards her cheek it was ten Albertines that I saw; this single girl being like a goddess with several heads, that which I had last seen, if I tried to approach it, gave place to another. At least so long as I had not touched it, that head, I could still see it, a faint perfume reached me from it. But alas — for in this matter of kissing our nostrils and eyes are as ill placed as our lips are shaped — suddenly my eyes ceased to see; next, my nose, crushed by the collision, no longer perceived any fragrance, and, without thereby gaining any clearer idea of the taste of the rose of my desire, I learned, from these unpleasant signs, that at last I was in the act of kissing Albertine’s cheek.

Was it because we were enacting — as may be illustrated by the rotation of a solid body — the converse of our scene together at Balbec, because it was I, now, who was lying in bed and she who sat beside me, capable of evading any brutal attack and of dictating her pleasure to me, that she allowed me to take so easily now what she had refused me on the former occasion with so forbidding a

frown? (No doubt from that same frown the voluptuous expression which her face assumed now at the approach of my lips differed only by a deviation of its lines immeasurably minute but one in which may be contained all the disparity that there is between the gesture of ‘finishing off’ a wounded man and that of bringing him relief, between a sublime and a hideous portrait.) Not knowing whether I had to give the credit, and to feel grateful for this change of attitude to some unwitting benefactor who in these last months, in Paris or at Balbec, had been working on my behalf, I supposed that the respective positions in which we were now placed might account for it. It was quite another explanation, however, that Albertine offered me; this, in short: “Oh, well, you see, that time at Balbec I didn’t know you properly. For all I knew, you might have meant mischief.” This argument left me in perplexity. Albertine was no doubt sincere in advancing it. So difficult is it for a woman to recognise in the movements of her limbs, in the sensations felt by her body in the course of an intimate conversation with a friend, the unknown sin into which she would tremble to think that a stranger was planning her fall.

In any case, whatever the modifications that had occurred at some recent time in her life, which might perhaps have explained why it was that she now readily accorded to my momentary and purely physical desire what at Balbec she had with horror refused to allow to my love, another far more surprising manifested itself in Albertine that same evening as soon as her caresses had procured in me the satisfaction which she could not have failed to notice, which, indeed, I had been afraid might provoke in her the instinctive movement of revulsion and offended modesty which Gilberte had given at a corresponding moment behind the laurel shrubbery in the Champs-Elysées.

The exact opposite happened. Already, when I had first made her lie on my bed and had begun to fondle her, Albertine had assumed an air which I did not remember in her, of docile good will, of an almost childish simplicity. Obliterating every trace of her customary anxieties and interests, the moment preceding pleasure, similar in this respect to the moment after death, had restored to her rejuvenated features what seemed like the innocence of earliest childhood. And no doubt everyone whose special talent is suddenly brought into play becomes modest, devoted, charming; especially if by this talent he knows that he is giving us a great pleasure, he is himself happy in the display of it, anxious to present it to us in as complete a form as possible. But in this new expression on Albertine’s face there was more than a mere profession of disinterestedness, conscience, generosity, a sort of conventional and unexpected

devotion; and it was farther than to her own childhood, it was to the infancy of the race that she had reverted. Very different from myself who had looked for nothing more than a physical alleviation, which I had finally secured, Albertine seemed to feel that it would indicate a certain coarseness on her part were she to seem to believe that this material pleasure could be unaccompanied by a moral sentiment or was to be regarded as terminating anything. She, who had been in so great a hurry a moment ago, now, presumably because she felt that kisses implied love and that love took precedence of all other duties, said when I reminded her of her dinner:

"Oh, but that doesn't matter in the least; I have plenty of time."

She seemed embarrassed by the idea of getting up and going immediately after what had happened, embarrassed by good manners, just as Françoise when, without feeling thirsty, she had felt herself bound to accept with a seemly gaiety the glass of wine which Jupien offered her, would never have dared to leave him as soon as the last drops were drained, however urgent the call of duty. Albertine — and this was perhaps, with another which the reader will learn in due course, one of the reasons which bad made me unconsciously desire her — was one of the incarnations of the little French peasant whose type may be seen in stone at Saint-André-des-Champs. As in Françoise, who presently nevertheless was to become her deadly enemy, I recognised in her a courtesy towards friend and stranger, a sense of decency, of respect for the bedside.

Françoise who, after the death of my aunt, felt obliged to speak only in a plaintive tone, would, in the months that preceded her daughter's marriage, have been quite shocked if, when the young couple walked out together, the girl had not taken her lover's arm. Albertine lying motionless beside me said:

"What nice hair you have; what nice eyes; you are a dear boy."

When, after pointing out to her that it was getting late, I added: "You don't believe me?" she replied, what was perhaps true but could be so only since the minute before and for the next few hours:

"I always believe you."

She spoke to me of myself, my family, my social position. She said: "Oh, I know your parents know some very nice people. You are a friend of Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage." For the moment these names conveyed absolutely nothing to me. But suddenly I remembered that I had indeed played as a child in the Champs-Elysées with Robert Forestier, whom I had never seen since then. As for Suzanne Delage, she was the great-niece of Mme. Blatin, and I had once been going to a dancing lesson, and had even promised to take a small

part in a play that was being acted in her mother's drawing-room. But the fear of being sent into fits of laughter, and of a bleeding nose, had made me decline, so that I had never set eyes on her. I had at the most a vague idea that I had once heard that the Swanns' governess with the feather in her hat had at one time been with the Delages, but perhaps it was only a sister of this governess, or a friend. I protested to Albertine that Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage occupied a very small place in my life. "That may be; but your mothers are friends, I can place you by that. I often pass Suzanne Delage in the Avenue de Messine, I admire her style." Our mothers were acquainted only in the imagination of Mme. Bontemps, who having heard that I had at one time played with Robert Forestier, to whom, it appeared, I used to recite poetry, had concluded from that that we were bound by family ties. She could never, I gathered, hear my mother's name mentioned without observing: "Oh, yes, she is in the Delage Forestier set," giving my parents a good mark which they had done nothing to deserve.

Apart from this, Albertine's social ideas were fatuous in the extreme. She regarded the Simonnets with a double 'n' as inferior not only to the Simonets with a single 'n' but to everyone in the world. That some one else should bear the same name as yourself without belonging to your family is an excellent reason for despising him. Of course there are exceptions. It may happen that two Simonnets (introduced to one another at one of those gatherings where one feels the need to converse, no matter on what subject, and where moreover one is instinctively well disposed towards strangers, for instance in a funeral procession on its way to the cemetery), finding that they have the same name, will seek with a mutual friendliness though without success to discover a possible connexion. But that is only an exception. Plenty of people are of dubious character, but we either know nothing or care nothing about them. If, however, a similarity of names brings to our door letters addressed to them, or vice versa, we at once feel a mistrust, often justified, as to their moral worth. We are afraid of being confused with them, we forestall the mistake by a grimace of disgust when anyone refers to them in our hearing. When we read our own name, as borne by them, in the newspaper, they seem to have usurped it. The transgressions of other members of the social organism leave us cold. We lay the burden of them more heavily upon our namesakes. The hatred which we bear towards the other Simonnets is all the stronger in that it is not a personal feeling but has been transmitted by heredity. After the second generation we remember only the expression of disgust with which our grandparents used to refer to the other Simonnets, we know nothing of the reason, we should not be surprised to learn

that it had begun with a murder. Until, as is not uncommon, the time comes when a male and female Simonnet, who are not related in any way, are joined together in matrimony and so repair the breach.

Not only did Albertine speak to me of Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage, but spontaneously, with that impulse to confide which the approximation of two human bodies creates, that is to say at first, before it has engendered a special duplicity and reticence in one person towards the other, she told me a story about her own family and one of Andrée's uncles, as to which, at Balbec, she had refused to utter a word; thinking that now she ought not to appear to have any secrets in which I might not share. From this moment, had her dearest friend said anything to her against me, she would have made it her duty to inform me. I insisted upon her going home, and finally she did go, but so ashamed on my account at my discourtesy that she laughed almost as though to apologise for me, as a hostess to whose party you have gone without dressing makes the best of you but is offended nevertheless.

"Are you laughing at me?" I inquired.

"I am not laughing, I am smiling at you," she replied lovingly. "When am I going to see you again?" she went on, as though declining to admit that what had just happened between us, since it is generally the crowning consummation, might not be at least the prelude to a great friendship, a friendship already existing which we should have to discover, to confess, and which alone could account for the surrender we had made of ourselves.

"Since you give me leave, I shall send for you when I can." I dared not let her know that I was subordinating everything else to the chance of seeing Mme. de Stermaria. "It will have to be at short notice, unfortunately," I went on, "I never know beforehand. Would it be possible for me to send round for you in the evenings, when I am free?"

"It will be quite possible in a little while, I am going to have a latch-key of my own. But just at present it can't be done. Anyhow I shall come round to-morrow or next day in the afternoon. You needn't see me if you're busy."

On reaching the door, surprised that I had not anticipated her, she offered me her cheek, feeling that there was no need now for any coarse physical desire to prompt us to kiss one another. The brief relations in which we had just indulged being of the sort to which an absolute intimacy and a heartfelt choice often tend, Albertine had felt it incumbent upon her to improvise and add provisionally to the kisses which we had exchanged on my bed the sentiment of which those kisses would have been the symbol for a knight and his lady such as they might

have been conceived in the mind of a gothic minstrel.

When she had left me, this young Picard, who might have been carved on his porch by the image-maker of Saint-André-des-Champs, Françoise brought me a letter which filled me with joy, for it was from Mme. de Stermaria, who accepted my invitation to dinner. From Mme. de Stermaria, that was to say for me not so much from the real Mme. de Stermaria as from her of whom I had been thinking all day before Albertine's arrival. It is the terrible deception of love that it begins by engaging us in play not with a woman of the external world but with a puppet fashioned and kept in our brain, the only form of her moreover that we have always at our disposal, the only one that we shall ever possess, one which the arbitrary power of memory, almost as absolute as that of imagination, may have made as different from the real woman as had been from the real Balbec the Balbec of my dreams; an artificial creation to which by degrees, and to our own hurt, we shall force the real woman into resemblance.

Albertine had made me so late that the play had just finished when I entered Mme. de Villeparisis's drawing-room; and having little desire to be caught in the stream of guests who were pouring out, discussing the great piece of news, the separation, said to be already effected, of the Duc de Guermantes from his wife, I had, until I should have an opportunity of shaking hands with my hostess, taken my seat on an empty sofa in the outer room, when from the other, in which she had no doubt had her chair in the very front row of all, I saw emerging, majestic, ample and tall in a flowing gown of yellow satin upon which stood out in relief huge black poppies, the Duchess herself. The sight of her no longer disturbed me in the least. There had been a day when, laying her hands on my forehead (as was her habit when she was afraid of hurting my feelings) and saying: "You really must stop hanging about trying to meet Mme. de Guermantes. All the neighbours are talking about you. Besides, look how ill your grandmother is, you really have something more serious to think about than waylaying a woman who only laughs at you," in a moment, like a hypnotist who brings one back from the distant country in which one imagined oneself to be, and opens one's eyes for one, or like the doctor who, by recalling one to a sense of duty and reality, cures one of an imaginary disease in which one has been indulging one's fancy, my mother had awakened me from an unduly protracted dream. The rest of the day had been consecrated to a last farewell to this malady which I was renouncing; I had sung, for hours on end and weeping as I sang, the sad words of Schubert's *Adieu*:

Farewell, strange voices call thee

Away from me, dear sister of the angels.

And then it had finished. I had given up my morning walks, and with so little difficulty that I thought myself justified in the prophecy (which we shall see was to prove false later on) that I should easily grow accustomed in the course of my life to ceasing to see a woman. And when, shortly afterwards, Françoise had reported to me that Jupien, anxious to enlarge his business, was looking for a shop in the neighbourhood, wishing to find one for him (quite happy, moreover, when strolling along a street which already from my bed I had heard luminously vociferous like a peopled beach, to see behind the raised iron shutters of the dairies the young milk-girls with their white sleeves), I had been able to begin these excursions again. Nor did I feel the slightest constraint; for I was conscious that I was no longer going out with the object of seeing Mme. de Guermantes; much as a married woman who takes endless precautions so long as she has a lover, from the day on which she has broken with him leaves his letters lying about, at the risk of disclosing to her husband an infidelity which ceased to alarm her the moment she ceased to be guilty of it. What troubled me now was the discovery that almost every house sheltered some unhappy person. In one the wife was always in tears because her husband was unfaithful to her. In the next it was the other way about. In another a hardworking mother, beaten black and blue by a drunkard son, was endeavouring to conceal her sufferings from the eyes of the neighbours. Quite half of the human race was in tears. And when I came to know the people who composed it I saw that they were so exasperating that I asked myself whether it might not be the adulterous husband and wife (who were so simply because their lawful happiness had been withheld from them, and shewed themselves charming and faithful to everyone but their respective wife and husband) who were in the right. Presently I ceased to have even the excuse of being useful to Jupien for continuing my morning wanderings. For we learned that the cabinet-maker in our courtyard, whose workrooms were separated from Jupien's shop only by the flimsiest of partitions, was shortly to be 'given notice' by the Duke's agent because his hammering made too much noise. Jupien could have hoped for nothing better; the workrooms had a basement for storing timber, which communicated with our cellars. He could keep his coal in this, he could knock down the partition, and would then have a huge shop all in one room. But even without the amusement of house-hunting on his behalf I had continued to go out every day before luncheon, just as Jupien himself, finding the rent that M. de Guermantes was asking him exorbitant, was allowing the premises to be inspected in the hope

that, discouraged by his failure to find a tenant, the Duke would resign himself to accepting a lower offer. Françoise, noticing that, even at an hour when no prospective tenant was likely to call, the porter left the door of the empty shop on the latch, scented a trap laid by him to entice the young woman who was engaged to the Guermantes footman (they would find a lovers' retreat there) and to catch them red-handed.

However that might be, and for all that I had no longer to find Jupien a new shop, I still went out before luncheon. Often, on these excursions, I met M. de Norpois. It would happen that, conversing as he walked with a colleague, he cast at me a glance which after making a thorough scrutiny of my person returned to his companion without his having smiled at me or given me any more sign of recognition than if he had never set eyes on me before. For, with these eminent diplomats, looking at you in a certain way is intended to let you know not that they have seen you but that they have not seen you and that they have some serious question to discuss with the colleague who is accompanying them. A tall woman whom I frequently encountered near the house was less discreet with me. For in spite of the fact that I did not know her, she would turn round to look at me, would wait for me, unavailingly, before shop windows, smile at me as though she were going to kiss me, make gestures indicative of a complete surrender. She resumed an icy coldness towards me if anyone appeared whom she knew. For a long time now in these morning walks, thinking only of what I had to do, were it but the most trivial purchase of a newspaper, I had chosen the shortest way, with no regret were it outside the ordinary course which the Duchess followed in her walks, and if on the other hand it lay along that course, without either compunction or concealment, because it no longer appeared to me the forbidden way on which I should snatch from an ungrateful woman the favour of setting eyes on her against her will. But it had never occurred to me that my recovery, when it restored me to a normal attitude towards Mme. de Guermantes, would have a corresponding effect on her, and so render possible a friendliness, even a friendship in which I no longer felt any interest. Until then, the efforts of the entire world banded together to bring me into touch with her would have been powerless to counteract the evil spell that is cast by an ill-starred love. Fairies more powerful than mankind have decreed that in such cases nothing can avail us until the day on which we have uttered sincerely and from our hearts the formula: "I am no longer in love." I had been vexed with Saint-Loup for not having taken me to see his aunt. But he was no more capable than anyone else of breaking an enchantment. So long as I was in love with

Mme. de Guermantes, the marks of politeness that ï received from others, their compliments actually distressed me, not only because they did not come from her but because she would never hear of them. And yet even if she had known of them it would not have been of the slightest use to me. Indeed, among the lesser auxiliaries to success in iove, an absence, the declining of an invitation to dinner, an unintentional, unconscious harshness are of more service than all the cosmetics and fine clothes in the world. There would be plenty of social success, were people taught upon these lines the art of succeeding.

As she swept through the room in which I was sitting, her mind filled with thoughts of friends whom I did not know and whom she would perhaps be meeting presently at some other party, Mme. de Guermantes caught sight of me on my sofa, genuinely indifferent and seeking only to be polite whereas while I was in love I had tried so desperately, without ever succeeding, to assume an air of indifference; she swerved aside, came towards me and, reproducing the smile she had worn that evening at the Opéra-Comique, which the unpleasant feeling of being cared for by some one for whom she did not care was no longer there to obliterate: “No, don’t move; you don’t mind if I sit down beside you for a moment?” she asked, gracefully gathering in her immense skirt which otherwise would have covered the entire sofa.

Of less stature than she, who was further expanded by the volume of her gown, I was almost brushed by her exquisite bare arm round which a faint, innumerable down rose in perpetual smoke like a golden mist, and by the fringe of her fair tresses which wafted their fragrance over me. Having barely room to sit down, she could not turn easily to face me, and so obliged to look straight before her rather than in my direction, assumed the sort of dreamy, sweet expression one sees in a portrait.

“Have you any news of Robert?” she inquired.

At that moment Mme. de Villeparisis entered the room.

“Well, Sir, you arrive at a fine time, when we do see you here for once in a way!” And noticing that I was talking to her niece, concluding, perhaps, that we were more intimate than she had supposed: “But don’t let me interrupt your conversation with Oriane,” she went on, and (for these good offices as pander are part of the duties of the perfect hostess): “You wouldn’t care to dine with her here on Thursday?”

It was the day on which I was to entertain Mme. de Stermaria, so I declined.

“Saturday, then?”

As my mother was returning on Saturday or Sunday, it would never do for

me not to stay at home every evening to dine with her; I therefore declined this invitation also.

"Ah, you're not an easy person to get hold of."

"Why do you never come to see me?" inquired Mme. de Guermantes when Mme. de Villeparisis had left us to go and congratulate the performers and present the leading lady with a bunch of roses upon which the hand that offered it conferred all its value, for it had cost no more than twenty francs. (This, incidentally, was as high as she ever went when an artist had performed only once. Those who gave their services at all her afternoons and evenings throughout the season received roses painted by the Marquise.)

"It's such a bore that we never see each other except in other people's houses. Since you won't meet me at dinner at my aunt's, why not come and dine with me?" Various people who had stayed to the last possible moment, upon one pretext or another, but were at length preparing to leave, seeing that the Duchess had sat down to talk to a young man on a seat so narrow as just to contain them both, thought that they must have been misinformed, that it was the Duchess, and not the Duke, who was seeking a separation, and on my account. Whereupon they hastened to spread abroad this intelligence. I had better grounds than anyone to be aware of its falsehood. But I was myself surprised that at one of those difficult periods in which a separation that is not yet completed is beginning to take effect, the Duchess, instead of withdrawing from society should go out of her way to invite a — person whom she knew so slightly. The suspicion crossed my mind that it had been the Duke alone who had been opposed to her having me in the house, and that now that he was leaving her she saw no further obstacle to her surrounding herself with the people that she liked.

A minute earlier I should have been stupefied had anyone told me that Mme. de Guermantes was going to ask me to call on her, let alone to dine with her. I might be perfectly aware that the Guermantes drawing-room could not furnish those particular refinements which I had extracted from the name of its occupants, the fact that it had been forbidden ground to me, by obliging me to give it the same kind of existence that we give to the drawing-rooms of which we have read the description in a novel, or seen the image in a dream, made me, even when I was certain that it was just like any other, imagine it as quite different. Between myself and it was the barrier at which reality ends. To dine with the Guermantes was like travelling to a place I had long wished to see, making a desire emerge from my brain and take shape before my eyes, forming acquaintance with a dream. At the most, I might have supposed that it would be

one of those dinners to which one's hosts invite one with: "Do come; there'll be*absolutely* nobody but ourselves," pretending to attribute to the pariah the alarm which they themselves feel at the thought of his mixing with their other friends, seeking indeed to convert into an enviable privilege, reserved for their intimates alone, the quarantine of the outsider, hopelessly uncouth, whom they are befriending. I felt on the contrary that Mme. de Guermantes was anxious for me to enjoy the most delightful society that she had to offer me when she went on, projecting as she spoke before my eyes as it were the violet-hued loveliness of a visit to Fabrice's aunt with the miracle of an introduction to Count Mosca:

"On Friday, now, couldn't you? There are just a few people coming; the Princesse de Parme, who is charming, not that I'd ask you to meet anyone who wasn't nice."

Discarded in the intermediate social grades which are engaged in a perpetual upward movement, the family still plays an important part in certain stationary grades, such as the lower middle class and the semi-royal aristocracy, which latter cannot seek to raise itself since above it, from its own special point of view, there exists nothing higher. The friendship shewn me by her 'aunt Villeparisis' and Robert had perhaps made me, for Mme. de Guermantes and her friends, living always upon themselves and in the same little circle, the object of a curious interest of which I had no suspicion.

She had of those two relatives a familiar, everyday, homely knowledge, of a sort, utterly different from what we imagine, in which if we happen to be comprised in it, so far from our actions being at once ejected, like the grain of dust from the eye or the drop of water from the windpipe, they are capable of remaining engraved, and will still be related and discussed years after we ourselves have forgotten them, in the palace in which we are astonished to find them preserved, like a letter in our own handwriting among a priceless collection of autographs.

People who are merely fashionable may set a guard upon doors which are too freely invalided. But the Guermantes door was not that. Hardly ever did a stranger have occasion to pass by it. If, for once in a way, the Duchess had one pointed out to her, she never dreamed of troubling herself about the social increment that he would bring, since this was a thing that she conferred and could not receive. She thought only of his real merits. Both Mme. de Villeparisis and Saint-Loup had testified to mine Doubtless she might not have believed them if she had not at the same time observed that they could never manage to secure me when they wanted me, and therefore that I attached no importance to

worldly things, which seemed to the Duchess a sign that the stranger was to be numbered among what she called ‘nice people.’

It was worth seeing, when one spoke to her of women for whom she did not care, how her face changed as soon as one named, in connexion with one of these, let us say, her sister-in-law. “Oh, she is charming!” the Duchess would exclaim in a judicious, confident tone. The only reason that she gave was that this lady had declined to be introduced to the Marquise de Chaussegros and the Princesse de Silistrie. She did not add that the lady had declined also an introduction to herself, the Duchesse de Guermantes. This had, nevertheless, been the case, and ever since the mind of the Duchess had been at work trying to unravel the motives of a woman who was so hard to know, she was dying to be invited to call on her. People in society are so accustomed to be sought after that the person who shuns them seems to them a phoenix and at once monopolises their attention. Was the true motive in the mind of Mme. de Guermantes for thus inviting me (now that I was no longer in love with her) that I did not run after her relatives, although apparently run after myself by them? I cannot say. In any case, having made up her mind to invite me, she was anxious to do me the honours of the best company at her disposal and to keep away those of her friends whose presence might have dissuaded me from coming again, those whom she knew to be boring. I had not known to what to attribute her change of direction, when I had seen her deviate from her stellar path, come to sit down beside me and had heard her invite me to dinner, the effect of causes unknown for want of a special sense to enlighten us in this respect. We picture to ourselves the people who know us but slightly — such as, in my case, the Duchesse de Guermantes — as thinking of us only at the rare moments at which they set eyes on us. As a matter of fact this ideal oblivion in which we picture them as holding us is a purely arbitrary conception on our part. So that while, in our solitary silence, like that of a cloudless night, we imagine the various queens of society pursuing their course in the heavens at an infinite distance, we cannot help an involuntary start of dismay or pleasure if there falls upon us from that starry height, like a meteorite engraved with our name which we supposed to be unknown on Venus or Cassiopeia, an invitation to dinner or a piece of malicious gossip.

Perhaps now and then when, following the example of the Persian princes who, according to the Book of Esther, made their scribes read out to them the registers in which were enrolled the names of those of their subjects who had shewn zeal in their service, Mme. de Guermantes consulted her list of the well-

disposed, she had said to herself, on coming to my name: “A man we must ask to dine some day.” But other thoughts had distracted her

(Beset by surging cares, a Prince’s mind
Towards fresh matters ever is inclined)

until the moment when she had caught sight of me sitting alone like Mordecai at the palace gate; and, the sight of me having refreshed her memory, sought, like Ahasuerus, to lavish her gifts upon me.

I must at the same time add that a surprise of a totally different sort was to follow that which I had felt on hearing Mme. de Guermantes ask me to dine with her. Since I had decided that it would shew greater modesty, on my part, and gratitude also not to conceal this initial surprise, but rather to exaggerate my expression of the delight that it gave me, Mme. de Guermantes, who was getting ready to go on to another, final party, had said to me, almost as a justification and for fear of my not being quite certain who she was, since I appeared so astonished at being invited to dine with her: “You know I’m the aunt of Robert de Saint-Loup, who is such a friend of yours; besides we have met before.” In replying that I was aware of this I added that I knew also M. de Charlus, “who had been very good to me at Balbec and in Paris.” Mme. de Guermantes appeared dumbfoundered, and her eyes seemed to turn, as though for a verification of this statement, to some page, already filled and turned, of her internal register of events. “What, so you know Palamède, do you?” This name assumed on the lips of Mme. de Guermantes a great charm, due to the instinctive simplicity with which she spoke of a man who was socially so brilliant a figure, but for her was no more than her brother-in-law and the cousin with whom she had grown up. And on the confused greyness which the life of the Duchesse de Guermantes was for me this name, Palamède, shed as it were the radiance of long summer days on which she had played with him as a girl, at Guermantes, in the garden. Moreover, in this long outgrown period in their lives, Oriane de Guermantes and her cousin Palamède had been very different from what they had since become; M. de Charlus in particular, entirely absorbed in the artistic pursuits from which he had so effectively restrained himself in later life that I was stupefied to learn that it was he who had painted the huge fan with black and yellow irises which the Duchess was at this moment unfurling. She could also have shewn me a little sonatina which he had once composed for her. I was completely unaware that the Baron possessed all these talents, of which he never spoke. Let me remark in passing that M. de Charlus did not at all relish being called ‘Palamède’ by his family. That the form ‘Mémé’ might not please him one

could easily understand. These stupid abbreviations are a sign of the utter inability of the aristocracy to appreciate its own Poetic beauty (in Jewry, too, we may see the same defect, since a nephew of Lady Israels, whose name was Moses, was commonly known as ‘Momo’) concurrently with its anxiety not to appear to attach any importance to what is aristocratic. Now M. de Charlus had, in this connexion, a greater wealth of poetic imagination and a more blatant pride. But the reason for his distaste for ‘Mémé’ could not be this, since it extended also to the fine name Palamède. The truth was that, considering, knowing himself to come of a princely stock, he would have liked his brother and sister-in-law to refer to him as ‘Charlus,’ just as Queen Marie-Amélie and Duc d’Orléans might have spoken of their sons and grandsons, brothers and nephews as ‘Joinville, Nemours, Chartres, Paris.’

“What a humbug Mémé is!” she exclaimed. “We talked to him about you for hours; he told us that he would be delighted to make your acquaintance, just as if he had never set eyes on you. You must admit he’s odd, and — though it’s not very nice of me to say such a thing about a brother-in-law I’m devoted to, and really do admire immensely — a trifle mad at times.”

I was struck by the application of this last epithet to M. de Charlus, and said to myself that this half-madness might perhaps account for certain things, such as his having appeared so delighted by his own proposal that I should ask Bloch to castigate his mother. I decided that, by reason not only of the things he said but of the way in which he said them, M. de Charlus must be a little mad. The first time that one listens to a barrister or an actor, one is surprised by his tone, so different from the conversational. But, observing that everyone else seems to find this quite natural, one says nothing about it to other people, one says nothing in fact to oneself, one is content with appreciating the degree of talent shewn. At the most, one may think, of an actor at the Théâtre-Français: “Why, instead of letting his raised arm fall naturally, did he make it drop in a series of little jerks broken by pauses for at least ten minutes?” or of a Labori: “Why, whenever he opened his mouth, did he utter those tragic, unexpected sounds to express the simplest things?” But as everybody admits these actions to be necessary and obvious one is not shocked by them. So, upon thinking it over, one said to oneself that M. de Charlus spoke of himself with undue emphasis in a tone which was not in the least that of ordinary speech. It seemed as though one might have at any moment interrupted him with: “But why do you shout so? Why are you so offensive?” only everyone seemed to have tacitly agreed that it was all right. And one took one’s place in the circle which applauded his

outbursts. But certainly, at certain moments, a stranger might have thought that he was listening to the ravings of a maniac.

"But are you sure you're not thinking of some one else? Do you really mean my brother-in-law Palamède?" went on the Duchess, a trace of impertinence grafted upon her natural simplicity.

I replied that I was absolutely sure, and that M. de Charlus must have failed to catch my name.

"Oh well! I shall leave you now," said Mme. de Guermantes, as though she regretted the parting. "I must look in for a moment at the Princesse de Ligne's. You aren't going on there? No? You don't care for parties? You're very wise, they are too boring for words. If only I hadn't got to go. But she's my cousin; it wouldn't be polite. I am sorry, selfishly, for my own sake, because I could have taken you there, and brought you back afterwards, too. So I shall say good-bye now, and look forward to Friday."

That M. de Charlus should have blushed to be seen with me by M. d'Argencourt was all very well. But that to his own sister-in-law, who had so high an opinion of him besides, he should deny all knowledge of me, knowledge which was perfectly natural seeing that I was a friend of both his aunt and his nephew, was a thing that I could not understand.

I shall end my account of this incident with the remark that from one point of view there was in Mme. de Guermantes a true greatness which consisted in her entirely obliterating from her memory what other people would have only partially forgotten. Had she never seen me waylaying her, following her, tracking her down as she took her morning walks, had she never responded to my daily salute with an angry impatience, had she never refused Saint-Loup when he begged her to invite me to her house, she could not have greeted me now in a nobler or more gracious manner. Not only did she waste no time in retrospective explanations, in hints, allusions or ambiguous smiles, not only was there in her present affability, without any harking back to the past, without any reticence, something as proudly rectilinear as her majestic stature, but the resentment which she might have felt against anyone in the past was so entirely reduced to ashes, the ashes were themselves cast so utterly from her memory, or at least from her manner, that on studying her face whenever she had occasion to treat with the most exquisite simplification what in so many other people would have been a pretext for reviving stale antipathies and recriminations one had the impression of an intense purity of mind.

But if I was surprised by the modification that had occurred in her opinion

of me, how much more did it surprise me to find a similar but ever so much greater change in my feeling for her. Had there not been a time during which I could regain life and strength only if — always building new castles in the air!— I had found some one who would obtain for me an invitation to her house and, after this initial boon, would procure many others for my increasingly exacting heart? It was the impossibility of finding any avenue there that had made me leave Paris for Doncières to visit Robert de Saint-Loup. And now it was indeed by the consequence of a letter from him that I was agitated, but on account this time of Mme. de Stermaria, not of Mme. de Guermantes.

Let me add further, to conclude my account of this party, that there Occurred at it an incident, contradicted a few days later, which continued to puzzle me, interrupted for some time my friendship with Bloch, and constitutes in itself one of those curious paradoxes the explanation of which will be found in the next part of this work. At this party at Mme. de Villeparisis's, Bloch kept on boasting to me about the friendly attentions shewn him by M. de Charlus, who, when he passed him in the street, looked him straight in the face as though he recognised him, was anxious to know him personally, knew quite well who he was. I smiled at first, Bloch having expressed so vehemently at Balbec his contempt for the said M. de Charlus. And I supposed merely that Bloch, like his father in the Case of Bergotte, knew the Baron 'without actually knowing him,' and that what he took for a friendly glance was due to absent-mindedness. But finally Bloch became so precise and appeared so confident that on two or three occasions M. de Charlus had wished to address him that, remembering that I had spoken of my friend to the Baron, who had, as we walked away together from this very house, as it happened, asked me various questions about him, I came to the conclusion that Bloch was not lying that M. de Charlus had heard his name, realised that he was my friend' and so forth. And so, a little later, at the theatre one evening, I asked M! de Charlus if I might introduce Bloch to him, and, on his assenting, went in search of my friend. But as soon as M. de Charlus caught sight of him an expression of astonishment, instantly repressed, appeared on his face where it gave way to a blazing fury. Not only did he not offer Bloch his hand but whenever Bloch spoke to him he replied in the most insolent manner, in an angry and wounding tone. So that Bloch, who, according to his version, had received nothing until then from the Baron but smiles, assumed that I had not indeed commended but disparaged him in the short speech in which, knowing M. de Charlus's liking for formal procedure, I had told him about my friend before bringing him up to be introduced. Bloch left us, his spirit broken, like a man who

has been trying to mount a horse which is always ready to take the bit in its teeth, or to swim against waves which continually dash him back on the shingle, and did not speak to me again for six months.

The days that preceded my dinner with Mme. de Stermaria were for me by no means delightful, in fact it was all I could do to live through them. For as a general rule, the shorter the interval is that separates us from our planned objective, the longer it seems to us, because we apply to it a more minute scale of measurement, or simply because it occurs to us to measure it at all. The Papacy, we are told, reckons by centuries, and indeed may not think perhaps of reckoning time at all, since its goal is in eternity. Mine was no more than three days off; I counted by seconds, I gave myself up to those imaginings which are the first movements of caresses, of caresses which it maddens us not to be able to make the woman herself reciprocate and complete — those identical caresses, to the exclusion of all others. And, as a matter of fact, it is true that, generally speaking, the difficulty of attaining to the object of a desire enhances that desire (the difficulty, not the impossibility, for that suppresses it altogether), yet in the case of a desire that is wholly physical the certainty that it will be realised, at a fixed and not distant point in time, is scarcely less exciting than uncertainty; almost as much as an anxious doubt, the absence of doubt makes intolerable the period of waiting for the pleasure that is bound to come, because it makes of that suspense an innumerably rehearsed accomplishment and by the frequency of our proleptic representations divides time into sections as minute as could be carved by agony. What I required was to possess Mme. de Stermaria, for during the last few days, with an incessant activity, my desires had been preparing this pleasure, in my imagination, and this pleasure alone, for any other kind (pleasure, that is, taken with another woman) would not have been ready, pleasure being but the realisation of a previous wish, and of one which is not always the same, but changes according to the endless combinations of one's fancies, the accidents of one's memory, the state of one's temperament, the variability of one's desires, the most recently granted of which lie dormant until the disappointment of their satisfaction has been to some extent forgotten; I should not have been prepared, I had already turned from the main road of general desires and had ventured along the bridle-path of a particular desire; I should have had — in order to wish for a different assignation — to retrace my steps too far before rejoining the main road and taking another path. To take possession of Mme. de Stermaria on the island in the Bois de Boulogne where I had asked her to dine with me, this was the pleasure that I imagined to myself afresh every moment. It would have

automatically perished if I had dined on that island without Mme. de Stermaria; but perhaps as greatly diminished had I dined, even with her, somewhere else. Besides, the attitudes in which one pictures a pleasure to oneself exist previously to the woman, to the type of woman required to give one that pleasure. They dictate the pleasure, and the place as well, and on that account bring to the fore alternatively, in our capricious fancy, this or that woman, this or that scene, this or that room, which in other weeks we should have dismissed with contempt. Child of the attitude that produced her, one woman will not appeal to us without the large bed in which we find peace by her side, while others, to be caressed with a more secret intention, require leaves blown by the wind, water rippling in the night, are as frail and fleeting as they.

No doubt in the past, long before I received Saint-Loup's letter and when there was as yet no question of Mme. de Stermaria, the island in the Bois had seemed to me to be specially designed for pleasure, because I had found myself going there to taste the bitterness of having no pleasure to enjoy in its shelter. It is to the shores of the lake from which one goes to that island, and along which, in the last weeks of summer, those ladies of Paris who have not yet left for the country take the air, that, not knowing where to look for her, or if indeed she has not already left Paris, one wanders in the hope of seeing the girl go by with whom one fell in love at the last ball of the season, whom one will not have a chance of meeting again in any drawing-room until the following spring. Feeling it to be at least the eve, if not the morrow, of the beloved's departure, one follows along the brink of the shivering water those attractive paths by which already a first red leaf is blooming like a last rose, one scans that horizon where, by a device the opposite of that employed in those panoramas beneath whose domed roofs the wax figures in the foreground impart to the painted canvas beyond them the illusory appearance of depth and mass, our eyes, passing without any transition from the cultivated park to the natural heights of Meudon and the Mont Valérien, do not know where to set the boundary, and make the natural country trespass upon the handiwork of the gardener, of which they project far beyond its own limits the artificial charm; like those rare birds reared in the open in a botanical garden which every day in the liberty of their winged excursions sally forth to strike, among the surrounding woods, an exotic note. Between the last festivity of summer and one's winter exile, one ranges anxiously that romantic world of chance encounters and lover's melancholy, and one would be no more surprised to learn that it was situated outside the mapped universe than if, at Versailles, looking down from the terrace, an observatory round which the

clouds are massed against a blue sky in the manner of Van der Meulen, after having thus risen above the bounds of nature, one were informed that, there where nature begins again at the end of the great canal, the villages which one just could not make out, on a horizon as dazzling as the sea, were called Fleurus or Nimègue.

And then, the last carriage having rolled by, when one feels with a throb of pain that she will not come now, one goes to dine on the island; above the shivering poplars which suggest endless mysteries of evening though without response, a pink cloud paints a last touch of life in the tranquil sky. A few drops of rain fall without noise on the water, ancient but still in its diyine infancy coloured always by the weather and continually forgetting the reflexions of clouds and flowers. And after the geraniums have vainly striven, by intensifying the brilliance of their scarlet, to resist the gathering darkness, a mist rises to envelop the now slumbering island; one walks in the moist dimness along the water's edge, where at the most the silent passage of a swan startles one like, in a bed, at night, the eyes, for a moment wide open, and the swift smile of a child whom one did not suppose to be awake. Then one would like to have with one a loving companion, all the more as one feels oneself to be alone and can imagine oneself to be far away from the world.

But to this island, where even in summer there was often a mist, how much more gladly would I have brought Mme. de Stermaria now that the cold season, the back end of autumn had come. If the weather that had prevailed since Sunday had not by itself rendered grey and maritime the scenes in which my imagination was living — as other seasons made them balmy, luminous, Italian — the hope of, in a few days' time, making Mme. de Stermaria mine would have been quite enough to raise, twenty times in an hour, a curtain of mist in my monotonously lovesick imagination. In any event the mist, which since yesterday had risen even in Paris, not only made me think incessantly of the native place of the young woman whom I had invited to dine with me, but, since it was probable that, far more thickly than in the streets of the town, it must after sunset be invading the Bois, especially the shores of the lake, I thought that it would make the Swans' Island, for me, something like that Breton island the marine and misty atmosphere of which had always enwrapped in my mind like a garment the pale outline of Mme. de Stermaria. Of course when we are young, at the age I had reached at the period of my walks along the Méséglise way, our desires, our faith bestow on a woman's clothing an individual personality, an ultimate quintessence. We pursue reality. But by dint of allowing it to escape we

end by noticing that, after all those vain endeavours which have led to nothing, something solid subsists, which is what we have been seeking. We begin to separate, to recognise what we love, we try to procure it for ourselves, be it only by a stratagem. Then, in the absence of our vanished faith, costume fills the gap, by means of a deliberate illusion. I knew quite well that within half an hour of home I should not find myself in Brittany. But in walking arm in arm with Mme. de Stermaria in the dusk of the island, by the water's edge, I should be acting like other men who, unable to penetrate the walls of à convent, do at least, before enjoying a woman, clothe her in the habit of a nun.

I could even look forward to hearing, as I sat with the lady, the lapping of waves, for, on the day before our dinner, a storm broke over Paris. I was beginning to shave myself before going to the island to engage the room (albeit at this time of year the island was empty and the restaurant deserted) and order the food for our dinner next day when Françoise came in to tell me that Albertine had called. I made her come in at once, indifferent to her finding me disfigured by a bristling chin, her for whom at Balbec I had never felt smart enough and who had cost me then as much agitation and distress as Mme. de Stermaria was costing me now. The latter, I was determined, must go away with the best possible impression from our evening together. Accordingly I asked Albertine to come with me there and then to the island to order the food. She to whom one gives everything is so quickly replaced by another that one is surprised to find oneself giving all that one has, afresh, at every moment, without any hope of future reward. At my suggestion the smiling rosy face beneath Albertine's flat cap, which came down very low, to her eyebrows, seemed to hesitate. She had probably other plans; if so she sacrificed them willingly, to my great satisfaction, for I attached the utmost importance to my having with me a young housewife who would know a great deal more than myself about ordering dinner.

It is quite true that she had represented something utterly different for me at Balbec. But our intimacy, even when we do not consider it close enough at the time, with a woman with whom we are in love creates between her and us, in spite of the shortcomings that pain us while our love lasts, social ties which outlast our love and even the memory of our love. Then, in her who is nothing more for us than a means of approach, an avenue towards others, we are just as astonished and amused to learn from our memory what her name meant originally to that other creature which we then were as if, after giving a cabman an address in the Boulevard des Capucines or the Rue du Bac, thinking only of

the person whom we are going to see there, we remind ourself that the names were once those of, respectively, the Capuchin nuns whose convent stood on the site and the ferry across the Seine.

At the same time, my Balbec desires had so generously ripened Albertine's body, had gathered and stored in it savours so fresh and sweet that, as we drove through the Bois, while the wind like a careful gardener shook the trees, brought down the fruit, swept up the fallen leaves, I said to myself that had there been any risk of Saint-Loup's being mistaken, or of my having misunderstood his letter, so that my dinner with Mme. de Stermaria might lead to no satisfactory result, I should have made an appointment for the same evening, later on, with Albertine, so as to forget, for a purely voluptuous hour, as I held in my arms a body of which my curiosity had long since computed, weighed up all the possible charms in which now it abounded, the emotions and perhaps the regrets of this first phase of love for Mme. de Stermaria. And certainly if I could have supposed that Mme de Stermaria would not grant me any of her favours at our first meeting, I should have formed a slightly depressing picture of my evening with her. I knew too well from experience how the two stages which occur in us in the first phase of our love for a woman whom we have desired without knowing her, loving in her rather the particular kind of existence in which she is steeped than her still unfamiliar self — how distorted is the reflexion of those two stages in the world of facts, that is to say not in ourselves any longer but in our meetings with her. We have, without ever having talked to her, hesitated, tempted as we were by the poetic charm which she represented for us. Shall it be this woman or another? And lo, our dreams become fixed round about her, cease to have any separate existence from her. The first meeting with her which will shortly follow should reflect this dawning love. Nothing of the sort. As if it were necessary that our material life should have its first period also, in love with her already, we talk to her in the most trivial fashion: "I asked you to dine on this island because I thought the surroundings would amuse you. I've nothing particular to say to you, don't you know. But it's rather damp, I'm afraid, and you may find it cold —" "Oh, no, not at all!" "You just say that out of politeness. Very well, Madame, I shall allow you to battle against the cold for another quarter of an hour, as I don't want to bother you, but in fifteen minutes I shall carry you off by force. I don't want to have you catching a chill." And without another word said we take her home, remembering nothing about her, at the most a certain look in her eyes, but thinking only of seeing her again. Well, at our second meeting (when we do not find even that look, our sole memory of her,

but nevertheless have been thinking only of seeing her again), the first stage is passed. Nothing has happened in the interval. And yet, instead of talking about the comfort or want of comfort of the restaurant, we say, without our words appearing to surprise the new person, who seems to us positively plain but to whom we should like to think that people were talking about us at every moment in her life: “We are going to have our work cut out to overcome all the obstacles in our way. Do you think we shall be successful? Do you suppose that we can triumph over our enemies — live happily ever afterwards, and all that sort of thing?” But these conversational openings, trivial to begin with, then hinting at love, would not be required; I could trust Saint-Loup’s letter for that. Mme. de Stermaria would yield herself to me from the first, I should have no need therefore to engage Albertine to come to me, as a makeshift, later in the evening. It would be superfluous; Robert never exaggerated, and his letter was explicit.

Albertine spoke hardly at all, conscious that my thoughts were elsewhere. We went a little way on foot into the greenish, almost submarine grotto of a dense mass of trees, on the domed tops of which we heard the wind sweep and the rain pelt. I trod underfoot dead leaves which, like shells, were trampled into the soil, and poked with my stick at fallen chestnuts prickly as sea-urchins.

On the boughs the last clinging leaves, shaken by the wind, followed it only as far as their stems would allow, but sometimes these broke, and they fell to the ground, along which they coursed to overtake it. I thought with joy how much more remote still, if this weather lasted, the island would be on the morrow — and in any case quite deserted. We returned to our carriage and, as the storm had passed off, Albertine asked me to take her on to Saint-Cloud. As on the ground the drifting leaves so up above the clouds were chasing the wind. And a stream of migrant evenings, of which a sort of conic section cut through the sky made visible the successive layers, pink, blue and green, were gathered in readiness for departure to warmer climes. To obtain a closer view of a marble goddess who had been carved in the act of leaping from her pedestal and, alone in a great wood which seemed to be consecrated to her, filled it with the mythological terror, half animal, half divine, of her frenzied bounding, Albertine climbed a grassy slope while I waited for her in the road. She herself, seen thus from below, no longer coarse and plump as, a few days earlier, on my bed when the grain of her throat became apparent in the lens of my eye as it approached her person, but chiselled and delicate, seemed a little statue on which our happy hours together at Balbec had left their patina. When I found myself alone again at home, and remembered that I had taken a drive that afternoon with Albertine,

that I was to dine in two days' time with Mme. de Guermantes and that I had to answer a letter from Gilberte, three women each of whom I had once loved, I said to myself that our social existence is, like an artist's studio, filled with abandoned sketches in which we have fancied for a moment that we could set down in permanent form our need of a great love, but it did not occur to me that sometimes, if the sketch be not too old, it may happen that we return to it and make of it a work wholly different, and possibly more important than what we had originally planned.

The next day was cold and fine; winter was in the air — indeed the season was so far advanced that it had seemed miraculous that we should find in the already pillaged Bois a few domes of gilded green. When I awoke I saw, as from the window of the barracks at Doncières, a uniform, dead white mist which hung gaily in the sunlight, consistent and sweet as a web of spun sugar. Then the sun withdrew, and the mist thickened still further in the afternoon. Night fell early, I made ready for dinner, but it was still too soon to start; I decided to send a carriage for Mme. de Stermaria. I did not like to go for her in it myself, not wishing to force my company on her, but I gave the driver a note for her in which I asked whether she would mind my coming to call for her. While I waited for her answer I lay down on my bed, shut my eyes for a moment, then opened them again. Over the top of the curtains there was nothing now but a thin strip of daylight which grew steadily fainter. I recognised that wasted hour, the large ante-room of pleasure, the dark, delicious emptiness of which I had learned at Balbec to know and to enjoy when, alone in my room as I was now, while all the rest were at dinner, I saw without regret the daylight fade from above my curtains, knowing that, presently, after a night of arctic brevity, it was to be resuscitated in a more dazzling brightness in the lighted rooms of Rivebelle. I sprang from my bed, tied my black necktie, passed a brush over my hair, final gestures of a belated tidying carried out at Balbec with my mind not on myself but on the women whom I should see at Rivebelle while I smiled at them in anticipation in the mirror that stood across a corner of my room, gestures which, on that account, had continued to herald a form of entertainment in which music and lights would be mingled. Like magic signs they summoned, nay rather presented this entertainment already; thanks to them I had, of its intoxicating frivolous charm as complete an enjoyment as I had had at Combray, in the month of July, when I heard the hammer-blows ring on the packing cases and enjoyed, in the coolness of my darkened room, a sense of warmth and sunshine.

Also, it was no longer exactly Mme. de Stermaria that I should have wished

most to see. Forced now to spend my evening with her, I should have preferred, as it was almost the last before the return of my parents that it should remain free and myself try instead to find some of the women from Rivebelle. I gave my hands one more final wash and, my sense of pleasure keeping me on the move, dried them as I walked through the shuttered dining-room. It appeared to have a door open on to the lighted hall but what I had taken for the bright chink of the door, which as a matter of fact was closed, was only the gleaming reflexion of my towel in a mirror that had been laid against the wall in readiness to be fixed in its place before Mamma's return. I thought of all the other illusions of the sort which I had discovered in different parts of the house, and which were not optical only, for when we first came there I had supposed that our next-door neighbour kept a dog on account of the continuous, almost human yapping which came from a certain pipe in the kitchen whenever the tap was turned on. And the door on to the outer landing never closed by itself, very gently, caught by a draught on the staircase, without rendering those broken, voluptuous, whimpering passages which sound over the chant of the pilgrims towards the end of Overture to *Tannhäuser*. I had, moreover, just as I had put my towel back on its rail, an opportunity of hearing a fresh rendering of this brilliant symphonic fragment, for at a peal of the bell I hurried out to open the door to the driver who had come with Mme. de Stermaria's answer. I thought that his message would be: "The lady is downstairs," or "The lady is waiting." But he had a letter in his hand. I hesitated for a moment before looking to see what Mme. de Stermaria had written, who, while she held the pen in her hand, might have been anything but was now, detached from herself, an engine of fate, pursuing a course alone, which she was utterly powerless to alter. I asked the driver to wait downstairs for a moment, although he was cursing the fog. As soon as he had gone I opened the envelope. On her card, inscribed *Vicomtesse Alix de. Stermaria*, my guest had written: "Am so sorry — am unfortunately prevented from dining with you this evening on the island in the Bois. Had been so looking forward to it. Will write you a proper letter from Stermaria. Very sorry. Kindest regards." I stood motionless, stunned by the shock that I had received. At my feet lay the card and envelope, fallen like the spent cartridge from a gun when the shot has been fired. I picked them up, tried to analyse her message. "She says that she cannot dine with me on the island in the Bois. One might gather from that that she would dine with me somewhere else. I shall not be so indiscreet as to go and fetch her, but, after all, that is quite a reasonable interpretation." And from that island in the Bois, as for the last few days my thoughts had been installed there

beforehand with Mme. de Stermâria, I could not succeed in bringing them back to where I was. My desire responded automatically to the gravitational force which had been pulling it now for so many hours on end, and in spite of this message, too recent to counteract that force, I went on instinctively getting ready to start, just as a student, although ploughed by the examiners, tries to answer one question more. At last I decided to tell Françoise to go down and pay the driver. I went along the passage without finding her, I passed through the dining-room, where suddenly my feet ceased to sound on the bare boards as they had been doing and were hushed to a silence which, even before I had realised the explanation of it, gave me a feeling of suffocation and confinement. It was the carpets which, in view of my parents' return, the servants had begun to put down again, those carpets which look so well on bright mornings when amid their disorder the sun stays and waits for you like a friend come to take you out to luncheon in the country, and casts over them the dappled light and shade of the forest, but which now on the contrary were the first installation of the wintry prison from which, obliged as I should be to live, to take my meals at home, I should no longer be free now to escape when I chose.

"Take care you don't slip, Sir; they're not tacked yet," Françoise called to me. "I ought to have lighted up. Oh, dear, it's the end of 'September' already, the fine days are over." In no time, winter; at the corner of a window, as in a Galle glass, a vein of crusted snow; and even in the Champs-Elysées, instead of the girls one waits to see, nothing but solitary sparrows.

What added to my distress at not seeing Mme. de Stermâria was that her answer led me to suppose that whereas, hour by hour, since Sunday, I had been living for this dinner alone, she had presumably never given it a second thought. Later on I learned of an absurd love match that she had suddenly made with a young man whom she must already have been seeing at this time, and who had presumably made her forget my invitation. For if she had remembered it she would surely never have waited for the carriage which I was not, for that matter, supposed to be sending for her, to inform me that she was otherwise engaged. My dreams of a young feudal maiden on a misty island had cleared the way to a still non-existent love. Now my disappointment, my rage, my desperate desire to recapture her who had just refused me were able, by bringing my sensibility into play, to make definite the possible love which until then my imagination alone had — and that more loosely — offered me.

How many are there in our memories, how many more have we forgotten, of these faces of girls and young women, all different, to which we have added a

certain charm and a frenzied desire to see them again only because at the last moment they eluded us? In the case of Mme. de Stermaria there was a good deal more than this, and it was enough now to make me love her for me to see her again so that I might refresh those impressions, so vivid but all too brief, which my memory would not, without such refreshment, have the strength to keep alive when we were apart. Circumstances decided against me; I did not see her again. It was not she that I loved, but it might well have been. And one of the things that made most cruel, perhaps, the great love which was presently to come to me was that when I thought of this evening I used to say to myself that my love might, given a slight modification of very ordinary circumstances, have been directed elsewhere, to Mme. de Stermaria; its application to her who inspired it in me so soon afterwards was not therefore — as I so longed so needed to believe — absolutely necessary and predestined.

Françoise had left me by myself in the dining-room with the remark that it was foolish of me to stay there before she had lighted the fire. She went to get me some dinner, for even before the return of my parents, from this very evening, my seclusion was to begin. I caught sight of a huge bundle of carpets, still rolled up, and leaning against one end of the sideboard, and burying my head in it, swallowing its dust with my own tears, as the Jews used to cover their heads with ashes in times of mourning, I began to sob. I shuddered not only because the room was cold, but because a distinct lowering of temperature (against the danger and — I should add, perhaps — the by no means disagreeable sensation of which we make no attempt to react) is brought about by a certain kind of tears which fall from our eyes, drop by drop, like a fine, penetrating, icy rain, and seem as though never would they cease to flow. Suddenly I heard a voice:

“May I come in? Françoise told me you would be in the dining-room. I looked in to see whether you would care to come out and dine somewhere, if it isn’t bad for your throat — there’s a fog outside you could cut with a knife.”

It was — arrived in Paris that morning, when I imagined him to be still in Morocco or on the sea — Robert de Saint-Loup.

I have already said (as a matter of fact, it was Robert himself who, at Balbec, had helped me, quite without meaning it, to arrive at this conclusion) what I think about friendship: to wit that it is so small a thing that I find it hard to understand how men with some claim to genius — Nietzsche, for instance — can have been such simpletons as to ascribe to it a certain intellectual value, and consequently to deny themselves friendships in which intellectual esteem would

have no part. Yes, it has always been a surprise to me to find a man who carried sincerity towards himself to so high a pitch as to cut himself off, by a scruple of conscience, from Wagner's music, imagining that the truth could ever be attained by the mode of expression, naturally vague and inadequate, which our actions in general and acts of friendship in particular furnish, or that there could be any kind of significance in the fact of one's leaving one's work to go and see a friend and shed tears with him on hearing the false report that the Louvre was burned. I had got so far, at Balbec, as to find that the pleasure of playing with a troop of girls is less destructive of the spiritual life, to which at least it remains alien, than friendship, the whole effort of which is directed towards making us sacrifice the one real and (save by the channel of art) incommunicable part of ourself to a superficial self which finds — not, like the other, any joy in itself, but rather a vague, sentimental attraction in the feeling that it is being supported by external props, hospitably entertained by a strange personality, through which, happy in the protection that is afforded it there, it makes its own comfort radiate in warm approval, and marvels at qualities which it would denounce as faults and seek to correct in itself. Moreover the scorners of friendship can, without illusion and not without remorse, be the finest friends in the world, just as an artist carrying in his brain a masterpiece and feeling that his duty is rather to live and carry on his work, nevertheless, so as not to be thought or to run the risk of actually being selfish, gives his life for a vain cause, and gives it all the more gallantly in that the reasons for which he would have preferred not to give it were disinterested. But whatever might be my opinion of friendship, to mention only the pleasure that it procured me, of a quality so mediocre as to be like something halfway between physical exhaustion and mental boredom, there is no brew so deadly that it cannot at certain moments, become precious and invigorating by giving us just the stimulus that was necessary, the warmth that we cannot generate in ourselves.

The thought of course never entered my mind now of asking Saint-Loup to take me (as, an hour earlier, I had been longing to go) to see some of the Rivebelle women; the scar left by my disappointment with Mme. de Stermaria was too recent still to be so easily healed, but at the moment when I had ceased to feel in my heart any reason for happiness Saint-Loup's bursting in upon me was like a sudden apparition of kindness, mirth, life, which were external to me, no doubt, but offered themselves to me, asked only to be made mine. He did not himself understand my shout of gratitude, my tears of affection. And yet is there anything more unaccountably affecting than one of those friends, be he diplomat,

explorer, airman or soldier like Saint-Loup, who, having to start next day for the country, from where they will go on heaven knows where, seem to form for themselves, in the evening which they devote to us, an impression which we are astonished both to find, so rare and fleeting is it, can be so pleasant to them, and, since it does so delight them, not to see them prolong farther or repeat more often. A meal with us, an event so natural in itself, affords these travellers the same strange and exquisite pleasure as our boulevards give to an Asiatic. We set off together to dine, and as I went downstairs I thought of Doncières where every evening I used to meet Robert at his restaurant, and the little dining-rooms there that I had forgotten. I remembered one of these to which I had never given a thought, and which was not in the hotel where Saint-Loup dined but in another, far humbler, a cross between an inn and a boarding-house, where the waiting was done by the landlady and one of her servants. I had been forced to take shelter there once from a snowstorm. Besides, Robert was not to be dining at the hotel that evening and I had not cared to go any farther. My food was brought to me, upstairs, in a little room with bare wooden walls. The lamp went out during dinner and the servant lighted a couple of candles. I, pretending that I could not see very well as I held out my plate, while she helped me to potatoes, took her bare fore-arm in my hand, as though to guide her. Seeing that she did not withdraw it, I began to fondle it, then, without saying a word, pulled her bodily to me, blew out the candles and told her to feel in my pocket for some money. For the next few days physical pleasure seemed to me to require, to be properly enjoyed, not only this servant but the timbered dining-room, so remote and lonely. And yet it was to the other, in which Saint-Loup and his friends dined, that I returned every evening, from force of habit and in friendship for them, until I left Doncières. But even of this hotel, where he took his meals with his friends, I had long ceased to think; we make little use of our experience, we leave unconsumed in the summer dusk or precocious nights of winter the hours in which it had seemed to us that there might nevertheless be contained some element of tranquillity or pleasure. But those hours are not altogether wasted. When, in their turn, come and sing to us fresh moments of pleasure, which by themselves would pass by equally bare in outline, the others recur, bringing with them the groundwork, the solid consistency of a rich orchestration. They are in this way prolonged into one of those types of happiness which we recapture only now and again but which continue to exist; in the present instance the type was that of forsaking everything else to dine in comfortable surroundings, which by the help of memory embody in a scene from nature suggestions of the rewards of

travel, with a friend who is going to stir our dormant life with all his energy, his affection, to communicate to us an emotional pleasure, very different from anything that we could derive from our own efforts or from social distractions; we are going to exist solely for him, to utter vows of friendship which, born within the confines of the hour, remaining imprisoned in it, will perhaps not be kept on the morrow but which I need have no scruple in taking before Saint-Loup since, with a courage into which there entered a great deal of common sense and the presentiment that friendship cannot explore its own depths, on the morrow he would be gone.

If as I came downstairs I lived over again the evenings at Doncières, when we reached the street, in a moment the darkness, now almost total, in which the fog seemed to have put out the lamps, which one could make out, glimmering very faintly, only when close at hand, took me back to I could not say what arrival, by night, at Combray, when the streets there were still lighted only at long intervals and one felt one's way through a darkness moist, warm, consecrated, like that of a Christmas manger, just visibly starred here and there by a wick that burned no brighter than a candle. Between that year — to which I could ascribe no precise date — of my Combray life and the evenings at Rivebelle which had, an hour earlier, been reflected above my drawn curtains, what a world of differences! I felt on perceiving them an enthusiasm which might have borne fruit had I been left alone and would then have saved me the unnecessary round of many wasted years through which I was yet to pass before there was revealed to me that invisible vocation of which these volumes are the history. Had the revelation come to me this evening, the carriage in which I sat would have deserved to rank as more memorable with me than Dr. Percepied's, on the box seat of which I had composed that little sketch — on which, as it happened, I had recently laid my hands, altered it and sent it in vain to the*Figaro* — of the spires of Martinville. Is it because we live over our past years not in their continuous sequence, day by day, but in a memory that fastens upon the coolness or sun-parched heat of some morning or afternoon, receives the shadow of some solitary place, is enclosed, immovable, arrested, lost, remote from all others, because, therefore, the changes gradually wrought not only in the world outside but in our dreams and our evolving character (changes which have imperceptibly carried us through life from one to another, wholly different time), are of necessity eliminated, that, if we revive another memory taken from a different year, we find between the two, thanks to lacunae, to vast stretches of oblivion, as it were the gulf of a difference in altitude or the incompatibility of

two divers qualities, that of the air we breathe and the colour of the scene before our eyes? But between one and another of the memories that had now come to me in turn of Combray, of Doncières and of Rivebelle, I was conscious at the moment of more than a distance in time, of the distance that there would be between two separate universes the material elements in which were not the same. If I had sought to reproduce the element in which appeared carven my most trivial memories of Rivebelle, I should have had to streak with rosy veins, to render at once translucent, compact, refreshing, resonant a substance hitherto analogous to the coarse dark sandstone walls of Combray. But Robert having finished giving his instructions to the driver joined me now in the carriage. The ideas that had appeared before me took flight. Ideas are goddesses who deign at times to make themselves visible to a solitary mortal, at a turning in the road, even in his bedroom while he sleeps, when they, standing framed in the doorway, bring him the annunciation of their tidings. But as soon as a companion joins him they vanish, in the society of his fellows no man has ever beheld them. And I found myself cast back upon friendship. When he first appeared Robert had indeed warned me that there was a good deal of fog outside, but while we were indoors, talking, it had grown steadily thicker. It was no longer merely the light mist which I had looked forward to seeing rise from the island and envelop Mme. de Stermaria and myself. A few feet away from us the street lamps were blotted out and then it was night, as dark as in the open fields, in a forest, or rather on a mild Breton island whither I would fain have gone; I lost myself, as on the stark coast of some. Northern sea where one risks one’s life twenty times over before coming to the solitary inn; ceasing to be a mirage for which one seeks, the fog became one of those dangers against which one has to fight, so that we had, in finding our way and reaching a safe haven, the difficulties, the anxiety and finally the joy which safety, so little perceived by him who is not threatened with the loss of it, gives to the perplexed and benighted traveller. One thing only came near to destroying my pleasure during our adventurous ride, owing to the angry astonishment into which it flung me for a moment, “You know, I told Bloch,” Saint-Loup suddenly informed me, “that you didn’t really think all that of him, that you found him rather vulgar at times. I’m like that, you see, I want people to know where they stand,” he wound up with a satisfied air and in a tone which brooked no reply. I was astounded. Not only had I the most absolute confidence in Saint-Loup, in the loyalty of his friendship, and he had betrayed it by what he had said to Bloch, but it seemed to me that he of all men ought to have been restrained from doing so, by his defects as well as by his

good qualities, by that astonishing veneer of breeding which was capable of carrying politeness to what was positively a want of frankness. His triumphant air, was it what we assume to cloak a certain embarrassment in admitting a thing which we know that we ought not to have done, or did it mean complete unconsciousness; stupidity making a virtue out of a defect which I had not associated with him; a passing fit of ill humour towards me prompting him to make an end of our friendship, or the notation in words of a passing fit of ill humour in the company of Bloch to whom he had felt that he must say something disagreeable, even although I should be compromised by it? However that might be, his face was seared, while he uttered this vulgar speech, by a frightful sinuosity which I saw on it once or twice only in all the time I knew him, and which, beginning by running more or less down the middle of his face, when it came to his lips twisted them, gave them a hideous expression of baseness, almost of bestiality, quite transitory and no doubt inherited. There must have been at such moments, which recurred probably not more than once every other year, a partial eclipse of his true self by the passage across it of the personality of some ancestor whose shadow fell on him. Fully as much as his satisfied air, the words: “I want people to know where they stand,” encouraged the same doubt and should have incurred a similar condemnation. I felt inclined to say to him that if one wants people to know where they stand one ought to confine these outbursts of frankness to one’s own affairs and not to acquire a too easy merit at the expense of others. But by this time the carriage had stopped outside the restaurant, the huge front of which, glazed and streaming with light, alone succeeded in piercing the darkness. The fog itself, beside the comfortable brightness of the lighted interior, seemed to be waiting outside on the pavement to shew one the way in with the joy of servants whose faces reflect the hospitable instincts of their master; shot with the most delicate shades of light, it pointed the way like the pillar of fire which guided the Children of Israel. Many of whom, as it happened, were to be found inside. For this was the place to which Bloch and his friends had long been in the habit, maddened by a hunger as famishing as the Ritual Fast, which at least occurs only once a year, for coffee and the satisfaction of political curiosity, of repairing in the evenings. Every mental excitement creating a value that overrides others, a quality superior to the rest of one’s habits, there is no taste at all keenly developed that does not thus gather round it a society which it unites and in which the esteem of his fellows is what each of its members seeks before anything else from life. Here, in their café, be it in a little provincial town, you will find impassioned music-lovers; the

greater part of their time, all their spare cash is spent in chamber-concerts, in meetings for musical discussion, in cafés where one finds oneself among musical people and rubs shoulders with the members of the orchestra. Others, keen upon flying, seek to stand well with the old waiter in the glazed bar perched on top of the aerodrome; sheltered from the wind as in the glass cage of a lighthouse, they can follow in the company of an airman who is not going up that day the evolutions of a pilot practising loops, while another, invisible a moment ago, comes suddenly swooping down to land with the great winged roar of an Arabian roc. The little group which met to try to perpetuate, to explore the fugitive emotions aroused by the Zola trial attached a similar importance to this particular café. But they were not viewed with favour by the young nobles who composed the rest of its patrons and had taken possession of a second room, separated from the other only by a flimsy parapet topped with a row of plants. These looked upon Dreyfus and his supporters as traitors, albeit twenty-five years later, ideas having had time to classify themselves and Dreyfusism to acquire, in the light of history, a certain distinction, the sons, dance-mad Bolshevists, of these same young nobles were to declare to the ‘intellectuals’ who questioned them that undoubtedly, had they been alive at the time, they would have stood up for Dreyfus, without having any clearer idea of what the great Case had been about than Comtesse Edmond de Pourtalès or the Marquise de Galliffet, other luminaries already extinct at the date of their birth. For on the night of the fog the noblemen of the café, who were in due course to become the fathers of these young intellectuals, Dreyfusards in retrospect, were still bachelors. Naturally the idea of a rich marriage was present in the minds of all their families, but none of them had yet brought such a marriage off. While still potential, the only effect of this rich marriage, the simultaneous ambition of several of them (there were indeed several heiresses in view, but after all the number of big dowries was considerably below that of the aspirants to them), was to create among these young men a certain amount of rivalry.

As ill luck would have it, Saint-Loup remaining outside for a minute to explain to the driver that he was to call for us again after dinner, I had to make my way in by myself. In the first place, once I had involved myself in the spinning door, to which I was not accustomed, I began to fear that I should never succeed in escaping from it. (Let me note here for the benefit of lovers of verbal accuracy that the contrivance in question, despite its peaceful appearance, is known as a ‘revolver,’ from the English ‘revolving door.’) This evening the proprietor, not venturing either to brave the elements outside or to desert his

customers, remained standing near the entrance so as to have the pleasure of listening to the joyful complaints of the new arrivals, all aglow with the satisfaction of people who have had difficulty in reaching a place and have been afraid of losing their way. The smiling cordiality of his welcome was, however, dissipated by the sight of a stranger incapable of disengaging himself from the rotating sheets of glass. This flagrant sign of social ignorance made him knit his brows like an examiner who has a good mind not to utter the formula: *Dignus est intrare*. As a crowning error I went to look for a seat in the room set apart for the nobility, from which he at once expelled me, indicating to me, with a rudeness to which all the waiters at once conformed, a place in the other room. This was all the less to my liking because the seat was in the middle of a crowded row and I had opposite me the door reserved for the Hebrews which, as it did not revolve, opening and shutting at every moment kept me in a horrible draught. But the proprietor declined to move me, saying: “No, Sir, I cannot have the whole place upset for you.” Presently, however, he forgot this belated and troublesome guest, captivated as he was by the arrival of each newcomer who, before calling for his beer, his wing of cold chicken or his hot grog (it was by now long past dinner-time), must first, as in the old romances, pay his scot by relating his adventure at the moment of his entry into this asylum of warmth and security where the contrast with the perils just escaped made that gaiety and sense of comradeship prevail which create a cheerful harmony round the campfire.

One reported that his carriage, thinking it had got to the Pont de la Concorde, had circled three times round the Invalides, another that his, in trying to make its way down the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, had driven into a clump of trees at the Rond Point, from which it had taken him three quarters of an hour to get clear. Then followed lamentations upon the fog, the cold, the deathly stillness of the streets, uttered and received with the same exceptionally jovial air, which was accounted for by the pleasant atmosphere of the room which, except where I sat, was warm, the dazzling light which set blinking eyes already accustomed to not seeing, and the buzz of talk which restored their activity to deafened ears.

It was all the newcomers could do to keep silence. The singularity of the mishaps which each of them thought unique burned their tongues, and their eyes roved in search of some one to engage in conversation. The proprietor himself lost all sense of social distinction. “M. le Prince de Foix lost his way three times coming from the Porte Saint-Martin,” he was not afraid to say with a laugh, actually pointing out, as though introducing one to the other, the illustrious

nobleman to an Israelite barrister, who, on any evening but this, would have been divided from him by a barrier far harder to surmount than the ledge of greenery. “Three times — fancy that!” said the barrister, touching his hat. This note of personal interest was not at all to the Prince’s liking. He formed one of an aristocratic group for whom the practice of impertinence, even at the expense of their fellow-nobles when these were not of the very highest rank, seemed the sole possible occupation. Not to acknowledge a bow, and, if the polite stranger repeated the offence, to titter with sneering contempt or fling back one’s head with a look of fury, to pretend not to know some elderly man who might have done them a service, to reserve their handclasp for dukes and the really intimate friends of dukes whom the latter introduced to them, such was the attitude of these young men, and especially of the Prince de Foix. Such an attitude was encouraged by the ill-balanced mentality of early manhood (a period in which, even in the middle class, one appears ungrateful and behaves like a cad because, having forgotten for months to write to a benefactor after he has lost his wife, one then ceases to nod to him in the street so as to simplify matters), but it was inspired above all by an over-acute caste snobbishness. It is true that, after the fashion of certain nervous affections the symptoms of which grow less pronounced in later life, this snobbishness was on the whole to cease to express itself in so offensive a form in these men who had been so intolerable when young. Once youth is outgrown, it is seldom that anyone remains hidebound by insolence. He had supposed it to be the only thing in the world; suddenly he discovers, for all the Prince that he is, that there also are such things as music, literature, even standing for parliament. The scale of human values is correspondingly altered and he joins in conversation with people whom at one time he would have slain with a glare of lightning. Which is fortunate for those of the latter who have had the patience to wait, and whose character is sufficiently formed — if one may so put it — for them to feel pleasure in receiving in their forties the civility and welcome that had been coldly withheld from them at twenty.

As I have mentioned the Prince de Foix, it may not be inconsequent here to add that he belonged to a set of a dozen or fifteen young men and to an inner group of four. The dozen or fifteen shared this characteristic (which the Prince lacked, I fancy) that each of them faced the world in a dual aspect. Up to their own eyes in debt, they were of no account in those of their tradesmen, notwithstanding the pleasure these took in addressing them as ‘Monsieur le Comte,’ ‘Monsieur le Marquis,’ ‘Monsieur le Duc.’ They hoped to retrieve their

fortunes by means of the famous rich marriage (‘money-bags’ as the expression still was) and, as the fat dowries which they coveted numbered at the most four or five, several of them would be silently training their batteries on the same damsel. And the secret would be so well kept that when one of them, on arriving at the café, announced: “My dear fellows, I am too fond of you all not to tell you of my engagement to Mlle. d’Ambresac,” there was a general outburst, more than one of the others imagining that the marriage was as good as settled already between Mlle. d’Ambresac and himself, and not having enough self-control to stifle a spontaneous cry of stupefaction and rage. “So you like the idea of marriage, do you Bibi?” the Prince de Châtellerault could not help exclaiming, letting his fork drop in his surprise and despair, for he had been fully expecting the engagement of this identical Mlle. d’Ambresac to be announced, but with himself, Châtellerault, as her bridegroom. And heaven only knew all that his father had cunningly hinted to the Ambresacs against Bibi’s mother. “So you think it’ll be fun, being married, do you?” he was impelled to repeat his question to Bibi, who, better prepared to meet it, for he had had plenty of time to decide on the right attitude to adopt since the engagement had reached the semi-official stage, replied with a smile: “What pleases me is not the idea of marriage, which never appealed much to me, but marrying Daisy d’Ambresac, whom I think charming.” In the time taken up by this response M. de Châtellerault had recovered his composure, but he was thinking that he must at the earliest possible moment execute a change of front in the direction of Mlle. de la Canourque or Miss Foster, numbers two and three on the list of heiresses, pacify somehow the creditors who were expecting the Ambresac marriage and finally explain to the people to whom he too had declared that Mlle. d’Ambresac was charming that this marriage was all very well for Bibi, but that he himself would have had all his family down on him like a ton of bricks if he had married her. Mme. Soléon (he decided to say) had actually announced that she would not have them in her house.

But if in the eyes of tradesmen, proprietors of restaurants and the like they seemed of little account, conversely, being creatures of dual personality, the moment they appeared in society they ceased to be judged by the decay of their fortunes and the sordid occupations by which they sought to repair them. They became once more M. le Prince this, M. le Duc that and were reckoned only in terms of their quarterings. A duke who was practically a multi-millionaire and seemed to combine in his own person every possible distinction gave precedence to them because, the heads of their various houses, they were by descent

sovereign princes of minute territories in which they were entitled to coin money and so forth. Often in this café one of them lowered his eyes when another came in so as not to oblige the newcomer to greet him. This was because in his imaginative pursuit of riches he had invited a banker to dine. Every time that a man about town enters into relations, on this footing, with a banker, the latter leaves him the poorer by a hundred thousand francs, which does not prevent the man about town from at once repeating the process with another. We continue to burn candles in churches and to consult doctors.

But the Prince de Foix, who was rich already, belonged not only to this fashionable set of fifteen or so young men, but to a more exclusive and inseparable group of four which included Saint-Loup. These were never asked anywhere separately, they were known as the four *gigolos*, they were always to be seen riding together, in country houses their hostesses gave them communicating bedrooms, with the result that, especially as they were all four extremely good looking, rumours were current as to the extent of their intimacy. I was in a position to give these the lie direct so far as Saint-Loup was concerned. But the curious thing is that if, later on, one was to learn that these rumours were true of all four, each of the quartet had been entirely in the dark as to the other three. And yet each of them had done his utmost to find out about the others, to gratify a desire or (more probably) a resentment, to prevent a marriage or to secure a hold over the friend whose secret he discovered. A fifth (for in these groups of four there are never four only) had joined this Platonic party who was more so than any of the others. But religious scruples restrained him until long after the group had broken up, and he himself was a married man, the father of a family, fervently praying at Lourdes that the next baby might be a boy or a girl, and spending the intervals of procreation in the pursuit of soldiers.

Despite the Prince's code of manners, the fact that the barrister's comment, though uttered in his hearing, had not been directly addressed to him made him less angry than he would otherwise have been. Besides, this evening was somewhat exceptional. Finally, the barrister had no more prospect of coming to know the Prince de Foix than the cabman who had driven that noble lord to the restaurant. The Prince felt, accordingly, that he might allow himself to reply, in an arrogant tone, as though speaking to some one 'off stage,' to this stranger who, thanks to the fog, was in the position of a travelling companion whom one meets at some seaside place at the ends of the earth, scoured by all the winds of heaven or shrouded in mist: "Losing your way's nothing; the trouble is, you can't find it again." The wisdom of this aphorism impressed the proprietor, for

he had already heard it several times in the course of the evening.

He was, in fact, in the habit of always comparing what he heard or read with an already familiar canon, and felt his admiration aroused if he could detect no difference. This state of mind is by no means to be ignored, for, applied to political conversations, to the reading of newspapers, it forms public opinion and thereby makes possible the greatest events in history. An aggregation of German landlords, simply by being impressed by a customer or a newspaper when he or it said that France, England and Russia were ‘out to crush’ Germany, made war, at the time of Agadir, possible, even if no war occurred. Historians, if they have not been wrong to abandon the practice of attributing the actions of peoples to the will of kings, ought to substitute for the latter the psychology of the person of no importance.

In politics the proprietor of this particular café had for some time now concentrated his pupil-teacher’s mind on certain particular details of the Dreyfus case. If he did not find the terms that were familiar to him in the conversation of a customer or the columns of a newspaper he would pronounce the article boring or the speaker insincere. The Prince de Foix, however, impressed him so forcibly that he barely gave him time to finish what he was saying. “That’s right, Prince, that’s right,” (which meant neither more nor less than ‘repeated without a mistake’) “that’s exactly how it is!” he exclaimed, expanding, like people in the Arabian Nights ‘to the limit of repletion.’ But the Prince had by this time vanished into the smaller room. Then, as life resumes its normal course after even the most sensational happenings, those who had emerged from the sea of fog began to order whatever they wanted to eat or drink; among them a party of young men from the Jockey Club who, in view of the abnormality of the situation, had no hesitation in taking their places at a couple of tables in the big room, and were thus quite close to me. So the cataclysm had established even between the smaller room and the bigger, among all these people stimulated by the comfort of the restaurant after their long wanderings across the ocean of fog, a familiarity from which I alone was excluded, not unlike the spirit that must have prevailed in Noah’s ark. Suddenly I saw the landlord’s body whipped into a series of bows, the head waiters hurrying to support him in a full muster which drew every eye towards the door. “Quick, send Cyprien here, lay a table for M. le Marquis de Saint-Loup,” cried the proprietor, for whom Robert was not merely a great nobleman possessing a real importance even in the eyes of the Prince de Foix, but a client who drove through life four-in-hand, so to speak, and spent a great deal of money in this restaurant. The customers in the big room

looked on with interest, those in the small room shouted simultaneous greetings to their friend as he finished wiping his shoes. But just as he was about to make his way into the small room he caught sight of me in the big one. “Good God,” he exclaimed, “what on earth are you doing there? And with the door wide open too?” he went on, with an angry glance at the proprietor, who ran to shut it, throwing the blame on his staff: “I’m always telling them to keep it shut.”

I had been obliged to shift my own table and to disturb others which stood in the way in order to reach him. “Why did you move? Would you sooner dine here than in the little room? Why, my poor fellow, you’re freezing. You will oblige me by keeping that door locked;” he turned to the proprietor. “This very instant, M. le Marquis; the gentlemen will have to go out of this room through the other, that is all.” And the better to shew his zeal he detailed for this operation a head waiter and several satellites, vociferating the most terrible threats of punishment were it not properly carried out. He began to shew me exaggerated marks of respect so as to make me forget that these had begun not upon my arrival but only after that of Saint-Loup, while, lest I should think them to have been prompted by the friendliness shewn me by his rich and noble client he gave me now and again a surreptitious little smile which seemed to indicate a regard that was wholly personal.

Something said by one of the diners behind me made me turn my head for a moment. I had caught, instead of the words: “Wing of chicken, excellent; and a glass of champagne, only not too dry,” the unexpected: “I should prefer glycerine. Yes, hot, excellent.” I wanted to see who the ascetic was that was inflicting upon himself such a diet. I turned quickly back to Saint-Loup so as not to be recognised by the man of strange appetite. It was simply a doctor, whom I happened to know, and of whom another customer, taking advantage of the fog to buttonhole him here in the café, was asking his professional advice. Like stockbrokers, doctors employ the first person singular.

Meanwhile I was studying Saint-Loup, and my thoughts took a line of their own. They were in this café, I had myself known at other times, plenty of foreigners, intellectuals, budding geniuses of all sorts, resigned to the laughter excited by their pretentious capes, their 1830 neckties and still more by the clumsiness of their movements, going so far as to provoke that laughter in order to shew that they paid no heed to it, who yet were men of real intellectual and moral worth, of an extreme sensibility. They repelled — the Jews among them principally, the unassimilated Jews, that is to say, for with the other kind we are not concerned — those who could not endure any oddity or eccentricity of

appearance (as Bloch repelled Al-bertine). Generally speaking, one realised afterwards that if they had against them hair worn too long, noses and eyes that were too big, stilted theatrical gestures, it was puerile to judge them by these only, they had plenty of intelligence and spirit and were men to whom, in the long run, one could become closely attached. Among the Jews especially there were few whose parents and kinsfolk had not a warmth of heart, a breadth of mind in comparison with which Saint-Loup's mother and the Duc de Guermantes cut the poorest of figures by their sereness, their skin-deep religiosity which denounced only the most open scandals, their apology for a Christianity which led invariably (by the unexpected channel of a purely calculating mind) to an enormously wealthy marriage. But in Saint-Loup, when all was said, however the faults of his relatives might be combined in a fresh creation of character, there reigned the most charming openness of mind and heart. And whenever (it must be frankly admitted, to the undying glory of France) these qualities are found in a man who is purely French, be he noble or plebeian, they flower — flourish would be too strong a word, for a sense of proportion persists and also a certain restraint — with a grace which the foreign visitor, however estimable he may be, does not present to us. Of these intellectual and moral qualities others undoubtedly have their share, and if we have first to overcome what repels us and what makes us smile they remain no less precious. But it is all the same a pleasant thing, and one which is perhaps exclusively French that what is fine from the standpoint of equity, what is of value to the heart and mind should be first of all attractive to the eyes, charmingly coloured, consummately chiselled, should express outwardly as well in substance as in form an inward perfection. I studied Saint-Loup's features and said to myself that it is a thing to be glad of when there is no lack of bodily grace to prepare one for the graces within, and when the winged nostrils are spread as delicately and with as perfect a design as the wings of the little butterflies that hover over the field-flowers round Combray; and that the true *opus francigenum*, the secret of which was not lost in the thirteenth century, the beauty of which would not be lost with the destruction of our churches, consists not so much in the stone angels of Saint-André-des-Champs as in the young sons of France, noble, citizen or peasant, whose faces are carved with that delicacy and boldness which have remained as traditional there as on the famous porch, but are creative still as well.

After leaving us for a moment in order to supervise personally the barring of the door and the ordering of our dinner (he laid great stress on our choosing

‘butcher’s meat,’ the fowls being presumably nothing to boast of) the proprietor came back to inform us that M. le Prince de Foix would esteem it a favour if M. le Marquis would allow him to dine at a table next to ours. “But they are all taken,” objected Robert, casting an eye over the tables which blocked the way to mine. “That doesn’t matter in the least, if M. le Marquis would like it, I can easily ask these people to move to another table. It is always a pleasure to do anything for M. le Marquis!” “But you must decide,” said Saint-Loup to me. “Foix is a good fellow, he may bore you or he may not; anyhow he’s not such a fool as most of them.” I told Robert that of course I should like to meet his friend but that now that I was for once in a way dining with him and was so entirely happy, I should be just as well pleased to have him all to myself. “He’s got a very fine cloak, the Prince has,” the proprietor broke in upon our deliberation. “Yes, I know,” said Saint-Loup. I wanted to tell Robert that M. de Charlus had disclaimed all knowledge of me to his sister-in-law, and to ask him what could be the reason of this, but was prevented by the arrival of M. de Foix. Come to see whether his request had been favourably received, we caught sight of him standing beside our table. Robert introduced us, but did not hide from his friend that as we had things to talk about he would prefer not to be disturbed. The Prince withdrew, adding to the farewell bow which he made me a smile which, pointed at Saint-Loup, seemed to transfer to him the responsibility for the shortness of a meeting which the Prince himself would have liked to see prolonged. As he turned to go, Robert, struck, it appeared, by a sudden idea, dashed off after his friend, with a “Stay where you are and get on with your dinner, I shall be back in a moment,” to me; and vanished into the smaller room. I was pained to hear the smart young men sitting near me, whom I did not know, repeat the most absurd and malicious stories about the young Hereditary Grand Duke of Luxembourg (formerly Comte de Nassau) whom I had met at Balbec and who had shewn me such delicate marks of sympathy at the time of my grandmother’s illness. According to one of these young me he had said to the Duchesse de Guermantes: “I expect everyone to get up when my wife passes,” to which the Duchess had retorted (with as little truth, had she said any such thing, as humour, the grandmother of the young Princess having always been the very pink of propriety): “Get up when your wife passes, do they? Well, that’s a change from her grandmother’s day. She expected the gentlemen to lie down.” Then some one alleged that, having gone down to see his aunt the Princesse de Luxembourg at Balbec, and put up at the Grand Hotel, he had complained to the manager there (my friend) that the royal standard of Luxembourg was not flown

in front of the hotel, over the sea. And that this flag being less familiar and less generally in use than the British or Italian, it had taken him several days to procure one, greatly to the young Grand Duke's annoyance. I did not believe a word of this story, but made up my mind, as soon as I went to Balbec, to inquire of the manager, so as to make certain that it was a pure invention. While waiting for Saint-Loup to return I asked the proprietor to get me some bread. "Certainly, Monsieur le Baron!" "I am not a Baron," I told him. "Oh, beg pardon, Monsieur le Comte!" I had no time to lodge a second protest which would certainly have promoted me to the rank of marquis; faithful to his promise of an immediate return, Saint-Loup reappeared in the doorway carrying over his arm the thick vicuna cloak of the Prince de Foix, from whom I guessed that he had borrowed it in order to keep me warm. He signed to me not to get up, and came towards me, but either my table would have to be moved again or I must change my seat if he was to get to his. Entering the big room he sprang lightly on to one of the red plush benches which ran round its walls and on which, apart from myself, there were sitting only three or four of the young men from the Jockey Club, friends of his own, who had not managed to find places in the other room. Between the tables and the wall electric wires were stretched at a certain height; without the least hesitation Saint-Loup jumped nimbly over them like a horse in a steeplechase; embarrassed that it should be done wholly for my benefit and to save me the trouble of a slight movement, I was at the same time amazed at the precision with which my friend performed this exercise in lévitation; and in this I was not alone; for, albeit they would probably have had but little admiration for a similar display on the part of a more humbly born and less generous client, the proprietor and his staff stood fascinated, like racegoers in the enclosure; one underling, apparently rooted to the ground, stood there gaping with a dish in his hand for which a party close beside him were waiting; and when Saint-Loup, having to get past his friends, climbed on the narrow ledge behind them and ran along it, balancing himself with his arms, discreet applause broke from the body of the room. On coming to where I was sitting he stopped short in his advance with the precision of a tributary chieftain before the throne of a sovereign, and, stooping down, handed to me with an air of courtesy and submission the vicuna cloak which, a moment later, having taken his place beside me, without my having to make a single movement he arranged as a light but warm shawl about my shoulders.

"By the way, while I think of it, my uncle Charlus has something to say to you. I promised I'd send you round to him to-morrow evening."

“I was just going to speak to you about him. But to-morrow evening I am dining with your aunt Guermantes.”

“Yes there’s a regular beanfeast to-morrow at Oriane’s. I’m not asked. But my uncle Palamède doesn’t want you to go there. You can’t get out of it, I suppose? Well, anyhow, go on to my uncle’s afterwards. I’m sure he really does want to see you. Look here, you can easily manage to get there by eleven. Eleven o’clock; don’t forget; I’ll let him know. He’s very touchy. If you don’t turn up he’ll never forgive you. And Oriane’s parties are always over quite early. If you are only going to dine there you can quite easily be at my uncle’s by eleven. I ought really to go and see Oriane, about getting shifted from Morocco; I want an exchange. She is so nice about all that sort of thing, and she can get anything she likes out of General de Saint-Joseph, who runs that branch. But don’t say anything about it to her. I’ve mentioned it to the Princesse de Parme, everything will be all right. Interesting place, Morocco. I could tell you all sorts of things. Very fine lot of men out there. One feels they’re on one’s own level, mentally.”

“You don’t think the Germans are going to go to war about it?”

“No; they’re annoyed with us, as after all they have every right to be. But the Emperor is out for peace. They are always making us think they want war, to force us to give in. Pure bluff, you know, like poker. The Prince of Monaco, one of Wilhelm’s agents, comes and tells us in confidence that Germany will attack us. Then we give way. But if we didn’t give way, there wouldn’t be war in any shape or form. You have only to think what a comic spectacle a war would be in these days. It’d be a bigger catastrophe than the Flood and the *Götterdämmerung* rolled in one. Only it wouldn’t last so long.”

He spoke to me of friendship, affection, regret, albeit like all visitors of his sort he was going off the next morning for some months, which he was to spend in the country, and would only be staying a couple of nights in Paris on his way back to Morocco (or elsewhere); but the words which he thus let fall into the heated furnace which my heart was this evening kindled a pleasant glow there. Our infrequent meetings, this one in particular, have since formed a distinct episode in my memories. For him, as for me, this was the evening of friendship. And yet the friendship that I felt for him at this moment was scarcely, I feared (and felt therefore some remorse at the thought), what he would have liked to inspire. Filled still with the pleasure that I had had in seeing him come bounding towards me and gracefully pause on arriving at his goal, I felt that this pleasure lay in my recognising that each of the series of movements which he had

developed against the wall, along the bench, had its meaning, its cause in Saint-Loup's own personal nature, possibly, but even more in that which by birth and upbringing he had inherited from his race.

A certainty of taste in the region not of beauty but manners, which when he was faced by a novel combination of circumstances enabled the man of breeding to grasp at once — like a musician who has been asked to play a piece he has never seen — the feeling, the motions that were required, and to apply the appropriate mechanism and technique; which then allowed this taste to display itself without the constraint of any other consideration, by which the average young man of the middle class would have been paralysed, from fear as well of making himself ridiculous in the eyes of strangers by his disregard of convention as of appearing too deferential in the eyes of his friends; the place of this constraint being taken in Robert by a lofty disdain which certainly he had never felt in his heart but which he had received by inheritance in his body, and which had moulded the attitudes of his ancestors to a familiarity with their inferiors which, they imagined, could only flatter and enchant those to whom it was displayed; lastly, a noble liberality which, taking no account of his boundless natural advantages (lavish expenditure in this restaurant had succeeded in making him, here as elsewhere, the most fashionable customer and the general favourite, a position which was underlined by the deference shewn him throughout the place not only by the waiters but by all its most exclusive young patrons), led him to trample them underfoot, just as he had, actually and symbolically, trodden upon those benches decked with purple, like a triumphal way which pleased my friend only because it enabled him more gracefully and swiftly to arrive at my side; such were the qualities, essential to aristocracy, which through the husk of this body, not opaque and vague as mine would have been, but significant and limpid, transmitted as through a work of art the industrious, energetic force which had created it and rendered the movements of this lightfoot course which Robert had pursued along the wall intelligible and charming as those of a row of knights upon a marble frieze. "Alas!" Robert might have thought, "was it worth while to have grown up despising birth, honouring only justice and intellect, choosing outside the ranks of the friends provided for me companions who were awkward and ill-dressed, provided they had the gift of eloquence, only for the sole personality apparent in me, which is to remain a treasured memory, to be not that which my will, with the most praiseworthy effort, has fashioned in my likeness, but one which is not of my making, which is not even myself, which I have always disliked and striven to

overcome; was it worth while to love my chosen friend as I have loved him, for the greatest pleasure that he can find in me to be that of discovering something far more general than myself, a pleasure which is not in the least (as he says, though he cannot seriously believe it) one of the pleasures of friendship, but an intellectual and detached, a sort of artistic pleasure?" This is what I am now afraid that Saint-Loup may at times have thought. If so, he was mistaken. If he had not (as he steadfastly had) cherished something more lofty than the suppleness innate in his body, if he had not kept aloof for so long from the pride that goes with noble birth, there would have been something more studied, a certain heaviness in his very agility, a self-important vulgarity in his manners. As with Mme. de Villeparisis a strong vein of seriousness had been necessary for her to give in her conversation and in her Memoirs a sense of the frivolous, which is intellectual, so, in order that Saint-Loup's body might be indwelt by so much nobility, the latter had first to desert a mind that was aiming at higher things, and, reabsorbed into his body, to be fixed there in unconscious, noble lines. In this way his distinction of mind was not absent from a bodily distinction which otherwise would not have been complete. An artist has no need to express his mind directly in his work for it to express the quality of that mind; it has indeed been said that the highest praise of God consists in the denial of Him by the atheist, who finds creation so perfect that it can dispense with a creator. And I was quite well aware that it was not merely a work of art that I was admiring in this young man unfolding along the wall the frieze of his flying course; the young Prince (a descendant of Catherine de Foix, Queen of Navarre and grand-daughter of Charles VII) whom he had just left for my sake, the endowments, by birth and fortune, which he was laying at my feet, the proud and shapely ancestors who survived in the assurance, the agility, the courtesy with which he now arranged about my shivering body the warm woollen cloak, were not all these like friends of longer standing in his life, by whom I might have expected that we should be permanently kept apart, and whom, on the contrary, he was sacrificing to me by a choice which one can make only in the loftiest places of the mind, with that sovereign liberty of which Robert's movements were the presentment and in which is realised perfect friendship?

How much familiar intercourse with a Guermantes — in place of the distinction that it had in Robert, because there the inherited scorn of humanity was but the outer garment, become an unconscious charm, of a real moral humility — could disclose of vulgar arrogance I had had an opportunity of seeing, not in M. de Charlus, in whom certain characteristic faults, for which I

had been unable, so far, to account, were overlaid upon his aristocratic habits, but in the Duc de Guermantes. And yet he too, in the general impression of commonness which had so strongly repelled my grandmother when she had met him once, years earlier, at Mme. de Villeparisis's, included glimpses of historic grandeur of which I became conscious when I went to dine in his house, on the evening following that which I had spent with Saint-Loup.

They had not been apparent to me either in himself or in the Duchess when I had met them first in their aunt's drawing-room, any more than I had discerned, on first seeing her, the differences that set Berma apart from her fellow-players, all the more that in her the individuality was infinitely more striking than in any social celebrity, such distinctions becoming more marked in proportion as the objects are more real, more conceivable by the intellect. And yet, however slight the shades of social distinction may be (and so slight are they that when an accurate portrayer like Sainte-Beuve tries to indicate the shades of difference between the salons of Mme. Geoffrin, Mme. Récamier and Mme. de Boigne, they appear so much alike that the cardinal truth which, unknown to the author, emerges from his investigations is the vacuity of that form of life), with them, and for the same reason as with Berma, when the Guermantes had ceased to impress me and the tiny drop of their originality was no longer vaporised by my imagination, I was able to distil and analyse it, imponderable as it was.

The Duchess having made no reference to her husband when she talked to me at her aunt's party, I wondered whether, in view of the rumours of a divorce that were current, he would be present at the dinner. But my doubts were speedily set at rest, for through the crowd of footmen who stood about in the hall and who (since they must until then have regarded me much as they regarded the children of the evicted cabinet-maker, that is to say with more fellow-feeling perhaps than their master but as a person incapable of being admitted to his house) must have been asking themselves to what this social revolution could be due, I saw slip towards me M. de Guermantes himself, who had been watching for my arrival so as to receive me upon his threshold and take off my greatcoat with his own hands.

"Mme. de Guermantes will be as pleased as punch," he greeted me in a glibly persuasive tone. "Let me help you off with your duds." (He felt it to be at once companionable and comic to employ the speech of the people.) "My wife was just the least bit afraid you might fail us, although you had fixed a date. We've been saying to each other all day long: 'Depend upon it, he'll never turn up.' I am bound to say, Mme. de Guermantes was a better prophet than I was.

You are not an easy man to get hold of, and I was quite sure you were going to play us false." And the Duke was so bad a husband, so brutal even (people said), that one felt grateful to him, as one feels grateful to wicked people for their occasional kindness of heart, for those words 'Mme. de Guermantes' with which he appeared to be spreading out over the Duchess a protecting wing, that she might be but one flesh with him. Meanwhile, taking me familiarly by the hand, he began to lead the way, to introduce me into his household. Just as some casual phrase may delight us coming from the lips of a peasant if it points to the survival of a local tradition, shews the trace of some historic event unknown, it may be, to him who thus alludes to it; so this politeness on the part of M. de Guermantes, which, moreover, he was to continue to shew me throughout the evening, charmed me as a survival of habits of many centuries' growth, habits of the seventeenth century in particular. The people of bygone ages seem to us infinitely remote. We do not feel justified in ascribing to them any underlying intention apart from those to which they give formal expression; we are amazed when we come upon a sentiment more or less akin to what we are feeling to-day in a Homeric hero, or upon a skilful tactical feint in Hannibal, during the battle of Cannae, where he let his flank be driven back in order to take the enemy by surprise and surround him; it would seem that we imagined the epic poet and the Punic general as being as remote from ourselves as an animal seen in a zoological garden. Even in certain personages of the court of Louis XIV, when we find signs of courtesy in the letters written by them to some man of inferior rank who could be of no service to them whatever, they leave us bewildered because they reveal to us suddenly, as existing among these great gentlemen, a whole world of beliefs to which they never give any direct expression but which govern their conduct, and especially the belief that they are bound in politeness to feign certain sentiments and to carry out with the most scrupulous care certain obligations of friendship.

This imagined remoteness of the past is perhaps one of the things that enable us to understand how even great writers have found an inspired beauty in the works of mediocre mystifiers, such as Macpherson's *Ossian*. We so little expected to learn that bards long dead could have modern ideas that we marvel if in what we believe to be an ancient Gaelic ode we come upon one which we should have thought, at the most, ingenious in a contemporary. A translator of talent has simply to add to an ancient writer whom he presents to us more or less faithfully reproduced fragments which, signed with a contemporary name and published separately, would seem entertaining only; at once he imparts a moving

grandeur to his poet, who is thus made to play upon the keyboards of several ages at once. This translator was capable only of a mediocre book, if that book had been published as his original work. Given out as a translation, it seems that of a masterpiece. The past not merely is not fugitive, it remains present. It is not within a few months only after the outbreak of a war that laws passed without haste can effectively influence its course, it is not within fifteen years only after a crime which has remained obscure that a magistrate can still find the vital evidence which will throw a light on it; after hundreds and thousands of years the scholar who has been studying in a distant land the place-names, the customs of the inhabitants, may still extract from them some legend long anterior to the Christian era, already unintelligible, if not actually forgotten, at the time of Herodotus, which in the name given to a rock, in a religious rite, dwells surrounded by the present, like an emanation of greater density, immemorial and stable. There was similarly an emanation, though far less ancient, of the life of the court, if not in the manners of M. de Guermantes, which were often vulgar, at least in the mind that controlled them. I was to breathe this again, like the odour of antiquity, when I joined him a little later in the drawing-room. For I did not go there at once.

As we left the outer hall, I had mentioned to M. de Guermantes that I was extremely anxious to see his Elstirs. “I am at your service. Is M. Elstir a friend of yours, then? If so, it is most vexing, for I know him slightly; he is a pleasant fellow, what our fathers used to call an ‘honest fellow’; I might have asked him to honour us with his company, and to dine tonight. I am sure he would have been highly flattered at being invited to spend the evening in your society.” Very little suggestive of the old order when he tried thus to assume its manner, the Duke relapsed unconsciously into it. After inquiring whether I wished him to shew me the pictures, he conducted me to them, gracefully standing aside for me at each door, apologising when, to shew me the way, he was obliged to precede me, a little scene which (since the days when Saint-Simon relates that an ancestor of the Guermantes did him the honours of his town house with the same punctilious exactitude in the performance of the frivolous duties of a gentleman) must, before coming gradually down to us, have been enacted by many other Guermantes for numberless other visitors. And as I had said to the Duke that I would like very much to be left alone for a few minutes with the pictures, he discreetly withdrew, telling me that I should find him in the drawing-room when I was ready.

Only, once I was face to face with the Elstirs, I completely forgot about dinner and the time; here again as at Balbec I had before me fragments of that strangely coloured world which was no more than the projection, the way of seeing things peculiar to that great painter, which his speech in no way expressed. The parts of the walls that were covered by paintings from his brush, all homogeneous with one another, were like the luminous images of a magic lantern, which would have been in this instance the brain of the artist, and the strangeness of which one could never have suspected so long as one had known only the man, which was like seeing the iron lantern boxing its lamp before any coloured slide had been slid into its groove. Among these pictures several of the kind that seemed most absurd to ordinary people interested me more than the rest because they recreated those optical illusions which prove to us that we should never succeed in identifying objects if we did not make some process of reasoning intervene How often, when driving in the dark, do we not come upon a long, lighted street which begins a few feet away from us, when what we have actually before our eyes is nothing but a rectangular patch of wall with a bright light falling on it, which has given us the mirage of depth. In view of which is it not logical, not by any artifice of symbolism but by a sincere return to the very root of the impression, to represent one thing by that other for which, in the flash of a first illusion, we mistook it? Surfaces and volumes are in reality independent of the names of objects which our memory imposes on them after we have recognised them. Elstir attempted to wrest from what he had just felt what he already knew, his effort had often been to break up that aggregate of impressions which we call vision.

The people who detested these ‘horrors’ were astonished to find that Elstir admired Chardin, Perroneau, any number of painters whom they, the ordinary men and women of society, liked. They did not take into account that Elstir had had to make, for his own part, in striving to reproduce reality (with the particular index of his taste for certain lines of approach), the same effort as a Chardin or a Perroneau and that consequently, when he ceased to work for himself, he admired in them attempts of the same order, fragments anticipatory so to speak of works of his own. Nor did these society people include in their conception of Elstir’s work that temporal perspective which enabled them to like, or at least to look without discomfort at Chardin’s painting. And yet the older among them might have reminded themselves that in the course of their lives they had seen gradually, as the years bore them away from it, the unbridgeable gulf between

what they considered a masterpiece by Ingres and what, they had supposed, must remain for ever a ‘horror’ (Manet’s*Olympia*, for example) shrink until the two canvases seemed like twins. But we learn nothing from any lesson because we have not the wisdom to work backwards from the particular to the general, and imagine ourselves always to be going through an experience which is without precedents in the past.

I was moved by the discovery in two of the pictures (more realistic, these, and in an earlier manner) of the same person, in one in evening dress in his own drawing-room, in the other wearing a frock coat and tall hat at some popular regatta where he had evidently no business to be, which proved that for Elstir he was not only a regular sitter but a friend, perhaps a patron whom it pleased him (just as Carpaccio used to introduce prominent figures, and in speaking likenesses, from contemporary life in Venice) to introduce into his pictures, just as Beethoven, too, found pleasure in inscribing at the top of a favourite work the beloved name of the Archduke Rudolph. There was something enchanting about this waterside carnival. The river, the women’s dresses, the sails of the boats, the innumerable reflexions of one thing and another came crowding into this little square panel of beauty which Elstir had cut out of a marvellous afternoon. What delighted one in the dress of a woman who had stopped for a moment in the dance because it was hot and she was out of breath was irresistible also in the same way in the canvas of a motionless sail, in the water of the little harbour, in the wooden bridge, in the leaves of the trees and in the sky. As in one of the pictures that I had seen at Balbec, the hospital, as beautiful beneath its sky of lapis lazuli as the cathedral itself, seemed (more bold than Elstir the theorician, then Elstir the man of taste, the lover of things mediaeval) to be intoning: “There is no such thing as gothic, there is no such thing as a masterpiece; this tasteless hospital is just as good as the glorious porch,” so I now heard: “The slightly vulgar lady at whom a man of discernment would refrain from glancing as he passed her by, would except from the poetical composition which nature has set before him — her dress is receiving the same light as the sail of that boat, and there are no degrees of value and beauty; the commonplace dress and the sail, beautiful in itself, are two mirrors reflecting the same gleam; the value is all in the painter’s eye.” This eye had had the skill to arrest for all time the motion of the hours at this luminous instant, when the lady had felt hot and had stopped dancing, when the tree was fringed with a belt of shadow, when the sails seemed to be slipping over a golden glaze. But just because the depicted moment pressed on one with so much force, this so permanent canvas gave one the most fleeting

impression, one felt that the lady would presently move out of it, the boats drift away, the night draw on, that pleasure comes to an end, that life passes and that the moments illuminated by the convergence, at once, of so many lights do not recur. I recognized yet another aspect, quite different it is true, of what the moment means in a series of water-colours of mythological subjects, dating from Elstir's first period, which also adorned this room. Society people who held 'advanced' views on art went 'as far as' this earliest manner, but no further. These were certainly not the best work that he had done, but already the sincerity with which the subject had been thought out melted its natural coldness. Thus the Muses, for instance, were represented as it might be creatures belonging to a species now fossilised, but creatures which it would not have been surprising in mythological times to see pass in the evening, in twos or threes, along some mountain path. Here and there a poet, of a race that had also a peculiar interest for the zoologist (characterised by a certain sexlessness) strolled with a Muse, as one sees in nature creatures of different but of kindred species consort together. In one of these water-colours one saw a poet wearied by long wanderings on the mountains, whom a Centaur, meeting him and moved to pity by his weakness, had taken on his back and was carrying home. In more than one other, the vast landscape (in which the mythical scene, the fabulous heroes, occupied a minute place and were almost lost) was rendered, from the mountain tops to the sea, with an exactitude which told one more than the hour, told one to the very minute what time of day ft was, thanks to the precise angle of the setting sun, to the fleeting fidelity of the shadows. In this way the artist managed to give, by making it instantaneous, a sort of historical reality, as of a thing actually lived, to the symbol of his fable, painted it and set it at a definite point in the past.

While I was examining Elstir's paintings the bell, rung by arriving guests had been pealing uninterruptedly, and had lulled me into a pleasing unconsciousness. But the silence which followed its clangour and had already lasted for some time succeeded — less rapidly, it is true — in awakening me from my dream, as the silence that follows Lindor's music arouses Bartolo from his sleep. I was afraid that I had been forgotten, that they had sat down to dinner, and hurried to the drawing-room. At the door of the Elstir gallery I found a servant waiting for me, white-haired, though whether with age or powder I cannot say, with the air of a Spanish Minister, but treating me with the same respect that he would have shewn to a King. I felt from his manner that he must have been waiting for at least an hour, and I thought with alarm of the delay I had caused in the service of dinner, especially as I had promised to be at M. de

Charlus's by eleven.

The Spanish Minister (though I also met on the way the footman persecuted by the porter, who, radiant with delight when I inquired after his girl, told me that the very next day they were both to be off duty, so that he would be able to spend the whole day with her, and extolled the generosity of Madame la Duchesse) conducted me to the drawing-room, where I was afraid of finding M. de Guermantes in an ill humour. He welcomed me, on the contrary, with a joy that was evidently to a certain extent artificial and dictated by politeness, but was also sincere, prompted both by his stomach which so long a delay had begun to famish, and his consciousness of a similar impatience in all his other guests, who completely filled the room. Indeed I heard afterwards that I had kept them waiting for nearly three-quarters of an hour. The Duc de Guermantes probably thought that to prolong the general torment for two minutes more would not intensify it and that, politeness having driven him to postpone for so long the moment of moving into the dining-room, this politeness would be more complete if, by not having dinner announced immediately, he could succeed in persuading me that I was not late, and that they had not been waiting for me. And so he asked me, as if we had still an hour before dinner and some of the party had not yet arrived, what I thought of his Elstirs. But at the same time, and without letting the cravings of his stomach become apparent, so as not to lose another moment, he, in concert with the Duchess, proceeded to the ceremony of introduction. Then only I perceived that there had occurred round about me, me who until this evening, save for my novitiate in Mme. Swann's drawing-room, had been accustomed, in my mother's homes, at Combray and in Paris, to the manners, either protecting or defensive, of the grim ladies of our middle-world, who treated me as a child, a change of surroundings comparable to that which introduces Parsifal suddenly into the midst of the Flower-Maidens. Those who surrounded me now, their bosoms entirely bare (the naked flesh appeared on either side of a sinuous spray of mimosa or behind the broad petals of a rose) could not murmur a word of greeting without at the same time bathing me in long, caressing glances, as though shyness alone restrained them from kissing me. Many of them were nevertheless highly respectable from the moral standpoint; many, not all, for the most virtuous had not for those of a lighter vein the same repulsion that my mother would have felt. The caprices of one's conduct, denied by saintlier friends, in the face of the evidence, seemed in the Guermantes world to matter far less than the relations which one had been able to maintain. One pretended not to know that the body of one's hostess was at the

disposal of all comers, provided that her visiting list showed no gaps. As the Duke put himself out not at all for his other guests (of whom he had long known everything that there was to know, and they of him) but quite markedly for me, whose kind of superiority, being outside his experience, inspired in him something akin to the respect which the great nobleman of the court of Louis XIV used to feel for his plebeian Ministers, he evidently considered that the fact of my not knowing his other guests mattered not at all — to me at least, though it might to them — and while I was anxious, on his account, as to the impression that I was going to make on them he was thinking only of how his friends would impress me.

At the very outset I found myself completely bewildered. No sooner had I entered the drawing-room than M. de Guermantes, without even allowing me time to shake hands with the Duchess, had led me, as though I were a delightful surprise to the person in question to whom he seemed to be saying: “Here’s your friend! You see, I’m bringing him to you by the scruff of his neck,” towards a lady of smallish stature. Whereupon, long before, thrust forward by the Duke, I had reached her chair, the lady had begun to flash at me continuously from her large, soft, dark eyes the thousand smiles of understanding which we address to an old friend who perhaps has not recognised us. As this was precisely my case and I could not succeed in calling to mind who she was I averted my eyes from her as I approached so as not to have to respond until our introduction should have released me from my predicament. Meanwhile the lady continued to maintain in unstable equilibrium the smile intended for myself. She looked as though she were anxious to be relieved of it and to hear me say: “Oh, but this is a pleasure! Mamma will be pleased when I tell her I’ve met you!” I was as impatient to learn her name as she was to see that I did finally greet her, fully aware of what I was doing, so that the smile which she was holding on indefinitely, like the note of a tuning-fork, might at length be let go. But M. de Guermantes managed things so badly (to my mind, at least) that I seemed to have heard only my own name uttered and was given no clue to the identity of my unknown friend, to whom it never occurred to tell me herself what her name was, so obvious did the grounds of our intimacy, which baffled me completely, seem to her. Indeed, as soon as I had come within reach, she did not offer me her hand, but took mine in a familiar clasp, and spoke to me exactly as though I had been equally conscious with herself of the pleasant memories to which her mind reverted. She told me how sorry Albert (who, I gathered, was her son) would be to have missed seeing me. I tried to remember who, among the people I had

known as boys, was called Albert, and could think only of Bloch, but this could not be Bloch's mother that I saw before me since she had been dead for some time. In vain I struggled to identify the past experience common to herself and me to which her thoughts had been carried back. But I could no more distinguish it through the translucent jet of her large, soft pupils which allowed only her smile to pierce their surface than one can distinguish a landscape that lies on the other side of a smoked glass, even when the sun is blazing on it. She asked me whether my father was not working too hard, if I would not come to the theatre some evening with Albert, if I was stronger now, and as my replies, stumbling through the mental darkness in which I was plunged, became distinct only to explain that I was not feeling well that evening, she pushed forward a chair for me herself, going to all sorts of trouble which I was not accustomed to see taken by my parents' friends. At length the clue to the riddle was furnished me by the Duke: "She thinks you're charming," he murmured in my ear, which felt somehow that it had heard these words before. They were what Mme. de Villeparisis had said to my grandmother and myself after we had made the acquaintance of the Princesse de Luxembourg. Everything became clear; the lady I now saw had nothing in common with Mme. de Luxembourg, but from the language of him who thus served me with her I could discern the nature of the animal. It was a Royalty. She had never before heard of either my family or myself, but, a scion of the noblest race and endowed with the greatest fortune in the world (for, a daughter of the Prince de Parme, she had married a cousin of equal princelihood), she sought always, in gratitude to her Creator, to testify to her neighbour, however poor or lowly he might be, that she did not look down upon him. Really, I might have guessed this from her smile. I had seen the Princesse de Luxembourg buy little rye-cakes on the beach at Balbec to give to my grandmother, as though to a caged deer in the zoological garden. But this was only the second Princess of the Blood Royal to whom I had been presented, and I might be excused my failure to discern in her the common factors of the friendliness of the great. Besides, had not they themselves gone out of their way to warn me not to count too much on this friendliness, since the Duchesse de Guermantes, who had waved me so effusive a greeting with her gloved hand at the Opéra-Comique, had appeared furious when I bowed to her in the street, like people who, having once given somebody a sovereign, feel that this has set them free from any further obligation toward him. As for M. de Charlus, his ups and downs were even more sharply contrasted. While in the sequel I have known, as the reader will learn, Highnesses and Majesties of another sort altogether,

Queens who play the Queen and speak not after the conventions of their kind but like the Queens in Sardou's plays.

If M. de Guermantes had been in such haste to present me, it was because the presence at a party of anyone not personally known to a Royal Personage is an intolerable state of things which must not be prolonged for a single instant. It was similar to the haste which Saint-Loup had shewn in making me introduce him to my grandmother. By the same token, by a fragmentary survival of the old life of the court which is called social courtesy and is not superficial, in which, rather, by a centripetal reversion, it is the surface that becomes essential and profound, the Due and Duchesse de Guermantes regarded as a duty more essential than those (which one at least of the pair neglected often enough) of charity, chastity, pity and justice, as a more unalterable law that of never addressing the Princesse de Parme save in the third person.

Having never yet in my life been to Parma (a pilgrimage I had been anxious to make ever since certain Easter holidays long ago), to meet its Princess, who, I knew, owned the finest palace in that matchless city, where, moreover, everything must be in keeping, isolated as it was from the rest of the world, within the polished walls, in the atmosphere, stifling as a breathless summer evening on the Piazza of a small town in Italy, of its compact and almost cloying name, would surely have substituted in a flash for what I had so often tried to imagine all that did really exist at Parma in a sort of partial arrival there, without my having to stir from Paris, of myself; it was in the algebraical expression of a journey to the city of Correggio a simple equation, so to speak, of that unknown quantity. But if I had for many years past — like a perfumer impregnating a solid mass of grease with scent — made this name, Princesse de Parme, absorb the fragrance of thousands of violets, in return, when I set eyes on the Princess, who, until then I should have sworn, must be the Sanseverina herself, a second process began which was not, I may say, completed until several months had passed, and consisted in expelling, by means of fresh chemical combinations, all the essential oil of violets and all the Stendhalian fragrance from the name of the Princess, and in implanting there, in their place, the image of a little dark woman, taken up with good works, of a friendliness so humble that one felt at once in how exalted a pride that friendliness had its roots. Moreover, while, barring a few points of difference, she was exactly like any other great lady, she was as little Stendhalian as is, for example, in Paris, in the Europe quarter, the Rue de Parme, which bears far less resemblance to the name of Parma than to any or all of the neighbouring streets, and reminds one not nearly so much of the

Charterhouse in which Fabrice ends his days as of the waiting room in the Saint-Lazare station.

Her friendliness sprang from two causes. The first and more general was the education which this daughter of Kings had received. Her mother (not merely allied by blood to all the royal families of Europe but furthermore — in contrast to the Ducal House of Parma — richer than any reigning Princess) had instilled into her from her earliest childhood the arrogantly humble precepts of an evangelical snobbery; and to-day every line of the daughter's face, the curve of her shoulders, the movements of her arms seemed to repeat the lesson: "Remember that if God has caused you to be born on the steps of a throne you ought not to make that a reason for looking down upon those to whom Divine Providence has willed (wherefore His Name be praised) that you should be superior by birth and fortune. On the contrary, you must suffer the little ones. Your ancestors were Princes of Treves and Juliers from the year 647: God has decreed in His bounty that you should hold practically all the shares in the Suez Canal and three times as many Royal Dutch as Edmond de Rothschild; your pedigree in a direct line has been established by genealogists from the year 63 of the Christian Era; you have as sisters-in-law two Empresses. Therefore never seem, in your speech, to be recalling these great privileges, not that they are precarious (for nothing can alter antiquity of race, while the world will always need petrol), but because it is useless to point out that you are better born than other people or that your investments are all gilt-edged, since everyone knows these facts already. Be helpful to the needy. Furnish to all those whom the bounty of Heaven has done you the favour of placing beneath you as much as you can give them without forfeiture of your rank, that is to say help in the form of money, even your personal service by their sickbeds, but never (bear well in mind) invite them to your parties, which would do them no possible good and, by weakening your own position, would diminish the efficacy of your benevolent activities."

And so even at the moments when she could not do good the Princess endeavoured to shew, or rather to let it be thought, by all the external signs of dumb language, that she did not consider herself superior to the people among whom she found herself thrown. She treated each of them with that charming courtesy with which well-bred people treat their inferiors and was continually, to make herself useful, pushing back her chair so as to leave more room, holding my gloves, offering me all those services which would demean the proud spirit of a commoner but are very willingly rendered by sovereign ladies or,

instinctively and by force of professional habit, by retired servants.

But already the Duke, who seemed in a hurry to complete the round of introduction, had led me off to another of the flower-maidens. On hearing her name I told her that I had passed by her country house, not far from Balbec. “Oh, I should have been so pleased to take you over it,” she informed me, almost in a whisper, to enhance her modesty, but in a tone of deep feeling, steeped in regret for the loss of an opportunity to enjoy a quite exceptional pleasure; and went on, with a meaning glance: “I do hope you will come again some day. But I must say that what would interest you more still would be my aunt Brancas’s place. It was built by Mansard; it is the jewel of the province.” It was not only she herself who would have been glad to shew me over her house, but her aunt Brancas would have been no less delighted to do me the honours of hers, or so I was assured by this lady who thought evidently that, especially at a time when the land shewed a tendency to pass into the hands of financiers who had no knowledge of the world, it was important that the great should keep up the exalted traditions of lordly hospitality, by speeches which involved them in nothing. It was also because she sought, like everyone in her world, to say the things which would give most pleasure to the person she was addressing, to give him the highest idea of himself, to make him think that he flattered people by writing to them, that he honoured those who entertained him, that everyone was burning to know him. The desire to give other people this comforting idea of themselves does, it must be admitted, exist even among the middle classes. We find there that kindly disposition, in the form of an individual merit compensating for some other defect, not alas among the most trusty male friends but at any rate among the most agreeable female companions. But there anyhow it blooms only in isolated patches. In an important section of the aristocracy, on the other hand, this characteristic has ceased to be individual; cultivated by education, sustained by the idea of a personal greatness which can fear no humiliation, which knows no rival, is aware that by being pleasant it can make people happy and delights in doing so, it has become the generic feature of a class. And even those whom personal defects of too incompatible a kind prevent from keeping it in their hearts bear the unconscious trace of it in their vocabulary or their gesticulation.

“She is a very good creature,” said the Duc de Guermantes, of the Princesse de Parme, “and she can play the ‘great lady’ when she likes, better than anyone.”

While I was being introduced to the ladies, one of the gentlemen of the party had been shewing various signs of agitation: this was Comte Hannibal de Bréauté-Consalvi. Arriving late, he had not had time to investigate the

composition of the party, and when I entered the room, seeing in me a guest who was not one of the Duchess's regular circle and must therefore have some quite extraordinary claim to admission, installed his monocle beneath the groined arch of his eyebrow, thinking that this would be a great help to him in discovering what manner of man I was. He knew that Mme. de Guermantes possessed (the priceless appanage of truly superior women) what was called a 'salon,' that is to say added occasionally to the people of her own set some celebrity who had recently come into prominence by the discovery of a new cure for something or the production of a masterpiece. The Faubourg Saint-Germain had not yet recovered from the shock of learning that, to the reception which she had given to meet the King and Queen of England, the Duchess had not been afraid to invite M. Détaille. The clever women of the Faubourg who had not been invited were inconsolable, so deliciously thrilling would it have been to come into contact with that strange genius. Mme. de Courvoisier made out that M. Ribot had been there as well, but this was a pure invention, designed to make people believe that Oriane was aiming at an Embassy for her husband. Finally, a last straw of scandal, M. de Guermantes, with a gallantry that would have done credit to Marshal Saxe, had repaired to the green-room of the Comédie Française, and had begged Mlle. Reichemberg to come and recite before the King, which having come to pass constituted an event without precedent in the annals of routs. Remembering all these surprises, which, moreover, had his entire approval, his own presence being not merely an ornament but, in the same way as that of the Duchesse de Guermantes, a consecration to any drawing-room, M. de Bréauté, when he asked himself who I could be, felt that the field of exploration was very wide. For a moment the name of M. Widor flashed before his mind, but he decided that I was not old enough to be an organist, and M. Widor not striking enough to be 'asked out.' It seemed on the whole more plausible to regard me simply as the new Attaché at the Swedish Legation of whom he had heard, and he was preparing to ask me for the latest news of Oscar, by whom he had several times been very hospitably received; but when the Duke, in introducing me, had mentioned my name to M. de Bréauté, the latter, finding that name to be completely unknown to him had no longer any doubt that, being where I was, I must be a celebrity Of some sort. Oriane would certainly never invite anyone who was not, and had the art of attracting men who were in the public eye to her house, in a ratio that of course never exceeded one per cent, otherwise she would have lowered its tone. M. de Bréauté began, therefore, to lick his chops and to sniff the air greedily, his appetite whetted not

only by the good dinner upon which he could count, but by the character of the party, which my presence could not fail to make interesting, and which would furnish him with a topic for brilliant conversation next day at the Duc de Chartres's luncheon-table. He had not yet settled in his own mind whether I was the man who had just been making those experiments with a serum to cure cancer, or the author of the new 'curtain-raiser' then in rehearsal at the Théâtre Français; but, a great intellectual, a great collector of 'travellers' tales,' he continued an ever increasing display of reverences, signs of mutual understanding, smiles filtered through the glass of his monocle; either in the mistaken idea that a man of my standing would esteem him more highly if he could manage to instil into me the illusion that for him, the Comte de Bréauté-Consalvi, the privileges of the mind were no less deserving of respect than those of birth; or simply from the need to express and difficulty of expressing his satisfaction, in his ignorance of the language in which he ought to address me, just as if, in fact, he had found himself face to face with one of the 'natives' of an undiscovered country on which his keel had grounded, natives from whom, in the hope of ultimate profit, he would endeavour, observing with interest the while their quaint customs and without interrupting his demonstrations of friendship, or like them uttering loud cries, to obtain ostrich eggs and spices in exchange for his glass beads. Having responded as best I could to his joy, I shook hands next with the Duc de Chatellerault, whom I had already met at Mme. de Villeparisis's, who, he informed me, was as 'cunning as they made 'em.' He was typically Guermantes in the fairness of his hair, his arched profile, the points where the skin of his cheeks lost colour, all of which may be seen in the portraits of that family which have come down to us from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But, as I was no longer in love with the Duchess, her reincarnation in the person of a young man offered me no attraction. I interpreted the hook made by the Duc de Chatellerault's nose, as if it had been the signature of a painter whose work I had long studied but who no longer interested me in the least. Next, I said good evening also to the Prince de Foix, and to the detriment of my knuckles, which emerged crushed and mangled, let them be caught in a vice which was the German handclasp, accompanied by an ironical or good-natured smile, of the Prince von Faffenheim, M. de Norpois's friend, who, by virtue of the mania for nicknames which prevailed in this set, was known so universally as Prince Von that he himself used to sign his letters 'Prince Von,' or, when he wrote to his intimates, 'Von.' And yet this abbreviation was understandable, in view of his triple-barrelled name. It was less easy to

grasp the reasons which made ‘Elizabeth’ be replaced, now by ‘Lili,’ now by ‘Bebeth,’ just as another world swarmed with ‘Kikis.’ One can realise that these people, albeit in most respects idle and light-minded enough, might have come to adopt ‘Quiou’ in order not to waste the precious time that it would have taken them to pronounce ‘Montesquieu.’ But it is not so easy to see what they saved by naming one of their cousins ‘Dinand’ instead of ‘Ferdinand.’ It must not be thought, however, that in the invention of nicknames the Guermantes invariably proceed to curtail or reduplicate syllables. Thus two sisters, the Comtesse de Montpeyroux and the Vicomtesse de Vélude, who were both of them enormously stout, invariably heard themselves addressed, without the least trace of annoyance on their part or of amusement on other people’s, so long established was the custom, as ‘Petite’ and ‘Mignonne.’ Mme. de Guermantes, who adored Mme. de Montpeyroux, would, if her friend had been seriously ill, have flown to the sister with tears in her eyes and exclaimed: “I hear Petite is dreadfully bad!” Mme. de l’Eclin, who wore her hair in bands that entirely hid her ears, was never called anything but ‘The Empty Stomach’; in some cases people simply added an ‘a’ to the last or first name of the husband to indicate the wife. The most miserly, most sordid, most inhuman man in the Faubourg having been christened Raphael, his charmer, his flower springing also from the rock always signed herself ‘Raphaela’— but these are merely a few specimens taken from innumerable rules, to which we can always return later on, if the occasion offers, and explain some of them. I then asked the Duke to present me to the Prince d’Agrigente. “What! Do you mean to say you don’t know our excellent Gri-gri!” cried M. de Guermantes, and gave M. d’Agrigente my name. His own, so often quoted by Françoise, had always appeared to me like a transparent sheet of coloured glass through which I beheld, struck, on the shore of the violet sea, by the slanting rays of a golden sun, the rosy marble cubes of an ancient city of which I had not the least doubt that the Prince — happening for a miraculous moment to be passing through Paris — was himself, as luminously Sicilian and gloriously mellowed, the absolute sovereign. Alas, the vulgar drone to whom I was introduced, and who wheeled round to bid me good evening with a ponderous ease which he considered elegant, was as independent of his name as of any work of art that he might have owned without bearing upon his person any trace of its beauty, without, perhaps, ever having stopped to examine it. The Prince d’Agrigente was so entirely devoid of anything princely, anything that might make one think of Girgenti that one was led to suppose that his name, entirely distinct from himself, bound by no ties to his person, had had the power

of attracting to itself the whole of whatever vague poetical element there might have been in this man as in any other, and isolating it, after the operation, in the enchanted syllables. If any such operation had been performed, it had certainly been done most efficiently, for there remained not an atom of charm to be drawn from this kinsman of Guermantes. With the result that he found himself at one and the same time the only man in the world who was Prince d'Agrigente and the man who, of all the men in the world was, perhaps, least so. He was, for all that, very glad to be what he was, but as a banker is glad to hold a number of shares in a mine without caring whether the said mine answers to the charming name of Ivanhoe or Primrose, or is called merely the Premier. Meanwhile, as these introductions, which it has taken me so long to recount but which, beginning as I entered the room, had lasted only a few seconds, were coming to an end, and Mme. de Guermantes, in an almost suppliant tone, was saying to me: "I am sure Basin is tiring you, dragging you round like that; we are anxious for you to know our friends, but we are a great deal more anxious not to tire you, so that you may come again often," the Duke, with a somewhat awkward and timid wave of the hand, gave (as he would gladly have given it at any time during the last hour, filled for me by the contemplation of his Elstirs) the signal that dinner might now be served.

I should add that one of the guests was still missing, M. de Grouchy, whose wife, a Guermantes by birth, had arrived by herself, her husband being due to come straight from the country, where he had been shooting all day. This M. de Grouchy, a descendant of his namesake of the First Empire, of whom it has been said, quite wrongly, that his absence at the start of the Battle of Waterloo was the principal cause of Napoleon's defeat, came of an excellent family which, however, was not good enough in the eyes of certain fanatics for blue blood. Thus the Prince de Guermantes, whose own tastes, in later life, were to prove more easily satisfied, had been in the habit of saying to his nieces: "What a misfortune for that poor Mme. de Guermantes" (the Vicomtesse de Guermantes, Mme. de Grouchy's mother) "that she has never succeeded in marrying any of her children." "But, uncle, the eldest girl married M. de Grouchy." "I do not call that a husband! However, they say that your uncle François has proposed for the youngest one, so perhaps they won't all die old maids." No sooner was the order to serve dinner given than with a vast gyratory whirr, multiple and simultaneous, the double doors of the dining-room swung apart; a chamberlain with the air of a Lord Chamberlain bowed before the Princesse de Parme and announced the tidings "Madame is served," in a tone such as he would have employed to say

“Madame is dead,” which, however, cast no gloom over the assembly for it was with an air of unrestrained gaiety and as, in summer, at ‘Robinson’ that the couples moved forward one behind another to the dining-room, separating when they had reached their places where footmen thrust their chairs in behind them; last of all, Mme. de Guermantes advanced upon me, that I might lead her to the table, and without my feeling the least shadow of the timidity that I might have feared, for, like a huntress to whom her great muscular prowess has made graceful motion an easy thing, observing no doubt that I had placed myself on the wrong side of her, she pivoted with such accuracy round me that I found her arm resting on mine and attuned in the most natural way to a rhythm of precise and noble movements. I yielded to these with all the more readiness in that the Guermantes attached no more importance to them than does to learning a truly learned man in whose company one is less alarmed than in that of a dunce; other doors opened through which there entered the steaming soup, as though the dinner were being held in a puppet-theatre of skilful mechanism where the belated arrival of the young guest set, on a signal from the puppet-master, all the machinery in motion.

Timid and not majestically sovereign had been this signal from the Duke, to which had responded the unlocking of that vast, ingenious, subservient and sumptuous clockwork, mechanical and human. The indecision of his gesture did not spoil for me the effect of the spectacle that was attendant upon it. For I could feel that what had made it hesitating and embarrassed was the fear of letting me see that they were waiting only for myself to begin dinner and that they had been waiting for some time, just as Mme. de Guermantes was afraid that after looking at so many pictures I would find it tiring and would be hindered from taking my ease among them if her husband engaged me in a continuous flow of introductions. So that it was the absence of grandeur in this gesture that disclosed its true grandeur. As, also, did that indifference shewn by the Duke to the splendour of his surroundings, in contrast to his deference towards a guest, however insignificant, whom he desired to honour.

Not that M. de Guermantes was not in certain respects thoroughly commonplace, shewing indeed some of the absurd weaknesses of a man with too much money, the arrogance of an upstart, which he certainly was not. But just as a public official or a priest sees his own humble talents multiplied to infinity (as a wave is by the whole mass of the sea which presses behind it) by those forces on which they can rely, the Government of France and the Catholic Church, so M. de Guermantes was borne on by that other force, aristocratic courtesy in its

truest form. This courtesy drew the line at any number of people. Mme. de Guermantes would not have asked to her house Mme. de Cambremer, or M. de Forcheville. But the moment that anyone (as was the case with me) appeared eligible for admission into the Guermantes world, this courtesy revealed treasures of hospitable simplicity more splendid still, were that possible, than those historic rooms, or the marvellous furniture that had remained in them.

When he wished to give pleasure to anyone, M. de Guermantes possessed, in this way, for making his guest for the moment the principal person present, an art which made the most of the circumstances and the place. No doubt at Guermantes his ‘distinctions’ and ‘favours’ would have assumed another form. He would have ordered his carriage to take me for a drive, alone with himself, before dinner. Such as they were, one could not help feeling touched by his manners as one is in reading memoirs of the period by those of Louis XIV when he replies good-naturedly, smiling and almost with a bow, to some one who has come to solicit his favour. It must however in both instances be borne in mind that this ‘politeness’ did not go beyond the strict meaning of the word.

Louis XIV (with whom the sticklers for pure nobility of his day find fault, nevertheless, for his scant regard for etiquette, so much so that, according to Saint-Simon, he was only a very minor king, as kings go, when compared with such monarchs as Philippe de Valois or Charles V), has the most minute instructions drawn up so that Princes of the Blood and Ambassadors may know to what sovereigns they ought to give precedence. In certain cases, in view of the impossibility of arriving at a decision a compromise is arranged by which the son of Louis XIV, Monseigneur, shall entertain certain foreign sovereigns only out of doors, in the open air, so that it may not be said that in entering the house one has preceded the other; and the Elector Palatine, entertaining the Duc de Chevreuse at dinner, pretends, so as not to have to make way for his guest, to be taken ill, and dines with him indeed, but dines lying down, thus avoiding the difficulty. M. le Duc evading opportunities of paying his duty to Monsieur the latter, on the advice of the King, his brother, who is moreover extremely attached to him, seizes an excuse for making his cousin attend his levee and forcing him to pass him his shirt. But as soon as the feeling is deep, when the heart is involved, this rule of duty, so inflexible when politeness only is at stake, changes entirely. A few hours after the death of his brother, one of the people whom he most dearly loved, when Monsieur, in the words of the Duc de Montfort, is ‘still warm,’ we find Louis XIV singing snatches from operas, astonished that the Duchesse de Bourgogne, who has difficulty in concealing her grief, should be

looking so woe-begone, and, desiring that the gaiety of the court shall be at once resumed, so that his courtiers may be encouraged to sit down to the tables, ordering the Duc de Bourgogne to start a game of *brelan*. Well, not only in his social and concentrated activities, but in the most spontaneous utterances, the ordinary preoccupations of M. de Guermantes, the use he made of his time, one found a similar contrast; the Guermantes were no more susceptible than other mortals to grief; one might indeed say that their actual sensibility was lower; on the other hand one saw their names every day in the social columns of the *Gaulois* on account of the prodigious number of funerals at which they would have felt it a neglect of duty not to have their presence recorded. As the traveller discovers, almost unaltered, the houses roofed with turf, the terraces which may have met the eyes of Xenophon or Saint Paul, so in the manners of M. de Guermantes, a man who melted one's heart by his courtesy and revolted it by his harshness, I found still intact after the lapse of more than two centuries that deviation typical of court life under Louis XIV which transfers all scruples of conscience from matters of the affections and morality and applies them to purely formal questions.

The other reason for the friendliness shewn me by the Princesse de Parme was of a more personal kind. It was that she was convinced beforehand that everything that she saw at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, people and things alike, was of a quality superior to that of anything that she had at home. It is true that in all the other houses of her acquaintance she behaved as if this had been the case; over the simplest dish, the most ordinary flowers, she was not satisfied with going into ecstasies, she would ask leave to send round next morning, to copy the recipe or to examine the variety of blossom, her head cook or head gardener, gentlemen with large salaries who kept their own carriages and were deeply humiliated at having to come to inquire after a dish they despised or to take notes of a kind of carnation that was not half so fine, had not such ornamental streaks, did not produce so large a blossom as those which they had long been growing for her at home. But if in the Princess, wherever she went, this astonishment at the sight of the most commonplace things was assumed, and intended to shew that she did not derive from the superiority of her rank and riches a pride forbidden by her early instructors, habitually dissembled by her mother and intolerable in the sight of her Creator, it was, on the other hand, in all sincerity that she regarded the drawing-room of the Duchesse de Guermantes as a privileged place in which she could pass only from surprise to delight. To a certain extent, for that matter, though not nearly enough to justify this state of

mind, the Guermantes were different from the rest of noble society, they were rarer and more refined. They had given me at first sight the opposite impression; I had found them vulgar, similar to all other men and women, but because before meeting them I had seen in them, as in Balbec, in Florence, in Parma, only names. Evidently, in this drawing-room, all the women whom I had imagined as being like porcelain figures were even more like the great majority of women. But, in the same way as Balbec or Florence, the Guermantes, after first disappointing the imagination because they resembled their fellow-creatures rather than their name, could subsequently, though to a less degree, appeal to the intellect by certain distinctive characteristics. Their bodily structure, the colour — a peculiar pink that merged at times into violet — of their skins, a certain almost flashing fairness of the finely spun hair, even in the men, on whom it was massed in soft golden tufts, half a wall-growing lichen, half a catlike fur (a luminous sparkle to which corresponded a certain brilliance of intellect, for if people spoke of the Guermantes complexion, the Guermantes hair, they spoke also of the wit of the Guermantes, as of the wit of the Mortemarts — a certain social quality whose superior fineness was famed even before the days of Louis XIV and all the more universally recognised since they published the fame of it themselves), all this meant that in the material itself, precious as that might be, in which one found them embedded here and there, the Guermantes remained recognisable, easy to detect and to follow, like the veins whose paleness streaks a block of jasper or onyx, or, better still, like the pliant waving of those tresses of light whose loosened hairs run like flexible rays along the sides of a moss-agate.

The Guermantes — those at least who were worthy of the name — were not only of a quality of flesh, of hair, of transparency of gaze that was exquisite, but had a way of holding themselves, of walking, of bowing, of looking at one before they shook one’s hand, of shaking hands, which made them as different in all these respects from an ordinary person in society as he in turn was from a peasant in a smock. And despite their friendliness one asked oneself: “Have they not indeed the right, though they waive it, when they see us walk, bow, leave a room, do any of those things which when performed by them become as graceful as the flight of a swallow or the bending of a rose on its stem, to think: ‘These people are of another race than ours, and we are, we, the true lords of creation.’?” Later on, I realised that the Guermantes did indeed regard me as being of another race, but one that aroused their envy because I possessed merits of which I knew nothing and which they professed to regard as alone important. Later still I came to feel that this profession of faith was only half sincere and

that in them scorn or surprise could be coexistent with admiration and envy The physical flexibility essential to the Guermantes was twofold; thanks to one of its forms, constantly in action, at any moment and if, for example, a male Guermantes were about to salute a lady, he produced a silhouette of himself made from the unstable equilibrium of a series of asymmetrical movements with nervous compensations, one leg dragging a little either on purpose or because, having been broken so often in the hunting-field, it imparted to his trunk in its effort to keep pace with the other a deviation to which the upward thrust of one shoulder gave a counterpoise, while the monocle settled itself before his eye, raising an eyebrow just as the tuft of hair on the forehead was lowered in the formal bow; the other flexibility, like the form of the wave, the wind or the ocean track which is preserved on the shell or the vessel, was so to speak stereotyped in a sort of fixed mobility, curving the arched nose which, beneath the blue, protruding eyes, above the over-thin lips, from which, in the women, there emerged a raucous voice, recalled the fabulous origin attributed in the sixteenth century by the complaisance of parasitic and Hellenising genealogists to his race, ancient beyond dispute, but not to the degree of antiquity which they claimed when they gave as its source the mythological impregnation of a nymph by a divine Bird.

The Guermantes were just as idiomatic from the intellectual as from the physical point of view. With the exception of Prince Gilbert (the husband with antiquated ideas of ‘Marie-Gilbert,’ who made his wife sit on his left when they drove out together because her blood, though royal, was inferior to his own)—but he was an exception and furnished, behind his back, a perpetual laughing-stock to the rest of the family, who had always fresh anecdotes to tell of him — the Guermantes, while living in the pure cream of aristocracy, affected to take no account of nobility. The theories of the Duchesse de Guermantes, who, to tell the truth, by dint of being a Guermantes, became to a certain extent something different and more attractive, subordinated everything else so completely to intellect, and were in politics so socialistic that one asked oneself where in her mansion could be hiding the familiar spirit whose duty it was to ensure the maintenance of the aristocratic standard of living, and which, always invisible but evidently crouching at one moment in the entrance hall, at another in the drawing-room, at a third in her dressing-room, reminded the servants of this woman who did not believe in titles to address her as Mme. la Duchesse, reminding also herself who cared only for reading and had no respect for persons to go out to dinner with her sister-in-law when eight o’clock struck, and to put

on a low gown.

The same familiar spirit represented to Mme. de Guermantes the social duties of duchesses, of the foremost among them, that was, who like herself were multi-millionaires, the sacrifice to boring tea, dinner and evening parties of hours in which she might have read interesting books, as unpleasant necessities like rain, which Mme. de Guermantes accepted, letting play on them her biting humour, but without seeking in any way to justify her acceptance of them. The curious accident by which the butler of Mme. de Guermantes invariably said "Madame la Duchesse" to this woman who believed only in the intellect did not however appear to shock her. Never had it entered her head to request him to address her simply as 'Madame.' Giving her the utmost benefit of the doubt one might have supposed that, thinking of something else at the time, she had heard only the word 'Madame' and that the suffix appended to it had not caught her attention. Only, though she might feign deafness, she was not dumb. In fact, whenever she had a message to give to her husband she would say to the butler: "Remind Monsieur le Duc —"

The familiar spirit had other occupations as well, one of which was to inspire them to talk morality. It is true that there were Guermantes who went in for intellect and Guermantes who went in for morals, and that these two classes did not as a rule coincide. But the former kind — including a Guermantes who had forged cheques, who cheated at cards and was the most delightful of them all, with a mind open to every new and sound idea — spoke even more eloquently upon morals than the others, and in the same strain as Mme. de Villeparisis, at the moments in which the familiar spirit expressed itself through the lips of the old lady. At corresponding moments one saw the Guermantes adopt suddenly a tone almost as old-ladylike, as genial and (as they themselves had more charm) more touching than that of the Marquise, to say of a servant: "One feels that she has a thoroughly sound nature, she's not at all a common girl, she must come of decent parents, she is certainly a girl who has never gone astray." At such moments the familiar spirit took the form of an intonation. But at times it could be bearing also, the expression on a face, the same in the Duchess as in her grandfather the Marshal, a sort of undefinable convulsion (like that of the Serpent, the genius of the Carthaginian family of Barca) by which my heart had more than once been set throbbing, on my morning walks, when before I had recognised Mme. de Guermantes I felt her eyes fastened upon me from the inside of a little dairy. This familiar spirit had intervened in a situation which was far from immaterial not merely to the Guermantes but to the Courvoisiers,

the rival faction of the family and, though of as good blood as the Guermantes (it was, indeed, through his Courvoisier grandmother that the Guermantes explained the obsession which led the Prince de Guermantes always to speak of birth and titles as though those were the only things that mattered), their opposite in every respect. Not only did the Courvoisiers not assign to intelligence the same importance as the Guermantes, they had not the same idea of it. For a Guermantes (even were he a fool) to be intelligent meant to have a sharp tongue, to be capable of saying cutting things, to 'get away with it'; but it meant also the capacity to hold one's own equally in painting, music, architecture, to speak English. The Courvoisiers had formed a less favourable impression of intelligence, and unless one were actually of their world being intelligent was almost tantamount to 'having probably murdered one's father and mother.' For them intelligence was the sort of burglar's jemmy by means of which people one did not know from Adam forced the doors of the most reputable drawing-rooms, and it was common knowledge among the Courvoisiers that you always had to pay in the long run for having 'those sort' of people in your house. To the most trivial statements made by intelligent people who were not 'in society' the Courvoisiers opposed a systematic distrust. Some one having on one occasion remarked: "But Swann is younger than Palamède,"—"He says so, at any rate, and if he says it you may be sure it's because he thinks it is to his interest!" had been Mme. de Gallardon's retort. Better still, when some one said of two highly distinguished foreigners whom the Guermantes had entertained that one of them had been sent in first because she was the elder: "But is she really the elder?" Mme. de Gallardon had inquired, not positively as though that sort of person did not have any age but as if presumably devoid of civil or religious status, of definite traditions, they were both more or less young, like two kittens of the same litter between which only a veterinary surgeon was competent to decide. The Courvoisiers, more than the Guermantes, maintained also in a certain sense the integrity of the titled class thanks at once to the narrowness of their minds and the bitterness of their hearts. Just as the Guermantes (for whom, below the royal families and a few others like the Lignes, the La Trémoïlles and so forth, all the rest were lost in a common rubbish-heap) were insolent towards various people of long descent who lived round Guermantes, simply because they paid no attention to those secondary distinctions by which the Courvoisiers were enormously impressed, so the absence of such distinctions affected them little. Certain women who did not hold any specially exalted rank in their native provinces but, brilliantly married, rich, good-looking, beloved of Duchesses,

were for Paris, where people are never very well up in who one's 'father and mother' were, an excellent and exclusive piece of 'imported goods.' It might happen, though not commonly, that such women were, through the channel of the Princesse de Parme or by virtue of their own attractions, received by certain Guermantes. But with regard to these the indignation of the Courvoisiers knew no bounds. Having to meet, between five and six in the afternoon, at their cousin's, people with whose relatives their own relatives did not care to be seen mixing down in the Perche became for them an ever-increasing source of rage and an inexhaustible fount of rhetoric. The moment, for instance, when the charming Comtesse G—— entered the Guermantes drawing-room, the face of Mme. de Villebon assumed exactly the expression that would have befitted it had she been called to recite the line:

And should but one stand fast, that one were surely I,

a line which for that matter was unknown to her. This Courvoisier had consumed almost every Monday an éclair stuffed with cream within a few feet of the Comtesse G——, but to no consequence. And Mme. de Villebon confessed in secret that she could not conceive how her cousin Guermantes could allow a woman into her house who was not even in the second-best society of Châteaudun. "I really fail to see why my cousin should make such a fuss about whom she knows; it's making a perfect farce of society!" concluded Mme. de Villebon with a change of facial expression, this time a sly smile of despair, which, in a charade, would have been interpreted rather as indicating another line of poetry, though one with which she was no more familiar than with the first:

Grâce aux Dieux mon malheur passe mon espérance.

We may here anticipate events to explain that the *persévérance*, (which rhymes, in the following line with *espérance*) shewn by Mme. de Villebon in snubbing Mme. G—— was not entirely wasted. In the eyes of Mme. G——— it invested Mme. de Villebon with a distinction so supreme, though purely imaginary, that when the time came for Mme. G——'s daughter, who was the prettiest girl and the greatest heiress in the ballrooms of that season, to marry, people were astonished to see her refuse all the Dukes in succession. The fact was that her mother, remembering the weekly humiliations she had had to endure in the Rue de Grenelle on account of Chateaudun could think of only one possible husband for her daughter — a Villebon son.

A single point at which Guermantes and Courvoisiers converged was the art (one, for that matter, of infinite variety) of marking distances. The Guermantes

manners were not absolutely uniform towards everyone. And yet, to take an example, all the Guermantes, all those who really were Guermantes, when you were introduced to them proceeded to perform a sort of ceremony almost as though the fact that they held out their hands to you had been as important as the conferring of an order of knighthood. At the moment when a Guermantes, were he no more than twenty, but treading already in the footsteps of his ancestors, heard your name uttered by the person who introduced you, he let fall on you as though he had by no means made up his mind to say “How d’ye do?” a gaze generally blue, always of the coldness of a steel blade which he seemed ready to plunge into the deepest recesses of your heart. Which was a matter of fact what the Guermantes imagined themselves to be doing, each of them regarding himself as a psychologist of the highest order. They thought moreover that they increased by this inspection the affability of the salute which was to follow it, and would not be rendered you without full knowledge of your deserts. All this occurred at a distance from yourself which, little enough had it been a question of a passage of arms, seemed immense for a handclasp, and had as chilling an effect in this connexion as in the other, so that when the Guermantes, after a rapid twisting thrust that explored the most intimate secrets of your soul and laid bare your title to honour, had deemed you worthy to associate with him thereafter, his hand, directed towards you at the end of an arm stretched out to its fullest extent, appeared to be presenting a rapier at you for a single combat, and that hand was in fact placed so far in advance of the Guermantes himself at that moment that when he afterwards bowed his head it was difficult to distinguish whether it was yourself or his own hand that he was saluting. Certain Guermantes, lacking the sense of proportion, or being incapable of refraining from repeating themselves incessantly, went further and repeated this ceremony afresh every time that they met you. Seeing that they had no longer any need to conduct the preliminary psychological investigation for which the ‘familiar spirit’ had delegated its powers to them and the result of which they had presumably kept in mind, the insistence of the perforating gaze preceding the handclasp could be explained only by the automatism which their gaze had acquired or by some power of fascination which they believed themselves to possess. The Courvoisiers whose physique was different, had tried in vain to assimilate that searching gaze and had had to fall back upon a lordly stiffness or a rapid indifference On the other hand, it was from the Courvoisiers that certain very exceptional Guermantes of the gentler sex seemed to have borrowed the feminine form of greeting. At the moment when you were presented to one of

these she made you a sweeping bow in which she carried towards you, almost to an angle of forty-five degrees, her head and bust, the rest of her body (which came very high, up to the belt which formed a pivot) remaining stationary. But no sooner had she projected thus towards you the upper part of her person than she flung it backwards beyond the vertical line by a sudden retirement through almost the same angle. This subsequent withdrawal neutralised what appeared to have been conceded to you; the ground which you believed yourself to have gained did not even remain a conquest, as in a duel; the original positions were retained. This same annulment of affability by the resumption of distance (which was Courvoisier in origin and intended to shew that the advances made in the first movement were no more than a momentary feint) displayed itself equally clearly, in the Courvoisier ladies as in the Guermantes, in the letters which you received from them, at any rate in the first period of your acquaintance. The 'body' of the letter might contain sentences such as one writes only (you would suppose) to a friend, but in vain might you have thought yourself entitled to boast of being in that relation to the lady, since the letter began with '*Monsieur*,' and ended with '*Croyez monsieur à mes sentiments distingués*.' After which, between this cold opening and frigid conclusion which altered the meaning of all the rest, there might come in succession (were it a reply to a letter of condolence from yourself) the most touching pictures of the grief which the Guermantes lady had felt on losing her sister, of the intimacy that had existed between them, of the beauty of the place in which she was staying, of the consolation that she found in the charm of her young children, all this amounted to no more than a letter such as one finds in printed collections, the intimate character of which implied, however, no more intimacy between yourself and the writer than if she had been the Younger Pliny or Mme. de Simiane.

It is true that certain Guermantes ladies wrote to you from the first as 'My dear friend,' or 'My friends'; these were not always the most simple natured among them, but rather those who, living only in the society of kings and being at the same time 'light,' assumed in their pride the certainty that everything which came from themselves gave pleasure and in their corruption the habit of setting no price upon any of the satisfactions that they had to offer. However, since to have had a common ancestor in the reign of Louis XIII was enough to make a young Guermantes say, in speaking of the Marquise de Guermantes: "My aunt Adam," the Guermantes were so numerous a clan that, even among these simple rites, that for example of the bow upon introduction to a stranger, there existed a wide divergence. Each subsection of any refinement had its own,

which was handed down from parents to children like the prescription for a liniment or a special way of making jam. Thus it was that we saw Saint-Loup's handclasp thrust out as though involuntarily at the moment of his hearing one's name, without any participation by his eyes, without the addition of a bow. Any unfortunate commoner who for a particular reason — which, for that matter, very rarely occurred — was presented to anyone of the Saint-Loup subsection racked his brains over this abrupt minimum of a greeting, which deliberately assumed the appearance of non-recognition, to discover what in the world the Guermantes — male or female — could have against him. And he was highly surprised to learn that the said Guermantes had thought fit to write specially to the introducer to tell him how delighted he or she had been with the stranger, whom he or she looked forward to meeting again. As specialised as the mechanical gestures of Saint-Loup were the complicated and rapid capers (which M. de Charlus condemned as ridiculous) of the Marquis de Fierbois, the grave and measured paces of the Prince de Guermantes. But it is impossible to describe here the richness of the choreography of the Guermantes ballet owing to the sheer length of the cast.

To return to the antipathy which animated the Courvoisiers against the Duchesse de Guermantes, they might have had the consolation of feeling sorry for her so long as she was still unmarried, for she was then comparatively poor. Unfortunately, at all times and seasons, a sort of fuliginous emanation, quite *sut generis*, enveloped, hid from the eye the wealth of the Courvoisiers which, however great it might be, remained obscure. In vain might a young Courvoisier with an ample dowry find a most eligible bridegroom; it invariably happened that the young couple had no house of their own in Paris, 'came up to stay' in the season with his parents, and for the rest of the year lived down in the country in the thick of a society that may have been unadulterated but was also quite undistinguished. Whereas a Saint-Loup who was up to the eyes in debt dazzled Doncières with his carriage-horses, a Courvoisier who was extremely rich always went in the tram. Similarly (though of course many years earlier) Mlle, de Guermantes (Oriane), who had scarcely a penny to her name, created more stir with her clothes than all the Courvoisiers put together. The really scandalous things she said gave a sort of advertisement to her style of dressing and doing her hair. She had had the audacity to say to the Russian Grand Duke: "Well, Sir, I hear you would like to have Tolstoy murdered?" at a dinner-party to which none of the Courvoisiers, not that any of them knew very much about Tolstoy, had been asked. They knew little more about Greek writers, if we may judge by the

Dowager Duchesse de Gallardon (mother-in-law of the Princesse de Gallardon who at that time was still a girl) who, not having been honoured by Oriane with a single visit in five years, replied to some one who asked her the reason for this abstention: “It seems she recites Aristotle” (meaning Aristophanes) “in society. I cannot allow that sort of thing in my house!”

One can imagine how greatly this ‘sally’ by Mlle. de Guermantes upon Tolstoy, if it enraged the Courvoisiers, delighted the Guermantes, and by derivation everyone who was not merely closely but even remotely attached to them. The Dowager Comtesse d’Argencourt (*née* Seineport) who entertained a little of everything, because she was a blue-stocking and in spite of her son’s being a terrible snob, repeated the saying before her literary friends with the comment: “Oriane de Guermantes, you know; she’s as fine as amber, as mischievous as a monkey, there’s nothing she couldn’t do if she chose, her water-colours are worthy of a great painter and she writes better verses than most of the great poets, and as for family, don’t you know, you couldn’t imagine anything better, her grandmother was Mlle, de Montpensier, and she is the eighteenth Oriane de Guermantes in succession, without a single misalliance; it’s the purest blood, the oldest in the whole of France.” And so the sham men of letters, those demi-intellectuals who went to Mme. d’Argencourt’s, forming a mental picture of Oriane de Guermantes, whom they would never have an opportunity to know personally, as something more wonderful and more extraordinary than Princess Badroulbadour, not only felt themselves ready to die for her on learning that so noble a person glorified Tolstoy above all others, but felt also quickening with a fresh strength in their minds their own love of Tolstoy, their longing to fight against Tsarism. These liberal ideas might have grown faint in them, they might have begun to doubt their importance, no longer venturing to confess to holding them, when suddenly from Mlle, de Guermantes herself, that is to say from a girl so indisputably cultured and authorised to speak, who wore her hair flat on her brow (a thing that no Courvoisier would ever have consented to do), came this vehement support. A certain number of realities, good or bad in themselves, gain enormously in this way by receiving the adhesion of people who are in authority over us. For instance among the Courvoisiers the rites of affability in a public thoroughfare consisted in a certain bow, very ugly and far from affable in itself but which people knew to be the distinguished way of bidding a person good day, with the result that everyone else, suppressing the instinctive smile of welcome on his own face, endeavoured to imitate these frigid gymnastics. But the Guermantes in general and Oriane in

particular, while better conversant than anyone with these rites, did not hesitate, if they caught sight of you from a carriage, to greet you with a sprightly wave of the hand, and in a drawing-room, leaving the Courvoisiers to make their stiff and imitative bows, sketched charming reverences in the air, held out their hands as though to a comrade with a smile from their blue eyes, so that suddenly, thanks to the Guermantes, there entered into the substance of smartness, until then a little hollow and dry, everything that you would naturally have liked and had compelled yourself to forego, a genuine welcome, the effusion of a true friendliness, spontaneity. It is in a similar fashion (but by a rehabilitation which this time is scarcely justified) that people who carry in themselves an instinctive taste for bad music and for melodies, however commonplace, which have in them something easy and caressing, succeed, by dint of education in symphonic culture, in mortifying that appetite. But once they have arrived at this point, when, dazzled — and rightly so — by the brilliant orchestral colouring of Richard Strauss, they see that musician adopt with an indulgence worthy of Auber the most vulgar motifs, what those people originally admired finds suddenly in so high an authority a justification which delights them, and they let themselves be enchanted without scruple and with a twofold gratitude, when they listen to *Salomé*, by what it would have been impossible for them to admire in *Les Diamants de la Couronne*. Authentic or not, the retort made by Mlle, de Guermantes to the Grand Duke, retailed from house to house, furnished an opportunity to relate the excessive smartness with which Oriane had been turned out at the dinner-party in question. But if such splendour (and this is precisely what rendered it unattainable by the Courvoisiers) springs not from wealth but from prodigality, the latter does nevertheless last longer if it enjoys the constant support of the former, which allows it to spend all its fire. Given the principles openly advertised not. only by Oriane but by Mlle, de Villeparisis, namely that nobility does not count, that it is ridiculous to bother one’s head about rank, that wealth does not necessarily mean happiness, that intellect, heart, talent are alone of importance, the Courvoisiers were justified in hoping that, as a result of the training she had received from the Marquise, Oriane would marry some one who was not in society, an artist, a fugitive from justice, a scallawag, a free-thinker, that she would pass definitely into the category of what the Courvoisiers called ‘detrimentals.’ They were all the more justified in this hope since, inasmuch as Mme. de Villeparisis was at this very moment, from the social point of view, passing through an awkward crisis (none of the few bright stars whom I was to meet in her drawing-room had as yet reappeared there), she professed an intense

horror of the society which was thus holding her aloof. Even when she referred to her nephew the Prince de Guermantes, whom she did still see, she could never make an end of mocking at him because he was so infatuated about his pedigree. But the moment it became a question of finding a husband for Oriane, it had been no longer the principles publicly advertised by aunt and niece that had controlled the operations, it had been the mysterious 'familiar spirit' of their race. As unerringly as if Mme. de Villeparisis and Oriane had never spoken of anything but rent-rolls and pedigrees in place of literary merit and depth of character, and as if the Marquise, for the space of a few days, had been — as she would ultimately be — dead and on her bier, in the church of Combray, where each member of the family would be reduced to a mere Guermantes, with a forfeiture of individuality and baptismal names to which there testified on the voluminous black drapery of the pall the single 'G' in purple surmounted by the ducal coronet, it was on the wealthiest man and the most nobly born, on the most eligible bachelor of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, on the eldest son of the Duc de Guermantes, the Prince des Laumes, that the familiar spirit had let fall the choice of the intellectual, the critical, the evangelical Mme. de Villeparisis. And for a couple of hours, on the day of the wedding, Mme. de Villeparisis received in her drawing-room all the noble persons at whom she had been in the habit of sneering, at whom she indeed sneered still to the various plebeian intimates whom she had invited and on whom the Prince des Laumes promptly left cards, preparatory to 'cutting the cable' in the following year. And then, making the Courvoisiers' cup of bitterness overflow, the same old maxims, which made out intellect and talent to be the sole claims to social pre-eminence, resumed their doctrinal fore in the household of the Princesse des Laumes immediately after her marriage. And in this respect, be it said in passing, the point of view which Saint-Loup upheld when he lived with Rachel, frequented the friends of Rachel, would have liked to marry Rachel, implied — whatever the horror that it inspired in the family — less falsehood than that of the Guermantes young ladies in general, preaching the virtues of intellect, barely admitting the possibility of anyone's questioning the equality of mankind, all of which ended at a given point in the same result as if they had professed the opposite principles, that is to say in marriage to an extremely wealthy duke. Saint-Loup did, on the contrary, act in conformity with his theories which led people to say that he was treading in evil ways. Certainly from the moral standpoint Rachel was not altogether satisfactory. But it is by no means certain whether, if she had been some person no more worthy but a duchess or the heiress to many millions, Mme. de

Marsantes would not have been in favour of the match.

Well, to return to Mme. des Laumes (shortly afterwards Duchesse de Guermantes, on the death of her father-in-law), it was the last agonising straw upon the backs of the Courvoisiers that the theories of the young Princess, remaining thus lodged in her speech, should not in any sense be guiding her conduct; with the result that this philosophy (if one may so call it) in no way impaired the aristocratic smartness of the Guermantes drawing-room. No doubt all the people whom Mme. de Guermantes did not invite imagined that it was because they were not clever enough, and some rich American lady who had never had any book in her possession except a little old copy, never opened, of Parny's poems, arranged because it was of the 'period' upon one of the tables in her inner room, shewed how much importance she attached to the things of the mind by the devouring gaze which she fastened on the Duchesse de Guermantes when that lady made her appearance at the Opera. No doubt, also, Mme. de Guermantes was sincere when she selected a person on account of his or her intellect. When she said of a woman: "It appears, she's quite charming!" or of a man that he was the "cleverest person in the world," she imagined herself to have no other reason for consenting to receive them than this charm or cleverness, the familiar spirit not interposing itself at this last moment; more deeply rooted, stationed at the obscure entry of the region in which the Guermantes exercised their judgment, this vigilant spirit precluded them from finding the man clever or the woman charming if they had no social value, actual or potential. The man was pronounced learned, but like a dictionary, or, on the contrary, common, with the mind of a commercial traveller, the woman pretty, but with a terribly bad style, or too talkative. As for the people who had no definite position, they were simply dreadful — such snobs! M. de Bréauté, whose country house was quite close to Guermantes, mixed with no one below the rank of Highness. But he laughed at them in his heart and longed only to spend his days in museums. Accordingly Mme. de Guermantes was indignant when anyone spoke of M. de Bréauté as a snob. "A snob! Babal! But, my poor friend, you must be mad, it's just the opposite. He loathes smart people; he won't let himself be introduced to anyone. Even in my house! If I ask him to meet some one he doesn't know, he swears at me all the time." This was not to say that, even in practice, the Guermantes did not adopt an entirely different attitude towards cleverness from the Courvoisiers. In a positive sense, this difference between the Guermantes and the Courvoisiers had begun already to bear very promising fruit. Thus the Duchesse de Guermantes, enveloped moreover in a

mystery which had set so many poets dreaming of her at a respectful distance, had given that party to which I have already referred, at which the King of England had enjoyed himself more thoroughly than anywhere else, for she had had the idea, which would never have occurred to a Courvoisier mind, of inviting, and the audacity, from which a Courvoisier courage would have recoiled, to invite, apart from the personages already mentioned, the musician Gaston Lemaire and the dramatist Grandmougin. But it was pre-eminently from the negative point of view that intellectuality made itself felt. If the necessary coefficient of cleverness and charm declined steadily as the rank of the person who sought an invitation from the Princesse des Laumes became more exalted, vanishing into zero when he or she was one of the principal Crowned Heads of Europe, conversely the farther they fell below this royal level the higher the coefficient rose. For instance at the Princesse de Parme's parties there were a number of people whom her Royal Highness invited because she had known them as children, or because they were related to some duchess, or attached to the person of some Sovereign, they themselves being quite possibly ugly, boring or stupid; well, with a Courvoisier any of the reasons: "a favourite of the Princesse de Parme," "a niece on the mother's side of the Duchesse d'Arpajon," "spends three months every year with the Queen of Spain," would have been sufficient to make her invite such people to her house, but Mme. de Guermantes, who had politely acknowledged their bows for ten years at the Princesse de Parme's, had never once allowed them to cross her threshold, considering that the same rule applied to a drawing-room in a social as in a material sense, where it only needed a few pieces of furniture which had no particular beauty but were left there to fill the room and as a sign of the owner's wealth, to render it hideous. Such a drawing-room resembled a book in which the author could not refrain from the use of language advertising his own learning, brilliance, fluency. Like a book, like a house, the quality of a 'salon,' thought Mme. de Guermantes — and rightly — is based on the corner-stone of sacrifice.

Many of the friends of the Princesse de Parme, with whom the Duchesse de Guermantes had confined herself for years past to the same conventional greeting, or to returning their cards, without ever inviting them to her parties or going to theirs, complained discreetly of these omissions to her Highness who, on days when M. de Guermantes came by himself to see her, passed on a hint to him. But the wily nobleman, a bad husband to the Duchess in so far as he kept mistresses, but her most tried and trusty friend in everything that concerned the good order of her drawing-room (and her own wit, which formed its chief

attraction), replied: “But doe my wife know her? Indeed! Oh, well, I daresay she does. But the truth is, Ma’am, that Oriane does not care for women’s conversation. She lives surrounded by a court of superior minds — I am not her husband, I am only the first footman. Except for quite a small number, who are all of them very clever indeed, women bore her. Surely, Ma’am, your Highness with all her fine judgment is not going to tell me that the Marquise de Souvré has any brains. Yes, I quite understand, the Princess receives her out of kindness. Besides, your Highness knows her. You tell me that Oriane has met her; it is quite possible, but once or twice at the most I assure you. And then, I must explain to your Highness, it is really a little my fault as well. My wife is very easily tired, and she is so anxious to be friendly always that if I allowed her she would never stop going to see people. Only yesterday evening she had a temperature, she was afraid of hurting the Duchesse de Bourbon’s feelings by not going to see her. I had to shew my teeth, I assure you; I positively forbade them to bring the carriage round. Do you know, Ma’am, I should really prefer not to mention to Oriane that you have spoken to me about Mme. de Souvré. My wife is so devoted to your Highness, she will go round at once to invite Mme. de Souvré to the house; that will mean another call to be paid, it will oblige us to make friends with the sister, whose husband I know quite well. I think I shall say nothing at all about it to Oriane, if the Princess has no objection. That will save her a great deal of strain and excitement. And I assure you that it will be no loss to Mme. de Souvré. She goes everywhere, moves in the most brilliant circles. You know, we don’t entertain at all, really, just a few little friendly dinners, Mme. de Souvré would be bored to death.” The Princesse de Parme, innocently convinced that the Duc de Guermantes would not transmit her request to his Duchess, and dismayed by her failure to procure the invitation that Mme. de Souvré sought, was all the more flattered to think that she herself was one of the regular frequenters of so exclusive a household. No doubt this satisfaction had its drawbacks also. Thus whenever the Princesse de Parme invited Mme. de Guermantes to her own parties she had to rack her brains to be sure that there was no one else on her list whose presence might offend the Duchess and make her refuse to come again.

On ordinary evenings (after dinner, at which she invariably entertained at a very early hour, for she clung to old customs, a small party) the drawing-room of the Princesse de Parme was thrown open to her regular guests, and, generally speaking, to all the higher ranks of the aristocracy, French and foreign. The order of her receptions was as follows: on issuing from the dining-room the Princess

sat down on a sofa before a large round table and chatted with the two most important of the ladies who had dined with her, or else cast her eyes over a magazine, or sometimes played cards (or pretended to play, adopting a German court custom), either a game of patience by herself or selecting as her real or pretended partner some prominent personage. By nine o'clock the double doors of the big drawing-room were in a state of perpetual agitation, opening and shutting and opening again to admit the visitors who had dined quietly at home (or if they had dined in town hurried from their café promising to return later, since they intended only to go in at one door and out at the other) in order to conform with the Princess's time-table. She, meanwhile, her mind fixed on her game or conversation, made a show of not seeing the new arrivals, and it was not until they were actually within reach of her that she rose graciously from her seat, with a friendly smile for the women. The latter thereupon sank before the upright Presence in a courtesy which was tantamount to a genuflexion, so as to bring their lips down to the level of the beautiful hand which hung very low, and to kiss it. But at that moment the Princess, just as if she had been every time surprised by a formality with which nevertheless she was perfectly familiar, raised the kneeling figure as though by main force, and with incomparable grace and sweetness, and kissed her on both cheeks. A grace and sweetness that were conditional, you may say, upon the meekness with which the arriving guest inclined her knee. Very likely; and it seems that in a society without distinctions of rank politeness would vanish, not, as is generally supposed, from want of breeding, but because from one class would have vanished the deference due to a distinction which must be imaginary to be effective, and, more completely still, from the other class the affability in the distribution of which one is prodigal so long as one knows it to be, to the recipient, of an untold value which, in a world based on equality, would at once fall to nothing like everything that has only a promissory worth. But this disappearance of politeness in a reconstructed society is by no means certain, and we are at times too ready to believe that the present is the only possible state of things. People of first-rate intelligence have held the opinion that a Republic could not have any diplomacy or foreign alliances, and, more recently, that the peasant class would not tolerate the separation of Church and State. After all, the survival of politeness in a society levelled to uniformity would be no more miraculous than the practical success of the railway or the use of the aeroplane in war. Besides, even if politeness were to vanish, there is nothing to shew that this would be a misfortune. Lastly, would not society become secretly more hierarchical as it became outwardly more democratic?

This seems highly probable. The political power of the Popes has grown enormously since they ceased to possess either States or an Army; our cathedrals meant far less to a devout Catholic of the seventeenth century than they mean to an atheist of the twentieth, and if the Princesse de Parme had been the sovereign ruler of a State, no doubt I should have felt myself impelled to speak of her almost as I should speak of a President of the Republic, that is to say not at all.

As soon as the postulant had been raised from the ground and embraced by the Princess, the latter resumed her seat and returned to her game of patience, but first of all, if the newcomer were of any importance, held her for a moment in conversation, making her sit down in an armchair.

When the room became too crowded the lady in waiting who had to control the traffic cleared the floor by leading the regular guests into an immense hall on to which the drawing-room opened, a hall filled with portraits and minor trophies of the House of Bourbon. The intimate friends of the Princess would then volunteer for the part of guide and would repeat interesting anecdotes, to which the young people had not the patience to listen, more interested in the spectacle of living Royalties (with the possibility of having themselves presented to them by the lady in waiting and the maids of honour) than in examining the relics of dead Sovereigns. Too much occupied with the acquaintances which they would be able to form and the invitations it might perhaps be possible to secure, they knew absolutely nothing, even in after-years, of what there was in this priceless museum of the archives of the Monarchy, and could only recall confusedly that it was decorated with cacti and giant palms which gave this centre of social elegance a look of the palmarium in the Jardin d'Acclimatation.

Naturally the Duchesse de Guermantes, by way of self-mortification, did occasionally appear on these evenings to pay an 'after dinner' call on the Princess, who kept her all the time by her side, while she rallied the Duke. But on evenings when the Duchess came to dine, the Princess took care not to invite her regular party, and closed her doors to the world on rising from table, for fear lest a too liberal selection of guests might offend the exacting Duchess. On such evenings, were any of the faithful who had not received warning to present themselves on the royal doorstep, they would be informed by the porter: "Her Royal Highness is not at home this evening," and would turn away. But, long before this, many of the Princess's friends had known that, on the day in question, they would not be asked to her house. These were a special set of parties, a privilege barred to so many who must have longed for admission. The excluded could, with a practical certainty, enumerate the roll of the elect, and

would say irritably among themselves: “You know, of course, that Oriane de Guermantes never goes anywhere without her entire staff.” With the help of this body the Princesse de Parme sought to surround the Duchess as with a protecting rampart against those persons the chance of whose making a good impression on her was at all doubtful. But with several of the Duchess’s favourites, with several members of this glittering ‘staff,’ the Princesse de Parme resented having to go out of her way to shew them attentions, seeing that they paid little or no attention to herself. No doubt the Princess was fully prepared to admit that it was possible to derive more enjoyment in the company of the Duchesse de Guermantes than in her own. She could not deny that there was always a ‘crush’ on the Duchess’s at-home days, or that she herself often met there three or four royal personages who thought it sufficient to leave their cards upon her. And in vain might she commit to memory Oriane’s witty sayings, copy her gowns, serve at her own tea parties the same strawberry tarts, there were occasions on which she was left by herself all afternoon with a lady in waiting and some foreign Counsellor of Legation. And so whenever (as had been the case with Swann, for instance, at an earlier period) there was anyone who never let a day pass without going to spend an hour or two at the Duchess’s and paid a call once in two years on the Princesse de Parme, the latter felt no great desire, even for the sake of amusing Oriane, to make to this Swann or whoever he was the ‘advances’ of an invitation to dinner. In a word, having the Duchess in her house was for the Princess a source of endless perplexity, so haunted was she by the fear that Oriane would find fault with everything. But in return, and for the same reason, when the Princesse de Parme came to dine with Mme. de Guermantes she could be certain beforehand that everything would be perfect, delightful, she had only one fear which was that of her own inability to understand, remember, give satisfaction, her inability to assimilate new ideas and people. On this account my presence aroused her attention and excited her cupidity, just as might a new way of decorating the dinner-table with festoons of fruit, uncertain as she was which of the two it might be — the table decorations or my presence — that was the more distinctively one of those charms, the secret of the success of Oriane’s parties, and in her uncertainty firmly resolved to try at her own next dinner-party to introduce them both. What for that matter fully justified the enraptured curiosity which the Princesse de Parme brought to the Duchess’s house was that element — amusing, dangerous, exciting — into which the Princess used to plunge with a combination of anxiety, shock and delight (as at the seaside on one of those days of ‘big waves’ of the danger of which the bathing-masters warn us, simply

and solely because none of them knows how to swim), from which she used to emerge terrified, happy, rejuvenated, and which was known as the wit of the Guermantes. The wit of the Guermantes — a thing as non-existent as the squared circle, according to the Duchess who regarded herself as the sole Guermantes to possess it — was a family reputation like that of the pork pies of Tours or the biscuits of Rheims. No doubt (since an intellectual peculiarity does not employ for its perpetuation the same channels as a shade of hair or complexion) certain intimate friends of the Duchess who were not of her blood were nevertheless endowed with this wit, which on the other hand had failed to permeate the minds of various Guermantes, too refractory to assimilate wit of any kind. The holders, not related to the Duchess, of this Guermantes wit had generally the characteristic feature of having been brilliant men, fitted for a career to which, whether it were in the arts, diplomacy, parliamentary eloquence or the army, they had preferred the life of a small and intimate group. Possibly this preference could be explained by a certain want of originality, of initiative, of will power, of health or of luck, or possibly by snobbishness.

With certain people (though these, it must be admitted, were the exception) if the Guermantes drawing-room had been the stumbling-block in their careers, it had been without their knowledge. Thus a doctor, a painter and a diplomat of great promise had failed to achieve success in the careers for which they were nevertheless more brilliantly endowed than most of their competitors because their friendship with the Guermantes had the result that the two former were regarded as men of fashion and the third as a reactionary, which had prevented each of the three from winning the recognition of his colleagues. The mediaeval gown and red cap which are still donned by the electoral colleges of the Faculties are (or were at least, not so long since) something more than a purely outward survival from a narrow-minded past, from a rigid sectarianism. Under the cap with its golden tassels, like the High Priest in the conical mitre of the Jews, the ‘Professors’ were still, in the years that preceded the Dreyfus case, fast rooted in rigorously pharisaical ideas. Du Boulbon was at heart an artist, but was safe because he did not care for society. Cottard was always at the Verdurins’. But Mme. Verdurin was a patient; besides, he was protected by his vulgarity; finally, at his own house he entertained no one outside the Faculty, at banquets over which there floated an aroma of carbolic. But in powerful corporations, where moreover the rigidity of their prejudices is but the price that must be paid for the noblest integrity, the most lofty conceptions of morality, which weaken in an atmosphere that, more tolerant, freer at first, becomes very soon dissolute, a

Professor in his gown of scarlet satin faced with ermine, like that of a Doge (which is to say a Duke) of Venice enshrined in the Ducal Palace, was as virtuous, as deeply attached to noble principles, but as unsparing of any alien element as that other Duke, excellent but terrible, whom we know as M. de Saint-Simon. The alien, here, was the wordly doctor, with other manners, other social relations. To make good, the unfortunate of whom we are now speaking, so as not to be accused by his colleagues of looking down on them (the strange ideas of a man of fashion!) if he concealed from them his Duchesse de Guermantes, hoped to disarm them by giving mixed dinner-parties in which the medical element was merged in the fashionable. He was unaware that in so doing he signed his own death-warrant, or rather he discovered this later, when the Council of Ten had to fill a vacant chair, and it was invariably the name of another doctor, more normal, it might be obviously inferior, that leaped from the fatal urn, when their 'Veto' thundered from the ancient Faculty, as solemn, as absurd and as terrible as the 'Juro' that spelled the death of Molière. So too with the painter permanently labelled man of fashion, when fashionable people who dabbled in art had succeeded in making themselves be labelled artists; so with the diplomat who had too many reactionary associations.

But this case was the rarest of all. The type of distinguished man who formed the main substance of the Guermantes drawing-room was that of people who had voluntarily (or so at least they supposed) renounced all else, everything that was incompatible with the wit of the Guermantes, with the courtesy of the Guermantes, with that indefinable charm odious to any 'Corporation' however little centralised.

And the people who were aware that in days gone by one of these frequenters of the Duchess's drawing-room had been awarded the gold medal of the Salon, that another, Secretary to the Bar Council, had made a brilliant start in the Chamber, that a third had ably served France as Chargé d'Affaires, might have been led to regard as 'failures' people who had done nothing more now for twenty years. But there were few who were thus 'well-informed,' and the parties concerned would themselves have been the last to remind people, finding these old distinctions to be now valueless, in the light of this very Guermantes spirit of wit: for did not this condemn respectively as a bore or an usher, and as a counter-jumper a pair of eminent Ministers, one a trifle solemn, the other addicted to puns, of whose praises the newspapers were always full but in whose company Mme. de Guermantes would begin to yawn and shew signs of impatience if the imprudence of a hostess had placed either of them next to her at the dinner-table.

Since being a statesman of the first rank was in no sense a recommendation to the Duchess's favour, those of her friends who had definitely abandoned the 'Career' or the 'Service,' who had never stood for the Chamber, felt, as they came day after day to have luncheon and talk with their great friend, or when they met her in the houses of Royal Personages, of whom for that matter they thought very little (or at least they said so), that they themselves had chosen the better part, albeit their melancholy air, even in the midst of the gaiety, seemed somehow to challenge the soundness of this opinion.

It must be recognised also that the refinement of social life, the subtlety of conversation at the Guermantes' did also contain, exiguous as it may have been, an element of reality. No official title was equivalent to the approval of certain chosen friends of Mme. de Guermantes, whom the most powerful Ministers had been unable to attract to their houses. If in this drawing-room so many intellectual ambitions, such noble efforts even had been for ever buried, still at least from their dust the rarest blossoms of civilised society had taken life. Certainly men of wit, Swann for instance, regarded themselves as superior to men of genuine worth, whom they despised, but that was because what the Duchesse de Guermantes valued above everything else was not intellect; it was, according to her, that superior, more exquisite form of the human intellect exalted to a verbal variety of talent — wit. And long ago at the Verdurins' when Swann condemned Brichot and Elstir, one as a pedant and the other as a clown, despite all the learning of one and the other's genius, it was the infiltration of the Guermantes spirit that had led him to classify them so. Never would he have dared to present either of them to the Duchess, conscious instinctively of the air with which she would have listened to Brichot's monologues and Elstir's hair-splittings, the Guermantes spirit regarding pretentious and prolix speech, whether in a serious or a farcical vein, as alike of the most intolerable imbecility.

As for the Guermantes of the true flesh and blood, if the Guermantes spirit had not absorbed them as completely as we see occur in, to take an example, those literary circles in which everyone shares a common way of pronouncing his words, of expressing his thoughts, and consequently of thinking, it was certainly not because originality is stronger in purely social groups or presents any obstacle there to imitation. But imitation depends not merely upon the absence of any unconquerable originality but also demands a relative fineness of ear which enables one first of all to discern what one is afterwards to imitate. Whereas there were several Guermantes in whom this musical sense was as entirely lacking as in the Courvoisiers.

To take as an instance what is called, in another sense of the word imitation, ‘giving imitations’ (or among the Guermantes was called ‘taking off’), Mme. de Guermantes might succeed in this to perfection, the Courvoisiers were as incapable of appreciating her as if they had been a tribe of rabbits instead of men and women, because they had never had the sense to observe the particular defect or accent that the Duchess was endeavouring to copy. When she ‘gave an imitation’ of the Duc de Limoges, the Courvoisiers would protest: “Oh, no, he doesn’t really speak like that! I met him again only yesterday at dinner at Bebeth’s; he talked to me all evening and he didn’t speak like that at all!” whereas the Guermantes of any degree of culture exclaimed: “Gad, what fun Oriane is! The odd part of it is that when she is copying him she looks exactly like him! I feel I’m listening to him. Oriane, do give us a little more Limoges!” Now these Guermantes (and not necessarily the few really outstanding members of the clan who when the Duchess imitated the Duc de Limoges, would say admiringly’ “Oh, you really have got him,” or “You do get him,”) might indeed be del void of wit according to Mme. de Guermantes (and in this respect she was right); yet, by dint of hearing and repeating her sayings they had come to imitate more or less her way of expressing herself, of criticising people of what Swann, like the Duke himself, used to call her ‘phrasing’ of things so that they presented in their conversation something which to the Courvoisiers appeared ‘fearfully like’ Oriane’s wit and was treated by them collectively as the ‘wit of the Guermantes.’ As these Guermantes were to her not merely kinsfolk but admirers, Oriane (who kept the rest of the family rigorously at arm’s-length and now avenged by her disdain the insults that they had heaped upon her in her girlhood) went to call on them now and then, generally in company with the Duke, in the season, when she drove out with him. These visits were historic events. The heart began to beat more rapidly in the bosom of the Princesse d’Epinay, who was ‘at home’ in her big drawing-room on the ground floor, when she perceived afar off, like the first glow of an innocuous fire, or the ‘reconnaissances’ of an unexpected invasion, making her way across the courtyard slowly, in a diagonal course, the Duchess crowned with a ravishing hat and holding atilt a sunshade from which there rained down a summer fragrance. “Why, here comes Oriane,” she would say, like an ‘On guard!’ intended to convey a prudent warning to her visitors, so that they should have time to beat an orderly retreat, to clear the rooms without panic. Half of those present dared not remain, and rose at once to go. “But no, why? Sit down again, I insist on keeping you a little longer,” said the Princess in a careless tone and seemingly at her ease (to shew herself the

great lady) but in a voice that suddenly rang false. “But you may want to talk to each other.” “Really, you’re in a hurry? Oh, very well, I shall come and see you,” replied the lady of the house to those whom she was just as well pleased to see depart. The Duke and Duchess gave a very civil greeting to people whom they had seen there regularly for years, without for that reason coming to know them any better, while these in return barely said good day to them, thinking this more discreet. Scarcely had they left the room before the Duke began asking good-naturedly who they were, so as to appear to be taking an interest in the intrinsic quality of people whom he himself, owing to the cross-purposes of fate or the wretched state of Oriane’s nerves, never saw in his own house. “Tell me, who was that little woman in the pink hat?” “Why, my dear cousin, you have seen her hundreds of times, she’s the Vicomtesse de Tours, who was a Lamarzelle.” “But, do you know, she’s quite good-looking; she seems clever too; if it weren’t for a little flaw in her upper lip she’d be a regular charmer. If there’s a Vicomte de Tours, he can’t have any too bad a time. Oriane, do you know what those eyebrows and the way her hair grows reminded me of? Your cousin Hedwige de Ligne.” The Duchesse de Guermantes, who languished whenever people spoke of the beauty of any woman other than herself, let the conversation drop. She bad reckoned without the weakness her husband had for letting it be seen that he knew all about the people who did not come to his house, whereby be believed that he shewed himself to be more seriously minded than his wife. ‘“But,” he resumed suddenly with emphasis, “you mentioned the name Lamarzelle. I remember, when I was in the Chamber, hearing a really remarkable speech made...” “That was the uncle of the young woman you saw just now.” “Indeed! What talent! No, my dear girl,” he assured the Vicomtesse d’Egremont, whom Mme. de Guermantes could not endure, but who, refusing to stir from the Princesse d’Epinay’s drawing-room where she willingly humbled herself to play the part of parlour-maid (and was ready to slap her own parlour-maid on returning home), stayed there, confused, tearful, but stayed when the ducal couple were in the room, took their cloaks, tried to make herself useful, offered discreetly to withdraw into the next room, “you are not to make tea for us, let us just sit and talk quietly, we are simple souls, really, honestly. Besides,” he went on, turning to the Princesse d’Epinay (leaving the Egremont lady blushing, humble, ambitious and full of zeal), “we can only give you a quarter of an hour.” This quarter of an hour was entirely taken up with a sort of exhibition of the witty things which the Duchess had said during the previous week, and to which she herself would certainly not have referred had not her husband, with great

adroitness, by appearing to be rebuking her with reference to the incidents that had provoked them, obliged her as though against her will to repeat them.

The Princesse d'Epinay, who was fond of her cousin and knew that she had a weakness for compliments, went into ecstasies over her hat, her sunshade, her wit. "Talk to her as much as you like about her clothes," said the Duke in the sullen tone which he had adopted and now tempered with a sardonic smile so that his resentment should not be taken seriously, "but for heaven's sake don't speak of her wit, I should be only too glad not to have so witty a wife. You are probably alluding to the shocking pun she made about my brother Palamède," he went on, knowing quite well that the Princess and the rest of the family had not yet heard this pun, and delighted to have an opportunity of shewing off his wife. "In the first place I consider it unworthy of a person who has occasionally, I must admit, said some quite good things, to make bad puns, but especially about my brother, who is very susceptible, and if it is going to lead to his quarrelling with me, that would really be too much of a good thing." "But we never heard a word about it! One of Oriane's puns! It's sure to be delicious. Oh, do tell us!" "No, no," the Duke went on, still sulking though with a broader smile, "I'm so glad you haven't heard it. Seriously, I'm very fond of my brother." "Listen, Basin," broke in the Duchess, the moment having come for her to take up her husband's cue, "I can't think why you should say that it might annoy Palamède, you know quite well it would do nothing of the sort. He is far too intelligent to be vexed by a stupid joke which has nothing offensive about it. You are making them think I said something nasty; I simply uttered a remark which was not in the least funny, it is you who make it seem important by losing your temper over it. I don't understand you." "You are making us terribly excited, what is it all about?" "Oh, obviously nothing serious!" cried M. de Guermantes. "You may have heard that my brother offered to give Brézé, the place he got from his wife, to his sister Marsantes." "Yes, but we were told that she didn't want it, she didn't care for that part of the country, the climate didn't suit her." "Very well, some one had been telling my wife all that and saying that if my brother was giving this place to our sister it was not so much to please her as to tease her. 'He's such a teaser, Charlus,' was what they actually said. Well, you know Brézé, it's a royal domain, I should say it's worth millions, it used to be part of the crown lands, it includes one of the finest forests in the whole of France. There are plenty of people who would be only too delighted to be teased to that tune. And so when she heard the word 'teaser' applied to Charlus because he was giving away such a magnificent property, Oriane could not help exclaiming, without meaning

anything, I must admit, there wasn't a trace of ill-nature about it, for it came like a flash of lightning: 'Teaser, teaser? Then he must be Teaser Augustus.' You understand," he went on, resuming his sulky tone, having first cast a sweeping glance round the room in order to judge the effect of his wife's witticism — and in some doubt as to the extent of Mme. d'Epinay's acquaintance with ancient history, "you understand, it's an allusion to Augustus Caesar, the Roman Emperor; it's too stupid, a bad play on words, quite unworthy of Oriane. And then, you see, I am more circumspect than my wife, if I haven't her wit, I think of the consequences; if anyone should be so ill-advised as to repeat the remark to my brother there'll be the devil to pay. All the more," he went on, "because as you know Palamède is very high and mighty, and very fussy also, given to gossip and all that sort of thing, so that quite apart from the question of his giving away Brézé you must admit that 'Teaser Augustus' suits him down to the ground. That is what justifies my wife's remarks; even when she is inclined to stoop to what is almost vulgar, she is always witty and does really describe people."

And so, thanks on one occasion to 'Teaser Augustus,' on another to something else, the visits paid by the Duke and Duchess to their kinsfolk replenished the stock of anecdotes, and the emotion which these visits aroused lasted long after the departure of the sparkling lady and her 'producer.' Her hostess would begin by going over again with the privileged persons who had been at the entertainment (those who had remained in the room) the clever things that Oriane had said. "You hadn't heard 'Teaser Augustus'?" asked the Princesse d'Epinay. "Yes," replied the Marquise de Baveno, blushing as she spoke, "the Princesse de Sarsina (the La Rochefoucauld one) mentioned it to me, not quite in the same words. But of course it was far more interesting to hear it repeated like that with my cousin in the room," she went on, as though speaking of a song that had been accompanied by the composer himself. "We were speaking of Oriane's latest — she was here just now," her hostess greeted a visitor who would be plunged in despair at not having arrived an hour earlier. "What! Has Oriane been here?" "Yes, you ought to have come a little sooner," the Princesse d'Epinay informed her, not in reproach but letting her understand all that her clumsiness had made her miss. It was her fault alone if she had not been present at the Creation of the World or at Mme. Carvalho's last performance. "What do you think of Oriane's latest? I must say, I do enjoy 'Teaser Augustus'," and the 'saying' would be served up again cold next day at luncheon before a few intimate friends who were invited on purpose, and would reappear under various

sauces throughout the week. Indeed the Princess happening in the course of that week to pay her annual visit to the Princesse de Parme seized the opportunity to ask whether her Royal Highness had heard the pun, and repeated it to her. “Ah! Teaser Augustus,” said the Princesse de Parme, her eyes bulging with an instinctive admiration, which begged however for a complementary elucidation which Mme. d’Epinay was not loath to furnish. “I must say, ‘Teaser Augustus’ pleases me enormously as a piece of ‘phrasing’,” she concluded. As a matter of fact the word ‘phrasing’ was not in the least applicable to this pun, but the Princesse d’Epinay, who claimed to have assimilated her share of the Guermantes spirit, had borrowed from Oriane the expressions ‘phrased’ and ‘phrasing’ and employed them without much discrimination. New the Princesse de Parme, who was not at all fond of Mme. d’Epinay, whom she considered plain, knew to be miserly and believed, on the authority of the Courvoisiers, to be malicious, recognised this word ‘phrasing’ which she had heard used by Mme. de Guermantes but would not by herself have known how or when to apply. She received the impression that it was in fact its ‘phrasing’ that formed the charm of ‘Teaser Augustus’ and, without altogether forgetting her antipathy towards the plain and miserly lady, could not repress a burst of admiration for a person endowed to such a degree with the Guermantes spirit, so strong that she was on the point of inviting the Princesse d’Epinay to the Opera. She was held in check only by the reflexion that it would be wiser perhaps to consult Mme. de Guermantes first. As for Mme. d’Epinay, who, unlike the Courvoisiers, paid endless attentions to Oriane and was genuinely fond of her but was jealous of her exalted friends and slightly irritated by the fun which the Duchess used to make of her before everyone on account of her meanness, she reported on her return home what an effort it had required to make the Princesse de Parme grasp the point of ‘Teaser Augustus,’ and declared what a snob Oriane must be to number such a goose among her friends. “I should never have been able to see much of the Princesse de Parme even if I had cared to,” she informed the friends who were dining with her. “M. d’Epinay would not have allowed it for a moment, because of her immorality,” she explained, alluding to certain purely imaginary excesses on the part of the Princess. “But even if I had had a husband less strict in his views, I must say I could never have made friends with her. I don’t know how Oriane can bear to see her every other day, as she does. I go there once a year, and it’s all I can do to sit out my call.” As for those of the Courvoisiers who happened to be at Victurnienne’s on the day of Mme. de Guermantes’s visit, the arrival of the Duchess generally put them to flight owing to the exasperation

they felt at the ‘ridiculous salaams’ that were made to her there. One alone remained on the afternoon of ‘Teaser Augustus.’ He did not entirely see the point, but he did see part of it, being an educated man. And the Courvoisiers went about repeating that Oriane had called uncle Palarned ‘Caesar Augustus,’ which was, according to them, a good enough descrin tion of him, but why all this endless talk about Oriane, they went on People couldn’t make more fuss about a queen. “After all, what is Oriane? I don’t say that the Guermantes aren’t an old family, but the Courvoisiers are every bit as good in rank, antiquity, marriages. We mustn’t forget that on the Field of the Cloth of Gold, when the King of England asked François I who was the noblest of the lords there present, ‘Sire,’ said the King of France, ‘Courvoisier.’” But even if all the Courvoisiers had stayed in the room to hear them, Oriane’s sayings would have fallen on deaf ears, since the incidents that usually gave occasion for those sayings would have been regarded by them from a totally different point of view. If, for instance, a Courvoisier found herself running short of chairs, in the middle of a party, or if she used the wrong name in greeting a guest whose face she did not remember, or if one of her servants said something stupid, the Courvoisier, extremely annoyed, flushed, quivering with excitement, would deplore so unfortunate an occurrence. And when she had a visitor in the room and Oriane was expected, she would say in a tone anxiously and imperiously questioning: “Do you know her?”, fearing that if the visitor did not know her his presence might make an unfortunate impression on Oriane. But Mme. de Guermantes on the contrary extracted from such incidents opportunities for stories which made the Guermantes laugh until the tears streamed down their cheeks, so that one was obliged to envy her her having run short of chairs, having herself made or having allowed her servant to make a blunder, having had at her party some one whom nobody knew, as one is obliged to be thankful that great writers have been kept at a distance by men and betrayed by women when their humiliations and their sufferings have been if not the direct stimulus of their genius, at any rate the subject matter of their works.

The Courvoisiers were incapable of rising to the level of the spirit of innovation which the Duchesse de Guermantes introduced into the life of society and, by adapting it, following an unerring instinct, to the necessities of the moment, made into something artistic where the purely rational application of cut and dried rules would have given as unfortunate results as would greet a man who, anxious to succeed in love or in politics, was to reproduce in his own daily life the exploits of Bussy d’Amboise. If the Courvoisiers gave a family dinner or

a dinner to meet some prince, the addition of a recognised wit, of some friend of their son seemed to them an anomaly capable of producing the direst consequences. A Courvoisier whose father had been a Minister of the Empire having to give an afternoon party to meet Princesse Mathilde deduced by a geometrical formula that she could invite no one but Bonapartists. Of whom she knew practically none. All the smart women of her acquaintance, all the amusing men were ruthlessly barred because, from their Legitimist views or connexions, they might easily, according to Courvoisier logic, give offence to the Imperial Highness. The latter, who in her own house entertained the flower of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, was quite surprised when she found at Mme. de Courvoisier's only a notorious old sponger whose husband had been an Imperial Prefect, the widow of the Director of Posts and sundry others known for their loyalty to Napoleon, their stupidity and their dullness. Princesse Mathilde, however, in no way stinted the generous and refreshing shower of her sovereign grace over these miserable scarecrows whom the Duchesse de Guermantes, for her part, took good care not to invite when it was her turn to entertain the Princess, but substituted for them without any abstract reasoning about Bonapartism the most brilliant coruscation of all the beauties, all the talents, all the celebrities, who, the exercise of some subtle sixth sense made her feel, would be acceptable to the niece of the Emperor even when they belonged actually to the Royal House. There was not lacking indeed the Due d'Aumale, and when on withdrawing the Princess, raising Mme. de Guermantes from the ground where she had sunk in a curtsey and was trying to kiss the august hand, embraced her on both cheeks, it was from the bottom of her heart that she was able to assure the Duchess that never had she spent a happier afternoon nor seen so delightful a party. The Princesse de Parme was Courvoisier in her incapacity for innovation in social matters, but unlike the Courvoisiers the surprise that was perpetually caused her by the Duchesse de Guermantes engendered in her not, as in them, antipathy but admiration. This astonishment was still farther enhanced by the infinitely backward state of the Princess's education. Mme. de Guermantes was herself a great deal less advanced than she supposed. But it was enough for her to have gone a little beyond Mme. de Parme to stupefy that lady, and, as the critics of each generation confine themselves to maintaining the direct opposite of the truths admitted by their predecessors, she had only to say that Flaubert, that archenemy of the bourgeois, had been bourgeois through and through, or that there was a great deal of Italian music in Wagner, to open before the Princess, at the cost of a nervous exhaustion which recurred every time, as

before the eyes of a swimmer in a stormy sea, horizons that seemed to her unimaginable and remained for ever vague. A stupefaction caused also by the paradoxes uttered with relation not only to works of art but to persons of their acquaintance and to current social events. No doubt the incapacity that prevented Mme. de Parme from distinguishing the true wit of the Guermantes from certain rudimentarily acquired forms of that wit (which made her believe in the high intellectual worth of certain, especially certain female Guermantes, of whom she was bewildered on hearing the Duchess confide to her with a smile that they were mere blockheads) was one of the causes of the astonishment which the Princess always felt on hearing Mme. de Guermantes criticise other people. But there was another cause also, one which I, who knew at this time more books than people and literature better than life, explained to myself by thinking that the Duchess, living this wordly life the idleness and sterility of which are to a true social activity what criticism, in art, is to creation, extended to the persons who surrounded her the instability of point of view, the uneasy thirst of the reasoner who to assuage a mind that has grown too dry goes in search of no matter what paradox that is still fairly new, and will make no bones about upholding the refreshing opinion that the really great *Iphigénie* is Piccini's and not Gluck's, at a pinch the true *Phèdre* that of Pradon.

When a woman who was intelligent, educated, witty had married a shy bumpkin whom one saw but seldom and never heard, Mme. de Guermantes one fine day would find a rare intellectual pleasure not only in decrying the wife but in 'discovering' the husband. In the Cambremer household for example, if she had lived in that section of society at the time, she would have decreed that Mme. de Cambremer was stupid, and that the really interesting person, misunderstood, delightful, condemned to silence by a chattering wife but himself worth a thousand of her, was the Marquis, and the Duchess would have felt on declaring this the same kind of refreshment as the critic who, after people have for seventy years been admiring *Hernani*, confesses to a preference for *Le Lion Amoureux*. And from this same morbid need of arbitrary novelties, if from her girlhood everyone had been pitying a model wife, a true saint, for being married to a scoundrel, one fine day Mme. de Guermantes would assert that this scoundrel was perhaps a frivolous man but one with a heart of gold, whom the implacable harshness of his wife had driven to do the most inconsistent things. I knew that it is not only over different works, in the long course of centuries, but over different parts of the same work that criticism plays, thrusting back into the shadow what for too long has been thought brilliant, and making emerge what

has appeared to be doomed to permanent obscurity. I had not only seen Bellini, Winterhalter, the Jesuit architects, a Restoration cabinetmaker come to take the place of men of genius who were called ‘worn out,’ simply because they had worn out the lazy minds of the intellectuals, as neurasthenics are always worn out and always changing; I had seen preferred in Sainte-Beuve alternately the critic and the poet, Musset rejected so far as his poetry went save for a few quite unimportant little pieces. No doubt certain essayists are mistaken when they set above the most famous scenes in *Le Cid* or *Polyeucte* some speech from *Le Menteur* which, like an old plan, furnishes information about the Paris of the day, but their predilection, justified if not by considerations of beauty at least by a documentary interest, is still too rational for our criticism run mad. It will barter the whole of Molière for a line from*L’Etourdi*, and even when it pronounces Wagner’s *Tristan* a bore will except a ‘charming note on the horns’ at the point where the hunt goes by. This depravation of taste helped me to understand that of which Mme. de Guermantes gave proof when she decided that a man of their world, recognised as a good fellow but a fool, was a monster of egoism, sharper than people thought — that another widely known for his generosity might be the personification of avarice, that a good mother paid no attention to her children, and that a woman generally supposed to be vicious was really actuated by the noblest feelings. As though spoiled by the nullity of life in society, the intelligence and perception of Mme. de Guermantes were too vacillating for disgust not to follow pretty swiftly in the wake of infatuation (leaving her still ready to feel herself attracted afresh by the kind of cleverness which she had in turn sought out and abandoned) and for the charm which she had felt in some warm-hearted man not to change, if he came too often to see her, sought too freely from her directions which she was incapable of giving him, into an irritation which she believed to be produced by her admirer but which was in fact due to the utter impossibility of finding pleasure when one does nothing else than seek it. The variations of the Duchess’s judgment spared no one, except her husband. He alone had never been in love with her, in him she had always felt an iron character, indifferent to the caprices that she displayed, contemptuous of her beauty, violent, of a will that would never bend, the sort under which alone nervous people can find tranquillity. M. de Guermantes on the other hand, pursuing a single type of feminine beauty but seeking it in mistresses whom he constantly replaced, had, once he had left them, and to express derision of them, only an associate, permanent and identical, who irritated him often by her chatter but as to whom he knew that everyone regarded her as the most

beautiful, the most virtuous, the cleverest, the best-read member of the aristocracy, as a wife whom he, M. de Guermantes, was only too fortunate to have found, who cloaked all his irregularities, entertained like no one else in the world, and upheld for their drawing-room its position as the premier in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. This common opinion he himself shared; often moved to ill-humour against her, he was proud of her. If, being as niggardly as he was fastidious, he refused her the most trifling sums for her charities or for the servants, yet he insisted upon her wearing the most sumptuous clothes and driving behind the best horses in Paris. Whenever Mme. de Guermantes had just perpetrated, with reference to the merits and defects, which she suddenly transposed, of one of their friends, a new and succulent paradox, she burned to make trial of it before people capable of relishing it, to bring out its psychological originality and to set its epigrammatic brilliance sparkling. No doubt these new opinions embodied as a rule no more truth than the old, often less; but this very element, arbitrary and incalculable, of novelty which they contained conferred on them something intellectual which made the communication of them exciting. Only the patient on whom the Duchess was exercising her psychological skill was generally an intimate friend as to whom those people to whom she longed to hand on her discovery were entirely unaware that he was not still at the apex of her favour; thus the reputation that Mme. de Guermantes had of being an incomparable friend, sentimental, tender and devoted, made it difficult for her to launch the attack herself; she could at the most intervene later on, as though under constraint, by uttering a response to appease, to contradict in appearance but actually to support a partner who had taken it on himself to provoke her; this was precisely the part in which M. de Guermantes excelled.

As for social activities, it was yet another form of pleasure, arbitrary and spectacular, that Mme. de Guermantes felt in uttering, with regard to them, those unexpected judgments which pricked with an incessant and exquisite feeling of surprise the Princesse de Parme. But with this one of the Duchess’s pleasures it was not so much with the help of literary criticism as by following political life and the reports of parliamentary debates that I tried to understand in what it might consist. The successive and contradictory edicts by which Mme. de Guermantes continually reversed the scale of values among the people of her world no longer sufficing to distract her, she sought also in the manner in which she ordered her own social behaviour, in which she recorded her own most trivial decisions on points of fashion, to taste those artificial emotions, to fulfil

those adventitious obligations which stimulate the perceptions of Parliaments and gain hold of the minds of politicians. We know that when a Minister explains to the Chamber that he believed himself to be acting rightly in following a line of conduct which does, as a matter of fact, appear quite straightforward to the commonsense person who next morning in his newspaper reads the report of the sitting, this commonsense reader does nevertheless feel himself suddenly stirred and begins to doubt whether he has been right in approving the Minister's conduct when he sees that the latter's speech was listened to with the accompaniment of a lively agitation and punctuated with expressions of condemnation such as: "It's most serious!" ejaculated by a Deputy whose name and titles are so long, and followed in the report by movements so emphatic that in the whole interruption the words "It's most serious!" occupy less room than a hemistich does in an alexandrine. For instance in the days when M. de Guermantes, Prince des Laumes, sat in the Chamber, one used to read now and then in the Paris newspapers, albeit it was intended primarily for the Méséglise division, to shew the electors there that they had not given their votes to an inactive or voiceless mandatory:

(Monsieur de Guermantes-Bouillon, Prince des Laumes: "This is serious!" "Hear, hear!" from the Centre and some of the Right benches, loud exclamations from the Extreme Left.)

The commonsense reader still retains a gleam of faith in the sage Minister, but his heart is convulsed with a fresh palpitation by the first words of the speaker who rises to reply:

"The astonishment, it is not too much to say the stupor" (keen sensation on the Right side of the House) "that I have felt at the words of one who is still, I presume, a member of the Government" (thunder of applause)... Several Under-Secretaries of State for Posts and Telegraphs without Deputies then crowded round the Ministerial bench. Then rising from his seat, nodded his head in the affirmative.

This 'thunder of applause' carries away the last shred of resistance in the mind of the commonsense reader; he discovers to be an insult to the Chamber, monstrous in fact, a course of procedure which in itself is of no importance; it may be some normal action such as arranging that the rich shall pay more than the poor, bringing to light some piece of injustice, preferring peace to war; he will find it scandalous and will see in it an offence to certain principles to which as a matter of fact he had never given a thought, which are not engraved on the human heart, but which move him forcibly by reason of the acclamations which

they provoke and the compact majorities which they assemble.

It must at the same time be recognised that this subtlety of the politician which served to explain to me the Guermantes circle, and other groups in society later on, is nothing more than the perversion of a certain fineness of interpretation often described as ‘reading between the lines.’ If in representative assemblies there is absurdity owing to perversion of this quality, there is equally stupidity, through the want of it, in the public who take everything ‘literally,’ who do not suspect a dismissal when a high dignitary is relieved of his office ‘at his own request,’ and say: “He cannot have been dismissed, since it was he who asked leave to retire,”— a defeat when the Russians by a strategic movement withdraw upon a stronger position that has been prepared beforehand, a refusal when, a Province having demanded its independence from the German Emperor, he grants it religious autonomy. It is possible, moreover (to return to these sittings of the Chamber), that when they open the Deputies themselves are like the commonsense person who will read the published report. Learning that certain workers on strike have sent their delegates to confer with a Minister, they may ask one another innocently: “There now, I wonder what they can have been saying; let’s hope it’s all settled,” at the moment when the Minister himself mounts the tribune in a solemn silence which has already brought artificial emotions into play. The first words of the Minister: “There is no necessity for me to inform the Chamber that I have too high a sense of what is the duty of the Government to have received a deputation of which the authority entrusted to me could take no cognisance,” produce a dramatic effect, for this was the one hypothesis which the commonsense of the Deputies had not imagined. But precisely because of its dramatic effect it is greeted with such applause that it is only after several minutes have passed that the Minister can succeed in making himself heard, the Minister who will receive on returning to his place on the bench the congratulations of his colleagues. We are as deeply moved as on the day when the same Minister failed to invite to a big official reception the President of the Municipal Council who was supporting the Opposition, and declare that on this occasion as on the other he has acted with true statesmanship.

M. de Guermantes at this period in his life had, to the great scandal of the Courvoisiers, frequently been among the crowd of Deputies who came forward to congratulate the Minister. I have heard it said afterwards that even at a time when he was playing a fairly important part in the Chamber and was being thought of in connexion with Ministerial office or an Embassy he was, when a

friend came to ask a favour of him, infinitely more simple, behaved politically a great deal less like the important political personage than anyone else who did not happen to be Duc de Guermantes. For if he said that nobility made no difference, that he regarded his fellow Deputies as equals, he did not believe it for a moment. He sought, pretended to value but really despised political importance, and as he remained in his own eyes M. de Guermantes it did not envelop his person in that dead weight of high office which makes other politicians unapproachable. And in this way his pride guarded against every assault not only his manners which were of an ostentatious familiarity but also such true simplicity as he might actually have.

To return to those artificial and moving decisions such as are made by politicians, Mme. de Guermantes was no less disconcerting to the Guermantes, the Courvoisiers, the Faubourg in general and, more than anyone, the Princesse de Parme by her habit of issuing unaccountable decrees behind which one could feel to be latent principles which impressed one all the more, the less one expected them. If the new Greek Minister have a fancy dress ball, everyone chose a costume and asked everyone else what the Duchess would wear. One thought that she would appear as the Duchesse de Bourgogne, another suggested as probable the guise of Princess of Dujabar, a third Psyche. Finally, a Courvoisier having asked her: “What are you going to wear, Oriane?” provoked the one response of which nobody had thought: “Why, nothing at all!” which at once set every tongue wagging, as revealing Oriane’s opinion as to the true social position of the new Greek Minister and the proper attitude to adopt towards him, that is to say the opinion which ought to have been foreseen namely that a duchess ‘was not expected’ to attend the fancy dress bali given by this new Minister: “I do not see that there is any necessity to go to the Greek Minister’s; I do not know him; I am not a Greek; why should I go to these people’s house, I have nothing to do with them?” said the Duchess. “But everybody will be there, they say it’s going to be charming!” cried Mme. de Gallardon. “Still, it’s just as charming sometimes to sit by one’s own fireside,” replied Mme. de Guermantes. The Courvoisiers could not get over this, but the Guermantes, without copying it, approved of their cousin’s attitude. “Naturally, everybody isn’t in a position like Oriane to break with all the conventions. But if you look at it in one way you can’t say she was actually wrong in wishing to shew that we are going rather far in flinging ourselves at the feet of all these foreigners who appear from heaven knows where.” Naturally, knowing the stream of comment which one or other attitude would not fail to provoke, Mme.

de Guermantes took as much pleasure in appearing at a party to which her hostess had not dared to count on her coming as in staying at home or spending the evening at the play with her husband on the night of a party to which ‘everybody was going,’ or, again, when people imagined that she would eclipse the finest diamonds with some historic diadem, by stealing into the room without a single jewel, and in another style of dress than what had been, wrongly, supposed to be essential to the occasion. Albeit she was anti-Dreyfusard (while retaining her belief in the innocence of Dreyfus, just as she spent her life in the social world believing only in abstract ideas) she had created an enormous sensation at a party at the Princesse de Ligne’s, first of all by remaining seated after all the ladies had risen to their feet as General Mercier entered the room, and then by getting up and in a loud voice asking for her carriage when a Nationalist orator had begun to address the gathering, thereby shewing that she did not consider that society was meant for talking politics; all heads were turned towards her at a Good Friday concert at which, although a Voltairean, she had not remained because she thought it indecent to bring Christ upon the stage. We know how important, even for the great queens of society, is that moment of the year at which the round of entertainment begins: so much so that the Marquise d’Amoncourt, who, from a need to say something, a form of mania, and also from want of perception, was always making a fool of herself, had actually replied to somebody who had called to condole with her on the death of her father, M. de Montmorency: “What makes it sadder still is that it should come at a time when one’s mirror is simply stuffed with cards!” Very well, at this point in the social year, when people invited the Duchesse de Guermantes to dinner, making every effort to see that she was not already engaged, she declined, for the one reason of which nobody in society would ever have thought; she was just starting on a cruise among the Norwegian fjords, which were so interesting. People in society were stupefied, and, without any thought of following the Duchess’s example, derived nevertheless from her action that sense of relief which one has in reading Kant when after the most rigorous demonstration of determinism one finds that above the world of necessity there is the world of freedom. Every invention of which no one has ever thought before excites the interest even of people who can derive no benefit from it. That of steam navigation was a small thing compared with the employment of steam navigation at that sedentary time of year called ‘the season.’ The idea that anyone could voluntarily renounce a hundred dinners or luncheons, twice as many afternoon teas, three times as many evening parties, the most brilliant

Mondays at the Opera and Tuesdays at the Français to visit the Norwegian fjords seemed to the Courvoisiers no more explicable than the idea of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, but conveyed to them a similar impression of independence and charm. So that not a day passed on which somebody might not be heard to ask, not merely: "You've heard Oriane's latest joke?" but "You know Oriane's latest?" and on 'Oriane's latest' as on 'Oriane's latest joke' would follow the comment: "How typical of Oriane!" "Isn't that pure Oriane?" Oriane's latest might be, for instance, that, having to write on behalf of a patriotic society to Cardinal X—, Bishop of Macon (whom M. de Guermantes when he spoke of him invariably called 'Monsieur de Mascon,' thinking this to be 'old French'), when everyone was trying to imagine what form the letter would take, and had no difficulty as to the opening words, the choice lying between 'Eminence,' and 'Monseigneur,' but was puzzled as to the rest, Oriane's letter, to the general astonishment, began: 'Monsieur le Cardinal,' following an old academic form, or: 'My Cousin,' this term being in use among the Princes of the Church, the Gsermantes and Crowned Heads, who prayed to God to take each and all of them into 'His fit and holy keeping.' To start people on the topic of an 'Oriane's latest' it was sufficient that at a performance at which all Paris was present and a most charming play was being given, when they looked for Mme. de Guermantes in the boxes of the Princesse de Parme, the Princesse de Guermantes, countless other ladies who had invited her, they discovered her sitting by herself, in black, with a tiny hat on her head, in a stall in which she had arrived before the curtain rose. "You hear better, when it's a play that's worth listening to," she explained, to the scandal of the Courvoisiers and the admiring bewilderment of the Guermantes and the Princesse de Parme, who suddenly discovered that the 'fashion' of hearing the beginning of a play was more up to date, was a proof of greater originality and intelligence (which need not astonish them, coming from Oriane) than that of arriving for the last act after a big dinner-party and 'going on' somewhere first. Such were the various kinds of surprise for which the Princesse de Parme knew that she ought to be prepared if she put a literary or social question to Mme. de Guermantes, one result of which was that during these dinner-parties at Oriane's her Royal Highness never ventured upon the slightest topic save with the uneasy and enraptured prudence of the bather emerging from between two breakers.

Among the elements which, absent from the three or four other more or less equivalent drawing-rooms that set the fashion for the Faubourg Saint-Germain, differentiated from them that of the Duchesse de Guermantes, just as Leibniz

allows that each monad, while reflecting the entire universe, adds to it something of its own, one of the least attractive was regularly furnished by one or two extremely good-looking women who had no title to be there apart from their beauty and the use that M. de Guermantes had made of them, and whose presence revealed at once, as does in other drawing-rooms that of certain otherwise unaccountable pictures, that in this household the husband was an ardent appreciator of feminine graces. They were all more or less alike, for the Duke had a taste for large women, at once statuesque and loose-limbed, of a type half-way between the Venus of Milo and the Samothracian Victory; often fair, rarely dark, sometimes auburn, like the most recent, who was at this dinner, that Vicomtesse d'Arpajon whom he had loved so well that for a long time he had obliged her to send him as many as ten telegrams daily (which slightly annoyed the Duchess), corresponded with her by carrier pigeon when he was at Guermantes, and from whom moreover he had long been so incapable of tearing himself away that, one winter which he had had to spend at Parma, he travelled back regularly every week to Paris, spending two days in the train, in order to see her.

As a rule these handsome 'supers' had been his mistresses but were no longer (as was Mme. d'Arpajon's case) or were on the point of ceasing to be so. It may well have been that the importance which the Duchess enjoyed in their sight and the hope of being invited to her house, though they themselves came of thoroughly aristocratic, but still not quite first-class stock, had prompted them, even more than the good looks and generosity of the Duke, to yield to his desires. Not that the Duchess would have placed any insuperable obstacle in the way of their crossing her threshold: she was aware that in more than one of them she had found an ally, thanks to whom she had obtained a thousand things which she wanted but which M. de Guermantes pitilessly denied his wife so long as he was not in love with some one else. And so the reason why they were not invited by the Duchess until their intimacy with the Duke was already far advanced lay principally in the fact that he, every time that he had embarked on the deep waters of love, had imagined nothing more than a brief flirtation, as a reward for which he considered an invitation from his wife to be more than adequate. And yet he found himself offering this as the price of far less, for a first kiss in fact, because a resistance upon which he had never reckoned had been brought into play or because there had been no resistance. In love it often happens that gratitude, the desire to give pleasure, makes us generous beyond the limits of what the other person's expectation and self-interest could have anticipated. But

then the realisation of this offer was hindered by conflicting circumstances. In the first place, all the women who had responded to M. de Guermantes's love, and sometimes even when they had not yet surrendered themselves to him, he had, one after another, segregated from the world. He no longer allowed them to see anyone, spent almost all his time in their company, looked after the education of their children to whom now and again, if one was to judge by certain speaking likenesses later on, he had occasion to present a little brother or sister. And so if, at the start of the connexion, the prospect of an introduction to Mme. de Guermantes, which had never crossed the mind of the Duke, had entered considerably into the thoughts of his mistress, their connexion had by itself altered the whole of the lady's point of view; the Duke was no longer for her merely the husband of the smartest woman in Paris, but a man with whom his new mistress was in love, a man moreover who had given her the means and the inclination for a more luxurious style of living and had transposed the relative importance in her mind of questions of social and of material advantage; while now and then a composite jealousy, into which all these factors entered, of Mme. de Guermantes animated the Duke's mistresses. But this case was the rarest of all; besides, when the day appointed for the introduction at length arrived (at a point when as a rule the Duke had lost practically all interest in the matter, his actions, like everyone's else, being generally dictated by previous actions the prime motive of which had already ceased to exist), it frequently happened that it was Mme. de Guermantes who had sought the acquaintance of the mistress in whom she hoped, and so greatly needed, to discover, against her dread husband, a valuable ally. This is not to say that, save at rare moments, in their own house, where, when the Duchess talked too much, he let fall a few words or, more dreadful still, preserved a silence which rendered her speechless, M. de Guermantes failed in his outward relations with his wife to observe what are called the forms. People who did not know them might easily misunderstand. Sometimes between the racing at Deauville, the course of waters and the return to Guermantes for the shooting, in the few weeks which people spend in Paris, since the Duchess had a liking for café-concerts, the Duke would go with her to spend the evening at one of these. The audience remarked at once, in one of those little open boxes in which there is just room for two, this Hercules in his 'smoking' (for in France we give to everything that is more or less British the one name that it happens not to bear in England), his monocle screwed in his eye, in his plump but finely shaped hand, on the ring-finger of which there glowed a sapphire, a plump cigar from which now and then he drew a puff of

smoke, keeping his eyes for the most part on the stage but, when he did let them fall upon the audience in which there was absolutely no one whom he knew, softening them with an air of gentleness, reserve, courtesy and consideration. When a verse struck him as amusing and not too indecent, the Duke would turn round with a smile to his wife, letting her share, by a twinkle of good-natured understanding, the innocent merriment which the new song had aroused in himself. And the spectators might believe that there was no better husband in the world than this, nor anyone more enviable than the Duchess — that woman outside whom every interest in the Duke's life lay, that woman with whom he was not in love, to whom he had been consistently unfaithful; when the Duchess felt tired, they saw M. de Guermantes rise, put on her cloak with his own hands, arranging her necklaces so that they did not catch in the lining, and clear a path for her to the street with an assiduous and respectful attention which she received with the coldness of the woman of the world who sees in such behaviour simply conventional politeness, at times even with the slightly ironical bitterness of the disabused spouse who has no illusion left to shatter. But despite these externals (another element of that politeness which has made duty evolve from the depths of our being to the surface, at a period already remote but still continuing for its survivors) the life of the Duchess was by no means easy. M. de Guermantes never became generous or human save for a new mistress who would take, as it generally happened, the Duchess's part; the latter saw becoming possible for her once again generosities towards inferiors, charities to the poor, even for herself, later on, a new and sumptuous motor-car. But from the irritation which developed as a rule pretty rapidly in Mme. de Guermantes at people whom she found too submissive the Duke's mistresses were not exempt. Presently the Duchess grew tired of them. Simultaneously, at this moment, the Duke's intimacy with Mme. d'Arpajon was drawing to an end. Another mistress dawned on the horizon.

No doubt the love which M. de Guermantes had had for each of them in succession would begin one day to make itself felt afresh; in the first place, this love in dying bequeathed them, like beautiful marbles — marbles beautiful to the Duke, become thus in part an artist, because he had loved them and was sensitive now to lines which he would not have appreciated without love — which brought into juxtaposition in the Duchess's drawing-room their forms long inimical, devoured by jealousies and quarrels, and finally reconciled in the peace of friendship; besides, this friendship itself was an effect of the love which had made M. de Guermantes observe in those who were his mistresses virtues

which exist in every human being but are perceptible only to the sensual eye, so much so that the ex-mistrêss, become ‘the best of comrades’ who would do anything in the world for one, is as recognised a type as the doctor or father who is not a doctor or a father but a friend. But during a period of transition the woman whom M. de Guermantes was preparing to abandon bewailed her lot, made scenes, shewed herself exacting, appeared indiscreet, became a nuisance. The Duke began to take a dislike to her. Then Mme. de Guermantes had an opportunity to bring into prominence the real or imagined defects of a person who annoyed her. Known as a kind woman, Mme. de Guermantes received the telephone messages, the confidences, the tears of the abandoned mistress and made no complaint. She laughed at them, first with her husband, then with a few chosen friends. And imagining that this pity which she shewed for the poor wretch gave her the right to make fun of her, even to her face, whatever the lady might say, provided it could be included among the attributes of the character for absurdity which the puke and Duchess had recently fabricated for her, Mme. de Guermantes had no hesitation in exchanging with her husband a glance of ironical connivance.

Meanwhile, as she sat down to table, the Princesse de Parme remembered that she had thought of inviting a certain other Princess to the Opera, and, wishing to be assured that this would not in any way offend Mme. de Guermantes, was preparing to sound her. At this moment there entered M. de Grouchy, whose train, owing to some block on the line, had been held up for an hour. He made what excuses he could. His wife, had she been a Courvoisier, would have died of shame. But Mme. de Grouchy was not a Guermantes for nothing. As her husband was apologising for being late:

“I see,” she broke in, “that even in little things arriving late is a tradition in your family.”

“Sit down, Grouchy, and don’t let them pull your leg,” said the Duke.

“I hope I move with the times, still I must admit that the Battle of Waterloo had its points, since it brought about the Restoration of the Bourbons, and better still in a way which made them unpopular. But you seem to be a regular Nimrod!”

“Well, as a matter of fact, I have had quite a good bag. I shall take the liberty of sending the Duchess six brace of pheasants to-morrow.”

An idea seemed to flicker in the eyes of Mme. de Guermantes. She insisted that M. de Grouchy must not give himself the trouble of sending the pheasants. And making a sign to the betrothed footman with whom I had exchanged a few

words on my way from the Elstir room:

"Poullein," she told him, "you will go to-morrow and fetch M. le Comte's pheasants and bring them straight back — you won't mind, will you, Grouchy, if I make a few little presents. Basin and I can't eat a whole dozen by ourselves."

"But the day after to-morrow will be soon enough," said M. de Grouchy.

"No, to-morrow suits me better," the Duchess insisted.

Poullein had turned pale; his appointment with his sweetheart would have to be missed. This was quite enough for the diversion of the Duchess, who liked to appear to be taking a human interest in everyone. "I know it's your day out," she went on to Poullein, "all you've got to do is to change with Georges; he can take to-morrow off and stay in the day after."

But the day after, Poullein's sweetheart would not be free. A holiday then was of no account to him. As soon as he was out of the room, everyone complimented the Duchess on the interest she took in her servants. "But I only behave towards them as I like people to behave to me." "That's just it. They can say they've found a good place with you." "Oh, nothing so very wonderful. But I think they all like me. That one is a little annoying because he's in love. He thinks it incumbent on him to go about with a long face."

At this point Poullein reappeared. "You're quite right," said M. de Grouchy, "he doesn't look much like smiling. With those fellows one has to be good but not too good." "I admit I'm not a very dreadful mistress. He'll have nothing to do all day but call for your pheasants, sit in the house doing nothing and eat his share of them." "There are plenty of people who would be glad to be in his place," said M. de Grouchy, for envy makes men blind.

"Oriane," began the Princesse de Parme, "I had a visit the other day from your cousin Heudicourt; of course she's a highly intelligent woman — she's a Guermantes, one can say no more, but they tell me she has a spitel ful tongue." The Duke fastened on his wife a slow gaze of deliberate stupefaction. Mme. de Guermantes began to smile. Gradually the Princess became aware of their pantomime. "But... do you mean to say you don't agree with me?" she stammered with growing uneasiness. "Really Ma'am, it's too good of you to pay any attention to Basin's faces. Now' Basin, you're not to hint nasty things about our cousins." "He thinks her too wicked?" inquired the Princess briskly. "Oh, dear me, no!" replied the Duchess. "I don't know who told your Highness that she was spiteful. On the contrary, she's an excellent creature who never said any harm of anyone, or did any harm to any one." "Ah!" sighed Mme. de Parme, greatly relieved. "I must say I never noticed anything myself. But I know it's

often difficult not to be a little spiteful when one is so full of wit...” “Ah! Now that is a quality of which she has even less.” “Less wit?” asked the stupefied Princess. “Come now, Oriane,” broke in the Duke in a plaintive tone, casting to right and left of him a glance of amusement, “you heard the Princess tell you that she was a superior woman.” “But isn’t she?” “Superior in chest measurement, at any rate.” “Don’t listen to him, Ma’am, he’s not sincere; she’s as stupid as a (h’m) goose,” came in a loud and rasping voice from Mme. de Guermantes, who, a great deal more ‘old French’ even than the Duke when he was not trying, did often deliberately seek to be, but in a manner the opposite of the lace-neckcloth, deliquescent style of her husband and in reality far more subtle, by a sort of almost peasant pronunciation which had a harsh and delicious flavour of the soil. “But she’s the best woman in the world. Besides, I don’t really know that one can call it stupidity when it’s carried to such a point as that. I don’t believe I ever met anyone quite like her; she’s a case for a specialist, there’s something pathological about her, she’s a sort of ‘innocent’ or ‘cretin’ or an ‘arrested development,’ like the people you see in melodramas, or in *L’Arlésienne*. I always ask myself, when she comes to see me, whether the moment may not have arrived at which her intelligence is going to dawn, which makes me a little nervous always.” The Princess was lost in admiration of these utterances but remained stupefied by the preceding verdict. “She repeated to me — and so did Mme. d’Epinay — what you said about ‘Teaser Augustus.’ It’s delicious,” she put in.

M. de Guermantes explained the joke to me. I wanted to tell him that his brother, who pretended not to know me, was expecting me that same evening at eleven o’clock. But I had not asked Robert whether I might mention this engagement, and as the fact that M. de Charlus had practically fixed it with me himself directly contradicted what he had told the Duchess I judged it more tactful to say nothing. “‘Teaser Augustus’ was not bad,” said M. de Guermantes, “but Mme. d’Heudicourt probably did not tell you a far better thing that Oriane said to her the other day in reply to an invitation to luncheon.” “No, indeed! Do tell me!” “Now Basin, you keep quiet; in the first place, it was a stupid remark, and it will make the Princess think me inferior even to my fool of a cousin. Though I don’t know why I should call her my cousin. She’s one of Basin’s cousins. Still, I believe she is related to me in some sort of way.” “Oh!” cried the Princesse de Parme, at the idea that she could possibly think Mme. de Guermantes stupid, and protesting helplessly that nothing could ever lower the Duchess from the place she held in her estimation. “Besides we have already

subtracted from her the quality of wit; as what I said to her tends to deny her certain other good qualities also, it seems to me inopportune to repeat it." "'Deny her!' 'Inopportune!' How well she expresses herself!" said the Duke with a pretence of irony, to win admiration for the Duchess. "Now, then, Basin, you're not to make fun of your wife." "I should explain to your Royal Highness," went on the Duke, "that Oriane's cousin may be superior, good, stout, anything you like to mention, but she is not exactly — what shall I say — lavish." "No, I know, she's terribly close-fisted," broke in the Princess. "I should not have ventured to use the expression, but you have hit on exactly the right word. You can see it in her house-keeping, and especially in the cooking, which is excellent, but strictly rationed." "Which leads to some quite amusing scenes," M. de Bréauté interrupted him. "For instance, my dear Basin, I was down at Heudicourt one day when you were expected, Oriane and yourself. They had made the most elaborate preparations when, during the afternoon, a footman brought in a telegram to say that you weren't coming." "That doesn't surprise me!" said the Duchess, who not only was difficult to secure, but liked people to know as much. "Your cousin read the telegram, was duly distressed, then immediately, without losing her head, telling herself that there was no point in going to unnecessary expense for so unimportant a gentleman as myself, called the footman back. 'Tell the cook not to put on the chicken!' she shouted after him. And that evening I heard her asking the butler: 'Well? What about the beef that was left over yesterday? Aren't you going to let us have that?'" "All the same, one must admit that the cheer you get there is of the very best," said the Duke, who fancied that in using this language he shewed himself to belong to the old school. "I don't know any house where one gets better food." "Or less," put in the Duchess. "It is quite wholesome and quite enough for what you would call a vulgar yokel like myself," went on the Duke, "one keeps one's appetite." "Oh, if it's to be taken as a cure, it's certainly more hygienic than sumptuous. Not that it's as good as all that," added Mme. de Guermantes, who was not at all pleased that the title of 'best table in Paris' should be awarded to any but her own. "With my cousin it's just the same as with those costive authors who hatch out every fifteen years a one-act play or a sonnet. The sort of thing people call a little masterpiece, trifles that are perfect gems, in fact the one thing I loathe most in the world. The cooking at Zénaïde's is not bad, but you would think it more ordinary if she was less parsimonious. There are some things her cook does quite well, and others that he spoils. I have had some thoroughly bad dinners there, as in most houses, only they've done me less harm there because the stomach is,

after all, more sensitive to quantity than to quality." "Well, to get on with the story," the Duke concluded "Zénaïde insisted that Oriane should go to luncheon there, and as my wife is not very fond of going out anywhere she resisted, wanted to be sure that under the pretence of a quiet meal she was not being trapped into some great banquet, and tried in vain to find out who else were to be of the party. 'You must come,' Zénaïde insisted, boasting of all the good things there would be to eat. 'You are going to have a *purée* of chestnuts, I need say no more than that, and there will be seven little*bouchées à la reine*.' 'Seven little *bouchées*!' cried Oriane, 'that means that we shall be at least eightl'" There was silence for a few seconds, and then the Princess having seen the point let her laughter explode like a peal of thunder. "Ah! 'Then we shall be eight,'— it's exquisite. How very well phrased!" she said, having by a supreme effort recaptured the expression she had heard used by Mme. d'Epinay, which this time was more appropriate. "Oriane, that was very charming of the Princess, she said your remark was well phrased." "But, my dear, you're telling me nothing new. I know how clever the Princess is," replied Mme. de Guermantes, who readily assimilated a remark when it was uttered at once by a Royal Personage and in praise of her own wit. "I am very proud that Ma'am should appreciate my humble phrasings. I don't remember, though, that I ever did say such a thing, and if I did it must have been to flatter my cousin, for if she had ordered seven 'mouthfuls,' the mouths, if I may so express myself, would have been a round dozen if not more."

"She used to have all M. de Bornier's manuscripts," went on the Princess, still speaking of Mme. d'Heudicourt, and anxious to make the most of the excellent reasons she might have for associating with that lady. "She must have dreamed it, I don't believe she ever even know him," said the Duchess. "What is really interesting about him is that he kept up a correspondence with people of different nationalities at the same time," put in the Vicomtesse d'Arpajon who, allied to the principal ducal and even reigning families of Europe, was always glad that people should be reminded of the fact. "Surely, Oriane," said M. de Guermantes, with ulterior purpose, "you can't have forgotten that dinner-party where you had M. de Bornier sitting next to you!" "But, Basin," the Duchess interrupted him, "if you mean to inform me that I knew M. de Bornier, why of course I did, he even called upon me several times, but I could never bring myself to invite him to the house because I should always have been obliged to have it disinfected afterwards with formol. As for the dinner you mean, I remember it only too well, but it was certainly not at Zénaïde's, who never set

eyes on Bornier in her life, and would probably think if you spoke to her of the *Fille de Roland* that you meant a Bonaparte Princess who was said at one time to be engaged to the son of the King of Greece; no, it was at the Austrian Embassy. Dear Hoyos imagined he was giving me a great treat by planting on the chair next to mine that pestiferous academician. I quite thought I had a squadron of mounted police sitting beside me. I was obliged to stop my nose as best I could, all through dinner; until the gruyère came round I didn't dare to breathe." M. de Guermantes, whose secret object was attained, made a furtive examination of his guests' faces to judge the effect of the Duchess's pleasantry. "You were speaking of correspondence; I must say, I thought Gambetta's admirable," she went on, to shew that she was not afraid to be found taking an interest in a proletarian and a radical. M. de Bréauté, who fully appreciated the brilliance of this feat of daring, gazed round him with an eye at once flashing and affectionate, after which he wiped his monocle.

"Gad, it's infernally dull that *Fille de Roland*," said M. de Guermantes, with the satisfaction which he derived from the sense of his own superiority to a work which had bored him so, perhaps also from the *suave mari magno* feeling one has in the middle of a good dinner, when one recalls so terrible an evening in the past. "Still, there were some quite good lines in it, and a patriotic sentiment."

I let it be understood that I had no admiration for M. de Bornier. "Indeed! You have some fault to find with him?" the Duke asked with a note of curiosity, for he always imagined when anyone spoke ill of a man that it must be on account of a personal resentment, just as to speak well of a woman marked the beginning of a love-affair. "I see you've got your knife into him. What did he do to you? You must tell us. Why yes, there must be some skeleton in the cupboard or you wouldn't run him down. It's long-winded, the *Fille de Roland*, but it's quite strong in parts." "Strong is just the right word for an author who smelt like that," Mme. de Guermantes broke in sarcastically. "If this poor boy ever found himself face to face with him, I can quite understand that he carried away an impression in his nostrils!" "I must confess, though, to Ma'am," the Duke went on, addressing the Princesse de Parme, "that quite apart from the*Fille de Roland*, in literature and even in music I am terribly old-fashioned; no old nightingale can be too stale for my taste. You won't believe me, perhaps, but in the evenings, if my wife sits down to the piano, I find myself calling for some old tune by Auber or Boieldieu, or even Beethoven! That's the sort of thing that appeals to me. As for Wagner, he sends me to sleep at once." "You are wrong there," said Mme. de Guermantes, "in spite of his insufferable long-windedness, Wagner was

a genius. *Lohengrin* is a masterpiece. Even in *Tristan* there are some amusing passages scattered about. And the Chorus of Spinners in the *Flying Dutchman* is a perfect marvel." "A'n't I right, Babal," said M. de Guermantes, turning to M. de Bréauté, "what we like is:

Les rendez-vous de noble compagnie
Se donnent tous en ce charmant séjour.

It's delicious. And *Fra Diavolo*, and the *Magic Flute*, and the *Chalet*, and the *Marriage of Figaro*, and the *Diamants de la Couronne* — there's music for you! It's the same thing in literature. For instance, I adore Balzac, the*Bal de Sceaux*, the *Mohicans de Paris*." "Oh, my dear, if you are going to begin about Balzac, we shall never hear the end of it; do wait, keep it for some evening when Mémé's here. He's even better, he knows it all by heart." Irritated by his wife's interruption, the Duke held her for some seconds under the fire of a menacing silence. And his huntsman's eyes reminded me of a brace of loaded pistols. Meanwhile Mme. d'Arpajon had been exchanging with the Princesse de Parme, upon tragic and other kinds of poetry, a series of remarks which did not reach me distinctly until I caught the following from Mme. d'Arpajon: "Oh, Ma'am is sure to be right; I quite admit he makes the world seem ugly, because he's unable to distinguish between ugliness and beauty, or rather because his insufferable vanity makes him believe that everything he says is beautiful; I agree with your Highness that in the piece we are speaking of there are some ridiculous things, quite unintelligible, errors of taste, that it is difficult to understand, that it's as much trouble to read as if it was written in Russian or Chinese, for of course it's anything in the world but French, still when one has taken the trouble, how richly one is rewarded, it's so full of imagination!" Of this little lecture I had missed the opening sentences. I gathered in the end not only that the poet incapable of distinguishing between beauty and ugliness was Victor Hugo, but furthermore that the poem which was as difficult to understand as Chinese or Russian was

Lorsque l’enfant paraît, le cercle de famille
Applaudit à grands cris.

a piece dating from the poet’s earliest period, and perhaps even nearer to Mme. Deshoulières than to the Victor Hugo of the *Légende des Siècles*. Far from condemning Mme. d’Arpajon as absurd, I saw her (the only one, at that table so matter-of-fact, so nondescript, at which I had sat down with such keen disappointment), I saw her in my mind’s eye crowned with that lace cap, with the long spiral ringlets falling from it on either side, which was worn by Mme. de Rémusat, Mme. de Broglie, Mme. de Saint-Aularie, all those distinguished women who in their fascinating letters quote with so much learning and so aptly passages from Sophocles, Schiller and the*Imitation*, but in whom the earliest poetry of the Romantics induced the alarm and exhaustion inseparable for my grandmother from the latest verses of Stéphane Mallarmé. “Mme. d’Arpajon is very fond of poetry,” said the Princesse de Parme to her hostess, impressed by the ardent tone in which the speech had been delivered. “No; she knows absolutely nothing about it,” replied Mme. de Guermantes in an undertone, taking advantage of the fact that Mme. d’Arpajon, who was dealing with an objection raised by General de Beautreillis, was too much intent upon what she herself was saying to hear what was being murmured by the Duchess. “She has become literary since she’s been forsaken. I can tell your Highness that it is I who have to bear the whole burden of it because it is to me that she comes in floods of tears whenever Basin hasn’t been to see her, which is practically every day. And yet it isn’t my fault, after all, if she bores him, and I can’t force him to go to her, although I would rather he were a little more faithful to her, because then I shouldn’t see quite so much of her myself. But she drives him crazy, and there’s nothing extraordinary in that. She isn’t a bad sort, but she’s boring to a degree you can’t imagine. And all this because Basin took it into his head for a year or so to play me false with her. And to have in addition a footman who has fallen in love with a little street-walker and goes about with a long face if I don’t request the young person to leave her profitable pavement for half an hour and come to tea with me! Oh! Life really is too tedious!” the Duchess languorously concluded. Mme. d’Arpajon bored M. de Guermantes principally because he had recently fallen in love with another, whom I discovered to be the Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc. At this moment the footman who had been deprived of his holiday was waiting at table. And it struck me that, still disconsolate, he was doing it with a good deal of difficulty, for I noticed that, in handing the dish to

M. de Châtellerault, he performed his task so awkwardly that the Duke's elbow came in contact several times with his own. The young Duke was not in the least annoyed with the blushing footman, but looked up at him rather with a smile in his clear blue eyes. This good humour seemed to me on the guest's part to betoken a kindness of heart. But the persistence of his smile led me to think that, aware of the servant's discomfiture, what he felt was perhaps really a malicious joy. "But, my dear, you know you're not revealing any new discovery when you tell us about Victor Hugo," went on the Duchess, this time addressing Mme. d'Arpajon whom she had just seen turn away from the General with a troubled air. "You mustn't expect to launch that young genius. Everybody knows that he has talent. What is utterly detestable is the Victor Hugo of the last stage, the *Légende des Siècles*, I forget all their names. But in the *Feuilles d'Automne*, the *Chants du Crépuscule*, there's a great deal that's the work of a poet, a true poet! Even in the*Contemplations*," went on the Duchess, whom none of her listeners dared to contradict, and with good reason, "there are still some quite pretty things. But I confess that I prefer not to venture farther than the*Crepuscule*! And then in the finer poems of Victor Hugo, and there really are some, one frequently comes across an idea, even a profound idea." And with the right shade of sentiment, bringing out the sorrowful thought with the full strength of her intonation, planting it somewhere beyond the sound of her voice, and fixing straight in front of her a charming, dreamy gaze, the Duchess said slowly: "Take this:

La douleur est un fruit,
Dieu ne le fait pas croître
Sur la branche trop faible encor pour le porter.

Or, better still:

Les morts durent bien peu.
Hélas, dans le cercueil ils tombent en poussière
Moins vite qu'en nos coeurs!"

And, while a smile of disillusionment contracted with a graceful undulation her sorrowing lips, the Duchess fastened on Mme. d'Arpajon the dreaming gaze of her charming, clear blue eyes. I was beginning to know them, as well as her voice, with its heavy drawl, its harsh savour. In those eyes and in that voice, I recognised much of the life of nature round Combray. Certainly, in the affectation with which that voice brought into prominence at times a rudeness of the soil there was more than one element: the wholly provincial origin of one branch of the Guermantes family, which had for long remained more localised,

more hardy, wilder, more provoking than the rest; and also the usage of really distinguished people, and of witty people who know that distinction does not consist in mincing speech, and the usage of nobles who fraternise more readily with their peasants than with the middle classes; peculiarities all of which the regal position of Mme. de Guermantes enabled her to display more easily to bring out with every sail spread. It appears that the same voice existed also in certain of her sisters whom she detested, and who, less intelligent than herself and almost plebeianly married, if one may coin this adverb to speak of unions with obscure noblemen, entrenched on their provincial estates, or, in Paris, in a Faubourg Saint-Germain of no brilliance, possessed this voice also but had bridled it, corrected it, softened it so far as lay in their power, just as it is very rarely that any of us presumes on his own originality and does not apply himself diligently to copying the most approved models. But Oriane was so much more intelligent, so much richer, above all, so much more in fashion than her sisters, she had so effectively, when Princesse des Laumes, behaved just as she pleased in the company of the Prince of Wales, that she had realised that this discordant voice was an attraction, and had made of it, in the social order, with the courage of originality rewarded by success, what in the theatrical order a Réjane, a Jeanne Granier (which implies no comparison, naturally, between the respective merits and talents of those two actresses) had made of theirs, something admirable and distinctive which possibly certain Réjane and Granier sisters, whom no one has ever known, strove to conceal as a defect.

To all these reasons for displaying her local originality, the favourite writers of Mme. de Guermantes — Mérimée, Meilhac and Halévy — had brought in addition, with the respect for what was natural, a feeling for the prosaic by which she attained to poetry and a spirit purely of society which called up distant landscapes before my eyes. Besides, the Duchess was fully capable, adding to these influences an artistic research of her own, of having chosen for the majority of her words the pronunciation that seemed to her most ‘He de France,’ most ‘Champenoise,’ since, if not quite to the same extent as her sister-in-law Marsantes, she rarely used anything but the pure vocabulary that might have been employed by an old French writer. And when one was tired of the composite patchwork of modern speech, it was, albeit one was aware that she expressed far fewer ideas, a thorough relaxation to listen to the talk of Mme. de Guermantes — almost the same feeling, if one was alone with her and she restrained and clarified still further her flow of words, as one has on hearing an old song. Then, as I looked at, as I listened to Mme. de Guermantes, I could see,

a prisoner in the perpetual and quiet afternoon of her eyes, a sky of the He de France or of Champagne spread itself, grey-blue, oblique, with the same angle of inclination as in the eyes of Saint-Loup.

Thus, by these several formations, Mme. de Guermantes expressed at once the most ancient aristocratic France, then, from a far later source, the manner in which the Duchesse de Broglie might have enjoyed and found fault with Victor Hugo under the July Monarchy, and, finally, a keen taste for the literature that sprang from Mérimée and Meilhac. The first of these formations attracted me more than the second, did more to console me for the disappointments of my pilgrimage to and arrival in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, so different from what I had imagined it to be; but even the second I preferred to the last. For, so long as Mme. de Guermantes was being, almost spontaneously, a Guermantes and nothing more, her Pailleronism, her taste for the younger Dumas were reflected and deliberate. As this taste was the opposite of my own, she was productive, to my mind, of literature when she talked to me of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and never seemed to me so stupidly Faubourg Saint-Germain as when she was talking literature.

Moved by this last quotation, Mme. d'Arpajon exclaimed: "'*Ces reliques du coeur ont aussi leur poussière*!'— Sir, you must write that down for me on my fan," she said to M. de Guermantes. "Poor woman, I feel sorry for her!" said the Princesse de Parme to Mme. de Guermantes. "No, really, Ma'am, you must not be soft-hearted, she has only got what she deserves." "But — you'll forgive me for saying this to you — she does really love him all the same!" "Oh, not at all; she isn't capable of it; she thinks she loves him just as she thought just now she was quoting Victor Hugo, when she repeated a line from Musset. Listen," the Duchess went on in a tone of melancholy, "nobody would be more touched than myself by any true sentiment. But let me give you an instance. Only yesterday, she made a terrible scene with Basin. Your Highness thinks perhaps that it was because he's in love with other women, because he no longer loves her; not in the least, it was because he won't put her sons down for the Jockey. Does Ma'am call that the behaviour of a woman in love? No; I will go farther;" Mme. de Guermantes added with precision, "she is a person of singular insensibility." Meanwhile it was with an eye sparkling with satisfaction that M. de Guermantes had listened to his wife talking about Victor Hugo 'point-blank' and quoting his poetry. The Duchess might frequently annoy him; at moments like this he was proud of her. "Oriane is really extraordinary. She can talk about anything, she has read everything. She could not possibly have guessed that the conversation

this evening would turn on Victor Hugo. Whatever subject you take up, she is ready for you, she can hold her own with the most learned scholars. This young man must be quite captivated."

"Do let us change the conversation," Mme. de Guermantes went on, "because she's dreadfully susceptible. You will think me quite old-fashioned," she began, turning to me. "I know that nowadays it's considered a weakness to care for ideas in poetry, poetry with some thought in it." "Old-fashioned?" asked the Princesse de Parme, quivering with the slight thrill sent through her by this new wave which she had not expected, albeit she knew that the conversation of the Duchesse de Guermantes always held in store for her these continuous and delightful shocks, that breath-catching panic, that wholesome exhaustion after which her thoughts instinctively turned to the necessity of taking a footbath in a dressing cabin and a brisk walk to 'restore her circulation.'

"For my part, no, Oriane," said Mme. de Brissac, "I don't in the least object to Victor Hugo's having ideas, quite the contrary, but I do object to his seeking for them in sheer monstrosities. After all, it was he who accustomed us to ugliness in literature. There are quite enough ugly things already in real life. Why can't we be allowed at least to forget it while we are reading. A distressing spectacle, from which we should turn away in real life, that is what attracts Victor Hugo."

"Victor Hugo is not as realistic as Zola though, surely?" asked the Princesse de Parme. The name of Zola did not stir a muscle on the face of M. de Beautreillis. The General's anti-Dreyfusism was too deep-rooted for him to seek to give expression to it. And his good-natured silence when anyone broached these topics moved the profane heart as a proof of the same delicacy that a priest shews in avoiding any reference to your religious duties, a financier when he takes care not to recommend your investing in the companies which he himself controls, a strong man when he behaves with lamblike gentleness and does not hit you in the jaw. "I know you're related to Admiral Jurien de la Gravière," was murmured to me with an air of connivance by Mme. de Varambon, the lady in waiting to the Princesse de Parme, an excellent but limited woman, procured for the Princess in the past by the Duke's mother. She had not previously uttered a word to me, and I could never afterwards, despite the admonitions of the Princess and my own protestations, get out of her mind the idea that I was in some way connected with the Academician Admiral, who was a complete stranger to me. The obstinate persistence of the Princesse de Parme's lady in waiting in seeing in me a nephew of Admiral Jurien de la Gravière was in itself

quite an ordinary form of silliness. But the mistake she made was only a crowning instance of all the other mistakes, less serious, more elaborate, unconscious or deliberate, which accompany one's name on the label which society writes out and attaches to one. I remember that a friend of the Guermantes who had expressed a keen desire to meet me gave me as the reason that I was a great friend of his cousin, Mme. de Chaussegros. "She is a charming person, she's so fond of you." I scrupulously, though quite vainly, insisted on the fact that there must be some mistake, as I did not know Mme. de Chaussegros. "Then it's her sister you know; it comes to the same thing. She met you in Scotland." I had never been in Scotland, and took the futile precaution, in my honesty, of letting my informant know this. It was Mme. de Chaussegros herself who had said that she knew me, and no doubt sincerely believed it, as a result of some initial confusion, for from that time onwards she never failed to hold out her hand to me whenever she saw me. And as, after all, the world in which I moved was precisely that in which Mme. de Chaussegros moved my modesty had neither rhyme nor reason. To say that I was intimate with the Chaussegros was, literally, a mistake, but from the social point of view was to state an equivalent of my position, if one can speak of the social position of so young a man as I then was. It therefore mattered not in the least that this friend of the Guermantes should tell me only things that were false about myself, he neither lowered nor exalted me (from the worldly point of view) in the idea which he continued to hold of me. And when all is said, for those of us who are not professional actors the tedium of living always in the same character is removed for a moment, as if we were to go on the boards, when another person forms a false idea of us, imagines that we are friends with a lady whom we do not know and are reported to have met in the course of a delightful tour of a foreign country which we have never made. Errors that multiply themselves and are harmless when they have not the inflexible rigidity of this one which had been committed, and continued for the rest of her life to be committed, in spite of my denials, by the imbecile lady in waiting to Mme. de Parme, rooted for all time in the belief that I was related to the tiresome Admiral Jurien de la Gravière. "She is not very strong in her head," the Duke confided to me, "and besides, she ought not to indulge in too many libations. I fancy, she's slightly under the influence of Bacchus." As a matter of fact Mme. de Varambon had drunk nothing but water, but the Duke liked to find scope for his favourite figures of speech. "But Zola is not a realist, Ma'am, he's a poet!" said Mme. de Guermantes, drawing inspiration from the critical essays which she had read in recent years and

adapting them to her own personal genius. Agreeably buffeted hitherto, in the course of this bath of wit, a bath stirred for herself, which she was taking this evening and which, she considered, must be particularly good for her health, letting herself be swept away by the waves of paradox which curled and broke one after another, before this, the most enormous of them all, the Princesse de Parme jumped for fear of being knocked over. And it was in a choking voice, as though she were quite out of breath, that she now gasped: “Zola a poet!” “Why, yes,” answered the Duchess with a laugh, entranced by this display of suffocation. “Your Highness must have remarked how he magnifies everything he touches. You will tell me that he touches just what — perish the thought! But he makes it into something colossal. His is the epic dungheap. He is the Homer of the sewers! He has not enough capitals to print Cambronne’s word.” Despite the extreme exhaustion which she was beginning to feel, the Princess was enchanted; never had she felt better. She would not have exchanged for an invitation to Schonbrunn, albeit that was the one thing that really flattered her, these divine dinner-parties at Mme. de Guermantes’s, made invigorating by so liberal a dose of attic salt. “He writes it with a big C,” cried Mme. d’Arpajon. “Surely with a big M, I think, my dear,” replied Mme. de Guermantes, exchanging first with her husband a merry glance which implied: “Did you ever hear such an idiot?” “Wait a minute, now.” Mme. de Guermantes turned to me, fixing on me a tender, smiling gaze, because, as an accomplished hostess, she was anxious to display her own knowledge of the artist who interested me specially, to give me, if I required it, an opportunity for exhibiting mine. “Wait,” she urged me, gently waving her feather fan, so conscious was she at this moment that she was performing in full the duties of hospitality, and, that she might be found wanting in none of them, making a sign also to the servants to help me to more of the asparagus and *mousseline* sauce: “wait, now, I do believe that Zola has actually written an essay on Elstir, the painter whose things you were looking at just now — the only ones of his, really, that I care for,” she concluded. As a matter of fact she hated Elstir’s work, but found a unique quality in anything that was in her own house. I asked M. de Guermantes if he knew the name of the gentleman in the tall hat who figured in the picture of the crowd and whom I recognised as the same person whose portrait the Guermantes also had and had hung beside the other, both dating more or less from the same early period in which Elstir’s personality was not yet completely established and he derived a certain inspiration from Manet. “Good Lord, yes,” he replied, “I know it’s a fellow who is quite well-known and no fool either in his own line,

but I have no head for names. I have it on the tip of my tongue, Monsieur.... Monsieur.... oh, well, it doesn't matter, I can't remember it. Swann would be able to tell you, it was he who made Mme. de Guermantes buy all that stuff; she is always too good-natured, afraid of hurting people's feelings if she refuses to do things; between ourselves, I believe he's landed us with a lot of rubbish. What I can tell you is that the gentleman you mean has been a sort of Maecenas to M. Elstir, he started him and has often helped him out of tight places by ordering pictures from him. As a compliment to this man — if you can call that sort of thing a compliment — he has painted him standing about among that crowd, where with his Sunday-go-to-meeting look he creates a distinctly odd effect. He may be a big gun in his own way but he is evidently not aware of the proper time and place for a top hat. With that thing on his head, among all those bare-headed girls, he looks like a little country lawyer on the razzle-dazzle. But tell me, you seem quite gone on his pictures. If I had only known, I should have got up the subject properly. Not that there's any need to rack one's brains over the meaning of M. Elstir's work, as one would for Ingres's *Source* or the *Princes in the Towier* by Paul Delaroche. What one appreciates in his work is that it's shrewdly observed, amusing, Parisian, and then one passes on to the next thing. One doesn't need to be an expert to look at that sort of thing. I know of course that they're merely sketches, still, I don't feel myself that he puts enough work into them. Swann was determined that we should buy a*Bundle of Asparagus*. In fact it was in the house for several days. There was nothing else in the picture, a bundle of asparagus exactly like what you're eating now. But I must say I declined to swallow M. Elstir's asparagus. He asked three hundred francs for them. Three hundred francs for a bundle of asparagus. A louis, that's as much as they're worth, even if they are out of season. I thought it a bit stiff. When he puts real people into his pictures as well, there's something rather caddish, something detrimental about him which does not appeal to me. I am surprised to see a delicate mind, a superior brain like yours admire that sort of thing." "I don't know why you should say that, Basin," interrupted the Duchess, who did not like to hear people run down anything that her rooms contained. "I am by no means prepared to admit that there's nothing distinguished in Elstir's pictures. You have to take it or leave it. But it's not always lacking in talent. And you must admit that the ones I bought are singularly beautiful." "Well, Oriane, in that style of thing I'd a thousand times rather have the little study by M. Vibert we saw at the water-colour exhibition. There's nothing much in it, if you like, you could take it in the palm of your hand, but you can see the man's clever through and through:

that unwashed scarecrow of a missionary standing before the sleek prelate who is making his little dog do tricks, it's a perfect little poem of subtlety, and in fact goes really deep." "I believe you know M. Elstir," the Duchess went on to me, "as a man, he's quite pleasant." "He is intelligent," said the Duke; "one is surprised, when one talks to him, that his painting should be so vulgar." "He is more than intelligent, he is really quite clever," said the Duchess in the confidently critical tone of a person who knew what she was talking about. "Didn't he once start a portrait of you, Oriane?" asked the Princesse de Parme. "Yes, in shrimp pink," replied Mme. de Guermantes, "but that's not going to hand his name down to posterity. It's a ghastly thing; Basin wanted to have it destroyed." This last statement was one which Mme. de Guermantes often made. But at other times her appreciation of the picture was different: "I do not care for his painting, but he did once do a good portrait of me." The former of these judgments was addressed as a rule to people who spoke to the Duchess of her portrait, the other to those who did not refer to it and whom therefore she was anxious to inform of its existence. The former was inspired in her by coquetry, the latter by vanity. "Make a portrait of you look ghastly! Why, then it can't be a portrait, it's a falsehood; I don't know one end of a brush from the other, but I'm sure if I were to paint you, merely putting you down as I see you, I should produce a masterpiece," said the Princesse de Parme ingenuously. "He sees me probably as I see myself, without any allurements," said the Duchesse de Guermantes, with the look, melancholy, modest and coaxing, which seemed to her best calculated to make her appear different from what Elstir had portrayed. "That portrait ought to appeal to Mme. de Gallardon," said the Duke. "Because she knows nothing about pictures?" asked the Princesse de Parme, who knew that Mme. de Guermantes had an infinite contempt for her cousin. "But she's a very good woman, isn't she?" The Duke assumed an air of profound astonishment. "Why, Basin, don't you see the Princess is making fun of you?" (The Princess had never dreamed of doing such a thing.) "She knows as well as you do that Gallardonette is an old poison," went on Mme. de Guermantes, whose vocabulary, limited as a rule to all these old expressions, was as savoury as those dishes which it is possible to come across in the delicious books of Pampille, but which have in real life become so rare, dishes where the jellies, the butter, the gravy, the quails are all genuine, permit of no alloy, where even the salt is brought specially from the salt-marshes of Brittany; from her accent, her choice of words, one felt that the basis of the Duchess's conversation came directly from Guermantes. In this way the Duchess differed profoundly from her

nephew Saint-Loup, the prey of so many new ideas and expressions; it is difficult, when one's mind is troubled by the ideas of Kant and the longings of Baudelaire, to write the exquisite French of Henri IV, which meant that the very purity of the Duchess's language was a sign of limitation, and that, in her, both her intelligence and her sensibility had remained proof against all innovation. Here again, Mme. de Guermantes's mind attracted me just because of what it excluded was exactly the content of my own thoughts) and by everything which by virtue of that exclusion, it had been able to preserve, that seductive vigour of the supple bodies which no exhausting necessity to think no moral anxiety or nervous trouble has deformed. Her mind, of a formation so anterior to my own, was for me the equivalent of what had been offered me by the procession of the girls of the little band along the seashore Mme. de Guermantes offered me, domesticated and held in subjection by her natural courtesy, by the respect due to another person's intellectual worth, all the energy and charm of a cruel little girl of one of the noble families round Combray who from her childhood had been brought up in the saddle, tortured cats, gouged out the eyes of rabbits, and; albeit she had remained a pillar of virtue, might equally well have been, a good few years ago now, the most brilliant mistress of the Prince de Sagan. Only she was incapable of realising what I had sought for in her, the charm of her historic name, and the tiny quantity of it that I had found in her, a rustic survival from Guermantes. Were our relations founded upon a misunderstanding which could not fail to become manifest as soon as my homage, instead of being addressed to the relatively superior woman that she believed herself to be, should be diverted to some other woman of equal mediocrity and breathing the same unconscious charm? A misunderstanding so entirely natural, and one that will always exist between a young dreamer like myself and a woman of the world, one however that profoundly disturbs him, so long as he has not yet discovered the nature of his imaginative faculties and has not acquired his share of the inevitable disappointments which he is destined to find in people, as in the theatre, in his travels and indeed in love. M. de Guermantes having declared (following upon Elstir's asparagus and those that were brought round after the *financière* chicken) that green asparagus grown in the open air, which, as has been so quaintly said by the charming writer who signs himself E. de Clermont-Tonnerre, "have not the impressive rigidity of their sisters," ought to be eaten with eggs: "One man's meat is another man's poison, as they say," replied M. de Bréauté. "In the province of Canton, in China, the greatest delicacy that can be set before one is a dish of ortolan's eggs completely rotten." M. de Bréauté, the

author of an essay on the Mormons which had appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, moved in none but the most aristocratic circles, but among these visited only such as had a certain reputation for intellect, with the result that from his presence, were it at all regular, in a woman's house one could tell that she had a 'salon.' He pretended to a loathing of society, and assured each of his duchesses in turn that it was for the sake of her wit and beauty that he came to see her. They all believed him. Whenever, with death in his heart, he resigned himself to attending a big party at the Princesse de Parme's, he summoned them all to accompany him, to keep up his courage, and thus appeared only to be moving in the midst of an intimate group. So that his reputation as an intellectual might survive his worldly success, applying certain maxims of the Guermantes spirit, he would set out with ladies of fashion on long scientific expeditions at the height of the dancing season, and when a woman who was a snob, and consequently still without any definite position, began to go everywhere, he would put a savage obstinacy into his refusal to know her, to allow himself to be introduced to her. His hatred of snobs was a derivative of his snobbishness, but made the simpletons (in other words, everyone) believe that he was immune from snobbishness. "Babal always knows everything," exclaimed the Duchesse de Guermantes. "I think it must be charming, a country where you can be quite sure that your dairyman will supply you with really rotten eggs, eggs of the year of the comet. I can see myself dipping my bread and butter in them. I must say, you get the same thing at aunt Madeleine's" (Mme. de Villeparisis's) "where everything's served in a state of putrefaction, eggs included." Then, as Mme. d'Arpajon protested, "But my dear Phili, you know it as well as I do. You can see the chicken in the egg. What I can't understand is how they manage not to fall out. It's not an omelette you get there, it's a poultry-yard. You were so wise not to come to dinner there yesterday, there was a brill cooked in carbolic! I assure you, it wasn't a dinner-table, it was far more like an operating-table. Really, Norpois carries loyalty to the pitch of heroism. He actually asked for more!" "I believe I saw you at dinner there the time she made that attack on M. Bloch" (M. de Guermantes, perhaps to give to an Israelite name a more foreign sound, pronounced the 'ch' in Bloch not like a 'k' but as in the German 'hoch') "when he said about some poit" (poet) "or other that he was sublime. Châtellerault did his best to break M. Bloch's shins, the fellow didn't understand in the least and thought my nephew's kick was aimed at a young woman sitting opposite him." (At this point, M. de Guermantes coloured slightly.) "He did not realise that he was annoying our aunt by his 'sublimes' chucked about all over

the place like that. In short, aunt Madeleine, who doesn't keep her tongue in her pocket, turned on him with: 'Indeed, Sir, and what epithet do you keep for M. de Bousset?'" (M. de Guermantes thought that, when one mentioned a famous name, the use of 'Monsieur' and a particle was eminently 'old school.') "That put him in his place, all right." "And what answer did this M. Bloch make?" came in a careless tone from Mme. de Guermantes, who, running short for the moment of original ideas, felt that she must copy her husband's teutonic pronunciation. "Ah! I can assure you, M. Bloch did not wait for any more, he's still running." "Yes, I remember quite well seeing you there that evening," said Mme. de Guermantes with emphasis as though, coming from her, there must be something in this reminiscence highly flattering to myself. "It is always so interesting at my aunt's. At the last party she gave, which was, of course, when I met you, I meant to ask you whether that old gentleman who went past where we were, sitting wasn't François Coppée. You must know who everyone is," she went on, sincerely envious of my relations with poets and poetry, and also out of 'consideration' for myself, the wish to establish in a better position in the eyes of her other guests a young man so well versed in literature. I assured the Duchess that I had not observed any celebrities at Mme. de Villeparisis's party. "What!" she replied with a bewilderment which revealed that her respect for men of letters and her contempt for society were more superficial than she said, perhaps even than she thought, "What! There were no famous authors there! You astonish me! Why, I saw all sorts of quite impossible people!" I remembered the evening in question distinctly owing to an entirely trivial incident that had occurred at the party. Mme. de Villeparisis had introduced Bloch to Mme. Alphonse de Rothschild, but my friend had not caught the name and, thinking he was talking to an old English lady who was a trifle mad had replied only in monosyllables to the garrulous conversation of the historic beauty, when Mme. de Villeparisis in making her known to some one else uttered, quite distinctly this time: "The Baronne Alphonse de Rothschild." Thereupon there had coursed suddenly and simultaneously through Bloch's arteries so many ideas of millions and of social importance, which it would have been more prudent to subdivide and separate, that he had undergone, so to speak, a momentary failure of heart and brain alike, and cried aloud in the dear old lady's presence: "If I'd only known!" an exclamation the silliness of which kept him from sleeping for at least a week afterwards. His remark was of no great interest, but I remembered it as a proof that sometimes in this life, under the stress of an exceptional emotion, people do say what is in their minds. "I fancy Mme. de Villeparisis is not

absolutely... moral," said the Princesse de Parme, who knew that the best people did not visit the Duchess's aunt, and, from what the Duchess herself had just been saying, that one might speak freely about her. But, Mme. de Guermantes not seeming to approve of this criticism, she hastened to add: "Though, of course, intellect carried to that degree excuses everything." "But you take the same view of my aunt that everyone else does," replied the Duchess, "which is, really, quite mistaken. It's just what Mémé was saying to me only yesterday." She blushed; a reminiscence unknown to me filmed her eyes. I formed the supposition that M. de Charlus had asked her to cancel my invitation, as he had sent Robert to ask me not to go to her house. I had the impression that the blush — equally incomprehensible to me — which had tinged the Duke's cheek when he made some reference to his brother could not be attributed to the same cause. "My poor aunt — she will always have the reputation of being a lady of the old school, of sparkling wit and uncontrolled passions. And really there's no more middle-class, serious, commonplace mind in Paris. She will go down as a patron of the arts, which means to say that she was once the mistress of a great painter, though he was never able to make her understand what a picture was; and as for her private life, so far from being a depraved woman, she was so much made for marriage, so conjugal from her cradle that, not having succeeded in keeping a husband, who incidentally was a cad, she has never had a love-affair which she hasn't taken just as seriously as if it were holy matrimony, with the same susceptibilities, the same quarrels, the same fidelity. By which token, those relations are often the most sincere; you'll find, in fact, more inconsolable lovers than husbands." "Yet, Oriane, if you take the case of your brother-in-law Palamède you were speaking about just now; no mistress in the world could ever dream of being mourned as that poor Mme. de Charlus has been." "Ah!" replied the Duchess, "Your Highness must permit me to be not altogether of her opinion. People don't all like to be mourned in the same way, each of us has his preferences." "Still, he did make a regular cult of her after her death. It is true that people sometimes do for the dead what they would not have done for the living." "For one thing," retorted Mme. de Guermantes in a dreamy tone which belied her teasing purpose, "we go to their funerals, which we never do for the living!" M. de Guermantes gave a sly glance at M. de Bréauté as though to provoke him into laughter at the Duchess's wit. "At the same time I frankly admit," went on Mme. de Guermantes, "that the manner in which I should like to be mourned by a man I loved would not be that adopted by my brother-in-law." The Duke's face darkened. He did not like to hear his wife utter rash judgments,

especially about M. de Charlus. “You are very particular. His grief set an example to everyone,” he reproved her stiffly. But the Duchess had in dealing with her husband that sort of boldness which animal tamers shew, or people who live with a madman and are not afraid of making him angry. “Oh, very well, just as you like — he does set an example, I never said he didn’t, he goes every day to the cemetery to tell her how many people he has had to luncheon, he misses her enormously, but — as he’d mourn for a cousin, a grandmother, a sister. It is not the grief of a husband. It is true that they were a pair of saints, which makes it all rather exceptional.” M. de Guermantes, infuriated by his wife’s chatter, fixed on her with a terrible immobility a pair of eyes already loaded. “I don’t wish to say anything against poor Mémé, who, by the way, could not come this evening,” went on the Duchess, “I quite admit there’s no one like him, he’s delightful; he has a delicacy, a warmth of heart that you don’t as a rule find in men. He has a woman’s heart, Mémé has!” “What you say is absurd,” M. de Guermantes broke in sharply. “There’s nothing effeminate about Mémé, I know nobody so manly as he is.” “But I am not suggesting that he’s the least bit in the world effeminate. Do at least take the trouble to understand what I say,” retorted the Duchess. “He’s always like that the moment anyone mentions his brother,” she added, turning to the Princesse de Parme. “It’s very charming, it’s a pleasure to hear him. There’s nothing so nice as two brothers who are fond of each other,” replied the Princess, as many a humbler person might have replied, for it is possible to belong to a princely race by birth and at the same time to be mentally affiliated to a race that is thoroughly plebeian.

“As we’re discussing your family, Oriane,” said the Princess, “I saw your nephew Saint-Loup yesterday; I believe he wants to ask you to do something for him.” The Duc de Guermantes bent his Olympian brow. When he did not himself care to do a service, he preferred his wife not to assume the responsibility for it, knowing that it would come to the same thing in the end and that the people to whom the Duchess would be obliged to apply would put this concession down to the common account of the household, just as much as if it had been asked of them by the husband alone. “Why didn’t he tell me about it himself?” said the Duchess. “He was here yesterday and stayed a couple of hours, and heaven only knows what a bore he managed to make himself. He would be no stupider than anyone else if he had only the sense, like many people we know, to be content with being a fool. It’s his veneer of knowledge that’s so terrible. He wants to preserve an open mind — open to all the things he doesn’t understand. He talks to you about Morocco. It’s appalling.”

“He can’t go back there, because of Rachel,” said the Prince de Foix “Surely, now that they’ve broken it off,” interrupted M. de Bréauté. “So far from breaking it off, I found her a couple of days ago in Robert’s rooms, they didn’t look at all like people who’d quarrelled, I can assure you,” replied the Prince de Foix, who loved to spread abroad every rumour that could damage Robert’s chances of marrying, and might for that matter have been misled by one of the intermittent resumptions of a connexion that was practically at an end.

“That Rachel was speaking to me about you, I see her like that in the mornings, on the way to the Champs-Elysées; she’s a kind of head-in-air, as you say, what you call ‘unlaced,’ a sort of ‘Dame aux Camélias,’ only figuratively speaking, of course.” This speech was addressed to me by Prince Von, who liked always to appear conversant with French literature and Parisian catchwords.

“Why, that’s just what it was — Morocco!” exclaimed the Princess, flinging herself into this opening. “What on earth can he want in Morocco?” asked M. de Guermantes sternly; “Oriane can do absolutely nothing for him there, as he knows perfectly well.” “He thinks he invented strategy,” Mme. de Guermantes pursued the theme, “and then he uses impossible words for the most trivial things, which doesn’t prevent him from making blots all over his letters. The other day he announced that he’d been given some sublime potatoes, and that he’d taken a *sublime* stage box.” “He speaks Latin,” the Duke went one better. “What! Latin?” the Princesse gasped. “‘Pon my soul he does! Ma’am can ask Oriane if I’m not telling the truth.” “Why, of course, Ma’am; the other day he said to us straight out, without stopping to think: ‘I know of no more touching example of *sic transit gloria mundi*.’ I can repeat the phrase now to your Highness because, after endless inquiries and by appealing to *linguists*, we succeeded in reconstructing it, but Robert flung it out without pausing for breath, one could hardly make out that there was Latin in it, he was just like a character in the *Malade Imaginaire*. And all this referred simply to the death of the Empress of Austria!” “Poor woman!” cried the Princess, “what a delicious creature she was.” “Yes,” replied the Duchess, “a trifle mad, a trifle headstrong, but she was a thoroughly good woman, a nice, kind-hearted lunatic; the only thing I could never make out about her was why she had never managed to get her teeth made to fit her; they always came loose half-way through a sentence and she was obliged to stop short or she’d have swallowed them.” “That Rachel was speaking to me about you, she told me that young Saint-Loup worshipped you, that he was fonder of you than he was of her,” said Prince Von to me, devouring his food like an ogre as he spoke, his face scarlet, his teeth bared by

his perpetual grin. “But in that case she must be jealous of me and hate me,” said I. “Not at all, she told me all sorts of nice things about you. The Prince de Foix’s mistress would perhaps be jealous if he preferred you to her. You don’t understand? Come home with me, and I’ll explain it all to you.” “I’m afraid I can’t, I’m going on to M. de Charlus at eleven.” “Why, he sent round to me yesterday to ask me to dine with him this evening, but told me not to come after a quarter to eleven. But if you must go to him, at least come with me as far as the Théâtre Français, you will be in the periphery,” said the Prince, who thought doubtless that this last word meant ‘proximity’ or possibly ‘centre.’

But the bulging eyes in his coarse though handsome red face frightened me and I declined, saying that a friend was coming to call for me. This reply seemed to me in no way offensive. The Prince, however, apparently formed a different impression of it for he did not say another word to me.

“I really must go and see the Queen of Naples; what a grief it must be to her,” said (or at least appeared to me to have said) the Princesse de Parme. For her words had come to me only indistinctly through the intervening screen of those addressed to me, albeit in an undertone, by Prince Von, who had doubtless been afraid, if he spoke louder, of being overheard by the Prince de Foix. “Oh, dear, no!” replied the Duchess, “I don’t believe it has been any grief at all.” “None at all! You do always fly to extremes so, Oriane,” said M. de Guermantes, resuming his part of the cliff which by standing up to the wave forces it to fling higher its crest of foam. “Basin knows even better than I that I’m telling the truth,” replied the Duchess, “but he thinks he’s obliged to look severe because you are present, Ma’am, and he’s afraid of my shocking you.” “Oh, please, no, I beg of you,” cried the Princesse de Parme, dreading the slightest alteration on her account of these delicious Fridays at the Duchesse de Guermantes’s, this forbidden fruit which the Queen of Sweden herself had not yet acquired the right to taste. “Why, it was Basin himself that she told, when he said to her with a duly sorrowful expression: ‘But the Queen is in mourning; for whom, pray, is it a great grief to your Majesty?’—’No, it’s not a deep mourning, it’s a light mourning, quite a light mourning, it’s my sister.’ The truth is, she’s delighted about it, as Basin knows perfectly well, she invited us to a party that very evening, and gave me two pearls. I wish she could lose a sister every day! So far from weeping for her sister’s death, she was in fits of laughter over it. She probably says to herself, like Robert, ‘*sic transit* ——’ I forget how it goes on,” she added modestly, knowing how it went on perfectly well.

In saying all this Mme. de Guermantes was only being witty, and with

complete insincerity, for the Queen of Naples, like the Duchesse d'Alençon, also doomed to a tragic fate, had the warmest heart in the world and mourned quite sincerely for her kinsfolk. Mme. de Guermantes knew those noble Bavarian sisters, her cousins, too well not to be aware of this. "He would like not to go back to Morocco," said the Princesse de Parme, alighting hurriedly again upon the perch of Robert's name which had been held out to her, quite unintentionally, by Mme. de Guermantes. "I believe you know General de Monserfeuil." "Very slightly," replied the Duchess, who was an intimate friend of the officer in question. The Princess explained what it was that Saint-Loup wanted. "Good gracious, yes, if I see him — it is possible that I may meet him," the Duchess replied, so as not to appear to be refusing, the occasions of her meeting General de Monserfeuil seeming to extend rapidly farther apart as soon as it became a question of her asking him for anything. This uncertainty did not, however, satisfy the Duke, who interrupted his wife: "You know perfectly well you won't seeing him, Oriane, and besides you have already asked him for two thing which he hasn't done. My wife has a passion for doing good turns to people," he went on, growing more and more furious, in order to force the Princess to withdraw her request, without there being any question made of his wife's good nature and so that Mme. de Parme should throw the blame back upon his own character, which was essentially obstructive. "Robert could get anything he wanted out of Monserfeuil. Only, as he happens not to know himself what he wants, he gets us to ask for it because he knows there's no better way of making the whole thing fall through. Oriane has asked too many favours of Monserfeuil. A request from her now would be a reason for him to refuse." "Oh, in that case, it would be better if the Duchess did nothing," said Mme. de Parme.

"Obviously!" the Duke closed the discussion. "Poor General, he's been defeated again at the elections," said the Princess, so as to turn the conversation from Robert. "Oh, it's nothing serious, it's only the seventh time," said the Duke, who, having been obliged himself to retire from politics, quite enjoyed hearing of other people's failures at the polls. "He has consoled himself by giving his wife another baby." "What! Is that poor Mme. de Monserfeuil in an interesting condition again?" cried the Princess.

"Why, of course," replied the Duke, "that's the one division where the poor General has never failed to get in."

In the period that followed I was continually to be invited, were it with a small party only, to these repasts at which I had at one time imagined the guests as seated like the Apostles in the Sainte-Chapelle. They did assemble there

indeed, like the early Christians, not to partake merely of a material nourishment, which incidentally was exquisite, but in a sort of social Eucharist; so that in the course of a few dinner-parties I assimilated the acquaintance of all the friends of my hosts, friends to whom they presented me with a shade of benevolent patronage so marked (as a person for whom they had always had a sort of parental affection) that there was not one among them who would not have felt himself to be failing in his duty to the Duke and Duchess if he had given a ball without including my name on his list, and at the same time, while I sipped one of those Yquems which lay concealed in the Guermantes cellars, I tasted ortolans dressed according to each of the different recipes which the Duke himself used to elaborate and modified with prudence. However, for one who had already set his knees more than once beneath the mystic board, the consumption of the latter was not indispensable. Old friends of M. and Mme. de Guermantes came in to see them after dinner, 'with the tooth-picks,' as Mme. Swann would have said, without being expected, and took in winter a cup of tilleul in the lighted warmth of the great drawing-room, in summer a glass of orangeade in the darkness of the little rectangular strip of garden outside. There was no record of anything else, among the Guermantes, in these evenings in the garden, but orangeade. It had a sort of ritual meaning. To have added other refreshments would have seemed to be falsifying the tradition, just as a big at-home in the Faubourg Saint-Germain ceases to be an at-home if there is a play also, or music. You must be supposed to have come simply — though there be five hundred of you — to pay a call on, let us say, the Princesse de Guermantes. People marvelled at my influence because I was able to procure the addition to this orangeade of a jug containing the juice of stewed cherries or stewed pears. I took a dislike on this account to the Prince d'Agrigente, who was like all the people who, lacking in imagination but not in covetousness, take a keen interest in what one is drinking and ask if they may taste a little of it themselves. Which meant that, every time, M. d'Agrigente, by diminishing my ration, spoiled my pleasure. For this fruit juice can never be provided in sufficient quantities to quench one's thirst for it. Nothing is less cloying than these transpositions into flavour of the colour of a fruit which when cooked seems to have travelled backwards to the past season of its blossoming. Blushing like an orchard in spring, or, it may be, colourless and cool like the zephyr beneath the fruit-trees, the juice lets itself be breathed and gazed into one drop by drop, and M. d'Agrigente prevented me, regularly, from taking my fill of it. Despite these distillations the traditional orangeade persisted like the *tilleul*. In these humble

kinds, the social communion was none the less administered. In this respect, doubtless, the friends of M. and Mme. de Guermantes had, after all, as I had originally imagined, remained more different from the rest of humanity than their outward appearance might have misled me into supposing. Numbers of elderly men came to receive from the Duchess, together with the invariable drink, a welcome that was often far from cordial. Now this could not have been due to snobbishness, they themselves being of a rank to which there was none superior; nor to love of splendour; they did love it perhaps, but on less stringent social conditions might have been enjoying a glittering example of it, for on these same evenings the charming wife of a colossally rich financier would have given anything in the world to have them among the brilliant shooting-party she was giving for a couple of days for the King of Spain. They had nevertheless declined her invitation, and had come round without fail to inquire whether Mme. de Guermantes was at home. They were not even certain of finding there opinions that conformed entirely with their own, or sentiments of any great warmth; Mme. de Guermantes let fall now and then, on the Dreyfus case, on the Republic, the Laws against Religion, or even in an undertone on themselves, their weaknesses, the dullness of their conversation, comments which they had to appear not to notice. No doubt, if they kept up their habit of coming there, it was owing to their superfine training as epicures in things worldly, to their clear consciousness of the prime and perfect quality of the social dish, with its familiar, reassuring, sappy savour, free from blend or taint, with the origin and history of which they were as well aware as she who served them with it, remaining more ‘noble’ in this respect than they themselves imagined. Now, on this occasion, among the visitors to whom I was introduced after dinner, it so happened that there was that General de Monserfeuil of whom the Princesse de Parme had been speaking, while Mme. de Guermantes, of whose drawing-room he was one of the regular frequenters, had not known that he was going to be there that evening. He bowed before me, on hearing my name, as though I had been the President of the Supreme War Council. I had supposed it to be simply from some deep-rooted unwillingness to oblige, in which the Duke, as in wit if not in love, was his wife’s accomplice, that the Duchess had practically refused to recommend her nephew to M. de Monserfeuil. And I saw in this an indifference all the more blameworthy in that I seemed to have gathered from a few words let fall by the Princess that Robert was in a post of danger from which it would be prudent to have him removed. But it was by the genuine malice of Mme. de Guermantes that I was revolted when, the Princesse de Parme having

timidly suggested that she might say something herself and on her own responsibility to the General, the Duchess did everything in her power to dissuade her. “But Ma’am,” she cried, “Monserfeuil has no sort of standing or influence whatever with the new Government. You would be wasting your breath.” “I think he can hear us,” murmured the Princess, as a hint to the Duchess not to speak so loud. Without lowering her voice: “Your Highness need not be afraid, he’s as deaf as a post,” said the Duchess, every word reaching the General distinctly. “The thing is, I believe M. de Saint-Loup is in a place that is not very safe,” said the Princess. “What is one to do?” replied the Duchess. “He’s in the same boat as everybody else, the only difference being that it was he who originally asked to be sent there. Besides, no, it’s not really dangerous; if it was, you can imagine how anxious I should be to help. I, should have spoken to Saint-Joseph about it during dinner. He has far more influence, and he’s a real worker. But, as you see, he’s gone now. Still, asking him would be less awkward than going to this one, who has; three of his sons in Morocco just now and has refused to apply for them to be exchanged; he might raise that as an objection. Since your Highness insists on it, I shall speak to Saint-Joseph — if I see him again, or to Beautreillis. But if I don’t see either of them, you mustn’t waste your pity on Robert. It was explained to us the other day exactly where he is. I’m sure he couldn’t wish for a better place.”

“What a pretty flower, I’ve never seen one like it; there’s no one like you, Oriane, for having such marvellous things in your house,” said the Princesse de Parme, who, fearing that General de Monserfeuil might have overheard the Duchess, sought now to change the conversation. I looked and recognised a plant of the sort that I had watched Elstir painting. “I am so glad you like them; they are charming, do look at their little purple velvet collars; the only thing against them is — as may happen with people who are very pretty and very nicely dressed — they have a hideous name and a horrid smell. In spite of which I am very fond of them. But what is rather sad is that they are dying.” “But they’re growing in a pot, they aren’t cut flowers,” said the Princess. “No,” answered the Duchess with a smile, “but it comes to the same thing, as they’re all ladies. It’s a kind of plant where the ladies and the gentlemen don’t both grow on the same stalk. I’m like people who keep a lady dog. I have to find a husband for my flowers. Otherwise I shan’t have any young ones!” “How very strange. Do you mean to say that in nature...?” “Yes! There are certain insects whose duty it is to bring about the marriage, as they do with Sovereigns, by proxy, without the bride and bridegroom ever having set eyes on one another. And so, I assure you, I

always tell my man to put my plant out in the window as often as possible, on the courtyard side and the garden side turn about, in the hope that the necessary insect will arrive. But the odds are too great. Fancy, he has first to have been seen by a person of the same species and the opposite sex, and he must then have taken it into his head to come and leave cards at the house. He hasn't appeared so far, I believe my plant can still qualify for the white flower of a blameless life, but I must say a little immodesty would please me better. It's just the same with that fine tree we have in the courtyard; he will die childless because he belongs to a kind that's very rare in these latitudes. In his case, it's the wind that's responsible for consummating the marriage, but the wall is a trifle high." "By Jove, yes," said M. de Bréauté, "you ought to take just a couple of inches off the top, that will be quite enough. There are certain operations one ought to know how to perform. The flavour of vanilla we tasted in the excellent ice you gave us this evening, Duchess, comes from a plant called the vanilla tree. This plant produces flowers which are both male and female, but a sort of solid wall set up between them prevents any communication. And so we could never get any fruit from them until a young Negro, a native of Réunion, by the name of Albins, which by the way is rather an odd name for a black man since it means 'white,' had the happy thought of using the point of a needle to bring the separate organs into contact." "Babal, you're divine, you know everything," cried the Duchess. "But you yourself, Oriane, have told me things I had no idea of," the Princesse de Parme assured her. "I must explain to your Highness that it is Swann who has always talked to me all about botany. Sometimes when we were too bored to go to a tea-party or a concert we would set off for the country, and he would shew me extraordinary marriages between flowers, which was far more amusing than going to human marriages — no wedding-breakfast and no crowd in the sacristy. We never had time to go very far. Now that motor-cars have come in, it Would be delightful. Unfortunately, in the interval he himself has made an even more astonishing marriage, which makes everything very difficult. Oh, Ma'am, life is a dreadful business, we spend our whole time doing things that bore us, and when by mere chance we come across somebody with whom we could go and look at something really interesting, he has to make a marriage like Swann's. Faced with the alternatives of giving up my botanical expeditions and being obliged to call upon a degrading person, I chose the former calamity. Besides, when it comes to that, there was no need to go quite so far. It seems that here, in my own little bit of garden, more odd things happen in broad daylight than at midnight — in the Bois de Boulogne! Only they attract no attention, because

among flowers it's all done quite simply, you see a little orange shower, or else a very dusty fly coming to wipe its feet or take a bath before crawling into a flower. And that does the trick!" "The cabinet the plant is standing on is splendid, too; it's Empire, I think," said the Princess, who, not being familiar with the works of Darwin and his followers, was unable to grasp the point of the Duchess's pleasantries. "It's lovely, isn't it? I'm so glad Ma'am likes it," replied the Duchess, "it's a magnificent piece. I must tell you that I've always adored the Empire style, even when it wasn't in fashion. I remember at Guermantes I got into terrible disgrace with my mother-in-law because I told them to bring down from the attics all the splendid Empire furniture Basin had inherited from the Montesquious, and used it to furnish the wing we lived in." M. de Guermantes smiled. He must nevertheless have remembered that the course of events had been totally different. But, the witticisms of the Princesse des Laumes at the expense of her mother-in-law's bad taste having been a tradition during the short time in which the Prince was in love with his wife, his love for the latter had been outlasted by a certain contempt for the intellectual inferiority of the former, a contempt which, however, went hand in hand with a considerable attachment and respect. "The Iénas have the same armchair with Wedgwood medallions, it's a lovely thing, but I prefer my own;" said the Duchess, with the same air of impartiality as if she had been the possessor of neither of the articles under discussion. "I know, of course, that they've some marvellous things which I haven't got." The Princesse de Parme remained silent. "But it's quite true; your Highness hasn't seen their collection. Oh, you ought really to come there one day with me, it's one of the most magnificent things in Paris. You'd say it was a museum come to life." And since this suggestion was one of the most 'Guermantes' of the Duchess's audacities, inasmuch as the lénas were for the Princesse de Parme rank usurpers, their son bearing like her own the title of Duc de Guastalla, Mme. de Guermantes in thus launching it could not refrain (so far did the love that she bore for her own originality prevail over the deference due to the Princesse de Parme) from casting at her other guests a smiling glance of amusement. They too made an effort to smile, at once frightened, bewildered, and above all delighted to think that they were being ear-witnesses of Oriane's very 'latest' and could carry it away with them 'red hot.' They were only half shocked, knowing that the Duchess had the knack of strewing the ground with all the Courvoisier prejudices to achieve a vital success more thrilling and more enjoyable. Had she not, within the last few years, brought together Princesse Mathilde and that Due d'Aumale who had written to the Princess's own brother

the famous letter: “In my family all the men are brave and the women chaste”? And inasmuch as Princes remain princely even at those moments when they appear anxious to forget that they are, the Due d’Aumale and Princesse Mathilde had enjoyed themselves so greatly at Mme. de Guermantes’s that they had thereafter formed a defensive alliance, with that faculty for forgetting the past which Louis XVIII shewed when he took as his Minister Fouché, who had voted the death of his brother. Mme. de Guermantes was now nourishing a similar project of arranging a meeting between Princesse Murât and the Queen of Naples. In the meantime, the Princesse de Parme appeared as embarrassed as might have been the heirs-apparent to the Thrones of the Netherlands and Belgium, styled respectively Prince of Orange and Duke of Brabant, had one offered to present to them M. de Mailly Nesle, Prince d’Orange, and M. de Charlus, Due de Brabant. But, before anything further could happen, the Duchess, whom Swann and M. de Charlus between them (albeit the latter was resolute in ignoring the lénas’ existence) had with great difficulty succeeded in making admire the Empire style, exclaimed: “Honestly, Ma’am, I can’t tell you how beautiful you will think it! I must confess that the Empire style has always had a fascination for me. But at the lénas’ it is really like a hallucination. That sort of — what shall I say — reflux from the Expedition to Egypt, and also the sweep forward into our own times from Antiquity, all those things that invade our houses, the Sphinxes that come to crouch at the feet of the sofas, the serpents coiled round candelabra, a huge Muse who holds out a little torch for you to play at *bouillotte*, or has quietly climbed on to the mantelpiece and is leaning against your clock; and then all the Pompeian lamps, the little boat-shaped beds which look as if they had been found floating on the Nile so that you expect to see Moses climb out of them, the classical chariots galloping along the bed tables...” “They’re not very comfortable to sit in, those Empire chairs,” the Princess ventured. “No,” the Duchess agreed, “but,” she at once added, insisting on the point with a smile: “I like being uncomfortable on those mahogany seats covered with ruby velvet or green silk. I like that discomfort of the warrior who understands nothing but the curule chair and in the middle of his principal drawing-room crosses his fasces and piles his laurels. I can assure you that at the Iénas’ one doesn’t stop to think for a moment of how comfortable one is, when one sees in front of one a great strapping wench of a Victory painted in fresco on the wall. My husband is going to say that I’m a very bad Royalist, but I’m terribly disaffected, as you know, I can assure you that in those people’s house one comes to love all the big N’s and all the bees. Good gracious, after all for a

good many years under our Kings we weren't exactly surfeited with glory, and so these warriors who brought home so many crowns that they stuck them even on the arms of the chairs, I must say I think it's all rather fetching! Your Highness ought really." "Why, my dear, if you think so," said the Princess, "but it seems to me that it won't be easy." "But Ma'am will find that it will all go quite smoothly. They are very good people, and no fools. We took Mme. de Chevreuse there," added the Duchess, knowing the force of this example, "she was enchanted. The son is really very pleasant. I'm going to say something that's not quite proper," she went on, "but he has a bedroom, and more especially a bed in it, in which I should love to sleep — without him! What is even less proper is that I went to see him once when he was ill and lying in it. By his side on the frame of the bed was moulded a long Siren, stretched out at full length, a lovely thing with a mother-of-pearl tail and some sort of lotus flowers in her hand. I assure you," went on Mme. de Guermantes, reducing the speed of her utterances to bring into even bolder relief the words which she had the air of modelling with the pout of her fine lips, drawing them out with her long expressive hands, directing on the Princess as she spoke a gentle, steady and searching gaze, "that with the palms and the golden crown at the side, it was most moving, it was just the arrangement of Gustave Moreau's *Death and the Young Man* (your Highness must know that great work, of course)." The Princesse de Parme, who did not know so much as the painter's name, made violent movements with her head and smiled ardently, in order to manifest her admiration for his picture. But the intensity of her mimicry could not fill the place of that light which is absent from our eyes so long as we do not understand what people are trying to tell us. "A good-looking boy, I believe?" she asked. "No for he's just like a tapir. The eyes are a little those of a Queen Hortense on a screen. But he has probably come to the conclusion that it is rather absurd for a man to develop such a resemblance, and it is lost in the encaustic surface of his cheeks which give him really rather a Mameluke appearance. You feel that the polisher must call round every morning. Swann," she went on, reverting to the bed of the young Duke, "was struck by the resemblance between this Siren and Gustave Moreau's *Death*. But apart from that," she added, her speech becoming more rapid though still serious, so as to provoke more laughter, "there was nothing really that could *strike* us, for it was only a cold in the head, and the young man made a marvellous recovery." "They say he's a snob?" put in M. de Bréauté, with a malicious twinkle, expecting to be answered with the same precision as though he had said: "They tell me that he has only four fingers on his right hand; is that so?" "G— ood g — racious, n —

o," replied Mme. de Guermantes with a smile of benign indulgence. "Perhaps just the least little bit of a snob in appearance, because he's extremely young, but I should be surprised to hear that he was really, for he's intelligent," she added, as though there were to her mind some absolute incompatibility between snobbishness and intelligence. "He has wit, too, I've known him to be quite amusing," she said again, laughing with the air of an epicure and expert, as though the act of declaring that a person could be amusing demanded a certain expression of merriment from the speaker, or as though the Duc de Guastalla's sallies were recurring to her mind as she spoke. "Anyway, as he never goes anywhere, he can't have much field for his snobbishness," she wound up, forgetting that this was hardly encouraging the Princesse de Parme to make overtures. "I cannot help wondering what the Prince de Guermantes, who calls her Mme. Iéna, will say if he hears that I've been to see her." "What!" cried the Duchess with extraordinary vivacity. "Don't you know that it was we who gave up to Gilbert" (she bitterly regretted that surrender now) "a complete card-room done in the Empire style which came to us from Quiou-Quiou, and is an absolute marvel! There was no room for it here, though I think it would look better here than it does with him. It's a thing of sheer beauty, half Etruscan, half Egyptian..." "Egyptian?" queried the Princess, to whom the word Etruscan conveyed little. "Well, really, you know, a little of both. Swann told us that, he explained it all to me, only you know I'm such a dunce. But then, Ma'am, what one has to bear in mind is that the Egypt of the Empire cabinetmakers has nothing to do with the historical Egypt, nor their Roman with the Romans nor their Etruria..." "Indeed," said the Princess. "No, it's like what they used to call a Louis XV costume under the Second Empire, when Anna de Monchy and dear Brigode's mother were girls. Basin was talking to you just now about Beethoven. We heard a thing of his played the other day which was really quite good, though a little stiff, with a Russian theme in it. It's pathetic to think that he believed it to be Russian. In the same way as the Chinese painters believed they were copying Bellini. Besides, even in the same country, whenever anybody begins to look at things in a way that is slightly novel, nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand are totally incapable of seeing what he puts before them. It takes at least forty years before they can manage to make it out." "Forty years!" the Princess cried in alarm. "Why, yes," went on the Duchess, adding more and more to her words (which were practically my own, for I had just been expressing a similar idea to her), thanks to her way of pronouncing them, the equivalent of what on the printed page is called italics: "it's like a sort of first isolated individual of a

species which does not yet exist but is going to multiply in the future, an individual endowed with a kind of *sense* which the human race of his generation does not possess. I can hardly give myself as an instance because I, on the contrary, have always loved any interesting production from the very start, however novel it might be. But really, the other day I was with the Grand Duchess in the Louvre and we happened to pass before Manet's *Olympia*. Nowadays nobody is in the least surprised by it. It looks just like an Ingres! And yet, heaven only knows how many spears I've had to break for that picture, which I don't altogether like but which is unquestionably the work of *somebody*." "And is the Grand Duchess well?" inquired the Princesse de Parme, to whom the Tsar's aunt was infinitely more familiar than Manet's model. "Yes; we talked about you. After all," she resumed, clinging to her idea, "the fact of the matter is, as my brother-in-law Palamède always says, that one has between oneself and the rest of the world the barrier of a strange language. Though I admit that there's no one it's quite so true of as Gilbert. If it amuses you to go to the Iénas', you have far too much sense to let your actions be governed by what that poor fellow may think, who is a dear, innocent creature, but really lives in a different world. I feel myself nearer, more akin to my coachman, my horses even, than to a man who keeps on harking back to what people would have thought under Philip the Bold or Louis the Fat. Just fancy, when he goes for a walk in the country, he takes a stick to drive the peasants out of his way, quite in a friendly spirit, saying: 'Get on, clowns!' Really, I'm just as much surprised when he speaks to me as if I heard myself addressed by one of the 'recumbents' on the old gothic tombs. It's all very well that animated gravestone's being my cousin; he frightens me, and the only idea that comes into my head is to let him stay in his Middle Ages. Apart from that, I quite admit that he's never assassinated anyone." "I've just been seeing him at dinner at Mme. de Villeparisis's," said the General, but without either smiling at or endorsing the Duchess's pleasantries. "Was M. de Norpois there?" asked Prince Von, whose mind still ran on the Academy of Moral Sciences. "Why, yes;" said the General. "In fact, he was talking about your Emperor." "It seems, the Emperor William is highly intelligent, but he does not care for Elstir's painting. Not that I'm saying this against him," said the Duchess, "I quite share his point of view. Although Elstir has done a fine portrait of me. You don't know it? It's not in the least like me, but it's a remarkable piece of work. He is interesting while one's sitting to him. He has made me like a little old woman It's after the style of the *Regents of the Hospital*, by Hals. I expect you know those sublimities, to borrow my

nephew's favourite expression," the Duchess turned to myself, gently flapping her fan of black feathers. More than erect on her chair, she flung her head nobly backwards, for, while always a great lady, she was a trifle inclined to play the great lady also. I said that I had been once to Amsterdam and The Hague, but that to avoid confusing my mind, as my time was limited, I had left out Haarlem. "Ah! The Hague! What a gallery!" cried M. de Guermantes. I said to him that he had doubtless admired Vermeer's *Street in Delft*. But the Duke was less erudite than arrogant. Accordingly he contented himself with replying in a tone of sufficiency, as was his habit whenever anyone spoke to him of a picture in a gallery, or in the Salon, which he did not remember having seen. "If it's to be seen, I saw it!" "What? You've been to Holland, and you never visited Haarlem!" cried the Duchess. "Why, even if you had only a quarter of an hour to spend in the place, they're an extraordinary thing to have seen, those Halses. I don't mind saying that a person who only caught a passing glimpse of them from the top of a tramway-car without stopping, supposing they were hung out to view in the street, would open his eyes pretty wide." This utterance shocked me as indicating a misconception of the way in which artistic impressions are formed in our minds, and because it seemed to imply that our eye is in that case simply a recording machine which takes instantaneous photographs.

M. de Guermantes, rejoicing that she should be speaking to me with so competent a knowledge of the subjects that interested me, gazed at the illustrious bearing of his wife, listened to what she was saying about Franz Hals, and thought: "She rides rough-shod over everything! Our young friend can go home and say that he's had before his eyes a great lady of the old school, in the full sense of the word, the like of whom couldn't be found anywhere to-day." Thus I beheld the pair of them, withdrawn from that name Guermantes in which long ago I had imagined them leading an unimaginable life, now just like other men and other women, lingering, only, behind their contemporaries a little way, and that not evenly, as in so many households of the Faubourg, where the wife has had the good taste to stop at the golden, the husband the misfortune to come down to the pinchbeck age of history, she remaining still Louis XV while her partner is pompously Louis-Philippe. That Mme. de Guermantes should be like other women had been for me at first a disappointment; it was now, by a natural reaction and with all these good wines to help, almost a miracle. A Don John of Austria, an Isabella d'Esté, situated for us in the world of names, have as little communication with the great pages of history as the Méséglise way had with the Guermantes. Isabella d'Esté was no doubt in reality a very minor Princess,

similar to those who under Louis XIV obtained no special place at Court. But seeming to us to be of a unique and therefore incomparable essence, we cannot conceive of her as being any less in greatness, so that a supper-party with Louis XIV would appear to us only to be rather interesting, whereas with Isabella d'Este we should find ourselves, were we to meet her, gazing with our own eyes on a supernatural heroine of romance. Well, after we have, in studying Isabella d'Esté, in transplanting her patiently from this world of fairyland into that of history, established the fact that her life, her thought contained nothing of that mysterious strangeness which had been suggested to us by her name, once this disappointment is complete we feel a boundless gratitude to this Princess for having had, of Mantegna's paintings, a knowledge almost equal to that, hitherto despised by us and put, as Françoise would have said, lower than the dirt, of M. Lafenestre. After having scaled the inaccessible heights of the name Guermantes, on descending the inner slope of the life of the Duchess, I felt on finding there the names, familiar elsewhere, of Victor Hugo, Franz Hals and, I regret to say, Vibert, the same astonishment that an explorer, after having taken into account, to imagine the singularity of the native customs in some wild valley of Central America or Northern Africa, its geographical remoteness, the strangeness of its flora, feels on discovering, once he has made his way through a hedge of giant aloes or manchineels, inhabitants who (sometimes indeed among the ruins of a Roman theatre and beneath a column dedicated to Venus) are engaged in reading *Mérope* or *Alzire*. And similarly, so remote, so distinct from, so far superior to the educated women of the middle classes whom I had known, the similar culture by which Mme. de Guermantes had made herself, with no ulterior motive, to gratify no ambition, descend to the level of people whom she would never know, had the character — meritorious, almost touching by virtue of being wholly useless — of an erudition in Phoenician antiquities in a politician or a doctor. "I might have shewn you a very fine one," said Mme. de Guermantes, still speaking of Hals, "the finest in existence, some people say, which was left to me by a German cousin. Unfortunately, it turned out to be 'enfeoffed' in the castle — you don't know the expression, nor I either," she added, with her fondness for making jokes (which made her, she thought, seem modern) at the expense of the old customs to which nevertheless she was unconsciously but keenly attached. "I am glad you have seen my Elstirs, but, I must admit, I should have been a great deal more glad if I could have done you the honours of my Hals, this 'enfeoffed' picture." "I know the one," said Prince Von, "it's the Grand Duke of Hesse's Hals." "Quite so; his brother married my

sister," said M. de Guermantes, "and his mother and Oriane's were first cousins as well." "But so far as M. Elstir is concerned," the Prince went on, "I shall take the liberty of saying, without having any opinion of his work, which I do not know, that the hatred with which the Emperor pursues him ought not, it seems to me, to be counted against him. The Emperor is a man of marvellous intelligence." "Yes, I've met him at dinner twice, once at my aunt Sagan's and once at my aunt Radziwill's, and I must say I found him quite unusual. I didn't find him at all simple! But there is something amusing about him, something 'forced,'" she detached the word, "like a green carnation, that is to say a thing that surprises me and docs not please me enormously, a thing it is surprising that anyone should have been able to create but which I feel would have been just as well uncreated. I trust I'm not shocking you." "The Emperor is a man of astounding intelligence," resumed the Prince, "he is passionately fond of the arts he has for works of art a taste that is practically infallible, if a thing is good he spots it at once and takes a dislike to it. If he detests anything there can be no more doubt about it, the thing is excellent."Everyone smiled. "You set my mind at rest," said the Duchess. "I should be inclined to compare the Emperor," went on the Prince, who, not knowing how to pronounce the word archaeologist (that is to say, as though it were spelt 'arkeologist'), never missed an opportunity of using it, "to an old archaeologist" (but the Prince said 'arsheologist') "we have in Berlin. If you put him in front of a genuine Assyrian antique, he weeps. But if it is a modern sham, if it is not really old, he does not weep. And so, when they want to know whether an arsheological piece is really old, they take it to the old arsheologist. If he weeps, they buy the piece for the Museum. If his eyes remain dry, they send it back to the dealer, and prosecute him for fraud. Well, every time I dine at Potsdam, if the Emperor says to me, of a play: 'Prince, you must see that, it's a work of genius,' I make a note not to go to it; and when I hear him fulminating against an exhibition, I rush to see it at the first possible opportunity." "Norpois is in favour of an Anglo-French understanding, isn't he?" said M. de Guermantes. "What use would that be to you?" asked Prince Von, who could not endure the English, in a tone at once of irritation and cunning. "The English are so *schtubid*. I know, of course, that it would not be as soldiers that they would help you. But one can judge them, all the same, by the stupidity of their Generals. A friend of mine was talking the other day to Botha, you know, the Boer leader. He said to my friend: 'It's terrible, an army like that. I rather like the English, as a matter of fact, but just imagine that I, who am only a peasant, have beaten them in every battle. And in the last, when I gave way before a force

twenty times the strength of my own, while I myself surrendered, because I had to, I managed to take two thousand prisoners! That was good enough, because I was only commanding an army of farmers, but if those poor fools ever have to stand up against a European army, one trembles to think what may happen to them!' Besides, you have only to see how their King, whom you know as well as I do, passes for a great man in England." I barely listened to these stories, stories of the kind that M. de Norpois used to tell my father; they supplied no food for my favourite train of thought; and besides, even had they possessed the elements which they lacked, they would have had to be of a very exciting quality for my inner life to awaken during those hours in which I dwelt in my skin, my well-brushed hair, my starched shirt-front, in which, that is to say, I could feel nothing of what constituted for me the pleasure of life. "Oh, I don't agree with you at all," said Mme. de Guermantes, who felt that the German Prince was wanting in tact, "I find King Edward charming, so simple, and much cleverer than people think. And the Queen is, even now, the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in the world." "But, Madame la Duchesse," said the Prince, who was losing his temper and did not see that he was giving offence, "you must admit that if the Prince of Wales had been an ordinary person there isn't a club that wouldn't have blackballed him, and nobody would have been willing to shake hands with him. The Queen is charming, exceedingly sweet and limited. But after all there is something shocking about a royal couple who are literally kept by their subjects, who get the big Jewish financiers to foot all the bills they ought to pay themselves, and create them Baronets in return. It's like the Prince of Bulgaria..." "He's our cousin," put in the Duchess. "He's a clever fellow." "He's mine, too, but we don't think him a good fellow on that account. No, it is us you ought to make friends with, it's the Emperor's dearest wish, but he insists on its coming from the heart. He says: 'What I want to see is a hand clasped in mine, not waving a hat in the air.' With that, you would be invincible. It would be more practical than the Anglo-French friendship M. de Norpois preaches." "You know him, of course," the Duchess said, turning to me, so as not to leave me out of the conversation. Remembering that M. de Norpois had said that I had once looked as though I wanted to kiss his hand, thinking that he had no doubt repeated this story to Mme. de Guermantes, and in any event could have spoken of me to her only with malice, since in spite of his friendship with my father he had not hesitated to make me appear so ridiculous, I did not do what a man of the world would have done. He would have said that he detested M. de Norpois, and had let him see it; he would have said this so as to give himself the appearance of

being the deliberate cause of the Ambassador's slanders, which would then have been no more than lying and calculated reprisals. I said, on the other hand, that, to my great regret, I was afraid that M. de Norpois did not like me. "You are quite mistaken," replied the Duchess, "he likes you very much indeed. You can ask Basin, for if people give me the reputation of only saying nice things, he certainly doesn't. He will tell you that we have never heard Norpois speak about anyone so kindly as he spoke to us of you. And only the other day he was wanting to give you a fine post at the Ministry. As he knew that you were not very strong and couldn't accept it, he had the delicacy not to speak of his kind thought to your father, for whom he has an unbounded admiration." M. de Norpois was quite the last person whom I should have expected to do me any practical service. The truth was that, his being a mocking and indeed somewhat malicious spirit, those people who had let themselves be taken in as I had by his outward appearance of a Saint Louis delivering justice beneath an oak-tree, by the sounds, easily modulated to pity, that emerged from his somewhat too tuneful lips, believed in a deliberate betrayal when they learned of a slander uttered at their expense by a man who had always seemed to put his whole heart into his speech. These slanders were frequent enough with him. But that did not prevent him from feeling attractions, from praising the people he liked and taking pleasure in shewing that he could be of use to them. "Not that I'm in the least surprised at his appreciating you," said Mme. de Guermantes, "he's an intelligent man. And I can quite understand," she added, for the benefit of the rest of the party, making allusion to a purpose of marriage of which I had heard nothing, "that my aunt, who has long ceased to amuse him as an old mistress, may not seem of very much use to him as a young wife. Especially as I understand that even as a mistress she has ceased for years now to serve any practical purpose, she is more wrapped up in her devotions than anything else. Boaz-Norpois can say, in the words of Victor Hugo:

> *Voilà longtemps que celle avec qui j'ai dormi,*
> *O Seigneur, a quitté ma couche pour la vôtre*!

Really, my poor aunt is like the artists of the advanced guard who have stood out all their lives against the Academy, and in the end start a little academy of their own, or the unfrocked priests who get up a little private religion. They should either keep their frocks, or not stick to their profession. And who knows," went on the Duchess with a meditative air, "it may be in preparation for her

widowhood, there's nothing sadder than the weeds one's not entitled to wear." "Ah! If Mme. de Villeparisis were to become Mme. de Norpois, I really believe our cousin Gilbert would take to his bed," said General de Monserfeuil. "The Prince de Guermantes is a charming man, but he is, really, very much taken up with questions of birth and manners," said the Princesse de Parme. "I went down to spend a few days with them in the country, when the Princess, unfortunately, was ill in bed. I was accompanied by Petite." (This was a nickname that was given to Mme. d'Hunolstein because she was enormously stout.) "The Prince came to meet me at the foot of the steps, and pretended not to see Petite. We went up to the first floor, to the door into the reception rooms, and then, stepping back to make way for me, he said: 'Oh, how d'ye do, Mme. d'Hunolstein?' (he always calls her that now, since her separation) pretending to have caught sight of Petite for the first time, so as to shew her that he had not come down to receive her at the foot of the steps." "That doesn't surprise me in the least. I don't need to tell you," said the Duke, who regarded himself as extremely modern, more contemptuous than anyone in the world of mere birth, and in fact a Republican, "that I have not many ideas in common with my cousin. Ma'am can imagine that we are just about as much agreed on most subjects as day and night. But I must say that if my aunt were to marry Norpois, for once I should be of Gilbert's opinion. To be the daughter of Florimond de Guise, and then to make a marriage like that would be enough, as the saying is, to make a cat laugh; what more can I say?" These last words, which the Duke uttered as a rule in the middle of a sentence, were here quite superfluous. But he felt a perpetual need to be saying them which made him postpone them to the end of a speech if he had found no place for them elsewhere. They were for him, among other things, almost a question of prosody. "Remember, though," he added, "that the Norpois are gallant gentlemen with a good place, of a good stock."

"Listen to me, Basin, it's really not worth your while to poke fun at Gilbert if you're going to speak the same language as he does," said Mme. de Guermantes, for whom the 'goodness' of a family, no less than that of a wine, consisted in its age. But, less frank than her cousin and more subtle than her husband, she made a point of never in her conversation playing false to the Guermantes spirit, and despised rank in her speech while ready to honour it by her actions. "But aren't you some sort of cousins?" asked General de Monserfeuil. "I seem to remember that Norpois married a La Rochefoucauld." "Not in that way at all, she belonged to the branch of the Ducs de La Rochefoucauld, my grandmother came from the Ducs de Doudeauville. She was

own grandmother to Edouard Coco, the wisest man in the family," replied the Duke, whose views of wisdom were somewhat superficial, "and the two branches haven't intermarried since Louis XIV's time; the connexion would be rather distant."

"I say, that's interesting; I never knew that," said the General. "However," went on M. de Guermantes, "his mother, I believe, was the sister of the Duc de Montmorency, and had originally been married to a La Tour d'Auvergne. But as those Montmorencys are barely Montmorencys, while those La Tour d'Auvergnes are not La Tour d'Auvergnes at all, I cannot see that it gives him any very great position. He says — and this should be more to the point — that he's descended from Saintrailles, and as we ourselves are in a direct line of descent..."

There was at Combray a Rue de Saintrailles, to which I had never given another thought. It led from the Rue de la Bretonnerie to the Rue de l'Oiseau. And as Saintrailles, the companion of Joan of Arc, had, by marrying a Guermantes, brought into that family the County of Combray, his arms were quartered with those of Guermantes at the foot of one of the windows in Saint-Hilaire. I saw again a vision of dark sandstone steps, while a modulation of sound brought to my ears that name, Guermantes, in the forgotten tone in which I used to hear it long ago, so different from that in which it was used to signify the genial hosts with whom I was dining this evening. If the name, Duchesse de Guermantes, was for me a collective name, it was so not merely in history, by the accumulation of all the women who had successively borne it, but also in the course of my own short life, which had already seen, in this single Duchesse de Guermantes, so many different women superimpose themselves, each one vanishing as soon as the next had acquired sufficient consistency. Words do not change their meaning as much in centuries as names do for us in the space of a few years. Our memory and our heart are not large enough to be able to remain faithful. We have not room enough, in our mental field, to keep the dead there as well as the living. We are obliged to build over what has gone before and is brought to light only by a chance excavation, such as the name Saintrailles had just wrought in my mind. I felt that it would be useless to explain all this, and indeed a little while earlier I had lied by implication in not answering when M. de Guermantes said to me: "You don't know our old wheedler?" Perhaps he was quite well aware that I did know him, and it was only from good breeding that he did not press the question.

Mme. de Guermantes drew me out of my meditation. "Really, I find all that

sort of thing too deadly. Listen, it's not always as boring as this at my parties. I hope that you will soon come and dine again as a compensation, with no pedigrees next time," she murmured, incapable both of appreciating the kind of charm which I could find in her house and of having sufficient humility to be content to appeal to me only as a herbarium, filled with plants of another day.

What Mme. de Guermantes believed to be disappointing my expectations was on the contrary what in the end — for the Duke and the General went on to discuss pedigrees now without stopping — saved my evening from becoming a complete disappointment. How could I have felt otherwise until now? Each of my fellow-guests at dinner, smothering the mysterious name under which I had only at a distance known and dreamed of them with a body and with a mind similar or inferior to those of all the people I knew, had given me the impression of flat vulgarity which the view on entering the Danish port of Elsinore would give to any passionate admirer of *Hamlet*. No doubt those geographical regions and that ancient past which put forest glades and gothic belfries into their names had in a certain measure formed their faces, their intellects and their prejudices, but survived in them only as does the cause in the effect, that is to say as a thing possible for the brain to extract but in no way perceptible to the imagination.

And these old-time prejudices restored in a flash to the friends of M. and Mme. de Guermantes their vanished poetry. Assuredly, the motions in the possession of nobles, which make of them the scholars, the etymologists of the language not of words but of names (and this, moreover, relatively only to the ignorant mass of the middle classes, for if at the same level of mediocrity a devout Catholic would be better able to stand questioning upon the details of the Liturgy than a free-thinker, on the other hand an anti-clerical archaeologist can often give points to his parish priest on everything connected even with the latter's own church), those notions, if we are going to confine ourselves to the truth, that is to say to the spirit, had not for these great gentlemen the charm that they would have had for a man of simple birth. They knew perhaps better than myself that the Duchesse de Guise was Princess of Cleves, of Orleans and of Porcien, and all the rest, but they had known, long before they knew all these names, the face of the Duchesse de Guise which thenceforward the names reflected back to them. I had begun with the fairy — were she fated shortly to perish — they with the woman.

In middle-class families one sometimes sees jealousies spring up if the younger sister is married before the elder. So the aristocratic world, Courvoisiers especially but Guermantes also, reduced its ennobled greatness to simple

domestic superiorities, by a system of child's-play which I had me' originally (and this gave it for me its sole charm) in books. Is it not just as though Tallemant des Réaux were speaking of the Guermantes, and not of the Rohans, when he relates with evident satisfaction how M. de Guéménée cried to his brother: "You can come in here; this is not the Louvre!" and said of the Chevalier de Rohan (because he was a natural son of the Duc de Clermont): "At any rate, he's a Prince." The only thing that distressed me in all this talk was to find that the absurd stories which were being circulated about the charming Hereditary Grand Duke of Luxembourg found as much credence in this drawing-room as they had among Saint-Loup's friends. Plainly it was an epidemic that would not last longer than perhaps a year or two but had meanwhile infected everyone. People repeated the same old stories, or enriched them with others equally untrue. I gathered that the Princesse de Luxembourg herself, while apparently defending her nephew, supplied weapons for the assault. "You are wrong to stand up for him," M. de Guermantes told me, as Saint-Loup had told me before. "Why, without taking into consideration the opinion of our family, who are unanimous about him, you have only to talk to his servants, and they, after all, are the people who know him best. M. de Luxembourg gave his little Negro page to his nephew. The Negro came back in tears: 'Grand Duke beaten me; me no bad boy; Grand Duke naughty man,' it's really too much. And I can speak with some knowledge, he's Oriane's cousin." I cannot, by the way, say how many times in the course of this evening I heard the word 'cousin' used. On the one hand, M. de Guermantes, almost at every name that was mentioned, exclaimed: "But he's Oriane's cousin!" with the sudden joy of a man who, lost in a forest, reads at the ends of a pair of arrows pointing in opposite directions on a metal plate, and followed by quite a low number of kilometres, the words: "Belvédère Casimir-Perier" and "Croix du Grand-Veneur," and gathers from them that he is on the right road. On the other hand the word cousin was employed in a wholly different connexion (which was here the exception to the prevailing rule) by the Turkish Ambassadress, who had come in after dinner. Devoured by social ambition and endowed with a real power of assimilating knowledge, she would pick up with equal facility the story of the Retreat of the Ten Thousand or the details of sexual perversion among birds. It would have been impossible to 'stump' her on any of the most recent German publications, whether they dealt with political economy, mental aberrations, the various forms of onanism, or the philosophy of Epicurus. She was, incidentally, a dangerous person to listen to, for, perpetually in error, she would point out to you as being

of the loosest morals women of irreproachable virtue, would put you on your guard against a gentleman whose intentions were perfectly honourable, and would tell you anecdotes of the sort that seem always to have come out of a book, not so much because they are serious as because they are so wildly improbable.

She was at this period little received in society. She had been going for some weeks now to the houses of women of real social brilliance, such as the Duchesse de Guermantes, but as a general rule had confined herself, of necessity, in the noblest families, to obscure scions whom the Guermantes had ceased to know. She hoped to give herself a really fashionable air by quoting the most historic names of the little-known people who were her friends. At once M. de Guermantes, thinking that she was referring to people who frequently dined at his table, quivered with joy at finding himself once more in sight of a landmark and shouted the rallying-cry: “But he’s Oriane’s cousin! I know him as well as I know my own name. He lives in the Rue Vaneau. His mother was Mlle. d’Uzés.” The Ambassadress was obliged to admit that her specimen had been drawn from smaller game. She tried to connect her friends with those of M. de Guermantes by cutting across his track: “I know quite well who’ you mean. No, it’s not those ones, they’re cousins.” But this cross-current launched by the unfortunate Ambassadress ran but a little way. For M. de Guermantes, losing interest, answered: “Oh, then I don’t know who’ you’re talking about.” The Ambassadress offered no reply, for if she never knew anyone nearer than the ‘cousins’ of those whom she ought to have known in person, very often these ‘cousins’ were not even related at all. Then from the lips of M. de Guermantes, would flow a fresh wave of “But she’s Oriane’s cousin!” words which seemed to have for the Duke the same practical value as certain epithets, convenient to the Roman poets because they provided them with dactyls or spondees for their hexameters. At least the explosion of: “But she’s Oriane’s cousin!” appeared to me quite natural when applied to the Princesse de Guermantes, who was indeed very closely related to the Duchess. The Ambassadress did not seem to care for this Princess. She said to me in an undertone: “She is stupid. No, she is not so beautiful as all that. That claim is usurped. Anyhow,” she went on, with an air at once reflective, rejecting and decided, “I find her most uncongenial.” But often the cousinship extended a great deal further than this, Mme. de Guermantes making it a point of honour to address as ‘Aunt’ ladies with whom it would have been impossible to find her an ancestress in common without going back at least to Louis XV; just as, whenever the ‘hardness’ of the times brought it about that a

multimillionairess married a prince whose great-great-grandfather had espoused, as had Oriane's also, a daughter of Louvois, one of the chief joys of the fair American was to be able, after a first visit to the Hôtel de Guermantes, where she was, incidentally, more or less coldly received and hotly cross-examined, to say 'Aunt' to Mme. de Guermantes, who allowed her to do so with a maternal smile. But little did it concern me what birth meant for M. de Guermantes and M. de Monserfeuil; in the conversations which they held on the subject I sought only for a poetic pleasure. Without being conscious of it themselves, they procured me this pleasure as might a couple of labourers or sailors speaking of the soil or the tides, realities too little detached from their own lives for them to be capable of enjoying the beauty which personally I proceeded to extract from them.

Sometimes rather than of a race it was of a particular fact, of a date that a name reminded me. Hearing M. de Guermantes recall that M. de Bréauté's mother had been a Choiseul and his grandmother a Lucinge, I fancied I could see beneath the commonplace shirt with its plain pearl studs, bleeding still in two globes of crystal, those august relics, the hearts of Mme. de Praslin and of the Duc de Berri. Others were more voluptuous: the fine and flowing hair of Mme. de Tallien or Mme. de Sabran.

Better informed than his wife as to what their ancestors had been, M. de Guermantes found himself the possessor of memories which gave to his conversation a fine air of an ancient mansion stripped of its real treasures but still full of pictures, authentic, indifferent and majestic, which taken as a whole look remarkably well. The Prince d'Agrigente having asked why Prince Von had said, in speaking of the Due d'Aumale, 'my uncle,' M. de Guermantes had replied: "Because his mother's brother, the Duke of Wurttemberg, married a daughter of Louis-Philippe." At once I was lost in contemplation of a casket, such as Carpaccio or Memling used to paint, from its first panel in which the Princess, at the wedding festivities of her brother the Duc d'Orléans, appeared wearing a plain garden dress to indicate her resentment at having seen the return, empty-handed, of the ambassadors who had been sent to sue on her behalf for the hand of the Prince of Syracuse, down to the last, in which she had just given birth to a son, the Duke of Württemberg (the first cousin of the Prince whom I had met at dinner), in that castle called Fantaisie, one of those places which are as aristocratic as certain families. They, moreover, outlasting a single generation of men, see attached to themselves more than one historical personage. In this one, especially, survive side by side memories of the Margravine of Bayreuth, of

this other somewhat fantastic Princess (the Duc d'Orléans's sister), to whom it was said that the name of her husband's castle made a distinct appeal, of the King of Bavaria, and finally of Prince Von, to whom it was simply his own postal address, at which he had just asked the Duc de Guermantes to write to him, for he had succeeded to it, and let it only during the Wagner festivals, to the Prince de Polignac, another delightful 'fantasist.' When M. de Guermantes, to explain how he was related to Mme. d'Arpajon, was obliged, going so far and so simply, to climb the chain formed by the joined hands of three or five ancestresses back to Marie-Louise or Colbert, it was still the same thing in each case; a great historical event appeared only in passing, masked, unnatural, reduced, in the name of a property, in the Christian names of a woman, so selected because she was the granddaughter of Louis-Philippe and Marie-Amélie, considered no longer as King and Queen of the French, but merely in the extent to which in their capacity as grandparents they bequeathed a heritage. (We see for other reasons in a gazetteer of the works of Balzac, where the most illustrious personages figure only according to their connexion with the Comédie Humaine, Napoleon occupy a space considerably less than that allotted to Rastignac, and occupy that space solely because he once spoke to the young ladies of Cinq-Cygne.) Similarly the aristocracy, in its heavy structure, pierced with rare windows, admitting a scanty daylight, shewing the same incapacity to soar but also the same massive and blind force as the architecture of the romanesque age, embodies all our history, immures it, beetles over it.

Thus the empty spaces of my memory were covered by degrees with names which in taking order, in composing themselves with relation to one another, in linking themselves to one another by an increasingly numerous connexion, resembled those finished works of art in which there is not one touch that is isolated, in which every part in turn receives from the rest a justification which it confers on them.

M. de Luxembourg's name having come up again in the course of the conversation, the Turkish Ambassadress told us how, the young bride's grandfather (he who had made that immense fortune out of flour and cereals) having invited M. de Luxembourg to luncheon, the latter had written to decline, putting on the envelope: "M. So-and-So, Miller," to which the grandfather had replied: "I am all the more disappointed that you were not able to come, my dear friend, because I should have been able to enjoy your society quite intimately, for we were quite an intimate party, just ourselves, and there would have been only the Miller, his Son, and you." This story was not merely utterly distasteful

to me, who knew the impossibility of my dear M. de Nassau's writing to the grandfather of his wife (whose fortune, moreover, he was expecting to inherit) and addressing him as 'Miller'; but furthermore its stupidity became glaring from the start, the word 'Miller' having obviously been dragged in only to lead up to the title of La Fontaine's fable. But there is in the Faubourg Saint-Germain a silliness so great, when it is aggravated by malice, that they decided that the letter had been sent and that the grandfather, as to whom at once everyone confidently declared that he was a remarkable man, had shewn a prettier wit than his grandson-in-law. The Duc de Châtellerault tried to take advantage of this story to tell the one that I had heard in the café: "Everyone had to lie down!"—but scarcely had he begun, or reported M. de Luxembourg's pretension that in his wife's presence M. de Guermantes ought to stand up, when the Duchess stopped him with the protest: "No, he is very absurd, but not as bad as that." I was privately convinced that all these stories at the expense of M. de Luxembourg were equally untrue, and that whenever I found myself face to face with any of th reputed actors or spectators I should hear the same contradiction. I asked myself, nevertheless, whether the contradiction just uttered by Mme. de Guermantes had been inspired by regard for truth or by self-esteem. In either event the latter quality succumbed to malice, for she went on, with a laugh: "Not that I haven't had my little fling at him too, for he invited me to luncheon, wishing to make me know the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, which is how he has the good taste to describe his wife when he's writing to his aunt. I sent a reply expressing my regret, and adding: As for the 'Grand Duchess of Luxembourg' (in inverted commas), tell her that if she is coming to see me I am at home every Thursday after five. I have even had another little fling. Happening to be at Luxembourg, I telephoned, asking him to ring me up. His Highness was going to luncheon, had just risen from luncheon, two hours went by and nothing happened; so then I employed another method: 'Will you tell the Comte de Nassau to come and speak to me?' Cut to the quick, he was at the instrument that very minute." Everyone laughed at the Duchess's story, and at other analogous, that is to say (I am convinced of it) equally untrue stories, for a man more intelligent, better, more refined, in a word more exquisite than this Luxembourg-Nassau I have never met. The sequel will shew that it was I who was in the right. I must admit that, in the midst of her onslaught, Mme. de Guermantes had still a kind word for him. "He was not always like that," she informed us. "Before he went off his head, like the man in the story-book who thinks he's become king, he was no fool, and indeed in the early days of his

engagement he used to speak of it in really quite a nice way, as something he could never have dreamed of: ‘It’s just like a fairy-tale; I shall have to make my entry into Luxembourg in a fairy coach,’ he said to his uncle d’Ornessan, who answered — for you know it’s not a very big place, Luxembourg: ‘A fairy coach! I’m afraid, my dear fellow, you’d never get it in. I should suggest that you take a goat carriage.’ Not only did this not annoy Nassau, but he was the first to tell us the story, and to laugh at it.” “Ornessan is a witty fellow, and he’s every rea — son to be; his mother was a Montjeu. lie’s in a very bad way now, poor Ornessan.” This name had the magic virtue of interrupting the flow of stale witticisms which otherwise would have gone on for ever. In fact, M. de Guermantes had to explain that M. d’Ornessan’s great-grandmother had been the sister of Marie de Castille Montjeu, the wife of Timoléon de Lorraine, and consequently Oriane’s aunt, with the result that the conversation drifted back to genealogies, while the idiot of a Turkish Ambassadress breathed in my ear: “You appear to be very much in the Duke’s good books; have a care!” and, on my demanding an explanation: “I mean to say, you understand what I mean, he’s a man to whom one could safely entrust one’s daughter, but not one’s son.” Now if ever, on the contrary, a man existed who was passionately and exclusively a lover of women, it was certainly the Duc de Guermantes. The state of error, the falsehood fatuously believed to be the truth, were for the Ambassadress like a vital element out of which she could not move. “His brother Mémé, who is, as it happens, for other reasons altogether” (he did not bow to her) “profoundly uncongenial to me, is genuinely distressed by the Duke’s morals. So is their aunt Villeparisis. Ah, now, her I adore! There is a saint of a woman for you, the true type of the great ladies of the past. It’s not only her actual virtue that’s so wonderful but her restraint. She still says ‘Monsieur’ to the Ambassador Norpois whom she sees every day, and who, by the way, left an excellent impression behind him in Turkey.”

I did not even reply to the Ambassadress, in order to listen to the genealogies. They were not all of them important. There came up indeed in the course of the conversation one of those unexpected alliances, which, M. de Guermantes informed me, was a misalliance, but not without charm, for, uniting under the July Monarchy the Duc de Guermantes and the Duc de Fezensac with the two irresistible daughters of an eminent navigator, it gave the two Duchesses the exciting novelty of a grace exotically middle-class, ‘Louisphilippically’ Indian. Or else, under Louis XIV, a Norpois had married the daughter of the Duc de Mortenart, whose illustrious title struck, in the remoteness of that epoch, the

name — which I had found colourless and might have supposed to be modern — of Norpois, carving deeply upon it the beauty of an old medal. And in these cases, moreover, it was not only the less well-known name that benefited by the association; the other, grown commonplace by the fact of its lustre, struck me more forcibly in this novel and more obscure aspect, just as among the portraits painted by a brilliant colourist the most striking is sometimes one that is all in black. The sudden mobility with which all these names seemed to me to have been endowed, as they sprang to take their places by the side of others from which I should have supposed them to be remote, was due not to my ignorance alone; the country-dances which they were performing in my mind they had carried out no less spontaneously at those epochs in which a title, being always attached to a piece of land, used to follow it from one family to another, so much so that, for example, in the fine feudal structure that is the title of Duc de Nemours or Duc de Chevreuse, I was able to discover successively hidden, as in the hospitable abode of a hermit-crab, a Guise, a Prince of Savoy, an Orléans, a Luynes. Sometimes several remained in competition for a single shell: for the Principality of Orange the Royal House of the Netherlands and MM. de Mailly-Nesle for the Duchy of Brabant the Baron de Charlus and the Royal House of Belgium, various others for the titles of Prince of Naples, Duke of Parma Duke of Reggio. Sometimes it was the other way; the shell had been so' long uninhabited by proprietors long since dead that it had never occurred to me that this or that name of a country house could have been, at an epoch which after all was comparatively recent, the name of a family. And so, when M. de Guermantes replied to a question put to him by M. de Monserfeuil: "No, my cousin was a fanatical Royalist; she was the daughter of the Marquis de Féterne, who played a certain part in the Chouan rising," on seeing this name Féterne, which had been for me, since my stay at Balbec, the name of a country house, become, what I had never dreamed that it could possibly be, a family name, I felt the same astonishment as in reading a fairy-tale, where turrets and a terrace come to life and turn into men and women. In this sense of the words, we may say that history, even mere family history, gives life to the old stones of a house. There have been in Parisian society men who played as considerable a part in it, who were more sought after for their distinction or for their wit, who were equally well born as the Duc de Guermantes or the Duc de La Trémoïlle. They have now fallen into oblivion because, as they left no descendants, their name which we no longer hear sounds like a name unknown; at most, the name of a thing beneath which we never think to discover the name of any person, it

survives in some country house, some remote village. The day is not distant when the traveller who, in the heart of Burgundy, stops in the little village of Charlus to look at its church, if he has not sufficient industry or is in too great a hurry to examine its tombstones, will go away ignorant that this name, Charlus, was that of a man who ranked with the highest in the land. This thought reminded me that it was time to go, and that while I was listening to M. de Guermantes talking pedigrees, the hour was approaching at which I had promised to call upon his brother. “Who knows,” I continued to muse, “whether one day Guermantes itself may not appear nothing more than a place-name, save to the archaeologists who, stopping by chance at Combray and standing beneath the window of Gilbert the Bad, have the patience to listen to the account given them by Theodore’s successor or to read the Cure’s guide?” But so long as a great name is not extinct it keeps in the full light of day those men and women who bear it; and there can be no doubt that, to a certain extent, the interest which the illustriousness of these families gave them in my eyes lay in the fact that one can, starting from to-day, follow their ascending course, step by step, to a point far beyond the fourteenth century, recover the diaries and correspondence of all the forebears of M. de Charlus, of the Prince d’Agrigente, of the Princesse de Parme, in a past in which an impenetrable night would cloak the origins of a middle-class family, and in which we make out, in the luminous backward projection of a name, the origin and persistence of certain nervous characteristics, certain vices, the disorders of one or another Guermantes. Almost identical pathologically with their namesakes of the present day, they excite from century to century the startled interest of their correspondents, whether these be anterior to the Princess Palatine and Mme. de Motteville, or subsequent to the Prince de Ligne.

However, my historical curiosity was faint in comparison with my aesthetic pleasure. The names cited had the effect of disincarnating the Duchess’s guests, whom, for all they might call themselves Prince d’Agrigente or de Cystira, their mask of flesh and of a common intelligence or want of intelligence had transformed into ordinary mortals, so much so that I had made my landing on the ducal door-mat not as upon the threshold (as I had supposed) but as at the farthest confines of the enchanted world of names. The Prince d’Agrigente himself, as soon as I heard that his mother had been a Damas, a granddaughter of the Duke of Modena, was delivered, as from an unstable chemical alloy, from the face and speech that prevented one from recognising him, and went to form with Damas and Modena, which themselves were only titles, a combination

infinitely more seductive. Each name displaced by the attractions of another, with which I had never suspected it of having any affinity, left the unalterable position which it had occupied in my brain, where familiarity had dulled it, and, speeding to join the Mortemarts, the Stuarts or the Bourbons, traced with them branches of the most graceful design and an ever-changing colour. The name Guermantes itself received from all the beautiful names — extinct, and so all the more glowingly rekindled — with which I learned only now that it was connected, a new sense and purpose, purely poetical. At the most, at the extremity of each spray that burgeoned from the exalted stem, I could see it flower in some face of a wise king or illustrious princess, like the sire of Henri IV or the Duchesse de Longueville. But as these faces, different in this respect from those of the party around me, were not discoloured for me by any trace of physical experience or fashionable mediocrity, they remained, in their handsome outlines and rainbow iridescence, homogeneous with those names which at regular intervals, each of a different hue, detached themselves from the genealogical tree of Guermantes, and disturbed with no foreign or opaque matter the buds — pellucid, alternate, many-coloured — which (like, in the old Jesse windows, the ancestors of Jesus) blossomed on either side of the tree of glass.

Already I had made several attempts to slip away, on account, more than for any other reason, of the triviality which my presence at it imparted to the gathering, albeit it was one of those which I had long imagined as being so beautiful — as it would doubtless have been had there been no inconvenient witness present. At least my departure would permit the other guests, once the profane intruder was no longer among them, to constitute themselves at length into a secret conclave. They would be free to celebrate the mysteries for the celebration of which they had met together, for it could obviously not have been to talk of Franz Hals or of avarice, and to talk of them in the same way as people talk in middle-class society. They uttered nothing but trivialities, doubtless because I was in the room, and I felt with some compunction, on seeing all these pretty women kept apart, that I was preventing them by my presence from carrying on, in the most precious of its drawing-rooms, the mysterious life of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. But this departure which I was trying at every moment to effect, M. and Mme. de Guermantes carried the spirit of self-sacrifice so far as to postpone, by keeping me in the room. A more curious thing still, several of the ladies who had come hurrying, delighted, beautifully dressed, with constellations of jewels, to be present at a party which, through my fault only, differed in no essential point from those that are given elsewhere than in the Faubourg Saint-

Germain, any more than one feels oneself at Balbec to be in a town that differs from what one's eyes are accustomed to see — several of these ladies retired not at all disappointed, as they had every reason to be, but thanking Mme. de Guermantes most effusively for the delightful evening which they had spent, as though on the other days, those on which I was not present, nothing more used to occur.

Was it really for the sake of dinners such as this that all these people dressed themselves up and refused to allow the penetration of middle-class women into their so exclusive drawing-rooms — for dinners such as this? The same, had I been absent? The suspicion flashed across my mind for a moment, but it was too absurd. Plain commonsense enabled me to brush it aside. And then, if I had adopted it, what would have been left of the name Guermantes, already so degraded since Combray?

It struck me that these flower-maidens were, to a strange extent, either ready to be pleased with another person or anxious to make that person pleased with them, for more than one of them, to whom I had not uttered, during the whole course of the evening, more than two or three casual remarks, the stupidity of which had left me blushing, made a point, before leaving the drawing-room, of coming to tell me, fastening on me her fine caressing eyes, straightening as she spoke the garland of orchids that followed the curve of her bosom, what an intense pleasure it had been to her to make my acquaintance, and to speak to me — a veiled allusion to an invitation to dinner — of her desire to 'arrange something' after she had 'fixed a day' with Mme. de Guermantes. None of these flower ladies left the room before the Princesse de Parme. The presence of that lady — one must never depart before Royalty — was one of the two reasons, neither of which I had guessed, for which the Duchess had insisted so strongly on my remaining. As soon as Mme. de Parme had risen, it was like a deliverance. Each of the ladies having made a genuflexion before the Princess, who raised her up from the ground, they received from her, in a kiss, and like a benediction which they had craved kneeling, the permission to ask for their cloaks and carriages. With the result that there followed, at the front door, a sort of stentorian recital of great names from the History of France. The Princesse de Parme had forbidden Mme. de Guermantes to accompany her downstairs to the hall for fear of her catching cold, and the Duke had added: "There, Oriane, since Ma'am gives you leave, remember what the doctor told you."

"I am sure the Princesse de Parme was *most pleased* to take dinner with you." I knew the formula. The Duke had come the whole way across the

drawing-room in order to utter it before me with an obliging, concerned air, as though he were handing me a diploma or offering me a plateful of biscuits. And I guessed from the pleasure which he appeared to be feeling as he spoke, and which brought so sweet an expression momentarily into his face, that the effort which this represented for him was of the kind which he would continue to make to the very end of his life, like one of those honorific and easy posts which, even when paralytic, one is still allowed to retain.

Just as I was about to leave, the lady in waiting reappeared in the drawing-room, having forgotten to take away some wonderful carnations, sent up from Guermantes, which the Duchess had presented to Mme. de Parme. The lady in waiting was somewhat flushed, one felt that she had just been receiving a scolding, for the Princess, so kind to everyone else, could not contain her impatience at the stupidity of her attendant. And so the latter picked up the flowers and ran quickly, but to preserve her air of ease and independence flung at me as she passed: “The Princess says I’m keeping her waiting; she wants to be gone, and to have the carnations as well. Good lord! I’m not a little bird, I can’t be in two places at once.”

Alas! the rule of not leaving before Royalty was not the only one. I could not depart at once, for there was another: this was that the famous lavishness, unknown to the Courvoisiers, with which the Guermantes, whether opulent or practically ruined, excelled in entertaining their friends, was not only a material lavishness, of the kind that I had often experienced with Robert de Saint-Loup, but also a lavish display of charming words, of courteous actions, a whole system of verbal elegance supplied from a positive treasure-house within. But as this last, in the inactivity of fashionable existence, must remain unemployed, it expanded at times, sought an outlet in a sort of fugitive effusion, all the more intense, which might, in Mme. de Guermantes, have led one to suppose a genuine affection for oneself. Which she did, for that matter, feel at the moment when she let it overflow, for she found then in the society of the friend, man or woman, with whom she happened to be a sort of intoxication, in no way sensual, similar to that which music produces in certain people; she would suddenly detach a flower from her bodice, or a medallion, and present it to someone with whom she would have liked to prolong the evening, with a melancholy feeling the while that such a prolongation could have led to nothing but idle talk, into which nothing could have passed of the nervous pleasure, the fleeting emotion, similar to the first warm days of spring in the impression they leave behind them of exhaustion and regret. As for the friend, it did not do for him to put too

implicit a faith in the promises, more exhilarating than anything he had ever heard, tendered by these women who, because they feel with so much more force the sweetness of a moment, make of it, with a delicacy, a nobility of which normally constituted creatures are incapable, a compelling masterpiece of grace and goodness, and have no longer anything of themselves left to give when the next moment has arrived. Their affection does not outlive the exaltation that has dictated it; and the subtlety of mind which had then led them to divine all the things that you wished to hear and to say them to you will permit them just as easily, a few days later, to seize hold of your absurdities and use them to entertain another of their visitors with whom they will then be in the act of enjoying one of those ‘musical moments’ which are so brief.

In the hall where I asked a footman for my snowboots which I had brought as a precaution against the snow, several flakes of which had already fallen, to be converted rapidly into slush, not having realised that they were hardly fashionable, I felt, at the contemptuous smile on all sides, a shame which rose to its highest pitch when I saw that Mme. de Parme had not gone and was watching me put on my American ‘rubbers.’ The Princess came towards me. “Oh! What a good idea,” she exclaimed, “it’s so practical! There’s a sensible man for you. Madame, we shall have to get a pair of those,” she went on to her lady in waiting, while the mockery of the footmen turned to respect and the other guests crowded round me to inquire where I had managed to find these marvels. “With those on, you will have nothing to fear even if it starts snowing again and you have a long way to go. You’re independent of the weather,” said the Princess to me. “Oh! If it comes to that, your Royal Highness can be reassured,” broke in the lady in waiting with a knowing air, “it will not snow again.” “What do you know about it, Madame?” came witheringly from the excellent Princesse de Parme, who alone could succeed in piercing the thick skin of her lady in waiting. “I can assure your Royal Highness, it cannot snow again. It is a physical impossibility.” “But why?” “It cannot snow any more, they have taken the necessary steps to prevent it, they have put down salt in the streets!” The simple-minded lady did not observe either the anger of the Princess or the mirth of the rest of her audience, for instead of remaining silent she said to me with a genial smile, paying no heed to my repeated denials of any connexion with Admiral Jurien de la Gravière: “Not that it matters, after all. This gentleman must have stout sea-legs. What’s bred in the bone!”

Then, having escorted the Princesse de Parme to her carriage, M. de Guermantes said to me, taking hold of my greatcoat: “Let me help you into your

skin." He had ceased even to smile when he employed this expression, for those that were most vulgar had for that very reason, because of the Guermantes affectation of simplicity, become aristocratic.

An exaltation that sank only into melancholy, because it was artificial, was what I also, although quite differently from Mme. de Guermantes, felt once I had finally left her house, in the carriage that was taking me to that of M. de Charlus. We can at pleasure abandon ourselves to one or other of two forces of which one rises in ourselves, emanates from our deepest impressions, the other comes to us from without. The first carries with it naturally a joy, the joy that springs from the life of the creator. The other current, that which endeavours to introduce into us the movement by which persons external to ourselves are stirred, is not accompanied by pleasure; but we can add a pleasure to it, by the shock of reaction, in an intoxication so feigned that it turns swiftly into boredom, into melancholy, whence the gloomy faces of so many men of fashion, and all those nervous conditions which may make them end in suicide. Well, in the carriage which was taking me to M. de Charlus, I was a prey to this second sort of exaltation, widely different from that which is given us by a personal impression, such as I had received in other carriages, once at Combray, in Dr. Percepied's gig, from which I had seen painted against the setting sun the spires of Martinville, another day at Balbec, in Mme. de Villeparisis's barouche, when I strove to identify the reminiscence that was suggested to me by an avenue of trees. But in this third carriage, what I had before my mind's eye were those conversations that had seemed to me so tedious at Mme. de Guermante's dinner-table, for example Prince Von's stories about the German Emperor, General Botha and the British Army. I had slipped them into the frame of the internal stereoscope through the lenses of which, once we are no longer ourselves, once, endowed with the spirit of society, we no longer wish to receive our life save from other people, we cast into relief what they have said and done. Like a tipsy man filled with tender feeling for the waiter who has been serving him, I marvelled at my good fortune, a good fortune not realised by me, it is true, at the actual moment, in having dined with a person who knew William II so well, and had told stories about him that were — upon my word — really witty. And, as I repeated to myself, with the Prince's German accent, the story of General Botha, I laughed out loud, as though this laugh, like certain kinds of applause which increase one's inward admiration, were necessary to the story as a corroboration of its comic element. Through the magnifying lenses even those of Mme. de Guermantes's pronouncements which had struck me as being stupid (as for

example that on the Hals pictures which one ought to see from the top of a tramway-car) took on a life, a depth that were extraordinary. And I must say that, even if this exaltation was quick to subside, it was not altogether unreasonable. Just as there may always come a day when we are glad to know the person whom we despise more than anyone in the world because he happens to be connected with a girl with whom we are in love, to whom he can introduce us, and thus offers us both utility and gratification, attributes in each of which we should have supposed him to be entirely lacking, so there is no conversation, any more than there are personal relations, from which we can be certain that we shall not one day derive some benefit. What Mme. de Guermantes had said to me about the pictures which it would be interesting to see, even from a tramway-car, was untrue, but it contained a germ of truth which was of value to me later on.

Similarly the lines of Victor Hugo which I had heard her quote were, it must be admitted, of a period earlier than that in which he became something more than a new man, in which he brought to light, in the order of evolution, a literary species till then unknown, endowed with more complex organs than any then in existence. In these first poems, Victor Hugo is still a thinker, instead of contenting himself, like Nature, with supplying food for thought. His 'thoughts' he at that time expressed in the most direct form, almost in the sense in which the Duke employed the word when, feeling it to be out of date and a nuisance that the guests at his big parties at Guermantes should, in the visitors' book, append to their signatures a philosophico-poetical reflexion, he used to warn novices in an appealing tone: "Your name, my dear fellow, but no 'thoughts' please!" Well, it was these 'thoughts' of Victor Hugo (almost as entirely absent from the *Légende des Siècles* as 'airs,' as 'melodies' are from Wagner's later manner) that Mme. de Guermantes admired in the early Hugo. Nor was she altogether wrong. They were touching, and already round about them, without their form's having yet the depth which it was to acquire only in later years, the rolling tide of words and of richly articulated rhymes put them beyond comparison with the lines that one might discover in a Corneille, for example, lines in which a Romanticism that is intermittent, restrained and so all the more moving, nevertheless has not at all penetrated to the physical sources of life, modified the unconscious and generalisable organism in which the idea is latent. And so I had been wrong in confining myself, hitherto, to the later volumes of Hugo. Of the earlier, of course, it was only a fractional part that Mme. de Guermantes used to embellish her conversation. But simply by quoting in this

way an isolated line one multiplies its power of attraction tenfold. The lines that had entered or returned to my mind during this dinner magnetised in turn, summoned to themselves with such force the poems in the heart of which they were normally embedded, that my magnetised hands could not hold out for longer than forty-eight hours against the force that drew them towards the volume in which were bound up the *Orientales* and the *Chants du Crépuscule*. I cursed Franchise's footman for having made a present to his native village of my copy of the *Feuilles d'Automne*, and sent him off, with not a moment to be lost, to procure me another. I read these volumes from cover to cover and found peace of mind only when I suddenly came across, awaiting me in the light in which she had bathed them, the lines that I had heard Mme. de Guermantes quote. For all these reasons, conversations with the Duchess resembled the discoveries that we make in the library of a country house, out of date, incomplete, incapable of forming a mind, lacking in almost everything that we value, but offering us now and then some curious scrap of information, for instance the quotation of a fine passage which we did not know and as to which we are glad to remember in after years that we owe our knowledge of it to a stately mansion of the great. We are then, by having found Balzac's preface to the *Chartreuse*, or some unpublished letters of Joubert, tempted to exaggerate the value of the life we led there, the sterile frivolity of which, for this windfall of a single evening, we forget.

From this point of view, if the fashionable world had been unable, at the first moment, to provide what my imagination expected, and must consequently strike me first of all by what it had in common with all the other worlds rather than by its difference, still it revealed itself to me by degrees as something quite distinct. Great noblemen are almost the only people of whom one learns as much as one does of peasants; their conversation is adorned with everything that concerns the land, houses, as people used to live in them long ago, old customs, everything of which the world of money is profoundly ignorant. Even supposing that the aristocrat most moderate in his aspirations has finally overtaken the period in which he lives, his mother, his uncles, his great-aunts keep him in touch, when he recalls his childhood, with the conditions of a life almost unknown today. In the death-chamber of a contemporary corpse Mme. de Guermantes would not have pointed out, but would immediately have perceived, all the lapses from the traditional customs. She was shocked to see at a funeral women mingling with the men, when there was a particular ceremony which ought to be celebrated for the women. As for the pall, the use of which Bloch

would doubtless have believed to be confined to coffins, on account of the pall bearers of whom one reads in the reports of funerals, M. de Guermantes could remember the time when, as a child, he had seen it borne at the wedding of M. de Mailly-Nesle. While Saint-Loup had sold his priceless 'Genealogical Tree,' old portraits of the Bouillons, letters of Louis XIII, in order to buy Carrières and furniture in the modern style, M. and Mme. de Guermantes, moved by a sentiment in which the burning love of art may have played only a minor part, and which left them themselves more insignificant than before, had kept their marvellous Boule furniture, which presented a picture attractive in a different way to an artist. A literary man would similarly have been enchanted by their conversation, which would have been for him — for one hungry man has no need of another to keep him company — a living dictionary of all those expressions which every day are becoming more and more forgotten: Saint-Joseph cravats, children dedicated to the Blue, and so forth, which one finds to-day only among those people who have constituted themselves the friendly and benevolent custodians of the past. The pleasure that a writer, more than among other writers, feels among them is not without danger, for there is a risk of his coming to believe that the things of the past have a charm in themselves, of his transferring them bodily into his work, still-born in that case, exhaling a tedium for which he consoles himself with the reflexion: "It is attractive because it's true; that is how people do talk." These aristocratic conversations had moreover the charm, with Mme. de Guermantes, of being couched in excellent French. For this reason they made permissible on the Duchess's part her hilarity at the words 'viaticum,' 'cosmic,' 'pythian,' 'pre-eminent,' which Saint-Loup used to employ — as, similarly, at his Bing furniture.

When all was said, very different in this respect from what I had been able to feel before the hawthorns, or when I tasted a crumb of *madeleine*, the stories that I had heard at Mme. de Guermantes's remained alien to me. Entering for a moment into me, who was only physically possessed by them, one would have said that, being of a social, not an individual nature, they were impatient to escape. I writhed in my seat in the carriage like the priestess of an oracle. I looked forward to another dinner-party at which I might myself become a sort of Prince Von to Mme. de Guermantes, and repeat them. In the meantime they made my lips quiver as I stammered them to myself, and I tried in vain to bring back and concentrate a mind that was carried away by a centrifugal force. And so it was with a feverish impatience not to have to bear the whole weight of them any longer by myself in a carriage where, for that matter, I atoned for the lack of

conversation by soliloquising aloud, that I rang the bell at M. de Charlus's door, and it was in long monologues with myself, in which I rehearsed everything that I was going to tell him and gave scarcely a thought to what he might have to say to me, that I spent the whole of the time during which I was kept waiting in a drawing-room into which a footman shewed me and where I was incidentally too much excited to look at what it contained. I felt so urgent a need that M. de Charlus should listen to the stories which I was burning to tell him that I was bitterly disappointed to think that the master of the house was perhaps in bed, and that I might have to go home to sleep off by myself my drunkenness of words. I had just noticed, in fact, that I had been twenty-five minutes — that they had perhaps forgotten about me — in this room of which, despite this long wait, I could at the most have said that it was very big, greenish in colour, and contained a large number of portraits. The need to speak prevents one not merely from listening but from seeing things, and in this case the absence of any description of my external surroundings is tantamount to a description of my internal state. I was preparing to leave the room to try to get hold of some one, and if I found no one to make my way back to the hall and have myself let out, when, just as I had risen from my chair and taken a few steps across the mosaic parquet of the floor, a manservant came in, with a troubled expression: "Monsieur le Baron has been engaged all evening, Sir," he told me. "There are still several people waiting to see him. I am doing everything I possibly can to get him to receive you, I have already telephoned up twice to the secretary." "No; please don't bother. I had an appointment with M. le Baron, but it is very late already, and if he is busy this evening I can come back another day." "Oh no, Sir, you must not go away," cried the servant. "M. le Baron might be vexed. I will try again." I was reminded of the things I had heard about M. de Charlus's servants and their devotion to their master. One could not quite say of him as of the Prince de Conti that he sought to give pleasure as much to the valet as to the Minister, but he had shewn such skill in making of the least thing that he asked of them a sort of personal favour that at night, when, his body-servants assembled round him at a respectful distance, after running his eye over them he said: "Coignet, the candlestick!" or "Ducret, the nightshirt!" it was with an envious murmur that the rest used to withdraw, jealous of him who had been singled out by his master's favour. Two of them, indeed, who could not abide one another, used to try to snatch the favour each from his rival by going on the most flimsy pretext with a message to the Baron, if he had gone upstairs earlier than usual, in the hope of being invested for the evening with the charge of

candlestick or nightshirt. If he addressed a few words directly to one of them on some subject outside the scope of his duty, still more if in winter, in the garden, knowing that one of his coachmen had caught cold, he said to him, after ten minutes: “Put your cap on!” the others would not speak to the fellow again for a fortnight, in their jealousy of the great distinction that had been conferred on him. I waited ten minutes more, and then, after requesting me not to stay too long as M. le Baron was tired and had had to send away several most important people who had made appointments with him many days before, they admitted me to his presence. This setting with which M. de Charlus surrounded himself seemed to me a great deal less impressive than the simplicity of his brother Guermantes, but already the door stood open, I could see the Baron, in a Chinese dressing-gown, with his throat bare, lying upon a sofa. My eye was caught at the same moment by a tall hat, its nap flashing like a mirror, which had been left on a chair with a cape, as though the Baron had but recently come in. The valet withdrew. I supposed that M. de Charlus would rise to greet me. Without moving a muscle he fixed on me a pair of implacable eyes. I went towards him, I said good evening; he did not hold out his hand, made no reply, did not ask me to take a chair. After a moment’s silence I asked him, as one would ask an ill-mannered doctor, whether it was necessary for me to remain standing. I said this without any evil intention, but my words seemed only to intensify the cold fury on M. de Charlus’s face. I was not aware, as it happened, that at home, in the country, at the Château de Charlus, he was in the habit, after dinner (so much did he love to play the king) of sprawling in an armchair in the smoking-room, letting hi3 guests remain standing round him. He would ask for a light from one, offer a cigar to another and then, after a few minutes’ interval, would say: “But Argencourt, why don’t you sit down? Take a chair, my dear fellow,” and so forth, having made a point of keeping them standing simply to remind them that it was from himself that permission came to them to be seated. “Put yourself in the Louis XIV seat,” he answered me with an imperious air, as though rather to force me to move away farther from himself than to invite me to be seated. I took an armchair which was comparatively near. “Ah! so that is what you call a Louis XIV seat, is it? I can see you have been well educated,” he cried in derision. I was so much taken aback that I did not move, either to leave the house, as I ought to have done, or to change my seat, as he wished. “Sir,” he next said to me, weighing each of his words, to the more impertinent of which he prefixed a double yoke of consonants, “the interview which I have condescended to grant you at the request of a person who desires to be nameless, will mark the final

point in our relations. I shall not conceal from you that I had hoped for better things! I should perhaps be forcing the sense of the words a little, which one ought not to do, even with people who are ignorant of their value, simply out of the respect due to oneself, were I to tell you that I had felt a certain *attraction* towards you. I think, however, that *benevolence*, in its most actively protecting sense, would exceed neither what I felt nor what I was proposing to display. I had, immediately on my return to Paris, given you to understand, while you were still at Balbec, that you could count upon me." I who remembered with what a torrent of abuse M. de Charlus had parted from me at Balbec made an instinctive gesture of contradiction. "What!" he cried with fury, and indeed his face, convulsed and white, differed as much from his ordinary face as does the sea when on a morning of storm one finds instead of its customary smiling surface a thousand serpents writhing in spray and foam, "do you mean to pretend that you did not receive my message — almost a declaration — that you were to remember me? What was there in the way of decoration round the cover of the book that I sent you?" "Some very pretty twined garlands with tooled ornaments," I told him. "Ah!" he replied, with an air of scorn, "these young Frenchmen know little of the treasures of our land. What would be said of a young Berliner who had never heard of the *Walküre*? Besides, you must have eyes to see and see not, since you yourself told me that you had stood for two hours in front of that particular treasure. I can see that you know no more about flowers than you do about styles; don't protest that you know about styles," he cried in a shrill scream of rage, "you can't even tell me what you are sitting on. You offer your hindquarters a Directory*chauffeuse* as a Louis XIV *bergère*. One of these days you'll be mistaking Mme. de Villeparisis's knees for the seat of the rear, and a fine mess you'll make of things then. It's precisely the same; you didn't even recognise on the binding of Bergotte's book the lintel of myosotis over the door of Balbec church. Could there be any clearer way of saying to you: 'Forget me not!'?" I looked at M. de Charlus. Undoubtedly his magnificent head, though repellent, yet far surpassed that of any of his relatives; you would have called him an Apollo grown old; but an olive-hued, bilious juice seemed ready to start from the corners of his evil mouth; as for intellect, one could not deny that his, over a vast compass, had taken in many things which must always remain unknown to his brother Guermantes. But whatever the fine words with which he coloured all his hatreds, one felt that, even if there was now an offended pride, now a disappointment in love, or a rancour, or sadism, a love of teasing, a fixed obsession, this man was capable of doing murder, and of proving by force of

logic that he had been right in doing it and was still superior by a hundred cubits in moral stature to his brother, his sister-in-law, or any of the rest. “Just as, in Velazquez’s*Lances*,” he went on, “the victor advances towards him who is the humbler in rank, as is the duty of every noble nature, since I was everything and you were nothing, it was I who took the first steps towards you. You have made an idiotic reply to what it is not for me to describe as an act of greatness. But I have not allowed myself to be discouraged. Our religion inculcates patience. The patience I have shewn towards you will be counted, I hope, to my credit, and also my having only smiled at what might be denounced as impertinence, were it within your power to offer any impertinence to me who surpass you in stature by so many cubits; but after all, Sir, all this is now neither here nor there. I have subjected you to the test which the one eminent man of our world has ingeniously named the test of excessive friendliness, and which he rightly declares to be the most terrible of all, the only one that can separate the good grain from the tares. I could scarcely reproach you for having undergone it without success, for those who emerge from it triumphant are very few. But at least, and this is the conclusion which I am entitled to draw from the last words that we shall exchange on this earth, at least I intend to hear nothing more of your calumnious fabrications.” So far, I had never dreamed that M. de Charlus’s rage could have been caused by an unflattering remark which had been repeated to him; I searched my memory; I had not spoken about him to anyone. Some evil-doer had invented the whole thing. I protested to-M. de Charlus that I had said absolutely nothing about him. “I don’t think I can have annoyed you by saying to Mme. de Guermantes that I was a friend of yours.” He gave a disdainful smile, made his voice climb to the supreme pitch of its highest register, and there, without strain, attacking the shrillest and most insolent note: “Oh! Sir,” he said, returning by the most gradual stages to a natural intonation, and seeming to revel as he went in the oddities of this descending scale, “I think that you are doing yourself an injustice when you accuse yourself of having said that we were *friends*. I do not look for any great verbal accuracy in anyone who could readily mistake a piece of Chippendale for a rococo *chaire*, but really I do not believe,” he went on, with vocal caresses that grew more and more winning and brought to hover over his lips what was actually a charming smile, “I do not believe that you can ever have said, or thought, that we were *frlends*! As for your having boasted that you had been *presented* to me, had *talked* to me, knew me slightly, had obtained, almost without solicitation, the prospect of coming one day under my *protection*, I find it on the contrary very natural and intelligent of

you to have done so. The extreme difference in age that there is between us enables me to recognise without absurdity that that*presentation*, those *talks*, that vague prospect of future *relations* were for you, it is not for me to say an honour, but still, when all is said and done, an advantage as to which I consider that your folly lay not in divulging it but in not having had the sense to keep it. I will go so far as to say," he went on, passing abruptly for a moment from his arrogant wrath to a gentleness so tinged with melancholy that I expected him to burst into tears, "that when you left unanswered the proposal I made to you here in Paris it seemed to me so unheard-of an act on your part, coming from you who had struck me as well brought up and of a good *bourgeois* family," (on this adjective alone his voice sounded a little whistle of impertinence) "that I was foolish enough to imagine all the excuses that never really happen, letters miscarrying, addresses copied down wrong. I can see that on my part it was great foolishness, but Saint Bonaventure preferred to believe that an ox could fly rather than that his brother was capable of lying. Anyhow, that is all finished now, the idea did not attract you, there is no more to be said. It seems to me only that you might have brought yourself," (and there was a genuine sound of weeping in his voice) "were it only out of consideration for my age, to write to me. I had conceived and planned for you certain infinitely seductive things, which I had taken good care not to tell you. You have preferred to refuse without knowing what they were; that is your affair. But, as I tell you, one can always *write*. In your place, and indeed in my own, I should have done so. I like my place, for that reason, better than yours — I say 'for that reason' because I believe that we are all equal, and I have more fellow-feeling for an intelligent labourer than for many of our dukes. But I can say that I prefer my place to yours, because what you have done, in the whole course of my life, which is beginning now to be a pretty long one, I am conscious that I have never done." His head was turned away from the light, and I could not see if his eyes were dropping tears as I might have supposed from his voice. "I told you that I had taken a hundred steps towards you; the only effect of that has been to make you retire two hundred from me. Now it is for me to withdraw, and we shall know one another no longer. I shall retain not your name but your story, so that at moments when I might be tempted to believe that men have good hearts, good manners, or simply the intelligence not to allow an unparalleled opportunity to escape them, I may remember that that is ranking them too highly. No, that you should have said that you knew me, when it was true — for henceforward it ceases to be true — I regard that as only natural, and I take it as an act of homage, that is to say something pleasant.

Unfortunately, elsewhere and in other circumstances, you have uttered remarks of a very different nature." "Sir, I swear to you that I have said nothing that could insult you." "And who says that I am insulted?" he cried with fury, flinging himself into an erect posture on the seat on which hitherto he had been reclining motionless, while, as the pale frothing serpents stiffened in his face, his voice became alternately shrill and grave, like the deafening onrush of a storm. (The force with which he habitually spoke, which used to make strangers turn round in the street, was multiplied an hundredfold, as is a musical *forte* if, instead of being played on the piano, it is played by an orchestra, and changed into a*fortissimo* as well. M. de Charlus roared.) "Do you suppose that it is within your power to insult me? You evidently are not aware to whom you are speaking? Do you imagine that the envenomed spittle of five hundred little gentlemen of your type, heaped one upon another, would succeed in slobbering so much as the tips of my august toes?" A moment before this my desire to persuade M. de Charlus that I had never said, nor heard anyone else say any evil of him had given place to a mad rage, caused by the words which were dictated to him solely, to my mind, by his colossal pride. Perhaps they were indeed the effect, in part at any rate, of this pride. Almost all the rest sprang from a feeling of which I was then still ignorant, and for which I could not therefore be blamed for not making due allowance. I could at least, failing this unknown element, have mingled with his pride, had I remembered the words of Mme. de Guermantes, a trace of madness. But at that moment the idea of madness never even entered my head. There was in him, according to me, only pride, in me there was only fury. This fury (at the moment when M. de Charlus ceased to shout, in order to refer to his august toes, with a majesty that was accompanied by a grimace, a nausea of disgust at his obscure blasphemers), this fury could contain itself no longer. With an impulsive movement, I wanted to strike something, and, a lingering trace of discernment making me respect the person of a man so much older than myself, and even, in view of their dignity as works of art, the pieces of German porcelain that were grouped around him, I flung myself upon the Baron's new silk hat, dashed it to the ground, trampled upon it, began blindly pulling it to pieces, wrenched off the brim, tore the crown in two, without heeding the vociferations of M. de Charlus, which continued to sound, and, crossing the room to leave it, opened the door. One on either side of it, to my intense stupefaction, stood two footmen, who moved slowly away, so as to appear only to have been casually passing in the course of their duty. (I afterwards learned their names; one was called Burnier, the other Charmel.) I

was not taken in for a moment by this explanation which their leisurely gait seemed to offer me. It was highly improbable; three others appeared to me to be less so; one that the Baron sometimes entertained guests against whom, as he might happen to need assistance (but why?), he deemed it necessary to keep reinforcements posted close at hand. The second was that, drawn by curiosity, they had stopped to listen at the keyhole, not thinking that I should come out so quickly. The third, that, the whole of the scene which M. de Charlus had made with me having been prepared and acted, he had himself told them to listen, from a love of the spectacular combined, perhaps, with a '*nunc crudimini*' from which each would derive a suitable profit.

My anger had not calmed that of M. de Charlus, my departure from the room seemed to cause him acute distress; he called me back, made his servants call me back, and finally, forgetting that a moment earlier, when he spoke of his 'august toes,' he had thought to make me a witness of his own deification, came running after me at full speed, overtook me in the hall, and stood barring the door. "There, now," he said, "don't be childish; come back for a minute; he who loveth well chasteneth well, and if I have chastened you well it is because I love you well." My anger had subsided; I let the word 'chasten' pass, and followed the Baron, who, summoning a footman, ordered him without a trace of self-consciousness to clear away the remains of the shattered hat, which was replaced by another. "If you will tell me, Sir, who it is that has treacherously maligned me," I said to M. de Charlus, "I will stay here to learn his name and to confute the impostor." "Who? Do you not know? Do you retain no memory of the things you say? Do you think that the people who do me the service of informing me of those things do not begin by demanding secrecy? And do you imagine that I am going to betray a person to whom I have given my promise?" "Sir, is it impossible then for you to tell me?" I asked, racking my brains in a final effort to discover (and discovering no one) to whom I could have spoken about M. de Charlus. "You did not hear me say that I had given a promise of secrecy to my informant?" he said in a snapping voice. "I see that with your fondness for abject utterances you combine one for futile persistence. You ought to have at least the intelligence to profit by a final conversation, and so to speak as to say something that does not mean precisely nothing." "Sir," I replied, moving away from him, "you insult me; I am unarmed, because you are several times my age, we are not equally matched; on the other hand, I cannot convince you; I have already sworn to you that I have said nothing." "I am lying, then, am I?" he cried in a terrifying tone, and with a bound forwards that brought him within a yard of myself.

“Some one has misinformed you.” Then in a gentle, affectionate, melancholy voice, as in those symphonies which are played without any break between the different movements, in which a graceful *scherzo*, amiable and idyllic, follows the thunder-peals of the opening pages: “It is quite possible,” he told me. “Generally speaking, a remark repeated at second hand is rarely true. It is your fault if, not having profited by the opportunities of seeing me which I had held out to you, you have not furnished me, by that open speech of daily intercourse which creates confidence, with the unique and sovereign remedy against a spoken word which made you out a traitor. Either way, true or false, the remark has done its work. I can never again rid myself of the impression it made on me. I cannot even say that he who chasteneth well loveth well, for I have chastened you well enough but I no longer love you.” While saying this he had forced me to sit down and had rung the bell. A different footman appeared. “Bring something to drink and order the brougham.” I said that I was not thirsty and besides had a carriage waiting. “They have probably paid him and sent him away,” he told me, “you needn’t worry about that. I am ordering a carriage to take you home.... If you’re anxious about the time... I could have given you a room here...” I said that my mother would be uneasy. “Ah! Of course, yes. Well, true or false, the remark has done its work. My affection, a trifle premature, had flowered too soon, and, like those apple trees of which you spoke so poetically at Balbec, it has been unable to withstand the first frost.” If M. de Charlus’s affection for me had not been destroyed, he could hardly have acted differently, since, while assuring me that we were no longer acquainted, he made me sit down, drink, asked me to stay the night, and was going now to send me home. He had indeed an air of dreading the moment at which he must part from me and find himself alone, that sort of slightly anxious fear which his sister-in-law and cousin Guermantes had appeared to me to be feeling when she had tried to force me to stay a little longer, with something of the same momentary fondness for myself, of the same effort to prolong the passing minute. “Unfortunately,” he went on, “I have not the power to make blossom again what has once been destroyed. My affection for you is quite dead. Nothing can revive it. I believe that it is not unworthy of me to confess that I regret it. I always feel myself to be a little like Victor Hugo’s Boaz: ‘I am widowed and alone, and the darkness gathers o’er me.’”

I passed again with him through the big green drawing-room. I told him, speaking quite at random, how beautiful I thought it. “Ain’t it?” he replied. “It’s a good thing to be fond of something. The woodwork is Bagard. What is rather

charming, d'you see, is that it was made to match the Beauvais chairs and the consoles. You observe, it repeats the same decorative design. There used to be only two places where you could see this, the Louvre and M. d'Hinnisdal's house. But naturally, as soon as I had decided to come and live in this street, there cropped up an old family house of the Chimays which nobody had ever seen before because it came here expressly for *me*. On the whole, it's good. It might perhaps be better, but after all it's not bad. Some pretty things, ain't there? These are portraits of my uncles, the King of Poland and the King of England, by Mignard. But why am I telling you all this? You must know it as well as I do, you were waiting in this room. No? Ah, then they must have put you in the blue drawing-room," he said with an air that might have been either impertinence, on the score of my want of interest, or personal superiority, in not having taken the trouble to ask where I had been kept waiting. "Look now, in this cabinet I have all the hats worn by Mlle. Elisabeth, by the Princesse de Lamballe, and by the Queen. They don't interest you, one would think you couldn't see. Perhaps you are suffering from an affection of the optic nerve. If you like this kind of beauty better, here is a rainbow by Turner beginning to shine out between these two Rembrandts, as a sign of our reconciliation. You hear: Beethoven has come to join him." And indeed one could hear the first chords of the third part of the Pastoral Symphony, 'Joy after the Storm,' performed somewhere not far away, on the first landing no doubt, by a band of musicians. I innocently inquired how they happened to be playing that, and who the musicians were. "Ah, well, one doesn't know. One never does know. They are unseen music. Pretty, ain't it?" he said to me in a slightly impertinent tone, which, nevertheless, suggested somehow the influence and accent of Swann. "But you care about as much for it as a fish does for little apples. You want to go home, regardless of any want of respect for Beethoven or for me. You are uttering your own judgment and condemnation," he added, with an affectionate and mournful air, when the moment had come for me to go. "You will excuse my not accompanying you home, as good manners ordain that I should," he said to me. "Since I have decided not to see you again, spending five minutes more in your company would make very little difference to me. But I am tired, and I have a great deal to do." And then, seeing that it was a fine night: "Very well, yes, I will come in the carriage, there is a superb moon which I shall go on to admire from the Bois after I have taken you home. What, you don't know how to shave; even on a night when you've been dining out, you have still a few hairs here," he said, taking my chin between two fingers, so to speak magnetised, which after a

moment's resistance ran up to my ears, like the fingers of a barber. "Ah! It would be pleasant to look at the 'blue light of the moon' in the Bois with some one like yourself," he said to me with a sudden and almost involuntary gentleness, then, in a sadder tone: "For you are nice, all the same; you could be nicer than anyone," he went on, laying his hand in a fatherly way on my shoulder. "Originally, I must say that I found you quite insignificant." I ought to have reflected that he must find me so still. I had only to recall the rage with which he had spoken to me, barely half an hour before. In spite of this I had the impression that he was, for the moment, sincere, that his kindness of heart was prevailing over what I regarded as an almost delirious condition of susceptibility and pride. The carriage was waiting beside us, and still he prolonged the conversation. "Come along," he said abruptly, "jump in, in five minutes we shall be at your door. And I shall bid you a good night which will cut short our relations, and for all time. It is better, since we must part for ever, that we should do so, as in music, on a perfect chord." Despite these solemn affirmations that we should never see one another again, I could have sworn that M. de Charlus, annoyed at having forgotten himself earlier in the evening and afraid of having hurt my feelings, would not have been displeased to see me once again. Nor was I mistaken, for, a moment later: "There, now," he said, "if I hadn't forgotten the most important thing of all. In memory of your grandmother, I have had bound for you a curious edition of Mme. de Sévigné. That is what is going to prevent this from being our last meeting. One must console oneself with the reflexion that complicated affairs are rarely settled in a day. Just look how long they took over the Congress of Vienna." "But I could call for it without disturbing you," I said obligingly. "Will you hold your tongue, you little fool," he replied with anger, "and not give yourself a grotesque appearance of regarding as a small matter the honour of being probably (I do not say certainly, for it will perhaps be one of my servants who hands you the volumes) received by me." Then, regaining possession of himself: "I do not wish to part from you on these words. No dissonance, before the eternal silence of the dominant." It was for his own nerves that he seemed to dread an immediate return home after harsh words of dissension. "You would not care to come to the Bois?" he addressed me in a tone not so much interrogative as affirmative, and that not, as it seemed to me, because he did not wish to make me the offer but because he was afraid that his self-esteem might meet with a refusal. "Oh, very well," he went on, still postponing our separation, "it is the moment when, as Whistler says, the *bourgeois* go to bed" (perhaps he wished now to capture me by my self-esteem)

“and the right time to begin to look at things. But you don’t even know who Whistler was!” I changed the conversation and asked him whether the Princesse d’Iéna was an intelligent person. M. de Charlus stopped me, and, adopting the most contemptuous tone that I had yet heard him use, “Oh! There, Sir,” he informed me, “you are alluding to an order of nomenclature with which I have no concern. There is perhaps an aristocracy among the Tahitians, but I must confess that I know nothing about it. The name which you have just mentioned, strangely enough, did sound in my ears only a few days ago. Some one asked me whether I would condescend to allow them to present to me the young Duc de Guastalla. The request astonished me, for the Duc de Guastalla has no need to get himself presented to me, for the simple reason that he is my cousin, and has known me all his life; he is the son of the Princesse de Parme, and, as a young kinsman of good upbringing, he never fails to come and pay his respects to me on New Year’s Day. But, on making inquiries, I discovered that it was not my relative who was meant but the son of the person in whom you are interested. As there exists no Princess of that title, I supposed that my friend was referring to some poor wanton sleeping under the Pont d’Iéna, who had picturesquely assumed the title of Princesse d’Iéna, just as one talks about the Panther of the Batignolles, or the Steel King. But no, the reference was to a rich person who possesses some remarkable furniture which I had seen and admired at an exhibition, and which has this advantage over the name of its owner that it is genuine. As for this self-styled Duc de Guastalla, he, I supposed, must be my secretary’s stockbroker; one can procure so many things with money. But no; it was the Emperor, it appears, who amused himself by conferring on these people a title which simply was not his to give. It was perhaps a sign of power, or of ignorance, or of malice; in any case, I consider, it was an exceedingly scurvy trick to play on these unconscious usurpers. But really, I cannot help you by throwing any light on the matter; my knowledge begins and ends with the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where, among all the Courvoisiers and Gallardons, you will find, if you can manage to secure an introduction, plenty of mangy old cats taken straight out of Balzac who will amuse you. Naturally, all that has nothing to do with the position of the Princesse de Guermantes, but without me and my ‘Open, Sesame’ her portals are unapproachable.” “It is really very lovely, isn’t it, Sir, the Princesse de Guermantes’s mansion?” “Oh, it’s not very lovely. It’s the loveliest thing in the world. Next to the Princess herself, of course.” “The Princesse de Guermantes is better than the Duchesse de Guermantes?” “Oh! There’s no comparison.” (It is to be observed that, whenever people in society

have the least touch of imagination, they will crown or dethrone, to suit their affections or their quarrels, those whose position appeared most solid and unalterably fixed.)

"The Duchesse de Guermantes" (possibly, in not calling her 'Oriane,' he wished to set a greater distance between her and myself) "is delightful, far superior to anything you can have guessed. But, after all, she is incommensurable with her cousin. The Princess is exactly what the people in the Markets might imagine Princess Metternich to have been, but old Metternich believed she had started Wagner, because she knew Victor Maurel. The Princesse de Guermantes, or rather her mother, knew the man himself. Which is a distinction, not to mention the incredible beauty of the lady. And the Esther gardens alone!" "One can't see them?" "No, you would have to be invited, but they never invite *anyone* unless I intervene." But at once withdrawing, after casting it at me, the bait of this offer, he held out his hand, for we had reached my door. "My part is played, Sir, I will simply add these few words. Another person will perhaps some day offer you his affection, as I have done. Let the present example serve for your instruction. Do not neglect it. Affection is always precious. What one cannot do by oneself in this life, because there are things which one cannot ask, nor do, nor wish, nor learn by oneself, one can do in company, and without needing to be Thirteen, as in Balzac's story, or Four, as in *The Three Musketeers*. Good-bye."

He must have been feeling tired and have abandoned the idea of going to look at the moonlight, for he asked me to tell his coachman to drive home. At once he made a sharp movement as though he had changed his mind. But I had already given the order, and, so as not to lose any more time, went across now to ring the bell, without its entering my head that I had been meaning to tell M. de Charlus, about the German Emperor and General Botha, stories which had been an hour ago such an obsession but which his unexpected and crushing reception had sent flying far out of my mind.

On entering my room I saw on my desk a letter which Franchise's young footman had written to one of his friends and had left lying there. Now that my mother was away, there was no liberty which he had the least hesitation in taking; I was the more to blame of the two for taking that of reading the letter which, without an envelope, lay spread out before me and (which was my sole excuse) seemed to offer itself to my eye.

"Dear Friend and Cousin,

"I hope this finds you in good health, and the same with all the young folk,

particularly my young godson Joseph whom I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting but whom I prefer to you all as being my godson, these relics of the heart they have their dust also, upon their blest remains let us not lay our hands. Besides dear friend and cousin who can say that to-morrow you and your dear wife my cousin Marie, will not both of you be cast headlong down into the bottom of the sea, like the sailor clinging to the mast on high, for this life is but a dark valley. Dear friend I must tell you that my principal occupation, which will astonish you I am certain, is now poetry which I love passionately, for one must somehow pass the time away. And so dear friend do not be too surprised if I have not answered your last letter before now, in place of pardon let oblivion come. As you are aware, Madame's mother has passed away amid unspeakable sufferings which fairly exhausted her as she saw as many as three doctors. The day of her interment was a great day for all Monsieur's relations came in crowds as well as several Ministers. It took them more than two hours to get to the cemetery, which will make you all open your eyes pretty wide in your village for they certainly won't do as much for mother Michu. So all my life to come can be but one long sob. I am amusing myself enormously with the motorcycle of which I have recently learned. What would you say, my dear friends, if I arrived suddenly like that at full speed at Les Ecorces. But on that head I shall no more keep silence for I feel that the frenzy of grief sweeps its reason away. I am associating with the Duchesse de Guermantes, people whose very names you have never heard in our ignorant villages. Therefore it is with pleasure that I am going to send the works of Racine, of Victor Hugo, of Pages Choisies de Chenedolle, of Alfred de Musset, for I would cure the land in which I saw the light of ignorance which leads unerringly to crime. I can think of nothing more to say to you and send you like the pelican wearied by a long flight my best regards as well as to your wife my godson and your sister Rose. May it never be said of her: And Rose she lived only as live the roses, as has been said by Victor Hugo, the sonnet of Arvers, Alfred de Musset, all those great geniuses who for that cause have had to die upon the blazing scaffold like Jeanne d'Arc. Hoping for your next letter soon, receive my kisses like those of a brother.

"Périgot (Joseph)."

We are attracted by every form of life which represents to us something unknown and strange, by a last illusion still unshattered. In spite of this, the mysterious utterances by means of which M. de Charlus had led me to imagine the Princesse de Guermantes as an extraordinary creature, different from anyone that I knew, were not sufficient to account for the stupefaction in which I was

plunged, speedily followed by the fear that I might be the victim of some bad joke planned by some one who wanted to send me to the door of a house to which I had not been invited, when, about two months after my dinner with the Duchess and while she was at Cannes, having opened an envelope the appearance of which had not led me to suppose that it contained anything out of the common, I read the following words engraved on a card: “The Princesse de Guermantes, *née* Duchesse en Bavière, At Home, the —— th.” No doubt to be invited to the Princesse de Guermantes’s was perhaps not, from the social point of view, any more difficult than to dine with the Duchess, and my slight knowledge of heraldry had taught me that the title of Prince is not superior to that of Duke. Besides, I told myself that the intelligence of a society woman could not be essentially so heterogeneous to that of her congeners as M. de Charlus made out, nor so heterogeneous to that of any one other woman in society. But my imagination, like Elstir engaged upon rendering some effect of perspective without reference to a knowledge of the laws of nature which he might quite well possess, depicted for me not what I knew but what it saw; what it saw, that is to say what the name shewed it. Now, even before I had met the Duchess, the name Guermantes preceded by the title of Princess, like a note or a colour or quantity, profoundly modified from the surrounding values by the mathematical or aesthetic sign that governs it, had already suggested to me something entirely different. With that title one finds one’s thoughts straying instinctively to the memoirs of the days of Louis XIII and Louis XIV, the English Court, the Queen of Scots, the Duchesse d’Aumale; and I imagined the town house of the Princesse de Guermantes as more or less frequented by the Duchesse de Longueville and the great Condé, whose presence there rendered it highly improbable that I should ever make my way into it.

Many of the things that M. de Charlus had told me had driven a vigorous spur into my imagination and, making it forget how much the reality had disappointed me at Mme. de Guermantes’s (people’s names are in this respect like the names of places), had swung it towards Oriane’s cousin. For that matter, M. de Charlus misled me at times as to the imaginary value and variety of people in society only because he was himself at times misled. And this, perhaps, because he did nothing, did not write, did not paint, did not even read anything in a serious and thorough manner. But, superior by several degrees to the people in society, if it was from them and the spectacle they afforded that he drew the material for his conversation, he was not for that reason understood by them. Speaking as an artist, he could at the most reveal the fallacious charm of people

in society. But reveal it to artists alone, with relation to whom he might be said to play the part played by the reindeer among the Esquimaux. This precious animal plucks for them from the barren rocks lichens and mosses which they themselves could neither discover nor utilise, but which, once they have been digested by the reindeer, become for the inhabitants of the far North a nourishing form of food.

To which I may add that the pictures which M. de Charlus drew of society were animated with plenty of life by the blend of his ferocious hatreds and his passionate affections. Hatreds directed mainly against the young men, adoration aroused principally by certain women.

If among these the Princesse de Guermantes was placed by M. de Charlus upon the most exalted throne, his mysterious words about the ‘unapproachable Aladdin’s palace’ in which his cousin dwelt were not sufficient to account for my stupefaction. Apart from whatever may be due to the divers subjective points of view, of which I shall have to speak later, in these artificial magnifications, the fact remains that there is a certain objective reality in each of these people, and consequently a difference among them. And how, when it comes to that, could it be otherwise? The humanity with which we consort and which bears so little resemblance to our dreams is, for all that, the same that, in the Memoirs, in the Letters of eminent persons, we have seen described and have felt a desire to know. The old man of complete insignificance whom we met at dinner is the same who wrote that proud letter, which (in a book on the War of 1870) we read with emotion, to Prince Friedrich-Karl. We are bored at a dinner-table because our imagination is absent, and because it is bearing us company we are interested in a book. But the people in question are the same. We should like to have known Mme. de Pompadour, who was so valuable a patron of the arts, and we should have been as much bored in her company as among the modern Egerias, at whose houses we cannot bring ourselves to pay a second call, so uninteresting do we find them. The fact remains, nevertheless, that these differences do exist. People are never exactly similar to one another, their mode of behaviour with regard to ourselves, at, one might say, the same level of friendship, reveals differences which, in the end, offer compensations. When I knew Mme. de Montmorency, she loved to say unpleasant things to me, but if I was in need of a service she would squander, in the hope of obtaining it for me effectively, all the credit at her disposal, without counting the cost. Whereas some other woman, Mme. de Guermantes for example, would never have wished to hurt my feelings, never said anything about me except what might give me pleasure, showered on

me all those tokens of friendship which formed the rich manner of living, morally, of the Guermantes, but, had I asked her for the least thing above and beyond that, would not have moved an inch to procure it for me, as in those country houses where one has at one's disposal a motor-car and a special footman, but where it is impossible to obtain a glass of cider, for which no provision has been made in the arrangements for a party. Which was for me the true friend, Mme. de Montmorency, so glad always to annoy me and always so ready to oblige, or Mme. de Guermantes, distressed by the slightest offence that might have been given me and incapable of the slightest effort to be of use to me? The types of the human mind are so varied, so opposite, not only in literature but in society, that Baudelaire and Mérimée are not the only people who have the right to despise one another mutually. These peculiarities continue to form in everyone a system of attitudes, of speech, of actions, so coherent, so despotic, that when we are in the presence of anyone his or her system seems to us superior to the rest. With Mme. de Guermantes, her words, deduced like a theorem from her type of mind, seemed to me the only ones that could possibly be said. And I was, at heart, of her opinion when she told me that Mme. de Montmorency was stupid and kept an open mind towards all the things she did not understand, or when, having heard of some spiteful remark by that lady, she said: "That is what you call a good woman; it is what I call a monster." But this tyranny of the reality which confronts us, this preponderance of the lamplight which turns the dawn — already distant — as pale as the faintest memory, disappeared when I was away from Mme. de Guermantes, and a different lady said to me, putting herself on my level and reckoning the Duchess as placed far below either of us: "Oriane takes no interest, really, in anything or anybody," or even (what in the presence of Mme. de Guermantes it would have seemed impossible to believe, so loudly did she herself proclaim the opposite): "Oriane is a snob." Seeing that no mathematical process would have enabled one to convert Mme. d'Arpajon and Mme. de Montpensier into commensurable quantities, it would have been impossible for me to reply, had anyone asked me which of the two seemed to me superior to the other.

Now, among the peculiar characteristics of the drawing-room of the Princesse de Guermantes, the one most generally quoted was a certain exclusiveness, due in part to the royal birth of the Princess, but especially to the almost fossilised rigidity of the aristocratic prejudices of the Prince, prejudices which, incidentally, the Duke and Duchess had made no scruple about deriding in front of me, and which naturally were to make me regard it as more

improbable than ever that I should have been invited to a party by this man who reckoned only in royalties and dukes, and at every dinner-party made a scene because he had not been put in the place to which he would have been entitled under Louis XIV, a place which, thanks to his immense erudition in matters of history and genealogy, he was the only person who knew. For this reason, many of the people in society placed to the credit of the Duke and Duchess the differences which distinguished them from their cousins. “The Duke and Duchess are far more modern, far more intelligent, they don’t think of nothing, like the other couple, but how many quarterings one has, their house is three hundred years in advance of their cousins’,” were customary remarks, the memory of which made me tremble as I looked at the card of invitation, to which they gave a far greater probability of its having been sent me by some practical joker.

If the Duke and Duchess had not been still at Cannes, I might have tried to find out from them whether the invitation which I had received was genuine. This state of doubt in which I was plunged was not due, as I flattered myself for a time by supposing, to a sentiment which a man of fashion would not have felt and which, consequently, a writer, even if he belonged apart from his writership to the fashionable caste, ought to reproduce in order to be thoroughly ‘objective’ and to depict each class differently. I happened, in fact, only the other day, in a charming volume of memoirs, to come upon the record of uncertainties analogous to those which the Princesse de Guermantes’s card made me undergo. “Georges and I” (or “Hély and I,” I have not the book at hand to verify the reference) “were so keen to be asked to Mme. Delessert’s that, having received an invitation from her, we thought it prudent, each of us independently, to make certain that we were not the victims of an April fool.” Now, the writer is none other than the Comte d’Haussonville (he who married the Duc de Broglie’s daughter) and the other young man who ‘independently’ makes sure that he is not having a practical joke played on him is, according to whether he is called Georges or Hély, one or other of the two inseparable friends of M. d’Haussonville, either M. d’Harcourt or the Prince de Chalais.

The day on which the party was to be given at the Princesse de Guermantes’s, I learned that the Duke and Duchess had just returned to Paris. The Princess’s ball would not have brought them back, but one of their cousins was seriously ill, and moreover the Duke was greatly taken up with a revel which was to be held the same night, and at which he himself was to appear as Louis XI and his wife as Isabel of Bavaria. And I determined to go and see her

that morning. But, having gone out early, they had not yet returned; I watched first of all from a little room, which had seemed to me to be a good look-out post, for the arrival of their carriage. As a matter of fact I had made a singularly bad choice in my observatory from which I could barely make out our courtyard, but I did see into several others, and this, though of no value to me, occupied my mind for a time. It is not only in Venice that one has those outlooks on to several houses at once which have proved so tempting to painters; it is just the same in Paris. Nor do I cite Venice at random. It is of its poorer quarters that certain poor quarters of Paris make one think, in the morning, with their tall, wide chimneys to which the sun imparts the most vivid pinks, the brightest reds; it is a whole garden that flowers above the houses, and flowers in such a variety of tints that one would call it, planted on top of the town, the garden of a tulip-fancier of Delft or Haarlem. And then also, the extreme proximity of the houses, with their windows looking opposite one another on to a common courtyard, makes of each casement the frame in which a cook sits dreamily gazing down at the ground below, in which farther off a girl is having her hair combed by an old woman with the face, barely distinguishable in the shadow, of a witch: thus each courtyard provides for the adjoining house, by suppressing all sound in its interval, by leaving visible a series of silent gestures in a series of rectangular frames, glazed by the closing of the windows, an exhibition of a hundred Dutch paintings hung in rows. Certainly from the Hôtel de Guermantes one did not have the same kind of view, but one had curious views also, especially from the strange trigonometrical point at which I had placed myself and from which one’s gaze was arrested by nothing nearer than the distant heights formed by the comparatively vague plots of ground which preceded, on a steep slope, the mansion of the Marquise de Plassac and Mme. de Tresmes, cousins (of the most noble category) of M. de Guermantes, whom I did not know. Between me and this house (which was that of their father, M. de Bréquigny) nothing but blocks of buildings of low elevation, facing in every conceivable direction, which, without blocking the view, increased the distance with their diagonal perspective. The red-tiled turret of the coach-house in which the Marquis de Frécourt kept his carriages did indeed end in a spire that rose rather higher, but was so slender that it concealed nothing, and made one think of those picturesque old buildings in Switzerland which spring up in isolation at the foot of a mountain. All these vague and divergent points on which my eyes rested made more distant apparently than if it had been separated from us by several streets or by a series of foothills the house of Mme. de Plassac, actually quite

near but chimerically remote as in an Alpine landscape. When its large paned windows, glittering in the sunlight like flakes of rock crystal, were thrown open so as to air the rooms, one felt, in following from one floor to the next the footmen whom it was impossible to see clearly but who were visibly shaking carpets, the same pleasure as when one sees in a landscape by Turner or Elstir a traveller in a mail-coach, or a guide, at different degrees of altitude on the Saint-Gothard. But from this point of view in which I had ensconced myself I should have been in danger of not seeing M. or Mme. de Guermantes come in, so that when in the afternoon I was free to resume my survey I simply stood on the staircase, from which the opening of the carriage-gate could not escape my notice, and it was on this staircase that I posted myself, albeit there did not appear there, so entrancing with their footmen rendered minute by distance and busily cleaning, the Alpine beauties of the Bréquigny-Tresmes mansion. Now this wait on the staircase was to have for me consequences so considerable, and to reveal to me a picture no longer Turneresque but ethical, of so great importance, that it is preferable to postpone the account of it for a little while by interposing first that of my visit to the Guermantes when I knew that they had come home. It was the Duke alone who received me in the library. As I went in there came out a little man with snow-white hair, a look of poverty, a little black neckcloth such as was worn by the lawyer at Combray and by several of my grandfather’s friends, but of a more timid aspect than they, who, making me a series of profound bows, refused absolutely to go downstairs until I had passed him. The Duke shouted after him from the library something which I did not understand, and the other responded with further bows, addressed to the wall, for the Duke could not see him, but endlessly repeated nevertheless, like the purposeless smiles on the faces of people who are talking to one over the telephone; he had a falsetto voice, and saluted me afresh with the humility of a man of business. And he might, for that matter, have been a man of business from Combray, so much was he in the style, provincial, out of date and mild, of the small folk, the modest elders of those parts. “You shall see Oriane in a minute,” the Duke told me when I had entered the room. “As Swann is coming in presently and bringing her the proofs of his book on the coinage of the Order of Malta, and, what is worse, an immense photograph he has had taken shewing both sides of each of the coins, Oriane preferred to get dressed early so that she can stay with him until it’s time to go out to dinner. We have such a heap of things in the house already that we don’t know where to put them all, and I ask myself where on earth we are going to stick this photograph. But I have too

good-natured a wife, who is too fond of giving people pleasure. She thought it would be polite to ask Swann to let her see side by side on one sheet the heads of all those Grand Masters of the Order whose medals he has found at Rhodes. I said Malta, didn't I, it is Rhodes, but it's all the same Order of Saint John of Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, she is interested in them only because Swann makes a hobby of it. Our family is very much mixed up in the whole story; even at the present day, my brother, whom you know, is one of the highest dignitaries in the Order of Malta. But I might have told all that to Oriane, she simply wouldn't have listened to me. On the other hand, it was quite enough that Swann's researches into the Templars (it's astonishing the passion that people of one religion have for studying others) should have led him on to the history of the Knights of Rhodes, who succeeded the Templars, for Oriane at once to insist on seeing the heads of these Knights. They were very small fry indeed compared with the Lusignans, Kings of Cyprus, from whom we descend in a direct line. But so far, as Swann hasn't taken them up, Oriane doesn't care to hear anything about the Lusignans." I could not at once explain to the Duke why I had come. What happened was that several relatives or friends, including Mme. de Silistrie and the Duchesse de Montrose, came to pay a call on the Duchess, who was often at home before dinner, and not finding her there stayed for a short while with the Duke. The first of these ladies (the Princesse de Silistrie), simply attired, with a dry but friendly manner, carried a stick in her hand. I was afraid at first that she had injured herself, or was a cripple. She was on the contrary most alert. She spoke regretfully to the Duke of a first cousin of his own — not on the Guermantes side, but more illustrious still, were that possible — whose health, which had been in a grave condition for some time past, had grown suddenly worse. But it was evident that the Duke, while full of pity for his cousin's lot, and repeating "Poor Mama! He's such a good fellow!" had formed a favourable prognosis. The fact was that the dinner at which the Duke was to be present amused him, the big party at the Princesse de Guermantes's did not bore him, but above all he was to go on at one o'clock in the morning with his wife to a great supper and costume ball, with a view to which a costume of Louis XI for himself, and one of Isabel of Bavaria for his wife were waiting in readiness. And the Duke was determined not to be disturbed amid all these gaieties by the sufferings of the worthy Amanien d'Osmond. Two other ladies carrying sticks, Mme. de Plassac and Mme. de Tresmes, both daughters of the Comte de Bréquigny, came in next to pay Basin a visit, and declared that cousin Mama's state left no room now for hope. The Duke shrugged his shoulders, and to

change the conversation asked whether they were going that evening to Marie-Gilbert's. They replied that they were not, in view of the state of Amanien who was in his last agony, and indeed they had excused themselves from the dinner to which the Duke was going, the other guests at which they proceeded to enumerate: the brother of King Theodosius, the Infanta Maria Concepcion, and so forth. As the Marquis d'Osmond was less nearly related to them than he was to Basin, their 'defection' appeared to the Duke to be a sort of indirect reproach aimed at his own conduct. And so, albeit they had come down from the heights of the Bréquigny mansion to see the Duchess (or rather to announce to her the alarming character, incompatible for his relatives with attendance at social gatherings, of their cousin's illness) they did not stay long, and, each armed with her alpenstock, Walpurge and Dorothée (such were the names of the two sisters) retraced the craggy path to their citadel. I never thought of asking the Guermantes what was the meaning of these sticks, so common in a certain part of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Possibly, looking upon the whole parish as their domain, and not caring to hire cabs, they were in the habit of taking long walks, for which some old fracture, due to immoderate indulgence in the chase, and to the falls from horseback which are often the fruit of that indulgence, or simply rheumatism caused by the dampness of the left bank and of old country houses made a stick necessary. Perhaps they had not set out upon any such long expedition through the quarter, but, having merely come down into their garden (which lay at no distance from that of the Duchess) to pick the fruit required for stewing, had looked in on their way home to bid good evening to Mme. de Guermantes, though without going so far as to bring a pair of shears or a watering-can into her house. The Duke appeared touched that I should have come to see them so soon after their return to Paris. But his face grew dark when I told him that I had come to ask his wife to find out whether her cousin really had invited me. I had touched upon one of those services which M. and Mme. de Guermantes were not fond of rendering. The Duke explained to me that it was too late, that if the Princess had not sent me an invitation it would make him appear to be asking her for one, that his cousins had refused him one once before, and he had no wish to appear either directly or indirectly to be interfering with their visiting list, be 'meddling'; finally, he could not even be sure that he and his wife, who were dining out that evening, would not come straight home afterwards, that in that case their best excuse for not having gone to the Princess's party would be to conceal from her the fact of their return to Paris, instead of hastening to inform her of it, as they must do if they sent her a note, or

spoke to her over the telephone about me, and certainly too late to be of any use, since, in all probability, the Princess's list of guests would be closed by now. "You've not fallen foul of her in any way?" he asked in a suspicious tone, the Guermantes living in a constant fear of not being informed of the latest society quarrels, and so of people's trying to climb back into favour on their shoulders. Finally, as the Duke was in the habit of taking upon himself all decisions that might seem not very good-natured: "Listen, my boy," he said to me suddenly, as though the idea had just come into his head, "I would really rather not mention at all to Oriane that you have been speaking to me about it. You know how kind-hearted she is; besides, she has an enormous regard for you, she would insist on sending to ask her cousin, in spite of anything I might say to the contrary, and if she is tired after dinner, there will be no getting out of it, she will be forced to go to the party. No, decidedly, I shall say nothing to her about it. Anyhow, you will see her yourself in a minute. But not a word about that matter, I beg of you. If you decide to go to the party, I have no need to tell you what a pleasure it will be to us to spend the evening there with you." The motives actuating humanity are too sacred for him before whom they are invoked not to bow to them, whether he believes them to be sincere or not; I did not wish to appear to be weighing in the balance for a moment the relative importance of my invitation and the possible tiredness of Mme. de Guermantes, and I promised not to speak to her of the object of my visit, exactly as though I had been taken in by the little farce which M. de Guermantes had performed for my benefit. I asked him if he thought there was any chance of my seeing Mme. de Stermaria at the Princess's. "Why, no," he replied with the air of an expert; "I know the name you mention, from having seen it in lists of club members, it is not at all the type of person who goes to Gilbert's. You will see nobody there who is not excessively proper and intensely boring, duchesses bearing titles which one thought were extinct years ago and which they have revived for the occasion, all the Ambassadors, heaps of Coburgs, foreign royalties, but you mustn't hope for the ghost of a Stermaria. Gilbert would be taken ill at the mere thought of such a thing.

"Wait now, you're fond of painting, I must shew you a superb picture I bought from my cousin, partly in exchange for the Elstirs, which frankly did not appeal to us. It was sold to me as a Philippe de Champaigne, but I believe myself that it's by some one even greater. Would you like to know my idea? I believe it to be a Velazquez, and of the best period," said the Duke, looking me boldly in the eyes, whether to learn my impression or in the hope of enhancing it. A footman came in. "Mme. la Duchesse has told me to ask M. le Duc if M. le Duc

will be so good as to see M. Swann, as Mme. la Duchesse is not quite ready." "Shew M. Swann in," said the Duke, after looking at his watch and seeing that he had still a few minutes before he need go to dress. "Naturally my wife, who told him to come, is not ready. There's no use saying anything before Swann about Marie-Gilbert's party," said the Duke. "I don't know whether he's been invited. Gilbert likes him immensely, because he believes him to be the natural grandson of the Duc de Berri, but that's a long story. (Otherwise, you can imagine! My cousin, who falls in a fit if he sees a Jew a mile off.) But now, don't you see, the Dreyfus case has made things more serious. Swann ought to have realised that he more than anyone must drop all connexion with those fellows, instead of which he says the most offensive things." The Duke called back the footman to know whether the man who had been sent to inquire at cousin Osmond's had returned. His plan was as follows: as he believed, and rightly, that his cousin was dying, he was anxious to obtain news of him before his death, that is to say before he was obliged to go into mourning. Once covered by the official certainty that Amanien was still alive, he could go without a thought to his dinner, to the Prince's party, to the midnight revel at which he would appear as Louis XI, and had made the most exciting assignation with a new mistress, and would make no more inquiries until the following day, when his pleasures would be at an end. Then one would put on mourning if the cousin had passed away in the night. "No, M. le Duc, he is not back yet." "What in the Name of God! Nothing is ever done in this house till the last minute," cried the Duke, at the thought that Amanien might still be in time to 'croak' for an evening paper, and so make him miss his revel. He sent for the *Temps*, in which there was nothing. I had not seen Swann for a long time, and asked myself at first whether in the old days he used to clip his moustache, or had not his hair brushed up vertically in front, for I found in him something altered; it was simply that he was indeed greatly 'altered' because he was very ill, and illness produces in the face modifications as profound as are created by growing a beard or by changing the line of one's parting. (Swann's illness was the same that had killed his mother, who had been attacked by it at precisely the age which he had now reached. Our existences are in truth, owing to heredity, as full of cabalistic ciphers, of horoscopic castings as if there really were sorcerers in the world. And just as there is a certain duration of life for humanity in general, so there is one for families in particular, that is to say, in any one family, for the members of it who resemble one another.) Swann was dressed with an elegance which, like that of his wife, associated with what he now was what he once had been. Buttoned

up in a pearl-grey frockcoat which emphasised the tallness of his figure, slender, his white gloves stitched in black, he carried a grey tall hat of a specially wide shape which Delion had ceased now to make except for him, the Prince de Sagan, the Marquis de Modène, M. Charles Haas and Comte Louis de Turenne. I was surprised at the charming smile and affectionate handclasp with which he replied to my greeting, for I had imagined that after so long an interval he would not recognise me at once; I told him of my astonishment; he received it with a shout of laughter, a trace of indignation and a further grip of my hand, as if it were throwing doubt on the soundness of his brain or the sincerity of his affection to suppose that he did not know me. And yet that was what had happened; he did not identify me, as I learned long afterwards, until several minutes later when he heard my name mentioned. But no change in his face, in his .speech, in the things he said to me betrayed the discovery which a chance word from M. de Guermantes had enabled him to make, with such mastery, with such absolute sureness did he play the social game. He brought to it, moreover, that spontaneity in manners and personal initiative, even in his style of dress, which characterised the Guermantes type. Thus it was that the greeting which the old clubman, without recognising me, had given me was not the cold and stiff greeting of the man of the world who was a pure formalist, but a greeting full of a real friendliness, of a true charm, such as the Duchesse de Guermantes, for instance, possessed (carrying it so far as to smile at you first, before you had bowed to her, if she met you in the street), in contrast to the more mechanical greeting customary among the ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. In the same way, again, the hat which, in conformity with a custom that was beginning to disappear, he laid on the floor by his feet, was lined with green leather, a thing not usually done, because, according to him, this kept the hat much cleaner, in reality because it was highly becoming. “Now, Charles, you’re a great expert, come and see what I’ve got to shew you, after which, my boys, I’m going to ask your permission to leave you together for a moment while I go and change my clothes, besides, I expect Oriane won’t be long now.” And he shewed his ‘Velazquez’ to Swann. “But it seems to me that I know this,” said Swann with the grimace of a sick man for whom the mere act of speaking requires an effort. “Yes,” said the Duke, turned serious by the time which the expert took in expressing his admiration. “You have probably seen it at Gilbert’s.” “Oh, yes, of course, I remember.” “What do you suppose it is?” “Oh, well, if it cornes from Gilbert’s, it is probably one of your *ancestors*,” said Swann with a blend of irony and deference towards a form of greatness which he would have felt it impolite

and absurd to despise, but to which for reasons of good taste he preferred to make only a playful reference.

"To be sure, it is," said the Duke bluntly. "It's Boson, the I forget how manieth de Guermantes. Not that I care a damn about that. You know I'm not as feudal as my cousin. I've heard the names mentioned of Rigaud, Mignard, Velazquez even!" he went on, fastening on Swann the gaze of an inquisitor and executioner in an attempt at once to read into his mind and to influence his response. "Well," he concluded, for when he was led to provoke artificially an opinion which he desired to hear, he had the faculty, after a few moments, of believing that it had been spontaneously uttered; "come, now, none of your flattery, do you think it's by one of those big masters I've mentioned?" "Nnnnno," said Swann. "But after all, I know nothing about these things, it's not for me to decide who daubed the canvas. But you're a dilettante, a master of the subject, to whom do you attribute it? You're enough of an expert to have some idea. What would you put it down as?" Swann hesitated for a moment before the picture, which obviously he thought atrocious. "A bad joke!" he replied with a smile at the Duke who could not check an impulsive movement of rage. When this had subsided: "Be good fellows, both of you, wait a moment for Oriane, I must go and put on my swallow-tails and then I'll join you. I shall send word to my good woman that you're both waiting for her." I talked for a minute or two with Swann about the Dreyfus case, and asked him how it was that all the Guermantes were anti-Dreyfusards. "In the first place because at heart all these people are anti-Semites," replied Swann, who, all the same, knew very well from experience that certain of them were not, but, like everyone who supports any cause with ardour, preferred, to explain the fact that other people did not share his opinion, to suppose in them a preconceived reason, a prejudice against which there was nothing to be done, rather than reasons which might permit of discussion. Besides, having come to the premature term of his life, like a weary animal that is goaded on, he cried out against these persecutions and was returning to the spiritual fold of his fathers. "Yes, the Prince de Guermantes," I said, "it is true, I've heard that he was anti-semitic." "Oh, that fellow! I wasn't even thinking about him. He carries it to such a point that when he was in the army and had a frightful toothache he preferred to grin and bear it rather than go to the only dentist in the district, who happened to be a Jew, and later on he allowed a wing of his castle which had caught fire to be burned to the ground, because he would have had to send for extinguishers to the place next door, which belongs to the Rothschilds." "Are you going to be there this evening, by

any chance?" "Yes," Swann replied, "although I am far too tired. But he sent me a wire to tell me that he has something to say to me. I feel that I shall be too unwell in the next few days to go there or to see him at home; it would upset me, so I prefer to get it over at once." "But the Duc de Guermantes is not anti-semitic?" "You can see quite well that he is, since he's an anti-Dreyfusard," replied Swann, without noticing the logical fallacy. "That doesn't prevent my being very sorry that I disappointed the man — what am I saying? The Duke, I mean — by not admiring his Mignard or whatever he calls it." "But at any rate," I went on, reverting to the Dreyfus case, "the Duchess, she, now, is intelligent." "Yes, she is charming. To my mind, however, she was even more charming when she was still known as the Princesse des Laumes. Her mind has become somehow more angular, it was all much softer in the juvenile great lady, but after all, young or old, men or women, what can you expect, all these people belong to a different race, one can't have a thousand years of feudalism in one's blood with impunity. Naturally they imagine that it counts for nothing in their opinions." "All the same, Robert de Saint-Loup is a Dreyfusard." "Ah! So much the better, all the more as you know that his mother is extremely 'and.' I had heard that he was, but I wasn't certain of it. That gives me a great deal of pleasure. It doesn't surprise me, he's highly intelligent. It's a great thing, that is."

Dreyfusism had brought to Swann an extraordinary simplicity of mind and had imparted to his way of looking at things an impulsiveness, an inconsistency more noticeable even than had been the similar effects of his marriage to Odette; this new loss of caste would have been better described as a recasting, and was entirely to his credit, since it made him return to the ways in which his forebears had trodden and from which he had turned aside to mix with the aristocracy. But Swann, just at the very moment when with such lucidity it had been granted to him, thanks to the gifts he had inherited from his race, to perceive a truth that was still hidden from people of fashion, shewed himself nevertheless quite comically blind. He subjected afresh all his admirations and all his contempts to the test of a new criterion, Dreyfusism. That the anti-Dreyfusism of Mme. Bontemps should have made him think her a fool was no more astonishing than that, when he was first married, he should have thought her intelligent. It was not very serious either that the new wave reached also his political judgments and made him lose all memory of having treated as a man with a price, a British spy (this latter was an absurdity of the Guermantes set), Clemenceau, whom he declared now to have always stood up for conscience, to be a man of iron, like Comely. "No, no, I never told you anything of the sort. You're thinking of some

one else." But, sweeping past his political judgments, the wave overthrew in Swann his literary judgments also, and even affected his way of pronouncing them. Barrés had lost all his talent, and even the books of his early days were feeble, one could hardly read them again. "You try, you'll find you can't struggle to the end. What a difference from Clemenceau! Personally, I am not anticlerical, but when you compare them together you must see that Barrés is invertebrate. He's a very great fellow, is old Clemenceau. How he knows the language!" However, the anti-Dreyfusards were in no position to criticise these follies. They explained that one was a Dreyfusard by one's being of Jewish origin. If a practising Catholic like Saniette stood out also for a fresh trial, that was because he was buttonholed by Mme. Verdurin, who behaved like a wild Radical. She was out above all things against the 'frocks.' Saniette was more fool than knave, and had no idea of the harm that the Mistress was doing him. If you pointed out that Brichot was equally a friend of Mme. Verdurin and was a member of the Patrie Française, that was because he was more intelligent. "You see him occasionally?" I asked Swann, referring to Saint-Loup. "No, never. He wrote to me the other day hoping that I would ask the Duc de Mouchy and various other people to vote for him at the Jockey, where for that matter he got through like a letter through the post." "In spite of the Case!" "The question was never raised. However I must tell you that since all this business began I never set foot in the place."

M. de Guermantes returned, and was presently joined by his wife, all ready now for the evening, tall and proud in a gown of red satin the skirt of which was bordered with spangles. She had in her hair a long ostrich feather dyed purple, and over her shoulders a tulle scarf of the same red as her dress. "How nice it is to have one's hat lined with leather," said the Duchess, whom nothing escaped. "However, with you, Charles, everything is always charming, whether it's what you wear or what you say what you read or what you do." Swann meanwhile, without apparently listening, was considering the Duchess as he would have studied the canvas of a master, and then sought her gaze, making with his lips the grimace which implies: 'The devil!' Mme. de Guermantes rippled with laughter. "So my clothes please you? I'm delighted. But I must say that they don't please me much," she went on with a sulking air. "Good Lord, what a bore it is to have to dress up and go out when one would ever so much rather stay at home!" "What magnificent rubies!" "Ah! my dear Charles, at least one can see that you know what you're talking about, you're not like that brute Monserfeuil who asked me if they were real. I must say that I've never seen anything quite

like them. They were a present from the Grand Duchess. They're a little too large for my liking, a little too like claret glasses filled to the brim, but I've put them on because we shall be seeing the Grand Duchess this evening at Marie-Gilbert's," added Mme. de Guermantes, never suspecting that this assertion destroyed the force of those previously made by the Duke. "What's on at the Princess's?" inquired Swann. "Practically nothing," the Duke hastened to reply, the question having made him think that Swann was not invited. "What's that, Basin? When all the highways and hedgerows have been scoured? It will be a deathly crush. What will be pretty, though," she went on, looking wistfully at Swann, "if the storm I can feel in the air now doesn't break, will be those marvellous gardens. You know them, of course. I was there a month ago, at the time when the lilacs were in flower, you can't have any idea how lovely they were. And then the fountain, really, it's Versailles in Paris." "What sort of person is the Princess?" I asked. "Why, you know quite well, you've seen her here, she's as beautiful as the day, also rather an idiot. Very nice, in spite of all her Germanic high-and-mightiness, full of good nature and stupid mistakes." Swann was too subtle not to perceive that the Duchess, in this speech, was trying to shew the 'Guermantes wit,' and at no great cost to herself, for she was only serving up in a less perfect form an old saying of her own. Nevertheless, to prove to the Duchess that he appreciated her intention to be, and as though she had really succeeded in being, funny, he smiled with a slightly forced air, causing me by this particular form of insincerity the same feeling of awkwardness that used to disturb me long ago when I heard my parents discussing with M. Vinteuil the corruption of certain sections of society (when they knew very well that a corruption far greater sat enthroned at Montjouvain), Legrandin colouring his utterances for the benefit of fools, choosing delicate epithets which he knew perfectly well would not be understood by a rich or smart but illiterate public. "Come now, Oriane, what on earth are you saying?" broke in M. de Guermantes. "Marie a fool? Why, she has read everything, she's as musical as a fiddle." "But, my poor little Basin, you're as innocent as a new-born babe. As if one could not be all that, and rather an idiot as well. Idiot is too strong a word; no, she's in the clouds, she's Hesse-Darmstadt, Holy Roman Empire, and! wa-wa-wa. Her pronunciation alone makes me tired. But I quite admit that she's a charming loony. Simply the idea of stepping down from her German throne to go and marry, in the most middle-class way, a private citizen. It is true that she chose him! Yes, it's quite true," she went on, turning to me, "you don't know Gilbert. Let me give you an idea of him, he took to his bed

once because I had left a card on Mme. Carnot. But, my little Charles," said the Duchess, changing the conversation when she saw that the story of the card left on the Carnots appeared to irritate M. de Guermantes, "you know, you've never sent me that photograph of our Knights of Rhodes, whom I've learned to love through you, and I am so anxious to make their acquaintance." The Duke meanwhile had not taken his eyes from his wife's face. "Oriane, you might at least tell the story properly and not cut out half. I ought to explain," he corrected, addressing Swann, "that the British Ambassadress at that time, who was a very worthy woman, but lived rather in the moon and was in the habit of making up these odd combinations, conceived the distinctly quaint idea of inviting us with the President and his wife. We were — Oriane herself was rather surprised, especially as the Ambassadress knew quite enough of the people we knew not to invite us, of all things, to so ill-assorted a gathering. There was a Minister there who is a swindler, however I pass over all that, we had not been warned in time, were caught in the trap, and, I'm bound to admit, all these people behaved most civilly to us. Only, once was enough. Mme. de Guermantes, who does not often do me the honour of consulting me, felt it incumbent upon her to leave a card in the course of the following week at the Elysée. Gilbert may perhaps have gone rather far in regarding it as a stain upon our name. But it must not be forgotten that, politics apart, M. Carnot, who for that matter filled his post quite adequately, was the grandson of a member of the Revolutionary Tribunal which caused the death of eleven of our people in a single day." "In that case, Basin, why did you go every week to dine at Chantilly? The Due d'Aumale was just as much the grandson of a member of the Revolutionary Tribunal, with this difference, that Carnot was a brave man and Philippe Egalité a wretched scoundrel." "Excuse my interrupting you to explain that I did send the photograph," said Swann. "I can't understand how it hasn't reached you." "It doesn't altogether surprise me," said the Duchess, "my servants tell me only what they think fit. They probably do not approve of the Order of Saint John." And she rang the bell. "You, know, Oriane, that when I used to go to Chantilly it was without enthusiasm." "Without enthusiasm, but with a nightshirt in a bag, in case the Prince asked you to stay, which for that matter he very rarely did, being a perfect cad like all the Orléans lot. Do you know who else are to be dining at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's?" Mme. de Guermantes asked her husband. "Besides the people you know already, she's asked at the last moment King Theodosius's brother." At these tidings the Duchess's features breathed contentment and her speech boredom. "Oh, good heavens, more princes!" "But that one is well-

mannered and intelligent," Swann suggested. "Not altogether, though," replied the Duchess, apparently seeking for words that would give more novelty to the thought expressed. "Have you ever noticed with princes that the best-mannered among them are not really well-mannered? They must always have an opinion about everything. Then, as they have none of their own, they spend the first half of their lives asking us ours and the other half serving it up to us secondhand. They positively must be able to say that one piece has been well played and the next not so well. When there is no difference. Listen, this little Theodosius junior (I forget his name) asked me what one called an orchestral motif. I replied," said the Duchess, her eyes sparkling while a laugh broke from her beautiful red lips: "'One calls it an orchestral motif.' I don't think he was any too well pleased, really. Oh, my dear Charles," she went on, "what a bore it can be, dining out. There are evenings when one would sooner die! It is true that dying may be perhaps just as great a bore, because we don't know what it's like." A servant appeared. It was the young lover who used to have trouble with the porter, until the Duchess, in her kindness of heart, brought about an apparent peace between them. "Am I to go up this evening to inquire for M. le Marquis d'Osmond?" he asked. "Most certainly not, nothing before to-morrow morning. In fact I don't want you to remain in the house to-night. The only thing that will happen will be that his footman, who knows you, will come to you with the latest report and send you out after us. Get off, go anywhere you like, have a woman, sleep out, but I don't want to see you here before to-morrow morning." An immense joy overflowed from the footman's face. He would at last be able to spend long hours with his ladylove, whom he had practically ceased to see ever since, after a final scene with the porter, the Duchess had considerately explained to him that it would be better, to avoid further conflicts, if he did not go out at all. He floated, at the thought of having an evening free at last, in a happiness which the Duchess saw and guessed its reason. She felt, so to speak, a tightening of the heart and an itching in all her limbs at the sight of this happiness which an amorous couple were snatching behind her back, concealing themselves from her, which left her irritated and jealous. "No, Basin, let him stay here; I say, he's not to stir out of the house." "But, Oriane, that's absurd, the house is crammed with servants, and you have the costumier's people coming as well at twelve to dress us for this show. There's absolutely nothing for him to do, and he's the only one who's a friend of Mama's footman; I would a thousand times rather get him right away from the house." "Listen, Basin, let me do what I want, I shall have a message for him to take in the evening, as it happens, I can't tell yet at

what time. In any case you're not to go out of the house for a single instant, do you hear?" she said to the despairing footman. If there were continual quarrels, and if servants did not stay long with the Duchess, the person to whose charge this guerrilla warfare was to be laid was indeed irremovable, but it was not the porter; no doubt for the rougher tasks, for the martyrdoms that it was more tiring to inflict, for the quarrels which ended in blows, the Duchess entrusted the heavier instruments to him; but even then he played his part without the least suspicion that he had been cast for it. Like the household servants, he admired the Duchess for her kindness of heart; and footmen of little discernment who came back, after leaving her service, to visit Françoise used to say that the Duke's house would have been the finest 'place' in Paris if it had not been for the porter's lodge. The Duchess 'played' the lodge on them, just as at different times clericalism, freemasonry, the Jewish peril have been played on the public. Another footman came into the room. "Why have not they brought up the package that M. Swann sent here? And, by the way (you've heard, Charles, that Mama is seriously ill?), Jules went up to inquire for news of M. le Marquis d'Osmond: has he come back yet?" "He's just come this instant, M. le Duc. They're waiting from one moment to the next for M. le Marquis to pass away." "Ah! He's alive!" exclaimed the Duke with a sigh of relief. "That's all right, that's all right: sold again, Satan! While there's life there's hope," the Duke announced to us with a joyful air. "They've been talking about him as though he were dead and buried. In a week from now he'll be fitter than I am." "It's the Doctors who said that he wouldn't last out the evening. One of them wanted to call again during the night. The head one said it was no use. M. le Marquis would be dead by then; they've only kept him alive by injecting him with camphorated oil." "Hold your tongue, you damned fool," cried the Duke in a paroxysm of rage. "Who the devil asked you to say all that? You haven't understood a word of what they told you." "It wasn't me they told, it was Jules." "Will you hold your tongue!" roared the Duke, and, turning to Swann, "What a blessing he's still alive! He will regain his strength gradually, don't you know. Still alive, after being in such a critical state, that in itself is an excellent sign. One mustn't expect everything at once. It can't be at all unpleasant, a little injection of camphorated oil." He rubbed his hands. "He's alive; what more could anyone want? After going through all that he's gone through, it's a great step forward. Upon my word, I envy him having such a temperament. Ah! these invalids, you know, people do all sorts of little things for them that they don't do for us. Now to-day there was a devil of a cook who sent me up a leg of mutton

with *béarnaise* sauce — it was done to a turn, I must admit, but just for that very reason I took so much of it that it's still lying on my stomach. However, that doesn't make people come to inquire for me as they do for dear Amanien. We do too much inquiring. It only tires him. We must let him have room to breathe. They're killing the poor fellow by sending round to him all the time." "Well," said the Duchess to the footman as he was leaving the room, "I gave orders for the envelope containing a photograph which M. Swann sent me to be brought up here." "Madame la Duchesse, it is so large that I didn't know if I could get it through the door. We have left it in the hall. Does Madame la Duchesse wish me to bring it up?" "Oh, in that case, no; they ought to have told me, but if it's so big I shall see it in a moment when I come downstairs." "I forgot to tell Mme. la Duchesse that Mme. la Comtesse Mole left a card this morning for Mme. la Duchesse." "What, this morning?" said the Duchess with an air of disapproval, feeling that so young a woman ought not to take the liberty of leaving cards in the morning. "About ten o'clock, Madame la Duchesse." "Shew me the cards." "In any case, Oriane, when you say that it was a funny idea on Marie's part to marry Gilbert," went on the Duke, reverting to the original topic of conversation, "it is you who have an odd way of writing history. If either of them was a fool, it was Gilbert, for having married of all people a woman so closely related to the King of the Belgians, who has usurped the name of Brabant which belongs to us. To put it briefly, we are of the same blood as the Hesses, and of the elder branch. It is always stupid to talk about oneself," he apologised to me, "but after all, whenever we have been not only at Darmstadt, but even at Cassel and all over Electoral Hesse, the Landgraves have always, all of them, been most courteous in giving us precedence as being of the elder branch." "But really, Basin, you don't mean to tell me that a person who was a Major in every regiment in her country, who had been engaged to the King of Sweden..." "Oriane, that is too much; anyone would think that you didn't know that the King of Sweden's grandfather was tilling the soil at Pau when we had been ruling the roost for nine hundred years throughout the whole of Europe." "That doesn't alter the fact that if somebody were to say in the street: 'Hallo, there's the King of Sweden,' everyone would at once rush to see him as far as the Place de la Concorde, and if he said: 'There's M. de Guermantes,' nobody would know who M. de Guermantes was." "What an argument!" "Besides, I never can understand how, once the title of Duke of Brabant has passed to the Belgian Royal Family, you can continue to claim it."

The footman returned with the Comtesse Mole's card, or rather what she had

left in place of a card. Alleging that she had none on her, she had taken from her pocket a letter addressed to herself, and keeping the contents had handed in the envelope which bore the inscription: ‘La Comtesse Mole.’ As the envelope was rather large, following the fashion in notepaper which prevailed that year, this manuscript ‘card’ was almost twice the size of an ordinary visiting card. “That is what people call Mme. Mole’s ‘simplicity,’” said the Duchess ironically. “She wants to make us think that she had no cards on her, and to shew her originality. But we know all about that, don’t we, my little Charles, we are quite old enough and quite original enough ourselves to see through the tricks of a little lady who has only been going about for four years. She is charming, but she doesn’t seem to me, all the same, to be quite ‘big’ enough to imagine that she can take the world by surprise with so little effort as merely leaving an envelope instead of a card and leaving it at ten o’clock in the morning. Her old mother mouse will shew her that she knows a thing or two about that.” Swann could not help smiling at the thought that the Duchess, who was, incidentally, a trifle jealous of Mme. Mole’s success, would find it quite in accordance with the ‘Guermantes wit’ to make some impertinent retort to her visitor. “So far as the title of Duc de Brabant is concerned, I’ve told you a hundred times, Oriane...” the Duke continued, but the Duchess, without listening, cut him short. “But, my little Charles, I’m longing to see your photograph.” “Ah! *Extinctor draconis latrator Anubis*,” said Swann. “Yes, it was so charming what you said about that when you were comparing the Saint George at Venice. But I don’t understand: why Anubis?” “What’s the one like who was an ancestor of Babal?” asked M. de Guermantes. “You want to see his bauble?” retorted his wife, dryly, to shew she herself scorned the pun. “I want to see them all,” she added. “Listen, Charles, let us wait downstairs till the carriage comes,” said the Duke; “you can pay your call on us in the hall, because my wife won’t let us have any peace until she’s seen your photograph. I am less impatient, I must say,” he added with a satisfied air. “I am not easily moved myself, but she would see us all dead rather than miss it.” “I am entirely of your opinion, Basin,” said the Duchess, “let us go into the hall; we shall at least know why we have come down from your study, while we shall never know how we have come down from the Counts of Brabant.” “I’ve told you a hundred times how the title came into the House of Hesse,” said the Duke (while we were going downstairs to look at the photograph, and I thought of those that Swann used to bring me at Combray), “through the marriage of a Brabant in 1241 with the daughter of the last Landgrave of Thuringia and Hesse, so that really it is the title of Prince of Hesse that came to

the House of Brabant rather than that of Duke of Brabant to the House of Hesse. You will remember that our battle-cry was that of the Dukes of Brabant: ‘Limbourg to her conqueror!’ until we exchanged the arms of Brabant for those of Guermantes, in which I think myself that we were wrong, and the example of the Gramonts will not make me change my opinion.” “But,” replied Mme. de Guermantes, “as it is the King of the Belgians who is the conqueror... Besides the Belgian Crown Prince calls himself Duc de Brabant.” “But, my dear child, your argument will not hold water for a moment. You know as well as I do that there are titles of pretension which can perfectly well exist even if the territory is occupied by usurpers. For instance, the King of Spain describes himself equally as Duke of Brabant, claiming in virtue of a possession less ancient than ours, but more ancient than that of the King of the Belgians. He calls himself also Duke of Burgundy, King of the Indies Occidental and Oriental, and Duke of Milan. Well, he is no more in possession of Burgundy, the Indies or Brabant than I possess Brabant myself, or the Prince of Hesse either, for that matter. The King of Spain likewise proclaims himself King of Jerusalem, as does the Austrian Emperor, and Jerusalem belongs to neither one nor the other.” He stopped for a moment with an awkward feeling that the mention of Jerusalem might have embarrassed Swann, in view of ‘current events,’ but only went on more rapidly: “What you said just now might be said of anyone. We were at one time Dukes of Aumale, a duchy that has passed as regularly to the House of France as Joinville and Chevreuse have to the House of Albert. We make no more claim to those titles than to that of Marquis de Noirmoutiers, which was at one time ours, and became perfectly regularly the appanage of the House of La Trémoïlle, but because certain cessions are valid, it does not follow that they all are. For instance,” he went on, turning to me, “my sister-in-law’s son bears the title of Prince d’Agrigente, which comes to us from Joan the Mad, as that of Prince de Tarente comes to the La Trémoïlles. Well, Napoleon went and gave this title of Tarente to a soldier, who may have been admirable in the ranks, but in doing so the Emperor was disposing of what belonged to him even less than Napoleon III when he created a Duc de Montmorency, since Périgord had at least a mother who was a Montmorency, while the Tarente of Napoleon I had no more Tarente about him than Napoleon’s wish that he should become so. That did not prevent Chaix d’Est-Ange, alluding to our uncle Condé, from asking the Procurer Impérial if he had picked up the title of Duc de Montmorency in the moat of Vincennes.”

“Listen, Basin, I ask for nothing better than to follow you to the ditches of

Vincennes, or even to Tarante. And that reminds me, Charles, of what I was going to say to you when you were telling me about your Saint George at Venice. We have an idea, Basin and I, of spending next spring in Italy and Sicily. If you were to come with us, just think what a difference it would make! I'm not thinking only of the pleasure of seeing you, but imagine, after all you've told me so often about the remains of the Norman Conquest and of ancient history, imagine what a trip like that would become if you came with us! I mean to say that even Basin — what am I saying, Gilbert — would benefit by it, because I feel that even his claims to the throne of Naples and all that sort of thing would interest me if they were explained by you in old romanesque churches in little villages perched on hills like primitive paintings. But now we're going to look at your photograph. Open the envelope," said the Duchess to a footman. "Please, Oriane, not this evening; you can look at it to-morrow," implored the Duke, who had already been making signs of alarm to me on seeing the huge size of the photograph. "But I like to look at it with Charles," said the Duchess, with a smile at once artificially concupiscent and psychologically subtle, for in her desire to be friendly to Swann she spoke of the pleasure which she would have in looking at the photograph as though it were the pleasure an invalid feels he would find in eating an orange, or as though she had managed to combine an escapade with her friends with giving information to a biographer as to some of her favourite pursuits. "All right, he will come again to see you, on purpose," declared the Duke, to whom his wife was obliged to yield. "You can spend three hours in front of it, if that amuses you," he added ironically. "But where are you going to stick a toy of those dimensions?" "Why, in my room, of course. I like to have it before my eyes." "Oh, just as you please; if it's in your room, probably I shall never see it," said the Duke, without thinking of the revelation he was thus blindly making of the negative character of his conjugal relations. "Very well, you will undo it with the greatest care," Mme. de Guermantes told the servant, multiplying her instructions out of politeness to Swann. "And see that you don't crumple the envelope, either." "So even the envelope has got to be respected!" the Duke murmured to me, raising his eyes to the ceiling. "But, Swann," he added, "I, who am only a poor married man and thoroughly prosaic, what I wonder at is how on earth you managed to find an envelope that size. Where did you pick it up?" "Oh, at the photographer's; they're always sending out things like that. But the man is a fool, for I see he's written on it 'The Duchesse de Guermantes,' without putting 'Madame.'" "I'll forgive him for that," said the Duchess carelessly; then, seeming to be struck by a sudden idea which enlivened

her, checked a faint smile; but at once returning to Swann: “Well, you don’t say whether you’re coming to Italy with us?” “Madame, I am really afraid that it will not be possible.” “Indeed! Mme. de Montmorency is more fortunate. You went with her to Venice and Vicenza. She told me that with you one saw things one would never see otherwise, things no one had ever thought of mentioning before, that you shewed her things she had never dreamed of, and that even in the well-known things she had been able to appreciate details which without you she might have passed by a dozen times without ever noticing. Obviously, she has been more highly favoured than we are to be.... You will take the big envelope from M. Swann’s photograph,” she said to the servant, “and you will hand it in, from me, this evening at half past ten at Mme. la Comtesse Mole’s.” Swann laughed. “I should like to know, all the same,” Mme. de Guermantes asked him, “how, ten months before the time, you can tell that a thing will be impossible.” “My dear Duchess, I will tell you if you insist upon it, but, first of all, you can see that I am very ill.” “Yes, my little Charles, I don’t think you look at all well. I’m not pleased with your colour, but I’m not asking you to come with me next week, I ask you to come in ten months. In ten months one has time to get oneself cured, you know.” At this point a footman came in to say that the carriage was at the door. “Come, Oriane, to horse,” said the Duke, already pawing the ground with impatience as though he were himself one of the horses that stood waiting outside. “Very well, give me in one word the reason why you can’t come to Italy,” the Duchess put it to Swann as she rose to say good-bye to us. “But, my dear friend, it’s because I shall then have been dead for several months. According to the doctors I consulted last winter, the thing I’ve got — which may, for that matter, carry me off at any moment — won’t in any case leave me more than three or four months to live, and even that is a generous estimate,” replied Swann with a smile, while the footman opened the glazed door of the hall to let the Duchess out. “What’s that you say?” cried the Duchess, stopping for a moment on her way to the carriage, and raising her fine eyes, their melancholy blue clouded by uncertainty. Placed for the first time in her life between two duties as incompatible as getting into her carriage to go out to dinner and shewing pity for a man who was about to die, she could find nothing in the code of conventions that indicated the right line to follow, and, not knowing which to choose, felt it better to make a show of not believing that the latter alternative need be seriously considered, so as to follow the first, which demanded of her at the moment less effort, and thought that the best way of settling the conflict would be to deny that any existed. “You’re joking,” she said to Swann. “It would

be a joke in charming taste," replied he ironically. "I don't know why I am telling you this; I have never said a word to you before about my illness. But as you asked me, and as now I may die at any moment... But whatever I do I mustn't make you late; you're dining out, remember," he added, because he knew that for other people their own social obligations took precedence of the death of a friend, and could put himself in her place by dint of his instinctive politeness. But that of the Duchess enabled her also to perceive in a vague way that the dinner to which she was going must count for less to Swann than his own death. And so, while continuing on her way towards the carriage, she let her shoulders droop, saying: "Don't worry about our dinner. It's not of any importance!" But this put the Duke in a bad humour, who exclaimed: "Come, Oriane, don't stop there chattering like that and exchanging your jeremiads with Swann; you know very well that Mme. de Saint-Euverte insists on sitting down to table at eight o'clock sharp. We must know what you propose to do; the horses have been waiting for a good five minutes. I beg your pardon, Charles," he went on, turning to Swann, "but it's ten minutes to eight already. Oriane is always late, and it will take us more than five minutes to get to old Saint-Euverte's." Mme. de Guermantes advanced resolutely towards the carriage and uttered a last farewell to Swann. "You know, we can talk about that another time; I don't believe a word you've been saying, but we must discuss it quietly. I expect they gave you a dreadful fright, come to luncheon, whatever day you like" (with Mme. de Guermantes things always resolved themselves into luncheons), "you will let me know your day and time," and, lifting her red skirt, she set her foot on the step. She was just getting into the carriage when, seeing this foot exposed, the Duke cried in a terrifying voice: "Oriane, what have you been thinking of, you wretch? You've kept on your black shoes! With a red dress! Go upstairs quick and put on red shoes, or rather," he said to the footman, "tell the lady's maid at once to bring down a pair of red shoes." "But, my dear," replied the Duchess gently, annoyed to see that Swann, who was leaving the house with me but had stood back to allow the carriage to pass out in front of us, could hear, "since we are late." "No, no, we have plenty of time. It is only ten to; it won't take us ten minutes to get to the Parc Monceau. And, after all, what would it matter? If we turned up at half past eight they'd have to wait for us, but you can't possibly go there in a red dress and black shoes. Besides, we shan't be the last, I can tell you; the Sassenages are coming, and you know they never arrive before twenty to nine." The Duchess went up to her room. "Well," said M. de Guermantes to Swann and myself, "we poor, down-trodden husbands, people

laugh at us, but we are of some use all the same. But for me, Oriane would have been going out to dinner in black shoes." "It's not unbecoming," said Swann, "I noticed the black shoes and they didn't offend me in the least." "I don't say you're wrong," replied the Duke, "but it looks better to have them to match the dress. Besides, you needn't worry, she would no sooner have got there than she'd have noticed them, and I should have been obliged to come home and fetch the others. I should have had my dinner at nine o'clock. Good-bye, my children," he said, thrusting us gently from the door, "get away, before Oriane comes down again. It's not that she doesn't like seeing you both. On the contrary, she's too fond of your company. If she finds you still here she will start talking again, she is tired out already, she'll reach the dinner-table quite dead. Besides, I tell you frankly, I'm dying of hunger. I had a wretched luncheon this morning when I came from the train. There was the devil of a *béarnaise* sauce, I admit, but in spite of that I shan't be at all sorry, not at all sorry to sit down to dinner. Five minutes to eight! Oh, women, women! She'll give us both indigestion before to-morrow. She is not nearly as strong as people think." The Duke felt no compunction at speaking thus of his wife's ailments and his own to a dying man, for the former interested him more, appeared to him more important. And so it was simply from good breeding and good fellowship that, after politely shewing us out, he cried 'from off stage,' in a stentorian voice from the porch to Swann, who was already in the courtyard: "You, now, don't let yourself be taken in by the doctors' nonsense, damn them. They're donkeys. You're as strong as the Pont Neuf. You'll live to bury us all!"

Cities of the Plain [Volume 4]

Sodome et Gomorrhe (1927)
Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (1889-1930)

Introduction

La femme aura Gomorrhe et l'homme aura Sodome.
Alfred de Vigny.

The reader will remember that, long before going that day (on the evening of which the Princesse de Guermantes was to give her party) to pay the Duke and Duchess the visit which I have just described, I had kept watch for their return and had made, in the course of my vigil, a discovery which, albeit concerning M. de Charlus in particular, was in itself so important that I have until now, until the moment when I could give it the prominence and treat it with the fulness that it demanded, postponed giving any account of it. I had, as I have said, left the marvellous point of vantage, so snugly contrived for me at the top of the house, commanding the broken and irregular slopes leading up to the Hôtel de Bréquigny, and gaily decorated in the Italian manner by the rose-pink campanile of the Marquis de Frécourt's stables. I had felt it to be more convenient, when I thought that the Duke and Duchess were on the point of returning, to post myself on the staircase. I regretted somewhat the abandonment of my watch-tower. But at that time of day, namely the hour immediately following luncheon, I had less cause for regret, for I should not then have seen, as in the morning, the foptmen of the Bréquigny-Tresmes household, converted by distance into minute figures in a picture, make their leisurely ascent of the abrupt precipice, feather-brush in hand, behind the large, transparent flakes of mica which stood out so charmingly upon its ruddy bastions. Failing the geologist's field of contemplation, I had at least that of the botanist, and was peering through the shutters of the staircase window at the Duchess's little tree and at the precious plant, exposed in the courtyard with that insistence with which mothers 'bring out' their marriageable offspring, and asking myself whether the unlikely insect would come, by a providential hazard, to visit the offered and neglected pistil. My curiosity emboldening me by degrees, I went down to the ground-floor window, which also stood open with its shutters ajar. I could hear distinctly, as he got ready to go out, Jupien who could not detect me behind my blind, where I stood perfectly still until the moment when I drew

quickly aside in order not to be seen by M. de Charlus, who, on his way to call upon Mme. de Villeparisis, was slowly crossing the courtyard, a pursy figure, aged by the strong light, his hair visibly grey. Nothing short of an indisposition of Mme. de Villeparisis (consequent on the illness of the Marquis de Fierbois, with whom he personally was at daggers drawn) could have made M. de Charlus pay a call, perhaps for the first time in his life, at that hour of the day. For with that eccentricity of the Guermantes, who, instead of conforming to the ways of society, used to modify them to suit their own personal habits (habits not, they thought, social, and deserving in consequence the abasement before them of that thing of no value, Society — thus it was that Mme. de Marsantes had no regular 'day,' but was at home to her friends every morning between ten o'clock and noon), the Baron, reserving those hours for reading, hunting for old curiosities and so forth, paid calls only between four and six in the afternoon. At six o'clock he went to the Jockey Club, or took a stroll in the Bois. A moment later, I again recoiled, in order not to be seen by Jupien. It was nearly time for him to start for the office, from which he would return only for dinner, and not even then always during the last week, his niece and her apprentices having gone to the country to finish a dress there for a customer. Then, realising that no one could see me, I decided not to let myself be disturbed again, for fear of missing, should the miracle be fated to occur, the arrival, almost beyond the possibility of hope (across so many obstacles of distance, of adverse risks, of dangers), of the insect sent from so far as ambassador to the virgin who had so long been waiting for him to appear. I knew that this expectancy was no more passive than in the male flower, whose stamens had spontaneously curved so that the insect might more easily receive their offering; similarly the female flower that stood here, if the insect came, would coquettishly arch her styles; and, to be more effectively penetrated by him, would imperceptibly advance, like a hypocritical but ardent damsel, to meet him half-way. The laws of the vegetable kingdom are themselves governed by other laws, increasingly exalted. If the visit of an insect, that is to say, the transportation of the seed of one flower is generally necessary for the fertilisation of another, that is because autofecundation, the fertilisation of a flower by itself, would lead, like a succession of intermarriages in the same family, to degeneracy and sterility, whereas the crossing effected by the insects gives to the subsequent generations of the same species a vigour unknown to their forebears. This invigoration may, however, prove excessive, the species develop out of all proportion; then, as an anti-toxin protects us against disease, as the thyroid gland regulates our adiposity, as defeat comes to punish pride,

fatigue, indulgence, and as sleep in turn depends upon fatigue, so an exceptional act of autofecundation comes at a given point to apply its turn of the screw, its pull on the curb, brings back within normal limits the flower that has exaggerated its transgression of them. My reflexions had followed a tendency which I shall describe in due course, and I had already drawn from the visible stratagems of flowers a conclusion that bore upon a whole unconscious element of literary work, when I saw M. de Charlus coming away from the Marquise. Perhaps he had learned from his elderly relative herself, or merely from a servant, the great improvement, or rather her complete recovery from what had been nothing more than a slight indisposition. At this moment, when he did not suspect that anyone was watching him, his eyelids lowered as a screen against the sun, M. de Charlus had relaxed that tension in his face, deadened that artificial vitality, which the animation of his talk and the force of his will kept in evidence there as a rule. Pale as marble, his nose stood out firmly, his fine features no longer received from an expression deliberately assumed a different meaning which altered the beauty of their modelling; nothing more now than a Guermantes, he seemed already carved in stone, he Pala-mède the Fifteenth, in their chapel at Combray. These general features of a whole family took on, however, in the face of M. de Charlus a fineness more spiritualised, above all more gentle. I regretted for his sake that he should habitually adulterate with so many acts of violence, offensive oddities, tale-bearings, with such harshness, susceptibility and arrogance, that he should conceal beneath a false brutality the amenity, the kindness which, at the moment of his emerging from Mme. de Villeparisis's, I could see displayed so innocently upon his face. Blinking his eyes in the sunlight, he seemed almost to be smiling, I found in his face seen thus in repose and, so to speak, in its natural state something so affectionate, so disarmed, that I could not help thinking how angry M. de Charlus would have been could he have known that he was being watched; for what was suggested to me by the sight of this man who was so insistent, who prided himself so upon his virility, to whom all other men seemed odiously effeminate, what he made me suddenly think of, so far had he momentarily assumed her features, expression, smile, was a woman.

I was about to change my position again, so that he should not catch sight of me; I had neither the time nor the need to do so. What did I see? Face to face, in that courtyard where certainly they had never met before (M. de Charlus coming to the Hôtel de Guermantes only in the afternoon, during the time when Jupien was at his office), the Baron, having suddenly opened wide his half-shut eyes,

was studying with unusual attention the ex-tailor poised on the threshold of his shop, while the latter, fastened suddenly to the ground before M. de Charlus, taking root in it like a plant, was contemplating with a look of amazement the plump form of the middle-aged Baron. But, more astounding still, M. de Charlus's attitude having changed, Jupien's, as though in obedience to the laws of an occult art, at once brought itself into harmony with it. The Baron, who was now seeking to conceal the impression that had been made on him, and yet, in spite of his affectation of indifference, seemed unable to move away without regret, went, came, looked vaguely into the distance in the way which, he felt, most enhanced the beauty of his eyes, assumed a complacent, careless, fatuous air. Meanwhile Jupien, shedding at once the humble, honest expression which I had always associated with him, had — in perfect symmetry with the Baron — thrown up his head, given a becoming tilt to his body, placed his hand with a grotesque impertinence on his hip, stuck out his behind, posed himself with the coquetry that the orchid might have adopted on the providential arrival of the bee. I had not supposed that he could appear so repellent. But I was equally unaware that he was capable of improvising his part in this sort of dumb charade, which (albeit he found himself for the first time in the presence of M. de Charlus) seemed to have been long and carefully rehearsed; one does not arrive spontaneously at that pitch of perfection except when one meets in a foreign country a compatriot with whom an understanding then grows up of itself, both parties speaking the same language, even though they have never seen one another before.

This scene was not, however, positively comic, it was stamped with a strangeness, or if you like a naturalness, the beauty of which steadily increased. M. de Charlus might indeed assume a detached air, indifferently let his eyelids droop; every now and then he raised them, and at such moments turned on Jupien an attentive gaze. But (doubtless because he felt that such a scene could not be prolonged indefinitely in this place, whether for reasons which we shall learn later on, or possibly from that feeling of the brevity of all things which makes us determine that every blow must strike home, and renders so moving the spectacle of every kind of love), each time that M. de Charlus looked at Jupien, he took care that his glance should be accompanied by a spoken word, which made it infinitely unlike the glances we usually direct at a person whom we do or do not know; he stared at Jupien with the peculiar fixity of the person who is about to say to us: "Excuse my taking the liberty, but you have a long white thread hanging down your back," or else: "Surely I can't be mistaken, you

come from Zurich too; I'm certain I must have seen you there often in the curiosity shop." Thus, every other minute, the same question seemed to be being intensely put to Jupien in the stare of M. de Charlus, like those questioning phrases of Beethoven indefinitely repeated at regular intervals, and intended — with an exaggerated lavish-ness of preparation — to introduce a new theme, a change of tone, a 'reentry.' On the other hand, the beauty of the reciprocal glances of M. de Charlus and Jupien arose precisely from the fact that they did not, for the moment at least, seem to be intended to lead to anything further. This beauty, it was the first time that I had seen the Baron and Jupien display it. In the eyes of both of them, it was the sky not of Zurich but of some Oriental city, the name of which I had not yet divined, that I saw reflected. Whatever the point might be that held M. de Charlus and the ex-tailor thus arrested, their pact seemed concluded and these superfluous glances to be but ritual preliminaries, like the parties that people give before a marriage which has been definitely 'arranged.' Nearer still to nature — and the multiplicity of these analogies is itself all the more natural in that the same man, if we examine him for a few minutes, appears in turn as a man, a man-bird or man-insect, and so forth — one would have called them a pair of birds, the male and the female, the male seeking to make advances, the female — Jupien — no longer giving any sign of response to these overtures, but regarding her new friend without surprise, with an inattentive fixity of gaze, which she doubtless felt to be more disturbing and the only effective method, once the male had taken the first steps, and had fallen back upon preening his feathers. At length Jupien's indifference seemed to suffice him no longer; from this certainty of having conquered, to making himself be pursued and desired was but the next stage, and Jupien, deciding to go off to his work, passed through the carriage gate. It was only, however, after turning his head two or three times that he escaped into the street towards which the Baron, trembling lest he should lose the trail (boldly humming a tune, not forgetting to fling a 'Good day' to the porter, who, half-tipsy himself and engaged in treating a few friends in his back kitchen, did not even hear him), hurried briskly to overtake him. At the same instant, just as M. de Charlus disappeared through the gate humming like a great bumble-bee, another, a real bee this time, came into the courtyard. For all I knew this might be the one so long awaited by the orchid, which was coming to bring it that rare pollen without which it must die a virgin. But I was distracted from following the gyrations of the insect for, a few minutes later, engaging my attention afresh, Jupien (perhaps to pick up a parcel which he did take away with him eventually and so,

presumably, in the emotion aroused by the apparition of M. de Charlus, had forgotten, perhaps simply for a more natural reason) returned, followed by the Baron. The latter, deciding to cut short the preliminaries, asked the tailor for a light, but at once observed: “I ask you for a light, but I find that I have left my cigars at home.” The laws of hospitality prevailed over those of coquetry. “Come inside, you shall have everything you require,” said the tailor, on whose features disdain now gave place to joy. The door of the shop closed behind them and I could hear no more. I had lost sight of the bee. I did not know whether he was the insect that the orchid needed, but I had no longer any doubt, in the case of an extremely rare insect and a captive flower, of the miraculous possibility of their conjunction when M. de Charlus (this is simply a comparison of providential hazards, whatever they may be, without the slightest scientific claim to establish a relation between certain laws and what is sometimes, most ineptly, termed homosexuality), who for years past had never come to the house except at hours when Jupien was not there, by the mere accident of Mme. de Villeparisis’s illness had encountered the tailor, and with him the good fortune reserved for men of the type of the Baron by one of those fellow-creatures who may indeed be, as we shall see, infinitely younger than Jupien and better looking, the man predestined to exist in order that they may have their share of sensual pleasure on this earth; the man who cares only for elderly gentlemen.

All that I have just said, however, I was not to understand until several minutes had elapsed; so much is reality encumbered by those properties of invisibility until a chance occurrence has divested it of them. Anyhow, for the moment I was greatly annoyed at not being able to hear any more of the conversation between the ex-tailor and the Baron. I then bethought myself of the vacant shop, separated from Jupien’s only by a partition that was extremely slender. I had, in order to get to it, merely to go up to our flat, pass through the kitchen, go down by the service stair to the cellars, make my way through them across the breadth of the courtyard above, and on coming to the right place underground, where the joiner had, a few months ago, still been storing his timber and where Jupien intended to keep his coal, climb the flight of steps which led to the interior of the shop. Thus the whole of my journey would be made under cover, I should not be seen by anyone. This was the most prudent method. It was not the one that I adopted, but, keeping close to the walls, I made a circuit in the open air of the courtyard, trying not to let myself be seen. If I was not, I owe it more, I am sure, to chance than to my own sagacity. And for the fact that I took so imprudent a course, when the way through the cellar was so safe, I

can see three possible reasons, assuming that I had any reason at all. First of all, my impatience. Secondly, perhaps, a dim memory of the scene at Montjouvain, when I stood concealed outside Mlle. Vinteuil's window. Certainly, the affairs of this sort of which I have been a spectator have always been presented in a setting of the most imprudent and least probable character, as if such revelations were to be the reward of an action full of risk, though in part clandestine. Lastly, I hardly dare, so childish does it appear, to confess the third reason, which was, I am quite sure, unconsciously decisive. Since, in order to follow — and see controverted — the military principles enunciated by Saint-Loup, I had followed in close detail the course of the Boer war, I had been led on from that to read again old accounts of explorations, narratives of travel. These stories had excited me, and I applied them to the events of my daily life to stimulate my courage. When attacks of illness had compelled me to remain for several days and nights on end not only without sleep but without lying down, without tasting food or drink, at the moment when my pain and exhaustion became so intense that I felt that I should never escape from them, I would think of some traveller cast on the beach, poisoned by noxious herbs, shivering with fever in clothes drenched by the salt water, who nevertheless in a day or two felt stronger, rose and went blindly upon his way, in search of possible inhabitants who might, when he came to them, prove cannibals. His example acted on me as a tonic, restored my hope, and I felt ashamed of my momentary discouragement. Thinking of the Boers who, with British armies facing them, were not afraid to expose themselves at the moment when they had to cross, in order to reach a covered position, a tract of open country: "It would be a fine thing," I thought to myself, "if I were to shew less courage when the theatre of operations is simply the human heart, and when the only steel that I, who engaged in more than one duel without fear at the time of the Dreyfus case, have to fear is that of the eyes of the neighbours who have other things to do besides looking into the courtyard,"

But when I was inside the shop, taking care not to let any plank in the floor make the slightest creak, as I found that the least sound in Jupien's shop could be heard from the other, I thought to myself how rash Jupien and M. de Charlus had been, and how wonderfully fortune had favoured them.

I did not dare move. The Guermantes groom, taking advantage no doubt of his master's absence, had, as it happened, transferred to the shop in which I now stood a ladder which hitherto had been kept in the coach-house, and if I had climbed this I could have opened the ventilator above and heard as well as if I had been in Jupien's shop itself. But I was afraid of making a noise. Besides, it

was unnecessary. I had not even cause to regret my not having arrived in the shop until several minutes had elapsed. For from what I heard at first in Jupien's shop, which was only a series of inarticulate sounds, I imagine that few words had been exchanged. It is true that these sounds were so violent that, if one set had not always been taken up an octave higher by a parallel plaint, I might have thought that one person was strangling another within a few feet of me, and that subsequently the murderer and his resuscitated victim were taking a bath to wash away the traces of the crime. I concluded from this later on that there is another thing as vociferous as pain, namely pleasure, especially when there is added to it — failing the fear of an eventual parturition, which could not be present in this case, despite the hardly convincing example in the *Golden Legend* — an immediate afterthought of cleanliness. Finally, after about half an hour (during which time I had climbed on tip-toe up my ladder so as to peep through the ventilator which I did not open), a conversation began. Jupien refused with insistence the money that M. de Charlus was pressing upon him.

"Why do you have your chin shaved like that," he inquired of the Baron in a cajoling tone. "It's so becoming, a nice beard." "Ugh! It's disgusting," the Baron replied. Meanwhile he still lingered upon the threshold and plied Jupien with questions about the neighbourhood. "You don't know anything about the man who sells chestnuts at the corner, not the one on the left, he's a horror, but the other way, a great, dark fellow? And the chemist opposite, he has a charming cyclist who delivers his parcels." These questions must have ruffled Jupien, for, drawing himself up with the scorn of a great courtesan who has been forsaken, he replied: "I can see you are completely heartless." Uttered in a pained, frigid, affected tone, this reproach must have made its sting felt by M. de Charlus, who, to counteract the bad impression made by his curiosity, addressed to Jupien, in too low a tone for me to be able to make out his words, a request the granting of which would doubtless necessitate their prolonging-their sojourn in the shop, and which moved the tailor sufficiently to make-him forget his annoyance, for he studied the Baron's face, plump and flushed beneath his grey hair, with the supremely blissful air of a person whose self-esteem has just been profoundly flattered, and, deciding to grant M. de Charlus the favour that he had just asked of him, after various remarks lacking in refinement such as: "Aren't you naughty!" said to the Baron with a smiling, emotional, superior and grateful air: "All right, you big baby, come along!"

"If I hark back to the question of the tram conductor," M. de Charlus went on imperturbably, "it is because, apart from anything else, he might offer me

some entertainment on my homeward journey. For it falls to my lot, now and then, like the Caliph who used to roam the streets of Bagdad in the guise of a common merchant, to condescend to follow some curious little person whose profile may have taken my fancy." I made at this point the same observation that I had made on Bergotte. If he should ever have to plead before a bench, he would employ not the sentences calculated to convince his judges, but such Bergottesque sentences as his peculiar literary temperament suggested to him and made him find pleasure in using. Similarly M. de Charlus, in conversing with the tailor, made use of the same language that he would have used to fashionable people of his own set, even exaggerating its eccentricities, whether because the shyness which he was striving to overcome drove him to an excess of pride or, by preventing him from mastering himself (for we are always less at our ease in the company of some one who is not of our station), forced him to unveil, to lay bare his true nature, which was, in fact, arrogant and a trifle mad, as Mme. de Guermantes had remarked. "So as not to lose the trail," he went on, "I spring like a little usher, like a young and good-looking doctor, into the same car as the little person herself, of whom we speak in the feminine gender only so as to conform with the rules of grammar (as we say, in speaking of a Prince, 'Is His Highness enjoying her usual health'). If she changes her car, I take, with possibly the germs of the plague, that incredible thing called a 'transfer,' a number, and one which, albeit it is presented to *me*, is not always number one! I change 'carriages' in this way as many as three or four times, I end up sometimes at eleven o'clock at night at the Orleans station and have to come home. Still, if it were only the Orleans station! Once, I must tell you, not having managed to get into conversation sooner, I went all the way to Orleans itself, in one of those frightful compartments where one has, to rest one's eyes upon, between triangles of what is known as 'string-work,' photographs of the principal architectural features of the line. There was only one vacant seat; I had in front of me, as an historic edifice, a 'view' of the Cathedral of Orleans, quite the ugliest in France, and as tiring a thing to have to stare at in that way against my will as if somebody had forced me to focus its towers in the lens of one of those optical penholders which give one ophthalmia. I got out of the train at Les Aubrais together with my young person, for whom alas his family (when I had imagined him to possess every defect except that of having a family) were waiting on the platform! My sole consolation, as I waited for a train to take me back to Paris, was the house of Diane de Poitiers. She may indeed have charmed one of my royal ancestors, I should have preferred a more living beauty. That is

why, as an antidote to the boredom of returning home by myself, I should rather like to make friends with a sleeping-car attendant or the conductor of an omnibus. Now, don't be shocked," the Baron wound up, "it is all a question of class. With what you call 'young gentlemen,' for instance, I feel no desire actually to have them, but I am never satisfied until I have touched them, I don't mean physically, but touched a responsive chord. As soon as, instead of leaving my letters unanswered, a young man starts writing to me incessantly, when he is morally at my disposal, I grow calm again, or at least I should grow calm were I not immediately caught by the attraction of another. Rather curious, ain't it?— Speaking of 'young gentlemen,' those that come to the house here, do you know any of them?" "No, baby. Oh, yes, I do, a dark one, very tall, with an eye-. glass, who keeps smiling and turning round." "I don't know who' you mean." Jupien filled in the portrait, but M. de Charlus could not succeed in identifying its subject, not knowing that the ex-tailor was one of those persons, more common than is generally supposed, who never remember the colour of the hair of people they do not know well. But to me, who was aware of this infirmity in Jupien and substituted 'fair' for 'dark,' the portrait appeared to be an exact description of the Duc de Châtellerault. "To return to young men not of the lower orders," the Baron went on, "at the present moment my head has been turned by a strange little fellow, an intelligent little cit who shews with regard to myself a prodigious want of civility. He has absolutely no idea of the prodigious personage that I am, and of the microscopic animalcule that he is in comparison. After all, what does it matter, the little ass may bray his head off before my august bishop's mantle." "Bishop!" cried Jupien, who had understood nothing of M. de Charlus's concluding remarks, but was completely taken aback by the word bishop. "But that sort of thing doesn't go with religion," he said. "I have three Popes in my family," replied M. de Charlus, "and enjoy the right to mantle in gules by virtue of a cardinalatial title, the niece of the Cardinal, my great-uncle, having conveyed to my grandfather the title of Duke which was substituted for it. I see, though, that metaphor leaves you deaf and French history cold. Besides," he added, less perhaps by way of conclusion than as a warning, "this attraction that I feel towards the young people who avoid me, from fear of course, for only their natural respect stops their mouths from crying out to me that they love me, requires in them an outstanding social position. And again, their feint of indifference may produce, in spite of that, the directly opposite effect. Fatuously prolonged, it sickens me. To take an example from a class with which you are more familiar, when they were doing up my Hôtel, so as not to create jealousies

among all the duchesses who were vying with one another for the honour of being able to say that they had given me a lodging, I went for a few days to an ‘hotel,’ as they call inns nowadays. One of the bedroom valets I knew, I pointed out to him an interesting little page who used to open and shut the front door, and who remained refractory to my proposals. Finally, losing my temper, in order to prove to him that my intentions were pure, I made him an offer of a ridiculously high sum simply to come upstairs and talk to me for five minutes in my room. I waited for him in vain. I then took such a dislike to him that I used to go out by the service door so as not to see his villainous little mug at the other. I learned afterwards that he had never had any of my notes, which had been intercepted, the first by the bedroom valet, who was jealous, the next by the day porter, who was virtuous, the third by the night porter, who was in love with the little page, and used to couch with him at the hour when Dian rose. But my disgust persisted none the less, and were they to bring me the page, simply like a dish of venison on a silver platter, I should thrust him away with a retching stomach. But there’s the unfortunate part of it, we have spoken of serious matters, and now all is over between us, there can be no more question of what I hoped to secure. But you could render me great services, act as my agent; why no, the mere thought of such a thing restores my vigour, and I can see that all is by no means over.”

From the beginning of this scene a revolution, in my unsealed eyes, had occurred in M. de Charlus, as complete, as immediate as if he had been touched by a magician’s wand. Until then, because I had not understood, I had not seen. The vice (we use the word for convenience only), the vice of each of us accompanies him through life after the manner of the familiar genius who was invisible to men so long as they were unaware of his presence. Our goodness, our meanness, our name, our social relations do not disclose themselves to the eye, we carry them hidden within us. Even Ulysses did not at once recognise Athena. But the gods are immediately perceptible to one another, as quickly like to like, and so too had M. de Charlus been to Jupien. Until that moment I had been, in the presence of M. de Charlus, in the position of an absent-minded man who, standing before a pregnant woman whose distended outline he has failed to remark, persists, while she smilingly reiterates: “Yes, I am a little tired just now,” in asking her indiscreetly: “Why, what is the matter with you?” But let some one say to him: “She is expecting a child,” suddenly he catches sight of her abdomen and ceases to see anything else. It is the explanation that opens our eyes; the dispelling of an error gives us an additional sense.

Those of my readers who do not care to refer, for examples of this law, to the Messieurs de Charlus of their acquaintance, whom for long years they had never suspected, until the day when, upon the smooth surface of the individual just like everyone else, there suddenly appeared, traced in an ink hitherto invisible, the characters that compose the word dear to the ancient Greeks, have only, in order to convince themselves that the world which surrounds them appears to them at first naked, bare of a thousand ornaments which it offers to the eyes of others better informed, to remind themselves how many times in the course of their lives they have found themselves on the point of making a blunder. Nothing upon the blank, undocumented face of this man or that could have led them to suppose that he was precisely the brother, or the intended husband, or the lover of a woman of whom they were just going to remark: "What a cow!" But then, fortunately, a word whispered to them by some one standing near arrests the fatal expression on their lips. At once there appear, like a *Mené, Tekel, Upharsin*, the words: "He is engaged to," or, "he is the brother of," or "he is the lover of the woman whom we ought not to describe, in his hearing, as a cow." And this one new conception will bring about an entire regrouping, thrusting some back, others forward, of the fractional conceptions, henceforward a complete whole, which we possessed of the rest of the family. In M. de Charlus another creature might indeed have coupled itself with him which made him as different from other men as the horse makes the centaur, this creature might indeed have incorporated itself in the Baron, I had never caught a glimpse of it. Now the abstraction had become materialised, the creature at last discerned had lost its power of remaining invisible, and the transformation of M. de Charlus into a new person was so complete that not only the contrasts of his face, of his voice, but, in retrospect, the very ups and downs of his relations with myself, everything that hitherto had seemed to my mind incoherent, became intelligible, brought itself into evidence, just as a sentence which presents no meaning so long as it remains broken up in letters scattered at random upon a table, expresses, if these letters be rearranged in the proper order, a thought which one can never afterwards forget.

I now understood, moreover, how, earlier in the day, when I had seen him coming away from Mme. de Villeparisis's, I had managed to arrive at the conclusion that M. de Charlus looked like a woman: he was one! He belonged to that race of beings, less paradoxical than they appear, whose ideal is manly simply because their temperament is feminine and who in their life resemble in appearance only the rest of men; there where each of us carries, inscribed in

those eyes through which he beholds everything in the universe, a human outline engraved on the surface of the pupil, for them it is that not of a nymph but of a youth. Race upon which a curse weighs and which must live amid falsehood and perjury, because it knows the world to regard as a punishable and a scandalous, as an inadmissible thing, its desire, that which constitutes for every human creature the greatest happiness in life; which must deny its God, since even Christians, when at the bar of justice they appear and are arraigned, must before Christ and in His Name defend themselves, as from a calumny, from the charge of what to them is life itself; sons without a mother, to whom they are obliged to lie all her life long and even in the hour when they close her dying eyes; friends without friendships, despite all those which their charm, frequently recognised, inspires and their hearts, often generous, would gladly feel; but can we describe as friendship those relations which flourish only by virtue of a lie and from which the first outburst of confidence and sincerity in which they might be tempted to indulge would make them be expelled with disgust, unless they are dealing with an impartial, that is to say a sympathetic mind, which however in that case, misled with regard to them by a conventional psychology, will suppose to spring from the vice confessed the very affection that is most alien to it, just as certain judges assume and are more inclined to pardon murder in inverts and treason in Jews for reasons derived from original sin and racial predestination. And lastly — according at least to the first-» theory which I sketched in outline at the time and which we shall see subjected to some modification in the sequel, a theory by which this would have angered them above all things, had not the paradox been hidden from their eyes by the very illusion that made them see and live — lovers from whom is always precluded the possibility of that love the hope of which gives them the strength to endure so many risks and so much loneliness, since they fall in love with precisely that type of man who has nothing feminine about him, who is not an invert and consequently cannot love them in return; with the result that their desire would be for ever insatiable did not their money procure for them real men, and their imagination end by making them take for real men the inverts to whom they had prostituted themselves. Their honour precarious, their liberty provisional, lasting only until the discovery of their crime; their position unstable, like that of the poet who one day was feasted at every table, applauded in every theatre in London, and on the next was driven from every lodging, unable to find a pillow upon which to lay his head, turning the mill like Samson and saying like him: “The two sexes shall die, each in a place apart!”; excluded even, save on the days of general disaster when the

majority rally round the victim as the Jews rallied round Dreyfus, from the sympathy — at times from the society — of their fellows, in whom they inspire only disgust at seeing themselves as they are, portrayed in a mirror which, ceasing to flatter them, accentuates every blemish that they have refused to observe in themselves, and makes them understand that what they have been calling their love (a thing to which, playing upon the word, they have by association annexed all that poetry, painting, music, chivalry, asceticism have contrived to add to love) springs not from an ideal of beauty which they have chosen but from an incurable malady; like the Jews again (save some who will associate only with others of their race and have always on their lips ritual words and consecrated pleasantries), shunning one another, seeking out those who are most directly their opposite, who do not desire their company, pardoning their rebuffs, moved to ecstasy by their condescension; but also brought into the company of their own kind by the ostracism that strikes them, the opprobrium under which they have fallen, having finally been invested, by a persecution similar to that of Israel, with the physical and moral characteristics of a race, sometimes beautiful, often hideous, finding (in spite of all the mockery with which he who, more closely blended with, better assimilated to the opposing race, is relatively, in appearance, the least inverted, heaps upon him who has remained more so) a relief in frequenting the society of their kind, and even some corroboration of their own life, so much so that, while steadfastly denying that they are a race (the name of which is the vilest of insults), those who succeed in concealing the fact that they belong to it they readily unmask, with a view less to injuring them, though they have no scruple about that, than to excusing themselves; and, going in search (as a doctor seeks cases of appendicitis) of cases of inversion in history, taking pleasure in recalling that Socrates was one of themselves, as the Israelites claim that Jesus was one of them, without reflecting that there were no abnormals when homosexuality was the norm, no anti-Christians before Christ, that the disgrace alone makes the crime because it has allowed to survive only those who remained obdurate to every warning, to every example, to every punishment, by virtue of an innate disposition so peculiar that it is more repugnant to other men (even though it may be accompanied by exalted moral qualities) than certain other vices which exclude those qualities, such as theft, cruelty, breach of faith, vices better understood and so more readily excused by the generality of men; forming a freemasonry far more extensive, more powerful and less suspected than that of the Lodges, for it rests upon an identity of tastes, needs, habits, dangers,

apprenticeship, knowledge, traffic, glossary, and one in which the members themselves, who intend not to know one another, recognise one another immediately by natural or conventional, involuntary or deliberate signs which indicate one of his congeners to the beggar in the street, in the great nobleman whose carriage door he is shutting, to the father in the suitor for his daughter's hand, to him who has sought healing, absolution, defence, in the doctor, the priest, the barrister to whom he has had recourse; all of them obliged to protect their own secret but having their part in a secret shared with the others, which the rest of humanity does not suspect and which means that to them the most wildly improbable tales of adventure seem true, for in this romantic, anachronistic life the ambassador is a bosom friend of the felon, the prince, with a certain independence of action with which his aristocratic breeding has furnished him, and which the trembling little cit would lack, on leaving the duchess's party goes off to confer in private with the hooligan; a reprobate part of the human whole, but an important part, suspected where it does not exist, flaunting itself, insolent and unpunished, where its existence is never guessed; numbering its adherents everywhere, among the people, in the army, in the church, in the prison, on the throne; living, in short, at least to a great extent, in a playful and perilous intimacy with the men of the other race, provoking them, playing with them by speaking of its vice as of something alien to it; a game that is rendered easy by the blindness or duplicity of the others, a game that may be kept up for years until the day of the scandal, on which these lion-tamers are devoured; until then, obliged to make a secret of their lives, to turn away their eyes from the things on which they would naturally fasten them, to fasten them upon those from which they would naturally turn away, to change the gender of many of the words in their vocabulary, a social constraint, slight in comparison with the inward constraint which their vice, or what is improperly so called, imposes upon them with regard not so much now to others as to themselves, and in such a way that to themselves it does not appear a vice. But certain among them, more practical, busier men who have not the time to go and drive their own bargains, or to dispense with the simplification of life and that saving of time which may result from cooperation, have formed two societies of which the second is composed exclusively of persons similar to themselves.

This is noticeable in those who are poor and have come up from the country, without friends, with nothing but their ambition to be some day a celebrated doctor or barrister, with a mind still barren of opinions, a person unadorned with manners, which they intend, as soon as possible, to decorate, just as they would

buy furniture for their little attic in the Latin quarter, copying whatever they had observed in those who had already ‘arrived’ in the useful and serious profession in which they also intend to establish themselves and to become famous; in these their special taste, unconsciously inherited like a weakness for drawing, for music, a weakness of vision, is perhaps the only living and despotic originality — which on certain evenings compels them to miss some meeting, advantageous to their career, with people whose ways, in other respect, of speaking, thinking, dressing, parting their hair, they have adopted. In their quarter, where otherwise they mix only with their brother students, their teachers or some fellow-provincial who has succeeded and can help them on, they have speedily discovered other young men whom the same peculiar taste attracts to them, as in a small town one sees an intimacy grow up between the assistant master and the lawyer, who are both interested in chamber music or mediaeval ivories; applying to the object of their distraction the same utilitarian instinct, the same professional spirit which guides them in their career, they meet these young men at gatherings to which no profane outsider is admitted any more than to those that bring together collectors of old snuff-boxes, Japanese prints or rare flowers, and at which, what with the pleasure of gaining information, the practical value of making exchanges and the fear of competition, there prevail simultaneously, as in a saleroom of postage stamps, the close cooperation of the specialists and the fierce rivalries of the collectors. No one moreover in the café where they have their table knows what the gathering is, whether it is that of an angling club, of an editorial staff, or of the ‘Sons of the Indre,’ so correct is their attire, so cold and reserved their manner, so modestly do they refrain from anything more than the most covert glances at the young men of fashion, the young ‘lions’ who, a few feet away, are making a great clamour about their mistresses, and among whom those who are admiring them without venturing to raise their eyes will learn only twenty years later, when they themselves are on the eve of admission to the Academy, and the others are middle-aged gentlemen in club windows, that the most seductive among them, now a stout and grizzled Charlus, was in reality akin to themselves, but differently, in another world, beneath other external symbols, with foreign labels, the strangeness of which led them into error. But these groups are at varying stages of advancement; and, just as the ‘Union of the Left’ differs from the ‘Socialist Federation’ or some Mendelssohnian musical club from the Schola Cantorum, on certain evenings, at another table, there are extremists who allow a bracelet to slip down from beneath a cuff, sometimes a necklace to gleam in the gap of a collar, who by

their persistent stares, their cooings, their laughter, their mutual caresses, oblige a band of students to depart in hot haste, and are served with a civility beneath which indignation boils by a waiter who, as on the evenings when he has to serve Dreyfusards, would find pleasure in summoning the police did he not find profit in pocketing their gratuities.

It is with these professional organisations that the mind contrasts the taste of the solitaries, and in one respect without straining the points of difference, since it is doing no more than copy the solitaries themselves who imagine that nothing differs more widely from organised vice than what appears to them to be a misunderstood love, but with some strain nevertheless, for these different classes correspond, no less than to diverse physiological types, to successive stages in a pathological or merely social evolution. And it is, in fact, very rarely that, one day or another, it is not in some such organisation that the solitaries come to merge themselves, sometimes from simple weariness, or for convenience (just as the people who have been most strongly opposed to such innovations end by having the telephone installed, inviting the Iénas to their parties, or dealing with Potin). They meet there, for that matter, with none too friendly a reception as a rule, for, in their relatively pure lives, their want of experience, the saturation in dreams to which they have been reduced, have branded more strongly upon them those special marks of effeminacy which the professionals have sought to efface. And it must be admitted that, among certain of these newcomers, the woman is not only inwardly united to the man but hideously visible, agitated as one sees them by a hysterical spasm, by a shrill laugh which convulses their knees and hands, looking no more like the common run of men than those monkeys with melancholy, shadowed eyes and prehensile feet who dress up in dinner-jackets and black bow ties; so that these new recruits are judged by others, less chaste for all that themselves, to be compromising associates, and their admission is hedged with difficulties; they are accepted, nevertheless, and they benefit then by those facilities by which commerce, great undertakings have transformed the lives of individuals, and have brought within their reach commodities hitherto too costly to acquire and indeed hard to find, which now submerge them beneath the plethora of what by themselves they had never succeeded in discovering amid the densest crowds. But, even with these innumerable outlets, the burden of social constraint is still too heavy for some, recruited principally among those who have not made a practice of self-control, and who still take to be rarer than it actually is their way of love. Let us leave out of consideration for the moment those who, the exceptional character of their inclinations making them regard

themselves as superior to the other sex, look down upon women, make homosexuality the privilege of great genius and of glorious epochs of history, and, when they seek to communicate their taste to others, approach not so much those who seem to them to be predisposed towards it (as the morphino-maniac does with his morphia) as those who seem to them to be worthy of it, from apostolic zeal, just as others preach Zionism, conscientious objection to military service, Saint-Simonism, vegetarianism or anarchy. Here is one who, should we intrude upon him in the morning, still in bed, will present to our gaze an admirable female head, so general is its expression and typical of the sex as a whole; his very hair affirms this, so feminine is its ripple; unbrushed, it falls so naturally in long curls over the cheek that one marvels how the young woman, the girl, the Galatea barely awakened to life, in the unconscious mass of this male body in which she is imprisoned, has contrived so ingeniously by herself, without instruction from anyone, to make use of the narrowest apertures in her prison wall to find what was necessary to her existence. No doubt the young man who sports this delicious head does not say: “I am a woman.” Even if — for any of the countless possible reasons — he lives with a woman, he can deny to her that he is himself one, can swear to her that he has never had intercourse with men. But let her look at him as we have just revealed him, lying back in bed, in pyjamas, his arms bare, his throat and neck bare also beneath the darkness of his hair. The pyjama jacket becomes a woman’s shift, the head that of a pretty Spanish girl. The mistress is astounded by these confidences offered to her gaze, truer than any spoken confidence could be, or indeed any action, which his actions, indeed, if they have not already done so, cannot fail later on to confirm, for every creature follows the line of his own pleasure, and if this creature is not too vicious he will seek it in a sex complementary to his own. And for the invert vice begins, not when he forms relations (for there are all sorts of reasons that may enjoin these), but when he takes his pleasure with women. The young man whom we have been attempting to portray was so evidently a woman that the women who looked upon him with longing were doomed (failing a special taste on their part) to the same disappointment as those who in Shakespeare’s comedies are taken in by a girl in disguise who passes as a youth. The deception is mutual, the invert is himself aware of it, he guesses the disillusionment which, once the mask is removed, the woman will experience, and feels to what an extent this mistake as to sex is a source of poetical imaginings. Besides, even from his exacting mistress, in vain does he keep back the admission (if she, that is to say, be not herself a denizen of Gomorrah): “I am a woman!” when all the

time with what stratagems, what agility, what obstinacy as of a climbing plant the unconscious but visible woman in him seeks the masculine organ. We have only to look at that head of curling hair on the white pillow to understand that if, in the evening, this young man slips through his guardians' fingers, in spite of anything that they, or he himself can do to restrain him, it will not be to go in pursuit of women. His mistress may chastise him, may lock him up; next day, the man-woman will have found some way of attaching himself to a man, as the convolvulus throws out its tendrils wherever it finds a convenient post or rake. Why, when we admire in the face of this person a delicacy that touches our hearts, a gracefulness, a spontaneous affability such as men do not possess, should we be dismayed to learn that this young man runs after boxers? They are different aspects of an identical reality. And indeed, what repels us is the most touching thing of all, more touching than any refinement of delicacy, for it represents an admirable though unconscious effort on the part of nature: the recognition of his sex by itself, in spite of the sexual deception, becomes apparent, the uncon-fessed attempt to escape from itself towards what an initial error on the part of society has segregated from it. Some, those no doubt who have been most timid in childhood, are scarcely concerned with the material kind of the pleasure they receive, provided that they can associate it with a masculine face. Whereas others, whose sensuality is doubtless more violent, imperiously restrict their material pleasure within certain definite limitations. These live perhaps less exclusively beneath the sway of Saturn's outrider, since for them women are not entirely barred, as for the former sort, in whose eyes women would have no existence apart from conversation, flirtation, loves not of the heart but of the head. But the second sort seek out those women who love other women; who can procure for them a young man, enhance the pleasure which they feel on finding themselves in his company; better still, they can, in the same fashion, enjoy with such women the same pleasure as with a man. Whence it arises that jealousy is kindled in those who love the first sort only by the pleasure which they may be enjoying with a man, which alone seems to their lovers a betrayal, since these do not participate in the love of women, have practised it only as a habit, and, so as to reserve for themselves the possibility of eventual marriage, representing to themselves so little the pleasure that it is capable of giving that they cannot be distressed by the thought that he whom they love is enjoying that pleasure; whereas the other sort often inspire jealousy by their love-affairs with women. For, in the relations which they have with her, they play, for the woman who loves her own sex, the part of another woman, and

she offers them at the same time more or less what they find in other men, so that the jealous friend suffers from the feeling that he whom he loves is riveted to her who is to him almost a man, and at the same time feels his beloved almost escape him because, to these women, he is something which the lover himself cannot conceive, a sort of woman. We need not pause here to consider those young fools who by a sort of arrested development, to tease their friends or to shock their families, proceed with a kind of frenzy to choose clothes that resemble women's dress, to redden their lips and blacken their eyelashes; we may leave them out of account, for they are those whom we shall find later on, when they have suffered the all too cruel penalty of their affectation, spending what remains of their lifetime in vain attempts to repair by a sternly protestant demeanour the wrong that they did to themselves when they were carried away by the same demon that urges young women of the Faubourg Saint-Germain to live in a scandalous fashion, to set every convention at defiance, to scoff at the entreaties of their relatives, until the day when they set themselves with perseverance but without success to reascend the slope down which it had seemed to them that it would be so amusing to glide, down which they had found it so amusing, or rather had not been able to stop themselves from gliding. Finally, let us leave to a later volume the men who have sealed a pact with Gomorrah. We shall deal with them when M. de Charlus comes to know them. Let us leave out for the present all those, of one sort or another, who will appear each in his turn, and, to conclude this first sketch of the subject, let us say a word only of those whom we began to mention just now, the solitary class. Supposing their vice to be more exceptional than it is, they have retired into solitude from the day on which they discovered it, after having carried it within themselves for a long time without knowing it, for a longer time only than certain other men. For no one can tell at first that he is an invert or a poet or a snob or a scoundrel. The boy who has been reading erotic poetry or looking at indecent pictures, if he then presses his body against a schoolfellow's, imagines himself only to be communing with him in an identical desire for a woman. How should he suppose that he is not like everybody else when he recognises the substance of what he feels on reading Mme. de Lafayette, Racine, Baudelaire, Walter Scott, at a time when he is still too little capable of observing himself to take into account what he has added from his own store to the picture, and that if the sentiment be the same the object differs, that what he desires is Rob Roy, and not Diana Vernon? With many, by a defensive prudence on the part of the instinct that precedes the clearer vision of the intellect, the mirror and walls of their bedroom vanish

beneath a cloud of coloured prints of actresses; they compose poetry such as:

I love but Chloe in the world,
For Chloe is divine;
Her golden hair is sweetly curled,
For her my heart doth pine.

Must we on that account attribute to the opening phase of such lives a taste which we shall never find in them later on, like those flaxen ringlets on the heads of children which are destined to change to the darkest brown? Who can tell whether the photographs of women are not a first sign of hypocrisy, a first sign also of horror at other inverts? But the solitary kind are precisely those to whom hypocrisy is painful. Possibly even the example of the Jews, of a different type of colony, is not strong enough to account for the frail hold that their upbringing has upon them, or for the artfulness with which they find their way back (perhaps not to anything so sheerly terrible as the suicide to which maniacs, whatever precautions one may take with them, return, and, pulled out of the river into which they have flung themselves, take poison, procure revolvers, and so forth; but) to a life of which the men of the other race not only do not understand, cannot imagine, abominate the essential pleasures but would be filled with horror by the thought of its frequent danger and everlasting shame. Perhaps, to form a picture of these, we ought to think, if not of the wild animals that never become domesticated, of the lion-cubs said to be tame but lions still at heart, then at least of the Negroes whom the comfortable existence of the white man renders desperately unhappy and who prefer the risks of a life of savagery and its incomprehensible joys. When the day has dawned on which they have discovered themselves to be incapable at once of lying to others and of lying to themselves, they go away to live in the country, shunning the society of their own kind (whom they believe to be few in number) from horror of the monstrosity or fear of the temptation, and that of the rest of humanity from shame. Never having arrived at true maturity, plunged in a constant melancholy, now and again, some Sunday evening when there is no moon, they go for a solitary walk as far as a crossroads where, although not a word has been said, there has come to meet them one of their boyhood's friends who is living in a house in the neighbourhood. And they begin again the pastimes of long ago, on the grass, in the night, neither uttering a word. During the week, they meet in their respective houses, talk of no matter what, without any allusion to what has occurred between them, exactly as though they had done nothing and were not to do anything again, save, in their relations, a trace of coldness, of irony, of

irritability and rancour, at times of hatred. Then the neighbour sets out on a strenuous expedition on horseback, and, on a mule, climbs mountain peaks, sleeps in the snow; his friend, who identifies his own vice with a weakness of temperament, the cabined and timid life, realises that vice can no longer exist in his friend now emancipated, so many thousands of feet above sea-level. And, sure enough, the other takes a wife. And yet the abandoned one is not cured (in spite of the cases in which, as we shall see, inversion is curable). He insists upon going down himself every morning to the kitchen to receive the milk from the hands of the dairyman's boy, and on the evenings when desire is too strong for him will go out of his way to set a drunkard on the right road or to "adjust the dress" of a blind man. No doubt the life of certain inverts appears at times to change, their vice (as it is called) is no longer apparent in their habits; but nothing is ever lost; a missing jewel turns up again; when the quantity of a sick man's urine decreases, it is because he is perspiring more freely, but the excretion must invariably occur. One day this homosexual hears of the death of a young cousin, and from his inconsolable grief we learned that it was to this love, chaste possibly and aimed rather at retaining esteem than at obtaining possession, that his desires have passed by a sort of virescence, as, in a budget, without any alteration in the total, certain expenditure is carried under another head. As is the case with invalids in whom a sudden attack of urticaria makes their chronic ailments temporarily disappear, this pure love for a young relative seems, in the invert, to have momentarily replaced, by metastasis, habits that will, one day or another, return to fill the place of the vicarious, cured malady.

Meanwhile the married neighbour of our recluse has returned; before the beauty of the young bride and the demonstrative affection of her, husband, on the day when their friend is obliged to invite them to dinner, he feels ashamed of the past. Already in an interesting condition, she must return home early, leaving her husband behind; he, when the time has come for him to go home also, asks his host to accompany him for part of the way; at first, no suspicion enters his mind, but at the crossroads he finds himself thrown down on the grass, with not a word said, by the mountaineer who is shortly to become a father. And their meetings begin again, and continue until the day when there comes to live not far off a cousin of the young woman, with whom her husband is now constantly to be seen. And he, if the twice-abandoned friend calls in the evening and endeavours to approach him, is furious, and repulses him with indignation that the other has not had the tact to foresee the disgust which he must henceforward inspire. Once, however, there appears a stranger, sent to him by his faithless

friend; but being busy at the time, the abandoned one cannot see him, and only afterwards learns with what object his visitor came.

Then the solitary languishes alone. He has no other diversion than to go to the neighbouring watering-place to ask for some information or other from a certain railwayman there. But the latter has obtained promotion, has been transferred to the other end of the country; the solitary will no longer be able to go and ask him the times of the trains or the price of a first class ticket, and, before retiring to dream, Griselda-like, in his tower, loiters upon the beach, a strange Andromeda whom no Argonaut will come to free, a sterile Medusa that must perish upon the sand, or else he stands idly, until his train starts, upon the platform, casting over the crowd of passengers a gaze that will seem indifferent, contemptuous or distracted to those of another race, but, like the luminous glow with which certain insects bedeck themselves in order to attract others of their species, or like the nectar which certain flowers offer to attract the insects that will fertilise them, would not deceive the almost undiscoverable sharer of a pleasure too singular, too hard to place, which is offered him, the colleague with whom our specialist could converse in the half-forgotten tongue; in which last, at the most, some seedy loafer upon the platform will put up a show of interest, but for pecuniary gain alone, like those people who, at the Collège de France, in the room in which the Professor of Sanskrit lectures without an audience, attend his course but only because the room itself is heated. Medusa! Orchid! When I followed my instinct only, the medusa used to revolt me at Balbec; but if I had the eyes to regard it, like Michelet, from the standpoint of natural history, and aesthetic, I saw an exquisite wheel of azure flame. Are they not, with the transparent velvet of their petals, as it were the mauve orchids of the sea? Like so many creatures of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, like the plant which would produce vanilla but, because in its structure the male organ is divided by a partition from the female, remains sterile unless the humming-birds or certain tiny bees convey the pollen from one to the other, or man fertilises them by artificial means, M. de Charlus (and here the word fertilise must be understood in a moral sense, since in the physical sense the union of male with male is and must be sterile, but it is no small matter that a person may encounter the sole pleasure which he is capable of enjoying, and that every ‘creature here below’ can impart to some other ‘his music, or his fragrance or his flame’), M. de Charlus was one of those men who may be called exceptional, because however many they may be, the satisfaction, so easy in others, of their sexual requirements depends upon the coincidence of too many conditions, and of

conditions too difficult to ensure. For men like M. de Charlus (leaving out of account the compromises which will appear in the course of this story and which the reader may already have foreseen, enforced by the need of pleasure which resigns itself to partial acceptations), mutual love, apart from the difficulties, so great as to be almost insurmountable, which it meets in the ordinary man, adds to these others so exceptional that what is always extremely rare for everyone becomes in their case well nigh impossible, and, if there should befall them an encounter which is really fortunate, or which nature makes appear so to them, their good fortune, far more than that of the normal lover, has about it something extraordinary, selective, profoundly necessary. The feud of the Capulets and Montagues was as nothing compared with the obstacles of every sort which must have been surmounted, the special eliminations which nature has had to submit to the hazards, already far from common, which result in love, before a retired tailor, who was intending to set off soberly for his office, can stand quivering in ecstasy before a stoutish man of fifty; this Romeo and this Juliet may believe with good reason that their love is not the caprice of a moment but a true predestination, prepared by the harmonies of their temperaments, and not only by their own personal temperaments but by those of their ancestors, by their most distant strains of heredity, so much so that the fellow creature who is conjoined with them has belonged to them from before their birth, has attracted them by a force comparable to that which governs the worlds on which we passed our former lives. M. de Charlus had distracted me from looking to see whether the bee was bringing to the orchid the pollen it had so long been waiting to receive, and had no chance of receiving save by an accident so unlikely that one might call it a sort of miracle. But this was a miracle also that I had just witnessed, almost of the same order and no less marvellous. As soon as I had considered their meeting from this point of view, everything about it seemed to me instinct with beauty. The most extraordinary devices that nature has invented to compel insects to ensure the fertilisation of flowers which without their intervention could not be fertilised because the male flower is too far away from the female — or when, if it is the wind that must provide for the transportation of the pollen, she makes that pollen so much more simply detachable from the male, so much more easily arrested in its flight by the female flower, by eliminating the secretion of nectar which is no longer of any use since there is no insect to be attracted, and, that the flower may be kept free for the pollen which it needs, which can fructify only in itself, makes it secrete a liquid which renders it immune to all other pollens — seemed to me no more marvellous than the

existence of the subvariety of inverts destined to guarantee the pleasures of love to the invert who is growing old: men who are attracted not by all other men, but — by a phenomenon of correspondence and harmony similar to those that precede the fertilisation of heterostyle trimorphous flowers like the *lythrum salicoria* — only by men considerably older than themselves. Of this subvariety Jupien had just furnished me with an example less striking however than certain others, which every collector of a human herbary, every moral botanist can observe in spite of their rarity, and which will present to the eye a delicate youth who is waiting for the advances of a robust and paunchy quinquagenarian, remaining as indifferent to those of other young men as the hermaphrodite flowers of the short-styled *primula veris* so long as they are fertilised only by other *primu-lae veris* of short style also, whereas they welcome with joy the pollen of the *primula veris* with the long styles. As for M. de Charlus's part in the transaction, I noticed afterwards that there were for him various kinds of conjunction, some of which, by their multiplicity, their almost invisible speed and above all the absence of contact between the two actors, recalled still more forcibly those flowers that in a garden are fertilised by the pollen of a neighbouring flower which they may never touch. There were in fact certain persons whom it was sufficient for him to make come to his house, hold for an hour or two under the domination of his talk, for his desire, quickened by some earlier encounter, to be assuaged. By a simple use of words the conjunction was effected, as simply as it can be among the infusoria. Sometimes, as had doubtless been the case with me on the evening on which I had been summoned by him after the Guermantes dinner-party, the relief was effected by a violent ejaculation which the Baron made in his visitor's face, just as certain flowers, furnished with a hidden spring, sprinkle from within the unconsciously collaborating and disconcerted insect. M. de Charlus, from vanquished turning victor, feeling himself purged of his uneasiness and calmed, would send away the visitor who had at once ceased to appear to him desirable. Finally, inasmuch as inversion itself springs from the fact that the invert is too closely akin to woman to be capable of having any effective relations with her, it comes under a higher law which ordains that so many hermaphrodite flowers shall remain unfertile, that is to say the law of the sterility of autofecundation. It is true that inverts, in their search for a male person, will often be found to put up with other inverts as effeminate as themselves. But it is enough that they do not belong to the female sex, of which they have in them an embryo which they can put to no useful purpose, such as we find in so many hermaphrodite flowers, and even in certain

hermaphrodite animals, such as the snail, which cannot be fertilised by themselves, but can by other hermaphrodites. In this respect the race of inverts, who eagerly connect themselves with Oriental antiquity or the Golden Age in Greece, might be traced back farther still, to those experimental epochs in which there existed neither dioecious plants nor monosexual animals, to that initial hermaph-roditism of which certain rudiments of male organs in the anatomy of the woman and of female organs in that of the man seem still to preserve the trace. I found the pantomime, incomprehensible to me at first, of Jupien and M. de Charlus as curious as those seductive gestures addressed, Darwin tells us, to insects not only by the flowers called composite which erect the florets of their capitals so as to be seen from a greater distance, such as a certain heterostyle which turns back its stamens and bends them to open the way for the insect, or offers him an ablution, or, to take an immediate instance, the nectar-fragrance and vivid hue of the corollae that were at that moment attracting insects to our courtyard. From this day onwards M. de Charlus was to alter the time of his visits to Mme. de Villeparisis, not that he could not see Jupien elsewhere and with greater convenience, but because to him just as much as to me the afternoon sunshine and the blossoming plant were, no doubt, linked together in memory. Apart from this, he did not confine himself to recommending the Jupiens to Mme. de Villeparisis, to the Duchesse de Guermantes, to a whole brilliant list of patrons, who were all the more assiduous in their attentions to the young seamstress when they saw that the few ladies who had held out, or had merely delayed their submission, were subjected to the direst reprisals by the Baron, whether in order that they might serve as an example, or because they had aroused his wrath and had stood out against his attempted domination; he made Jupien's position more and more lucrative, until he definitely engaged him as his secretary and established him in the state in which we shall see him later on. "Ah, now! There is a happy man, if you like, that Jupien," said Françoise, who had a tendency to minimise or exaggerate people's generosity according as it was bestowed on herself or on others. Not that, in this instance, she had any need to exaggerate, nor for that matter did she feel any jealousy, being genuinely fond of Jupien. "Oh, he's such a good man, the Baron," she went on, "such a well-behaved, religious, proper sort of man. If I had a daughter to marry and was one of the rich myself, I would give her to the Baron with my eyes shut." "But, Françoise," my mother observed gently, "she'd be well supplied with husbands, that daughter of yours. Don't forget you've already promised her to Jupien." "Ah! Lordy, now," replied Françoise, "there's another of them that would make a

woman happy. It doesn't matter whether you're rich or poor, it makes no difference to your nature. The Baron and Jupien, they're just the same sort of person."

However, I greatly exaggerated at the time, on the strength of this first revelation, the elective character of so carefully selected a combination. Admittedly, every man of the kind of M. de Charlus is an extraordinary creature since, if he does not make concessions to the possibilities of life, he seeks out essentially the love of a man of the other race, that is to say a man who is a lover of women (and incapable consequently of loving him); in contradiction of what I had imagined in the courtyard, where I had seen Jupien turning towards M. de Charlus like the orchid making overtures to the bee, these exceptional creatures whom we commiserate are a vast crowd, as we shall see in the course of this work, for a reason which will be disclosed only at the end of it, and commiserate themselves for being too many rather than too few. For the two angels who were posted at the gates of Sodom to learn whether its inhabitants (according to Genesis) had indeed done all the things the report of which had ascended to the Eternal Throne must have been, and of this one can only be glad, exceedingly ill chosen by the Lord, Who ought not to have entrusted the task to any but a Sodomite. Such an one the excuses: "Father of six children — I keep two mistresses," and so forth could never have persuaded benevolently to lower his flaming sword and to mitigate the punishment; he would have answered: "Yes, and your wife lives in a torment of jealousy. But even when these women have not been chosen by you from Gomorrah, you spend your nights with a watcher of flocks upon Hebron." And he would at once have made him retrace his steps to the city which the rain of fire and brimstone was to destroy. On the contrary, they allowed to escape all the shame-faced Sodomites, even if these, on catching sight of a boy, turned their heads, like Lot's wife, though without being on that account changed like her into pillars of salt. With the result that they engendered a numerous posterity with whom this gesture has continued to be habitual, like that of the dissolute women who, while apparently studying a row of shoes displayed in a shop window, turn their heads to keep track of a passing student. These descendants of the Sodomites, so numerous that we may apply to them that other verse of Genesis: "If a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered," have established themselves throughout the entire world; they have had access to every profession and pass so easily into the most exclusive clubs that, whenever a Sodomite fails to secure election, the blackballs are, for the most part, cast by other Sodomites, who are anxious to penalise

sodomy, having inherited the falsehood that enabled their ancestors to escape from the accursed city. It is possible that they may return there one day. Certainly they form in every land an Oriental colony, cultured, musical, malicious, which has certain charming qualities and intolerable defects. We shall study them with greater thoroughness in the course of the following pages; but I have thought it as well to utter here a provisional warning against the lamentable error of proposing (just as people have encouraged a Zionist movement) to create a Sodomist movement and to rebuild Sodom. For, no sooner had they arrived there than the Sodomites would leave the town so as not to have the appearance of belonging to it, would take wives, keep mistresses in other cities where they would find, incidentally, every diversion that appealed to them. They would repair to Sodom only on days of supreme necessity, when their own town was empty, at those seasons when hunger drives the wolf from the woods; in other words, everything would go on very much as it does to-day in London, Berlin, Rome, Petrograd or Paris.

Anyhow, on the day in question, before paying my call on the Duchess, I did not look so far ahead, and I was distressed to find that I had, by my engrossment in the Jupien-Charlus conjunction, missed perhaps an opportunity of witnessing the fertilisation of the blossom by the bee.

Chapter 1

As I was in no haste to arrive at this party at the Guermantes', to which I was not certain that I had been invited, I remained sauntering out of doors; but the summer day seemed to be in no greater haste than myself to stir. Albeit it was after nine o'clock, it was still the light of day that on the Place de la Concorde was giving the Luxor obelisk the appearance of being made of pink nougat. Then it diluted the tint and changed the surface to a metallic substance, so that the obelisk not only became more precious but seemed to have grown more slender and almost flexible. You imagined that you might have twisted it in your fingers, had perhaps already slightly distorted its outline. The moon was now in the sky like a section of orange delicately peeled although slightly bruised. But presently she was to be fashioned of the most enduring gold. Sheltering alone behind her, a poor little star was to serve as sole companion to the lonely moon, while she, keeping her friend protected, but bolder and striding ahead, would brandish like an irresistible weapon, like an Oriental symbol, her broad and marvellous crescent of gold.

Outside the mansion of the Princesse de Guermantes, I met the Duc de Châtellerault; I no longer remembered that half an hour earlier I had still been persecuted by the fear — which, for that matter, was speedily to grip me again — that I might be entering the house uninvited. We grow uneasy, and it is sometimes long after the hour of danger, which a subsequent distraction has made us forget, that we remember our uneasiness. I greeted the young Duke and made my way into the house. But here I must first of all record a trifling incident, which will enable us to understand something that was presently to occur.

There was one person who, on that evening as on the previous evenings, had been thinking a great deal about the Duc de Châtellerault, without however suspecting who he was: this was the usher (styled at that time the *aboyeur*) of Mme. de Guermantes. M. de Châtellerault, so far from being one of the Princess's intimate friends, albeit he was one of her cousins, had been invited to her house for the first time. His parents, who had not been on speaking terms

with her for the last ten years, had been reconciled to her within the last fortnight, and, obliged to be out of Paris that evening, had requested their son to fill their place. Now, a few days earlier, the Princess's usher had met in the Champs-Elysées a young man whom he had found charming but whose identity he had been unable to establish. Not that the young man had not shewn himself as obliging as he had been generous. All the favours that the usher had supposed that he would have to bestow upon so young a gentleman, he had on the contrary received. But M. de Châtellerault was as reticent as he was rash; he was all the more determined not to disclose his incognito since he did not know with what sort of person he was dealing; his fear would have been far greater, although quite unfounded, if he had known. He had confined himself to posing as an Englishman, and to all the passionate questions with which he was plied by the usher, desirous to meet again a person to whom he was indebted for so much pleasure and so ample a gratuity, the Duke had merely replied, from one end of the Avenue Gabriel to the other: "I do not speak French."

Albeit, in spite of everything — remembering his cousin Gilbert's maternal ancestry — the Duc de Guermantes pretended to find a touch of Courvoisier in the drawing-room of the Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière, the general estimate of that lady's initiative spirit and intellectual superiority was based upon an innovation that was to be found nowhere else in her set. After dinner, however important the party that was to follow, the chairs, at the Princesse de Guermantes's, were arranged in such a way as to form little groups, in which people might have to turn their backs upon one another. The Princess then displayed her social sense by going to sit down, as though by preference, in one of these. Not that she was afraid to pick out and attract to herself a member of another group. If, for instance, she had remarked to M. Détaille, who naturally agreed with her, on the beauty of Mme. de Villemur's neck, of which that lady's position in another group made her present a back view, the Princess did not hesitate to raise her voice: "Madame de Villemur, M. Détaille, with his wonderful painter's eye, has just been admiring your neck." Mme. de Villemur interpreted this as a direct invitation to join in the conversation; with the agility of a practiced horsewoman, she made her chair rotate slowly through three quadrants of a circle, and, without in the least disturbing her neighbours, came to rest almost facing the Princess. "You don't know M. Détaille?" exclaimed their hostess, for whom her guest's nimble and modest tergiversation was not sufficient. "I do not know him, but I know his work," replied Mme. de Villemur, with a respectful, engaging air, and a promptitude which many of the onlookers

envied her, addressing the while to the celebrated painter whom this invocation had not been sufficient to introduce to her in a formal manner, an imperceptible bow. “Come, Monsieur Détaille,” said the Princess, “let me introduce you to Mme. de Villemur.” That lady thereupon shewed as great ingenuity in making room for the creator of the *Dream* as she had shewn a moment earlier in wheeling round to face him. And the Princess drew forward a chair for herself; she had indeed invoked Mme. de Villemur only to have an excuse for quitting the first group, in which she had spent the statutory ten minutes, and bestowing a similar allowance of her time upon the second. In three quarters of an hour, all the groups had received a visit from her, which seemed to have been determined in each instance by impulse and predilection, but had the paramount object of making it apparent how naturally “a great lady knows how to entertain.” But now the guests for the party were beginning to arrive, and the lady of the house was seated not far from the door — erect and proud in her semi-regal majesty, her eyes ablaze with their own incandescence — between two unattractive Royalties and the Spanish Ambassadress.

I stood waiting behind a number of guests who had arrived before me. Facing me was the Princess, whose beauty is probably not the only thing, where there were so many beauties, that reminds me of this party. But the face of my hostess was so perfect; stamped like so beautiful a medal, that it has retained a commemorative force in my mind. The Princess was in the habit of saying to her guests when she met them a day or two before one of her parties: “You will come, won’t you?” as though she felt a great desire to talk to them. But as, on the contrary, she had nothing to talk to them about, when they entered her presence she contented herself, without rising, with breaking off for an instant her vapid conversation with the two Royalties and the Ambassadress and thanking them with: “How good of you to have come,” not that she thought that the guest had shewn his goodness by coming, but to enhance her own; then, at once dropping him back into the stream, she would add: “You will find M. de Guermantes by the garden door,” so that the guest proceeded on his way and ceased to bother her. To some indeed she said nothing, contenting herself with shewing them her admirable onyx eyes, as though they had come merely to visit an exhibition of precious stones.

The person immediately in front of me was the Duc de Châtellerault.

Having to respond to all the smiles, all the greetings waved to him from inside the drawing-room, he had not noticed the usher. But from the first moment the usher had recognised him. The identity of this stranger, which he

had so ardently desired to learn, in another minute he would know. When he asked his ‘Englishman’ of the other evening what name he was to announce, the usher was not merely stirred, he considered that he was being indiscreet, indelicate. He felt that he was about to reveal to the whole world (which would, however, suspect nothing) a secret which it was criminal of him to force like this and to proclaim in public. Upon hearing the guest’s reply: “Le duc de Châtellerault,” he felt such a burst of pride that he remained for a moment speechless. The Duke looked at him, recognised him, saw himself ruined, while the servant, who had recovered his composure and was sufficiently versed in heraldry to complete for himself an appellation that was too modest, shouted with a professional vehemence softened by an emotional tenderness: “Son Altesse Monseigneur le duc de Châtellerault!” But it was now my turn to be announced. Absorbed in contemplation of my hostess, who had not yet seen me, I had not thought of the function — terrible to me, although not in the same sense as to M. de Châtellerault — of this usher garbed in black like a headsman, surrounded by a group of lackeys in the most cheerful livery, lusty fellows ready to seize hold of an intruder and cast him out of doors. The usher asked me my name, I told him it as mechanically as the condemned man allows himself to be strapped to the block. At once he lifted his head majestically and, before I could beg him to announce me in a lowered tone so as to spare my own feelings if I were not invited and those of the Princesse de Guermantes if I were, shouted the disturbing syllables with a force capable of bringing down the roof.

The famous Huxley (whose grandson occupies an unassailable position in the English literary world of to-day) relates that one of his patients dared not continue to go into society because often, on the actual chair that was pointed out to her with a courteous gesture, she saw an old gentleman already seated. She could be quite certain that either the gesture of invitation or the old gentleman’s presence was a hallucination, for her hostess would not have offered her a chair that was already occupied. And when Huxley, to cure her, forced her to reappear in society, she felt a moment of painful hesitation when she asked herself whether the friendly sign that was being made to her was the real thing, or, in obedience to a non-existent vision, she was about to sit down in public upon the knees of a gentleman in flesh and blood. Her brief uncertainty was agonising. Less so perhaps than mine. From the moment at which I had taken in the sound of my name, like the rumble that warns us of a possible cataclysm, I was bound, to plead my own good faith in either event, and as though I were not tormented by any doubt, to advance towards the Princess with a resolute air.

She caught sight of me when I was still a few feet away and (to leave me in no doubt that I was the victim of a conspiracy), instead of remaining seated, as she had done for her other guests, rose and came towards me. A moment later, I was able to heave the sigh of relief of Huxley's patient, when, having made up her mind to sit down on the chair, she found it vacant and realised that it was the old gentleman that was a hallucination. The Princess had just held out her hand to me with a smile. She remained standing for some moments with the kind of charm enshrined in the verse of Malherbe which ends:

"To do them honour all the angels rise."

She apologised because the Duchess had not yet come, as though I must be bored there without her. In order to give me this greeting, she wheeled round me, holding me by the hand, in a graceful revolution by the whirl of which I felt myself carried off my feet. I almost expected that she would next offer me, like the leader of a cotillon, an ivory-headed cane or a watch-bracelet. She did not, however, give me anything of the sort, and as though, instead of dancing the boston, she had been listening to a sacred quartet by Beethoven the sublime strains of which she was afraid of interrupting, she cut short the conversation there and then, or rather did not begin it, and, still radiant at having seen me come in, merely informed me where the Prince was to be found.

I moved away from her and did not venture to approach her again, feeling that she had absolutely nothing to say to me and that, in her vast kindness, this woman marvellously tall and handsome, noble as were so many great ladies who stepped so proudly upon the scaffold, could only, short of offering me a draught of honeydew, repeat what she had already said to me twice: "You will find the Prince in the garden." Now, to go in search of the Prince was to feel my doubts revive in a fresh form.

In any case I should have to find somebody to introduce me. One could hear, above all the din of conversation, the interminable chatter of M. de Charlus, talking to H. E. the Duke of Sidonia, whose acquaintance he had just made. Members of the same profession find one another out, and so it is with a common vice. M. de Charlus and M. de Sidonia had each of them immediately detected the other's vice, which was in both cases that of soliloquising in society, to the extent of not being able to stand any interruption. Having decided at once that, in the words of a famous sonnet, there was 'no help,' they had made up their minds not to be silent but each to go on talking without any regard to what the other might say. This had resulted in the confused babble produced in Molière's comedies by a number of people saying different things

simultaneously. The Baron, with his deafening voice, was moreover certain of keeping the upper hand, of drowning the feeble voice of M. de Sidonia; without however discouraging him, for, whenever M. de Charlus paused for a moment to breathe, the interval was filled by the murmurs of the Grandee of Spain who had imperturbably continued his discourse. I could easily have asked M. de Charlus to introduce me to the Prince de Guermantes, but I feared (and with good reason) that he might be cross with me. I had treated him in the most ungrateful fashion by letting his offer pass unheeded for the second time and by never giving him a sign of my existence since the evening when he had so affectionately escorted me home. And yet I could not plead the excuse of having anticipated the scene which I had just witnessed, that very afternoon, enacted by himself and Jupien. I suspected nothing of the sort. It is true that shortly before this, when my parents reproached me with my laziness and with not having taken the trouble to write a line to M. de Charlus, I had violently reproached them with wishing me to accept a degrading proposal. But anger alone, and the desire to hit upon the expression that would be most offensive to them had dictated this mendacious retort. In reality, I had imagined nothing sensual, nothing sentimental even, underlying the Baron's offers. I had said this to my parents with entire irresponsibility. But sometimes the future is latent in us without our knowledge, and our words which we suppose to be false forecast an imminent reality.

M. de Charlus would doubtless have forgiven me my want of gratitude. But what made him furious was that my presence this evening at the Princesse de Guermantes's, as for some time past at her cousin's, seemed to be a defiance of his solemn declaration: "There is no admission to those houses save through me." A grave fault, a crime that was perhaps inexpiable, I had not followed the conventional path. M. de Charlus knew well that the thunderbolts which he hurled at those who did not comply with his orders, or to whom he had taken a dislike, were beginning to be regarded by many people, however furiously he might brandish them, as mere pasteboard, and had no longer the force to banish anybody from anywhere. But he believed perhaps that his diminished power, still considerable, remained intact in the eyes of novices like myself. And so I did not consider it well advised to ask a favour of him at a party at which the mere fact of my presence seemed an ironical denial of his pretentions.

I was buttonholed at that moment by a man of a distinctly common type, Professor E——. He had been surprised to see me at the Guermantes'. I was no less surprised to see him there, for nobody had ever seen before or was ever to see again a person of his sort at one of the Princess's parties. He had just

succeeded in curing the Prince, after the last rites had been administered, of a septic pneumonia, and the special gratitude that Mme. de Guermantes felt towards him was the reason for her thus departing from custom and inviting him to her house. As he knew absolutely nobody in the rooms, and could not wander about there indefinitely by himself, like a minister of death, having recognised me, he had discovered, for the first time in his life, that he had an infinite number of things to say to me, which enabled him to assume an air of composure, and this was one of the reasons for his advancing upon me. There was also another. He attached great importance to his never being mistaken in his diagnoses. Now his correspondence was so numerous that he could not always bear in mind, when he had seen a patient once only, whether the disease had really followed the course that he had traced for it. The reader may perhaps remember that, immediately after my grandmother's stroke, I had taken her to see him, on the afternoon when he was having all his decorations stitched to his coat. After so long an interval, he no longer remembered the formal announcement which had been sent to him at the time. "Your grandmother is dead, isn't she?" he said to me in a voice in which a semi-certainty calmed a slight apprehension. "Ah! Indeed! Well, from the moment I saw her my prognosis was extremely grave, I remember it quite well."

It was thus that Professor E—— learned or recalled the death of my grandmother, and (I must say this to his credit, which is that of the medical profession as a whole), without displaying, without perhaps feeling, any satisfaction. The mistakes made by doctors are innumerable. They err habitually on the side of optimism as to treatment, of pessimism as to the outcome. "Wine? In moderation, it can do you no harm, it is always a tonic.... Sexual enjoyment? After all it is a natural function. I allow you to use, but not to abuse it, you understand. Excess in anything is wrong." At once, what a temptation to the patient to renounce those two life-givers, water and chastity. If, on the other hand, he has any trouble with his heart, albumen, and so forth, it never lasts for long. Disorders that are grave but purely functional are at once ascribed to an imaginary cancer. It is useless to continue visits which are powerless to eradicate an incurable malady. Let the patient, left to his own devices, thereupon subject himself to an implacable regime, and in time recover, or merely survive, and the doctor, to whom he touches his hat in the Avenue de l'Opéra, when he supposed him to have long been lying in Père Lachaise, will interpret the gesture as an act of insolent defiance. An innocent stroll, taken beneath his nose and venerable beard, would arouse no greater wrath in the Assize Judge who, two years earlier,

had sentenced the rascal, now passing him with apparent impunity, to death. Doctors (we do not here include them all, of course, and make a mental reservation of certain admirable exceptions), are in general more displeased, more irritated by the quashing of their sentence than pleased by its execution. This explains why Professor E——, despite the intellectual satisfaction that he doubtless felt at finding that he had not been mistaken, was able to speak to me only with regret of the blow that had fallen upon us. He was in no hurry to cut short the conversation, which kept him in countenance and gave him a reason for remaining. He spoke to me of the great heat through which we were passing, but, albeit he was a well-read man and capable of expressing himself in good French, said to me: “You are none the worse for this hyperthermia?” The fact is that medicine has made some slight advance in knowledge since Molière’s days, but none in its vocabulary. My companion went on: “The great thing is to avoid the sudations that are caused by weather like this, especially in superheated rooms. You can remedy them, when you go home and feel thirsty, by the application of heat” (by which he apparently meant hot drinks).

Owing to the circumstances of my grandmother’s death, the subject interested me, and I had recently read in a book by a great specialist that perspiration was injurious to the kidneys, by making moisture pass through the skin when its proper outlet was elsewhere. I thought with regret of those dog-days at the time of my grandmother’s death, and was inclined to blame them for it. I did not mention this to Dr. E——, but of his own accord he said to me: “The advantage of this very hot weather in which perspiration is abundant is that the kidney is correspondingly relieved.” Medicine is not an exact science.

Keeping me engaged in talk, Professor E—— asked only not to be forced to leave me. But I had just seen, making a series of sweeping bows to right and left of the Princesse de Guermantes, stepping back a pace first, the Marquis de Vaugoubert. M. de Norpois had recently introduced me to him and I hoped that I might find in him a person capable of introducing me to our host. The proportions of this work do not permit me to explain here in consequence of what incidents in his youth M. de Vaugoubert was one of the few men (possibly the only man) in society who happened to be in what is called at Sodom the “confidence” of M. de Charlus. But, if our Minister to the Court of King Theodosius had certain defects in common with the Baron, they were only a very pale reflexion. It was merely in an infinitely softened, sentimental and simple form that he displayed those alternations of affection and hatred through which the desire to attract, and then the fear — equally imaginary — of being, if not

scorned, at any rate unmasked, made the Baron pass. Made ridiculous by a chastity, a ‘pla-tonicism’ (to which as a man of keen ambition he had, from the moment of passing his examination, sacrificed all pleasure), above all by his intellectual nullity, these alternations M. de Vaugoubert did, nevertheless, display. But whereas in M. de Charlus the immoderate praises were proclaimed with a positive burst of eloquence, and seasoned with the subtlest, the most mordant banter which marked a man for ever, by M. de Vaugoubert, on the other hand, the affection was expressed with the banality of a man of the lowest intelligence, and of a public official, the grievances (worked up generally into a complete indictment, as with the Baron) by a malevolence which, though relentless, was at the same time spiritless, and was all the more startling inasmuch as it was invariably a direct contradiction of what the Minister had said six months earlier and might soon perhaps be saying again: a regularity of change which gave an almost astronomic poetry to the various phases of M. de Vaugoubert’s life, albeit apart from this nobody was ever less suggestive of a star.

The greeting that he gave me had nothing in common with that which I should have received from M. de Charlus. To this greeting M. de Vaugou-bert, apart from the thousand mannerisms which he supposed to be indicative of good breeding and diplomacy, imparted a cavalier, brisk, smiling air, which should make him seem on the one hand to be rejoicing at being alive — at a time when he was inwardly chewing the mortification of a career with no prospect of advancement and with the threat of enforced retirement — and on the other hand young, virile and charming, when he could see and no longer ventured to go and examine in the glass the lines gathering upon a face which he would have wished to keep full of seduction. Not that he would have hoped for effective conquests, the mere thought of which filled him with terror on account of what people would say, scandals, blackmail. Having passed from an almost infantile corruption to an absolute continence dating from the day on which his thoughts had turned to the Quai d’Orsay and he had begun to plan a great career for himself, he had the air of a caged animal, casting in every direction glances expressive of fear, appetite and stupidity. This last was so dense that he did not reflect that the street-arabs of his adolescence were boys no longer, and when a newsvendor bawled in his face: “*La Presse*!” even more than with longing he shuddered with terror, imagining himself recognised and denounced.

But in default of the pleasures sacrificed to the ingratitude of the Quai d’Orsay, M. de Vaugoubert — and it was for this that he was anxious still to

attract — was liable to sudden stirrings of the heart. Heaven knows with how many letters he would overwhelm the Ministry (what personal ruses he would employ, the drafts that he made upon the credit of Mme. de Vaugoubert, who, on account of her corpulence, her exalted birth, her masculine air, and above all the mediocrity of her husband, was reputed to be endowed with eminent capacities and to be herself for all practical purposes the Minister), to introduce without any valid reason a young man destitute of all merit into the staff of the Legation. It is true that a few months, a few years later, the insignificant attaché had only to appear, without the least trace of any hostile intention, to have shown signs of coldness towards his chief for the latter, supposing himself scorned or betrayed, to devote the same hysterical ardour to punishing him with which he had showered favours upon him in the past. He would move heaven and earth to have him recalled and the Director of Political Affairs would receive a letter daily: “Why don’t you hurry up and rid me of that lascar. Give him a dressing down in his own interest. What he needs is a slice of humble pie.” The post of attaché at the court of King Theodosius was on this account far from enjoyable. But in all other respects, thanks to his perfect common sense as a man of the world, M. de Vaugoubert was one of the best representatives of the French Government abroad. When a man who was reckoned a superior person, a Jacobin, with an expert knowledge of all subjects, replaced him later on, it was not long before war broke out between France and the country over which that monarch reigned.

M. de Vaugoubert, like M. de Charlus, did not care to be the first to give a greeting. Each of them preferred to ‘respond,’ being constantly afraid of the gossip which the person to whom otherwise they might have offered their hand might have heard about them since their last meeting. In my case, M. de Vaugoubert had no need to ask himself this question, I had as a matter of fact gone up of my own accord to greet him, if only because of the difference in our ages. He replied with an air of wonder and delight, his eyes continuing to stray as though there had been a patch of clover on either side of me upon which he was forbidden to graze. I felt that it would be more becoming to ask him to introduce me to Mme. de Vaugoubert, before effecting that introduction to the Prince which I decided not to mention to him until afterwards. The idea of making me acquainted with his wife seemed to fill him with joy, for his own sake as well as for hers, and he led me at a solemn pace towards the Marquise. Arriving in front of her, and indicating me with his hand and eyes, with every conceivable mark of consideration, he nevertheless remained silent and

withdrew after a few moments, in a sidelong fashion, leaving me alone with his wife. She had at once given me her hand, but without knowing to whom this token of friendship was addressed, for I realised that M. de Vaugoubert had forgotten my name, perhaps even had failed to recognise me, and being unwilling, from politeness, to confess his ignorance had made the introduction consist in a mere dumb show. And so I was no further advanced; how was I to get myself introduced to my host by a woman who did not know my name? Worse still, I found myself obliged to remain for some moments talking to Mme. de Vaugoubert. And this annoyed me for two reasons. I had no wish to remain all night at this party, for I had arranged with Albertine (I had given her a box for *Phèdre*) that she was to pay me a visit shortly before midnight. Certainly I was not in the least in love with her; I was yielding, in making her come this evening, to a wholly sensual desire, albeit we were at that torrid period of the year when sensuality, evaporating, visits more readily the organ of taste, seeks above all things coolness. More than for the kiss of a girl, it thirsts for orangeade, for a cold bath, or even to gaze at that peeled and juicy moon which was quenching the thirst of heaven. I counted however upon ridding myself, in Albertine's company — which, moreover, reminded me of the coolness of the sea — of the regret that I should not fail to feel for many charming faces (for it was a party quite as much for girls as for married women that the Princess was giving. On the other hand, the face of the imposing Mme. de Vaugoubert, Bourbonian and morose, was in no way attractive).

People said at the Ministry, without any suggestion of malice, that in their household it was the husband who wore the petticoats and the wife the trousers. Now there was more truth in this saying than was supposed. Mme. de Vaugoubert was really a man. Whether she had always been one, or had grown to be as I saw her, matters little, for in either case we have to deal with one of the most touching miracles of nature which, in the latter alternative especially, makes the human kingdom resemble the kingdom of flowers. On the former hypothesis — if the future Mme. de Vaugoubert had always been so clumsily manlike — nature, by a fiendish and beneficent ruse, bestows on the girl the deceiving aspect of a man. And the youth who has no love for women and is seeking to be cured greets with joy this subterfuge of discovering a bride who figures in his eyes as a market porter. In the alternative case, if the woman has not originally these masculine characteristics, she adopts them by degrees, to please her husband, and even unconsciously, by that sort of mimicry which makes certain flowers assume the appearance of the insects which they seek to

attract. Her regret that she is not loved, that she is not a man, virilises her. Indeed, quite apart from the case that we are now considering, who has not remarked how often the most normal couples end by resembling each other, at times even by an exchange of qualities? A former German Chancellor, Prince von Bùlow, married an Italian. In the course of time, on the Pincio, it was remarked how much the Teutonic husband had absorbed of Italian delicacy, and the Italian Princess of German coarseness. To turn aside to a point without the province of the laws which we are now tracing, everyone knows an eminent French diplomat, whose origin was at first suggested only by his name, one of the most illustrious in the East. As he matured, as he grew old, there was revealed in him the Oriental whom no one had ever suspected, and now when we see him we regret the absence of the fez that would complete the picture.

To revert to habits completely unknown to the ambassador whose profile, coarsened by heredity, we have just recalled, Mme. de Vaugoubert realised the acquired or predestined type, the immortal example of which is the Princess Palatine, never out of a riding habit, who, having borrowed from her husband more than his virility, championing the defects of the men who do not care for women, reports in her familiar correspondence the mutual relations of all the great noblemen of the court of Louis XIV. One of the reasons which enhance still farther the masculine air of women like Mme. de Vaugoubert is that the neglect which they receive from their husbands, the shame that they feel at such neglect, destroy in them by degrees everything that is womanly. They end by acquiring both the good and the bad qualities which their husbands lack. The more frivolous, effeminate, indiscreet their husbands are, the more they grow into the effigy, devoid of charm, of the virtues which their husbands ought to practise.

Traces of abasement, boredom, indignation, marred the regular features of Mme. de Vaugoubert. Alas, I felt that she was regarding me with interest and curiosity as one of those young men who appealed to M. de Vaugoubert, and one of whom she herself would so much have liked to be, now that her husband, growing old, shewed a preference for youth. She was gazing at me with the close attention shewn by provincial ladies who from an illustrated catalogue copy the tailor-made dress so becoming to the charming person in the picture (actually, the same person on every page, but deceptively multiplied into different creatures, thanks to the differences of pose and the variety of attire). The instinctive attraction which urged Mme. de Vaugoubert towards me was so strong that she went the length of seizing my arm, so that I might take her to get a glass of orangeade. But I released myself, alleging that I must presently be

going, and had not yet been introduced to our host.

This distance between me and the garden door where he stood talking to a group of people was not very great. But it alarmed me more than if, in order to cross it, I should have to expose myself to a continuous hail of fire.

A number of women from whom I felt that I might be able to secure an introduction were in the garden, where, while feigning an ecstatic admiration, they were at a loss for an occupation. Parties of this sort are as a rule premature. They have little reality until the following day, when they occupy the attention of the people who were not invited. A real author, devoid of the foolish self-esteem of so many literary people, if, when he reads an article by a critic who has always expressed the greatest admiration for his works, he sees the names of various inferior writers mentioned, but not his own, has no time to stop and consider what might be to him a matter for astonishment: his books are calling him. But a society woman has nothing to do and, on seeing in the *Figaro*: "Last night the Prince and Princesse de Guermantes gave a large party," etc., exclaims: "What! Only three days ago I talked to Marie-Gilbert for an hour, and she never said a word about it!" and racks her brains to discover how she can have offended the Guermantes. It must be said that, so far as the Princess's parties were concerned, the astonishment was sometimes as great among those who were invited as among those who were not. For they would burst forth at the moment when one least expected them, and summoned in people whose existence Mme. de Guermantes had forgotten for years. And almost all the people in society are so insignificant that others of their sort adopt, in judging them, only the measure of their social success, cherish them if they are invited, if they are omitted detest them. As to the latter, if it was the fact that the Princess often, even when they were her friends, did not invite them, that was often due to her fear of annoying 'Palamede,' who had excommunicated them. And so I might be certain that she had not spoken of me to M. de Charlus, for otherwise I should not have found myself there. He meanwhile was posted between the house and the garden, by the side of the German Ambassador, leaning upon the balustrade of the great staircase which led from the garden to the house, so that the other guests, in spite of the three or four feminine admirers who were grouped round the Baron and almost concealed him, were obliged to greet him as they passed. He responded by naming each of them in turn. And one heard an incessant: "Good evening, Monsieur du Hazay, good evening, Madame de la Tour du Pin-Verclause, good evening, Madame de la Tour du Pin-Gouvernet, good evening, Philibert, good evening, my dear Ambassadress," and so on. This

created a continuous barking sound, interspersed with benevolent suggestions or inquiries (to the answers to which he paid no attention), which M. de Charlus addressed to them in a tone softened, artificial to shew his indifference, and benign: “Take care the child doesn’t catch cold, it is always rather damp in the gardens. Good evening, Madame de Brantes. Good evening, Madame de Mecklembourg. Have you brought your daughter? Is she wearing that delicious pink frock? Good evening, Saint-Geran.” Certainly there was an element of pride in this attitude, for M. de Charlus was aware that he was a Guermantes, and that he occupied a supreme place at this party. But there was more in it than pride, and the very word *fête* suggested, to the man with aesthetic gifts, the luxurious, curious sense that it might bear if this party were being given not by people in contemporary society but in a painting by Carpaccio or Veronese. It is indeed highly probable that the German Prince that M. de Charlus was must rather have been picturing to himself the reception that occurs in *Tannhäuser*, and himself as the Margrave, standing at the entrance to the Warburg with a kind word of condescension for each of his guests, while their procession into the castle or the park is greeted by the long phrase, a hundred times renewed, of the famous March.

I must, however, make up my mind. I could distinguish beneath the trees various women with whom I was more or less closely acquainted, but they seemed transformed because they were at the Princess’s and not at her cousin’s, and because I saw them seated not in front of Dresden china plates but beneath the boughs of a chestnut. The refinement of their setting mattered nothing. Had it been infinitely less refined than at Oriane’s, I should have felt the same uneasiness. When the electric light in our drawing-room fails, and we are obliged to replace it with oil lamps, everything seems altered. I was recalled from my uncertainty by Mme. de Souvré. “Good evening,” she said as she approached me. “Have you seen the Duchesse de Guermantes lately?” She excelled in giving to speeches of this sort an intonation which proved that she was not uttering them from sheer silliness, like people who, not knowing what to talk about, come up to you a thousand times over to mention some bond of common acquaintance, often extremely slight. She had on the contrary a fine conducting wire in her glance which signified: “Don’t suppose for a moment that I haven’t recognised you. You are the young man I met at the Duchesse de Guermantes. I remember quite well.” Unfortunately, this protection, extended over me by this phrase, stupid in appearance but delicate in intention, was extremely fragile, and vanished as soon as I tried to make use of it. Madame de

Souvré had the art, if called upon to convey a request to some influential person, of appearing at the same time, in the petitioner's eyes, to be recommending him, and in those of the influential person not to be recommending the petitioner, so that her ambiguous gesture opened a credit balance of gratitude to her with the latter without placing her in any way in debt to the former. Encouraged by this lady's civilities to ask her to introduce me to M. de Guermantes, I found that she took advantage of a moment when our host was not looking in our direction, laid a motherly hand on my shoulder, and, smiling at the averted face of the Prince who was unable to see her, thrust me towards him with a gesture of feigned protection, but deliberately ineffective, which left me stranded almost at my starting point. Such is the cowardice of people in society.

That of a lady who came to greet me, addressing me by my name, was greater still. I tried to recall her own name as I talked to her; I remembered quite well having met her at dinner, I could remember things that she had said. But my attention, concentrated upon the inward region in which these memories of her lingered, was unable to discover her name there. It was there, nevertheless. My thoughts began playing a sort of game with it to grasp its outlines, its initial letter, and so finally to bring the whole name to light. It was labour in vain, I could more or less estimate its mass, its weight, but as for its forms, confronting them with the shadowy captive lurking in the inward night, I said to myself: "It is not that." Certainly my mind would have been capable of creating the most difficult names. Unfortunately, it had not to create but to reproduce. All action by the mind is easy, if it is not subjected to the test of reality. Here, I was forced to own myself beaten. Finally, in a flash, the name came back to me as a whole: 'Madame d'Arpajon.' I am wrong in saying that it came, for it did not, I think, appear to me by a spontaneous propulsion. I do not think either that the many slight memories which associated me with the lady, and to which I did not cease to appeal for help (by such exhortations as: "Come now, it is the lady who is a friend of Mme. de Souvré, who feels for Victor Hugo so artless an admiration, mingled with so much alarm and horror,")— I do not believe that all these memories, hovering between me and her name, served in any way to bring it to light. In that great game of hide and seek which is played in our memory when we seek to recapture a name, there is not any series of gradual approximations. We see nothing, then suddenly the name appears in its exact form and very different from what we thought we could make out. It is not the name that has come to us. No, I believe rather that, as we go on living, we pass our time in keeping away from the zone in which a name is distinct, and it was by an

exercise of my will and attention which increased the acuteness of my inward vision that all of a sudden I had pierced the semi-darkness and seen daylight. In any case, if there are transitions between oblivion and memory, then, these transitions are unconscious. For the intermediate names through which we pass, before finding the real name, are themselves false, and bring us nowhere nearer to it. They are not even, properly speaking, names at all, but often mere consonants which are nol to be found in the recaptured name. And yet, this operation of the mind passing from a blank to reality is so mysterious, that it is possible after all that these false consonants are really handles, awkwardly held out to enable us to seize hold of the correct name. “All this,” the reader will remark, “tells us nothing as to the lady’s failure to oblige; but since you have made so long a digression, allow me, gentle author, to waste another moment of your time in telling you that it is a pity that, young as you were (or as your hero was, if he be not yourself), you had already so feeble a memory that you could not recall the name of a lady whom you knew quite well.” It is indeed a pity, gentle reader. And sadder than you think when one feels the time approaching when names and words will vanish from the clear zone of consciousness, and when one must for ever cease to name to oneself the people whom one has known most intimately. It is indeed a pity that one should require this effort, when one is still young, to recapture names which one knows quite well. But if this infirmity occurred only in the case of names barely known, quite naturally forgotten, names which one would not take the trouble to remember, the infirmity would not be without its advantages. “And what are they, may I ask?” Well, Sir, that the malady alone makes us remark and apprehend, and allows us to dissect the mechanism of which otherwise we should know nothing. A man who, night after night, falls like a lump of lead upon his bed, and ceases to live until the moment when he wakes and rises, will such a man ever dream of making, I do not say great discoveries, but even minute observations upon sleep? He barely knows that he does sleep. A little insomnia is not without its value in making us appreciate sleep, in throwing a ray of light upon that darkness. A memory without fault is not a very powerful incentive to studying the phenomena of memory. “In a word, did Mme. d’Arpajon introduce you to the Prince?” No, but be quiet and let me go on with my story.

Mme. d’Arpajon was even more cowardly than Mme. de Souvré, but there was more excuse for her cowardice. She knew that she had always had very little influence in society. This influence, such as it was, had been reduced still farther by her connexion with the Duc de Guermantes; his desertion of her dealt it the

final blow. The resentment which she felt at my request that she should introduce me to the Prince produced a silence which, she was artless enough to suppose, conveyed the impression that she had not heard what I said. She was not even aware that she was knitting her brows with anger. Perhaps, on the other hand, she was aware of it, did not bother about the inconsistency, and made use of it for the lesson which she was thus able to teach me without undue rudeness; I mean a silent lesson, but none the less eloquent for that.

Apart from this, Mme. d'Arpajon was extremely annoyed; many eyes were raised in the direction of a renaissance balcony at the corner of which, instead of one of those monumental statues which were so often used as ornaments at that period, there leaned, no less sculptural than they, the magnificent Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc, who had recently succeeded Mme. d'Arpajon in the heart of Basin de Guermantes. Beneath the flimsy white tulle which protected her from the cool night air, one saw the supple form of a winged victory. I had no recourse left save to M. de Charlus, who had withdrawn to a room downstairs which opened on the garden. I had plenty of time (as he was pretending to be absorbed in a fictitious game of whist which enabled him to appear not to notice people) to admire the deliberate, artistic simplicity of his evening coat which, by the merest trifles which only a tailor's eye could have picked out, had the air of a 'Harmony in Black and White' by Whistler; black, white and red, rather, for M. de Charlus was wearing, hanging from a broad ribbon pinned to the lapel of his coat, the Cross, in white, black and red enamel, of a Knight of the religious Order of Malta. At that moment the Baron's game was interrupted by Mme. de Gallardon, leading her nephew, the Vicomte de Cour-voisier, a young man with an attractive face and an impertinent air. "Cousin," said Mme. de Gallardon, "allow me to introduce my nephew Adalbert. Adalbert, you remember the famous Palamède of whom you have heard so much." "Good evening, Madame de Gallardon," M. de Charlus replied. And he added, without so much as a glance at the young man: "Good evening, Sir," with a truculent air and in a tone so violently discourteous that everyone in the room was stupefied. Perhaps M. de Charlus, knowing that Mme. de Gallardon had her doubts as to his morals and guessing that she had not been able to resist, for once in a way, the temptation to allude to them, was determined to nip in the bud any scandal that she might have embroidered upon a friendly reception of her nephew, making at the same time a resounding profession of indifference with regard to young men in general; perhaps he had not considered that the said Adalbert had responded to his aunt's speech with a sufficiently respectful air; perhaps, desirous of making headway in

time to come with so attractive a cousin, he chose to give himself the advantage of a preliminary assault, like those sovereigns who, before engaging upon diplomatic action, strengthen it by an act of war.

It was not so difficult as I supposed to secure M. de Charlus's consent to my request that he should introduce me to the Prince de Guermantes. For one thing, in the course of the last twenty years, this Don Quixote had tilted against so many windmills (often relatives who, he imagined, had behaved badly to him), he had so frequently banned people as being 'impossible to have in the house' from being invited by various male or female Guermantes, that these were beginning to be afraid of quarrelling with all the people they knew and liked, of condemning themselves to a lifelong deprivation of the society of certain newcomers whom they were curious to meet, by espousing the thunderous but unexplained rancours of a brother-in-law or cousin who expected them to abandon for his sake, wife, brother, children. More intelligent than the other Guermantes, M. de Charlus realised that people were ceasing to pay any attention, save once in a while, to his veto, and, looking to the future, fearing lest one day it might be with his society that they would dispense, he had begun to make allowances, to reduce, as the saying is, his terms. Furthermore, if he had the faculty of ascribing for months, for years on end, an identical life to a detested person — to such an one he would not have tolerated their sending an invitation, and would have fought, rather, like a trooper, against a queen, the status of the person who stood in his way ceasing to count for anything in his eyes; on the other hand, his explosions of wrath were too frequent not to be somewhat fragmentary. "The imbecile, the rascal! We shall have to put him in his place, sweep him into the gutter, where unfortunately he will not be innocuous to the health of the town," he would scream, even when he was alone in his own room, while reading a letter that he considered irreverent, or upon recalling some remark that had been repeated to him. But a fresh outburst against a second imbecile cancelled the first, and the former victim had only to shew due deference for the crisis that he had occasioned to be forgotten, it not having lasted long enough to establish a foundation of hatred upon which to build. And so, I might perhaps — despite his ill-humour towards me — have been successful when I asked him to introduce me to the Prince, had I not been so ill-inspired as to add, from a scruple of conscience, and so that he might not suppose me guilty of the indelicacy of entering the house at a venture, counting upon him to enable me to remain there: "You are aware that I know them quite well, the Princess has been very kind to me." "Very well, if you know them, why

do you need me to introduce you?" he replied in a sharp tone, and, turning his back, resumed his make-believe game with the Nuncio, the German Ambassador and another personage whom I did not know by sight.

Then, from the depths of those gardens where in days past the Duc d'Aiguillon used to breed rare animals, there came to my ears, through the great, open doors, the sound of a sniffing nose that was savouring all those refinements and determined to miss none of them. The sound approached, I moved at a venture in its direction, with the result that the words *good evening* were murmured in my ear by M. de Bréauté, not like the rusty metallic-sound of a knife being sharpened on a grindstone, even less like the cry of the wild boar, devastator of tilled fields, but like the voice of a possible saviour.

Less influential than Mme. de Souvré, but less deeply ingrained than she with the incapacity to oblige, far more at his ease with the Prince than was Mme. d'Arpajon, entertaining some illusion perhaps as to my position in the Guermantes set, or perhaps knowing more about it than myself, I had nevertheless for the first few moments some difficulty in arresting his attention, for, with fluttering, distended nostrils, he was turning in every direction, inquisitively protruding his monocle, as though he found himself face to face with five hundred matchless works of art. But, having heard my request, he received it with satisfaction, led me towards the Prince and presented me to him with a relishing, ceremonious, vulgar air, as though he had been handing him, with a word of commendation, a plate of cakes. Just as the greeting of the Duc de Guermantes was, when he chose, friendly, instinct with good fellowship, cordial and familiar, so I found that of the Prince stiff, solemn, haughty. He barely smiled at me, addressed me gravely as 'Sir.' I had often heard the Duke make fun of his cousin's stiffness. But from the first words that he addressed to me, which by their cold and serious tone formed the most entire contrast with the language of Basin, I realised at once that the fundamentally disdainful man was the Duke, who spoke to you at your first meeting with him as 'man to man,' and that, of the two cousins, the one who was really simple was the Prince. I found in his reserve a stronger feeling, I do not say of equality, for that would have been inconceivable to him, but at least of the consideration which one may shew for an inferior, such as may be found in all strongly hierarchical societies; in the Law Courts, for instance, in a Faculty, where a public prosecutor or dean, conscious of their high charge, conceal perhaps more genuine simplicity, and, when you come to know them better, more kindness, true simplicity, cordiality, beneath their traditional aloofness than the more modern brethren beneath their

jocular affectation of comradeship. “Do you intend to follow the career of Monsieur, your father?” he said to me with a distant but interested air. I answered his question briefly, realising that he had asked it only out of politeness, and moved away to allow him to greet the fresh arrivals.

I caught sight of Swann, and meant to speak to him, but at that moment I saw that the Prince de Guermantes, instead of waiting where he was to receive the greeting of — Odette’s husband, had immediately, with the force of a suction pump, carried him off to the farther end of the garden, in order, as some said, ‘to shew him the door.’

So entirely absorbed in the company that I did not learn until two days later, from the newspapers, that a Czech orchestra had been playing throughout the evening, and that Bengal lights had been burning in constant succession, I recovered some power of attention with the idea of going to look at the celebrated fountain of Hubert Robert.

In a clearing surrounded by fine trees several of which were as old as itself, set in a place apart, one could see it in the distance, slender, immobile, stiffened, allowing the breeze to stir only the lighter fall of its pale and quivering plume. The eighteenth century had refined the elegance of its lines, but, by fixing the style of the jet, seemed to have arrested its life; at this distance one had the impression of a work of art rather than the sensation of water. The moist cloud itself that was perpetually gathering at its crest preserved the character of the period like those that in the sky assemble round the palaces of Versailles. But from a closer view one realised that, while it respected, like the stones of an ancient palace, the design traced for it beforehand, it was a constantly changing stream of water that, springing upwards and seeking to obey the architect’s traditional orders, performed them to the letter only by seeming to infringe them, its thousand separate bursts succeeding only at a distance in giving the impression of a single flow. This was in reality as often interrupted as the scattering of the fall, whereas from a distance it had appeared to me unyielding, solid, unbroken in its continuity. From a little nearer, one saw that this continuity, apparently complete, was assured, at every point in the ascent of the jet, wherever it must otherwise have been broken, by the entering into line, by the lateral incorporation of a parallel jet which mounted higher than the first and was itself, at an altitude greater but already a strain upon its endurance, relieved by a third. Seen close at hand, drops without strength fell back from the column of water crossing on their way their climbing sisters and, at times, torn, caught in an eddy of the night air, disturbed by this ceaseless flow, floated awhile before

being drowned in the basin. They teased with their hesitations, with their passage in the opposite direction, and blurred with their soft vapour the vertical tension of that stem, bearing aloft an oblong cloud composed of a thousand tiny drops, but apparently painted in an unchanging, golden brown which rose, unbreakable, constant, urgent, swift, to mingle with the clouds in the sky. Unfortunately, a gust of wind was enough to scatter it obliquely on the ground; at times indeed a single jet, disobeying its orders, swerved and, had they not kept a respectful distance, would have drenched to their skins the incautious crowd of gazers.

One of these little accidents, which could scarcely occur save when the breeze freshened for a moment, was distinctly unpleasant. Somebody had told Mme. d'Arpajon that the Duc de Guermantes, who as a matter of fact had not yet arrived, was with Mme. de Surgis in one of the galleries of pink marble to which one ascended by the double colonnade, hollowed out of the wall, which rose from the brink of the fountain. Now, just as Mme. d'Arpajon was making for one of these staircases, a strong gust of warm air made the jet of water swerve and inundated the fair lady so completely that, the water streaming down from her open bosom inside her dress, she was soaked as if she had been plunged into a bath. Whereupon, a few feet away, a rhythmical roar resounded, loud enough to be heard by a whole army, and at the same time protracted in periods as though it were being addressed not to the army as a whole but to each unit in turn; it was the Grand Duke Vladimir, who was laughing wholeheartedly upon seeing the immersion of Mme. d'Arpajon, one of the funniest sights, as he was never tired of repeating afterwards, that he had ever seen in his life. Some charitable persons having suggested to the Muscovite that a word of sympathy from himself was perhaps deserved and would give pleasure to the lady who, notwithstanding her tale of forty winters fully told, wiping herself with her scarf, without appealing to anyone for help, was stepping clear in spite of the water that was maliciously spilling over the edge of the basin, the Grand Duke, who had a kind heart, felt that he must say a word in season, and, before the last military tattoo of his laughter had altogether subsided, one heard a fresh roar, more vociferous even than the last. "Bravo, old girl!" he cried, clapping his hands as though at the theatre. Mme. d'Arpajon was not at all pleased that her dexterity should be commended at the expense of her youth. And when some one remarked to her, in a voice drowned by the roar of the water, over which nevertheless rose the princely thunder: "I think His Imperial Highness said something to you." "No! It was to Mme. de Souvré," was her reply.

I passed through the gardens and returned by the stair, upon which the

absence of the Prince, who had vanished with Swann, enlarged the crowd of guests round M. de Charlus, just as, when Louis XIV was not at Versailles, there was a more numerous attendance upon Monsieur, his brother. I was stopped on my way by the Baron, while behind me two ladies and a young man came up to greet him.

"It is nice to see you here," he said to me, as he held out his hand. "Good evening, Madame de la Trémoïlle, good evening, my dear Herminie." But doubtless the memory of what he had said to me as to his own supreme position in the Hôtel Guermantes made him wish to appear to be feeling, with regard to a matter which annoyed him but which he had been unable to prevent, a satisfaction which his high-and-mighty impertinence and his hysterical excitement immediately invested in a cloak of exaggerated irony. "It is nice," he repeated, "but it is, really, very odd." And he broke into peals of laughter which appeared to be indicative at once of his joy and of the inadequacy of human speech to express it. Certain persons, meanwhile, who knew both how difficult he was of access and how prone to insolent retorts, had been drawn towards us by curiosity, and, with an almost indecent haste, took to their heels. "Come, now, don't be cross," he said to me, patting me gently on the shoulder, "you know that I am your friend. Good evening, Antioche, good evening, Louis-René. Have you been to look at the fountain?" he asked me in a tone that was affirmative rather than questioning. "It is quite pretty, ain't it? It is marvellous. It might be made better still, naturally, if certain things were removed, and then there would be nothing like it in France. But even as it stands, it is quite one of the best things. Bréauté will tell you that it was a mistake to put lamps round it, to try and make people forget that it was he who was responsible for that absurd idea. But after all he has only managed to spoil it a very little. It is far more difficult to deface a great work of art than to create one. Not that we had not a vague suspicion all the time that Bréauté was not quite a match for Hubert Robert."

I drifted back into the stream of guests who were entering the house. "Have you seen my delicious cousin Oriane lately?" I was asked by the Princess who had now deserted her post by the door and with whom I was making my way back to the rooms. "She's sure to be here to-night, I saw her this afternoon," my hostess added. "She promised me to come. I believe too that you will be dining with us both to meet the Queen of Italy, at the Embassy, on Thursday. There are to be all the Royalties imaginable, it will be most alarming." They could not in any way alarm the Princesse de Guermantes, whose rooms swarmed with them, and who would say: 'My little Coburgs' as she might have said 'my little dogs.'

And so Mme. de Guermantes said: “It will be most alarming,” out of sheer silliness, which, among people in society, overrides even their vanity. With regard to her own pedigree, she knew less than a passman in history. As for the people of her circle, she liked to shew that she knew the nicknames with which they had been labelled. Having asked me whether I was dining, the week after, with the Marquise de la Pommelière, who was often called ‘la Pomme,’ the Princess, having elicited a reply in the negative, remained silent for some moments. Then, without any other motive than a deliberate display of instinctive erudition, banality, and conformity to the prevailing spirit, she added: “She’s not a bad sort, the Pomme!”

While the Princess was talking to me, it so happened that the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes made their entrance. But I could not go at once to greet them, for I was waylaid by the Turkish Ambassadress, who, pointing to our hostess whom I had just left, exclaimed as she seized me by the arm: “Ah! What a delicious woman the Princess is! What a superior being! I feel sure that, if I were a man,” she went on, with a trace of Oriental servility and sensuality, “I would give my life for that heavenly creature.” I replied that I did indeed find her charming, but that I knew her cousin, the Duchess, better. “But there is no comparison,” said the Ambassadress. “Oriane is a charming society woman who gets her wit from Même and Babal, whereas Marie-Gilbert is *somebody*.”

I never much like to be told like this, without a chance to reply, what I ought to think about people whom I know. And there was no reason why the Turkish Ambassadress should be in any way better qualified than myself to judge of the worth of the Duchesse de Guermantes.

On the other hand (and this explained also my annoyance with the Ambassadress), the defects of a mere acquaintance, and even of a friend, are to us real poisons, against which we are fortunately ‘mithridated.’

But, without applying any standard of scientific comparison and talking of anaphylaxis, let us say that, at the heart of our friendly or purely social relations, there lurks a hostility momentarily cured but recurring by fits and starts. As a rule, we suffer little from these poisons, so long as people are ‘natural.’ By saying ‘Babal’ and ‘Mémé’ to indicate people with whom she was not acquainted, the Turkish Ambassadress suspended the effects of the ‘mithridatism’ which, as a rule, made me find her tolerable. She annoyed me, which was all the more unfair, inasmuch as she did not speak like this to make me think that she was an intimate friend of ‘Mémé,’ but owing to a too rapid education which made her name these noble lords according to what she

believed to be the custom of the country. She had crowded her course into a few months, and had not picked up the rules. But, on thinking it over, I found another reason for my disinclination to remain in the Ambassadress's company. It was not so very long since, at Oriane's, this same diplomatic personage had said to me, with a purposeful and serious air, that she found the Princesse de Guermantes frankly antipathetic. I felt that I need not stop to consider this change of front: the invitation to the party this evening had brought it about. The Ambassadress was perfectly sincere when she told me that the Princesse de Guermantes was a sublime creature. She had always thought so. But, having never before been invited to the Princess's house, she had felt herself bound to give this non-invitation the appearance of a deliberate abstention on principle. Now that she had been asked, and would presumably continue to be asked in the future, she could give free expression to her feelings. There is no need, in accounting for three out of four of the opinions that we hold about other people, to go so far as crossed love or exclusion from public office. Our judgment remains uncertain: the withholding or bestowal of an invitation determines it. Anyhow, the Turkish Ambassadress, as the Baronne de Guermantes remarked while making a tour of inspection through the rooms with me, 'was all right.' She was, above all, extremely useful. The real stars of society are tired of appearing there. He who is curious to gaze at them must often migrate to another hemisphere, where they are more or less alone. But women like the Ottoman Ambassadress, of quite recent admission to society, are never weary of shining there, and, so to speak, everywhere at once. They are of value at entertainments of the sort known as *soirée* or *rout*, to which they would let themselves be dragged from their deathbeds rather than miss one. They are the supers upon whom a hostess can always count, determined never to miss a party. And so, the foolish young men, unaware that they are false stars, take them for the queens of fashion, whereas it would require a formal lecture to explain to them by virtue of what reasons Mme. Standish, who, her existence unknown to them, lives remote from the world, painting cushions, is at least as great a lady as the Duchesse de Doudeauville.

In the ordinary course of life, the eyes of the Duchesse de Guermantes were absent and slightly melancholy, she made them sparkle with a. flame of wit only when she had to say how-d'ye-do to a friend; precisely as though the said friend had been some witty remark, some charming touch, some titbit for delicate palates, the savour of which has set on the face of the connoisseur an expression of refined joy. But upon big evenings, as she had too many greetings to bestow,

she decided that it would be tiring to have to switch off the light after each. Just as an ardent reader, when he goes to the theatre to see a new piece by one of the masters of the stage, testifies to his certainty that he is not going to spend a dull evening by having, while he hands his hat and coat to the attendant, his lip adjusted in readiness for a sapient smile, his eye kindled for a sardonic approval; similarly it was at the moment of her arrival that the Duchess lighted up for the whole evening. And while she was handing over her evening cloak, of a magnificent Tiepolo red, exposing a huge collar of rubies round her neck, having cast over her gown that final rapid, minute and exhaustive dressmaker's glance which is also that of a woman of the world, Oriane made sure that her eyes, just as much as her other jewels, were sparkling. In vain might sundry 'kind friends' such as M. de Janville fling themselves upon the Duke to keep him from entering: "But don't you know that poor Mama is at his last gasp? He had had the Sacraments." "I know, I know," answered M. de Guermantes, thrusting the tiresome fellow aside in order to enter the room. "The viaticum has acted splendidly," he added, with a smile of pleasure at the thought of the ball which he was determined not to miss after the Prince's party. "We did not want people to know that we had come back," the Duchess said to me. She never suspected that the Princess had already disproved this statement by telling me that she had seen her cousin for a moment, who had promised to come. The Duke, after a protracted stare with which he proceeded to crush his wife for the space of five minutes, observed: "I told Oriane about your misgivings." Now that she saw that they were unfounded, and that she herself need take no action in the attempt to dispel them, she pronounced them absurd, and continued to chaff me about them. "The idea of supposing that you were not invited! Besides, wasn't I there? Do you suppose that I should be unable to get you an invitation to my cousin's house?" I must admit that frequently, after this, she did things for me that were far more difficult; nevertheless, I took care not to interpret her words in the sense that I had been too modest. I was beginning to learn the exact value of the language, spoken or mute, of aristocratic affability, an affability that is happy to shed balm upon the sense of inferiority in those persons towards whom it is directed, though not to the point of dispelling that sense, for in that case it would no longer have any reason to exist. "But you are our equal, if not our superior," the Guermantes seemed, in all their actions, to be saying; and they said it in the most courteous fashion imaginable, to be loved, admired, but not to be believed; that one should discern the fictitious character of this affability was what they called being well-bred; to suppose it to be genuine, a sign of ill-breeding. I was

to receive, as it happened, shortly after this, a lesson which gave me a full and perfect understanding of the extent and limitations of certain forms of aristocratic affability. It was at an afternoon party given by the Duchesse de Montmorency to meet the Queen of England; there was a sort of royal procession to the buffet, at the head of which walked Her Majesty on the arm of the Duc de Guermantes. I happened to arrive at that moment. With his disengaged hand the Duke conveyed to me, from a distance of nearly fifty yards, a thousand signs of friendly invitation, which appeared to mean that I need not be afraid to approach, that I should not be devoured alive instead of the sandwiches. But I, who was becoming word-perfect in the language of the court, instead of going even one step nearer, keeping my fifty yards' interval, made a deep how, but without smiling, the sort of bow that I should have made to some one whom I scarcely knew, then proceeded in the opposite direction. Had I written a masterpiece, the Guermantes would have given me less credit for it than I earned by that bow. Not only did it not pass unperceived by the Duke, albeit he had that day to acknowledge the greetings of more than five hundred people, it caught the eye of the Duchess, who, happening to meet my mother, told her of it, and, so far from suggesting that I had done wrong, that I ought to have gone up to him, said that her husband had been lost in admiration of my bow, that it would have been impossible for anyone to put more into it. They never ceased to find in that bow every possible merit, without however mentioning that which had seemed the most priceless of all, to wit that it had been discreet, nor did they cease either to pay me compliments which I understood to be even less a reward for the past than a hint for the future, after the fashion of the hint delicately conveyed to his pupils by the headmaster of a school: "Do not forget, my boys, that these prizes are intended not so much for you as for your parents, so that they may send you back next term." So it was that Mme. de Marsantes, when some one from a different world entered her circle, would praise in his hearing the discreet people whom "you find at home when you go to see them, and who at other times let you forget their existence," as one warns by an indirect allusion a servant who has an unpleasant smell, that the practice of taking a bath is beneficial to the health.

While, before she had even left the entrance hall, I was talking to Mme. de Guermantes, I could hear a voice of a sort which, for the future, I was to be able to classify without the possibility of error. It was, in this particular instance, the voice of M. de Vaugoubert talking to M. de Charlus. A skilled physician need not even make his patient unbutton his shirt, nor listen to his breathing, the

sound of his voice is enough. How often, in time to come, was my ear to be caught in a drawing-room by the intonation or laughter of some man, who, for all that, was copying exactly the language of his profession or the manners of his class, affecting a stern aloofness or a coarse familiarity, but whose artificial voice was enough to indicate: 'He is a Charlus' to my trained ear, like the note of a tuning fork. At that moment the entire staff of one of the Embassies went past, pausing to greet M. de Charlus. For all that my discovery of the sort of malady in question dated only from that afternoon (when I had surprised M. de Charlus with Jupien) I should have had no need, before giving a diagnosis, to put questions, to auscultate. But M. de Vaugoubert, when talking to M. de Charlus, appeared uncertain. And yet he must have known what was in the air after the doubts of his adolescence. The invert believes himself to be the only one of his kind in the universe; it is only in later years that he imagines — another exaggeration — that the unique exception is the normal man. But, ambitious and timorous, M. de Vaugoubert had not for many years past surrendered himself to what would to him have meant pleasure. The career of diplomacy had had the same effect upon his life as a monastic profession. Combined with his assiduous fréquentation of the School of Political Sciences, it had vowed him from his twentieth year to the chastity of a professing Christian. And so, as each of our senses loses its strength and vivacity, becomes atrophied when it is no longer exercised, M. de Vaugoubert, just as the civilised man is no longer capable of the feats of strength, of the acuteness of hearing of the cave-dweller, had lost that special perspicacy which was rarely at fault in M. de Charlus; and at official banquets, whether in Paris or abroad, the Minister Plenipotentiary was no longer capable of identifying those who, beneath the disguise of their uniform, were at heart his congeners. Certain names mentioned by M. de Charlus, indignant if he himself was cited for his peculiarities, but always delighted to give away those of other people, caused M. de Vaugoubert an exquisite surprise. Not that, after all these years, he dreamed of profiting by any windfall. But these rapid revelations, similar to those which in Racine's tragedies inform Athalie and Abner that Joas is of the House of David, that Esther, enthroned in the purple, comes of a Yiddish stock, changing the aspect of the X—— Legation, or of one or another department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rendered those palaces as mysterious, in retrospect, as the Temple of Jerusalem or the Throne-room at Susa. At the sight of the youthful staff of this Embassy advancing in a body to shake hands with M. de Charlus, M. de Vaugoubert assumed the astonished air of Elise exclaiming, in *Esther*: "Great heavens! What a swarm of innocent

beauties issuing from all sides presents itself to my gaze! How charming a modesty is depicted on their faces!" Then, athirst for more definite information, he cast at M. de Charlus a smiling glance fatuously interrogative and concupiscent. "Why, of course they are," said M. de Charlus with the knowing air of a learned man speaking to an ignoramus. From that instant M. de Vaugoubert (greatly to the annoyance of M. de Charlus) could not tear his eyes from these young secretaries whom the X—— Ambassador to France, an old stager, had not chosen blindfold. M. de Vaugoubert remained silent, I could only watch his eyes. But, being accustomed from my childhood to apply, even to what is voiceless, the language of the classics, I made M. de Vaugoubert's eyes repeat the lines in which Esther explains to Elise that Mardochée, in his zeal for his religion, has made it a rule that only those maidens who profess it shall be employed about the Queen's person. "And now his love for our nation has peopled this palace with daughters of Sion, young and tender flowers wafted by fate, transplanted like myself beneath a foreign sky. In a place set apart from profane eyes, he" (the worthy Ambassador) "devotes his skill and labour to shaping them."

At length M. de Vaugoubert spoke, otherwise than with his eyes. "Who knows," he said sadly, "that in the country where I live the same thing does not exist also?" "It is probable," replied M. de Charlus, "starting with King Theodosius, not that I know anything definite about him." "Oh, dear, no! Nothing of that sort!" "Then he has no right to look it so completely. Besides, he has all the little tricks. He had that 'my dear' manner, which I detest more than anything in the world. I should never dare to be seen walking in the street with him. Anyhow, you must know what he is, they all call him the White Wolf." "You are entirely mistaken about him. He is quite charming, all the same. The day on which the agreement with France was signed, the King kissed me. I have never been so moved." "That was the moment to tell him what you wanted." "Oh, good heavens! What an idea! If he were even to suspect such a thing! But I have no fear in that direction." A conversation which I could hear, for I was standing close by, and which made me repeat to myself: "The King unto this day knows not who I am, and this secret keeps my tongue still enchained."

This dialogue, half mute, half spoken, had lasted but a few moments, and I had barely entered the first of the drawing-rooms with the Duchesse de Guermantes when a little dark lady, extremely pretty, stopped her.

"I've been looking for you everywhere. D'Annunzio saw you from a box in the theatre, he has written the Princesse de T —— a letter in which he says that

he never saw anything so lovely. He would give his life for ten minutes' conversation with you. In any case, even if you can't or won't, the letter is in my possession. You must fix a day to come and see me. There are some secrets which I cannot tell you here. I see you don't remember me," she added, turning to myself; "I met you at the Princesse de Parme's" (where I had never been). "The Emperor of Russia is anxious for your father to be sent to Petersburg. If you could come in on Monday, Isvolski himself will be there, he will talk to you about it. I have a present for you, by dear," she went on, returning to the Duchess, "which I should not dream of giving to anyone but you. The manuscripts of three of Ibsen's plays, which he sent to me by his old attendant. I shall keep one and give you the other two."

The Duc de Guermantes was not overpleased by these offers. Uncertain whether Ibsen and D'Annunzio were dead or alive, he could see in his mind's eye a tribe of authors, playwrights, coming to call upon his wife and putting her in their works. People in society are too apt to think of a book as a sort of cube one side of which has been removed, so that the author can at once 'put in' the people he meets. This is obviously disloyal, and authors are a pretty low class. Certainly, it would not be a bad thing to meet them once in a way, for thanks to them, when one reads a book or an article, one can 'read between the lines,' 'unmask' the characters. After all, though, the wisest thing is to stick to dead authors. M. de Guermantes considered 'quite all right' only the gentleman who did the funeral notices in the *Gaulois*. He, at any rate, confined himself to including M. de Guermantes among the people 'conspicuous by their presence' at funerals at which the Duke had given his name. When he preferred that his name should not appear, instead of giving it, he sent a letter of condolence to the relatives of the deceased, assuring them of his deep and heartfelt sympathy. If, then, the family sent to the paper "among the letters received, we may mention one from the Duc de Guermantes," etc., this was the fault not of the ink-slinger but of the son, brother, father of the deceased whom the Duke thereupon described as upstarts, and with whom he decided for the future to have no further dealings (what he called, not being very well up in the meaning of such expressions, 'having a crow to pick'). In any event, the names of Ibsen and D'Annunzio, and his uncertainty as to their survival, brought a frown to the brows of the Duke, who was not far enough away from us to escape hearing the various blandishments of Mme. Timoléon d'Amoncourt. This was a charming woman, her wit, like her beauty, so entrancing that either of them by itself would have made her shine. But, born outside the world in which she now lived, having

aspired at first merely to a literary salon, the friend successively — and nothing more than a friend, for her morals were above reproach — and exclusively of every great writer, who gave her all his manuscripts, wrote books for her, chance having once introduced her into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, these literary privileges were of service to her there. She had now an established position, and no longer needed to dispense other graces than those that were shed by her presence. But, accustomed in times past to act as go-between, to render services, she persevered in them even when they were no longer necessary. She had always a state secret to reveal to you, a potentate whom you must meet, a water colour by a master to present to you. There was indeed in all these superfluous attractions a trace of falsehood, but they made her life a comedy that scintillated with complications, and it was no exaggeration to say that she appointed prefects and generals.

As she strolled by my side, the Duchesse de Guermantes allowed the azure light of her eyes to float in front of her, but vaguely, so as to avoid the people with whom she did not wish to enter into relations, whose presence she discerned at times, like a menacing reef in the distance. We advanced between a double hedge of guests, who, conscious that they would never come to know ‘Oriane,’ were anxious at least to point her out, as a curiosity, to their wives: “Quick, Ursule, come and look at Madame de Guermantes talking to that young man.” And one felt that in another moment they would be clambering upon the chairs, for a better view, as at the Military Review on the 14th of July, or the Grand Prix. Not that the Duchesse de Guermantes had a more aristocratic salon than her cousin. The former’s was frequented by people whom the latter would never have been willing to invite, principally on account of her husband. She would never have been at home to Mme. Alphonse de Rothschild, who, an intimate friend of Mme. de la Trémoïlle and of Mme. de Sagan, as was Oriane herself, was constantly to be seen in the house of the last-named. It was the same with Baron Hirsch, whom the Prince of Wales had brought to see her, but not to the Princess, who would not have approved of him, and also with certain outstandingly notorious Bonapartists or even Republicans, whom the Duchess found interesting but whom the Prince, a convinced Royalist, would not have allowed inside his house. His anti-semitism also being founded on principle did not yield before any social distinction, however strongly accredited, and if he was at home to Swann, whose friend he had been since their boyhood, being, however, the only one of the Guermantes who addressed him as Swann and not as Charles, this was because, knowing that Swann’s grandmother, a Protestant

married to a Jew, had been the Duc de Berri's mistress, he endeavoured, from time to time, to believe in the legend which made out Swann's father to be a natural son of that Prince. By this hypothesis, which incidentally was false, Swann, the son of a Catholic father, himself the son of a Bourbon by a Catholic mother, was a Christian to his finger-tips.

"What, you don't know these glories?" said the Duchess, referring to the rooms through which we were moving. But, having given its due meed of praise to her cousin's 'palace,' she hastened to add that she a thousand times preferred her own 'humble den.' "This is an admirable house to visit. But I should die of misery if I had to stay behind and sleep in rooms that have witnessed so many historic events. It would give me the feeling of having been left after closing-time, forgotten, in the Château of Blois, or Fontainebleau, or even the Louvre, with no antidote to my depression except to tell myself that I was in the room in which Monaldeschi was murdered. As a sedative, that is not good enough. Why, here comes Mme. de Saint-Euverte. We've just been dining with her. As she is giving her great annual beanfeast to-morrow, I supposed she would be going straight to bed. But she can never miss a party. If this one had been in the country, she would have jumped on a lorry rather than not go to it."

As a matter of fact, Mme. de Saint-Euverte had come this evening, less for the pleasure of not missing another person's party than in order to ensure the success of her own, recruit the latest additions to her list, and, so to speak, hold an eleventh hour review of the troops who were on the morrow to perform such brilliant evolutions at her garden party. For, in the long course of years, the guests at the Saint-Euverte parties had almost entirely changed. The female celebrities of the Guermantes world, formerly so sparsely scattered, had — loaded with attentions by their hostess — begun gradually to bring their friends. At the same time, by an enterprise equally progressive, but in the opposite direction, Mme. de Saint-Euverte had, year by year, reduced the number of persons unknown to the world of fashion. You had ceased to see first one of them, then another. For some time the 'batch' system was in operation, which enabled her, thanks to parties over which a veil of silence was drawn, to summon the inéligibles separately to entertain one another, which dispensed her from having to invite them with the nice people. What cause had they for complaint? Were they not given (*panem et circenses*) light refreshments and a select musical programme? And so, in a kind of symmetry with the two exiled duchesses whom, in years past, when the Saint-Euverte salon was only starting, one used to see holding up, like a pair of Caryatides, its unstable crest, in these later years

one could distinguish, mingling with the fashionable throng, only two heterogeneous persons, old Mme. de Cambremer and the architect's wife with a fine voice who was always having to be asked to sing. But, no longer knowing anybody at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, bewailing their lost comrades, feeling that they were in the way, they stood about with a frozen-to-death air, like two swallows that have not migrated in time. And so, the following year, they were not invited; Mme. de Fran-quetot made an attempt on behalf of her cousin, who was so fond of music. But as she could obtain for her no more explicit reply than the words: "Why, people can always come in and listen to music, if they like; there is nothing criminal about that!" Mme. de Cambremer did not find the invitation sufficiently pressing, and abstained.

Such a transformation having been effected by Mme. de Saint-Euverte, from a leper hospice to a gathering of great ladies (the latest form, apparently in the height of fashion, that it had assumed), it might seem odd that the person who on the following day was to give the most brilliant party of the season should need to appear overnight to address a last word of command to her troops. But the fact was that the pre-eminence of Mme. de Saint-Euverte's drawing-room existed only for those whose social life consists entirely in reading the accounts of afternoon and evening parties in the *Gaulois* or *Figaro*, without ever having been present at one. To these worldlings who see the world only as reflected in the newspapers, the enumeration of the British, Austrian, etc., Ambassadresses, of the Duchesses d'Uzès, de la Trémoïlle, etc., etc., was sufficient to make them instinctively imagine the Saint-Euverte drawing-room to be the first in Paris, whereas it was among the last. Not that the reports were mendacious. The majority of the persons mentioned had indeed been present. But each of them had come in response to entreaties, civilities, services, and with the sense of doing infinite honour to Mme. de Saint-Euverte. Such drawing-rooms, shunned rather than sought after, to which people are so to speak roped in, deceive no one but the fair readers of the 'Society' column. They pass over a really fashionable party, the sort at which the hostess, who could have had all the duchesses in existence, they being athirst to be 'numbered among the elect,' invites only two or three and does not send any list of her guests to the papers. And so these hostesses, ignorant or contemptuous of the power that publicity has acquired to-day, are considered fashionable by the Queen of Spain but are overlooked by the crowd, because the former knows and the latter does not know who they are.

Mme. de Saint-Euverte was not one of these women, and, with an eye to the main chance, had come to gather up for the morrow everyone who had been

invited. M. de Charlus was not among these, he had always refused to go to her house. But he had quarrelled with so many people that Mme. de Saint-Euverte might put this down to his peculiar nature.

Assuredly, if it had been only Oriane, Mme. de Saint-Euverte need not have put herself to the trouble, for the invitation had been given by word of mouth, and, what was more, accepted with that charming, deceiving grace in the exercise of which those Academicians are unsurpassed from whose door the candidate emerges with a melting heart, never doubting that he can count upon their support. But there were others as well. The Prince d'Agrigente, would he come? And Mme. de Durfort? And so, with an eye to business, Mme. de Saint-Euverte had thought it expedient to appear on the scene in person. Insinuating with some, imperative with others, to all alike she hinted in veiled words at inconceivable attractions which could never be seen anywhere again, and promised each that he should find at her party the person he most wished, or the personage he most wanted to meet. And this sort of function with which she was invested on one day in the year — like certain public offices in the ancient world — of the person who is to give on the morrow the biggest garden-party of the season conferred upon her a momentary authority. Her lists were made up and closed, so that while she wandered slowly through the Princess's rooms to drop into one ear after another: "You won't forget about me to-morrow," she had the ephemeral glory of turning away her eyes, while continuing to smile, if she caught sight of some horrid creature who was to be avoided or some country squire for whom the bond of a schoolboy friendship had secured admission to Gilbert's, and whose presence at her garden-party would be no gain. She preferred not to speak to him, so as to be able to say later on: "I issued my invitations verbally, and unfortunately I didn't see you anywhere." And so she, a mere Saint-Euverte, set to work with her gimlet eyes to pick and choose among the guests at the Princess's party. And she imagined herself, in so doing, to be every inch a Duchesse de Guermantes.

It must be admitted that the latter lady had not, either, whatever one might suppose, the unrestricted use of her greetings and smiles. To some extent, no doubt, when she withheld them, it was deliberately. "But the woman bores me to tears," she would say, "am I expected to talk to her about her party for the next hour?"

A duchess of swarthy complexion went past, whom her ugliness and stupidity, and certain irregularities of behaviour, had exiled not from society as a whole but from certain small and fashionable circles. "Ah!" murmured Mme. de

Guermantes, with the sharp, unerring glance of the connoisseur who is shewn a false jewel, “so they have that sort here?” By the mere sight of this semi-tarnished lady, whose face was burdened with a surfeit of moles from which black hairs sprouted, Mme. de Guermantes gauged the mediocre importance of this party. They had been brought up together, but she had severed all relations with the lady; and responded to her greeting only with the curtest little nod. “I cannot understand,” she said to me, “how Marie-Gilbert can invite us with all that scum. You might say there was a deputation of paupers from every parish. Mélanie Pourtalès arranged things far better. She could have the Holy Synod and the Oratoire Chapel in her house if she liked, but at least she didn’t invite us on the same day.” But, in many cases, it was from timidity, fear of a scene with her husband, who did not like her to entertain artists and such like (Marie-Gilbert took a kindly interest in dozens of them, you had to take care not to be accosted by some illustrious German diva), from some misgivings, too, with regard to Nationalist feeling, which, inasmuch as she was endowed, like M. de Charlus, with the wit of the Guermantes, she despised from the social point of view (people were now, for the greater glory of the General Staff, sending a plebeian general in to dinner before certain dukes), but to which, nevertheless, as she knew that she was considered unsound in her views, she made liberal concessions, even dreading the prospect of having to offer her hand to Swann in these anti-semitic surroundings. With regard to this, her mind was soon set at rest, for she learned that the Prince had refused to have Swann in the house, and had had ‘a sort of an altercation’ with him. There was no risk of her having to converse in public with ‘poor Charles,’ whom she preferred to cherish in private.

“And who in the world is that?” Mme. de Guermantes exclaimed, upon seeing a little lady with a slightly lost air, in a black gown so simple that you would have taken her for a pauper, greet her, as did also the lady’s husband, with a sweeping bow. She did not recognise the lady and, in her insolent way, drew herself up as though offended and stared at her without responding. “Who is that person, Basin?” she asked with an air of astonishment, while M. de Guermantes, to atone for Oriane’s impoliteness, was bowing to the lady and shaking hands with her husband. “Why, it is Mme. de Chaussepierre, you were most impolite.” “I have never heard of anybody called Chaussepierre.” “Old mother Chanlivault’s nephew.” “I haven’t the faintest idea what you’re talking about. Who is the woman, and why does she bow to me?” “But you know her perfectly, she’s Mme. de Charleval’s daughter, Henriette Montmorency.” “Oh, but I knew her mother quite well, she was charming, extremely intelligent. What made her

go and marry all these people I never heard of? You say that she calls herself Mme. de Chaussepierre?" she said, isolating each syllable of the name with a questioning air, and as though she were afraid of making a mistake. "It is not so ridiculous as you appear to think, to call oneself Chaussepierre! Old Chaussepierre was the brother of the aforesaid Chan-livault, of Mme. de Sennecour and of the Vicomtesse de Merlerault. They're a good family." "Oh, do stop," cried the Duchess, who, like a lion-tamer, never cared to appear to be allowing herself to be intimidated by the devouring glare of the animal. "Basin, you are the joy of my life. I can't imagine where you picked up those names, but I congratulate you on them. If I did not know Chaussepierre, I have at least read Balzac, you are not the only one, and I have even read Labiche. I can appreciate Chanlivault, I do not object to Charleval, but I must confess that Merlerault is a masterpiece. However, let us admit that Chaussepierre is not bad either. You must have gone about collecting them, it's not possible. You mean to write a book," she turned to myself, "you ought to make a note of Charleval and Merlerault. You will find nothing better." "He will find himself in the dock, and will go to prison; you are giving him very bad advice, Oriane." "I hope, for his own sake, that he has younger people than me at his disposal if he wishes to ask for bad advice; especially if he means to follow it. But if he means to do nothing worse than write a book!" At some distance from us, a wonderful, proud young woman stood out delicately from the throng in a white dress, all diamonds and tulle. Madame de Guermantes watched her talking to a whole group of people fascinated by her grace. "Your sister is the belle of the ball, as usual; she is charming to-night," she said, as she took a chair, to the Prince de Chimay who went past. Colonel de Froberville (the General of that name was his uncle) came and sat down beside us, as did M. de Bréauté, while M. de Vaugou-bert, after hovering about us (by an excess of politeness which he maintained even when playing tennis when, by dint of asking leave of the eminent personages present before hitting the ball, he invariably lost the game for his partner) returned to M. de Charlus (until that moment almost concealed by the huge skirt of the Comtesse Mole, whom he professed to admire above all other women), and, as it happened, at the moment when several members of the latest diplomatic mission to Paris were greeting the Baron. At the sight of a young secretary with a particularly intelligent air, M. de Vaugoubert fastened on M. de Charlus a smile upon which there bloomed visibly one question only. M. de Charlus would, no doubt, readily have compromised some one else, but to feel himself compromised by this smile formed on another person's lips, which, moreover,

could have but one meaning, exasperated him. “I know absolutely nothing about the matter, I beg you to keep your curiosity to yourself. It leaves me more than cold. Besides, in this instance, you are making a mistake of the first order. I believe this young man to be absolutely the opposite.” Here M. de Charlus, irritated at being thus given away by a fool, was not speaking the truth. The secretary would, had the Baron been correct, have formed an exception to the rule of his Embassy. It was, as a matter of fact, composed of widely different personalities, many of them extremely second-rate, so that, if one sought to discover what could have been the motive of the selection that had brought them together, the only one possible seemed to be inversion. By setting at the head of this little diplomatic Sodom an Ambassador who on the contrary ran after women with the comic exaggeration of an old buffer in a revue, who made his battalion of male impersonators toe the line, the authorities seemed to have been obeying the law of contrasts. In spite of what he had beneath his nose, he did not believe in inversion. He gave an immediate proof of this by marrying his sister to a Chargé d’Affaires whom he believed, quite mistakenly, to be a womaniser. After this he became rather a nuisance and was soon replaced by a fresh Excellency who ensured the homogeneity of the party. Other Embassies sought to rival this one, but could never dispute the prize (as in the matriculation examinations, where a certain school always heads the list), and more than ten years had to pass before, heterogeneous attachés having been introduced into this too perfect whole, another might at last wrest the grim trophy from it and march at the head.

Reassured as to her fear of having to talk to Swann, Mme. de Guermantes felt now merely curious as to the subject of the conversation he had had with their host. “Do you know what it was about?” the Duke asked M. de Bréauté. “I did hear,” the other replied, “that it was about a little play which the writer Bergotte produced at their house. It was a delightful show, as it happens. But it seems the actor made up as Gilbert, whom, as it happens, Master Bergotte had intended to take off.” “Oh, I should have loved to see Gilbert taken off,” said the Duchess, with a dreamy smile. “It was about this little performance,” M. de Bréauté went on, thrusting forward his rodent jaw, “that Gilbert demanded an explanation from Swann, who merely replied what everyone thought very witty: ‘Why, not at all, it wasn’t the least bit like you, you are far funnier!’ It appears, though,” M. de Bréauté continued, “that the little play was quite delightful. Mme. Molé was there, she was immensely amused.” “What, does Mme. Molé go there?” said the Duchess in astonishment. “Ah! That must be Mémé’s doing.

That is what always happens, in the end, to that sort of house. One fine day everybody begins to flock to it, and I, who have deliberately remained aloof, upon principle, find myself left to mope alone in my corner." Already, since M. de Bréauté's speech, the Duchesse de Guermantes (with regard if not to Swann's house, at least to the hypothesis of encountering him at any moment) had, as we see, adopted a fresh point of view. "The explanation that you have given us," said Colonel de Fro-berville to M. de Bréauté, "is entirely unfounded. I have good reason to know. The Prince purely and simply gave Swann a dressing down and would have him to know, as our forebears used to say, that he was not to shew his face in the house again, seeing the opinions he flaunts. And, to my mind, my uncle Gilbert was right a thousand times over, not only in giving Swann a piece of his mind, he ought to have finished six months ago with an out-and-out Dreyfusard."

Poor M. de Vaugoubert, changed now from a too cautious tennis-player to a mere inert tennis ball which is tossed to and fro without compunction, found himself projected towards the Duchesse de Guermantes to whom he made obeisance. He was none too well received, Oriane living in the belief that all the diplomats — or politicians — of her world were nincompoops.

M. de Froberville had greatly benefited by the social privileges that had of late been accorded to military men. Unfortunately, if the wife of his bosom was a quite authentic relative of the Guermantes, she was also an extremely poor one, and, as he himself had lost his fortune, they went scarcely anywhere, and were the sort of people who were apt to be overlooked except on great occasions, when they had the good fortune to bury or marry a relative. Then, they did really enter into communion with the world of fashion, like those nominal Catholics who approach the holy table but once in the year. Their material situation would indeed have been deplorable had not Mme. de Saint-Euverte, faithful to her affection for the late General de Froberville, done everything to help the household, providing frocks and entertainments for the two girls. But the Colonel, though generally considered a good fellow, had not the spirit of gratitude. He was envious of the splendours of a benefactress who extolled them herself without pause or measure. The annual garden party was for him, his wife and children a marvellous pleasure which they would not have missed for all the gold in the world, but a pleasure poisoned by the thought of the joys of satisfied pride that Mme. de Saint-Euverte derived from it. The accounts of this garden party in the newspapers, which, after giving detailed reports, would add with Machiavellian guile: "We shall refer again to this brilliant gathering," the

complementary details of the women's costume, appearing for several days in succession, all this was so obnoxious to the Frobervilles, that they, cut off from most pleasures and knowing that they could count upon the pleasure of this one afternoon, were moved every year to hope that bad weather would spoil the success of the party, to consult the barometer and to anticipate with ecstasy the threatenings of a storm that might ruin everything.

"I shall not discuss politics with you, Froberville," said M. de Guermantes, "but, so far as Swann is concerned, I can tell you frankly that his conduct towards ourselves has been beyond words. Introduced into society, in the past, by ourselves, by the Duc de Chartres, they tell me now that he is openly a Dreyfusard. I should never have believed it of him, an epicure, a man of practical judgment, a collector, who goes in for old books, a member of the Jockey, a man who enjoys the respect of all that know him, who knows all the good addresses, and used to send us the best port wine you could wish to drink, a dilettante, the father of a family. Oh! I have been greatly deceived. I do not complain for myself, it is understood that I am only an old fool, whose opinion counts for nothing, mere rag tag and bobtail, but if only for Oriane's sake, he ought to have openly disavowed the Jews and the partisans of the man Dreyfus.

"Yes, after the friendship my wife has always shewn him," went on the Duke, who evidently considered that to denounce Dreyfus as guilty of high treason, whatever opinion one might hold in one's own conscience as to his guilt, constituted a sort of thank-offering for the manner in which one had been received in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, "he ought to have disassociated himself. For, you can ask Oriane, she had a real friendship for him." The Duchess, thinking that an ingenuous, calm tone would give a more dramatic and sincere value to her words, said in a schoolgirl voice, as though she were simply letting the truth fall from her lips, merely giving a slightly melancholy expression to her eyes: "It is quite true, I have no reason to conceal the fact that I did feel a sincere affection for Charles!" "There, you see, I don't have to make her say it. And after that, he carries his ingratitude to the point of being a Dreyfusard!"

"Talking of Dreyfusards," I said, "it appears, Prince Von is one." "Ah, I am glad you reminded me of him," exclaimed M. de Guermantes, "I was forgetting that he had asked me to dine with him on Monday. But whether he is a Dreyfusard or not is entirely immaterial, since he is a foreigner. I don't give two straws for his opinion. With a Frenchman, it is another matter. It is true that Swann is a Jew. But, until to-day — forgive me, Fro-berville — I have always

been foolish enough to believe that a Jew can be a Frenchman, that is to say, an honourable Jew, a man of the world. Now, Swann was that in every sense of the word. Ah, well! He forces me to admit that I have been mistaken, since he has taken the side of this Dreyfus (who, guilty or not, never moved in his world, he cannot ever have met him) against a society that had adopted him, had treated him as one of ourselves. It goes without saying, we were all of us prepared to vouch for Swann, I would have answered for his patriotism as for my own. Ah! He is rewarding us very badly: I must confess that I should never have expected such a thing from him. I thought better of him. He was a man of intelligence (in his own line, of course). I know that he had already made that insane, disgraceful marriage. By which token, shall I tell you some one who was really hurt by Swann's marriage: my wife. Oriane often has what I might call an affectation of insensibility. But at heart she feels things with extraordinary keenness." Mme. de Guermantes, delighted by this analysis of her character, listened to it with a modest air but did not utter a word, from a scrupulous reluctance to acquiesce in it, but principally from fear of cutting it short. M. de Guermantes might have gone on talking for an hour on this subject, she would have sat as still, or even stiller than if she had been listening to music. "Very well! I remember, when she heard of Swann's marriage, she felt hurt; she considered that it was wrong in a person to whom we had given so much friendship. She was very fond of Swann; she was deeply grieved. Am I not right, Oriane?" Mme. de Guermantes felt that she ought to reply to so direct a challenge, upon a point of fact, which would allow her, unobtrusively, to confirm the tribute which, she felt, had come to an end. In a shy and simple tone, and with an air all the more studied in that it sought to shew genuine 'feeling,' she said with a meek reserve, "It is true, Basin is quite right." "Still, that was not quite the same. After all, love is love, although, in my opinion, it ought to confine itself within certain limits. I might excuse a young fellow, a mere boy, for letting himself be caught by an infatuation. But Swann, a man of intelligence, of proved refinement, a good judge of pictures, an intimate friend of the Duc de Chartres, of Gilbert himself!" The tone in which M. de Guermantes said this was, for that matter, quite inoffensive, without a trace of the vulgarity which he too often shewed. He spoke with a slightly indignant melancholy, but everything about him was steeped in that gentle gravity which constitutes the broad and unctuous charm of certain portraits by Rembrandt, that of the Burgomaster Six, for example. One felt that the question of the immorality of Swann's conduct with regard to 'the Case' never even presented itself to the Duke, so confident was he of the answer;

it caused him the grief of a father who sees one of his sons, for whose education he has made the utmost sacrifices, deliberately ruin the magnificent position he has created for him and dishonour, by pranks which the principles or prejudices of his family cannot allow, a respected name. It is true that M. de Guermantes had not displayed so profound and pained an astonishment when he learned that Saint-Loup was a Dreyfusard. But, for one thing, he regarded his nephew as a young man gone astray, as to whom nothing, until he began to mend his ways, could be surprising, whereas Swann was what M. de Guermantes called 'a man of weight, a man occupying a position in the front rank.' Moreover and above all, a considerable interval of time had elapsed during which, if, from the historical point of view, events had, to some extent, seemed to justify the Dreyfusard argument, the anti-Dreyfusard opposition had doubled its violence, and, from being purely political, had become social. It was now a question of militarism, of patriotism, and the waves of anger that had been stirred up in society had had time to gather the force which they never have at the beginning of a storm. "Don't you see," M. de Guermantes went on, "even from the point of view of his beloved Jews, since he is absolutely determined to stand by them, Swann has made a blunder of an incalculable magnitude. He has shewn that they are to some extent forced to give their support to anyone of their own race, even if they do not know him personally. It is a public danger. We have evidently been too easy going, and the mistake Swann is making will create all the more stir since he was respected, not to say received, and was almost the only Jew that anyone knew. People will say: *Ab uno disce omnes*." (His satisfaction at having hit, at the right moment, in his memory, upon so apt a quotation, alone brightened with a proud smile the melancholy of the great nobleman conscious of betrayal.)

I was longing to know what exactly had happened between the Prince and Swann, and to catch the latter, if he had not already gone home. "I don't mind telling you," the Duchess answered me when I spoke to her of this desire, "that I for my part am not overanxious to see him, because it appears, by what I was told just now at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, that he would like me before he dies to make the acquaintance of his wife and daughter. Good heavens, it distresses me terribly that he should be ill, but, I must say, I hope it is not so serious as all that. And besides, it is not really a reason at all, because if it were it would be so childishly simple. A writer with no talent would have only to say: 'Vote for me at the Academy because my wife is dying and I wish to give her this last happiness.' There would be no more entertaining if one was obliged to make

friends with all the dying people. My coachman might come to me with: ‘My daughter is seriously ill, get me an invitation to the Princesse de Parme’s.’ I adore Charles, and I should hate having to refuse him, and so that is why I prefer to avoid the risk of his asking me. I hope with all my heart that he is not dying, as he says, but really, if it has to happen, it would not be the moment for me to make the acquaintance of those two creatures who have deprived me of the most amusing of my friends for the last fifteen years, with the additional disadvantage that I should not even be able to make use of their society to see him, since he would be dead!”

Meanwhile M. de Bréauté had not ceased to ruminate the contradiction of his story by Colonel de Froberville. “I do not question the accuracy of your version, my dear fellow,” he said, “but I had mine from a good source. It was the Prince de la Tour d’Auvergne who told me.”

“I am surprised that an educated man like yourself should still say ‘Prince de la Tour d’Auvergne,’” the Duc de Guermantes broke in, “you know that he is nothing of the kind. There is only one member of that family left. Oriane’s uncle, the Duc de Bouillon.”

“The brother of Mme. de Villeparisis?” I asked, remembering that she had been Mlle, de Bouillon. “Precisely. Oriane, Mme. de Lambresac is bowing to you.” And indeed, one saw at certain moments form and fade like a shooting star a faint smile directed by the Duchesse de Lambresac at somebody whom she had recognised. But this smile, instead of taking definite shape in an active affirmation, in a language mute but clear, was drowned almost immediately in a sort of ideal ecstasy which expressed nothing, while her head drooped in a gesture of blissful benediction, recalling the inclination towards the crowd of communicants of the head of a somewhat senile prelate. There was not the least trace of senility about Mme. de Lambresac. But I was acquainted already with this special type of old-fashioned distinction. At Combray and in Paris, all my grandmother’s friends were in the habit of greeting one another at a social gathering with as seraphic an air as if they had caught sight of some one of their acquaintance in church, at the moment of the Elevation or during a funeral, and were casting him a gentle ‘Good morning’ which ended in prayer. At this point a remark made by M. de Guermantes was to complete the likeness that I was tracing. “But you have seen the Duc de Bouillon,” he said to me. “He was just going out of my library this afternoon as you came in, a short person with white hair.” It was the person whom I had taken for a man of business from Combray, and yet, now that I came to think it over, I could see the resemblance to Mme. de

Villeparisis. The similarity between the evanescent greetings of the Duchesse de Lambresac and those of my grandmother's friends had first aroused my interest, by shewing me how in all narrow and exclusive societies, be they those of the minor gentry or of the great nobility, the old manners persist, allowing us to recapture, like an archaeologist, what might have been the standard of upbringing, and the side of life which it reflects, in the days of the Vicomte d'Arlincourt and Loïsa Puget. Better still now, the perfect conformity in appearance between a man of business from Combray of his generation and the Duc de Bouillon reminded me of what had already struck me so forcibly when I had seen Saint-Loup's maternal grandfather, the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, in a daguerreotype in which he was exactly similar, in dress, air and manner, to my great-uncle, that social, and even individual differences are merged when seen from a distance in the uniformity of an epoch. The truth is that the similarity of dress, and also the reflexion, from a person's face, of the spirit of his age occupy so much more space than his caste, which bulks largely only in his own self-esteem and the imagination of other people, that in order to discover that a great nobleman of the time of Louis Philippe differs less from a citizen of the time of Louis Philippe than from a great nobleman of the time of Louis XV, it is not necessary to visit the galleries of the Louvre.

At that moment, a Bavarian musician with long hair, whom the Princesse de Guermantes had taken under her wing, bowed to Oriane. She responded with an inclination of her head, but the Duke, furious at seeing his wife bow to a person whom he did not know, who had a curious style, and, so far as M. de Guermantes understood, an extremely bad reputation, turned upon his wife with a terrible inquisitorial air, as much as to say: "Who in the world is that Ostrogoth?" Poor Mme. de Guermantes's position was already distinctly complicated, and if the musician had felt a little pity for this martyred wife, he would have made off as quickly as possible. But, whether from a desire not to remain under the humiliation that had just been inflicted on him in public, before the eyes of the Duke's oldest and most intimate friends, whose presence there had perhaps been responsible to some extent for his silent bow, and to shew that it was on the best of grounds and not without knowing her already that he had greeted the Duchesse de Guermantes, or else in obedience to the obscure but irresistible impulse to commit a blunder which drove him — at a moment when he ought to have trusted to the spirit — to apply the whole letter of the law, the musician came closer to Mme. de Guermantes and said to her: "Madame la Duchesse, I should like to request the honour of being presented to the Duke."

Mme. de Guermantes was indeed in a quandary. But after all, she might well be a forsaken wife, she was still Duchesse de Guermantes and could not let herself appear to have forfeited the right to introduce to her husband the people whom she knew. “Basin,” she said, “allow me to present to you M. d’Herweck.”

“I need not ask whether you are going to Madame de Saint-Euverte’s to-morrow,” Colonel de Froberville said to Mme. de Guermantes, to dispel the painful impression produced by M. d’Herweck’s ill-timed request. “The whole of Paris will be there.” Meanwhile, turning with a single movement and as though he were carved out of a solid block towards the indiscreet musician, the Duc de Guermantes, fronting his suppliant, monumental, mute, wroth, like Jupiter Tonans, remained motionless like this for some seconds, his eyes ablaze with anger and astonishment, his waving locks seeming to issue from a crater. Then, as though carried away by an impulse which alone enabled him to perform the act of politeness that was demanded of him, and after appearing by his attitude of defiance to be calling the entire company to witness that he did not know the Bavarian musician, clasping his white-gloved hands behind his back, he jerked his body forward and bestowed upon the musician a bow so profound, instinct with such stupefaction and rage, so abrupt, so violent, that the trembling artist recoiled, stooping as he went, so as not to receive a formidable butt in the stomach. “Well, the fact is, I shall not be in Paris,” the Duchess answered Colonel de Froberville. “I may as well tell you (though I ought to be ashamed to confess such a thing) that I have lived all these years without seeing the windows at Montfort-l’Amaury. It is shocking, but there it is. And so, to make amends for my shameful ignorance, I decided that I would go and see them to-morrow.” M. de Bréauté smiled a subtle smile. He quite understood that, if the Duchess had been able to live all these years without seeing the windows at Montfort-l’Amaury, this artistic excursion did not all of a sudden take on the urgent character of an expedition ‘hot-foot’ and might without danger, after having been put off for more than twenty-five years, be retarded for twenty-four hours. The plan that the Duchess had formed was simply the Guermantes way of issuing the decree that the Saint-Euverte establishment was definitely not a ‘really nice’ house, but a house to which you were invited that you might be utilised afterwards in the account in the Gaulois, a house that would set the seal of supreme smartness upon those, or at any rate upon her (should there be but one) who did not go to it. The delicate amusement of M. de Bréauté, enhanced by that poetical pleasure which people in society felt when they saw Mme. de Guermantes do things which their own inferior position did not allow them to

imitate, but the mere sight of which brought to their lips the smile of the peasant thirled to the soil when he sees freer and more fortunate men pass by above his head, this delicate pleasure could in no way be compared with the concealed but frantic ecstasy that was at once felt by M. de Froberville.

The efforts that this gentleman was making so that people should not hear his laughter had made him turn as red as a turkey-cock, in spite of which it was only with a running interruption of hiccoughs of joy that he exclaimed in a pitying tone: “Oh! Poor Aunt Saint-Euverte, she will take to her bed! No! The unhappy woman is not to have her Duchess, what a blow, why, it is enough to kill her!” he went on, convulsed with laughter. And in his exhilaration he could not help stamping his feet and rubbing his hands. Smiling out of one eye and with the corner of her lips at M. de Froberville, whose amiable intention she appreciated, but found the deadly boredom of his society quite intolerable, Mme. de Guermantes decided finally to leave him.

“Listen, I shall be obliged to bid you good night,” she said to him as she rose with an air of melancholy resignation, and as though it had been a bitter grief to her. Beneath the magic spell of her blue eyes her gently musical voice made one think of the poetical lament of a fairy. “Basin wants me to go and talk to Marie for a little.” In reality, she was tired of listening to Froberville, who did not cease to envy her her going to Montfort-l’Amaury, when she knew quite well that he had never heard of the windows before in his life, nor for that matter would he for anything in the world have missed going to the Saint-Euverte party. “Good-bye, I’ve barely said a word to you, it is always like that at parties, we never see the people, we never say the things we should like to say, but it is the same everywhere in this life. Let us hope that when we are dead things will be better arranged. At any rate, we shall not always be having to put on low dresses. And yet, one never knows. We may perhaps have to display our bones and worms on great occasions. Why not? Look, there goes old Rampillon, do you see any great difference between her and a skeleton in an open dress? It is true that she has every right to look like that, for she must be at least a hundred. She was already one of those sacred monsters before whom I refused to bow the knee when I made my first appearance in society. I thought she had been dead for years; which for that matter would be the only possible explanation of the spectacle she presents. It is impressive and liturgical; quite *Camposanto*!” The Duchess had moved away from Froberville; he came after her: “Just one word in your ear.” Slightly annoyed: “Well, what is it now?” she said to him stiffly. And he, having been afraid lest, at the last moment, she might change her mind about

Montfort-l'Amaury: "I did not like to mention it for Mme. de Saint-Euverte's sake, so as not to get her into trouble, but since you don't intend to be there, I may tell you that I am glad for your sake, for she has measles in the house!" "Oh, good gracious!" said Oriane, who had a horror of illnesses. "But that wouldn't matter to me, I've had them already. You can't get them twice." "So the doctors say; I know people who've had them four times. Anyhow, you are warned." As for himself, these fictitious measles would have needed to attack him in reality and to chain him to his bed before he would have resigned himself to missing the Saint-Euverte party to which he had looked forward for so many months. He would have the pleasure of seeing so many smart people there! The still greater pleasure of remarking that certain things had gone wrong, and the supreme pleasures of being able for long afterwards to boast that he had mingled with the former and, while exaggerating or inventing them, of deploring the latter.

I took advantage of the Duchess's moving to rise also in order to make my way to the smoking-room and find out the truth about Swann. "Do not believe a word of what Babal told us," she said to me. "Little Molé would never poke her nose into a place like that. They tell us that to draw us. Nobody ever goes to them and they are never asked anywhere either. He admits it himself: 'We spend the evenings alone by our own fireside.' As he always says we, not like royalty, but to include his wife, I do not press him. But I know all about it," the Duchess added. We passed two young men whose great and dissimilar beauty took its origin from one and the same woman. They were the two sons of Mme. de Surgis, the latest mistress of the Duc de Guermantes. Both were resplendent with their mother's perfections, but each in his own way. To one had passed, rippling through a virile body, the royal presence of Mme. de Surgis and the same pallor, ardent, flushed and sacred, flooded the marble cheeks of mother and son; but his brother had received the Grecian brow, the perfect nose, the statuesque throat, the eyes of infinite depth; composed thus of separate gifts, which the goddess had shared between them, their twofold beauty offered one the abstract pleasure of thinking that the cause of that beauty was something outside themselves; one would have said that the principal attributes of their mother were incarnate in two different bodies; that one of the young men was his mother's stature and her complexion, the other her gaze, like those divine beings who were no more than the strength and beauty of Jupiter or Minerva. Full of respect for M. de Guermantes, of whom they said: "He is a great friend of our parents," the elder nevertheless thought that it would be wiser not to come up and greet the

Duchess, of whose hostility towards his mother he was aware, though without perhaps understanding the reason for it, and at the sight of us he slightly averted his head. The younger, who copied his brother in everything, because, being stupid and short-sighted to boot, he did not venture to own a personal opinion, inclined his head at the same angle, and the pair slipped past us towards the card-room, one behind the other, like a pair of allegorical figures.

Just as I reached this room, I was stopped by the Marquise de Citri, still beautiful but almost foaming at the mouth. Of decently noble birth, she had sought and made a brilliant match in marrying M. de Citri, whose great-grandmother had been an Aumale-Lorraine. But no sooner had she tasted this satisfaction than her natural cantankerousness gave her a horror of people in society which did not cut her off absolutely from social life. Not only, at a party, did she deride everyone present, her derision of them was so violent that mere laughter was not sufficiently bitter, and changed into a guttural hiss. “Ah!” she said to me, pointing to the Duchesse de Guermantes who had now left my side and was already some way off, “what defeats me is that she can lead this sort of existence.” Was this the speech of a righteously indignant Saint, astonished that the Gentiles did not come of their own accord to perceive the Truth, or that of an anarchist athirst for carnage? In any case there could be no possible justification for this apostrophe. In the first place, the ‘existence led’ by Mme. de Guermantes differed hardly perceptibly (except in indignation) from that led by Mme. de Citri. Mme. de Citri was stupefied when she saw the Duchess capable of that mortal sacrifice: attendance at one of Marie-Gilbert’s parties. It must be said in this particular instance that Mme. de Citri was genuinely fond of the Princess, who was indeed the kindest of women, and knew that, by attending her party, she was giving her great pleasure. And so she had put off, in order to come to the party, a dancer whom she regarded as a genius, and who was to have initiated her into the mysteries of Russian choreography. Another reason which to some extent stultified the concentrated rage which Mme. de Citri felt on seeing Oriane greet one or other of the guests was that Mme. de Guermantes, albeit at a far less advanced stage, shewed the symptoms of the malady that was devouring Mme. de Citri. We have seen, moreover, that she had carried the germs of it from her birth. In fact, being more intelligent than Mme. de Citri, Mme. de Guermantes would have had better right than she to this nihilism (which was more than merely social), but it is true that certain good qualities help us rather to endure the defects of our neighbour than they make us suffer from them; and a man of great talent will normally pay less attention to other people’s folly than would a

fool. We have already described at sufficient length the nature of the Duchess's wit to convince the reader that, if it had nothing in common with great intellect, it was at least wit, a wit adroit in making use (like a translator) of different grammatical forms. Now nothing of this sort seemed to entitle Mme. de Citri to look down upon qualities so closely akin to her own. She found everyone idiotic, but in her conversation, in her letters, shewed herself distinctly inferior to the people whom she treated with such disdain. She had moreover such a thirst for destruction that, when she had almost given up society, the pleasures that she then sought were subjected, each in turn, to her terrible disintegrating force. After she had given up parties for musical evenings, she used to say: "You like listening to that sort of thing, to music? Good gracious, it all depends on what it is. It can be simply deadly! Oh! Beethoven! What a bore!" With Wagner, then with Franck, Debussy, she did not even take the trouble to say the word *barbe*, but merely passed her hand over her face with a tonsorial gesture.

Presently, everything became boring. "Beautiful things are such a bore. Oh! Pictures! They're enough to drive one mad. How right you are, it is such a bore having to write letters!" Finally it was life itself that she declared to be *rasante*, leaving her hearers to wonder where she applied the term.

I do not know whether it was the effect of what the Duchesse de Guermantes, on the evening when I first dined at her house, had said of this interior, but the card — or smoking-room, with its pictorial floor, its tripods, its figures of gods and animals that gazed at you, the sphinxes stretched out along the arms of the chairs, and most of all the huge table, of marble or enamelled mosaic, covered with symbolical signs more or less imitated from Etruscan and Egyptian art, gave me the impression of a magician's cell. And, on a chair drawn up to the glittering, augural table, M. de Charlus, in person, never touching a card, unconscious of what was going on round about him, incapable of observing that I had entered the room, seemed precisely a magician applying all the force of his will and reason to drawing a horoscope. Not only that, but, like the eyes of a Pythian on her tripod, his eyes were starting from his head, and that nothing might distract him from labours which required the cessation of the most simple movements, he had (like a calculator who will do nothing else until he has solved his problem) laid down beside him the cigar which he had previously been holding between his lips, but had no longer the necessary detachment of mind to think of smoking. Seeing the two crouching deities borne upon the arms of the chair that stood facing him, one might have thought that the Baron was endeavouring to solve the enigma of the Sphinx, had it not been that, rather, of a

young and living Oedipus, seated in that very armchair, where he had come to join in the game. Now, the figure to which M. de Charlus was applying with such concentration all his mental powers, and which was not, to tell the truth, one of the sort that are commonly studied *more geometrico*, was that of the proposition set him by the lineaments of the young Comte de Surgis; it appeared, so profound was M. de Charlus's absorption in front of it, to be some rebus, some riddle, some algebraical problem, of which he must try to penetrate the mystery or to work out the formula. In front of him the sibylline signs and the figures inscribed upon that Table of the Law seemed the gramarye which would enable the old sorcerer to tell in what direction the young man's destiny was shaping. Suddenly he became aware that I was watching him, raised his head as though he were waking from a dream, smiled at me and blushed. At that moment Mme. de Surgis's other son came up behind the one who was playing, to look at his cards. When M. de Charlus had learned from me that they were brothers, his features could not conceal the admiration that he felt for a family which could create masterpieces so splendid and so diverse. And what added to the Baron's enthusiasm was the discovery that the two sons of Mme. de Surgis-le-Duc were sons not only of the same mother but of the same father. The children of Jupiter are dissimilar, but that is because he married first Metis, whose destiny was to bring into the world wise children, then Themis, and after her Eurynome, and Mnemosyne, and Leto, and only as a last resort Juno. But to a single father Mme. de Surgis had borne these two sons who had each received beauty from her, but a different beauty.

I had at length the pleasure of seeing Swann come into this room, which was very big, so big that he did not at first catch sight of me. A pleasure mingled with sorrow, with a sorrow which the other guests did not, perhaps, feel, their feeling consisting rather in that sort of fascination which is exercised by the strange and unexpected forms of an approaching death, a death that a man already has, in the popular saying, written on his face. And it was with a stupefaction that was almost offensive, into which entered indiscreet curiosity, cruelty, a scrutiny at once quiet and anxious (a blend of *suave mari magno* and *memento quia pulvis*, Robert would have said), that all eyes were fastened upon that face the cheeks of which had been so eaten away by disease, like a waning moon, that, except at a certain angle, the angle doubtless at which Swann looked at himself, they stopped short like a flimsy piece of scenery to which only an optical illusion can add the appearance of solidity. Whether because of the absence of those cheeks, no longer there to modify it, or because arteriosclerosis, which also is a form of

intoxication, had reddened it, as would drunkenness, or deformed it, as would morphine, Swann's punchinello nose, absorbed for long years in an attractive face, seemed now enormous, tumid, crimson, the nose of an old Hebrew rather than of a dilettante Valois. Perhaps too in him, in these last days, the race was making appear more pronounced the physical type that characterises it, at the same time as the sentiment of a moral solidarity with the rest of the Jews, a solidarity which Swann seemed to have forgotten throughout his life, and which, one after another, his mortal illness, the Dreyfus case and the anti-semitic propaganda had revived. There are certain Israelites, superior people for all that and refined men of the world, in whom there remain in reserve and in the wings, ready to enter at a given moment in their lives, as in a play, a bounder and a prophet. Swann had arrived at the age of the prophet. Certainly, with his face from which, by the action of his disease, whole segments had vanished, as when a block of ice melts and slabs of it fall off bodily, he had greatly altered. But I could not help being struck by the discovery how far more he had altered in relation to myself. This man, excellent, cultivated, whom I was far from annoyed at meeting, I could not bring myself to understand how I had been able to invest him long ago in a mystery so great that his appearance in the Champs-Elysées used to make my heart beat so violently that I was too bashful to approach his silk-lined cape, that at the door of the flat in which such a being dwelt I could not ring the bell without being overcome by boundless emotion and dismay; all this had vanished not only from his home, but from his person, and the idea of talking to him might or might not be agreeable to me, but had no effect whatever upon my nervous system.

And besides, how he had altered since that very afternoon, when I had met him — after all, only a few hours earlier — in the Duc de Guermantes's study. Had he really had a scene with the Prince, and had it left him crushed? The supposition was not necessary. The slightest efforts that are demanded of a person who is very ill quickly become for him an excessive strain. He has only to be exposed, when already tired, to the heat of a crowded drawing-room, for his countenance to decompose and turn blue, as happens in a few hours with an overripe pear or milk that is ready to turn. Besides, Swann's hair was worn thin in patches, and, as Mme. de Guermantes remarked, needed attention from the furrier, looked as if it had been camphored, and camphored badly. I was just crossing the room to speak to Swann when unfortunately a hand fell upon my shoulder.

"Hallo, old boy, I am in Paris for forty-eight hours. I called at your house,

they told me you were here, so that it is to you that my aunt is indebted for the honour of my company at her party." It was Saint-Loup. I told him how greatly I admired the house. "Yes, it makes quite a historic edifice. Personally, I think it appalling. We mustn't go near my uncle Palamède, or we shall be caught. Now that Mme. Molé has gone (for it is she that is ruling the roost just now), he is quite at a loose end. It seems it was as good as a play, he never let her out of his sight for a moment, and only left her when he had put her safely into her carriage. I bear my uncle no ill will, only I do think it odd that my family council, which has always been so hard on me, should be composed of the very ones who have led giddy lives themselves, beginning with the giddiest of the lot, my uncle Charlus, who is my official guardian, has had more women than Don Juan, and is still carrying on in spite of his age. There was a talk at one time of having me made a ward of court. I bet, when all those gay old dogs met to consider the question, and had me up to preach to me and tell me that I was breaking my mother's heart, they dared not look one another in the face for fear of laughing. Just think of the fellows who formed the council, you would think they had deliberately chosen the biggest womanisers." Leaving out of account M. de Charlus, with regard to whom my friend's astonishment no longer seemed to me to be justified, but for different reasons, and reasons which, moreover, were afterwards to undergo modification in my mind, Robert was quite wrong in finding it extraordinary that lessons in worldly wisdom should be given to a young man by people who had done foolish things, or were still doing them.

Even if we take into account only atavism, family likenesses, it is inevitable that the uncle who delivers the lecture should have more or less the same faults as the nephew whom he has been deputed to scold. Nor is the uncle in the least hypocritical in so doing, taken in as he is by the faculty that people have of believing, in every fresh experience, that 'this is quite different,' a faculty which allows them to adopt artistic, political and other errors without perceiving that they are the same errors which they exposed, ten years ago, in another school of painters, whom they condemned, another political affair which, they considered, merited a loathing that they no longer feel, and espouse those errors without recognising them in a fresh disguise. Besides, even if the faults of the uncle are different from those of the nephew, heredity may none the less be responsible, for the effect does not always resemble the cause, as a copy resembles its original, and even if the uncle's faults are worse, he may easily believe them to be less serious.

When M. de Charlus made indignant remonstrances to Robert, who

moreover was unaware of his uncle's true inclinations, at that time, and indeed if it had still been the time when the Baron used to scarify his own inclinations, he might perfectly well have been sincere in considering, from the point of view of a man of the world, that Robert was infinitely more to blame than himself. Had not Robert, at the very moment when his uncle had been deputed to make him listen to reason, come within an inch of getting himself ostracised by society, had he not very nearly been blackballed at the Jockey, had he not made himself a public laughing stock by the vast sums that he threw away upon a woman of the lowest order, by his friendships with people — authors, actors, Jews — not one of whom moved in society, by his opinions, which were indistinguishable from those held by traitors, by the grief he was causing to all his relatives? In what respect could it be compared, this scandalous existence, with that of M. de Charlus who had managed, so far, not only to retain but to enhance still further his position as a Guermantes, being in society an absolutely privileged person, sought after, adulated in the most exclusive circles, and a man who, married to a Bourbon Princess, a woman of eminence, had been able to ensure her happiness, had shewn a devotion to her memory more fervent, more scrupulous than is customary in society, and had thus been as good a husband as a son!

"But are you sure that M. de Charlus has had all those mistresses?" I asked, not, of course, with any diabolical intent of revealing to Robert the secret that I had surprised, but irritated, nevertheless, at hearing him maintain an erroneous theory with so much certainty and assurance. He merely shrugged his shoulders in response to what he took for ingenuousness on my part. "Not that I blame him in the least, I consider that he is perfectly right." And he began to sketch in outline a theory of conduct that would have horrified him at Balbec (where he was not content with denouncing seducers, death seeming to him then the only punishment adequate to their crime). Then, however, he had still been in love and jealous. He went so far as to sing me the praises of houses of assignation. "They're the only places where you can find a shoe to fit you, sheath your weapon, as we say in the regiment." He no longer felt for places of that sort the disgust that had inflamed him at Balbec when I made an allusion to them, and, hearing what he now said, I told him that Bloch had introduced me to one, but Robert replied that the one which Bloch frequented must be "extremely mixed, the poor man's paradise!— It all depends, though: where is it?" I remained vague, for I had just remembered that it was the same house at which one used to have for a louis that Rachel whom Robert had so passionately loved. "Anyhow, I can take you to some far better ones, full of stunning women." Hearing me

express the desire that he would take me as soon as possible to the ones he knew, which must indeed be far superior to the house to which Bloch had taken me, he expressed a sincere regret that he could not, on this occasion, as he would have to leave Paris next day. “It will have to be my next leave,” he said. “You’ll see, there are young girls there, even,” he added with an air of mystery. “There is a little Mademoiselle de... I think it’s d’Orgeville, I can let you have the exact name, who is the daughter of quite tip-top people; her mother was by way of being a La Croix-l’Evêque, and they’re a really decent family, in fact they’re more or less related, if I’m not mistaken, to my aunt Oriane. Anyhow, you have only to see the child, you can tell at once that she comes of decent people” (I could detect, hovering for a moment over Robert’s voice, the shadow of the genius of the Guermantes, which passed like a cloud, but at a great height and without stopping). “It seems to me to promise marvellous developments. The parents are always ill and can’t look after her. Gad, the child must have some amusement, and I count upon you to provide it!” “Oh! When are you coming back?” “I don’t know, if you don’t absolutely insist upon Duchesses” (Duchess being in aristocracy the only title that denotes a particularly brilliant rank, as the lower orders talk of ‘Princesses’), “in a different class of goods, there is Mme. Putbus’s maid.”

At this moment, Mme. de Surgis entered the room in search of her sons. As soon as he saw her M. de Charlus went up to her with a friendliness by which the Marquise was all the more agreeably surprised, in that an icy frigidity was what she had expected from the Baron, who had always posed as Oriane’s protector and alone of the family — the rest being too often inclined to forgive the Duke his irregularities by the glamour of his position and their own jealousy of the Duchess — kept his brother’s mistresses pitilessly at a distance. And so Mme. de Surgis had fully understood the motives of the attitude that she dreaded to find in the Baron, but never for a moment suspected those of the wholly different welcome that she did receive from him. He spoke to her with admiration of the portrait that Jacquet had painted of her years before. This admiration waxed indeed to an enthusiasm which, if it was partly deliberate, with the object of preventing the Marquise from going away, of ‘hooking’ her, as Robert used to say of enemy armies when you seek to keep their effective strength engaged at one point, might also be sincere. For, if everyone was delighted to admire in her sons the regal bearing and eyes of Mme. de Surgis, the Baron could taste an inverse but no less keen pleasure in finding those charms combined in the mother, as in a portrait which does not by itself excite desire, but feeds with the

aesthetic admiration that it does excite the desires that it revives. These came now to give, in retrospect, a voluptuous charm to Jacquet's portrait itself, and at that moment the Baron would gladly have purchased it to study upon its surface the physiognomic pedigree of the two young Surgis.

"You see, I wasn't exaggerating," Robert said in my ear. "Just look at the way my uncle is running after Mme. de Surgis. Though I must say, that does surprise me. If Oriane knew, she would be furious. Really, there are enough women in the world without his having to go and sprawl over that one," he went on; like everybody who is not in love, he imagined that one chose the person whom one loved after endless deliberations and on the strength of various qualities and advantages. Besides, while completely mistaken about his uncle, whom he supposed to be devoted to women, Robert, in his rancour, spoke too lightly of M. de Charlus. We are not always somebody's nephew with impunity. It is often through him that a hereditary habit is transmitted to us sooner or later. We might indeed arrange a whole gallery of portraits, named like the German comedy:*Uncle and Nephew*, in which we should see the uncle watching jealously, albeit unconsciously, for his nephew to end by becoming like himself.

I go so far as to say that this gallery would be incomplete were we not to include in it the uncles who are not really related by blood, being the uncles only of their nephews' wives. The Messieurs de Charlus are indeed so convinced that they themselves are the only good husbands, what is more the only husbands of whom their wives are not jealous, that generally, out of affection for their niece, they make her marry another Charlus. Which tangles the skein of family likenesses. And, to affection for the niece, is added at times affection for her betrothed as well. Such marriages are not uncommon, and are often what are called happy.

"What were we talking about? Oh yes, that big, fair girl, Mme. Put-bus's maid. She goes with women too, but I don't suppose you mind that, I can tell you frankly, I have never seen such a gorgeous creature." "I imagine her rather Giorgione?" "Wildly Giorgione! Oh, if I only had a little time in Paris, what wonderful things there are to be done! And then, one goes on to the next. For love is all rot, mind you, I've finished with all that." I soon discovered, to my surprise, that he had equally finished with literature, whereas it was merely with regard to literary men that he had struck me as being disillusioned at our last meeting. ("They're practically all a pack of scoundrels," he had said to me, a saying that might be explained by his justified resentment towards certain of Rachel's friends. They had indeed persuaded her that she would never have any

talent if she allowed ‘Robert, scion of an alien race’ to acquire an influence over her, and with her used to make fun of him, to his face, at the dinners to which he entertained them.) But in reality Robert’s love of Letters was in no sense profound, did not spring from his true nature, was only a by-product of his love of Rachel, and he had got rid of it, at the same time as of his horror of voluptuaries and his religious respect for the virtue of women.

“There is something very strange about those two young men. Look at that curious passion for gambling, Marquise,” said M. de Charlus, drawing Mme. de Surgis’s attention to her own sons, as though he were completely unaware of their identity. “They must be a pair of Orientals, they have certain characteristic features, they are perhaps Turks,” he went on, so as both to give further support to his feint of innocence and to exhibit a vague antipathy, which, when in due course it gave place to affability, would prove that the latter was addressed to the young men solely in their capacity as sons of Mme. de Surgis, having begun only when the Baron discovered who they were. Perhaps too M. de Charlus, whose insolence was a natural gift which he delighted in exercising, took advantage of the few moments in which he was supposed not to know the name of these two young men to have a little fun at Mme. de Surgis’s expense, and to indulge in his habitual sarcasm, as Scapin takes advantage of his master’s disguise to give him a sound drubbing.

“They are my sons,” said Mme. de Surgis, with a blush which would not have coloured her cheeks had she been more discerning, without necessarily being more virtuous. She would then have understood that the air of absolute indifference or of sarcasm which M. de Charlus displayed towards a young man was no more sincere than the wholly superficial admiration which he shewed for a woman, did not express his true nature. The woman to whom he could go on indefinitely paying the prettiest compliments might well be jealous of the look which, while talking to her, he shot at a man whom he would pretend afterwards not to have noticed. For that look was not of the sort which M. de Charlus kept for women; a special look, springing from the depths, which even at a party could not help straying innocently in the direction of the young men, like the look in a tailor’s eye which betrays his profession by immediately fastening upon your attire.

“Oh, how very strange!” replied M. de Charlus, not without insolence, as though his mind had to make a long journey to arrive at a reality so different from what he had pretended to suppose. “But I don’t know them!” he added, fearing lest he might have gone a little too far in the expression of his antipathy,

and have thus paralysed the Marquise’s intention to let him make their acquaintance. “Would you allow me to introduce them to you?” Mme. de Surgis inquired timidly. “Why, good gracious, just as you please, I shall be delighted, I am perhaps not very entertaining company for such young people,” M. de Charlus intoned with the air of hesitation and coldness of a person who is letting himself be forced into an act of politeness.

“Arnulphe, Victurnien, come here at once,” said Mme. de Surgis. Victurnien rose with decision. Arnulphe, though he could not see where his brother was going, followed him meekly.

“It’s the sons’ turn, now,” muttered Saint-Loup. “It’s enough to make one die with laughing. He tries to curry favour with every one, down to the dog in the yard. It is all the funnier, as my uncle detests pretty boys. And just look how seriously he is listening to them. If it had been I who tried to introduce them to him, he would have given me what for. Listen, I shall have to go and say how d’ye do to Oriane. I have so little time in Paris that I want to try and see all the people here that I ought to leave cards on.”

“What a well-bred air they have, what charming manners,” M. de Charlus was saying. “You think so?” Mme. de Surgis replied, highly delighted.

Swann having caught sight of me came over to Saint-Loup and myself. His Jewish gaiety was less refined than his witticisms as a man of the world. “Good evening,” he said to us. “Heavens! All three of us together, people will think it is a meeting of the Syndicate. In another minute they’ll be looking for the safe!” He had not observed that M. de Beaucerfeuil was just behind his back and could hear what he said. The General could not help wincing. We heard the voice of M. de Charlus close beside us: “What, you are called Victurnien, after the *Cabinet des Antiques*,” the Baron was saying, to prolong his conversation with the two young men. “By Balzac, yes,” replied the elder Surgis, who had never read a line of that novelist’s work, but to whom his tutor had remarked, a few days earlier, upon the similarity of his Christian name and d’Esgrignon’s. Mme. de Surgis was delighted to see her son shine, and at M. de Charlus’s ecstasy before such a display of learning.

“It appears that Loubet is entirely on our side, I have it from an absolutely trustworthy source,” Swann informed Saint-Loup, but this time in a lower tone so as not to be overheard by the General. Swann had begun to find his wife’s Republican connexions more interesting now that the Dreyfus case had become his chief preoccupation. “I tell you this because I know that your heart is with us.”

“Not quite to that extent; you are entirely mistaken,” was Robert’s answer. “It’s a bad business, and I’m sorry I ever had a finger in it. It was no affair of mine. If it were to begin over again, I should keep well clear of it. I am a soldier, and my first duty is to support the Army. If you will stay with M. Swann for a moment, I shall be back presently, I must go and talk to my aunt.” But I saw that

it was with Mlle. d'Ambresac that he went to talk, and was distressed by the thought that he had lied to me about the possibility of their engagement. My mind was set at rest when I learned that he had been introduced to her half an hour earlier by Mme. de Marsantés, who was anxious for the marriage, the Ambresacs being extremely rich.

"At last," said M. de Charlus to Mme. de Surgis, "I find a young man with some education, who has read, who knows what is meant by Balzac. And it gives me all the more pleasure to meet him where that sort of thing has become most rare, in the house of one of my peers, one of ourselves," he added, laying stress upon the words. It was all very well for the Guermantes to profess to regard all men as equal; on the great occasions when they found themselves among people who were 'born,' especially if they were not quite so well born as themselves, whom they were anxious and able to flatter, they did not hesitate to trot out old family memories. "At one time," the Baron went on, "the word aristocrat meant the best people, in intellect, in heart. Now, here is the first person I find among pur-selves who has ever heard of Victurnien d'Esgrignon. I am wrong in saying the first. There are also a Polignac and a Montesquieu," added M. de Charlus, who knew that this twofold association must inevitably thrill the Marquise. "However, your sons have every reason to be learned, their maternal grandfather had a famous collection of eighteenth century stuff. I will shew you mine if you will do me the pleasure of coming to luncheon with me one day," he said to the young Victurnien. "I can shew you an interesting edition of the *Cabinet des Antiques* with corrections in Balzac's own hand. I shall be charmed to bring the two Victurniens face to face."

I could not bring myself to leave Swann. He had arrived at that stage of exhaustion in which a sick man's body becomes a mere retort in which we study chemical reactions. His face was mottled with tiny spots of Prussian blue, which seemed not to belong to the world of living things, and emitted the sort of odour which, at school, after the 'experiments,' makes it so unpleasant to have to remain in a 'science' classroom. I asked him whether he had not had a long conversation with the Prince de Guermantes and if he would tell me what it had been about. "Yes," he said, "but go for a moment first with M. de Charlus and Mme. de Surgis, I shall wait for you here."

Indeed, M. de Charlus, having suggested to Mme. de Surgis that they should leave this room which was too hot, and go and sit for a little in another, had invited not the two sons to accompany their mother, but myself. In this way he made himself appear, after he had successfully hooked them, to have lost all

interest in the two young men. He was moreover paying me an inexpensive compliment, Mme. de Surgis being in distinctly bad odour.

Unfortunately, no sooner had we sat down in an alcove from which there was no way of escape than Mme. de Saint-Euverte, a butt for the Baron's jibes, came past. She, perhaps to mask or else openly to shew her contempt for the ill will which she inspired in M. de Charlus, and above all to shew that she was on intimate terms with a woman who was talking so familiarly to him, gave a disdainfully friendly greeting to the famous beauty, who acknowledged it, peeping out of the corner of her eye at M. de Charlus with a mocking smile. But the alcove was so narrow that Mme. de Saint-Euverte, when she tried to continue, behind our backs, her canvass of her guests for the morrow, found herself a prisoner, and had some difficulty in escaping, a precious moment which M. de Charlus, anxious that his insolent wit should shine before the mother of the two young men, took good care not to let slip. A silly question which I had put to him, without malice aforethought, gave him the opportunity for a hymn of triumph of which the poor Saint-Euverte, almost immobilised behind us, could not have lost a word. "Would you believe it, this impertinent young man," he said, indicating me to Mme. de Surgis, "asked me just now, without any sign of that modesty which makes us keep such expeditions private, if I was going to Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, which is to say, I suppose, if I was suffering from the colic. I should endeavour, in any case, to relieve myself in some more comfortable place than the house of a person who, if my memory serves me, was celebrating her centenary when I first began to go about town, though not, of course, to her house. And yet who could be more interesting to listen to? What a host of historic memories, seen and lived through in the days of the First Empire and the Restoration, and secret history too, which could certainly have nothing of the 'saint' about it, but must be decidedly 'verdant' if we are to judge by the amount of kick still left in the old trot's shanks. What would prevent me from questioning her about those passionate times is the acuteness of my olfactory organ. The proximity of the lady is enough. I say to myself all at once: oh, good lord, some one has broken the lid of my cesspool, when it is simply the Marquise opening her mouth to emit some invitation. And you can understand that if I had the misfortune to go to her house, the cesspool would be magnified into a formidable sewage-cart. She bears a mystic name, though, which has always made me think with jubilation, although she has long since passed the date of her jubilee, of that stupid line of poetry called deliquescent: 'Ah, green, how green my soul was on that day.... ' But I require a cleaner sort of verdure. They tell me

that the indefatigable old streetwalker gives ‘garden-parties,’ I should describe them as ‘invitations to explore the sewers.’ Are you going to wallow there?” he asked Mme. de Surgis, who this time was annoyed. Wishing to pretend for the Baron’s benefit that she was not going, and knowing that she would give days of her life rather than miss the Saint-Euverte party, she got out of it by taking a middle course, that is to say uncertainty. This uncertainty took so clumsily amateurish, so sordidly material a form, that M. de Charlus, with no fear of offending Mme. de Surgis, whom nevertheless he was anxious to please, began to laugh to shew her that ‘it cut no ice with him.’

“I always admire people who make plans,” she said; “I often change mine at the last moment. There is a question of a summer frock which may alter everything. I shall act upon the inspiration of the moment.”

For my part, I was furious at the abominable little speech that M. de Charlus had just made. I would have liked to shower blessings upon the giver of garden-parties. Unfortunately, in the social as in the political world, the victims are such cowards that one cannot for long remain indignant with their tormentors. Mme. de Saint-Euverte, who had succeeded in escaping from the alcove to which we were barring the entry, brushed against the Baron inadvertently as she passed him, and, by a reflex action of snobbishness which wiped out all her anger, perhaps even in the hope of securing an opening, at which this could not be the first attempt, exclaimed: “Oh! I beg your pardon, Monsieur de Charlus, I hope I did not hurt you,” as though she were kneeling before her lord and master. The latter did not deign to reply save by a broad ironical smile, and conceded only a “Good evening,” which, uttered as though he were only now made aware of the Marquise’s presence after she had greeted him, was an insult the more. Lastly, with a supreme want of spirit which pained me for her sake, Mme. de Saint-Euverte came up to me and, drawing me aside, said in my ear: “Tell me, what have I done to offend M. de Charlus? They say that he doesn’t consider me smart enough for him,” she said, laughing from ear to ear. I remained serious. For one thing, I thought it stupid of her to appear to believe or to wish other people to believe that nobody, really, was as smart as herself. For another thing, people who laugh so heartily at what they themselves have said, when it is not funny, dispense us accordingly, by taking upon themselves the responsibility for the mirth, from joining in it.

“Other people assure me that he is cross because I do not invite him. But he does not give me much encouragement. He seems to avoid me.” (This expression struck me as inadequate.) “Try to find out, and come and tell me to-

morrow. And if he feels remorseful and wishes to come too, bring him. I shall forgive and forget. Indeed, I shall be quite glad to see him, because it will annoy Mme. de Surgis. I give you a free hand. You have the most perfect judgment in these matters and I do not wish to appear to be begging my guests to come. In any case, I count upon you absolutely."

It occurred to me that Swann must be getting tired of waiting for me. I did not wish, moreover, to be too late in returning home, because of Albertine, and, taking leave of Mme. de Surgis and M. de Charlus, I went in search of my sick man in the card-room. I asked him whether what he had said to the Prince in their conversation in the garden was really what M. de Bréauté (whom I did not name) had reported to us, about a little play by Bergotte. He burst out laughing: "There is not a word of truth in it, not one, it is entirely made up and would have been an utterly stupid thing to say. Really, it is unheard of, this spontaneous generation of falsehood. I do not ask who it was that told you, but it would be really interesting, in a field as limited as this, to work back from one person to another and find out how the story arose. Anyhow, what concern can it be of other people, what the Prince said to me? People are very inquisitive. I have never been inquisitive, except when I was in love, and when I was jealous. And a lot I ever learned! Are you jealous?" I told Swann that I had never experienced jealousy, that I did not even know what it was. "Indeed! I congratulate you. A little jealousy is not at all a bad thing, from two points of view. For one thing, because it enables people who are not inquisitive to take an interest in the lives of others, or of one other at any rate. And besides, it makes one feel the pleasure of possession, of getting into a carriage with a woman, of not allowing her to go about by herself. But that occurs only in the very first stages of the disease, or when the cure is almost complete. In the interval, it is the most agonising torment. However, even the two pleasures I have mentioned, I must own to you that I have tasted very little of them: the first, by the fault of my own nature, which is incapable of sustained reflexion; the second, by force of circumstances, by the fault of the woman, I should say the women, of whom I have been jealous. But that makes no difference. Even when one is no longer interested in things, it is still something to have been interested in them; because it was always for reasons which other people did not grasp. The memory of those sentiments is, we feel, to be found only in ourselves; we must go back into ourselves to study it. You mustn't laugh at this idealistic jargon, what I mean to say is that I have been very fond of life and very fond of art. Very well! Now that I am a little too weary to live with other people, those old sentiments, so

personal and individual, that I felt in the past, seem to me — it is the mania of all collectors — very precious. I open my heart to myself like a sort of showcase, and examine one by one ever so many love affairs of which the rest of the world can have known nothing. And of this collection, to which I am now even more attached than to my others, I say to myself, rather as Mazarin said of his library, but still without any keen regret, that it will be very tiresome to have to leave it all. But, to come back to my conversation with the Prince, I shall repeat it to one person only, and that person is going to be yourself." My attention was distracted by the conversation that M. de Charlus, who had returned to the card-room, was prolonging indefinitely close beside us. "And are you a reader too? What do you do?" he asked Comte Arnulphe, who had never heard even the name of Balzac. But his short-sightedness, as he saw everything very small, gave him the appearance of seeing to great distances, so that, rare poetry in a sculptural Greek god, there seemed to be engraved upon his pupils remote, mysterious stars.

"Suppose we took a turn in the garden, Sir," I said to Swann, while Comte Arnulphe, in a lisping voice which seemed to indicate that mentally at least his development was incomplete, replied to M. de Charlus with an artlessly obliging precision: "I, oh, golf chiefly, tennis, football, running, polo I'm really keen on." So Minerva, being subdivided, ceased in certain cities to be the goddess of wisdom, and incarnated part of herself in a purely sporting, horse-loving deity, Athene Hippia. And he went to Saint Moritz also to ski, for Pallas Trilogeneia frequents the high peaks and outruns swift horsemen. "Ah!" replied M. de Charlus with the transcendent smile of the intellectual who does not even take the trouble to conceal his derision, but, on the other hand, feels himself so superior to other people and so far despises the intelligence of those who are the least stupid, that he barely differentiates between them and the most stupid, the moment they can be attractive to him in some other way. While talking to Arnulphe, M. de Charlus felt that by the mere act of addressing him he was conferring upon him a superiority which everyone else must recognise and envy. "No," Swann replied, "I am too tired to walk about, let us sit down somewhere in a corner, I cannot remain on my feet any longer." This was true, and yet the act of beginning to talk had already given him back a certain vivacity. This was because, in the most genuine exhaustion, there is, especially in neurotic people, an element that depends upon attracting their attention and is kept going only by an act of memory. We at once feel tired as soon as we are afraid of feeling tired, and, to throw off our fatigue, it suffices us to forget about it. To be sure, Swann was far from being one of those indefatigable invalids who, entering a room

worn out and ready to drop, revive in conversation like a flower in water and are able for hours on end to draw from their own words a reserve of strength which they do not, alas, communicate to their hearers, who appear more and more exhausted the more the talker comes back to life. But Swann belonged to that stout Jewish race, in whose vital energy, its resistance to death, its individual members seem to share. Stricken severally by their own diseases, as it is stricken itself by persecution, they continue indefinitely to struggle against terrible suffering which may be prolonged beyond every apparently possible limit, when already one sees nothing more than a prophet's beard surmounted by a huge nose which dilates to inhale its last breath, before the hour strikes for the ritual prayers and the punctual procession begins of distant relatives advancing with mechanical movements, as upon an Assyrian frieze.

We went to sit down, but, before moving away from the group formed by M. de Charlus with the two young Surgis and their mother, Swann could not resist fastening upon the lady's bosom the slow expansive concupiscent gaze of a connoisseur. He put up his monocle, for a better view, and, while he talked to me, kept glancing in the direction of the lady. "This is, word for word," he said to me when we were seated, "my conversation with the Prince, and if you remember what I said to you just now, you will see why I choose you as my confidant. There is another reason as well, which you shall one day learn.—'My dear Swann,' the Prince de Guermantes said to me, 'you must forgive me if I have appeared to be avoiding you for some time past.' (I had never even noticed it, having been ill and avoiding society myself.) 'In the first place, I had heard it said that, as I fully expected, in the unhappy affair which is splitting the country in two your views were diametrically opposed to mine. Now, it would have been extremely painful to me to have to hear you express them. So sensitive were my nerves that when the Princess, two years ago, heard her brother-in-law, the Grand Duke of Hesse, say that Dreyfus was innocent, she was not content with promptly denying the assertion but refrained from repeating it to me in order not to upset me. About the same time, the Crown Prince of Sweden came to Paris and, having probably heard some one say that the Empress Eugénie was a Dreyfusist, confused her with the Princess (a strange confusion, you will admit, between a woman of the rank of my wife and a Spaniard, a great deal less well born than people make out, and married to a mere Bonaparte), and said to her: Princess, I am doubly glad to meet you, for I know that you hold the same view as myself of the Dreyfus case, which does not surprise me since Your Highness is Bavarian. Which drew down upon the Prince the answer: Sir, I am nothing

now but a French Princess, and I share the views of all my fellow-countrymen. Now, my dear Swann, about eighteen months ago, a conversation I had with General de Beaucerfeuil made me suspect that not an error, but grave illegalities had been committed in the procedure of the trial.'"

We were interrupted (Swann did not wish people to overhear his story) by the voice of M. de Charlus who (without, as it happened, paying us the slightest attention) came past escorting Mme. de Surgis, and stopped in the hope of detaining her for a moment longer, whether on account of her sons or from that reluctance common to all the Guermantes to bring anything to an end, which kept them plunged in a sort of anxious inertia. Swann informed me, in this connexion, a little later, of something that stripped the name Surgis-le-Duc, for me, of all the poetry that I had found in it. The Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc boasted a far higher social position, far finer connexions by marriage than her cousin the Comte de Surgis, who had no money and lived on his estate in the country. But the words that ended her title "le Duc" had not at all the origin which I ascribed to them, and which had made me associate it in my imagination with Bourg-l'Abbé, Bois-le-Roi, etc. AH that had happened was that a Comte de Surgis had married, during the Restoration, the daughter of an immensely rich industrial magnate, M. Leduc, or Le Duc, himself the son of a chemical manufacturer, the richest man of his day, and a Peer of France. King Charles X had created for the son born of this marriage the Marquisate of Surgis-le-Duc, a Marquisate of Surgis existing already in the family. The addition of the plebeian surname had not prevented this branch from allying itself, on the strength of its enormous fortune, with the first families of the realm. And the present Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc, herself of exalted birth, might have moved in the very highest circles. A demon of perversity had driven her, scorning the position ready made for her, to flee from the conjugal roof, to live a life of open scandal. Whereupon the world which she had scorned at twenty, when it was at her feet, had cruelly failed her at thirty, when, after ten years, everybody, except a few faithful friends, had ceased to bow to her, and she set to work to reconquer laboriously, inch by inch, what she had possessed as a birthright. (An outward and return journey which are not uncommon.)

As for the great nobles, her kinsmen, whom she had disowned in the past, and who in their turn had now disowned her, she found an excuse for the joy that she would feel in gathering them again to her bosom in the memories of childhood that they would be able to recall. And in so saying, to cloak her snobbishness, she was perhaps less untruthful than she supposed. "Basin is all

my girlhood!" she said on the day on which he came back to her. And as a matter of fact there was a grain of truth in the statement. But she had miscalculated when she chose him for her lover. For all the women friends of the Duchesse de Guermantes were to rally round her, and so Mme. de Surgis must descend for the second time that slope up which she had so laboriously toiled. "Well!" M. de Charlus was saying to her, in his attempt to prolong the conversation. "You will lay my tribute at the feet of the beautiful portrait. How is it? What has become of it?" "Why," replied Mme. de Surgis, "you know I haven't got it now; my husband wasn't pleased with it." "Not pleased! With one of the greatest works of art of our time, equal to Nattier's Duchesse de Châteauroux, and, moreover, perpetuating no less majestic and heart-shattering a goddess. Oh! That little blue collar! I swear, Vermeer himself never painted a fabric more consummately, but we must not say it too loud or Swann will fall upon us to avenge his favourite painter, the Master of Delft." The Marquise, turning round, addressed a smile and held out her hand to Swann, who had risen to greet her. But almost without concealment, whether in his declining days he had lost all wish for concealment, by indifference to opinion, or the physical power, by the excitement of his desire and the weakening of the control that helps us to conceal it, as soon as Swann, on taking the Marquise's hand, saw her bosom at close range and from above, he plunged an attentive, serious, absorbed, almost anxious gaze into the cavity of her bodice, and his nostrils, drugged by the lady's perfume, quivered like the wings of a butterfly about to alight upon a half-hidden flower. He checked himself abruptly on the edge of the precipice, and Mme. de Surgis herself, albeit annoyed, stifled a deep sigh, so contagious can desire prove at times. "The painter was cross," she said to M. de Charlus, "and took it back. I have heard that it is now at Diane de Saint-Euverte's." "I decline to believe," said the Baron, "that a great picture can have such bad taste."

"He is talking to her about her portrait. I could talk to her about that portrait just as well as Charlus," said Swann, affecting a drawling, slangy tone as he followed the retreating couple with his gaze. "And I should certainly enjoy talking about it more than Charlus," he added. I asked him whether the things that were said about M. de Charlus were true, in doing which I was lying twice over, for, if I had no proof that anybody ever had said anything, I had on the other hand been perfectly aware for some hours past that what I was hinting at was true. Swann shrugged his shoulders, as though I had suggested something quite absurd. "It's quite true that he's a charming friend. But, need I add, his friendship is purely platonic. He is more sentimental than other men, that is all;

on the other hand, as he never goes very far with women, that has given a sort of plausibility to the idiotic rumours to which you refer. Charlus is perhaps greatly attached to his men friends, but you may be quite certain that the attachment is only in his head and in his heart. At last, we may perhaps be left in peace for a moment. Well, the Prince de Guermantes went on to say: 'I don't mind telling you that this idea of a possible illegality in the procedure of the trial was extremely painful to me, because I have always, as you know, worshipped the army; I discussed the matter again with the General, and, alas, there could be no two ways of looking at it. I don't mind telling you frankly that, all this time, the idea that an innocent man might be undergoing the most degrading punishment had never even entered my mind. But, starting from this idea of illegality, I began to study what I had always declined to read, and then the possibility not, this time, of illegal procedure but of the prisoner's innocence began to haunt me. I did not feel that I could talk about it to the Princess. Heaven knows that she has become just as French as myself. You may say what you like, from the day of our marriage, I took such pride in shewing her our country in all its beauty, and what to me is the most splendid thing in it, our Army, that it would have been too painful to me to tell her of my suspicions, which involved, it is true, a few officers only. But I come of a family of soldiers, I did not like to think that officers could be mistaken. I discussed the case again with Beaucerfeuil, he admitted that there had been culpable intrigues, that the *bordereau* was possibly not in Dreyfus's writing, but that an overwhelming proof of his guilt did exist. This was the Henry document. And, a few days later, we learned that it was a forgery. After that, without letting the Princess see me, I began to read the *Siècle* and the*Aurore* every day; soon I had no doubt left, it kept me awake all night. I confided my distress to our friend, the abbé Poiré, who, I was astonished to find, held the same conviction, and I got him to say masses for the intention of Dreyfus, his unfortunate wife and their children. Meanwhile, one morning as I was going to the Princess's room, I saw her maid trying to hide something from me that she had in her hand. I asked her, chaffingly, what it was, she blushed and refused to tell me. I had the fullest confidence in my wife, but this incident disturbed me considerably (and the Princess too, no doubt, who must have heard of it from her woman), for my dear Marie barely uttered a word to me that day at luncheon. I asked the abbé Poiré whether he could say my mass for Dreyfus on the following morning.... ' And so much for that!" exclaimed Swann, breaking off his narrative. I looked up, and saw the Duc de Guermantes bearing down upon us. "Forgive me for interrupting you, boys. My lad," he went on,

addressing myself, “I am instructed to give you a message from Oriane. Marie and Gilbert have asked her to stay and have supper at their table with only five or six other people: the Princess of Hesse, Mme. de Ligné, Mme. de Tarente, Mme. de Chevreuse, the Duchesse d’Arenberg. Unfortunately, we can’t wait, we are going on to a little ball of sorts.” I was listening, but whenever we have something definite to do at a given moment, we depute a certain person who is accustomed to that sort of duty to keep an eye on the clock and warn us in time. This indwelling servant reminded me, as I had asked him to remind me a few hours before, that Albertine, who at the moment was far from my thoughts, was to come and see me immediately after the theatre. And so I declined the invitation to supper. This does not mean that I was not enjoying myself at the Princesse de Guermantes’s. The truth is that men can have several sorts of pleasure. The true pleasure is that for which they abandon the other. But the latter, if it is apparent, or rather if it alone is apparent, may put people off the scent of the other, reassure or mislead the jealous, create a false impression. And yet, all that is needed to make us sacrifice it to the other is a little happiness or a little suffering. Sometimes a third order of pleasures, more serious but more essential, does not yet exist for us, in whom its potential existence is indicated only by its arousing regrets, discouragement. And yet it is to these pleasures that we shall devote ourselves in time to come. To give an example of quite secondary importance, a soldier in time of peace will sacrifice a social existence to love, but, once war is declared (and without there being any need to introduce the idea of a patriotic duty), will sacrifice love to the passion, stronger than love, for fighting. It was all very well Swann’s saying that he enjoyed telling me his story, I could feel that his conversation with me, because of the lateness of the hour, and because he himself was too ill, was one of those fatigues at which those who know that they are killing themselves by sitting up late, by overexerting themselves, feel when they return home an angry regret, similar to that felt at the wild extravagance of which they have again been guilty by the spendthrifts who will not, for all that, be able to restrain themselves to-morrow from throwing money out of the windows. After we have passed a certain degree of enfeeblement, whether it be caused by age or by ill health, all pleasure taken at the expense of sleep, in departure from our habits, every breach of the rules becomes a nuisance. The talker continues to talk, out of politeness, from excitement, but he knows that the hour at which he might still have been able to go to sleep has already passed, and he knows also the reproaches that he will heap upon himself during the insomnia and fatigue that must ensue. Already,

moreover, even the momentary pleasure has come to an end, body and brain are too far drained of their strength to welcome with any readiness what seems to the other person entertaining. They are like a house on the morning before a journey or removal, where visitors become a perfect plague, to be received sitting upon locked trunks, with our eyes on the clock. “At last we are alone,” he said; “I quite forget where I was. Oh yes, I had just told you, hadn’t I, that the Prince asked the abbé Poiré if he could say his mass next day for Dreyfus. ‘No, the abbé informed me’ (I say *me* to you,” Swann explained to me, “because it is the Prince who is speaking, you understand?), ‘for I have another mass that I have been asked to say for him to-morrow as well.— What, I said to him, is there another Catholic as well as myself who is convinced of his innocence?— It appears so. — But this other supporter’s conviction must be of more recent growth than mine.— Maybe, but this other was making me say masses when you still believed Dreyfus guilty.— Ah, I can see that it is not anyone in our world.— On the contrary!— Indeed! There are Dreyfusists among us, are there? You intrigue me; I should like to unbosom myself to this rare bird, if I know him.— You do know him.— His name?— The Princesse de Guermantes. While I was afraid of shocking the Nationalist opinions, the French faith of my dear wife, she had been afraid of alarming my religious opinions, my patriotic sentiments. But privately she had been thinking as I did, though for longer than I had. And what her maid had been hiding as she went into her room, what she went out to buy for her every morning, was the *Aurore*. My dear Swann, from that moment I thought of the pleasure that I should give you when I told you how closely akin my views upon this matter were to yours; forgive me for not having done so sooner. If you bear in mind that I had never said a word to the Princess, it will not surprise you to be told that thinking the same as yourself must at that time have kept me farther apart from you than thinking differently. For it was an extremely painful topic for me to approach. The more I believe that an error, that crimes even have been committed, the more my heart bleeds for the Army. It had never occurred to me that opinions like mine could possibly cause you similar pain, until I was told the other day that you were emphatically protesting against the insults to the Army and against the Dreyfusists for consenting to ally themselves with those who insulted it. That settled it, I admit that it has been most painful for me to confess to you what I think of certain officers, few in number fortunately, but it is a relief to me not to have to keep at arms’ length from you any longer, and especially that you should quite understand that if I was able to entertain other sentiments, it was because I had not a shadow of

doubt as to the soundness of the verdict. As soon as my doubts began, I could wish for only one thing, that the mistake should be rectified.' I must tell you that this speech of the Prince de Guermantes moved me profoundly. If you knew him as I do, if you could realise the distance he has had to traverse in order to reach his present position, you would admire him as he deserves. Not that his opinion surprises me, his is such a straightforward nature!" Swann was forgetting that in the afternoon he had on the contrary told me that people's opinions as to the Dreyfus case were dictated by atavism. At the most he had made an exception in favour of intelligence, because in Saint-Loup it had managed to overcome atavism and had made a Dreyfusard of him. Now he had just seen that this victory had been of short duration and that Saint-Loup had passed into the opposite camp. And so it was to straightforwardness now that he assigned the part which had previously devolved upon intelligence. In reality we always discover afterwards that our adversaries had a reason for being on the side they espoused, which has nothing to do with any element of right that there may be on that side, and that those who think as we do do so because their intelligence, if their moral nature is too base to be invoked, or their straightforwardness, if their penetration is feeble, has compelled them.

Swann now found equally intelligent anybody who was of his opinion, his old friend the Prince de Guermantes and my schoolfellow Bloch, whom previously he had avoided and whom he now invited to luncheon. Swann interested Bloch greatly by telling him that the Prince de Guermantes was a Dreyfusard. "We must ask him to sign our appeal for Picquart; a name like his would have a tremendous effect." But Swann, blending with his ardent conviction as an Israelite the diplomatic moderation of a man of the world, whose habits he had too thoroughly acquired to be able to shed them at this late hour, refused to allow Bloch to send the Prince a circular to sign, even on his own initiative. "He cannot do such a thing, we must not expect the impossible," Swann repeated. "There you have a charming man who has travelled thousands of miles to come over to our side. He can be very useful to us. If he were to sign your list, he would simply be compromising himself with his own people, would be made to suffer on our account, might even repent of his confidences and not confide in us again." Nor was this all, Swann refused his own signature. He felt that his name was too Hebraic not to create a bad effect. Besides, even if he approved of all the attempts to secure a fresh trial, he did not wish to be mixed up in any way in the antimilitarist campaign. He wore, a thing he had never done previously, the decoration he had won as a young militiaman, in '70, and added a

codicil to his will asking that, contrary to his previous dispositions, he might be buried with the military honours due to his rank as Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. A request which assembled round the church of Combray a whole squadron of those troopers over whose fate Françoise used to weep in days gone by, when she envisaged the prospect of a war. In short, Swann refused to sign Bloch's circular, with the result that, if he passed in the eyes of many people as a fanatical Dreyfusard, my friend found him lukewarm, infected with Nationalism, and a militarist. Swann left me without shaking hands so as not to be forced into a general leave-taking in this room which swarmed with his friends, but said to me: "You ought to come and see your friend Gilberte. She has really grown up now and altered, you would not know her. She would be so pleased!" I was no longer in love with Gilberte. She was for me like a dead person for whom one has long mourned, then forgetfulness has come, and if she were to be resuscitated, she could no longer find any place in a life which has ceased to be fashioned for her. I had no desire now to see her, not even that desire to shew her that I did not wish to see her which, every day, when I was in love with her, I vowed to myself that I would flaunt before her, when I should be in love with her no longer.

And so, seeking now only to give myself, in Gilberte's eyes, the air of having longed with all my heart to meet her again and of having been prevented by circumstances of the kind called "beyond our control" albeit they only occur, with any certainty at least, when we have done nothing to prevent them, so far from accepting Swann's invitation with reserve, I would not let him go until he had promised to explain in detail to his daughter the mischances that had prevented and would continue to prevent me from going to see her. "Anyhow, I am going to write to her as soon as I go home," I added. "But be sure you tell her it will be a threatening letter, for in a month or two I shall be quite free, and then let her tremble, for I shall be coming to your house as regularly as in the old days."

Before parting from Swann, I said a word to him about his health. "No, it is not as bad as all that," he told me. "Still, as I was saying, I am quite worn out, and I accept with resignation whatever may be in store for me. Only, I must say that it would be most annoying to die before the end of the Dreyfus case. Those scoundrels have more than one card up their sleeves. I have no doubt of their being defeated in the end, but still they are very powerful, they have supporters everywhere. Just as everything is going on splendidly, it all collapses. I should like to live long enough to see Dreyfus rehabilitated and Picquart a colonel."

When Swann had left, I returned to the great drawing-room in which was to be found that Princesse de Guermantes with whom I did not then know that I was one day to be so intimate. Her passion for M. de Charlus did not reveal itself to me at first. I noticed only that the Baron, after a certain date, and without having taken one of those sudden dislikes, which were not surprising in him, to the Princesse de Guermantes, while continuing to feel for her just as strong an affection, a stronger affection perhaps than ever, appeared worried and annoyed whenever anyone mentioned her name to him. He never included it now in his list of the people whom he wished to meet at dinner.

It is true that before this time I had heard an extremely malicious man about town say that the Princess had completely changed, that she was in love with M. de Charlus, but this slander had appeared to me absurd and had made me angry. I had indeed remarked with astonishment that, when I was telling her something that concerned myself, if M. de Charlus's name cropped up in the middle, the Princess immediately screwed up her attention to the narrower focus of a sick man who, hearing us talk about ourselves, and listening, in consequence, in a careless and distracted fashion, suddenly realises that a name we have mentioned is that of the disease from which he is suffering, which at once interests and delights him. So, if I said to her: "Why, M. de Charlus told me..." the Princess at once gathered up the slackened reins of her attention. And having on one occasion said in her hearing that M. de Charlus had at that moment a warm regard for a certain person, I was astonished to see appear in the Princess's eyes that momentary change of colour, like the line of a fissure in the pupil, which is due to a thought which our words have unconsciously aroused in the mind of the person to whom we are talking, a secret thought that will not find expression in words, but will rise from the depths which we have stirred to the surface — altered for an instant — of his gaze. But if my remark had moved the Princess, I did not then suspect in what fashion.

Anyhow, shortly after this, she began to talk to me about M. de Charlus, and almost without ambiguity. If she made any allusion to the rumours which a few people here and there were spreading about the Baron, it was merely as though to absurd and scandalous inventions. But, on the other hand, she said: "I feel that any woman who fell in love with a man of such priceless worth as Palamède ought to have sufficient breadth of mind, enough devotion, to accept him and understand him as a whole, for what he is, to respect his freedom, humour his fancies, seek only to smooth out his difficulties and console him in his griefs." Now, by such a speech, vague as it was, the Princesse de Guermantes revealed

the weakness of the character she was seeking to extol, just as M. de Charlus himself did at times. Have I not heard him, over and again, say to people who until then had been uncertain whether or not he was being slandered: “I, who have climbed many hills and crossed many valleys in my life, who have known all manner of people, burglars as well as kings, and indeed, I must confess, with a slight preference for the burglars, who have pursued beauty in all its forms,” and so forth; and by these words which he thought adroit, and in contradicting rumours the currency of which no one suspected (or to introduce, from inclination, moderation, love of accuracy, an element of truth which he was alone in regarding as insignificant), he removed the last doubts of some of his hearers, inspired others, who had not yet begun to doubt him, with their first. For the most dangerous of all forms of concealment is that of the crime itself in the mind of the guilty party. His permanent consciousness of it prevents him from imagining how generally it is unknown, how readily a complete lie would be accepted, and on the other hand from realising at what degree of truth other people will detect, in words which he believes to be innocent, a confession. Not that he would not be entirely wrong in seeking to hush it up, for there is no vice that does not find ready support in the best society, and one has seen a country house turned upside down in order that two sisters might sleep in adjoining rooms as soon as their hostess learned that theirs was a more than sisterly affection. But what revealed to me all of a sudden the Princess’s love was a trifling incident upon which I shall not dwell here, for it forms part of quite another story, in which M. de Charlus allowed a Queen to die rather than miss an appointment with the hairdresser who was to singe his hair for the benefit of an omnibus conductor who filled him with alarm. However, to be done with the Princess’s love, let us say what the trifle was that opened my eyes. I was, on the day in question, alone with her in her carriage. As we were passing a post office she stopped the coachman. She had come out without a footman. She half drew a letter from her muff and was preparing to step down from the carriage to put it into the box. I tried to stop her, she made a show of resistance, and we both realised that our instinctive movements had been, hers compromising, in appearing to be guarding a secret, mine indiscreet, in attempting to pass that guard. She was the first to recover. Suddenly turning very red, she gave me the letter. I no longer dared not to take it, but, as I slipped it into the box, I could not help seeing that it was addressed to M. de Charlus.

To return to this first evening at the Princesse de Guermantes’s, I went to bid her good-night, for her cousins, who had promised to take me home, were in a

hurry to be gone. M. de Guermantes wished, however, to say good-bye to his brother, Mme. de Surgis having found time to mention to the Duke as she left that M. de Charlus had been charming to her and to her sons. This great courtesy on his brother's part, the first moreover that he had ever shewn in that line, touched Basin deeply and aroused in him old family sentiments which were never asleep for long. At the moment when we were saying good-bye to the Princess he was attempting, without actually thanking M. de Charlus, to give expression to his fondness for him, whether because he really found a difficulty in controlling it or in order that the Baron might remember that actions of the sort that he had performed this evening did not escape the eyes of a brother, just as, with the object of creating a chain of pleasant associations in the future, we give sugar to a dog that has done its trick. "Well, little brother!" said the Duke, stopping M. de Charlus and taking him lovingly by the arm, "so this is how one walks past one's elders and betters without so much as a word. I never see you now, Mémé, and you can't think how I miss you. I was turning over some old letters just now and came upon some from poor Mamma, which are all so full of love for you." "Thank you, Basin," replied M. de Charlus in a broken voice, for he could never speak without emotion of their mother. "You must make up your mind to let me fix up bachelor quarters for you at Guermantes," the Duke went on. "It is nice to see the two brothers so affectionate towards each other," the Princess said to Oriane. "Yes, indeed! I don't suppose you could find many brothers like that. I shall invite you to meet him," she promised me. "You've not quarrelled with him?... But what can they be talking about?" she added in an anxious tone, for she could catch only an occasional word of what they were saying. She had always felt a certain jealousy of the pleasure that M. de Guermantes found in talking to his brother of a past from which he was inclined to keep his wife shut out. She felt that, when they were happy at being together like this, and she, unable to restrain her impatient curiosity, came and joined them, her coming did not add to their pleasure. But this evening, this habitual jealousy was reinforced by another. For if Mme. de Surgis had told M. de Guermantes how kind his brother had been to her so that the Duke might thank his brother, at the same time certain devoted female friends of the Guermantes couple had felt it their duty to warn the Duchess that her husband's mistress had been seen in close conversation with his brother. And this information was torture to Mme. de Guermantes. "Think of the fun we used to have at Guermantes long ago," the Duke went on. "If you came down sometimes in summer we could take up our old life again. Do you remember old Father

Courveau: ‘Why is Pascal vexing? Because he is vec... vec...’” “*Said*!” put in M. de Charlus as though he were still answering his tutor’s question. “And why is Pascal vexed; because he is vec... because he is vec... *Sing*! Very good, you will pass, you are certain to be mentioned, and Madame la Duchesse will give you a Chinese dictionary.” “How it all comes back to me, young Même, and the old china vase Hervey brought you from Saint-Denis, I can see it now. You used to threaten us that you would go and spend your life in China, you were so fond of the country; even then you used to love wandering about all night. Ah! You were a peculiar type, for I can honestly say that never in anything did you have the same tastes as other people...” But no sooner had he uttered these words than the Duke flamed up, as the saying is, for he was aware of his brother’s reputation, if not of his actual habits. As he never made any allusion to them before his brother, he was all the more annoyed at having said something which might be taken to refer to them, and more still at having shewn his annoyance. After a moment’s silence: “Who knows,” he said, to cancel the effect of his previous speech, “you were perhaps in love with a Chinese girl, before loving so many white ones and finding favour with them, if I am to judge by a certain lady to whom you have given great pleasure this evening by talking to her. She was delighted with you.” The Duke had vowed that he would not mention Mme. de Surgis, but, in the confusion that the blunder he had just made had wrought in his ideas, he had fallen upon the first that occurred to him, which happened to be precisely the one that ought not to have appeared in the conversation, although it had started it. But M. de Charlus had observed his brother’s blush. And, like guilty persons who do not wish to appear embarrassed that you should talk in their presence of the crime which they are supposed not to have committed, and feel that they ought to prolong a dangerous conversation: “I am charmed to hear it,” he replied, “but I should like to go back to what you were saying before, which struck me as being profoundly true. You were saying that I never had the same ideas as other people, how right you are, you said that I had peculiar tastes.” “No,” protested M. de Guermantes who, as a matter of fact, had not used those words, and may not have believed that their meaning was applicable to his brother. Besides, what right had he to bully him about eccentricities which in any case were vague enough or secret enough to have in no way impaired the Baron’s tremendous position in society? What was more, feeling that the resources of his brother’s position were about to be placed at the service of his mistresses, the Duke told himself that this was well worth a little tolerance in exchange; had he at that moment known of some “peculiar” intimacy of his

brother, M. de Guermantes would, in the hope of the support that the other was going to give him, have passed it over, shutting his eyes to it, and if need be lending a hand. “Come along, Basin; good night, Palamède,” said the Duchess, who, devoured by rage and curiosity, could endure no more, “if you have made up your minds to spend the night here, we might just as well have stayed to supper. You have been keeping Marie and me standing for the last half-hour.” The Duke parted from his brother after a significant pressure of his hand, and the three of us began to descend the immense staircase of the Princess’s house.

On either side of us, on the topmost steps, were scattered couples who were waiting for their carriages to come to the door. Erect, isolated, flanked by her husband and myself, the Duchess kept to the left of the staircase, already wrapped in her Tiepolo cloak, her throat clasped in its band of rubies, devoured by the eyes of women and men alike, who sought to divine the secret of her beauty and distinction. Waiting for her carriage upon the same step of the stair as Mme. de Guermantes, but at the opposite side of it, Mme. de Gallardon, who had long abandoned all hope of ever receiving a visit from her cousin, turned her back so as not to appear to have seen her, and, what was more important, so as not to furnish a proof of the fact that the other did not greet her. Mme. de Gallardon was in an extremely bad temper because some gentlemen in her company had taken it upon themselves to speak to her of Oriane: “I have not the slightest desire to see her,” she had replied to them, “I did see her, as a matter of fact, just now, she is beginning to shew her age; it seems she can’t get over it. Basin says so himself. And, good lord, I can understand that, for, as she has no brains, is as mischievous as a weevil, and has shocking manners, she must know very well that, once her looks go, she will have nothing left to fall back upon.”

I had put on my greatcoat, for which M. de Guermantes, who dreaded chills, reproached me, as we went down together, because of the heated atmosphere indoors. And the generation of noblemen which more or less passed through the hands of Mgr. Dupanloup speaks such bad French (except the Castellane brothers) that the Duke expressed what was in his mind thus: “It is better not to put on your coat before going out of doors, at least *as a general rule*.” I can see all that departing crowd now, I can see, if I be not mistaken in placing him upon that staircase, a portrait detached from its frame, the Prince de Sagan, whose last appearance in society this must have been, baring his head to offer his homage to the Duchess, with so sweeping a revolution of his tall hat in his white-gloved hand (harmonising with the gardenia in his buttonhole), that one felt surprised that it was not a plumed felt hat of the old regime, several ancestral faces from

which were exactly reproduced in the face of this great gentleman. He stopped for but a short time in front of her, but even his momentary attitudes were sufficient to compose a complete tableau vivant, and, as it were, an historical scene. Moreover, as he has since then died, and as I never had more than a glimpse of him in his lifetime, he has so far become for me a character in history, social history at least, that I am quite astonished when I think that a woman and a man whom I know are his sister and nephew.

While we were going downstairs, there came up, with an air of weariness that became her, a woman who appeared to be about forty, but was really older. This was the Princesse d'Orvillers, a natural daughter, it was said, of the Duke of Parma, whose pleasant voice rang with a vaguely Austrian accent. She advanced, tall, stooping, in a gown of white flowered silk, her exquisite, throbbing, cankered bosom heaving beneath a harness of diamonds and sapphires. Tossing her head like a royal palfrey embarrassed by its halter of pearls, of an incalculable value but an inconvenient weight, she let fall here and there a gentle, charming gaze, of an azure which, as time began to fade it, became more caressing than ever, and greeted most of the departing guests with a friendly nod. "You choose a nice time to arrive, Paulette!" said the Duchess. "Yes, I am so sorry! But really it was a physical impossibility," replied the Princesse d'Orvillers, who had acquired this sort of expression from the Duchesse de Guermantes, but added to it her own natural sweetness and the air of sincerity conveyed by the force of a remotely Teutonic accent in so tender a voice. She appeared to be alluding to complications of life too elaborate to be related, and not merely to evening parties, although she had just come on from a succession of these. But it was not they that obliged her to come so late. As the Prince de Guermantes had for many years forbidden his wife to receive Mme. d'Orvillers, that lady, when the ban was withdrawn, contented herself with replying to the other's invitations, so as not to appear to be thirsting after them, by simply leaving cards. After two or three years of this method, she came in person, but very late, as though after the theatre. In this way she gave herself the appearance of attaching no importance to the party, nor to being seen at it, but simply of having come to pay the Prince and Princess a visit, for their own sakes, because she liked them, at an hour when, the great majority of their guests having already gone, she would "have them more to herself."

"Oriane has really sunk very low," muttered Mme. de Gallardon. "I cannot understand Basin's allowing her to speak to Mme. d'Orvillers. I am sure M. de Gallardon would never have allowed me." For my part, I had recognised in

Mme. d'Orvillers the woman who, outside the Hôtel Guermantes, used to cast languishing glances at me, turn round, stop and gaze into shop windows. Mme. de Guermantes introduced me, Mme. d'Orvillers was charming, neither too friendly nor annoyed. She gazed at me as at everyone else out of her gentle eyes.... But I was never again, when I met her, to receive from her one of those overtures with which she had seemed to be offering herself. There is a special kind of glance, apparently of recognition, which a young man never receives from certain women — nor from certain men — after the day on which they have made his acquaintance and have learned that he is the friend of people with whom they too are intimate.

We were told that the carriage was at the door. Mme. de Guermantes gathered up her red skirt as though to go downstairs and get into the carriage, but, seized perhaps by remorse, or by the desire to give pleasure, and above all to profit by the brevity which the material obstacle to prolonging it imposed upon so boring an action, looked at Mme. de Gallardon; then, as though she had only just caught sight of her, acting upon a sudden inspiration, before going down tripped across the whole width of the step and, upon reaching her delighted cousin, held out her hand. "Such a long time," said the Duchess who then, so as not to have to develop all the regrets and legitimate excuses that this formula might be supposed to contain, turned with a look of alarm towards the Duke, who as a matter of fact, having gone down with me to the carriage, was storming with rage when he saw that his wife had gone over to Mme. de Gallardon and was holding up the stream of carriages behind. "Oriane is still very good looking, after all!" said Mme. de Gallardon. "People amuse me when they say that we have quarrelled; we may (for reasons which we have no need to tell other people) go for years without seeing one another, we have too many memories in common ever to be separated, and in her heart she must know that she cares far more for me than for all sorts of people whom she sees every day and who are not of her rank." Mme. de Gallardon was in fact like those scorned lovers who try desperately to make people believe that they are better loved than those, whom their fair one cherishes. And (by the praises which, without heeding their contradiction of what she had been saying a moment earlier, she now lavished in speaking of the Duchesse de Guermantes) she proved indirectly that the other was thoroughly conversant with the maxims that ought to guide in her career a great lady of fashion who, at the selfsame moment when her most marvellous gown is exciting an admiration not unmixed with envy, must be able to cross the whole width of a staircase to disarm it. "Do at least take care not to

wet your shoes" (a brief but heavy shower of rain had fallen), said the Duke, who was still furious at having been kept waiting.

On our homeward drive, in the confined space of the coupé, the red shoes were of necessity very close to mine, and Mme. de Guermantes, fearing that she might actually have touched me, said to the Duke: "This young man will have to say to me, like the person in the caricature: 'Madame, tell me at once that you love me, but don't tread on my feet like that.'" My thoughts, however, were far from Mme. de Guermantes. Ever since Saint-Loup had spoken to me of a young girl of good family who frequented a house of ill-fame, and of the Baroness Putbus's maid, it was in these two persons that were coalesced and embodied the desires inspired in me day by day by countless beauties of two classes, on the one hand the plebeian and magnificent, the majestic lady's maids of great bouses, swollen with pride and saying 'we' when they spoke of Duchesses, on the other hand those girls of whom it was enough for me sometimes, without even having seen them go past in carriages or on foot, to have read the names in the account of a ball for me to fall in love with them and, having conscientiously searched the year-book for the country houses in which they spent the summer (as often as not letting myself be led astray by a similarity of names), to dream alternately of going to live amid the plains of the West, the sandhills of the North, the pine-forests of the South. But in vain might I fuse together all the most exquisite fleshly matter to compose, after the ideal outline traced for me by Saint-Loup, the young girl of easy virtue and Mme. Putbus's maid, my two possessible beauties still lacked what I should never know until I had seen them: individual character. I was to wear myself out in seeking to form a mental picture, during the months in which I would have preferred a lady's maid, of the maid of Mme. Putbus. But what peace of mind after having been perpetually troubled by my restless desires, for so many fugitive creatures whose very names I often did not know, who were in any case so hard to find again, harder still to become acquainted with, impossible perhaps to captivate, to have subtracted from all that scattered, fugitive, anonymous beauty, two choice specimens duly labelled, whom I was at least certain of being able to procure when I chose. I kept putting off the hour for devoting myself to this twofold pleasure, as I put off that for beginning to work, but the certainty of having it whenever I chose dispensed me almost from the necessity of taking it, like those soporific tablets which one has only to have within reach of one's hand not to need them and to fall asleep. In the whole universe I desired only two women, of whose faces I could not, it is true, form any picture, but whose names Saint-Loup had told me

and had guaranteed their consent. So that, if he had, by what he had said this evening, set my imagination a heavy task, he had at the same time procured an appreciable relaxation, a prolonged rest for my will.

"Well!" said the Duchess to me, "apart from your balls, can't I be of any use to you? Have you found a house where you would like me to introduce you?" I replied that I was afraid the only one that tempted me was hardly fashionable enough for her. "Whose is that?" she asked in a hoarse and menacing voice, scarcely opening her lips. "Baroness Putbus." This time she pretended to be really angry. "No, not that! I believe you're trying to make a fool of me. I don't even know how I come to have heard the creature's name. But she is the dregs of society. It's just as though you were to ask me for an introduction to my milliner. And worse than that, for my milliner is charming. You are a little bit cracked, my poor boy. In any case, I beg that you will be polite to the people to whom I have introduced you, leave cards on them, and go and see them, and not talk to them about Baroness Putbus of whom they have never heard." I asked whether Mme. d'Orvillers was not inclined to be flighty. "Oh, not in the least, you are thinking of some one else, why, she's rather a prude, if anything. Ain't she, Basin?" "Yes, in any case I don't think there has ever been anything to be said about her," said the Duke.

"You won't come with us to the ball?" he asked me. "I can lend you a Venetian cloak and I know some one who will be damned glad to see you there — Oriane for one, that I needn't say — but the Princesse de Parme. She's never tired of singing your praises, and swears by you alone. It's fortunate for you — since she is a trifle mature — that she is the model of virtue. Otherwise she would certainly have chosen you as a sigisbee, as it was called in my young days, a sort of *cavalière servente*."

I was interested not in the ball but in my appointment with Albertine. And so I refused. The carriage had stopped, the footman was shouting for the gate to be opened, the horses pawing the ground until it was flung apart and the carriage passed into the courtyard. "Till we meet again," said the Duke. "I have sometimes regretted living so close to Marie," the Duchess said to me, "because I may be very fond of her, but I am not quite so fond of her company. But have never regretted it so much as to-night, since it has allowed me so little of yours." "Come, Oriane, no speechmaking." The Duchess would have liked me to come inside for a minute. She laughed heartily, as did the Duke, when I said that I could not because I was expecting a girl to call at any moment. "You choose a funny time to receive visitors," she said to me.

“Come along, my child, there is no time to waste,” said M. de Guermantes to his wife. “It is a quarter to twelve, and time we were dressed...” He came in collision, outside his front door which they were grimly guarding, with the two ladies of the walking-sticks, who had not been afraid to descend at dead of night from their mountain-top to prevent a scandal. “Basin, we felt we must warn you, in case you were seen at that ball: poor Amanien has just passed away, an hour ago.” The Duke felt a momentary alarm. He saw the delights of the famous ball snatched from him as soon as these accursed mountaineers had informed him of the death of M. d’Osmond. But he quickly recovered himself and flung at his cousins a retort into which he introduced, with his determination not to forego a pleasure, his incapacity to assimilate exactly the niceties of the French language: “He is dead! No, no, they exaggerate, they exaggerate!” And without giving a further thought to his two relatives who, armed with their alpenstocks, were preparing to make their nocturnal ascent, he fired off a string of questions at his valet:

“Are you sure my helmet has come?” “Yes, Monsieur le Duc.” “You’re sure there’s a hole in it I can breathe through? I don’t want to be suffocated, damn it!” “Yes, Monsieur le Duc.” “Oh, thunder of heaven, this is an unlucky evening. Oriane, I forgot to ask Babal whether the shoes with pointed toes were for you!” “But, my dear, the dresser from the Opéra-Comique is here, he will tell us. I don’t see how they could go with your spurs.” “Let us go and find the dresser,” said the Duke. “Good-bye, my boy, I should ask you to come in while we are trying on, it would amuse you. But we should only waste time talking, it is nearly midnight and we must not be late in getting there or we shall spoil the set.”

I too was in a hurry to get away from M. and Mme. de Guermantes as quickly as possible. *Phèdre* finished at about half past eleven. Albertine must have arrived by now. I went straight to Françoise: “Is Mlle. Albertine in the house?” “No one has called.”

Good God, that meant that no one would call! I was in torment, Al-bertine’s visit seeming to me now all the more desirable, the less certain it had become.

Françoise was cross too, but for quite a different reason. She had just installed her daughter at the table for a succulent repast. But, on hearing me come in, and seeing that there was not time to whip away the dishes and put out needles and thread as though it were a work party and not a supper party: “She has just been taking a spoonful of soup,” Françoise explained to me, “I forced her to gnaw a bit of bone,” to reduce thus to nothing her daughter’s supper, as

though the crime lay in its abundance. Even at luncheon or dinner, if I committed the error of entering the kitchen, Françoise would pretend that they had finished, and would even excuse herself with "I just felt I could eat a *scrap*," or 'a *mouthjul*.' But I was speedily reassured on seeing the multitude of the plates that covered the table, which Françoise, surprised by my sudden entry, like a thief in the night which she was not, had not had time to conjure out of sight. Then she added: "Go along to your bed now, you have done enough work today" (for she wished to make it appear that her daughter not only cost us nothing, lived by privations, but was actually working herself to death in our service). "You are only crowding up the kitchen, and disturbing Master, who is expecting a visitor. Go on, upstairs," she repeated, as though she were obliged to use her authority to send her daughter to bed, who, the moment supper was out of the question, remained in the kitchen only for appearance's sake, and if I had stayed five minutes longer would have withdrawn of her own accord. And turning to me, in that charming popular and yet, somehow, personal French which was her spoken language: "Master doesn't see that her face is just cut in two with want of sleep." I remained, delighted at not having to talk to Françoise's daughter.

I have said that she came from a small village which was quite close to her mother's, and yet different from it in the nature of the soil, its cultivation, in dialect; above all in certain characteristics of the inhabitants. Thus the 'butcheress' and Françoise's niece did not get on at all well together, but had this point in common, that, when they went out on an errand, they would linger for hours at 'the sister's' or 'the cousin's,' being themselves incapable of finishing a conversation, in the course of which the purpose with which they had set out faded so completely from their minds that, if we said to them on their return:

"Well! Will M. le Marquis de Norpois be at home at a quarter past six?" they did not even beat their brows and say: "Oh, I forgot all about it," but "Oh! I didn't understand that Master wanted to know that, I thought I had just to go and bid him good day." If they 'lost their heads' in this manner about a thing that had been said to them an hour earlier, it was on the other hand impossible to get out of their heads what they had once heard said, by 'the' sister or cousin. Thus, if the butcheress had heard it said that the English made war upon us in '70 at the same time as the Prussians, and I had explained to her until I was tired that this was not the case, every three weeks the butcheress would repeat to me in the course of conversation: "It's all because of that war the English made on us in '70, with the Prussians." "But I've told you a hundred times that you are wrong."— She would then answer, implying that her conviction was in no way

shaken: “In any case, that’s no reason for wishing them any harm. Plenty of water has run under the bridges since ‘70,” and so forth. On another occasion, advocating a war with England which I opposed, she said: “To be sure, it’s always better not to go to war; but when you must, it’s best to do it at once. As the sister was explaining just now, ever since that war the English made on us in ‘70, the commercial treaties have ruined us. After we’ve beaten them, we won’t allow one Englishman into France, unless he pays three hundred francs to come in, as we have to pay now to land in England.”

Such was, in addition to great honesty and, when they were speaking, an obstinate refusal to allow any interruption, going back twenty times over to the point at which they had been interrupted, which ended by giving to their talk the unshakable solidity of a Bach fugue, the character of the inhabitants of this tiny village which did not boast five hundred, set among its chestnuts, its willows, and its fields of potatoes and beetroot.

Franchise’s daughter, on the other hand, spoke (regarding herself as an up-to-date woman who had got out of the old ruts) Parisian slang and was well versed in all the jokes of the day. Françoise having told her that I had come from the house of a Princess: “Oh, indeed! The Princess of Brazil, I suppose, where the nuts come from.” Seeing that I was expecting a visitor, she pretended to suppose that my name was Charles. I replied innocently that it was not, which enabled her to get in: “Oh, I thought it was! And I was just saying to myself, *Charles attend* (charlatan).” This was not in the best of taste. But I was less unmoved when, to console me for Albertine’s delay, she said to me: “I expect you’ll go on waiting till doomsday. She’s never coming. Oh! Those modern flappers!”

And so her speech differed from her mother’s; but, what is more curious, her mother’s speech was not the same as that of her grandmother, a native of Bailleau-le-Pin, which was so close to Franchise’s village. And yet the dialects differed slightly, like the scenery. Franchise’s mother’s village, scrambling down a steep bank into a ravine, was overgrown with willows. And, miles away from either of them, there was, on the contrary, a small district of France where the people spoke almost precisely the same dialect as at Méséglise. I made this discovery only to feel its drawbacks. In fact, I once came upon Françoise eagerly conversing with a neighbour’s housemaid, who came from this village and spoke its dialect. They could more or less understand one another, I did not understand a word, they knew this but did not however cease (excused, they felt, by the joy of being fellow-countrywomen although born so far apart) to converse in this

strange tongue in front of me, like people who do not wish to be understood. These picturesque studies in linguistic geography and comradeship be-lowstairs were continued weekly in the kitchen, without my deriving any pleasure from them.

Since, whenever the outer gate opened, the doorkeeper pressed an electric button which lighted the stairs, and since all the occupants of the building had already come in, I left the kitchen immediately and went to sit down in the hall, keeping watch, at a point where the curtains did not quite meet over the glass panel of the outer door, leaving visible a vertical strip of semi-darkness on the stair. If, all of a sudden, this strip turned to a golden yellow, that would mean that Albertine had just entered the building and would be with me in a minute; nobody else could be coming at that time of night. And I sat there, unable to take my eyes from the strip which persisted in remaining dark; I bent my whole body forward to make certain of noticing any change; but, gaze as I might, the vertical black band, despite my impassioned longing, did not give me the intoxicating delight that I should have felt had I seen it changed by a sudden and significant magic to a luminous bar of gold. This was a great to do to make about that Albertine to whom I had not given three minutes' thought during the Guermantes party! But, reviving my feelings when in the past I had been kept waiting by other girls, Gilberte especially, when she delayed her coming, the prospect of having to forego a simple bodily pleasure caused me an intense mental suffering.

I was obliged to retire to my room. Françoise followed me. She felt that, as I had come away from my party, there was no point in my keeping the rose that I had in my buttonhole, and approached to take it from me. Her action, by reminding me that Albertine was perhaps not coming, and by obliging me also to confess that I wished to look smart for her benefit, caused an irritation that was increased by the fact that, in tugging myself free, I crushed the flower and Françoise said to me: "It would have been better to let me take it than to go and spoil it like that." But anything that she might say exasperated me. When we are kept waiting, we suffer so keenly from the absence of the person for whom we are longing that we cannot endure the presence of anyone else.

When Françoise had left my room, it occurred to me that, if it only meant that now I wanted to look my best before Albertine, it was a pity that I had so many times let her see me unshaved, with several days' growth of beard, on the evenings when I let her come in to renew our caresses. I felt that she took no interest in me and was giving me the cold shoulder. To make my room look a little brighter, in case Albertine should still come, and because it was one of the

prettiest things that I possessed, I set out, for the first time for years, on the table by my bed, the turquoise-studded cover which Gilberte had had made for me to hold Bergotte's pamphlet, and which, for so long a time, I had insisted on keeping by me while I slept, with the agate marble. Besides, as much perhaps as Albertine herself, who still did not come, her presence at that moment in an 'alibi' which she had evidently found more attractive, and of which I knew nothing, gave me a painful feeling which, in spite of what I had said, barely an hour before, to Swann, as to my incapacity for being jealous, might, if I had seen my friend at less protracted intervals, have changed into an anxious need to know where, with whom, she was spending her time. I dared not send round to Albertine's house, it was too late, but in the hope that, having supper perhaps with some other girls, in a café, she might take it into her head to telephone to me, I turned the switch and, restoring the connexion to my own room, cut it off between the post office and the porter's lodge to which it was generally switched at that hour. A receiver in the little passage on which Françoise's room opened would have been simpler, less inconvenient, but useless. The advance of civilisation enables each of us to display unsuspected merits or fresh defects which make him dearer or more insupportable to his friends. Thus Dr. Bell's invention had enabled Françoise to acquire an additional defect, which was that of refusing, however important, however urgent the occasion might be, to make use of the telephone. She would manage to disappear whenever anybody was going to teach her how to use it, as people disappear when it is time for them to be vaccinated. And so the telephone was installed in my bedroom, and, that it might not disturb my parents, a rattle had been substituted for the bell. I did not move, for fear of not hearing it sound. So motionless did I remain that, for the first time for months, I noticed the tick of the clock. Françoise came in to make the room tidy. She began talking to me, but I hated her conversation, beneath the uniformly trivial continuity of which my feelings were changing from one minute to another, passing from fear to anxiety; from anxiety to complete disappointment. Belying the words of vague satisfaction which I thought myself obliged to address to her, I could feel that my face was so wretched that I pretended to be suffering from rheumatism, to account for the discrepancy between my feigned indifference and my woebegone expression; besides, I was afraid that her talk, which, for that matter, Françoise carried on in an undertone (not on account of Albertine, for she considered that all possibility of her coming was long past), might prevent me from hearing the saving call which now would not sound. At length Françoise went off to bed; I dismissed her with an abrupt

civility, so that the noise she made in leaving the room should not drown that of the telephone. And I settled down again to listen, to suffer; when we are kept waiting, from the ear which takes in sounds to the mind which dissects and analyses them, and from the mind to the heart, to which it transmits its results, the double journey is so rapid that we cannot even detect its course, and imagine that we have been listening directly with our heart.

I was tortured by the incessant recurrence of my longing, ever more anxious and never to be gratified, for the sound of a call; arrived at the culminating point of a tortuous ascent through the coils of my lonely anguish, from the heart of the populous, nocturnal Paris that had suddenly come close to me, there beside my bookcase, I heard all at once, mechanical and sublime, like, in *Tristan*, the fluttering veil or the shepherd's pipe, the purr of the telephone. I sprang to the instrument, it was Albertine. "I'm not disturbing you, ringing you up at this hour?" "Not at all..." I said, restraining my joy, for her remark about the lateness of the hour was doubtless meant as an apology for coming, in a moment, so late, and did not mean that she was not coming. "Are you coming round?" I asked in a tone of indifference. "Why... no, unless you absolutely must see me."

Part of me which the other part sought to join was in Albertine. It was essential that she come, but I did not tell her so at first; now that we were in communication, I said to myself that I could always oblige her at the last moment either to come to me or to let me hasten to her. "Yes, I am near home," she said, "and miles away from you; I hadn't read your note properly. I have just found it again and was afraid you might be waiting up for me." I felt sure that she was lying, and it was now, in my fury, from a desire not so much to see her as to upset her plans that I determined to make her come. But I felt it better to refuse at first what in a few moments I should try to obtain from her. But where was she? With the sound of her voice were blended other sounds: the braying of a bicyclist's horn, a woman's voice singing, a brass band in the distance rang out as distinctly as the beloved voice, as though to shew me that it was indeed Albertine in her actual surroundings who was beside me at that moment, like a clod of earth with which we have carried away all the grass that was growing from it. The same sounds that I heard were striking her ear also, and were distracting her attention: details of truth, extraneous to the subject under discussion, valueless in themselves, all the more necessary to our perception of the miracle for what it was; elements sober and charming, descriptive of some street in Paris, elements heart-rending also and cruel of some unknown festivity which, after she came away from *Phèdre*, had prevented Albertine from coming

to me. “I must warn you first of all that I don’t in the least want you to come, because, at this time of night, it will be a frightful nuisance...” I said to her, “I’m dropping with sleep. Besides, oh, well, there are endless complications. I am bound to say that there was no possibility of your misunderstanding my letter. You answered that it was all right. Very well, if you hadn’t understood, what did you mean by that?” “I said it was all right, only I couldn’t quite remember what we had arranged. But I see you’re cross with me, I’m sorry. I wish now I’d never gone to *Phèdre*. If I’d known there was going to be all this fuss about it...” she went on, as people invariably do when, being in the wrong over one thing, they pretend to suppose that they are being blamed for another. “I am not in the least annoyed about *Phèdre*, seeing it was I that asked you to go to it.” “Then you are angry with me; it’s a nuisance it’s so late now, otherwise I should have come to you, but I shall call tomorrow or the day after and make it up.” “Oh, please, Albertine, I beg of you not to, after making me waste an entire evening, the least you can do is to leave me in peace for the next few days. I shan’t be free for a fortnight or three weeks. Listen, if it worries you to think that we seem to be parting in anger, and perhaps you are right, after all, then I greatly prefer, all things considered, since I have been waiting for you all this time and you have not gone home yet, that you should come at once. I shall take a cup of coffee to keep myself awake.” “Couldn’t you possibly put it off till tomorrow? Because the trouble is...” As I listened to these words of deprecation, uttered as though she did not intend to come, I felt that, with the longing to see again the velvet-blooming face which in the past, at Balbec, used to point all my days to the moment when, by the mauve September sea, I should be walking by the side of that roseate flower, a very different element was painfully endeavouring to combine. This terrible need of a person, at Combray I had learned to know it in the case of my mother, and to the pitch of wanting to die if she sent word to me by Françoise that she could not come upstairs. This effort on the part of the old sentiment, to combine and form but a single element with the other, more recent, which had for its voluptuous object only the coloured surface, the rosy complexion of a flower of the beach, this effort results often only in creating (in the chemical sense) a new body, which can last for but a few moments. This evening, at any rate, and for long afterwards, the two elements remained apart. But already, from the last words that had reached me over the telephone, I was beginning to understand that Albertine’s life was situated (not in a material sense, of course) at so great a distance from mine that I should always have to make a strenuous exploration before I could lay my hand on her, and, what was

more, organised like a system of earthworks, and, for greater security, after the fashion which, at a later period, we learned to call camouflaged. Albertine, in fact, belonged, although at a slightly higher social level, to that class of persons to whom their door-keeper promises your messenger that she will deliver your letter when she comes in (until the day when you realise that it is precisely she, the person whom you met out of doors, and to whom you have allowed yourself to write, who is the door-keeper. So that she does indeed live (but in the lodge, only) at the address she has given you, which for that matter is that of a private brothel, in which the door-keeper acts as pander), or who gives as her address a house where she is known to accomplices who will not betray her secret to you, from which your letters will be forwarded to her, but in which she does not live, keeps at the most a few articles of toilet. Lives entrenched behind five or six lines of defence, so that when you try to see the woman, or to find out about her, you invariably arrive too far to the right, or to the left, or too early, or too late, and may remain for months on end, for years even, knowing nothing. About Albertine, I felt that I should never find out anything, that, out of that tangled mass of details of fact and falsehood, I should never unravel the truth: and that it would always be so, unless I were to shut her up in prison (but prisoners escape) until the end. This evening, this conviction gave me only a vague uneasiness, in which however I could detect a shuddering anticipation of long periods of suffering to come.

"No," I replied, "I told you a moment ago that I should not be free for the next three weeks — no more to-morrow than any other day." "Very well, in that case... I shall come this very instant... it's a nuisance, because I am at a friend's house, and she..." I saw that she had not believed that I would accept her offer to come, which therefore was not sincere, and I decided to force her hand. "What do you suppose I care about your friend, either come or don't, it's for you to decide, it wasn't I that asked you to come, it was you who suggested it to me." "Don't be angry with me, I am going to jump into a cab now and shall be with you in ten minutes." And so from that Paris out of whose murky depths there had already emanated as far as my room, delimiting the sphere of action of an absent person, a voice which was now about to emerge and appear, after this preliminary announcement, it was that Albertine whom I had known long ago beneath the sky of Balbec, when the waiters of the Grand Hotel, as they laid the tables, were blinded by the glow of the setting sun, when, the glass having been removed from all the windows, every faintest murmur of the evening passed freely from the beach where the last strolling couples still lingered, into the vast

dining-room in which the first diners had not yet taken their places, and, across the mirror placed behind the cashier's desk, there passed the red reflexion of the hull, and lingered long after it the grey reflexion of the smoke of the last steamer for Rivebelle. I no longer asked myself what could have made Albertine late, and, when Françoise came into my room to inform me: "Mademoiselle Albertine is here," if I answered without even turning my head, that was only to conceal my emotion: "What in the world makes Mademoiselle Albertine come at this time of night!" But then, raising my eyes to look at Françoise, as though curious to hear her answer which must corroborate the apparent sincerity of my question, I perceived, with admiration and wrath, that, capable of rivalling Berma herself in the art of endowing with speech inanimate garments and the lines of her face, Françoise had taught their part to her bodice, her hair — the whitest threads of which had been brought to the surface, were displayed there like a birth-certificate — her neck bowed by weariness and obedience. They commiserated her for having been dragged from her sleep and from her warm bed, in the middle of the night, at her age, obliged to bundle into her clothes in haste, at the risk of catching pneumonia. And so, afraid that I might have seemed to be apologising for Albertine's late arrival: "Anyhow, I'm very glad she has come, it's just what I wanted," and I gave free vent to my profound joy. It did not long remain unclouded, when I had heard Françoise's reply. Without uttering a word of complaint, seeming indeed to be doing her best to stifle an irrepressible cough, and simply folding her shawl over her bosom as though she were feeling cold, she began by telling me everything that she had said to Albertine, whom she had not forgotten to ask after her aunt's health. "I was just saying, Monsieur must have been afraid that Mademoiselle was not coming, because this is no time to pay visits, it's nearly morning. But she must have been in some place where she was enjoying herself, because she never even said as much as that she was sorry she had kept Monsieur waiting, she answered me with a devil-may-care look, 'Better late than never!'" And Françoise added, in words that pierced my heart: "When she spoke like that she gave herself away. She would have liked to hide what she was thinking, perhaps, but..."

I had no cause for astonishment. I said, a few pages back, that Françoise rarely paid attention, when she was sent with a message, if not to what she herself had said, which she would willingly relate in detail, at any rate to the answer that we were awaiting. But if, making an exception, she repeated to us the things that our friends had said, however short they might be, she generally arranged, appealing if need be to the expression, the tone that, she assured us,

had accompanied them, to make them in some way or other wounding. At a pinch, she would bow her head beneath an insult (probably quite imaginary) which she had received from a tradesman to whom we had sent her, provided that, being addressed to her as our representative, who was speaking in our name, the insult might indirectly injure us. The only thing would have been to tell her that she had misunderstood the man, that she was suffering from persecution mania and that the shopkeepers were not at all in league against her. However, their sentiments affected me little. It was a very different matter, what Albertine's sentiments were. And, as she repeated the ironical words: "Better late than never!" Françoise at once made me see the friends in whose company Albertine had finished the evening, preferring their company, therefore, to mine. "She's a comical sight, she has a little flat hat on, with those big eyes of hers, it does make her look funny, especially with her cloak which she did ought to have sent to the amender's, for it's all in holes. She amuses me," added, as though laughing at Albertine, Françoise who rarely shared my impressions, but felt a need to communicate her own. I refused even to appear to understand that this laugh was indicative of scorn, but, to give tit for tat, replied, although I had never seen the little hat to which she referred: "What you call a 'little flat hat' is a simply charming..." "That is to say, it's just nothing at all," said Françoise, giving expression, frankly this time, to her genuine contempt. Then (in a mild and leisurely tone so that my mendacious answer might appear to be the expression not of my anger but of the truth), wasting no time, however, so as not to keep Albertine waiting, I heaped upon Françoise these cruel words: "You are excellent," I said to her in a honeyed voice, "you are kind, you have a thousand merits, but you have never learned a single thing since the day when you first came to Paris, either about ladies' clothes or about how to pronounce words without making silly blunders." And this reproach was particularly stupid, for those French words which We are so proud of pronouncing accurately are themselves only blunders made by the Gallic lips which mispronounced Latin or Saxon, our language being merely a defective pronunciation of several others.

The genius of language in a living state, the future and past of French, that is what ought to have interested me in Françoise's mistakes. Her 'amender' for 'mender' was not so curious as those animals that survive from remote ages, such as the whale or the giraffe, and shew us the states through which animal life has passed. "And," I went on, "since you haven't managed to learn in all these years, you never will. But don't let that distress you, it doesn't prevent you from being a very good soul, and making spiced beef with jelly to perfection, and lots

of other things as well. The hat that you think so simple is copied from a hat belonging to the Princesse de Guermantes which cost five hundred francs. However, I mean to give Mlle. Albertine an even finer one very soon." I knew that what would annoy Françoise more than anything was the thought of my spending money upon people whom she disliked. She answered me in a few words which were made almost unintelligible by a sudden attack of breathlessness. When I discovered afterwards that she had a weak heart, how remorseful I felt that I had never denied myself the fierce and sterile pleasure of making these retorts to her speeches. Françoise detested Albertine, moreover, because, being poor, Albertine could not enhance what Françoise regarded as my superior position. She smiled benevolently whenever I was invited by Mme. de Villeparisis. On the other hand, she was indignant that Albertine did not practice reciprocity. It came to my being obliged to invent fictitious presents which she was supposed to have given me, in the existence of which Françoise never for an instant believed. This want of reciprocity shocked her most of all in the matter of food. That Albertine should accept dinners from Mamma, when we were not invited to Mme. Bontemps's (who for that matter spent half her time out of Paris, her husband accepting 'posts' as in the old days when he had had enough of the Ministry), seemed to her an indelicacy on the part of my friend which she rebuked indirectly by repeating a saying current at Combray:

"Let's eat my bread."
"Ay, that's the stuff."
"Let's eat thy bread."
"I've had enough."

I pretended that I was obliged to write a letter. "To whom were you writing?" Albertine asked me as she entered the room. "To a pretty little friend of mine, Gilberte Swann. Don't you know her?" "No." I decided not to question Albertine as to how she had spent the evening, I felt that I should only find fault with her and that we should not have any time left, seeing how late it was already, to be reconciled sufficiently to pass to kisses and caresses. And so it was with these that I chose to begin from the first moment. Besides, if I was a little calmer, I was not feeling happy. The loss of all orientation, of all sense of direction that we feel when we are kept waiting, still continues, after the coming of the person awaited, and, taking the place, inside us, of the calm spirit in which we were picturing her coming as so great a pleasure, prevents us from deriving any from it. Albertine was in the room: my unstrung nerves, continuing to flutter, were still expecting her. "I want a nice kiss, Albertine." "As many as you like,"

she said to me in her kindest manner. I had never seen her looking so pretty. “Another?” “Why, you know it’s a great, great pleasure to me.” “And a thousand times greater to me,” she replied. “Oh! What a pretty book-cover you have there!” “Take it, I give it to you as a keepsake.” “You are too kind...” People would be cured for ever of romanticism if they could make up their minds, in thinking of the girl they love, to try to be the man they will be when they are no longer in love with her. Gilberte’s book-cover, her agate marble, must have derived their importance in the past from some purely inward distinction, since now they were to me a book-cover, a marble like any others.

I asked Albertine if she would like something to drink. “I seem to see oranges over there and water,” she said. “That will be perfect.” I was thus able to taste with her kisses that refreshing coolness which had seemed to me to be better than they, at the Princesse de Guermantes’s. And the orange squeezed into the water seemed to yield to me, as I drank, the secret life of its ripening growth, its beneficent action upon certain states of that human body which belongs to so different a kingdom, its powerlessness to make that body live, but on the other hand the process of irrigation by which it was able to benefit it, a hundred mysteries concealed by the fruit from my senses, but not from my intellect.

When Albertine had gone, I remembered that I had promised Swann that I would write to Gilberte, and courtesy, I felt, demanded that I should do so at once. It was without emotion and as though drawing a line at the foot of a boring school essay, that I traced upon the envelope the name*Gilberte Swann*, with which at one time I used to cover my exercise-books to give myself the illusion that I was corresponding with her. For if, in the past, it had been I who wrote that name, now the task had been deputed by Habit to one of the many secretaries whom she employs. He could write down Gilberte’s name with all the more calm, in that, placed with me only recently by Habit, having but recently entered my service, he had never known Gilberte, and knew only, without attaching any reality to the words, because he had heard me speak of her, that she was a girl with whom I had once been in love.

I could not accuse her of hardness. The person that I now was in relation to her was the clearest possible proof of what she herself had been: the book-cover, the agate marble had simply become for me in relation to Albertine what they had been for Gilberte, what they would have been to anybody who had not suffused them with the glow of an internal flame. But now I felt a fresh disturbance which in its turn destroyed the very real power of things and words. And when Albertine said to me, in a further outburst of gratitude: “I do love

turquoises!" I answered her: "Do not let them die," entrusting to them as to some precious jewel the future of our friendship which however was no more capable of inspiring a sentiment in Albertine than it had been of preserving the sentiment that had bound me in the past to Gilberte.

There appeared about this time a phenomenon which deserves mention only because it recurs in every important period of history. At the same moment when I was writing to Gilberte, M. de Guermantes, just home from his ball, still wearing his helmet, was thinking that next day he would be compelled to go into formal mourning, and decided to proceed a week earlier to the cure that he had been ordered to take. When he returned from it three weeks later (to anticipate for a moment, since I am still finishing my letter to Gilberte), those friends of the Duke who had seen him, so indifferent at the start, turn into a raving anti-Dreyfusard, were left speechless with amazement when they heard him (as though the action of the cure had not been confined to his bladder) answer: "Oh, well, there'll be a fresh trial and he'll be acquitted; you can't sentence a fellow without any evidence against him. Did you ever see anyone so gaga as Forcheville? An officer, leading the French people to the shambles, heading straight for war. Strange times we live in." The fact was that, in the interval, the Duke had met, at the spa, three charming ladies (an Italian princess and her two sisters-in-law). After hearing them make a few remarks about the books they were reading, a play that was being given at the Casino, the Duke had at once understood that he was dealing with women of superior intellect, by whom, as he expressed it, he would be knocked out in the first round. He was all the more delighted to be asked to play bridge by the Princess. But, the moment he entered her sitting room, as he began, in the fervour of his double-dyed anti-Dreyfusism: "Well, we don't hear very much more of the famous Dreyfus and his appeal," his stupefaction had been great when he heard the Princess and her sisters-in-law say: "It's becoming more certain every day. They can't keep a man in prison who has done nothing." "Eh? Eh?" the Duke had gasped at first, as at the discovery of a fantastic nickname employed in this household to turn to ridicule a person whom he had always regarded as intelligent. But, after a few days, as, from cowardice and the spirit of imitation, we shout 'Hallo, Jojotte' without knowing why at a great artist whom we hear so addressed by the rest of the household, the Duke, still greatly embarrassed by the novelty of this attitude, began nevertheless to say: "After all, if there is no evidence against him." The three charming ladies decided that he was not progressing rapidly enough and began to bully him: "But really, nobody with a grain of intelligence can ever have

believed for a moment that there was anything." Whenever any revelation came out that was 'damning' to Dreyfus, and the Duke, supposing that now he was going to convert the three charming ladies, came to inform them of it, they burst out laughing and had no difficulty in proving to him, with great dialectic subtlety, that his argument was worthless and quite absurd. The Duke had returned to Paris a frantic Dreyfusard. And certainly we do not suggest that the three charming ladies were not, in this instance, messengers of truth. But it is to be observed that, every ten years or so, when we have left a man filled with a genuine conviction, it so happens that an intelligent couple, or simply a charming lady, come in touch with him and after a few months he is won over to the opposite camp. And in this respect there are plenty of countries that behave like the sincere man, plenty of countries which we have left full of hatred for another race, and which, six months later, have changed their attitude and broken off all their alliances.

I ceased for some time to see Albertine, but continued, failing Mme. de Guermantes who no longer spoke to my imagination, to visit other fairies and their dwellings, as inseparable from themselves as is from the mollusc that fashioned it and takes shelter within it the pearly or enamelled valve or crenellated turret of its shell. I should not have been able to classify these ladies, the difficulty being that the problem was so vague in its terms and impossible not merely to solve but to set. Before coming to the lady, one had first to approach the faery mansion. Now as one of them was always at home after luncheon in the summer months, before I reached her house I was obliged to close the hood of my cab, so scorching were the sun's rays, the memory of which was, without my realising it, to enter into my general impression. I supposed that I was merely being driven to the Cours-la-Reine; in reality, before arriving at the gathering which a man of wider experience would perhaps have despised, I received, as though on a journey through Italy, a delicious, dazzled sensation from which the house was never afterwards to be separated in my memory. What was more, in view of the heat of the season and the hour, the lady had hermetically closed the shutters of the vast rectangular saloons on the ground floor in which she entertained her friends. I had difficulty at first in recognising my hostess and her guests, even the Duchesse de Guermantes, who in her hoarse voice bade me come and sit down next to her, in a Beauvais armchair illustrating the Rape of Europa. Then I began to make out on the walls the huge eighteenth century tapestries representing vessels whose masts were hollyhocks in blossom, beneath which I sat as though in the palace not of the

Seine but of Neptune, by the brink of the river Oceanus, where the Duchesse de Guermantes became a sort of goddess of the waters. I should never stop if I began to describe all the different types of drawing-room. This example is sufficient to shew that I introduced into my social judgments poetical impressions which I never included among the items when I came to add up the sum, so that, when I was calculating the importance of a drawing-room, my total was never correct.

Certainly, these were by no means the only sources of error, but I have no time left now, before my departure for Balbec (where to my sorrow I am going to make a second stay which will also be my last), to start upon a series of pictures of society which will find their place in due course. I need here say only that to this first erroneous reason (my relatively frivolous existence which made people suppose that I was fond of society) for my letter to Gilberte, and for that reconciliation with the Swann family to which it seemed to point, Odette might very well, and with equal inaccuracy, have added a second. I have suggested hitherto the different aspects that the social world assumes in the eyes of a single person only by supposing that, if a woman who, the other day, knew nobody now goes everywhere, and another who occupied a commanding position is ostracised, one is inclined to regard these changes merely as those purely personal ups and downs of fortune which from time to time bring about in a given section of society, in consequence of speculations on the stock exchange, a crashing downfall or enrichment beyond the dreams of avarice. But there is more in it than that. To a certain extent social manifestations (vastly less important than artistic movements, political crises, the evolution that sweeps the public taste in the direction of the theatre of ideas, then of impressionist painting, then of music that is German and complicated, then of music that is Russian and simple, or of ideas of social service, justice, religious reaction, patriotic outbursts) are nevertheless an echo of them, remote, broken, uncertain, disturbed, changing. So that even drawing-rooms cannot be portrayed in a static immobility which has been conventionally employed up to this point for the study of characters, though these too must be carried along in an almost historical flow. The thirst for novelty that leads men of the world who are more or less sincere in their eagerness for information as to intellectual evolution to frequent the circles in which they can trace its development makes them prefer as a rule some hostess as yet undiscovered, who represents still in their first freshness the hopes of a superior culture so faded and tarnished in the women who for long years have wielded the social sceptre and who, having no secrets

from these men, no longer appeal to their imagination. And every age finds itself personified thus in fresh women, in a fresh group of women, who, closely adhering to whatever may at that moment be the latest object of interest, seem, in their attire, to be at that moment making their first public appearance, like an unknown species, born of the last deluge, irresistible beauties of each new Consulate, each new Directory. But very often the new hostess is simply like certain statesmen who may be in office for the first time but have for the last forty years been knocking at every door without seeing any open, women who were not known in society but who nevertheless had been receiving, for years past, and failing anything better, a few 'chosen friends' from its ranks. To be sure, this is not always the case, and when, with the prodigious flowering of the Russian Ballet, revealing one after another Bakst, Nijinski, Benoist, the genius of Stravinski, Princess Yourbeletieff, the youthful sponsor of all these new great men, appeared bearing on her head an immense, quivering egret, unknown to the women of Paris, which they all sought to copy, one might have supposed that this marvellous creature had been imported in their innumerable baggage, and as their most priceless treasure, by the Russian dancers; but when presently, by her side, in her stage box, we see, at every performance of the 'Russians,' seated like a true fairy godmother, unknown until that moment to the aristocracy, Mme. Verdurin, we shall be able to tell the society people who naturally supposed that Mme. Verdurin had recently entered the country with Diaghileff's troupe, that this lady had already existed in different periods, and had passed through various avatars of which this is remarkable only in being the first that is bringing to pass at last, assured henceforth, and at an increasingly rapid pace, the success so long awaited by the Mistress. In Mme. Swann's case, it is true, the novelty she represented had not the same collective character. Her drawing-room was crystallised round a man, a dying man, who had almost in an instant passed, at the moment when his talent was exhausted, from obscurity to a blaze of glory. The passion for Bergotte's works was unbounded. He spent the whole day, on show, at Mme. Swann's, who would whisper to some influential man: "I shall say a word to him, he will write an article for you." He was, for that matter, quite capable of doing so and even of writing a little play for Mme. Swann. A stage nearer to death, he was not quite so feeble as at the time when he used to come and inquire after my grandmother. This was because intense physical suffering had enforced a regime on him. Illness is the doctor to whom we pay most heed: to kindness, to knowledge we make promises only; pain we obey.

It is true that the Verdurins and their little clan had at this time a far more

vital interest than the drawing-room, faintly nationalist, more markedly literary, and pre-eminently Bergottic, of Mme. Swann. The little clan was in fact the active centre of a long political crisis which had reached its maximum of intensity: Dreyfusism. But society people were for the most part so violently opposed to the appeal that a Dreyfusian house seemed to them as inconceivable a thing as, at an earlier period, a Communard house. The Principessa di Caprarola, who had made Mme. Verdurin's acquaintance over a big exhibition which she had organised, had indeed been to pay her a long call, in the hope of seducing a few interesting specimens of the little clan and incorporating them in her own drawing-room, a call in the course of which the Princess (playing the Duchesse de Guermantes in miniature) had made a stand against current ideas, declared that the people in her world were idiots, all of which, thought Mme. Verdurin, shewed great courage. But this courage was not, in the sequel, to go the length of venturing, under fire of the gaze of nationalist ladies, to bow to Mme. Verdurin at the Balbec races. With Mme. Swann, on the contrary, the anti-Dreyfusards gave her credit for being 'sound,' which, in a woman married to a Jew, was doubly meritorious. Nevertheless, the people who had never been to her house imagined her as visited only by a few obscure Israelites and disciples of Bergotte. In this way we place women far more outstanding than Mme. Swann on the lowest rung of the social ladder, whether on account of their origin, or because they do not care about dinner parties and receptions at which we never see them, and suppose this, erroneously, to be due to their not having been invited, or because they never speak of their social connexions, but only of literature and art, or because people conceal the fact that they go to their houses, or they, to avoid impoliteness to yet other people, conceal the fact that they open their doors to these, in short for a thousand reasons which, added together, make of one or other of them in certain people's eyes, the sort of woman whom one does not know. So it was with Odette. Mme. d'Epinoy, when busy collecting some subscription for the 'Patrie Française,' having been obliged to go and see her, as she would have gone to her dressmaker, convinced moreover that she would find only a lot of faces that were not so much impossible as completely unknown, stood rooted to the ground when the door opened not upon the drawing-room she imagined but upon a magic hall in which, as in the transformation scene of a pantomime, she recognised in the dazzling chorus, half reclining upon divans, seated in armchairs, addressing their hostess by her Christian name, the royalties, the duchesses, whom she, the Princesse d'Epinoy, had the greatest difficulty in enticing into her own drawing-room, and to whom

at that moment, beneath the benevolent eyes of Odette, the Marquis du Lau, Comte Louis de Turenne, Prince Borghese, the Duc d'Estrées, carrying orangeade and cakes, were acting as cupbearers and henchmen. The Princesse d'Epinoy, as she instinctively made people's social value inherent in themselves, was obliged to disincarnate Mme. Swann and reincarnate her in a fashionable woman. Our ignorance of the real existence led by the women who do not advertise it in the newspapers draws thus over certain situations (thereby helping to differentiate one house from another) a veil of mystery. In Odette's case, at the start, a few men of the highest society, anxious to meet Bergotte, had gone to dine, quite quietly, at her house. She had had the tact, recently acquired, not to advertise their presence, they found when they went there, a memory perhaps of the little nucleus, whose traditions Odette had preserved in spite of the schism, a place laid for them at table, and so forth. Odette took them with Bergotte (whom these excursions, incidentally, finished off) to interesting first nights. They spoke of her to various women of their own world who were capable of taking an interest in such a novelty. These women were convinced that Odette, an intimate friend of Bergotte, had more or less collaborated in his works, and believed her to be a thousand times more intelligent than the most outstanding women of the Faubourg, for the same reason that made them pin all their political faith to certain Republicans of the right shade such as M. Doumer and M. Deschanel, whereas they saw France doomed to destruction were her destinies entrusted to the Monarchy men who were in the habit of dining with them, men like Charette or Doudeauville. This change in Odette's status was carried out, so far as she was concerned, with a discretion that made it more secure and more rapid but allowed no suspicion to filter through to the public that is prone to refer to the social columns of the *Gaulois* for evidence as to the advance or decline of a house, with the result that one day, at the dress rehearsal of a play by Bergotte, given in one of the most fashionable theatres in aid of a charity, the really dramatic moment was when people saw enter the box opposite, which was that reserved for the author, and sit down by the side of Mme. Swann, Mme. de Marsantes and her who, by the gradual self-effacement of the Duchesse de Guermantes (glutted with fame, and retiring to save the trouble of going on), was on the way to becoming the lion, the queen of the age, Comtesse Mole. "We never even supposed that she had begun to climb," people said of Odette as they saw Comtesse Molé enter her box, "and look, she has reached the top of the ladder."

So that Mme. Swann might suppose that it was from snobbishness that I was

taking up again with her daughter.

Odette, notwithstanding her brilliant escort, listened with close attention to the play, as though she had come there solely to see it performed, just as in the past she used to walk across the Bois for her health, as a form of exercise. Men who in the past had shewn less interest in her came to the edge of the box, disturbing the whole audience, to reach up to her hand and so approach the imposing circle that surrounded her. She, with a smile that was still more friendly than ironical, replied patiently to their questions, affecting greater calm than might have been expected, a calm which was, perhaps, sincere, this exhibition being only the belated revelation of a habitual and discreetly hidden intimacy. Behind these three ladies to whom every eye was drawn was Bergotte flanked by the Prince d'Agrigente, Comte Louis de Turenne, and the Marquis de Bréauté. And it is easy to understand that, to men who were received everywhere and could not expect any further advancement save as a reward for original research, this demonstration of their merit which they considered that they were making in letting themselves succumb to a hostess with a reputation for profound intellectuality, in whose house they expected to meet all the dramatists and novelists of the day, was more exciting, more lively than those evenings at the Princesse de Guermantes's, which, without any change of programme or fresh attraction, had been going on year after year, all more or less like the one we have described in such detail. In that exalted sphere, the sphere of the Guermantes, in which people were beginning to lose interest, the latest intellectual fashions were not incarnate in entertainments fashioned in their image, as in those sketches that Bergotte used to write for Mme. Swann, or those positive committees of public safety (had society been capable of taking an interest in the Dreyfus case) at which, in Mme. Verdurin's drawing-room, used to assemble Picquart, Clemenceau, Zola, Reinach and Labori.

Gilberte, too, helped to strengthen her mother's position, for an uncle of Swann had just left nearly twenty-four million francs to the girl, which meant that the Faubourg Saint-Germain was beginning to take notice of her. The reverse of the medal was that Swann (who, however, was dying) held Dreyfusard opinions, though this as a matter of fact did not injure his wife, but was actually of service to her. It did not injure her because people said: "He is dotty, his mind has quite gone, nobody pays any attention to him, his wife is the only person who counts and she is charming." But even Swann's Dreyfusism was useful to Odette. Left to herself, she would quite possibly have allowed herself to make advances to fashionable women which would have been her undoing. Whereas

on the evenings when she dragged her husband out to dine in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Swann, sitting sullenly in his corner, would not hesitate, if he saw Odette seeking an introduction to some Nationalist lady, to exclaim aloud: “Really, Odette, you are mad. Why can’t you keep yourself to yourself. It is idiotic of you to get yourself introduced to anti-Semites, I forbid you.” People in society whom everyone else runs after are not accustomed either to such pride or to such ill-breeding. For the first time they beheld some one who thought himself ‘superior’ to them. The fame of Swann’s mutterings was spread abroad, and cards with turned-down corners rained upon Odette. When she came to call upon Mme. d’Arpajon there was a brisk movement of friendly curiosity. “You didn’t mind my introducing her to you,” said Mme. d’Arpajon. “She is so nice. It was Marie de Mar-santes that told me about her.” “No, not at all, I hear she’s so wonderfully clever, and she is charming. I had been longing to meet her; do tell me where she lives.” Mme. d’Arpajon told Mme. Swann that she had enjoyed herself hugely at the latter’s house the other evening, and had joyfully forsaken Mme. de Saint-Euverte for her. And it was true, for to prefer Mme. Swann was to shew that one was intelligent, like going to concerts instead of to tea-parties. But when Mme. de Saint-Euverte called on Mme. d’Arpajon at the same time as Odette, as Mme. de Saint-Euverte was a great snob and Mme. d’Arpajon, albeit she treated her without ceremony, valued her invitations, she did not introduce Odette, so that Mme. de Saint-Euverte should not know who it was. The Marquise imagined that it must be some Princess who never went anywhere, since she had never seen her before, prolonged her call, replied indirectly to what Odette was saying, but Mme. d’Arpajon remained adamant. And when Mme. Saint-Euverte owned herself defeated and took her leave: “I did not introduce you,” her hostess told Odette, “because people don’t much care about going to her parties and she is always inviting one; you would never hear the last of her.” “Oh, that is all right,” said Odette with a pang of regret. But she retained the idea that people did not care about going to Mme. de Saint-Euverte’s, which was to a certain extent true, and concluded that she herself held a position in society vastly superior to Mme. de Saint-Euverte’s, albeit that lady held a very high position, and Odette, so far, had none at all.

That made no difference to her, and, albeit all Mme. de Guermantes’s friends were friends also of Mme. d’Arpajon, whenever the latter invited Mme. Swann, Odette would say with an air of compunction: “I am going to Mme. d’Arpajon’s; you will think me dreadfully old-fashioned, I know, but I hate going, for Mme. de Guermantes’s sake” (whom, as it happened, she had never

met). The distinguished men thought that the fact that Mme. Swann knew hardly anyone in good society meant that she must be a superior woman, probably a great musician, and that it would be a sort of extra distinction, as for a Duke to be a Doctor of Science, to go to her house. The completely unintelligent women were attracted by Odette for a diametrically opposite reason; hearing that she attended the Colonne concerts and professed herself a Wagnerian, they concluded from this that she must be 'rather a lark,' and were greatly excited by the idea of getting to know her. But, being themselves none too firmly established, they were afraid of compromising themselves in public if they appeared to be on friendly terms with Odette, and if, at a charity concert, they caught sight of Mme. Swann, would turn away their heads, deeming it impossible to bow, beneath the very nose of Mme. de Rochechouart, to a woman who was perfectly capable of having been to Bayreuth, which was as good as saying that she would stick at nothing. Everybody becomes different upon entering another person's house. Not to speak of the marvellous metamorphoses that were accomplished thus in the faery palaces, in Mme. Swann's drawing-room, M. de Bréauté, acquiring a sudden importance from the absence of the people by whom he was normally surrounded, by his air of satisfaction at finding himself there, just as if instead of going out to a party he had slipped on his spectacles to shut himself up in his study and read the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the mystic rite that he appeared to be performing in coming to see Odette, M. de Bréauté himself seemed another man. I would have given anything to see what alterations the Duchesse de Montmorency-Luxembourg would undergo in this new environment. But she was one of the people who could never be induced to meet Odette. Mme. de Montmorency, a great deal kinder to Oriane than Oriane was to her, surprised me greatly by saying, with regard to Mme. de Guermantes: "She knows some quite clever people, everybody likes her, I believe that if she had just had a slightly more coherent mind, she would have succeeded in forming a salon. The fact is, she never bothered about it, she is quite right, she is very well off as she is, with everybody running after her." If Mme. de Guermantes had not a 'salon,' what in the world could a 'salon' be? The stupefaction in which this speech plunged me was no greater than that which I caused Mme. de Guermantes when I told her that I should like to be invited to Mme. de Montmorency's. Oriane thought her an old idiot. "I go there," she said, "because I'm forced to, she's my aunt, but you! She doesn't even know how to get nice people to come to her house." Mme. de Guermantes did not realise that nice people left me cold, that when she spoke to me of the Arpajon drawing-

room I saw a yellow butterfly, and the Swann drawing-room (Mme. Swann was at home in the winter months between 6 and 7) a black butterfly, its wings powdered with snow. Even this last drawing-room, which was not a ‘salon’ at all, she considered, albeit out of bounds for herself, permissible to me, on account of the ‘clever people’ to be found there. But Mme. de Luxembourg! Had I already produced something that had attracted attention, she would have concluded that an element of snobbishness may be combined with talent. But I put the finishing touch to her disillusionment; I confessed to her that I did not go to Mme. de Montmorency’s (as she supposed) to ‘take notes’ and ‘make a study.’ Mme. de Guermantes was in this respect no more in error than the social novelists who analyse mercilessly from outside the actions of a snob or supposed snob, but never place themselves in his position, at the moment when a whole social springtime is bursting into blossom in his imagination. I myself, when I sought to discover what was the great pleasure that I found in going to Mme. de Montmorency’s, was somewhat taken aback. She occupied, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, an old mansion ramifying into pavilions which were separated by small gardens. In the outer hall a statuette, said to be by Falconnet, represented a spring which did, as it happened, exude a perpetual moisture. A little farther on the doorkeeper, her eyes always red, whether from grief or neurasthenia, a headache or a cold in the head, never answered your inquiry, waved her arm vaguely to indicate that the Duchess was at home, and let a drop or two trickle from her eyelids into a bowl filled with forget-me-nots. The pleasure that I felt on seeing the statuette, because it reminded me of a ‘little gardener’ in plaster that stood in one of the Combray gardens, was nothing to that which was given me by the great staircase, damp and resonant, full of echoes, like the stairs in certain old-fashioned bathing establishments, with the vases filled with cinerarias — blue against blue — in the entrance hall and most of all the tinkle of the bell, which was exactly that of the bell in Eulalie’s room. This tinkle raised my enthusiasm to a climax, but seemed to me too humble a matter for me to be able to explain it to Mme. de Montmorency, with the result that she invariably saw me in a state of rapture of which she might never guess the cause.

THE HEART’S INTERMISSIONS

My second arrival at Balbec was very different from the other. The manager had come in person to meet me at Pont-a-Couleuvre, reiterating how greatly he valued his titled patrons, which made me afraid that he had ennobled me, until I realised that, in the obscurity of his grammatical memory, *titré* meant simply

attitré, or accredited. In fact, the more new languages he learned the worse he spoke the others. He informed me that he had placed me at the very top of the hotel. “I hope,” he said, “that you will not interpolate this as a want of discourtesy, I was sorry to give you a room of which you are unworthy, but I did it in connexion with the noise, because in that room you will not have anyone above your head to disturb your trapanum (tympanum). Don’t be alarmed, I shall have the windows closed, so that they shan’t bang. Upon that point, I am intolerable” (the last word expressing not his own thought, which was that he would always be found inexorable in that respect, but, quite possibly, the thoughts of his underlings). The rooms were, as it proved, those we had had before. They were no humbler, but I had risen in the manager’s esteem. I could light a fire if I liked (for, by the doctors’ orders, I had left Paris at Easter), but he was afraid there might be ‘fixtures’ in the ceiling. “See that you always wait before alighting a fire until the preceding one is extenuated” (extinct). “The important thing is to take care not to avoid setting fire to the chimney, especially as, to cheer things up a bit, I have put an old china pottage on the mantelpiece which might become insured.”

He informed me with great sorrow of the death of the leader of the Cherbourg bar. “He was an old retainer,” he said (meaning probably ‘campaigner’) and gave me to understand that his end had been hastened by the quickness, otherwise the fastness, of his life. “For some time past I noticed that after dinner he would take a doss in the reading-room” (take a doze, presumably). “The last times, he was so changed that if you hadn’t known who it was, to look at him, he was barely recognisant” (presumably, recognisable).

A happy compensation: the chief magistrate of Caen had just received his ‘bags’ (badge) as Commander of the Legion of Honour. “Surely to goodness, he has capacities, but seems they gave him it principally because of his general ‘impotence.’” There was a mention of this decoration, as it happened, in the previous day’s *Echo de Paris*, of which the manager had as yet read only ‘the first paradox’ (meaning paragraph). The paper dealt admirably with M. Caillaux’s policy. “I consider, they’re quite right,” he said. “He is putting us too much under the thimble of Germany” (under the thumb). As the discussion of a subject of this sort with a hotel-keeper seemed to me boring, I ceased to listen. I thought of the visual images that had made me decide to return to Balbec. They were very different from those of the earlier time, the vision in quest of which I came was as dazzlingly clear as the former had been clouded; they were to prove deceitful nevertheless. The images selected by memory are as arbitrary, as

narrow, as intangible as those which imagination had formed and reality has destroyed. There is no reason why, existing outside ourselves, a real place should conform to the pictures in our memory rather than to those in our dreams. And besides, a fresh reality will perhaps make us forget, detest even, the desires that led us forth upon our journey.

Those that had led me forth to Balbec sprang to some extent from my discovery that the Verdurins (whose invitations I had invariably declined, and who would certainly be delighted to see me, if I went to call upon them in the country with apologies for never having been able to call upon them in Paris), knowing that several of the faithful would be spending the holidays upon that part of the coast, and having, for that reason, taken for the whole season one of M. de Cambremer's houses (la Raspelière), had invited Mme. Putbus to stay with them. The evening on which I learned this (in Paris) I lost my head completely and sent our young footman to find out whether the lady would be taking her Abigail to Balbec with her. It was eleven o'clock. Her porter was a long time in opening the front door, and, for a wonder, did not send my messenger packing, did not call the police, merely gave him a dressing down, but with it the information that I desired. He said that the head lady's maid would indeed be accompanying her mistress, first of all to the waters in Germany, then to Biarritz, and at the end of the season to Mme. Verdurin's. From that moment my mind had been at rest, and glad to have this iron in the fire, I had been able to dispense with those pursuits in the streets, in which I had not that letter of introduction to the beauties I encountered which I should have to the 'Giorgione' in the fact of my having dined that very evening, at the Verdurins', with her mistress. Besides, she might form a still better opinion of me perhaps when she learned that I knew not merely the middle class tenants of la Raspelière but its owners, and above all Saint-Loup who, prevented from commending me personally to the maid (who did not know him by name), had written an enthusiastic letter about me to the Cambremers. He believed that, quite apart from any service that they might be able to render me, Mme. de Cambremer, the Legrandin daughter-in-law, would interest me by her conversation. "She is an intelligent woman," he had assured me. "She won't say anything final" (*final* having taken the place of *sublime* things with Robert, who, every five or six years, would modify a few of his favourite expressions, while preserving the more important intact), "but it is an interesting nature, she has a personality, intuition; she has the right word for everything. Every now and then she is maddening, she says stupid things on purpose, to seem smart, which is all

the more ridiculous as nobody could be less smart than the Cambremers, she is not always in the picture, but, taking her all round, she is one of the people it is more or less possible to talk to."

No sooner had Robert's letter of introduction reached them than the Cambremers, whether from a snobbishness that made them anxious to oblige Saint-Loup, even indirectly, or from gratitude for what he had done for one of their nephews at Doncières, or (what was most likely) from kindness of heart and traditions of hospitality, had written long letters insisting that I should stay with them, or, if I preferred to be more independent, offering to find me lodgings. When Saint-Loup had pointed out that I should be staying at the Grand Hotel, Balbec, they replied that at least they would expect a call from me as soon as I arrived and, if I did not appear, would come without fail to hunt me out and invite me to their garden parties.

No doubt there was no essential connexion between Mme. Putbus's maid and the country round Balbec; she would not be for me like the peasant girl whom, as I strayed alone along the Méséglise way, I had so often sought in vain to evoke, with all the force of my desire.

But I had long since given up trying to extract from a woman as it might be the square root of her unknown quantity, the mystery of which a mere introduction was generally enough to dispel. Anyhow at Balbec, where I had not been for so long, I should have this advantage, failing the necessary connexion which did not exist between the place and this particular woman, that my sense of reality would not be destroyed by familiarity, as in Paris, where, whether in my own home or in a bedroom that I already knew, pleasure indulged in with a woman could not give me for one instant, amid everyday surroundings, the illusion that it was opening the door for me to a new life. (For if habit is a second nature, it prevents us from knowing our original nature, whose cruelties it lacks and also its enchantments.) Now this illusion I might perhaps feel in a strange place, where one's sensibility is revived by a ray of sunshine, and where my ardour would be raised to a climax by the lady's maid whom I desired: we shall see, in the course of events, not only that this woman did not come to Balbec, but that I dreaded nothing so much as the possibility of her coming, so that the principal object of my expedition was neither attained, nor indeed pursued. It was true that Mme. Putbus was not to be at the Verdurins' so early in the season; but these pleasures which we have chosen beforehand may be remote, if their coming is assured, and if, in the interval of waiting, we can devote ourselves to the pastime of seeking to attract, while powerless to love. Moreover, I was not

going to Balbec in the same practical frame of mind as before; there is always less egoism in pure imagination than in recollection; and I knew that I was going to find myself in one of those very places where fair strangers most abound; a beach presents them as numerously as a ball-room, and I looked forward to strolling up and down outside the hotel, on the front, with the same sort of pleasure that Mme. de Guermantes would have procured me if, instead of making other hostesses invite me to brilliant dinner-parties, she had given my name more frequently for their lists of partners to those of them who gave dances. To make female acquaintances at Balbec would be as easy for me now as it had been difficult before, for I was now as well supplied with friends and resources there as I had been destitute of them on my former visit.

I was roused from my meditations by the voice of the manager, to whose political dissertations I had not been listening. Changing the subject, he told me of the chief magistrate's joy on hearing of my arrival, and that he was coming to pay me a visit in my room, that very evening. The thought of this visit so alarmed me (for I was beginning to feel tired) that I begged him to prevent it (which he promised to do, and, as a further precaution, to post members of his staff on guard, for the first night, on my landing). He did not seem overfond of his staff. "I am obliged to keep running after them all the time because they are lacking in inertia. If I was not there they would never stir. I shall post the lift-boy on sentry outside your door." I asked him if the boy had yet become 'head page.' "He is not old enough yet in the house," was the answer. "He has comrades more aged than he is. It would cause an outcry. We must act with granulation in everything. I quite admit that he strikes a good aptitude" (meaning attitude) "at the door of his lift. But he is still a trifle young for such positions. With others in the place of longer standing, it would make a contrast. He is a little wanting in seriousness, which is the primitive quality" (doubtless, the primordial, the most important quality). "He needs his leg screwed on a. bit tighter" (my informant meant to say his head). "Anyhow, he can leave it all to me. I know what I'm about. Before I won my stripes as manager of the Grand Hotel, I smelt powder under M. Paillard." I was impressed by this simile, and thanked the manager for having come in person as far as Pont-à-Couleuvre. "Oh, that's nothing! The loss of time has been quite infinite" (for infinitesimal). Meanwhile, we had arrived.

Complete physical collapse. On the first night, as I was suffering from cardiac exhaustion, trying to master my pain, I bent down slowly and cautiously to take off my boots. But no sooner had I touched the topmost button than my bosom swelled, filled with an unknown, a divine presence, I shook with sobs,

tears streamed from my eyes. The person who came to my rescue, who saved me from barrenness of spirit, was the same who, years before, in a moment of identical distress and loneliness, in a moment when I was no longer in any way myself, had come in, and had restored me to myself, for that person was myself and more than myself (the container that is greater than the contents, which it was bringing to me). I had just perceived, in my memory, bending over my weariness, the tender, preoccupied, dejected face of my grandmother, as she had been on that first evening of our arrival, the face not of that grandmother whom I was astonished — and reproached myself — to find that I regretted so little and who was no more of her than just her name, but of my own true grandmother, of whom, for the first time since that afternoon in the Champs-Elysées on which she had had her stroke, I now recaptured, by an instinctive and complete act of recollection, the living reality. That reality has no existence for us, so long as it has not been created anew by our mind (otherwise the men who have been engaged in a Titanic conflict would all of them be great epic poets); and so, in my insane desire to fling myself into her arms, it was not until this moment, more than a year after her burial, because of that anachronism which so often prevents the calendar of facts from corresponding to that of our feelings, that I became conscious that she was dead. I had often spoken about her in the interval, and thought of her also, but behind my words and thoughts, those of an ungrateful, selfish, cruel youngster, there had never been anything that resembled my grandmother, because, in my frivolity, my love of pleasure, my familiarity with the spectacle of her ill health, I retained only in a potential state the memory of what she had been. At whatever moment we estimate it, the total value of our spiritual nature is more or less fictitious, notwithstanding the long inventory of its treasures, for now one, now another of these is unrealisable, whether we are considering actual treasures or those of the imagination, and, in my own case, fully as much as the ancient name of Guermantes, this other, how far more important item, my real memory of my grandmother. For with the troubles of memory are closely linked the heart’s intermissions. It is, no doubt, the existence of our body, which we may compare to a jar containing our spiritual nature, that leads us to suppose that all our inward wealth, our past joys, all our sorrows, are perpetually in our possession. Perhaps it is equally inexact to suppose that they escape or return. In any case, if they remain within us, it is, for most of the time, in an unknown region where they are of no service to us, and where even the most ordinary are crowded out by memories of a different kind, which preclude any simultaneous occurrence of them in our consciousness. But

if the setting of sensations in which they are preserved be recaptured, they acquire in turn the same power of expelling everything that is incompatible with them, of installing alone in us the self that originally lived them. Now, inasmuch as the self that I had just suddenly become once again had not existed since that evening long ago when my grandmother undressed me after my arrival at Balbec, it was quite naturally, not at the end of the day that had just passed, of which that self knew nothing, but — as though there were in time different and parallel series — without loss of continuity, immediately after the first evening at Balbec long ago, that I clung to the minute in which my grandmother had leaned over me. The self that I then was, that had so long disappeared, was once again so close to me that I seemed still to hear the words that had just been spoken, albeit they were nothing more now than illusion, as a man who is half awake thinks he can still make out close at hand the sounds of his receding dream. I was nothing now but the person who sought a refuge in his grandmother's arms, sought to wipe away the traces of his suffering by giving her kisses, that person whom I should have had as great difficulty in imagining when I was one or other of those persons which, for some time past, I had successively been, as the efforts, doomed in any event to sterility, that I should now have had to make to feel the desires and joys of any of those which, for a time at least, I no longer was. I reminded myself how, an hour before the moment at which my grandmother had stooped down like that, in her dressing gown, to unfasten my boots, as I wandered along the stiflingly hot street, past the pastry-cook's, I had felt that I could never, in my need to feel her arms round me, live through the hour that I had still to spend without her. And now that this same need was reviving in me, I knew that I might wait hour after hour, that she would never again be by my side, I had only just discovered this because I had only just, on feeling her for the first time, alive, authentic, making my heart swell to breaking-point, on finding her at last, learned that I had lost her for ever. Lost for ever; I could not understand and was struggling to bear the anguish of this contradiction: on the one hand an existence, an affection, surviving in me as I had known them, that is to say created for me, a love in whose eyes everything found in me so entirely its complement, its goal, its constant lodestar, that the genius of great men, all the genius that might have existed from the beginning of the world would have been less precious to my grandmother than a single one of my defects; and on the other hand, as soon as I had lived over again that bliss, as though it were present, feeling it shot through by the certainty, throbbing like a physical anguish, of an annihilation that had effaced my image of that affection,

had destroyed that existence, abolished in retrospect our interwoven destiny, made of my grandmother at the moment when I found her again as in a mirror, a mere stranger whom chance had allowed to spend a few years in my company, as it might have been in anyone's else, but to whom, before and after those years, I was, I could be nothing.

Instead of the pleasures that I had been experiencing of late, the only pleasure that it would have been possible for me to enjoy at that moment would have been, by modifying the past, to diminish the sorrows and sufferings of my grandmother's life. Now, I did not recall her only in that dressing-gown, a garment so appropriate as to have become almost their symbol to the labours, foolish no doubt but so lovable also, that she performed for me, gradually I began to remember all the opportunities that I had seized, by letting her perceive, by exaggerating if necessary my sufferings, to cause her a grief which I imagined as being obliterated immediately by my kisses, as though my affection had been as capable as my happiness of creating hers; and, what was worse, I, who could conceive no other happiness now than in finding happiness shed in my memory over the contours of that face, moulded and bowed by love, had set to work with frantic efforts, in the past, to destroy even its most modest pleasures, as on the day when Saint-Loup had taken my grandmother's photograph and I, unable to conceal from her what I thought of the ridiculous childishness of the coquetry with which she posed for him, with her wide-brimmed hat, in a flattering half light, had allowed myself to mutter a few impatient, wounding words, which, I had perceived from a contraction of her features, had carried, had pierced her; it was I whose heart they were rending now that there was no longer possible, ever again, the consolation of a thousand kisses.

But never should I be able to wipe out of my memory that contraction of her face, that anguish of her heart, or rather of my own: for as the dead exist only in us, it is ourselves that we strike without ceasing when we persist in recalling the blows that we have dealt them. To these griefs, cruel as they were. I clung with all my might and main, for I realised that they were the effect of my memory of my grandmother, the proof that this memory which I had of her was really present within me. I felt that I did not really recall her save by grief and should have liked to feel driven yet deeper into me these nails which fastened the memory of her to my consciousness. I did not seek to mitigate my suffering, to set it off, to pretend that my grandmother was only somewhere else and momentarily invisible, by addressing to her photograph (the one taken by Saint-

Loup, which I had beside me) words and prayers as to a person who is separated from us but, retaining his personality, knows us and remains bound to us by an indissoluble harmony. Never did I do this, for I was determined not merely to suffer, but to respect the original form of my suffering, as it had suddenly come upon me unawares, and I wished to continue to feel it, according to its own laws, whenever those strange contradictory impressions of survival and obliteration crossed one another again in my mind. This painful and, at the moment, incomprehensible impression, I knew — not, forsooth, whether I should one day distil a grain of truth from it — but that if I ever should succeed in extracting that grain of truth, it could only be from it, from so singular, so spontaneous an impression, which had been neither traced by my intellect nor attenuated by my pusillanimity, but which death itself, the sudden revelation of death, had, like a stroke of lightning, carved upon me, along a supernatural, inhuman channel, a two-fold and mysterious furrow. (As for the state of forgetfulness of my grandmother in which I had been living until that moment, I could not even think of turning to it to extract truth from it; since in itself it was nothing but a negation, a weakening of the mind incapable of recreating a real moment of life and obliged to substitute for it conventional and neutral images.) Perhaps, however, as the instinct of preservation, the ingenuity of the mind in safeguarding us from grief, had begun already to build upon still smouldering ruins, to lay the first courses of its serviceable and ill-omened structure, I relished too keenly the delight of recalling this or that opinion held by my dear one, recalling them as though she had been able to hold them still, as though she existed, as though I continued to exist for her. But as soon as I had succeeded in falling asleep, at that more truthful hour when my eyes closed to the things of the outer world, the world of sleep (on whose frontier intellect and will, momentarily paralysed, could no longer strive to rescue me from the cruelty of my real impressions) reflected, refracted the agonising synthesis of survival and annihilation, in the mysteriously lightened darkness of my organs. World of sleep in which our inner consciousness, placed in bondage to the disturbances of our organs, quickens the rhythm of heart or breath because a similar dose of terror, sorrow, remorse acts with a strength magnified an hundredfold if it is thus injected into our veins; as soon as, to traverse the arteries of the subterranean city, we have embarked upon the dark current of our own blood as upon an inward Lethe meandering sixfold, huge solemn forms appear to us, approach and glide away, leaving us in tears. I sought in vain for my grandmother’s form when I had stepped ashore beneath the sombre portals; I knew, indeed, that she did still

exist, but with a diminished vitality, as pale as that of memory; the darkness was increasing, and the wind; my father, who was to take me where she was, did not appear. Suddenly my breath failed me, I felt my heart turn to stone; I had just remembered that for week after week I had forgotten to write to my grandmother. What must she be thinking of me? “Great God!” I said to myself, “how wretched she must be in that little room which they have taken for her, no bigger than what one would take for an old servant, where she is all alone with the nurse they have put there to look after her, from which she cannot stir, for she is still slightly paralysed and has always refused to rise from her bed. She must be thinking that I have forgotten her now that she is dead; how lonely she must be feeling, how deserted! Oh, I must run to see her, I mustn’t lose a minute, I mustn’t wait for my father to come, even — but where is it, how can I have forgotten the address, will she know me again, I wonder? How can I have forgotten her all these months?” It is so dark, I shall not find her; the wind is keeping me back; but look I there is my father walking ahead of me; I call out to him: “Where is grandmother? Tell me her address. Is she all right? Are you quite sure she has everything she wants?” “Why,” says my father, “you need not alarm yourself. Her nurse is well trained. We send her a trifle, from time to time, so that she can get your grandmother anything she may need. She asks, sometimes, how you are getting on. She was told that you were going to write a book. She seemed pleased. She wiped away a tear.” And then I fancied I could remember that, a little time after her death, my grandmother had said to me, crying, with a humble expression, like an old servant who has been given notice to leave, like a stranger, in fact: “You will let me see something of you occasionally, won’t you; don’t let too many years go by without visiting me. Remember that you were my grandson, once, and that grandmothers never forget.” And seeing again that face, so submissive, so sad, so tender, which was hers, I wanted to run to her at once and say to her, as I ought to have said to her then: “Why, grandmother, you can see me as often as you like, I have only you in the world, I shall never leave you any more.” What tears my silence must have made her shed through all those months in which I have never been to the place where she lies, what can she have been saying to herself about me? And it is in a voice choked with tears that I too shout to my father: “Quick, quick, her address, take me to her.” But he says: “Well... I don’t know whether you will be able to see her. Besides, you know, she is very frail now, very frail, she is not at all herself, I am afraid you would find it rather painful. And I can’t be quite certain of the number of the avenue.” “But tell me, you who know, it is not true that the dead have ceased to

exist. It can't possibly be true, in spite of what they say, because grandmother does exist still." My father smiled a mournful smile: "Oh, hardly at all, you know, hardly at all. I think that it would be better if you did not go. She has everything that she wants. They come and keep the place tidy for her." "But she is often left alone?" "Yes, but that is better for her. It is better for her not to think, which could only be bad for her. It often hurts her, when she tries to think. Besides, you know, she is quite lifeless now. I shall leave a note of the exact address, so that you can go to her; but I don't see what good you can do there, and I don't suppose the nurse will allow you to see her." "You know quite well I shall always stay beside her, dear, deer, deer, Francis Jammes, fork." But already I had retraced the dark meanderings of the stream, had ascended to the surface where the world of living people opens, so that if I still repeated: "Francis Jammes, deer, deer," the sequence of these words no longer offered me the limpid meaning and logic which they had expressed to me so naturally an instant earlier and which I could not now recall. I could not even understand why the word 'Aias' which my father had just said to me, had immediately signified: "Take care you don't catch cold," without any possible doubt. I had forgotten to close the shutters, and so probably the daylight had awakened me. But I could not bear to have before my eyes those waves of the sea which my grandmother could formerly contemplate for hours on end; the fresh image of their heedless beauty was at once supplemented by the thought that she did not see them; I should have liked to stop my ears against their sound, for now the luminous plenitude of the beach carved out an emptiness in my heart; everything seemed to be saying to me, like those paths and lawns of a public garden in which I had once lost her, long ago, when I was still a child: "We have not seen her," and beneath the hemisphere of the pale vault of heaven I felt myself crushed as though beneath a huge bell of bluish glass, enclosing an horizon within which my grandmother was not. To escape from the sight of it, I turned to the wall, but alas what was now facing me was that partition which used to serve us as a morning messenger, that partition which, as responsive as a violin in rendering every fine shade of sentiment, reported so exactly to my grandmother my fear at once of waking her and, if she were already awake, of not being heard by her and so of her not coming, then immediately, like a second instrument taking up the melody, informed me that she was coming and bade me be calm. I dared not put out my hand to that wall, any more than to a piano on which my grandmother had played and which still throbbed from her touch. I knew that I might knock now, even louder, that I should hear no response, that my

grandmother would never come again. And I asked nothing better of God, if a Paradise exists, than to be able, there, to knock upon that wall the three little raps which my grandmother would know among a thousand, and to which she would reply with those other raps which said: “Don’t be alarmed, little mouse, I know you are impatient, but I am just coming,” and that He would let me remain with her throughout eternity which would not be too long for us.

The manager came in to ask whether I would not like to come down. He had most carefully supervised my ‘placement’ in the dining-room. As he had seen no sign of me, he had been afraid that I might have had another of my choking fits. He hoped that it might be only a little ‘sore throats’ and assured me that he had heard it said that they could be soothed with what he called ‘calyptus.’

He brought me a message from Albertine. She was not supposed to be coming to Balbec that year but, having changed her plans, had been for the last three days not in Balbec itself but ten minutes away by the tram at a neighbouring watering-place. Fearing that I might be tired after the journey, she had stayed away the first evening, but sent word now to ask when I could see her. I inquired whether she had called in person, not that I wished to see her, but so that I might arrange not to see her. “Yes,” replied the manager. “But she would like it to be as soon as possible, unless you have not some quite necessitous reasons. You see,” he concluded, “that everybody here desires you, definitively.” But for my part, I wished to see nobody.

And yet the day before, on my arrival, I had felt myself recaptured by the indolent charm of a seaside existence. The same taciturn lift-boy, silent this time from respect and not from scorn, and glowing with pleasure, had set the lift in motion. As I rose upon the ascending column, I had passed once again through what had formerly been for me the mystery of a strange hotel, in which when you arrive, a tourist without protection or position, each old resident returning to his room, each chambermaid passing along the eery perspective of a corridor, not to mention the young lady from America with her companion, on their way down to dinner, give you a look in which you can read nothing that you would have liked to see. This time on the contrary I had felt the entirely soothing pleasure of passing up through an hotel that I knew, where I felt myself at home, where I had performed once again that operation which we must always start afresh, longer, more difficult than the turning outside in of an eyelid, which consists in investing things with the spirit that is familiar to us instead of their own which we found alarming. Must I always, I had asked myself, little thinking of the sudden change of mood that was in store for me, be going to strange

hotels where I should be dining for the first time, where Habit would not yet have killed upon each landing, outside every door, the terrible dragon that seemed to be watching over an enchanted life, where I should have to approach those strange women whom fashionable hotels, casinos, watering-places, seem to draw together and endow with a common existence.

I had found pleasure even in the thought that the boring chief magistrate was so eager to see me, I could see, on that first evening, the waves, the azure mountain ranges of the sea, its glaciers and its cataracts, its elevation and its careless majesty — merely upon smelling for the first time after so long an interval, as I washed my hands, that peculiar odour of the over-scented soaps of the Grand Hotel — which, seeming to belong at once to the present moment and to my past visit, floated between them like the real charm of a particular form of existence to which one returns only to change one's necktie. The sheets on my bed, too fine, too light, too large, impossible to tuck in, to keep in position, which billowed out from beneath the blankets in moving whorls had distressed me before. Now they merely cradled upon the awkward, swelling fulness of their sails the glorious sunrise, big with hopes, of my first morning. But that sun had not time to appear. In the dead of night, the awful, godlike presence had returned to life. I asked the manager to leave me, and to give orders that no one was to enter my room. I told him that I should remain in bed and rejected his offer to send to the chemist's for the excellent drug. He was delighted by my refusal for he was afraid that other visitors might be annoyed by the smell of the 'calyptus.' It earned me the compliment: "You are in the movement" (he meant: 'in the right'), and the warning: "take care you don't defile yourself at the door, I've had the lock 'elucidated' with oil; if any of the servants dares to knock at your door, he'll be beaten 'black and white.' And they can mark my words, for I'm not a repeater" (this evidently meant that he did not say a thing twice). "But wouldn't you care for a drop of old wine, just to set you up; I have a pig's head of it downstairs" (presumably hogshead). "I shan't bring it to you on a silver dish like the head of Jonathan, and I warn you that it is not Château-Lafite, but it is virtuously equivocal" (virtually equivalent). "And as it's quite light, they might fry you a little sole." I declined everything, but was surprised to hear the name of the fish (sole) pronounced like that of the King of Israel, Saul, by a man who must have ordered so many in his life.

Despite the manager's promises, they brought me in a little later the turned down card of the Marquise de Cambremer. Having come over to see me, the old lady had sent to inquire whether I was there and when she heard that I had

arrived only the day before, and was unwell, had not insisted, but (not without stopping, doubtless, at the chemist's or the haberdasher's, while the footman jumped down from the box and went in to pay a bill or to give an order) had driven back to Féterne, in her old barouche upon eight springs, drawn by a pair of horses. Not infrequently did one hear the rumble and admire the pomp of this carriage in the streets of Balbec and of various other little places along the coast, between Balbec and Féterne. Not that these halts outside shops were the object of these excursions. It was on the contrary some tea-party or garden-party at the house of some squire or functionary, socially quite unworthy of the Marquise. But she, although completely overshadowing, by her birth and wealth, the petty nobility of the district, was in her perfect goodness and simplicity of heart so afraid of disappointing anyone who had sent her an invitation that she would attend all the most insignificant social gatherings in the neighbourhood. Certainly, rather than travel such a distance to listen, in the stifling heat of a tiny drawing-room, to a singer who generally had no voice and whom in her capacity as the lady bountiful of the countryside and as a famous musician she would afterwards be compelled to congratulate with exaggerated warmth, Mme. de Cambremer would have preferred to go for a drive or to remain in her marvellous gardens at Féterne, at the foot of which the drowsy waters of a little bay float in to die amid the flowers. But she knew that the probability of her coming had been announced by the host, whether he was a noble or a free burgess of Maineville-la Teinturière or of Chattoncourt-l'Orgueilleux. And if Mme. de Cambremer had driven out that afternoon without making a formal appearance at the party, any of the guests who had come from one or other of the little places that lined the coast might have seen and heard the Marquise's barouche, which would deprive her of the excuse that she had not been able to get away from Féterne. On the other hand, these hosts might have seen Mme. de Cambremer, time and again, appear at concerts given in houses which, they considered, were no place for her; the slight depreciation caused thereby, in their eyes, to the position of the too obliging Marquise vanished as soon as it was they who were entertaining her, and it was with feverish anxiety that they kept asking themselves whether or not they were going to have her at their 'small party.' What an allaying of the doubts and fears of days if, after the first song had been sung by the daughter of the house or by some amateur on holiday in the neighbourhood, one of the guests announced (an infallible sign that the Marquise was coming to the party) that he had seen the famous barouche and pair drawn up outside the watchmaker's or the chemist's! Thereupon Mme. de Cambremer

(who indeed was to enter before long followed by her daughter-in-law, the guests who were staying with her at the moment and whom she had asked permission, granted with such joy, to bring) shone once more with undiminished lustre in the eyes of her host and hostess, to whom the hoped-for reward of her coming had perhaps been the determining if unavowed cause of the decision they had made a month earlier: to burden themselves with the trouble and expense of an afternoon party. Seeing the Marquise present at their gathering, they remembered no longer her readiness to attend those given by their less deserving neighbours, but the antiquity of her family, the splendour of her house, the rudeness of her daughter-in-law, born Legrandin, who by her arrogance emphasised the slightly insipid good-nature of the dowager. Already they could see in their mind's eye, in the social column of the *Gaulois*, the paragraph which they would draft themselves in the family circle, with all the doors shut and barred, upon 'the little corner of Brittany which is at present a whirl of gaiety, the select party from which the guests could hardly tear themselves away, promising their charming host and hostess that they would soon pay them another visit.' Day after day they watched for the newspaper to arrive, worried that they had not yet seen any notice in it of their party, and afraid lest they should have had Mme. de Cambremer for their other guests alone and not for the whole reading public. At length the blessed day arrived: "The season is exceptionally brilliant this year at Balbec. Small afternoon concerts are the fashion..." Heaven be praised, Mme. de Cambremer's name was spelt correctly, and included 'among others we may mention' but at the head of the list. All that remained was to appear annoyed at this journalistic indiscretion which might get them into difficulties with people whom they had not been able to invite, and to ask hypocritically in Mme. de Cambremer's hearing who could have been so treacherous as to send the notice, upon which the Marquise, every inch the lady bountiful, said: "I can understand your being annoyed, but I must say I am only too delighted that people should know I was at your party."

On the card that was brought me, Mme. de Cambremer had scribbled the message that she was giving an afternoon party 'the day after tomorrow.' To be sure, as recently as the day before yesterday, tired as I was of the social round, it would have been a real pleasure to me to taste it, transplanted amid those gardens in which there grew in the open air, thanks to the exposure of Féterne, fig trees, palms, rose bushes extending down to a sea as blue and calm often as the Mediterranean, upon which the host's little yacht sped across, before the party began, to fetch from the places on the other side of the bay the most

important guests, served, with its awnings spread to shut out the sun, after the party had assembled, as an open air refreshment room, and set sail again in the evening to take back those whom it had brought. A charming luxury, but so costly that it was partly to meet the expenditure that it entailed that Mme. de Cambremer had sought to increase her income in various ways, and notably by letting, for the first time, one of her properties very different from Féterne: la Raspelière. Yes, two days earlier, how welcome such a party, peopled with minor nobles all unknown to me, would have been to me as a change from the 'high life' of Paris. But now pleasures had no longer any meaning for me. And so I wrote to Mme. de Cambremer to decline, just as, an hour ago, I had put off Albertine: grief had destroyed in me the possibility of desire as completely as a high fever takes away one's appetite.... My mother was to arrive on the morrow. I felt that I was less unworthy to live in her company, that I should understand her better, now that an alien and degrading existence had wholly given place to the resurging, heartrending memories that wreathed and ennobled my soul, like her own, with their crown of thorns. I thought so: in reality there is a world of difference between real griefs, like my mother's, which literally crush out our life for years if not for ever, when we have lost the person we love — and those other griefs, transitory when all is said, as mine was to be, which pass as quickly as they have been slow in coming, which we do not realise until long after the event, because, in order to feel them, we need first to understand them; griefs such as so many people feel, from which the grief that was torturing me at this moment differed only in assuming the form of unconscious memory.

That I was one day to experience a grief as profound as that of my mother, we shall find in the course of this narrative, but it was neither then nor thus that I imagined it. Nevertheless, like a principal actor who ought to have learned his part and to have been in his place long beforehand but has arrived only at the last moment and, having read over once only what he has to say, manages to 'gag' so skilfully when his cue comes that nobody notices his unpunctuality, my new-found grief enabled me, when my mother came, to talk to her as though it had existed always. She supposed merely that the sight of these places which I had visited with my grandmother (which was not at all the case) had revived it. For the first time then, and because I felt a sorrow which was nothing compared with hers, but which opened my eyes, I realised and was appalled to think what she must be suffering. For the first time I understood that the fixed and tearless gaze (which made Françoise withhold her sympathy) that she had worn since my grandmother's death had been arrested by that incomprehensible contradiction of

memory and nonexistence. Besides, since she was, although still in deep mourning, more fashionably dressed in this strange place, I was more struck by the transformation that had occurred in her. It is not enough to say that she had lost all her gaiety; melted, congealed into a sort of imploring image, she seemed to be afraid of shocking by too sudden a movement, by too loud a tone, the sorrowful presence that never parted from her. But, what struck me most of all, when I saw her cloak of crape, was — what had never occurred to me in Paris — that it was no longer my mother that I saw before me, but my grandmother. As, in royal and princely families, upon the death of the head of the house his son takes his title and, from being Duc d'Orléans, Prince de Tarente or Prince des Laumes, becomes King of France, Duc de la Trémoïlle, Duc de Guermantes, so by an accession of a different order and more remote origin, the dead man takes possession of the living who becomes his image and successor, carries on his interrupted life. Perhaps the great sorrow that follows, in a daughter such as Mamma, the death of her mother only makes the chrysalis break open a little sooner, hastens the metamorphosis and the appearance of a person whom we carry within us and who, but for this crisis which annihilates time and space, would have come more gradually to the surface. Perhaps, in our regret for her who is no more, there is a sort of auto-suggestion which ends by bringing out on our features resemblances which potentially we already bore, and above all a cessation of our most characteristically personal activity (in my mother, her common sense, the sarcastic gaiety that she inherited from her father) which we did not shrink, so long as the beloved was alive, from exercising, even at her expense, and which counterbalanced the traits that we derived exclusively from her. Once she is dead, we should hesitate to be different, we begin to admire only what she was, what we ouiselves already were only blended with something else, and what in future we are to be exclusively. It is in this sense (and not in that other, so vague, so false, in which the phrase is generally used) that we may say that death is not in vain, that the dead man continues to react upon us. He reacts even more than a living man because, true reality being discoverable only by the mind, being the object of a spiritual operation, we acquire a true knowledge only of things that we are obliged to create anew by thought, things that are hidden' from us in everyday life.... Lastly, in our mourning for our dead we pay an idolatrous worship to the things that they liked. Not only could not my mother bear to be parted from my grandmother's bag, become more precious than if it had been studded with sapphires and diamonds, from her muff, from all those garments which served to enhance their personal resemblance, but even from the

volumes of Mme. de Sévigné which my grandmother took with her everywhere, copies which my mother would not have exchanged for the original manuscript of the letters. She had often teased my grandmother who could never write to her without quoting some phrase of Mme. de Sévigné or Mme. de Beausergent. In each of the three letters that I received from Mamma before her arrival at Balbec, she quoted Mme. de Sévigné to me, as though those three letters had been written not by her to me but by my grandmother and to her. She must at once go out upon the front to see that beach of which my grandmother had spoken to her every day in her letters. Carrying her mother's sunshade, I saw her from my window advance, a sable figure, with timid, pious steps, over the sands that beloved feet had trodden before her, and she looked as though she were going down to find a corpse which the waves would cast up at her feet. So that she should not have to dine by herself, I was to join her downstairs. The chief magistrate and the barrister's widow asked to be introduced to her. And everything that was in any way connected with my grandmother was so precious to her that she was deeply touched, remembered ever afterwards with gratitude what the chief magistrate had said to her, just as she was hurt and indignant that, the barrister's wife had not a word to say in memory of the dead. In reality, the chief magistrate was no more concerned about my grandmother than the barrister's wife. The heartfelt words of the one and the other's silence, for all that my mother imagined so vast a difference between them, were but alternative ways of expressing that indifference which we feel towards the dead. But I think that my mother found most comfort in the words in which, quite involuntarily, I conveyed to her a little of my own anguish. It could not but make Mamma happy (notwithstanding all her affection for myself), like everything else that guaranteed my grandmother survival in our hearts. Daily after this my mother went down and sat upon the beach, so as to do exactly what her mother had done, and read her mother's two favourite books, the*Memoirs* of Madame de Beausergent and the *Letters* of Madame de Sévigné. She, like all the rest of us, could not bear to hear the latter lady called the 'spirituelle Marquise' any more than to hear La Fontaine called 'le Bonhomme.' But when, in reading the *Letters*, she came upon the words: 'My daughter,' she seemed to be listening to her mother's voice.

She had the misfortune, upon one of these pilgrimages during which she did not like to be disturbed, to meet upon the beach a lady from Combray, accompanied by her daughters. Her name was, I think, Madame Poussin. But among ourselves we always referred to her as the 'Pretty Kettle of Fish,' for it

was by the perpetual repetition of this phrase that she warned her daughters of the evils that they were laying up for themselves, saying for instance if one of them was rubbing her eyes: “When you go and get ophthalmia, that will be a pretty kettle of fish.” She greeted my mother from afar with slow and melancholy bows, a sign not of condolence but of the nature of her social training. We might never have lost my grandmother, or had any reason to be anything but happy. Living in comparative retirement at Combray within the walls of her large garden, she could never find anything soft enough to her liking, and subjected to a softening process the words and even the proper names of the French language. She felt ‘spoon’ to be too hard a word to apply to the piece of silver which measured out her syrups, and said, in consequence, ‘spune’; she would have been afraid of hurting the feelings of the sweet singer of Télémaque by calling him bluntly Fénelon — as I myself said with a clear conscience, having had as a friend the dearest and cleverest of men, good and gallant, never to be forgotten by any that knew him, Bertrand de Fénelon — and never said anything but ‘Fénelon,’ feeling that the acute accent added a certain softness. The far from soft son-in-law of this Madame Poussin, whose name I have forgotten, having been a lawyer at Combray, ran off with the contents of the safe, and relieved my uncle among others of a considerable sum of money. But most of the people of Combray were on such friendly terms with the rest of the family that no coolness ensued and her neighbours said merely that they were sorry for Madame Poussin. She never entertained, but whenever people passed by her railings they would stop to admire the delicious shade of her trees’, which was the only thing that could be made out. She gave us no trouble at Balbec, where I encountered her only once, at a moment when she was saying to a daughter who was biting her nails: “When they begin to fester, that will be a pretty kettle of fish.”

While Mamma sat reading on the beach I remained in my room by myself. I recalled the last weeks of my grandmother’s life, and everything connected with them, the outer door of the flat which had been propped open when I went out with her for the last time. In contrast to all this the rest of the world seemed scarcely real and my anguish poisoned everything in it. Finally my mother insisted upon my going out. But at every step, some forgotten view of the casino, of the street along which, as I waited until she was ready, that first evening, I had walked as far as the monument to Duguay-Trouin, prevented me, like a wind against which it is hopeless to struggle, from going farther; I lowered my eyes in order not to see. And after I had recovered my strength a little I turned back

towards the hotel, the hotel in which I knew that it was henceforth impossible that, however long I might wait, I should find my grandmother, whom I had found there before, on the evening of our arrival. As it was the first time that I had gone out of doors, a number of servants whom I had not yet seen were gazing at me curiously. Upon the very threshold of the hotel a young page took off his cap to greet me and at once put it on again. I supposed that Aimé had, to borrow his own expression, ‘given him the office’ to treat me with respect. But I saw a moment later that, as some one else entered the hotel, he doffed it again. The fact of the matter was that this young man had no other occupation in life than to take off and put on his cap, and did it to perfection. Having realised that he was incapable of doing anything else and that in this art he excelled, he practised it as often as was possible daily, which won him a discreet but widespread regard from the visitors, coupled with great regard from the hall porter upon whom devolved the duty of engaging the boys and who, until this rare bird alighted, had never succeeded in finding one who did not receive notice within a week, greatly to the astonishment of Aimé who used to say: “After all, in that job they’ve only got to be polite, which can’t be so very difficult.” The manager required in addition that they should have what he called a good ‘presence,’ meaning thereby that they should not be absent from their posts, or perhaps having heard the word ‘presence’ used of personal appearance. The appearance of the lawn behind the hotel had been altered by the creation of several flower-beds and by the removal not only of an exotic shrub but of the page who, at the time of my former visit, used to provide an external decoration with the supple stem of his figure crowned by the curious colouring of his hair. He had gone with a Polish countess who had taken him as her secretary, following the example of his two elder brothers and their typist sister, torn from the hotel by persons of different race and sex who had been attracted by their charm. The only one remaining was the youngest, whom nobody wanted, because he squinted. He was highly delighted when the Polish countess or the protectors of the other two brothers came on a visit to the hotel at Balbec. For, albeit he was jealous of his brothers, he was fond of them and could in this way cultivate his family affections for a few weeks in the year. Was not the Abbess of Fontevrault accustomed, deserting her nuns for the occasion, to come and partake of the hospitality which Louis XIV offered to that other Mortemart, his mistress, Madame de Montespan? The boy was still in his first year at Balbec; he did not as yet know me, but having heard his comrades of longer standing supplement the word ‘Monsieur,’ when they addressed me, with my surname, he

copied them from the first with an air of satisfaction, whether at shewing his familiarity with a person whom he supposed to be well-known, or at conforming with a custom of which five minutes earlier he had never heard but which he felt it to be indispensable that he should not fail to observe. I could quite well appreciate the charm that this great 'Palace' might have for certain persons. It was arranged like a theatre, and a numerous cast filled it to the doors with animation. For all that the visitor was only a sort of spectator, he was perpetually taking part in the performance, and that not as in one of those theatres where the actors perform a play among the audience, but as though the life of the spectator were going on amid the sumptuous fittings of the stage. The lawn-tennis player might come in wearing a white flannel blazer, the porter would have put on a blue frock coat with silver braid before handing him his letters. If this lawn-tennis player did not choose to walk upstairs, he was equally involved with the actors in having by his side, to propel the lift, its attendant no less richly attired. The corridors on each landing engulfed a flying band of nymphlike chambermaids, fair visions against the sea, at whose modest chambers the admirers of feminine beauty arrived by cunning detours. Downstairs, it was the masculine element that predominated and made this hotel, in view of the extreme and effortless youth of the servants, a sort of Judaeo-Christian tragedy given bodily form and perpetually in performance. And so I could not help repeating to myself, when I saw them, not indeed the lines of Racine that had come into my head at the Princesse de Guermantes's while M. de Vaugoubert stood watching young secretaries of embassy greet M. de Charlus, but other lines of Racine, taken this time not from *Esther* but from *Athalie*: for in the doorway of the hall, what in the seventeenth century was called the portico, 'a flourishing race' of young pages clustered, especially at tea-time, like the young Israelites of Racine's choruses. But I do not believe that one of them could have given even the vague answer that Joas finds to satisfy Athalie when she inquires of the infant Prince: "What is your office, then?" for they had none. At the most, if one had asked of any of them, like the new Queen: "But all this race, what do they then, imprisoned in this place?" he might have said: "I watch the solemn pomp and bear my part." Now and then one of the young supers would approach some more important personage, then this young beauty would rejoin the chorus, and, unless it were the moment for a spell of contemplative relaxation, they would proceed with their useless, reverent, decorative, daily evolutions. For, except on their 'day off,' 'reared in seclusion from the world' and never crossing the threshold, they led the same ecclesiastical existence as the Levites in *Athalie*,

and as I gazed at that ‘young and faithful troop’ playing at the foot of the steps draped with sumptuous carpets, I felt inclined to ask myself whether I were entering the Grand Hotel at Balbec or the Temple of Solomon.

I went straight up to my room. My thoughts kept constantly turning to the last days of my grandmother’s illness, to her sufferings which I lived over again, intensifying them with that element which is even harder to endure than the sufferings of other people, and is added to them by our merciless pity; when we think that we are merely reviving the pains of a beloved friend, our pity exaggerates them; but perhaps it is our pity that is in the right, more than the sufferers’ own consciousness of their pains, they being blind to that tragedy of their own existence which pity sees and deplores. Certainly my pity would have taken fresh strength and far exceeded my grandmother’s sufferings had I known then what I did not know until long afterwards, that my grandmother, on the eve of her death, in a moment of consciousness and after making sure that I was not in the room, had taken Mamma’s hand, and, after pressing her fevered lips to it, had said: “Farewell, my child, farewell for ever.” And this may perhaps have been the memory upon which my mother never ceased to gaze so fixedly. Then more pleasant memories returned to me. She was my grandmother and I was her grandson. Her facial expressions seemed written in a language intended for me alone; she was everything in my life, other people existed merely in relation to her, to the judgment that she would pass upon them; but no, our relations were too fleeting to have been anything but accidental. She no longer knew me, I should never see her again. We had not been created solely for one another, she was a stranger to me. This stranger was before my eyes at the moment in the photograph taken of her by Saint-Loup. Mamma, who had met Albertine, insisted upon my seeing her, because of the nice things that she had said about my grandmother and myself. I had accordingly made an appointment with her. I told the manager that she was coming, and asked him to let her wait for me in the drawing-room. He informed me that he had known her for years, her and her friends, long before they had attained ‘the age of purity’ but that he was annoyed with them because of certain things that they had said about the hotel. “They can’t be very ‘gentlemanly’ if they talk like that. Unless people have been slandering them.” I had no difficulty in guessing that ‘purity’ here meant ‘puberty.’ As I waited until it should be time to go down and meet Albertine, I was keeping my eyes fixed, as upon a picture which one ceases to see by dint of staring at it, upon the photograph that Saint-Loup had taken, when all of a sudden I thought once again: “It’s grandmother, I am her grandson” as a man

who has lost his memory remembers his name, as a sick man changes his personality. Françoise came in to tell me that Albertine was there, and, catching sight of the photograph: “Poor Madame; it’s the very image of her, even the beauty spot on her cheek; that day the Marquis took her picture, she was very poorly, she had been taken bad twice. ‘Whatever happens, Françoise,’ she said, ‘you must never let my grandson know.’ And she kept it to herself, she was always bright with other people. When she was by herself, though, I used to find that she seemed to be in rather monotonous spirits now and then. But that soon passed away. And then she said to me, she said: ‘If anything were to happen to me, he ought to have a picture of me to keep. And I have never had one done in my life.’ So then she sent me along with a message to the Marquis, and he was never to let you know that it was she who had asked him, but could he take her photograph. But when I came back and told her that he would, she had changed her mind again, because she was looking so poorly. ‘It would be even worse,’ she said to me, ‘than no picture at all.’ But she was a clever one, she was, and in the end she got herself up so well in that big shady hat that it didn’t shew at all when she was out of the sun. She was very glad to have that photograph, because at that time she didn’t think she would ever leave Balbec alive. It was no use my saying to her: ‘Madame, it’s wrong to talk like that, I don’t like to hear Madame talk like that,’ she had got it into her head. And, lord, there were plenty days when she couldn’t eat a thing. That was why she used to make Monsieur go and dine away out in the country with M. le Marquis. Then, instead of going in to dinner, she would pretend to be reading a book, and as soon as the Marquis’s carriage had started, up she would go to bed. Some days she wanted to send word to Madame, to come down and see her in time. And then she was afraid of alarming her, as she had said nothing to her about it. ‘It will be better for her to stay with her husband, don’t you see, Françoise.’” Looking me in the face, Françoise asked me all of a sudden if I was ‘feeling indisposed.’ I said that I was not; whereupon she: “And you make me waste my time talking to you. Your visitor has been here all this time. I must go down and tell her. She is not the sort of person to have here. Why, a fast one like that, she may be gone again by now. She doesn’t like to be kept waiting. Oh, nowadays, Mademoiselle Albertine, she’s somebody!” “You are quite wrong, she is a very respectable person, too respectable for this place. But go and tell her that I shan’t be able to see her to-day.”

What compassionate declamations I should have provoked from Françoise if she had seen me cry. I carefully hid myself from her. Otherwise I should have

had her sympathy. But I gave her mine. We do not put ourselves sufficiently in the place of these poor maidservants who cannot bear to see us cry, as though crying were bad for us; or bad, perhaps, for them, for Françoise used to say to me when I was a child: “Don’t cry like that, I don’t like to see you crying like that.” We dislike highfalutin language, asseverations, we are wrong, we close our hearts to the pathos of the countryside, to the legend which the poor servant girl, dismissed, unjustly perhaps, for theft, pale as death, grown suddenly more humble than if it were a crime merely to be accused, unfolds, invoking her father’s honesty, her mother’s principles, her grandam’s counsels. It is true that those same servants who cannot bear our tears will have no hesitation in letting us catch pneumonia, because the maid downstairs likes draughts and it would not be polite to her to shut the windows. For it is necessary that even those who are right, like Françoise, should be wrong also, so that Justice may be made an impossible thing. Even the humble pleasures of servants provoke either the refusal or the ridicule of their masters. For it is always a mere nothing, but foolishly sentimental, unhygienic. And so, they are in a position to say: “How is it that I ask for only this one thing in the whole year, and am not allowed it.” And yet the masters will allow them something far more difficult, which was not stupid and dangerous for the servants — or for themselves. To be sure, the humility of the wretched maid, trembling, ready to confess the crime that she has not committed, saying “I shall leave to-night if you wish it,” is a thing that nobody can resist. But we must learn also not to remain unmoved, despite the solemn, menacing fatuity of the things that she says, her maternal heritage and the dignity of the family ‘kailyard,’ before an old cook draped in the honour of her life and of her ancestry, wielding her broom like a sceptre, donning the tragic buskin, stifling her speech with sobs, drawing herself up with majesty. That afternoon, I remembered or imagined scenes of this sort which I associated with our old servant, and from then onwards, in spite of all the harm that she might do to Albertine, I loved Françoise with an affection, intermittent it is true, but of the strongest kind, the kind that is founded upon pity.

To be sure, I suffered agonies all that day, as I sat gazing at my grandmother’s photograph. It tortured me. Not so acutely, though, as the visit I received that evening from the manager. After I had spoken to him about my grandmother, and he had reiterated his condolences, I heard him say (for he enjoyed using the words that he pronounced wrongly): “Like the day when Madame your grandmother had that sincup, I wanted to tell you about it, because of the other visitors, don’t you know, it might have given the place a bad name.

She ought really to have left that evening. But she begged me to say nothing about it and promised me that she wouldn't have another sincup, or the first time she had one, she would go. The floor waiter reported to me that she had had another. But, lord, you were old friends that we try to please, and so long as nobody made any complaint." And so my grandmother had had syncopes which she had never mentioned to me. Perhaps at the very moment when I was being most beastly to her, when she was obliged, amid her pain, to see that she kept her temper, so as not to anger me, and her looks, so as not to be turned out of the hotel. 'Sincup' was a word which, so pronounced, I should never have imagined, which might perhaps, applied to other people, have struck me as ridiculous, but which in its strange sonorous novelty, like that of an original discord, long retained the faculty of arousing in me the most painful sensations.

Next day I went, at Mamma's request, to lie down for a little on the sands, or rather among the dunes, where one is hidden by their folds, and I knew that Albertine and her friends would not be able to find me. My drooping eyelids allowed but one kind of light to pass, all rosy, the light of the inner walls of the eyes. Then they shut altogether. Whereupon my grandmother appeared to me, seated in an armchair. So feeble she was, she seemed to be less alive than other people. And yet I could hear her breathe; now and again she made a sign to shew that she had understood what we were saying, my father and I. But in vain might I take her in my arms, I failed utterly to kindle a spark of affection in her eyes, a flush of colour in her cheeks. Absent from herself, she appeared somehow not to love me, not to know me, perhaps not to see me. I could not interpret the secret of her indifference, of her dejection, of her silent resentment. I drew my father aside. "You can see, all the same," I said to him, "there's no doubt about it, she understands everything perfectly. It is a perfect imitation of life. If we could have your cousin here, who maintains that the dead don't live. Why, she's been dead for more than a year now, and she's still alive. But why won't she give me a kiss?" "Look her poor head is drooping again." "But she wants to go, now, to the Champs-Elysées." "It's madness!" "You really think it can do her any harm, that she can die any further? It isn't possible that she no longer loves me. I keep on hugging her, won't she ever smile at me again?" "What can you expect, when people are dead they are dead."

A few days later I was able to look with pleasure at the photograph that Saint-Loup had taken of her; it did not revive the memory of what Françoise had told me, because that memory had never left me and I was growing used to it. But with regard to the idea that I had received of the state of her health — so

grave, so painful — on that day, the photograph, still profiting by the ruses that my grandmother had adopted, which succeeded in taking me in even after they had been disclosed to me, shewed me her so smart, so care-free, beneath the hat which partly hid her face, that I saw her looking less unhappy and in better health than I had imagined. And yet, her cheeks having unconsciously assumed an expression of their own, livid, haggard, like the expression of an animal that feels that it has been marked down for slaughter, my grandmother had an air of being under sentence of death, an air involuntarily sombre, unconsciously tragic, which passed unperceived by me but prevented Mamma from ever looking at that photograph, that photograph which seemed to her a photograph not so much of her mother as of her mother's disease, of an insult that the disease was offering to the brutally buffeted face of my grandmother.

Then one day I decided to send word to Albertine that I would see her presently. This was because, on a morning of intense and premature heat, the myriad cries of children at play, of bathers disporting themselves, of newsvendors, had traced for me in lines of fire, in wheeling, interlacing flashes, the scorching beach which the little waves came up one after another to sprinkle with their coolness; then had begun the symphonic concert mingled with the splashing of the water, through which the violins hummed like a swarm of bees that had strayed out over the sea. At once I had longed to hear again Albertine's laughter, to see her friends, those girls outlined against the waves who had remained in my memory the inseparable charm, the typical flora of Balbec; and I had determined to send a line by Françoise to Albertine, making an appointment for the following week, while, gently rising, the sea as each wave uncurled completely buried in layers of crystal the melody whose phrases appeared to be separated from one another like those angel lutanists which on the roof of the Italian cathedral rise between the peaks of blue porphyry and foaming jasper. But on the day on which Albertine came, the weather had turned dull and cold again, and moreover I had no opportunity of hearing her laugh; she was in a very bad temper. "Balbec is deadly dull this year," she said to me. "I don't mean to stay any longer than I can help. You know I've been here since Easter, that's more than a month. There's not a soul here. You can imagine what fun it is." Notwithstanding the recent rain and a sky that changed every moment, after escorting Albertine as far as Epreville, for she was, to borrow her expression, 'on the run' between that little watering-place, where Mme. Bontemps had her villa, and Incarville, where she had been taken 'en pension' by Rosemonde's family, I went off by myself in the direction of the highroad that Mme. de Villeparisis's

carriage had taken when we went for a drive with my grandmother; pools of water which the sun, now bright again, had not dried made a regular quagmire of the ground, and I thought of my grandmother who, in the old days, could not walk a yard without covering herself with mud. But on reaching the road I found a dazzling spectacle. Where I had seen with my grandmother in the month of August only the green leaves and, so to speak, the disposition of the apple-trees, as far as the eye could reach they were in full bloom, marvellous in their splendour, their feet in the mire beneath their ball-dresses, taking no precaution not to spoil the most marvellous pink satin that was ever seen, which glittered in the sunlight; the distant horizon of the sea gave the trees the background of a Japanese print; if I raised my head to gaze at the sky through the blossom, which made its serene blue appear almost violent, the trees seemed to be drawing apart to reveal the immensity of their paradise. Beneath that azure a faint but cold breeze set the blushing bouquets gently trembling. Blue tits came and perched upon the branches and fluttered among the flowers, indulgent, as though it had been an amateur of exotic art and colours who had artificially created this living beauty. But it moved one to tears because, to whatever lengths the artist went in the refinement of his creation, one felt that it was natural, that these apple-trees were there in the heart of the country, like peasants, upon one of the highroads of France. Then the rays of the sun gave place suddenly to those of the rain; they streaked the whole horizon, caught the line of apple-trees in their grey net. But they continued to hold aloft their beauty, pink and blooming, in the wind that had turned icy beneath the drenching rain: it was a day in spring.

Chapter 2

In my fear lest the pleasure I found in this solitary excursion might weaken my memory of my grandmother, I sought to revive this by thinking of some great mental suffering that she had undergone; in response to my appeal that suffering tried to build itself in my heart, threw up vast pillars there; but my heart was doubtless too small for it, I had not the strength to bear so great a grief, my attention was distracted at the moment when it was approaching completion, and its arches collapsed before joining as, before they have perfected their curve, the waves of the sea totter and break.

And yet, if only from my dreams when I was asleep, I might have learned that my grief for my grandmother's death was diminishing, for she appeared in them less crushed by the idea that I had formed of her non-existence. I saw her an invalid still, but on the road to recovery, I found her in better health. And if she made any allusion to what she had suffered, I stopped her mouth with my kisses and assured her that she was now permanently cured. I should have liked to call the sceptics to witness that death is indeed a malady from which one recovers. Only, I no longer found in my grandmother the rich spontaneity of old times. Her words were no more than a feeble, docile response, almost a mere echo of mine; she was nothing more than the reflexion of my own thoughts.

Incapable as I still was of feeling any fresh physical desire, Albertine was beginning nevertheless to inspire in me a desire for happiness. Certain dreams of shared affection, always floating on the surface of our minds, ally themselves readily by a sort of affinity with the memory (provided that this has already become slightly vague) of a woman with whom we have taken our pleasure. This sentiment recalled to me aspects of Albertine's face, more gentle, less gay, quite different from those that would have been evoked by physical desire; and as it was also less pressing than that desire I would gladly have postponed its realisation until the following winter, without seeking to see Albertine again at Balbec, before her departure. But even in the midst of a grief that is still keen physical desire will revive. From my bed, where I was made to spend hours every day resting, I longed for Albertine to come and resume our former

amusements. Do we not see, in the very room in which they have lost a child, its parents soon come together again to give the little angel a baby brother? I tried to distract my mind from this desire by going to the window to look at that day's sea. As in the former year, the seas, from one day to another, were rarely the same. Nor, however, did they at all resemble those of that first year, whether because we were now in spring with its storms, or because even if I had come down at the same time as before, the different, more changeable weather might have discouraged from visiting this coast certain seas, indolent, vaporous and fragile, which I had seen throughout long, scorching days, asleep upon the beach, their bluish bosoms, only, faintly stirring, with a soft palpitation, or, as was most probable, because my eyes, taught by Elstir to retain precisely those elements that before I had deliberately rejected, would now gaze for hours at what in the former year they had been incapable of seeing. The contrast that used then to strike me so forcibly between the country drives that I took with Mme. de Villeparisis and this proximity, fluid, inaccessible, mythological, of the eternal Ocean, no longer existed for me. And there were days now when, on the contrary, the sea itself seemed almost rural. On the days, few and far between, of really fine weather, the heat had traced upon the waters, as it might be across country, a dusty white track, at the end of which the pointed mast of a fishing-boat stood up like a village steeple. A tug, of which one could see only the funnel, was smoking in the distance like a factory amid the fields, while alone against the horizon a convex patch of white, sketched there doubtless by a sail but apparently a solid plastered surface, made one think of the sunlit wall of some isolated building, an hospital or a school. And the clouds and the wind, on days when these were added to the sun, completed if not the error of judgment, at any rate the illusion of the first glance, the suggestion that it aroused in the imagination. For the alternation of sharply defined patches of colour like those produced in the country by the proximity of different crops, the rough, yellow, almost muddy irregularities of the marine surface, the banks, the slopes that hid from sight a vessel upon which a crew of nimble sailors seemed to be reaping a harvest, all this upon stormy days made the ocean a thing as varied, as solid, as broken, as populous, as civilised as the earth with its carriage roads over which I used to travel, and was soon to be travelling again. And once, unable any longer to hold out against my desire, instead of going back to bed I put on my clothes and started off to Incarville, to find Albertine. I would ask her to come with me to Douville, where I would pay calls at Féterne upon Mme. de Cambremer and at la Raspelière upon Mme. Verdurin. Albertine would wait for me meanwhile

upon the beach and we would return together after dark. I went to take the train on the local light railway, of which I had picked up, the time before, from Albertine and her friends all the nicknames current in the district, where it was known as the*Twister* because of its numberless windings, the *Crawler* because the train never seemed to move, the *Transatlantic* because of a horrible siren which it sounded to clear people off the line, the *Decauville* and the *Funi*, albeit there was nothing funicular about it but because it climbed the cliff, and, although not, strictly speaking, a Decauville, had a 60 centimetre gauge, the *B. A. G.* because it ran between Balbec and Grattevast *via* Angerville, the *Tram* and the *T. S. N.* because it was a branch of the Tramways of Southern Normandy. I took my seat in a compartment in which I was alone; it was a day of glorious sunshine, and stiflingly hot; I drew down the blue blind which shut off all but a single ray of sunlight. But immediately I beheld my grandmother, as she had appeared sitting in the train, on our leaving Paris for Balbec, when, in her sorrow at seeing me drink beer, she had preferred not to look, to shut her eyes and pretend to be asleep. I, who in my childhood had been unable to endure her anguish when my grandfather tasted brandy, I had inflicted this anguish upon her, not merely of seeing me accept, at the invitation of another, a drink which she regarded as bad for me, I had forced her to leave me free to swill it down to my heart's content, worse still, by my bursts of passion, my choking fits, I had forced her to help, to advise me to do so, with a supreme resignation of which I saw now in my memory the mute, despairing image, her eyes closed to shut out the sight. So vivid a memory had, like the stroke of a magic wand, restored the mood that I had been gradually outgrowing for some time past; what had I to do with Rosemondé when my lips were wholly possessed by the desperate longing to kiss a dead woman, what had I to say to the Cambremers and Verdurins when my heart was beating so violently because at every moment there was being renewed in it the pain that my grandmother had suffered. I could not remain in the compartment. As soon as the train stopped at Maineville-la-Teinturiere, abandoning all my plans, I alighted. Maineville had of late acquired considerable importance and a reputation all its own, because a director of various casinos, a caterer in pleasure, had set up, just outside it, with a luxurious display of bad taste that could vie with that of any smart hotel, an establishment to which we shall return anon, and which was, to put it briefly, the first brothel for 'exclusive' people that it had occurred to anyone to build upon the coast of France. It was the only one. True, every port has its own, but intended for sailors only, and for lovers of the picturesque whom it amuses to see, next door to the primeval parish

church, the bawd, hardly less ancient, venerable and moss-grown, standing outside her ill-famed door, waiting for the return of the fishing fleet.

Hurrying past the glittering house of ‘pleasure,’ insolently erected there despite the protests which the heads of families had addressed in vain to the mayor, I reached the cliff and followed its winding paths in the direction of Balbec. I heard, without responding to it, the appeal of the hawthorns. Neighbours, in humbler circumstances, of the blossoming apple trees, they found them very coarse, without denying the fresh complexion of the rosy-petalled daughters of those wealthy brewers of cider. They knew that, with a lesser dowry, they were more sought after, and were attractive enough by themselves in their tattered whiteness.

On my return, the hotel porter handed me a black-bordered letter in which the Marquis and the Marquise de Gonneville, the Vicomte and the Vicomtesse d’Amfreville, the Comte and the Comtesse de Berneville, the Marquis and the Marquise de Graincourt, the Comte d’Amenoncourt, the Comtesse de Maineville, the Comte and the Comtesse de Franquetot, the Comtesse de Chaverny *née* d’Aigleville, begged to announce, and from which I understood at length why it had been sent to me when I caught sight of the names of the Marquise de Cambremer née du Mesnil la Guichard, the Marquis and the Marquise de Cambremer, and saw that the deceased, a cousin of the Cambremers, was named Eléonore-Euphrasie-Humbertine de Cambremer, Comtesse de Criquetot. In the whole extent of this provincial family, the enumeration of which filled the closely printed lines, not a single commoner, and on the other hand not a single title that one knew, but the entire muster-roll of the nobles of the region who made their names — those of all the interesting spots in the neighbourhood — ring out their joyous endings in *ville*, in *court*, sometimes on a duller note (in *tot*). Garbed in the roof-tiles of their castle or in the roughcast of their parish church, their nodding heads barely reaching above the vault of the nave or banqueting hall, and then only to cap themselves with the Norman lantern or the dovecot of the pepperpot turret, they gave the impression of having sounded the rallying call to all the charming villages straggling or scattered over a radius of fifty leagues, and to have paraded them in massed formation, without one absentee, one intruder, on the compact, rectangular draught-board of the aristocratic letter edged with black.

My mother had gone upstairs to her room, meditating the phrase of Madame de Sévigné: “I see nothing of the people who seek to distract me from you; the truth of the matter is that they are seeking to prevent me from thinking of you,

and that annoys me."— because the chief magistrate had told her that she ought to find some distraction. To me he whispered: "That's the Princesse de Parme!" My fears were dispelled when I saw that the woman whom the magistrate pointed out to me bore not the slightest resemblance to Her Royal Highness. But as she had engaged a room in which to spend the night after paying a visit to Mme. de Luxembourg, the report of her coming had the effect upon many people of making them take each newcomer for the Princesse de Parme — and upon me of making me go and shut myself up in my attic.

I had no wish to remain there by myself. It was barely four o'clock. I asked Françoise to go and find Albertine, so that she might spend the rest of the afternoon with me.

It would be untrue, I think, to say that there were already symptoms of that painful and perpetual mistrust which Albertine was to inspire in me, not to mention the special character, emphatically Gomorrhan, which that mistrust was to assume. Certainly, even that afternoon — but this was not the first time — I grew anxious as I was kept waiting. Françoise, once she had started, stayed away so long that I began to despair. I had not lighted the lamp. The daylight had almost gone. The wind was making the flag over the casino flap. And, fainter still in the silence of the beach over which the tide was rising, and like a voice rendering and enhancing the troubling emptiness of this restless, unnatural hour, a little barrel organ that had stopped outside the hotel was playing Viennese waltzes. At length Françoise arrived, but unaccompanied. "I have been as quick as I could but she wouldn't come because she didn't think she was looking smart enough. If she was five minutes painting herself and powdering herself, she was an hour by the clock. You'll be having a regular scentshop in here. She's coming, she stayed behind to tidy herself at the glass. I thought I should find her here." There was still a long time to wait before Albertine appeared. But the gaiety, the charm that she shewed on this occasion dispelled my sorrow. She informed me (in contradiction of what she had said the other day) that she would be staying for the whole season and asked me whether we could not arrange, as in the former year, to meet daily. I told her that at the moment I was too melancholy and that I would rather send for her from time to time at the last moment, as I did in Paris. "If ever you're feeling worried, or feel that you want me, do not hesitate," she told me, "to send for me, I shall come immediately, and if you are not afraid of its creating a scandal in the hotel, I shall stay as long as you like." Françoise, in bringing her to me, had assumed the joyous air she wore whenever she had gone out of her way to please me and had been successful. But Albertine

herself contributed nothing to her joy, and the very next day Françoise was to greet me with the profound observation: “Monsieur ought not to see that young lady. I know quite well the sort she is, she’ll land you in trouble.” As I escorted Albertine to the door I saw in the lighted dining-room the Princesse de Parme. I merely gave her a glance, taking care not to be seen. But I must say that I found a certain grandeur in the royal politeness which had made me smile at the Guermantes’. It is a fundamental rule that sovereign princes are at home wherever they are, and this rule is conventionally expressed in obsolete and useless customs such as that which requires the host to carry his hat in his hand, in his own house, to shew that he is not in his own home but in the Prince’s. Now the Princesse de Parme may not have formulated this idea to herself, but she was so imbued with it that all her actions, spontaneously invented to suit the circumstances, pointed to it. When she rose from table she handed a lavish tip to Aimé, as though he had been there solely for her and she were rewarding, before leaving a country house, a footman who had been detailed to wait upon her. Nor did she stop at the tip, but with a gracious smile bestowed on him a few friendly, flattering words, with a store of which her mother had provided her. Another moment, and she would have told him that, just as the hotel was perfectly managed, so Normandy was a garden of roses and that she preferred France to any other country in the world. Another coin slipped from the Princess’s fingers, for the wine waiter, for whom she had sent and to whom she made a point of expressing her satisfaction like a general after an inspection. The lift-boy had come up at that moment with a message for her; he too received a little speech, a smile and a tip, all this interspersed with encouraging and humble words intended to prove to them that she was only one of themselves. As Aimé, the wine waiter, the lift-boy and the rest felt that it would be impolite not to grin from ear to ear at a person who smiled at them, she was presently surrounded by a cluster of servants with whom she chatted kindly; such ways being unfamiliar in smart hotels, the people who passed by, not knowing who she was, thought they beheld a permanent resident at Balbec, who, because of her humble origin, or for professional reasons (she was perhaps the wife of an agent for champagne) was less different from the domestics than the really smart visitors. As for me, I thought of the palace at Parma, of the counsels, partly religious, partly political, given to this Princess, who behaved towards the lower orders as though she had been obliged to conciliate them in order to reign over them one day. All the more, as if she were already reigning.

I went upstairs again to my room, but I was not alone there. I could hear

some one softly playing Schumann. No doubt it happens at times that people, even those whom we love best, become saturated with the melancholy or irritation that emanates from us. There is nevertheless an inanimate object which is capable of a power of exasperation to which no human being will ever attain: to wit, a piano.

Albertine had made me take a note of the dates on which she would be going away for a few days to visit various girl friends, and had made me write down their addresses as well, in case I should want her on one of those evenings, for none of them lived very far away. This meant that when I tried to find her, going from one girl to another, she became more and more entwined in ropes of flowers. I must confess that many of her friends — I was not yet in love with her — gave me, at one watering-place or another, moments of pleasure. These obliging young comrades did not seem to me to be very many. But recently I have thought it over, their names have recurred to me. I counted that, in that one season, a dozen conferred on me their ephemeral favours. A name came back to me later, which made thirteen. I then, with almost a child's delight in cruelty, dwelt upon that number. Alas, I realised that I had forgotten the first of them all, Albertine who no longer existed and who made the fourteenth.

I had, to resume the thread of my narrative, written down the names and addresses of the girls with whom I should find her upon the days when she was not to be at Incarville, but privately had decided that I would devote those days rather to calling upon Mme. Verdurin. In any case, our desire for different women varies in intensity. One evening we cannot bear to let one out of our sight who, after that, for the next month or two, will never enter our mind. Then there is the law of change, for a study of which this is not the place, under which, after an over-exertion of the flesh, the woman whose image haunts our momentary senility is one to whom we would barely give more than a kiss on the brow. As for Albertine, I saw her seldom, and only upon the very infrequent evenings when I felt that I could not live without her. If this desire seized me when she was too far from Balbec for Françoise to be able to go and fetch her, I used to send the lift-boy to Egreville, to La Sogne, to Saint-Frichoux, asking him to finish his work a little earlier than usual. He would come into my room, but would leave the door open for, albeit he was conscientious at his 'job' which was pretty hard, consisting in endless cleanings from five o'clock in the morning, he could never bring himself to make the effort to shut a door, and, if one were to remark to him that it was open, would turn back and, summoning up all his strength, give it a gentle push. With the democratic pride that marked him, a

pride to which, in more liberal careers, the members of a profession that is at all numerous never attain, barristers, doctors and men of letters speaking simply of a ‘brother’ barrister, doctor or man of letters, he, employing, and rightly, a term that is confined to close corporations like the Academy, would say to me in speaking of a page who was in charge of the lift upon alternate days: “I shall get my *colleague*to take my place.” This pride did not prevent him from accepting, with a view to increasing what he called his ‘salary,’ remuneration for his errands, a fact which had made Françoise take a dislike to him: “Yes, the first time you see him you would give him the sacrament without confession, but there are days when his tongue is as smooth as a prison door. It’s your money he’s after.” This was the category in which she had so often included Eulalie, and in which, alas (when I think of all the trouble that was one day to come of it), she already placed Albertine, because she saw me often asking Mamma, on behalf of my impecunious friend, for trinkets and other little presents, which Françoise held to be inexcusable because Mme. Bontemps had only a general servant. A moment later the lift-boy, having removed what I should have called his livery and he called his tunic, appeared wearing a straw hat, carrying a cane, holding himself stiffly erect, for his mother had warned him never to adopt the ‘working-class’ or ‘pageboy’ style. Just as, thanks to books, all knowledge is open to a work-ing man, who ceases to be such when he has finished his work, so, thanks to a ‘boater’ hat and a pair of gloves, elegance became accessible to the lift-boy who, having ceased for the evening to take the visitors upstairs, imagined himself, like a young surgeon who has taken off his overall, or Serjeant Saint-Loup out of uniform, a typical young man about town. He was not for that matter lacking in ambition, or in talent either in manipulating his machine and not bringing you to a standstill between two floors. But his vocabulary was defective. I credited him with ambition because he said in speaking of the porter, under whom he served: “My porter,” in the same tone in which a man who owned what the page would have called a ‘private mansion’ in Paris would have referred to his footman. As for the lift-boy’s vocabulary, it is curious that anybody who heard people, fifty times a day, calling for the ‘lift,’ should never himself call it anything but a ‘left.’ There were certain things about this boy that were extremely annoying: whatever I might be saying to him he would interrupt with a phrase: “I should say so!” or “I say!” which seemed either to imply that my remark was so obvious that anybody would have thought of it, or else to take all the credit for it to himself, as though it were he that was drawing my attention to the subject. “I should say so!” or “I say!” exclaimed with the utmost

emphasis, issued from his lips every other minute, over matters to which he had never given a thought, a trick which irritated me so much that I immediately began to say the opposite to shew him that he knew nothing about it. But to my second assertion, albeit it was incompatible with the first, he replied none the less stoutly: “I should say so!” “I say!” as though these words were inevitable. I found it difficult, also, to forgive him the trick of employing certain terms proper to his calling, which would therefore have sounded perfectly correct in their literal sense, in a figurative sense only, which gave them an air of feeble witticism, for instance the verb to pedal. He never used it when he had gone anywhere on his bicycle. But if, on foot, he had hurried to arrive somewhere in time, then, to indicate that he had walked fast, he would exclaim: “I should say I didn’t half pedal!” The lift-boy was on the small side, clumsily built and by no means good looking. This did not prevent him, whenever one spoke to him of some tall, slim, handsome young man, from saying: “Oh, yes, I know, a fellow who is just my height.” And one day when I was expecting him to bring me the answer to a message, hearing somebody come upstairs, I had in my impatience opened the door of my room and caught sight of a page as beautiful as Endymion, with incredibly perfect features, who was bringing a message to a lady whom I did not know. When the lift-boy returned, in telling him how impatiently I had waited for the answer, I mentioned to him that I had thought I heard him come upstairs but that it had turned out to be a page from the Hôtel de Normandie. “Oh, yes, I know,” he said, “they have only the one, a boy about my build. He’s so like me in face, too, that we’re always being mistaken; anybody would think he was my brother.” Lastly, he always wanted to appear to have understood you perfectly from the first second, which meant that as soon as you asked him to do anything he would say: “Yes, yes, yes, yes, I understand all that,” with a precision and a tone of intelligence which for some time deceived me; but other people, as we get to know them, are like a metal dipped in an acid bath, and we see them gradually lose their good qualities (and their bad qualities too, at times). Before giving him my instructions, I saw that he had left the door open; I pointed this out to him, I was afraid that people might hear us; he acceded to my request and returned, having reduced the gap. “Anything to oblige. But there’s nobody on this floor except us two.” Immediately I heard one, then a second, then a third person go by. This annoyed me partly because of the risk of my being overheard, but more still because I could see that it did not in the least surprise him and was a perfectly normal occurrence. “Yes, that’ll be the maid next door going for her things. Oh, that’s of no importance, it’s the bottler

putting away his keys. No, no, it's nothing, you can say what you want, it's my colleague just going on duty." Then, as the reasons that all these people had for passing did not diminish my dislike of the thought that they might overhear me, at a formal order from me he went, not to shut the door, which was beyond the strength of this bicyclist who longed for a 'motor,' but to push it a little closer to. "Now we shall be quite quiet." So quiet were we that an American lady burst in and withdrew with apologies for having mistaken the number of her room. "You are going to bring this young lady back with you," I told him, after first going and banging the door with all my might (which brought in another page to see whether a window had been left open). "You remember the name: Mlle. Albertine Simonet. Anyhow, it's on the envelope. You need only say to her that it's from me. She will be delighted to come," I added, to encourage him and preserve a scrap of my own self-esteem. "I should say so!" "Not at all, there is not the slightest reason to suppose that she will be glad to come. It's a great nuisance getting here from Berneville." "I understand!" "You will tell her to come with you." "Yes, yes, yes, yes, I understand perfectly," he replied, in that sharp, precise tone which had long ceased to make a 'good impression' upon me because I knew that it was almost mechanical and covered with its apparent clearness plenty of uncertainty and stupidity. "When will you be back?" "Haven't any too much time," said the lift-boy, who, carrying to extremes the grammatical rule that forbids the repetition of personal pronouns before coordinate verbs, omitted the pronoun altogether. "Can go there all right. Leave was stopped this afternoon, because there was a dinner for twenty at luncheon. And it was my turn off duty to-day. So it's all right if I go out a bit this evening. Take my bike with me. Get there in no time." And an hour later he reappeared and said: "Monsieur's had to wait, but the young lady's come with me. She's down below." "Oh, thanks very much; the porter won't be cross with me?" "Monsieur Paul? Doesn't even know where I've been. The head of the door himself can't say a word." But once, after I had told him: "You absolutely must bring her back with you," he reported to me with a smile: "You know, I couldn't find her. She's not there. Couldn't wait any longer; was afraid of getting it like my colleague who was 'missed from the hotel" (for the lift-boy, who used the word 'rejoin' of a profession which one joined for the first time, "I should like to rejoin the post-office," to make up for this, or to mitigate the calamity, were his own career at stake, or to insinuate it more delicately and treacherously were the victim some one else, elided the prefix and said: "I know he's been 'missed"). It was not with any evil intent that he smiled, but from sheer timidity. He thought

that he was diminishing the magnitude of his crime by making a joke of it. In the same way, if he had said to me: "*You know*, I couldn't find her," this did not mean that he really thought that I knew it already. On the contrary, he was all too certain that I did not know it, and, what was more, was afraid to tell me. And so he said 'you know' to ward off the terror which menaced him as he uttered the words that were to bring me the knowledge. We ought never to lose our tempers with people who, when we find fault with them, begin to titter. They do so not because they are laughing at us, but because they are trembling lest we should be angry. Let us shew all pity and tenderness to those who laugh. For all the world like a stroke, the lift-boy's anxiety had wrought in him not merely an apoplectic flush but an alteration in his speech which had suddenly become familiar. He wound up by telling me that Albertine was not at Egreville, that she would not be coming back there before nine o'clock, and that if betimes (which meant, by chance) she came back earlier, my message would be given her, and in any case she would be with me before one o'clock in the morning.

[Translator's note: In the French text of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Volume I ends at this point.]

It was not this evening, however, that my cruel mistrust began to take solid form. No, to make no mystery about it, although the incident did not occur until some weeks later, it arose out of a remark made by Cottard. Albertine and her friends had insisted that day upon dragging me to the casino at Incarville where, as luck would have it, I should not have joined them (having intended to go and see Mme. Verdurin who had invited me again and again), had I not been held up at Incarville itself by a breakdown of the tram which it would take a considerable time to repair. As I strolled up and down waiting for the men to finish working at it, I found myself all of a sudden face to face with Doctor Cottard, who had come to Incarville to see a patient. I almost hesitated to greet him as he had not answered any of my letters. But friendship does not express itself in the same way in different people. Not having been brought up to observe the same fixed rules of behaviour as well-bred people, Cottard was full of good intentions of which one knew nothing, even denying their existence, until the day when he had an opportunity of displaying them. He apologised, had indeed received my letters, had reported my whereabouts to the Verdurins who were most anxious to see me and whom he urged me to go and see. He even proposed to take me to them there and then, for he was waiting for the little local train to take him back there for dinner. As I hesitated and he had still some time before his train (for there was bound to be still a considerable delay), I made him come with me to

the little casino, one of those that had struck me as being so gloomy on the evening of my first arrival, now filled with the tumult of the girls, who, in the absence of male partners, were dancing together. Andrée came sliding along the floor towards me; I was meaning to go off with Cottard in a moment to the Verdurins', when I definitely declined his offer, seized by an irresistible desire to stay with Albertine. The fact was, I had just heard her laugh. And her laugh at once suggested the rosy flesh, the fragrant portals between which it had just made its way, seeming also, as strong, sensual and revealing as the scent of geraniums, to carry with it some microscopic particles of their substance, irritant and secret.

One of the girls, a stranger to me, sat down at the piano, and Andrée invited Albertine to waltz with her. Happy in the thought that I was going to remain in this little casino with these girls, I remarked to Cottard how well they danced together. But he, taking the professional point of view of a doctor and with an ill-breeding which overlooked the fact that they were my friends, although he must have seen me shaking hands with them, replied: "Yes, but parents are very rash to allow their daughters to form such habits. I should certainly never let mine come here. Are they nice-looking, though? I can't see their faces. There now, look," he went on, pointing to Albertine and Andrée who were waltzing slowly, tightly clasped together, "I have left my glasses behind and I don't see very well, but they are certainly keenly roused. It is not sufficiently known that women derive most excitement from their breasts. And theirs, as you see, are completely touching." And indeed the contact had been unbroken between the breasts of Andrée and of Albertine. I do not know whether they heard or guessed Cottard's observation, but they gently broke the contact while continuing to waltz. At that moment Andrée said something to Albertine, who laughed, the same deep and penetrating laugh that I had heard before. But all that it wafted to me this time was a feeling of pain; Albertine appeared to be revealing by it, to be making Andrée share some exquisite, secret thrill. It rang out like the first or the last strains of a ball to which one has not been invited. I left the place with Cottard, distracted by his conversation, thinking only at odd moments of the scene I had just witnessed. This does not mean that Cottard's conversation was interesting. It had indeed, at that moment, become bitter, for we had just seen Doctor du Boulbon go past without noticing us. He had come down to spend some time on the other side of Balbec bay, where he was greatly in demand. Now, albeit Cottard was in the habit of declaring that he did no professional work during the holidays, he had hoped to build up a select practice along the coast, a hope

which du Boulbon's presence there doomed to disappointment. Certainly, the Balbec doctor could not stand in Cottard's way. He was merely a thoroughly conscientious doctor who knew everything, and to whom you could not mention the slightest irritation of the skin without his immediately prescribing, in a complicated formula, the ointment, lotion or liniment that would put you right. As Marie Gineste used to say, in her charming speech, he knew how to 'charm' cuts and sores. But he was in no way eminent. He had indeed caused Cottard some slight annoyance. The latter, now that he was anxious to exchange his Chair for that of Therapeutics, had begun to specialise in toxic actions. These, a perilous innovation in medicine, give an excuse for changing the labels in the chemists' shops, where every preparation is declared to be in no way toxic, unlike its substitutes, and indeed to be disintoxicant. It is the fashionable cry; at the most there may survive below in illegible lettering, like the faint trace of an older fashion, the assurance that the preparation has been carefully disinfected. Toxic actions serve also to reassure the patient, who learns with joy that his paralysis is merely a toxic disturbance. Now, a Grand Duke who had come for a few days to Balbec and whose eye was extremely swollen had sent for Cottard who, in return for a wad of hundred-franc notes (the Professor refused to see anyone for less), had put down the inflammation to a toxic condition and prescribed a disintoxicant treatment. As the swelling did not go down, the Grand Duke fell back upon the general practitioner of Balbec, who in five minutes had removed a speck of dust. The following day, the swelling had gone. A celebrated specialist in nervous diseases was, however, a more dangerous rival. He was a rubicund, jovial person, since, for one thing, the constant society of nervous wrecks did not prevent him from enjoying excellent health, but also so as to reassure his patients by the hearty merriment of his 'Good morning' and 'Good-bye,' while quite ready to lend the strength of his muscular arms to fastening them in strait-waistcoats later on. Nevertheless, whenever you spoke to him at a party, whether of politics or of literature, he would listen to you with a kindly attention, as though he were saying: "What is it all about?" without at once giving an opinion, as though it were a matter for consultation. But anyhow he, whatever his talent might be, was a specialist. And so the whole of Cottard's rage was heaped upon du Boulbon. But I soon bade good-bye to the Verdurins' professional friend, and returned to Balbec, after promising him that I would pay them a visit before long.

The mischief that his remarks about Albertine and Andrée had done me was extreme, but its worst effects were not immediately felt by me, as happens with

those forms of poisoning which begin to act only after a certain time.

Albertine, on the night after the lift-boy had gone in search of her, did not appear, notwithstanding his assurances. Certainly, personal charm is a less frequent cause of love than a speech such as: “No, this evening I shall not be free.” We barely notice this speech if we are with friends; we are gay all the evening, a certain image never enters our mind; during those hours it remains dipped in the necessary solution; when we return home we find the plate developed and perfectly clear. We become aware that life is no longer the life which we would have surrendered for a trifle the day before, because, even if we continue not to fear death, we no longer dare think of a parting.

From, however, not one o’clock in the morning (the limit fixed by the lift-boy), but three o’clock, I no longer felt as in former times the anguish of seeing the chance of her coming diminish. The certainty that she would not now come brought me a complete, refreshing calm; this night was simply a night like all the rest during which I did not see her, such was the idea from which I started. After which, the thought that I should see her in the morning, or some other day, outlining itself upon the blank which I submissively accepted, became pleasant. Sometimes, during these nights of waiting, our anguish is due to a drug which we have taken. The sufferer, misinterpreting his own symptoms, thinks that he is anxious about the woman who fails to appear. Love is engendered in these cases, as are certain nervous maladies, by the inaccurate explanation of a state of discomfort. An explanation which it is useless to correct, at any rate so far as love is concerned, a sentiment which (whatever its cause) is invariably in error.

Next day, when Albertine wrote to me that she had only just got back to Epreville, and so had not received my note in time, and was coming, if she might, to see me that evening, behind the words of her letter, as behind those that she had said to me once over the telephone, I thought I could detect the presence of pleasures, of people whom she had preferred to me. Once again, I was stirred from head to foot by the painful longing to know what she could have been doing, by the latent love which we always carry within us; I almost thought for a moment that it was going to attach me to Albertine, but it confined itself to a stationary throbbing, the last echo of which died away without the machine’s having been set in motion.

I had failed during my first visit to Balbec — and perhaps, for that matter, Andrée had failed equally — to understand Albertine’s character. I had put it down as frivolous, but had not known whether our combined supplications might not succeed in keeping her with us and making her forego a garden-party, a

donkey ride, a picnic. During my second visit to Balbec, I began to suspect that this frivolity was only for show, the garden-party a mere screen, if not an invention. She shewed herself in various colours in the following incident (by which I mean the incident as seen by me, from my side of the glass which was by no means transparent, and without my having any means of determining what reality there was on the other side). Albertine was making me the most passionate protestations of affection. She looked at the time because she had to go and call upon a lady who was at home, it appeared, every afternoon at five o'clock, at Infreville. Tormented by suspicion, and feeling at the same time far from well, I asked Albertine, I implored her to remain with me. It was impossible (and indeed she could wait only five minutes longer) because it would annoy the lady who was far from hospitable, highly susceptible and, said Albertine, a perfect nuisance. "But one can easily cut a call." "No, my aunt has always told me that the chief thing is politeness." "But I have so often seen you being impolite." "It's not the same thing, the lady would be angry with me and would say nasty things about me to my aunt. I'm pretty well in her bad books already. She expects me to go and see her." "But if she's at home every day?" Here Albertine, feeling that she was caught, changed her line of argument. "So she is at home every day. But to-day I've made arrangements to meet some other girls there. It will be less boring that way." "So then, Albertine, you prefer this lady and your friends to me, since, rather than miss paying an admittedly boring call, you prefer to leave me here alone, sick and wretched?" "I don't care if it is boring. I'm going for their sake. I shall bring them home in my trap. Otherwise they won't have any way of getting back." I pointed out to Albertine that there were trains from Infreville up to ten o'clock at night. "Quite true, but don't you see, it is possible that we may be asked to stay to dinner. She is very hospitable." "Very well then, you won't." "I should only make my aunt angry." "Besides, you can dine with her and catch the ten o'clock train." "It's cutting it rather fine." "Then I can never go and dine in town and come back by train. But listen, Albertine. We are going to do something quite simple, I feel that the fresh air will do me good; since you can't give up your lady, I am going to come with you to Infreville. Don't be alarmed, I shan't go as far as the Tour Elisabeth" (the lady's villa), "I shall see neither the lady nor your friends." Albertine started as though she had received a violent blow. For a moment, she was unable to speak. She explained that the sea bathing was not doing her any good. "If you don't want me to come with you?" "How can you say such a thing, you know there's nothing I enjoy more than going out with you." A sudden change of tactics had

occurred. “Since we are going for a drive together,” she said to me, “why not go out in the other direction, we might dine together. It would be so nice. After all, that side of Balbec is much the prettier. I’m getting sick of Infreville and all those little spinach-bed places.” “But your aunt’s friend will be annoyed if you don’t go and see her.” “Very well, let her be.” “No, it is wrong to annoy people.” “But she won’t even notice that I’m not there, she has people every day; I can go to-morrow, the next day, next week, the week after, it’s exactly the same.” “And what about your friends?” “Oh, they’ve cut me often enough. It’s my turn now.” “But from the side you suggest there’s no train back after nine.” “Well, what’s the matter with that? Nine will do perfectly. Besides, one need never think about getting back. We can always find a cart, a bike, if the worse comes to the worst, we have legs.” “We can always find, Albertine, how you go on! Out Infreville way, where the villages run into one another, well and good. But the other way, it’s a very different matter.” “That way too. I promise to bring you back safe and sound.” I felt that Albertine was giving up for my sake some plan arranged beforehand of which she refused to tell me, and that there was some one else who would be as unhappy as I was. Seeing that what she had intended to do was out of the question, since I insisted upon accompanying her, she gave it up altogether. She knew that the loss was not irremediable. For, like all women who have a number of irons in the fire, she had one resource that never failed: suspicion and jealousy. Of course she did not seek to arouse them, quite the contrary. But lovers are so suspicious that they instantly scent out falsehood. With the result that Albertine, being no better than anyone else, knew by experience (without for a moment imagining that she owed her experience to jealousy) that she could always be certain of meeting people again after she had failed to keep an appointment. The stranger whom she was deserting for me would be hurt, would love her all the more for that (though Albertine did not know that this was the reason), and, so as not to prolong the agony, would return to her of his own accord, as I should have done. But I had no desire either to give pain to another, or to tire myself, or to enter upon the terrible course of investigation, of multiform, unending vigilance. “No, Albertine, I do not wish to spoil your pleasure, go to your lady at Infreville, or rather to the person you really mean to see, it is all the same to me. The real reason why I am not coming with you is that you do not wish it, the outing you would be taking with me is not the one you meant to take, which is proved by your having contradicted yourself at least five times without noticing it.” Poor Albertine was afraid that her contradictions, which she had not noticed, had been more serious than they

were. Not knowing exactly what fibs she had told me: “It is quite on the cards that I did contradict myself. The sea air makes me lose my head altogether. I’m always calling things by the wrong names.” And (what proved to me that she would not, now, require many tender affirmations to make me believe her) I felt a stab in my heart as I listened to this admission of what I had but faintly imagined. “Very well, that’s settled, I’m off,” she said in a tragic tone, not without looking at the time to see whether she was making herself late for the other person, now that I had provided her with an excuse for not spending the evening with myself. “It’s too bad of you. I alter all my plans to spend a nice, long evening with you, and it’s you that won’t have it, and you accuse me of telling lies. I’ve never known you to be so cruel. The sea shall be my tomb. I will never see you any more.” (My heart leaped at these words, albeit I was certain that she would come again next day, as she did.) “I shall drown myself, I shall throw myself into the water.” “Like Sappho.” “There you go, insulting me again. You suspect not only what I say but what I do.” “But, my lamb, I didn’t mean anything, I swear to you, you know Sappho flung herself into the sea.” “Yes, yes, you have no faith in me.” She saw that it was twenty minutes to the hour by the clock; she was afraid of missing her appointment, and choosing the shortest form of farewell (for which as it happened she apologised by coming to see me again next day, the other person presumably not being free then), she dashed from the room, crying: “Good-bye for ever,” in a heartbroken tone. And perhaps she was heartbroken. For knowing what she was about at that moment better than I, being at the same time more strict and more indulgent towards herself than I was towards her, she may all the same have had a fear that I might refuse to see her again after the way in which she had left me. And I believe that she was attached to me, so much so that the other person was more jealous than I was.

Some days later, at Balbec, while we were in the ballroom of the casino, there entered Bloch’s sister and cousin, who had both turned out quite pretty, but whom I refrained from greeting on account of my girl friends, because the younger one, the cousin, was notoriously living with the actress whose acquaintance she had made during my first visit. Andrée, at a murmured allusion to this scandal, said to me: “Oh! About that sort of thing I’m like Albertine; there’s nothing we both loathe so much as that sort of thing.” As for Albertine, on sitting down to talk to me upon the sofa, she had turned her back on the disreputable pair. I had noticed, however, that, before she changed her position, at the moment when Mlle. Bloch and her cousin appeared, my friend’s eyes had flashed with that sudden, close attention which now and again imparted to the

face of this frivolous girl a serious, indeed a grave air, and left her pensive afterwards. But Albertine had at once turned towards myself a gaze which nevertheless remained singularly fixed and meditative. Mlle. Bloch and her cousin having finally left the room after laughing and shouting in a loud and vulgar manner, I asked Albertine whether the little fair one (the one who was so intimate with the actress) was not the girl who had won the prize the day before in the procession of flowers. “I don’t know,” said Albertine, “is one of them fair? I must confess they don’t interest me particularly, I have never looked at them. Is one of them fair?” she asked her three girl friends with a detached air of inquiry. When applied to people whom Albertine passed every day on the front, this ignorance seemed to me too profound to be genuine. “They didn’t appear to be looking at us much either,” I said to Albertine, perhaps (on the assumption, which I did not however consciously form, that Albertine loved her own sex), to free her from any regret by pointing out to her that she had not attracted the attention of these girls and that, generally speaking, it is not customary even for the most vicious of women to take an interest in girls whom they do not know. “They weren’t looking at us!” was Albertine’s astonished reply. “Why, they did nothing else the whole time.” “But you can’t possibly tell,” I said to her, “you had your back to them.” “Very well, and what about that?” she replied, pointing out to me, set in the wall in front of us, a large mirror which I had not noticed and upon which I now realised that my friend, while talking to me, had never ceased to fix her troubled, preoccupied eyes.

Ever since the day when Cottard had accompanied me into the little casino at Incarville, albeit I did not share the opinion that he had expressed, Albertine had seemed to me different; the sight of her made me lose my temper. I myself had changed, quite as much as she had changed in my eyes. I had ceased to bear her any good will; to her face, behind her back when there was a chance of my words being repeated to her, I spoke of her in the most insulting language. There were, however, intervals of calmer feeling. One day I learned that Albertine and Andrée had both accepted an invitation to Elstir’s. Feeling certain that this was in order that they might, on the return journey, amuse themselves like schoolgirls on holiday by imitating the manners of fast young women, and in so doing find an unmaidenly pleasure the thought of which wrung my heart, without announcing my intention, to embarrass them and to deprive Albertine of the pleasure on which she was reckoning, I paid an unexpected call at his studio. But I found only Andrée there. Albertine had chosen another day when her aunt was to go there with her. Then I said to myself that Cottard must have been mistaken;

the favourable impression that I received from Andrée's presence there without her friend remained with me and made me feel more kindly disposed towards Albertine. But this feeling lasted no longer than the healthy moments of delicate people subject to passing maladies, who are prostrated again by the merest trifle. Albertine incited Andrée to actions which, without going very far, were perhaps not altogether innocent; pained by this suspicion, I managed in the end to repel it. No sooner was I healed of it than it revived under another form. I had just seen Andrée, with one of those graceful gestures that came naturally to her, lay her head coaxingly on Albertine's shoulder, kiss her on the throat, half shutting her eyes; or else they had exchanged a glance; a remark had been made by somebody who had seen them going down together to bathe: little trifles such as habitually float in the surrounding atmosphere where the majority of people absorb them all day long without injury to their health or alteration of their mood, but which have a morbid effect and breed fresh sufferings in a nature predisposed to receive them. Sometimes even without my having seen Albertine again, without anyone's having spoken to me about her, there would flash from my memory some vision of her with Gisèle in an attitude which had seemed to me innocent at the time; it was enough now to destroy the peace of mind that I had managed to recover, I had no longer any need to go and breathe dangerous germs outside, I had, as Cottard would have said, supplied my own toxin. I thought then of all that I had been told about Swann's love for Odette, of the way in which Swann had been tricked all his life. Indeed, when I come to think of it, the hypothesis that made me gradually build up the whole of Albertine's character and give a painful interpretation to every moment of a life that I could not control in its entirety, was the memory, the rooted idea of Mme. Swann's character, as it had been described to me. These accounts helped my imagination, in after years, to take the line of supposing that Albertine might, instead of being a good girl, have had the same immorality, the same faculty of deception as a reformed prostitute, and I thought of all the sufferings that would in that case have been in store for me had I ever really been her lover.

One day, outside the Grand Hotel, where we were gathered on the front, I had just been addressing Albertine in the harshest, most humiliating language, and Rosemonde was saying: "Oh, how you have changed your mind about her; why, she used to be everything, it was she who ruled the roost, and now she isn't even fit to be thrown to the dogs." I was beginning, in order to make my attitude towards Albertine still more marked, to say all the nicest things I could think of to Andrée, who, if she was tainted with the same vice, seemed to me to have

more excuse for it since she was sickly and neurasthenic, when we saw emerging at the steady trot of its pair of horses into the street at right angles to the front, at the corner of which we were standing, Mme. de Cambremer's barouche. The chief magistrate who, at that moment, was advancing towards us, sprang back upon recognising the carriage, in order not to be seen in our company; then, when he thought that the Marquise's eye might catch his, bowed to her with an immense sweep of his hat. But the carriage, instead of continuing, as might have been expected, along the Rue de la Mer, disappeared through the gate of the hotel. It was quite ten minutes later when the lift-boy, out of breath, came to announce to me: "It's the Marquise de Camembert, she's come here to see Monsieur. I've been up to the room, I looked in the reading-room, I couldn't find Monsieur anywhere. Luckily I thought of looking on the beach." He had barely ended this speech when, followed by her daughter-in-law and by an extremely ceremonious gentleman, the Marquise advanced towards me, coming on probably from some afternoon tea-party in the neighbourhood, and bowed down not so much by age as by the mass of costly trinkets with which she felt it more sociable and more befitting her rank to cover herself, in order to appear as 'well dressed' as possible to the people whom she went to visit. It was in fact that 'landing' of the Cambremers at the hotel which my grandmother had so greatly dreaded long ago when she wanted us not to let Legrandin know that we might perhaps be going to Balbec. Then Mamma used to laugh at these fears inspired by an event which she considered impossible. And here it was actually happening, but by different channels and without Legrandin's having had any part in it. "Do you mind my staying here, if I shan't be in your way?" asked Albertine (in whose eyes there lingered, brought there by the cruel things I had just been saying to her, a pair of tears which I observed without seeming to see them, but not without rejoicing inwardly at the sight), "there is something I want to say to you." A hat with feathers, itself surmounted by a sapphire pin, was perched haphazard upon Mme. de Cambremer's wig, like a badge the display of which was necessary but sufficient, its place immaterial, its elegance conventional and its stability superfluous. Notwithstanding the heat, the good lady had put on a jet cloak, like a dalmatic, over which hung an ermine stole the wearing of which seemed to depend not upon the temperature and season, but upon the nature of the ceremony. And on Mme. de Cambremer's bosom a baronial torse, fastened to a chain, dangled like a pectoral cross. The gentleman was an eminent lawyer from Paris, of noble family, who had come down to spend a few days with the Cambremers. He was one of those men whom their

vast professional experience inclines to look down upon their profession, and who say, for instance: “I know that I am a good pleader, so it no longer amuses me to plead,” or: “I’m no longer interested in operating, I know that I’m a good operator.” Men of intelligence, *artists*, they see themselves in their maturity, richly endowed by success, shining with that intellect, that artistic nature which their professional brethren recognise in them and which confer upon them a kind of taste and discernment. They form a passion for the paintings not of a great artist, but of an artist who nevertheless is highly distinguished, and spend upon the purchase of his work the large sums that their career procures for them. Le Sidaner was the artist chosen by the Cambremers’ friend, who incidentally was a delightful person. He talked well about books, but not about the books of the true masters, those who have mastered themselves. The only irritating habit that this amateur displayed was his constant use of certain ready made expressions, such as ‘for the most part,’ which gave an air of importance and incompleteness to the matter of which he was speaking. Madame de Cambremer had taken the opportunity, she told me, of a party which some friends of hers had been giving that afternoon in the Balbec direction to come and call upon me, as she had promised Robert de Saint-Loup. “You know he’s coming down to these parts quite soon for a few days: His uncle Charlus is staying near here with his sister-in-law, the Duchesse de Luxembourg, and M. de Saint-Loup means to take the opportunity of paying his aunt a visit and going to see his old regiment, where he is very popular, highly respected. We often have visits from officers who are never tired of singing his praises. How nice it would be if you and he would give us the pleasure of coming together to Féterne.” I presented Albertine and her friends. Mme. de Cambremer introduced us all to her daughter-in-law. The latter, so frigid towards the petty nobility with whom her seclusion at Féterne forced her to associate, so reserved, so afraid of compromising herself, held out her hand to me with a radiant smile, safe as she felt herself and delighted at seeing a friend of Robert de Saint-Loup, whom he, possessing a sharper social intuition than he allowed to appear, had mentioned to her as being a great friend of the Guermantes. So, unlike her mother-in-law, Mme. de Cambremer employed two vastly different forms of politeness. It was at the most the former kind, dry, insupportable, that she would have conceded me had I met her through her brother Legrandin. But for a friend of the Guermantes she had not smiles enough. The most convenient room in the hotel for entertaining visitors was the reading-room, that place once so terrible into which I now went a dozen times every day, emerging freely, my own master, like those mildly afflicted lunatics

who have so long been inmates of an asylum that the superintendent trusts them with a latchkey. And so I offered to take Mme. de Cambremer there. And as this room no longer filled me with shyness and no longer held any charm for me, since the faces of things change for us like the faces of people, it was without the slightest emotion that I made this suggestion. But she declined it, preferring to remain out of doors, and we sat down in the open air, on the terrace of the hotel. I found there and rescued a volume of Madame de Sévigné which Mamma had not had time to carry off in her precipitate flight, when she heard that visitors had called for me. No less than my grandmother, she dreaded these invasions of strangers, and, in her fear of being too late to escape if she let herself be seen, would fly from the room with a rapidity which always made my father and me laugh at her. Madame de Cambremer carried in her hand, with the handle of a sunshade, a number of embroidered bags, a hold-all, a gold purse from which there dangled strings of garnets, and a lace handkerchief. I could not help thinking that it would be more convenient for her to deposit them on a chair; but I felt that it would be unbecoming and useless to ask her to lay aside the ornaments of her pastoral visitation and her social priesthood. We gazed at the calm sea upon which, here and there, a few gulls floated like white petals. Because of the ‘mean level’ to which social conversation reduces us and also of our desire to attract not by means of those qualities of which we are ourselves unaware but of those which, we suppose, ought to be appreciated by the people who are with us, I began instinctively to talk to Mme. de Cambremer née Legrandin in the strain in which her brother might have talked. “They appear,” I said, referring to the gulls, “as motionless and as white as water-lilies.” And indeed they did appear to be offering a lifeless object to the little waves which tossed them about, so much so that the waves, by contrast, seemed in their pursuit of them to be animated by a deliberate intention, to have acquired life. The dowager Marquise could not find words enough to do justice to the superb view of the sea that we had from Balbec, or to say how she envied it, she who from la Raspelière (where for that matter she was not living that year) had only such a distant glimpse of the waves. She had two remarkable habits, due at once to her exalted passion for the arts (especially for the art of music), and to her want of teeth. Whenever she talked of aesthetic subjects her salivary glands — like those of certain animals when in rut — became so overcharged that the old lady’s edentulous mouth allowed to escape from the corners of her faintly moustached lips a trickle of moisture for which that was not the proper place. Immediately she drew it in again with a deep sigh, like a person recovering his

breath. Secondly, if her subject were some piece of music of surpassing beauty, in her enthusiasm she would raise her arms and utter a few decisive opinions, vigorously chewed and at a pinch issuing from her nose. Now it had never occurred to me that the vulgar beach at Balbec could indeed offer a ‘seascape,’ and Mme. de Cambremer’s simple words changed my ideas in that respect. On the other hand, as I told her, I had always heard people praise the matchless view from la Raspelière, perched on the summit of the hill, where, in a great drawing-room with two fireplaces, one whole row of windows swept the gardens, and, through the branches of the trees, the sea as far as Balbec and beyond it, and the other row the valley. “How nice of you to say so, and how well you put it: the sea through the branches. It is exquisite, one would say... a painted fan.” And I gathered from a deep breath intended to catch the falling spittle and dry the moustaches, that the compliment was sincere. But the Marquise *née* Legrandin remained cold, to shew her contempt not for my words but for those of her mother-in-law. Besides, she not only despised the other’s intellect but deplored her affability, being always afraid that people might not form a sufficiently high idea of the Cambremers. “And how charming the name is,” said I. “One would like to know the origin of all those names.” “That one I can tell you,” the old lady answered modestly. “It is a family place, it came from my grandmother Arrachepel, not an illustrious family, but a decent and very old country stock.” “What! Not illustrious!” her daughter-in-law tartly interrupted her. “A whole window in Bayeux cathedral is filled with their arms, and the principal church at Avranches has their tombs. If these old names interest you,” she added, “you’ve come a year too late. We managed to appoint to the living of Criquetot, in spite of all the difficulties about changing from one diocese to another, the parish priest of a place where I myself have some land, a long way from here, Combray, where the worthy cleric felt that he was becoming neurasthenic. Unfortunately, the sea air was no good to him at his age; his neurasthenia grew worse and he has returned to Combray. But he amused himself while he was our neighbour in going about looking up all the old charters, and he compiled quite an interesting little pamphlet on the place names of the district. It has given him a fresh interest, too, for it seems he is spending his last years in writing a great work upon Combray and its surroundings. I shall send you his pamphlet on the surroundings of Féterne. It is worthy of a Benedictine. You will find the most interesting things in it about our old Raspelière, of which my mother-in-law speaks far too modestly.” “In any case, this year,” replied the dowager Mme. de Cambremer, “la Raspelière is no longer ours and does not belong to me. But I

can see that you have a painter's instincts; I am sure you sketch, and I should so like to shew you Féterne, which is far finer than la Raspelière." For as soon as the Cambremers had let this latter residence to the Verdurins, its commanding situation had at once ceased to appear to them as it had appeared for so many years past, that is to say to offer the advantage, without parallel in the neighbourhood, of looking out over both sea and valley, and had on the other hand, suddenly and retrospectively, presented the drawback that one had always to go up or down hill to get to or from it. In short, one might have supposed that if Mme. de Cambremer had let it, it was not so much to add to her income as to spare her horses. And she proclaimed herself delighted at being able at last to have the sea always so close at hand, at Féterne, she who for so many years (forgetting the two months that she spent there) had seen it only from up above and as though in a panorama. "I am discovering it at my age," she said, "and how I enjoy it! It does me a world of good. I would let la Raspelière for nothing so as to be obliged to live at Féterne."

"To return to more interesting topics," went on Legrandin's sister, who addressed the old Marquise as 'Mother,' but with the passage of years had come to treat her with insolence, "you mentioned water-lilies: I suppose you know Claude Monet's pictures of them. What a genius! They interest me particularly because near Combray, that place where I told you I had some land..." But she preferred not to talk too much about Combray. "Why! That must be the series that Elstir told us about, the greatest painter of this generation," exclaimed Albertine, who had said nothing so far. "Ah! I can see that this young lady loves the arts," cried Mme. de Cambremer and, drawing a long breath, recaptured a trail of spittle. "You will allow me to put Le Sidaner before him, Mademoiselle," said the lawyer, smiling with the air of an expert. And, as he had enjoyed, or seen people enjoy, years ago, certain 'daring' work by Elstir, he added: "Elstir was gifted, indeed he was one of the advance guard, but for some reason or other he never kept up, he has wasted his life." Mme. de Cambremer disagreed with the lawyer, so far as Elstir was concerned, but, greatly to the annoyance of her guest, bracketed Monet with Le Sidaner. It would be untrue to say that she was a fool; she was overflowing with a kind of intelligence that meant nothing to me. As the sun was beginning to set, the seagulls were now yellow, like the water-lilies on another canvas of that series by Monet. I said that I knew it, and (continuing to copy the diction of her brother, whom I had not yet dared to name) added that it was a pity that she had not thought of coming a day earlier, for, at the same hour, there would have been a Poussin light for her to admire.

Had some Norman squireen, unknown to the Guermantes, told her that she ought to have come a day earlier, Mme. de Cambremer-Legrandin would doubtless have drawn herself up with an offended air. But I might have been far more familiar still, and she would have been all smiles and sweetness; I might in the warmth of that fine afternoon devour my fill of that rich honey cake which Mme. de Cambremer so rarely was and which took the place of the dish of pastry that it had not occurred to me to offer my guests. But the name of Poussin, without altering the amenity of the society lady, called forth the protests of the connoisseur. On hearing that name, she produced six times in almost continuous succession that little smack of the tongue against the lips which serves to convey to a child who is misbehaving at once a reproach for having begun and a warning not to continue. “In heaven’s name, after a painter like Monet, who is an absolute genius, don’t go and mention an old hack without a vestige of talent, like Poussin. I don’t mind telling you frankly that I find him the deadliest bore. I mean to say, you can’t really call that sort of thing painting. Monet, Degas, Manet, yes, there are painters if you like! It is a curious thing,” she went on, fixing a scrutinous and ecstatic gaze upon a vague point in space where she could see what was in her mind, “it is a curious thing, I used at one time to prefer Manet. Nowadays, I still admire Manet, of course, but I believe I like Monet even more. Oh! The *Cathedrals*!” She was as scrupulous as she was condescending in informing me of the evolution of her taste. And one felt that the phases through which that taste had evolved were not, in her eyes, any less important than the different manners of Monet himself. Not that I had any reason to feel flattered by her taking me into her confidence as to her preferences, for even in the presence of the narrowest of provincial ladies she could not remain for five minutes without feeling the need to confess them. When a noble dame of Avranches, who would have been incapable of distinguishing between Mozart and Wagner, said in Mme. de Cambremer’s hearing: “We saw nothing of any interest while we were in Paris, we went once to the Opéra-Comique, they were doing *Pelléas et Mélisande*, it’s dreadful stuff,” Mme. de Cambremer not only boiled with rage but felt obliged to exclaim: “Not at all, it’s a little gem,” and to ‘argue the point.’ It was perhaps a Combray habit which she had picked up from my grandmother’s sisters, who called it ‘fighting in the good cause,’ and loved the dinner-parties at which they knew all through the week that they would have to defend their idols against the Philistines. Similarly, Mme. de Cambremer liked to ‘fly into a passion’ and wrangle about art, as other people do about politics. She stood up for Debussy as she would have stood up for a woman friend whose

conduct had been criticised. She must however have known very well that when she said: “Not at all, it’s a little gem,” she could not improvise in the other lady, whom she was putting in her place, the whole progressive development of artistic culture on the completion of which they would come naturally to an agreement without any need of discussion. “I must ask Le Sidaner what he thinks of Poussin,” the lawyer remarked to me. “He’s a regular recluse, never opens his mouth, but I know how to get things out of him.”

“Anyhow,” Mme. de Cambremer went on, “I have a horror of sunsets, they’re so romantic, so operatic. That is why I can’t abide my mother-in-law’s house, with its tropical plants. You will see it, it’s just like a public garden at Monte-Carlo. That’s why I prefer your coast, here. It is more sombre, more sincere; there’s a little lane from which one doesn’t see the sea. On rainy days, there’s nothing but mud, it’s a little world apart. It’s just the same at Venice, I detest the Grand Canal and I don’t know anything so touching as the little alleys. But it’s all a question of one’s surroundings.” “But,” I remarked to her, feeling that the only way to rehabilitate Poussin in Mme. de Cambremer’s eyes was to inform her that he was once more in fashion, “M. Degas assures us that he knows nothing more beautiful than the Poussins at Chantilly.” “Indeed? I don’t know the ones at Chantilly,” said Mme. de Cambremer who had no wish to differ from Degas, “but I can speak about the ones in the Louvre, which are appalling.” “He admires them immensely too.” “I must look at them again. My impressions of them are rather distant,” she replied after a moment’s silence, and as though the favourable opinion which she was certain, before very long, to form of Poussin would depend, not upon the information that I had just communicated to her, but upon the supplementary and, this time, final examination that she intended to make of the Poussins in the Louvre in order to be in a position to change her mind. Contenting myself with what was a first step towards retraction since, if she did not yet admire the Poussins, she was adjourning the matter for further consideration, in order not to keep her on tenterhooks any longer, I told her mother-in-law how much I had heard of the wonderful flowers at Féterne. In modest terms she spoke of the little presbytery garden that she had behind the house, into which in the mornings, by simply pushing open a door, she went in her wrapper to feed her peacocks, hunt for new-laid eggs, and gather the zinnias or roses which, on the sideboard, framing the creamed eggs or fried fish in a border of flowers, reminded her of her garden paths. “It is true, we have a great many roses,” she told me, “our rose garden is almost too near the house, there are days when it makes my head ache. It is nicer

on the terrace at la Raspelière where the breeze carries the scent of the roses, but it is not so heady." I turned to her daughter-in-law. "It is just like *Pelléas*," I said to her, to gratify her taste for the modern, "that scent of roses wafted up to the terraces. It is so strong in the score that, as I suffer from hay-fever and rose-fever, it sets me sneezing every time I listen to that scene."

"What a marvellous thing *Pelléas* is," cried Mme. de Cambremer, "I'm mad about it;" and, drawing closer to me with the gestures of a savage woman seeking to captivate me, using her fingers to pick out imaginary notes, she began to hum something which, I supposed, represented to her the farewells of *Pelléas*, and continued with a vehement persistence as though it had been important that Mme. de Cambremer should at that moment remind me of that scene or rather should prove to me that she herself remembered it. "I think it is even finer than *Parsifal*," she added, "because in *Parsifal* the most beautiful things are surrounded with a sort of halo of melodious phrases, which are bad simply because they are melodious." "I know, you are a great musician, Madame," I said to the dowager. "I should so much like to hear you play." Mme. de Cambremer-Legrandin gazed at the sea so as not to be drawn into the conversation. Being of the opinion that what her mother-in-law liked was not music at all, she regarded the talent, a sham talent according to her, though in reality of the very highest order that the other was admitted to possess as a technical accomplishment devoid of interest. It was true that Chopin's only surviving pupil declared, and with justice, that the Master's style of playing, his 'feeling' had been transmitted, through herself, to Mme. de Cambremer alone, but to play like Chopin was far from being a recommendation in the eyes of Legran-din's sister, who despised nobody so much as the Polish composer. "Oh! They are flying away," exclaimed Albertine, pointing to the gulls which, casting aside for a moment their flowery incognito, were rising in a body towards the sun. "Their giant wings from walking hinder them," quoted Mme. de Cambremer, confusing the seagull with the albatross. "I do love them; I used to see them at Amsterdam," said Albertine. "They smell of the sea, they come and breathe the salt air through the paving stones even." "Oh! So you have been in Holland, you know the Vermeers?" Mme. de Cambremer asked imperiously, in the tone in which she would have said: "You know the Guermantes?" for snobbishness in changing its subject does not change its accent. Albertine replied in the negative, thinking that they were living people. But her mistake was not apparent. "I should be delighted to play to you," Mme. de Cambremer said to me. "But you know I only play things that no longer appeal to your generation. I

was brought up in the worship of Chopin," she said in a lowered tone, for she was afraid of her daughter-in-law, and knew that to the latter, who considered that Chopin was not music,*playing him well or badly were meaningless terms. She admitted that her mother-in-law had technique, was a finished pianist. "Nothing will ever make me say that she is a musician," was Mme. de Cambremer-Legrandin's conclusion. Because she considered herself 'advanced,' because (hi matters of art only) "one could never move far enough to the Left," she said, she maintained not merely that music progressed, but that it progressed along one straight line, and that Debussy was in a sense a super-Wagner, slightly more advanced again than Wagner. She did not take into account the fact that if Debussy was not as independent of Wagner as she herself was to suppose in a few years' time, because we must always make use of the weapons that we have captured to free ourselves finally from the foe whom we have for the moment overpowered, he was seeking nevertheless, after the feeling of satiety that people were beginning to derive from work that was too complete, in which everything was expressed, to satisfy an opposite demand. There were theories of course, to support this reaction for the time being, like those theories which, in politics, come to the support of the laws against religious communities, of wars in the East (unnatural teaching, the Yellow Peril, etc., etc.). People said that an age of speed required rapidity in art, precisely as they might have said that the next war could not last longer than a fortnight, or that the coming of railways would kill the little places beloved of the coaches, which the motor-car, for all that, was to restore to favour. Composers were warned not to strain the attention of their audience, as though we had not at our disposal different degrees of attention, among which it rests precisely with the artist himself to arouse the highest. For the people who yawn with boredom after ten lines of a mediocre article have journeyed year after year to Bayreuth to listen to the Ring. Besides, the day was to come when, for a season, Debussy would be pronounced as trivial as Massenet, and the trills of Mélisande degraded to the level of Manon's. For theories and schools, like microbes and corpuscles, devour one another and by their warfare ensure the continuity of existence. But that time was still to come.*

As on the Stock Exchange, when a rise occurs, a whole group of securities benefit by it, so a certain number of despised composers were gaining by the reaction, either because they did not deserve such scorn, or simply — which enabled one to be original when one sang their praises — because they had incurred it. And people even went the length of seeking out, in an isolated past, men of independent talent upon whose reputation the present movement did not

seem calculated to have any influence, but of whom one of the new masters was understood to have spoken favourably. Often it was because a master, whoever he may be, however exclusive his school, judges in the light of his own untutored instincts, does justice to talent wherever it be found, or rather not so much to talent as to some agreeable inspiration which he has enjoyed in the past, which reminds him of a precious moment in his adolescence. Or, it may be, because certain artists of an earlier generation have in some fragment of their work realised something that resembles what the master has gradually become aware that he himself meant at one time to create. Then he sees the old master as a sort of precursor; he values in him, under a wholly different form, an effort that is momentarily, partially fraternal. There are bits of Turner in the work of Poussin, we find a phrase of Flaubert in Montesquieu. Sometimes, again, this rumoured predilection of the Master was due to an error, starting heaven knows where and circulated through the school. But in that case the name mentioned profited by the auspices under which it was introduced in the nick of time, for if there is an element of free will, some genuine taste expressed in the master's choice, the schools themselves go only by theory. Thus it is that the mind, following its habitual course which advances by digression, inclining first in one direction, then in the other, had brought back into the light of day a number of works to which the need for justice, or for a renewal of standards, or the taste of Debussy, or his caprice, or some remark that he had perhaps never made had added the works of Chopin. Commended by the judges in whom one had entire confidence, profiting by the admiration that was aroused by *Pelléas*, they had acquired a fresh lustre, and even the people who had not heard them again were so anxious to admire them that they did so in spite of themselves, albeit preserving the illusion of free will. But Mme. de Cambremer-Legrandin spent part of the year in the country. Even in Paris, being an invalid, she was largely confined to her own room. It is true that the drawbacks of this mode of existence were noticeable chiefly in her choice of expressions which she supposed to be fashionable and which would have been more appropriate to the written language, a distinction that she did not perceive, for she derived them more from reading than from conversation. The latter is not so necessary for an exact knowledge of current opinion as of the latest expressions. Unfortunately this revival of the *Nocturnes* had not yet been announced by the critics. The news of it had been transmitted only by word of mouth among the 'younger' people. It remained unknown to Mme. de Cambremer-Legrandin. I gave myself the pleasure of informing her, but by addressing my remark to her mother-in-law, as

when at billiards in order to hit a ball one aims at the cushion, that Chopin, so far from being out of date, was Debussy's favourite composer. "Indeed, that's quaint," said the daughter-in-law with a subtle smile as though it had been merely a deliberate paradox on the part of the composer of *Pelléas*. Nevertheless it was now quite certain that in future she would always listen to Chopin with respect and even pleasure. Moreover my words which had sounded the hour of deliverance for the dowager produced on her face an expression of gratitude to myself and above all of joy. Her eyes shone like the eyes of Latude in the play entitled *Latude, or Thirty-five Years in Captivity*, and her bosom inhaled the sea air with that dilatation which Beethoven has so well described in *Fidelio,* at the point where his prisoners at last breathe again 'this life-giving air.' As for the dowager, I thought that she was going to press her hirsute lips to my cheek. "What, you like Chopin? He likes Chopin, he likes Chopin," she cried with a nasal trumpet-tone of passion; she might have been saying: "What, you know Mme. de Franquetot too?" with this difference, that my relations with Mme. de Franquetot would have left her completely indifferent, whereas my knowledge of Chopin plunged her in a sort of artistic delirium. Her salivary super-secretion no longer sufficed. Not having attempted even to understand the part played by Debussy in the rediscovery of Chopin, she felt only that my judgment of him was favourable. Her musical enthusiasm overpowered her. "Elodie! Elodie! He likes Chopin!" her bosom rose and she beat the air with her arms. "Ah! I knew at once that you were a musician," she cried. "I can quite understand an artist such as you are liking him. He's so lovely!" And her voice was as pebbly as if, to express her ardour for Chopin, she had copied Demosthenes and filled her mouth with all the shingle on the beach. Then came the turn of the tide, reaching as far as her veil which she had not time to lift out of harm's way and which was flooded; and lastly the Marquise wiped away with her embroidered handkerchief the tidemark of foam in which the memory of Chopin had steeped her moustaches.

"Good heavens," Mme. de Cambremer-Legrandin remarked to me, "I'm afraid my mother-in-law's cutting it rather fine, she's forgotten that we've got my Uncle de Ch'nouville dining. Besides, Cancan doesn't like to be kept waiting." The word 'Cancan' was beyond me, and I supposed that she might perhaps be referring to a dog. But as for the Ch'nouville relatives, the explanation was as follows. With the lapse of time the young Marquise had outgrown the pleasure that she had once found in pronouncing their name in this manner. And yet it was the prospect of enjoying that pleasure that had decided

her choice of a husband. In other social circles, when one referred to the Chenouville family, the custom was (whenever, that is to say, the particle was preceded by a word ending in a vowel sound, for otherwise you were obliged to lay stress upon the *de*, the tongue refusing to utter Madam' d'Ch'nonceaux) that it was the mute *e* of the particle that was sacrificed. One said: "Monsieur d'Chenouville." The Cambremer tradition was different, but no less imperious. It was the mute e of Chenouville that was suppressed. Whether the name was preceded by *mon cousin* or by *ma cousine*, it was always *de Ch'nouville* and never *de Chenouville*. (Of the father of these Chenouvilles, one said 'our Uncle' for they were not sufficiently 'smart set' at Féterne to pronounce the word 'Unk' like the Guermantes, whose deliberate jargon, suppressing consonants and naturalising foreign words, was as difficult to understand as Old French or a modern dialect.) Every newcomer into the family circle at once received, in the matter of the Ch'nouvilles, a lesson which Mme. de Cambremer-Legrandin had not required. When, paying a call one day, she had heard a girl say: "My Aunt d'Uzai," "My Unk de Rouan," she had not at first recognised the illustrious names which she was in the habit of pronouncing: Uzès, and Rolîan, she had felt the astonishment, embarrassment and shame of a person who sees before him on the table a recently invented implement of which he does not know the proper use and with which he dares not begin to eat. But during that night and the next day she had rapturously repeated: "My Aunt Uzai," with that suppression of the final *s*, a suppression that had stupefied her the day before, but which it now seemed to her so vulgar not to know that, one of her friends having spoken to her of a bust of the Duchesse d'Uzès, Mlle. Legrandin had answered her crossly, and in an arrogant tone: "You might at least pronounce her name properly: Mme. d'Uzai." From that moment she had realised that, by virtue of the transmutation of solid bodies into more and more subtle elements, the considerable and so honourably acquired fortune that she had inherited from her father, the finished education that she had received, her regular attendance at the Sorbonne, whether at Caro's lectures or at Brunetiere's, and at the Lamoureux concerts, all this was to be rendered volatile, to find its utmost sublimation in the pleasure of being able one day to say: "My Aunt d'Uzai." This did not exclude the thought that she would continue to associate, in the earlier days, at least, of her married life, not indeed with certain women friends whom she liked and had resigned herself to sacrificing, but with certain others whom she did not like and to whom she looked forward to being able to say (since that, after all, was why she was marrying): "I must introduce you to my Aunt d'Uzai," and, when she saw that

such an alliance was beyond her reach, “I must introduce you to my Aunt de Ch’nouville,” and “I shall ask you to dine to meet the Uzai.” Her marriage to M. de Cambremer had procured for Mlle. Legrandin the opportunity to use the former of these phrases but not the latter, the circle in which her parents-in-law moved not being that which she had supposed and of which she continued to dream. After saying to me of Saint-Loup (adopting for the occasion one of his expressions, for if in talking to her I used those expressions of Legrandin, she by a reverse suggestion answered me in Robert’s dialect which she did not know to be borrowed from Rachel), bringing her thumb and forefinger together and half-shutting her eyes as though she were gazing at something infinitely delicate which she had succeeded in capturing: “He has a charming quality of mind,” she began to extol him with such warmth that one might have supposed that she was in love with him (it had indeed been alleged that, some time back, when he was at Don-cières, Robert had been her lover), in reality simply that I might repeat her words to him, and ended up with: “You are a great friend of the Duchesse de Guermantes. I am an invalid, I never go anywhere, and I know that she sticks to a close circle of chosen friends, which I do think so wise of her, and so I know her very slightly, but I know she is a really remarkable woman.” Aware that Mme. de Carnbremer barely knew her, and anxious to reduce myself to her level, I avoided the subject and answered the Marquise that the person whom I did know well was her brother, M. Legrandin. At the sound of his name she assumed the same evasive air as myself over the name of Mme. de Guermantes, but combined with it an expression of annoyance, for she supposed that I had said this with the object of humiliating not myself but her. Was she gnawed by despair at having been born a Legrandin? So at least her husband’s sisters and sisters-in-law asserted, ladies of the provincial nobility who knew nobody and nothing, and were jealous of Mme. de Cambremer’s intelligence, her education, her fortune, the physical attractions that she had possessed before her illness. “She can think of nothing else, that is what is killing her,” these slanderers would say whenever they spoke of Mme. de Cambremer to no matter whom, but preferably to a plebeian, whether, were he conceited and stupid, to enhance, by this affirmation of the shamefulness of a plebeian origin, the value of the affability that they were shewing him, of, if he were shy and clever and applied the remark to himself, to give themselves the pleasure, while receiving him hospitably, of insulting him indirectly. But if these ladies thought that they were speaking the truth about their sister-in-law, they were mistaken. She suffered not at all from having been born Legrandin, for she had forgotten the fact altogether.

She was annoyed at my reminding her of it, and remained silent as though she had not understood, not thinking it necessary to enlarge upon or even to confirm my statement.

"Our cousins are not the chief reason for our cutting short our visit," said the dowager Mme. de Cambremer, who was probably more satiated than her daughter-in-law with the pleasure to be derived from saying 'Ch'nouville.' "But, so as not to bother you with too many people, Monsieur," she went on, indicating the lawyer, "was afraid to bring his wife and son to the hotel. They are waiting for us on the beach, and they will be growing impatient." I asked for an exact description of them and hastened in search of them. The wife had a round face like certain flowers of the ranunculus family, and a large vegetable growth at the corner of her eye. And as the generations of mankind preserve their characteristic like a family of plants, just as on the blemished face of his mother, an identical mole, which might have helped one in classifying a variety of the species, protruded below the eye of the son. The lawyer was touched by my civility to his wife and son. He shewed an interest in the subject of my stay at Balbec. "You must find yourself rather out of your element, for the people here are for the most part foreigners." And he kept his eye on me as he spoke, for, not caring for foreigners, albeit he had many foreign clients, he wished to make sure that I was not hostile to his xenophobia, in which case he would have beaten a retreat saying: "Of course, Mme. X—— may be a charming woman. It's a question of principle." As at that time I had no definite opinion about foreigners, I shewed no sign of disapproval; he felt himself to be on safe ground. He went so far as to invite me to come one day, in Paris, to see his collection of Le Sidaner, and to bring with me the Cambremers, with whom he evidently supposed me to be on intimate terms. "I shall invite you to meet Le Sidaner," he said to me, confident that from that moment I would live only in expectation of that happy day. "You shall see what a delightful man he is. And his pictures will enchant you. Of course, I can't compete with the great collectors, but I do believe that I am the one that possesses the greatest number of his favourite canvases. They will interest you all the more, coming from Balbec, since they are marine subjects, for the most part, at least." The wife and son, blessed with a vegetable nature, listened composedly. One felt that their house in Paris was a sort of temple of Le Sidaner. Temples of this sort are not without their use. When the god has doubts as to his own merits, he can easily stop the cracks in his opinion of himself with the irrefutable testimony of people who have devoted their lives to his work.

At a signal from her daughter-in-law, Mme. de Cambremer prepared to depart, and said to me: “Since you won’t come and stay at Féterne, won’t you at least come to luncheon, one day this week, to-morrow for instance?” And in her bounty, to make the invitation irresistible, she added: “You will *find* the Comte de Crisenoy,” whom I had never lost, for the simple reason that I did not know him. She was beginning to dazzle me with yet further temptations, but stopped short. The chief magistrate who, on returning to the hotel, had been told that she was on the premises had crept about searching for her everywhere, then waited his opportunity, and pretending to have caught sight of her by chance, came up now to greet her. I gathered that Mme. de Cambremer did not mean to extend to him the invitation to luncheon that she had just addressed to me. And yet he had known her far longer than I, having for years past been one of the regular guests at the afternoon parties at Féterne whom I used so to envy during my former visit to Balbec. But old acquaintance is not the only thing that counts in society. And hostesses are more inclined to reserve their luncheons for new acquaintances who still whet their curiosity, especially when they arrive preceded by a glowing and irresistible recommendation like Saint-Loup’s of me. Mme. de Cambremer decided that the chief magistrate could not have heard what she was saying to me, but, to calm her guilty conscience, began addressing him in the kindest tone. In the sunlight that flooded, on the horizon, the golden coastline, invisible as a rule, of Rivebelle, we could just make out, barely distinguishable from the luminous azure, rising from the water, rosy, silvery, faint, the little bells that were sounding the angélus round about Féterne. “That is rather*Pelléas*, too,” I suggested to Mme. de Cambremer-Legrandin. “You know the scene I mean.” “Of course I do!” was what she said; but “I haven’t the faintest idea” was the message proclaimed by her voice and features which did not mould themselves to the shape of any recollection and by a smile that floated without support in the air. The dowager could not get over her astonishment that the sound of the bells should carry so far, and rose, reminded of the time. “But, as a rule,” I said, “we never see that part of the coast from Balbec, nor hear it either. The weather must have changed and enlarged the horizon in more ways than one. Unless, that is to say, the bells have come to look for you, since I see that they are making you leave; to you they are a dinner bell.” The chief magistrate, little interested in the bells, glanced furtively along the front, on which he was sorry to see so few people that evening. “You are a true poet,” said Mme. de Cambremer to me. “One feels you are so responsive, so artistic, come, I will play you Chopin,” she went on, raising her arms with an air of ecstasy and

pronouncing the words in a raucous voice like the shifting of shingle on the beach. Then came the deglutition of spittle, and the old lady instinctively wiped the stubble of her moustaches with her handkerchief. The chief magistrate did me, unconsciously, a great service by offering the Marquise his arm to escort her to her carriage, a certain blend of vulgarity, boldness and love of ostentation prompting him to actions which other people would have hesitated to risk, and which are by no means unsuccessful in society. He was, moreover, and had been for years past far more in the habit of these actions than myself. While blessing him for what he did I did not venture to copy him, and walked by the side of Mme. de Cambremer-Legrandin who insisted upon seeing the book that I had in my hand. The name of Madame de Sévigné drew a grimace from her; and using a word which she had seen in certain newspapers, but which, used in speech and given a feminine form, and applied to a seventeenth century writer, had an odd effect, she asked me: “Do you think her really masterly?” The Marquise gave her footman the address of a pastry-cook where she had to call before taking the road, rosy with the evening haze, through which loomed one beyond another the dusky walls of cliff. She asked her old coachman whether one of the horses which was apt to catch cold had been kept warm enough, whether the other’s shoe were not hurting him. “I shall write to you and make a definite engagement,” she murmured to me. “I heard you talking about literature to my daughter-in-law, she’s a darling,” she went on, not that she really thought so, but she had acquired the habit — and kept it up in her kindness of heart — of saying so, in order that her son might not appear to have married for money. “Besides,” she added with a final enthusiastic gnashing of her teeth, “she’s so harttissttick!” With this she stepped into her carriage, nodding her head, holding the crook of her sunshade aloft like a crozier, and set off through the streets of Balbec, overloaded with the ornaments of her priesthood, like an old Bishop on a confirmation tour.

“She has asked you to luncheon,” the chief magistrate said to me sternly when the carriage had passed out of sight and I came indoors with the girls. “We’re not on the best of terms just now. She feels that I neglect her. Gad, I’m easy enough to get on with. If anybody needs me, I’m always there to say: Adsum! But they tried to force my hand. That, now,” he went on with an air of subtlety, holding up his finger as though making and arguing a distinction, “that is a thing I do not allow. It is a threat to the liberty of my holidays. I was obliged to say: Stopl You seem to be in her good books. When you reach my age you will see that society is a very trumpery thing, and you will be sorry you attached

so much importance to these trifles. Well, I am going to take a turn before dinner. Good-bye, children," he shouted back at us, as though he were already fifty yards away.

When I had said good-bye to Rosemonde and Gisèle, they saw with astonishment that Albertine was staying behind instead of accompanying them. "Why, Albertine, what are you doing, don't you know what time it is?" "Go home," she replied in a tone of authority. "I want to talk to him," she added, indicating myself with a submissive air. Rosemonde and Gisèle stared at me, filled with a new and strange respect. I enjoyed the feeling that, for a moment at least, in the eyes even of Rosemonde and Gisèle, I was to Albertine something more important than the time, than her friends, and might indeed share solemn secrets with her into which it was impossible for them to be admitted. "Shan't we see you again this evening?" "I don't know, it will depend on this person. Anyhow, to-morrow." "Let us go up to my room," I said to her, when her friends had gone. We took the lift; she remained silent in the boy's presence. The habit of being obliged to resort to personal observation and deduction in order to find out the business of their masters, those strange beings who converse among themselves and do not speak to them, develops in 'employees' (as the lift-boy styled servants), a stronger power of divination than the 'employer' possesses. Our organs become atrophied or grow stronger or more subtle, accordingly as our need of them increases or diminishes. Since railways came into existence, the necessity of not missing the train has taught us to take account of minutes whereas among the ancient Romans, who not only had a more cursory science of astronomy but led less hurried lives, the notion not of minutes but even of fixed hours barely existed. And so the lift-boy had gathered and meant to inform his comrades that Albertine and I were preoccupied. But he talked to us without ceasing because he had no tact. And yet I could see upon his face, in place of the customary expression of friendliness and joy at taking me up in his lift, an air of extraordinary depression and uneasiness. As I knew nothing of the cause of this, in an attempt to distract his thoughts, and albeit I was more preoccupied than Albertine, I told him that the lady who had just left was called the Marquise de Cambremer and not de Camembert. On the landing at which we were pausing at the moment, I saw, carrying a pair of pails, a hideous chambermaid who greeted me with respect, hoping for a tip when I left. I should have liked to know if she were the one whom I had so ardently desired on the evening of my first arrival at Balbec, but I could never arrive at any certainty. The lift-boy swore to me with the sincerity of most false witnesses, but without shedding his expression of

despair, that it was indeed by the name of Camembert that the Marquise had told him to announce her. And as a matter of fact it was quite natural that he should have heard her say a name which he already knew. Besides, having those very vague ideas of nobility, and of the names of which titles are composed, which are shared by many people who are not lift-boys, the name Camembert had seemed to him all the more probable inasmuch as, that cheese being universally known, it was not in the least surprising that people should have acquired a marquisate from so glorious a distinction, unless it were the marquisate that had bestowed its renown upon the cheese. Nevertheless as he saw that I refused to admit that I might be mistaken, and as he knew that masters like to see their most futile whims obeyed and their most obvious lies accepted, he promised me like a good servant that in future he would say Cambremer. It is true that none of the shopkeepers in the town, none of the peasants in the district, where the name and persons of the Cambremers were perfectly familiar, could ever have made the lift-boy's mistake. But the staff of the 'Grand Hotel of Balbec' were none of them natives. They came direct, with the furniture and stock, from Biarritz, Nice and Monte-Carlo, one division having been transferred to Deauville, another to Dinard and the third reserved for Balbec.

But the lift-boy's pained anxiety continued to grow. That he should thus forget to shew his devotion to me by the customary smiles, some misfortune must have befallen him. Perhaps he had been ''missed.' I made up my mind in that case to try to secure his reinstatement, the manager having promised to ratify all my wishes with regard to his staff. "You can always do just what you like, I rectify everything in advance." Suddenly, as I stepped out of the lift, I guessed the meaning of the boy's distress, his panic-stricken air. Because Albertine was with me, I had not given him the five francs which I was in the habit of slipping into his hand when I went up. And the idiot, instead of understanding that I did not wish to make a display of generosity in front of a third person, had begun to tremble, supposing that it was all finished, that I would never give him anything again. He imagined that I was 'on the rocks' (as the Duc de Guermantes would have said), and the supposition inspired him with no pity for myself but with a terrible selfish disappointment. I told myself that I was less unreasonable than my mother thought when I dared not, one day, refrain from giving the extravagant but feverishly awaited sum that I had given the day before. But at the same time the meaning that I had until then, and without a shadow of doubt, ascribed to his habitual expression of joy, in which I had no hesitation in seeing a sign of devotion, seemed to me to have become less

certain. Seeing the lift-boy ready, in his despair, to fling himself down from the fifth floor of the hotel, I asked myself whether, if our respective social stations were to be altered, in consequence let us say of a revolution, instead of politely working his lift for me, the boy, grown independent, would not have flung me down the well, and whether there was not, in certain of the lower orders, more duplicity than in society, where, no doubt, people reserve their offensive remarks until we are out of earshot, but where their attitude towards us would not be insulting if we were reduced to poverty.

One cannot however say that, in the Balbec hotel, the lift-boy was the most commercially minded. From this point of view the staff might be divided into two categories; on the one hand, those who drew distinctions between the visitors, and were more grateful for the modest tip of an old nobleman (who, moreover, was in a position to relieve them from 28 days of military service by saying a word for them to General de Beautreillis) than for the thoughtless liberalities of a cad who by his very profusion revealed a want of practice which only to his face did they call generosity. On the other hand, those to whom nobility, intellect, fame, position, manners were nonexistent, concealed under a cash valuation. For these there was but a single standard, the money one has, or rather the money one bestows. Possibly Aimé himself, albeit pretending, in view of the great number of hotels in which he had served, to a great knowledge of the world, belonged to this latter category. At the most he would give a social turn, shewing that he knew who was who, to this sort of appreciation, as when he said of the Princesse de Luxembourg: “There’s a pile of money among that lot?” (the question mark at the end being to ascertain the facts or to check such information as he had already ascertained, before supplying a client with a ‘chef for Paris, or promising him a table on the left, by the door, with a view of the sea, at Balbec). In spite of this, and albeit not free from sordid considerations, he would not have displayed them with the fatuous despair of the lift-boy. And yet, the latter’s artlessness helped perhaps to simplify things. It is the convenience of a big hotel, of a house such as Rachel used at one time to frequent, that, without any intermediary, the face, frozen stiff until that moment, of a servant or a woman, at the sight of a hundred-franc note, still more of one of a thousand, even although it is being given to some one else, will melt in smiles and offers of service. Whereas in the dealings, in the relations between lover and mistress, there are too many things interposed between money and docility. So many things that the very people upon whose faces money finally evokes a smile are often incapable of following the internal process that links them together, believe themselves to

be, and indeed are more refined. Besides, it rids polite conversation of such speeches as: “There’s only one thing left for me to do, you will find me to-morrow in the mortuary.” And so one meets in polite society few novelists, or poets, few of all those sublime creatures who speak of the things that are not to be mentioned.

As soon as we were alone and had moved along the corridor, Albertine began: “What is it, you have got against me?” Had my harsh treatment of her been painful to myself? Had it been merely an unconscious ruse on my part, with the object of bringing my mistress to that attitude of fear and supplication which would enable me to interrogate her, and perhaps to find out which of the alternative hypotheses that I had long since formed about her was correct? However that may be, when I heard her question, I suddenly felt the joy of one who attains to a long desired goal. Before answering her, I escorted her to the door of my room. Opening it, I scattered the roseate light that was flooding the room and turning the white muslin of the curtains drawn for the night to golden damask. I went across to the window; the gulls had settled again upon the waves; but this time they were pink. I drew Albertine’s attention to them. “Don’t change the subject,” she said, “be frank with me.” I lied. I declared to her that she must first listen to a confession, that of my passionate admiration, for some time past, of Andrée, and I made her this confession with a simplicity and frankness worthy of the stage, but seldom employed in real life except for a love which people do not feel. Harking back to the fiction I had employed with Gilberte before my first visit to Balbec, but adapting its terms, I went so far (in order to make her more ready to believe me when I told her now that I was not in love with her) as to let fall the admission that at one time I had been on the point of falling in love with her, but that too long an interval had elapsed, that she could be nothing more to me now than a good friend and comrade, and that even if I wished to feel once again a more ardent sentiment for her it would be quite beyond my power. As it happened, in taking my stand thus before Albertine on these protestations of coldness towards her, I was merely — because of a particular circumstance and with a particular object in view — making more perceptible, accentuating more markedly, that dual rhythm which love adopts in all those who have too little confidence in themselves to believe that a woman can ever fall in love with them, and also that they themselves can genuinely fall in love with her. They know themselves well enough to have observed that in the presence of the most divergent types of woman they felt the same hopes, the same agonies, invented the same romances, uttered the same words, to have

deduced therefore that their sentiments, their actions bear no close and necessary relation to the woman they love, but pass by her, spatter her, surround her, like the waves that break round upon the rocks, and their sense of their own instability increases still further their misgivings that this woman, by whom they would so fain be loved, is not in love with them. Why should chance have brought it about, when she is simply an accident placed so as to catch the ebullience of our desire, that we should ourselves be the object of the desire that is animating her? And so, while we feel the need to pour out before her all those sentiments, so different from the merely human sentiments that our neighbour inspires in us, those so highly specialised sentiments which are a lover's, after we have taken a step forward, in avowing to her whom we love our affection for her, our hopes, overcome at once by the fear of offending her, ashamed too that the speech we have addressed to her was not composed expressly for her, that it has served us already, will serve us again for others, that if she does not love us she cannot understand us and we have spoken in that case with the want of taste, of modesty shewn by the pedant who addresses an ignorant audience in subtle phrases which are not for them, this fear, this shame bring into play the counter-rhythm, the reflux, the need, even by first drawing back, hotly denying the affection we have already confessed, to resume the offensive, and to recapture her esteem, to dominate her; the double rhythm is perceptible in the various periods of a single love affair, in all the corresponding periods of similar love affairs, in all those people whose self-analysis outweighs their self-esteem. If it was however somewhat more vigorously accentuated than usual in this speech which I was now preparing to make to Albertine, that was simply to allow me to pass more speedily and more emphatically to the alternate rhythm which should sound my affection.

As though it must be painful to Albertine to believe what I was saying to her as to the impossibility of my loving her again, after so long an interval, I justified what I called an eccentricity of my nature by examples taken from people with whom I had, by their fault or my own, allowed the time for loving them to pass, and been unable, however keenly I might have desired it, to recapture it. I thus appeared at one and the same time to be apologising to her, as for a want of courtesy, for this inability to begin loving her again, and to be seeking to make her understand the psychological reasons for that incapacity as though they had been peculiar to myself. But by explaining myself in this fashion, by dwelling upon the case of Gilberte, in regard to whom the argument had indeed been strictly true which was becoming so far from true when applied

to Albertine, all that I did was to render my assertions as plausible as I pretended to believe that they were not. Feeling that Albertine appreciated what she called my ‘frank speech’ and recognising in my deductions the clarity of the evidence, I apologised for the former by telling her that I knew that the truth was always unpleasant and in this instance must seem to her incomprehensible. She, on the contrary, thanked me for my sincerity and added that so far from being puzzled she understood perfectly a state of mind so frequent and so natural.

This avowal to Albertine of an imaginary sentiment for Andrée, and, towards herself, an indifference which, that it might appear altogether sincere and without exaggeration, I assured her incidentally, as though by a scruple of politeness, must not be taken too literally, enabled me at length, without any fear of Albertine’s suspecting me of loving her, to speak to her with a tenderness which I had so long denied myself and which seemed to me exquisite. I almost caressed my confidant; as I spoke to her of her friend whom I loved, tears came to my eyes. But, coming at last to the point, I said to her that she knew what love meant, its susceptibilities, its sufferings, and that perhaps, as the old friend that she now was, she might feel it in her heart to put a stop to the bitter grief that she was causing me, not directly, since it was not herself that I loved, if I might venture to repeat that without offending her, but indirectly by wounding me in my love for Andrée. I broke off to admire and point out to Albertine a great bird, solitary and hastening, which far out in front of us, lashing the air with the regular beat of its wings, was passing at full speed over the beach stained here and there with reflexions like little torn scraps of red paper, and crossing it from end to end without slackening its pace, without diverting its attention, without deviating from its path, like an envoy carrying far afield an urgent and vital message. “He at least goes straight to the point!” said Albertine in a tone of reproach. “You say that because you don’t know what it is I was going to tell you. But it is so difficult that I prefer to give it up; I am certain that I should make you angry; and then all that will have happened will be this: I shall be in no way better off with the girl I really love and I shall have lost a good friend.” “But when I swear to you that I will not be angry.” She had so sweet, so wistfully docile an air, as though her whole happiness depended on me, that I could barely restrain myself from kissing — with almost the same kind of pleasure that I should have taken in kissing my mother — this novel face which no longer presented the startled, blushing expression of a rebellious and perverse kitten with its little pink, tip-tilted nose, but seemed, in the fulness of its crushing sorrow, moulded in broad, flattened, drooping slabs of pure goodness. Making

an abstraction of my love as of a chronic mania that had no connexion with her, putting myself in her place, I let my heart be melted before this honest girl, accustomed to being treated in a friendly and loyal fashion, whom the good comrade that she might have supposed me had been pursuing for weeks past with persecutions which had at last arrived at their culminating point. It was because I placed myself at a standpoint that was purely human, external to both of us, at which my jealous love dissolved, that I felt for Albertine that profound pity, which would have been less profound if I had not loved her. However, in that rhythmical oscillation which leads from a declaration to a quarrel (the surest, the most certainly perilous way of forming by opposite and successive movements a knot which will not be loosed and attaches us firmly to a person by the strain of the movement of withdrawal which constitutes one of the two elements of the rhythm), of what use is it to analyse farther the refluences of human pity, which, the opposite of love, though springing perhaps unconsciously from the same cause, produces in every case the same effects? When we count up afterwards the total amount of all that we have done for a woman, we often discover that the actions prompted by the desire to shew that we love her, to make her love us, to win her favours, bulk little if any greater than those due to the human need to repair the wrongs that we have done to the creature whom we love, from a mere sense of moral duty, as though we were not in love with her. “But tell me, what on earth have I done?” Albertine asked me. There was a knock at the door; it was the lift-boy; Albertine’s aunt, who was passing the hotel in a carriage, had stopped on the chance of finding her there, to take her home. Albertine sent word that she could not come, that they were to begin dinner without her, that she could not say at what time she would return. “But won’t your aunt be angry?” “What do you suppose? She will understand all right.” And so, at this moment at least, a moment such as might never occur again — a conversation with myself was proved by this incident to be in Albertine’s eyes a thing of such self-evident importance that it must be given precedence over everything, a thing to which, referring no doubt instinctively to a family code, enumerating certain crises in which, when the career of M. Bontemps was at stake, a journey had been made without a thought, my friend never doubted that her aunt would think it quite natural to see her sacrifice the dinner-hour. That remote hour which she passed without my company, among her own people, Albertine, having brought it to me, bestowed it on me; I might make what use of it I chose. I ended by making bold to tell her what had been reported to me about her way of living, and that notwithstanding the profound

disgust that I felt for women tainted with that vice, I had not given it a thought until I had been told the name of her accomplice, and that she could readily understand, loving Andrée as I did, the grief that, the news had caused me. It would have been more tactful perhaps to say that I had been given the names of other women as well, in whom I was not interested. But the sudden and terrible revelation that Cottard had made to me had entered my heart to lacerate it, complete in itself but without accretions. And just as, before that moment, it would never have occurred to me that Albertine was in love with Andrée, or at any rate could find pleasure in caressing her, if Cottard had not drawn my attention to their attitude as they waltzed together, so I had been incapable of passing from that idea to the idea, so different for me, that Albertine might have, with other women than Andrée, relations for which affection could not be pleaded in excuse. Albertine, before even swearing to me that it was not true, shewed, like everyone upon learning that such things are being said about him, anger, concern, and, with regard to the unknown slanderer, a fierce curiosity to know who he was and a desire to be confronted with him so as to be able to confound him. But she assured me that she bore me, at least, no resentment. “If it had been true, I should have told you. But Andrée and I both loathe that sort of thing. We have not lived all these years without seeing women with cropped hair who behave like men and do the things you mean, and nothing revolts us more.” Albertine gave me merely her word, a peremptory word unsupported by proof. But this was just what was best calculated to calm me, jealousy belonging to that family of sickly doubts which are better purged by the energy than by the probability of an affirmation. It is moreover the property of love to make us at once more distrustful and more credulous, to make us suspect, more readily than we should suspect anyone else, her whom we love, and be convinced more easily by her denials. We must be in love before we can care that all women are not virtuous, which is to say before we can be aware of the fact, and we must be in love too before we can hope, that is to say assure ourselves that some are. It is human to seek out what hurts us and then at once to seek to get rid of it. The statements that are capable of so relieving us seem quite naturally true, we are not inclined to cavil at a sedative that acts. Besides, however multiform may be the person with whom we are in love, she can in any case offer us two essential personalities accordingly as she appears to us as ours, or as turning her desires in another direction. The former of these personalities possesses the peculiar power which prevents us from believing in the reality of the other, the secret remedy to heal the sufferings that this latter has caused us. The beloved object is

successively the malady and the remedy that suspends and aggravates it. No doubt, I had long since been prepared, by the strong impression made on my imagination and my faculty for emotion by the example of Swann, to believe in the truth of what I feared rather than of what I should have wished. And so the comfort brought me by Albertine's affirmations came near to being jeopardised for a moment, because I was reminded of the story of Odette. But I told myself that, if it was only right to allow for the worst, not only when, in order to understand Swann's sufferings, I had tried to put myself in his place, but now, when I myself was concerned, in seeking the truth as though it referred to some one else, still I must not, out of cruelty to myself, a soldier who chooses the post not where he can be of most use but where he is most exposed, end in the mistake of regarding one supposition as more true than the rest, simply because it was more painful. Was there not a vast gulf between Albertine, a girl of good, middle-class parentage, and Odette, a courtesan bartered by her mother in her childhood? There could be no comparison of their respective credibility. Besides, Albertine had in no respect the same interest in lying to me that Odette had had in lying to Swann. Moreover to him Odette had admitted what Albertine had just denied. I should therefore be guilty of an error in reasoning as serious — though in the opposite direction — as that which had inclined me towards a certain hypothesis because it had caused me less pain than the rest, were I not to take into account these material differences in their positions, but to reconstruct the real life of my mistress solely from what I had been told about the life of Odette. I had before me a new Albertine, of whom I had already, it was true, caught more than one glimpse towards the end of my previous visit to Balbec, frank and honest, an Albertine who had, out of affection for myself, forgiven me my suspicions and tried to dispel them. She made me sit down by her side upon my bed. I thanked her for what she had said to me, assured her that our reconciliation was complete, and that I would never be horrid to her again. I suggested to her that she ought, at the same time, to go home to dinner. She asked me whether I was not glad to have her with me. Drawing my head towards her for a caress which she had never before given me and which I owed perhaps to the healing of our rupture, she passed her tongue lightly over my lips which she attempted to force apart. At first I kept them tight shut. "You are a great bear!" she informed me.

I ought to have left the place that evening and never set eyes on her again. I felt even then that in a love which is not reciprocated — I might as well say, in love, for there are people for whom there is no such thing as reciprocated love —

we can enjoy only that simulacrum of happiness which had been given me at one of those unique moments in which a woman's good nature, or her caprice, or mere chance, bring to our desires, in perfect coincidence, the same words, the same actions as if we were really loved. The wiser course would have been to consider with curiosity, to possess with delight that little parcel of happiness failing which I should have died without ever suspecting what it could mean to hearts less difficult to please or more highly favoured; to suppose that it formed part of a vast and enduring happiness of which this fragment only was visible to me, and — lest the next day should expose this fiction — not to attempt to ask for any fresh favour after this, which had been due only to the artifice of an exceptional moment. I ought to have left Balbec, to have shut myself up in solitude, to have remained so in harmony with the last vibrations of the voice which I had contrived to render amorous for an instant, and of which I should have asked nothing more than that it might never address another word to me; for fear lest, by an additional word which now could only be different, it might shatter with a discord the sensitive silence in which, as though by the pressure of a pedal, there might long have survived in me the throbbing chord of happiness.

Soothed by my explanation with Albertine, I began once again to live in closer intimacy with my mother. She loved to talk to me gently about the days in which my grandmother had been younger. Fearing that I might reproach myself with the sorrows with which I had perhaps darkened the close of my grandmother's life, she preferred to turn back to the years when the first signs of my dawning intelligence had given my grandmother a satisfaction which until now had always been kept from me. We talked of the old days at Combray. My mother reminded me that there at least I used to read, and that at Balbec I might well do the same, if I was not going to work. I replied that, to surround myself with memories of Combray and of the charming coloured plates, I should like to read again the *Thousand and One Nights*. As, long ago at Combray, when she gave me books for my birthday, so it was in secret, as a surprise for me, that my mother now sent for both the *Thousand and One Nights* of Galland and the *Thousand Nights and a Night* of Mardrus. But, after casting her eye over the two translations, my mother would have preferred that I should stick to Galland's, albeit hesitating to influence me because of the respect that she felt for intellectual liberty, her dread of interfering with my intellectual life and the feeling that, being a woman, on the one hand she lacked, or so she thought, the necessary literary equipment, and on the other hand ought not to condemn because she herself was shocked by it the reading of a young man. Happening

upon certain of the tales, she had been revolted by the immorality of the subject and the crudity of the expression. But above all, preserving, like precious relics, not only the brooch, the sunshade, the cloak, the volume of Madame de Sévigné, but also the habits of thought and speech of her mother, seeking on every occasion the opinion that she would have expressed, my mother could have no doubt of the horror with which my grandmother would have condemned Mardrus's book. She remembered that at Combray while before setting out for a walk, Méséglise way, I was reading Augustin Thierry, my grandmother, glad that I should be reading, and taking walks, was indignant nevertheless at seeing him whose name remained enshrined in the hemistich: 'Then reignèd Mérovée' called Merowig, refused to say 'Carolingians' for the 'Carlovingians' to which she remained loyal. And then I told her what my grandmother had thought of the Greek names which Bloch, following Leconte de Lisle, gave to the gods of Homer, going so far, in the simplest matters, as to make it a religious duty, in which he supposed literary talent to consist, to adopt a Greek system of spelling. Having occasion, for instance, to mention in a letter that the wine which they drank at his home was real nectar, he would write 'real nektar,' with a *k*, which enabled him to titter at the mention of Lamartine. And if an *Odyssey* from which the names of Ulysses and Minerva were missing was no longer the *Odyssey* to her, what would she have said upon seeing corrupted even upon the cover the title of her *Thousand and One Nights*, upon no longer finding, exactly transcribed as she had all her life been in the habit of pronouncing them, the immortally familiar names of Scheherazade, of Dinarzade, in which, debaptised themselves (if one may use the expression of Musulman tales), the charming Caliph and the powerful Genies were barely recognisable, being renamed, he the 'Khalifat' and they the 'Gennis.' Still, my mother handed over both books to me, and I told her that I would read them on the days when I. felt too tired to go out.

These days were not very frequent, however. We used to go out picnicking as before in a band, Albertine, her friends and myself, on the cliff or to the farm called Marie-Antoinette. But there were times when Albertine bestowed on me this great pleasure. She would say to me: "To-day I want to be alone with you for a little, it will be nicer if we are just by ourselves." Then she would give out that she was busy, not that she need furnish any explanation, and so that the others, if they went all the same, without us, for an excursion and picnic, might not be able to find us, we would steal away like a pair of lovers, all by ourselves to Bagatelle or the Cross of Heulan, while the band, who would never think of looking for us there and never went there, waited indefinitely, in the hope of seeing us appear,

at Marie-Antoinette. I recall the hot weather that we had then, when from the brow of each of the farm-labourers toiling in the sun a drop of sweat would fall, vertical, regular, intermittent, like the drop of water from a cistern, and alternate with the fall of the ripe fruit dropping from the tree in the adjoining ‘closes’; they have remained, to this day, with that mystery of a woman’s secret, the most substantial part of every love that offers itself to me. A woman who has been mentioned to me and to whom I would not give a moment’s thought — I upset all my week’s engagements to make her acquaintance, if it is a week of similar weather, and I am to meet her in some isolated farmhouse. It is no good my knowing that this kind of weather, this kind of assignation are not part of her, they are still the bait, which I know all too well, by which I allow myself to be tempted and which is sufficient to hook me. I know that this woman, in cold weather, in a town, I might perhaps have desired, but without the accompaniment of a romantic sentiment, without becoming amorous; my love for her is none the less keen as soon as, by force of circumstances, it has enthralled me — it is only the more melancholy, as in the course of life our sentiments for other people become, in proportion as we become more clearly aware of the ever smaller part that they play in our life and that the new love which we would like to be so permanent, cut short in the same moment as life itself, will be the last.

There were still but a few people at Balbec, hardly any girls. Sometimes I saw some girl resting upon the beach, devoid of charm, and yet apparently identified by various features as one whom I had been in despair at not being able to approach at the moment when she emerged with her friends from the riding school or gymnasium. If it was the same (and I took care not to mention the matter to Albertine), then the girl that I had thought so exciting did not exist. But I could not arrive at any certainty, for the face of any one of these girls did not fill any space upon the beach, did not offer a permanent form, contracted, dilated, transformed as it was by my own observation, the uneasiness of my desire or a sense of comfort that was self-sufficient, by the different clothes that she was wearing, the rapidity of her movements or her immobility. All the same, two or three of them seemed to me adorable. Whenever I saw one of these, I longed to take her away along the Avenue des Tamaris, or among the sandhills, better still upon the cliff. But, albeit into desire, as opposed to indifference, there enters already that audacity which is a first stage, if only unilateral, towards realisation, all the same, between my desire and the action that my request to be allowed to kiss her would have been, there was all the indefinite blank of

hesitation, of timidity. Then I went into the pastrycook's bar, I drank, one after another, seven or eight glasses of port wine. At once, instead of the impassable gulf between my desire and action, the effect of the alcohol traced a line that joined them together. No longer was there any room for hesitation or fear. It seemed to me that the girl was about to fly into my arms. I went up to her, the words came spontaneously to my lips: "I should like to go for a walk with you. You wouldn't care to go along the cliff, we shan't be disturbed behind the little wood that keeps the wind off the wooden bungalow that is empty just now?" All the difficulties of life were smoothed away, there was no longer any obstacle to the conjunction of our two bodies. No obstacle for me, at least. For they had not been volatilised for her, who had not been drinking port wine. Had she done so, had the outer world lost some of its reality in her eyes, the long cherished dream that would then have appeared to her to be suddenly realisable might perhaps have been not at all that of falling into my arms.

Not only were the girls few in number but at this season which was not yet 'the season' they stayed but a short time. There is one I remember with a reddish skin, green eyes and a pair of ruddy cheeks, whose slight symmetrical face resembled the winged seeds of certain trees. I cannot say what breeze wafted her to Balbec or what other bore her away. So sudden was her removal that for some days afterwards I was haunted by a grief which I made bold to confess to Albertine when I realised that the girl had gone for ever.

I should add that several of them were either girls whom I did not know at all or whom I had not seen for years. Often, before addressing them, I wrote to them. If their answer allowed me to believe in the possibility of love, what joy! We cannot, at the outset of our friendship with a woman, even if that friendship is destined to come to nothing, bear to part from those first letters that we have received from her. We like to have them beside us all the time, like a present of rare flowers, still quite fresh, at which we cease to gaze only to draw them closer to us and smell them. The sentence that we know by heart, it is pleasant to read again, and in those that we have committed less accurately to memory we like to verify the degree of affection in some expression. Did she write: 'Your dear letter'? A slight marring of our bliss, which must be ascribed either to our having read too quickly, or to the illegible handwriting of our correspondent; she did not say: 'Your dear letter' but 'From your letter.' But the rest is so tender. Oh, that more such flowers may come to-morrow. Then that is no longer enough, we must with the written words compare the writer's eyes, her face. We make an appointment, and — without her having altered, perhaps — whereas we

expected, from the description given us or our personal memory, to meet the fairy Viviane, we encounter Puss-in-Boots. We make an appointment, nevertheless, for the following day, for it is, after all, *she*, and the person we desired is she. And these desires for a woman of whom we have been dreaming do not make beauty of form and feature essential. These desires are only the desire for a certain person; vague as perfumes, as styrax was the desire of Prothyraia, saffron the ethereal desire, aromatic scents the desire of Hera, myrrh the perfume of the Magi, manna the desire of Nike, incense the perfume of the sea. But these perfumes that are sung in the Orphic hymns are far fewer in number than the deities they worship. Myrrh is the perfume of the Magi, but also of Protogonos, Neptune, Nereus, Leto; incense is the perfume of the sea, but also of the fair Dike, of Themis, of Circe, of the Nine Muses, of Eos, of Mnemosyne, of the Day, of Dikaiosyne. As for styrax, manna and aromatic scents, it would be impossible to name all the deities that inhale them, so many are they. Amphietes has all the perfumes except incense, and Gaia rejects only beans and aromatic scents. So was it with these desires for different girls that I felt. Fewer in number than the girls themselves, they changed into disappointments and regrets closely similar one to another. I never wished for myrrh. I reserved it for Jupien and for the Prince de Guermantes, for it is the desire of Protogonos "of twofold sex, who roars like a bull, of countless orgies, memorable, unspeakable, descending, joyous, to the sacrifices of the Orgiophants."

But presently the season was in full swing; every day there was some fresh arrival, and for the sudden increase in the frequency of my outings, which took the place of the charmed perusal of the *Thousand and One Nights*, there was a reason devoid of pleasure which poisoned them all. The beach was now peopled with girls, and, since the idea suggested to me by Cottard had not indeed furnished me with fresh suspicions but had rendered me sensitive and weak in that quarter and careful not to let any suspicion take shape in my mind, as soon as a young woman arrived at Balbec, I began to feel ill at ease, I proposed to Albertine the most distant excursions, in order that she might not make the newcomer's acquaintance, and indeed, if possible, might not set eyes on her. I dreaded naturally even more those women whose dubious ways were remarked or their bad reputation already known; I tried to persuade my mistress that this bad reputation had no foundation, was a slander, perhaps, without admitting it to myself, from a fear, still unconscious, that she might seek to make friends with the depraved woman or regret her inability to do so, because of me, or might conclude from the number of examples that a vice so widespread was not to be

condemned. In denying the guilt of each of them, my intention was nothing less than to pretend that sapphism did not exist. Albertine adopted my incredulity as to the viciousness of this one or that. “No, I think it’s just a pose, she wants to look the part.” But then, I regretted almost that I had pleaded the other’s innocence, for it distressed me that Albertine, formerly so severe, could believe that this ‘part’ was a thing so flattering, so advantageous, that a woman innocent of such tastes could seek to ‘look it.’ I would have liked to be sure that no more women were coming to Balbec; I trembled when I thought that, as it was almost time for Mme. Putbus to arrive at the Verdurins’, her maid, whose tastes Saint-Loup had not concealed from me, might take it into her head to come down to the beach, and, if it were a day on which I was not with Albertine, might seek to corrupt her. I went the length of asking myself whether, as Cottard had made no secret of the fact that the Verdurins thought highly of me and, while not wishing to appear, as he put it, to be running after me, would give a great deal to have me come to their house, I might not, on the strength of promises to bring all the Guermantes in existence to call on them in Paris, induce Mme. Verdurin, upon some pretext or other, to inform Mme. Putbus that it was impossible to keep her there any longer and make her leave the place at once. Notwithstanding these thoughts, and as it was chiefly the presence of Andrée that was disturbing me, the soothing effect that Albertine’s words had had upon me still to some extent persisted — I knew moreover that presently I should have less need of it, as Andrée would be leaving the place with Rosemonde and Gisèle just about the time when the crowd began to arrive and would be spending only a few weeks more with Albertine. During these weeks, moreover, Albertine seemed to have planned everything that she did, everything that she said, with a view to destroying my suspicions if any remained, or to prevent them from reviving. She contrived never to be left alone with Andrée, and insisted, when we came back from an excursion, upon my accompanying her to her door, upon my coming to fetch her when we were going anywhere. Andrée meanwhile took just as much trouble on her side, seemed to avoid meeting Albertine. And this apparent understanding between them was not the only indication that Albertine must have informed her friend of our conversation and have asked her to be so kind as to calm my absurd suspicions.

About this time there occurred at the Grand Hotel a scandal which was not calculated to modify the intensity of my torment. Bloch’s cousin had for some time past been indulging, with a retired actress, in secret relations which presently ceased to satisfy them. That they should be seen seemed to them to add

perversity to their pleasure, they chose to flaunt their perilous sport before the eyes of all the world. They began with caresses, which might, after all, be set down to a friendly intimacy, in the card-room, by the baccarat-table. Then they grew more bold. And finally, one evening, in a corner that was not even dark of the big ball-room, on a sofa, they made no more attempt to conceal what they were doing than if they had been in bed. Two officers who happened to be near, with their wives, complained to the manager. It was thought for a moment that their protest would be effective. But they had this against them that, having come over for the evening from Netteholme, where they were staying, they could not be of any use to the manager. Whereas, without her knowing it even, and whatever remarks the manager may have made to her, there hovered over Mlle. Bloch the protection of M. Nissim Bernard. I must explain why. M. Nissim Bernard carried to their highest pitch the family virtues. Every year he took a magnificent villa at Balbec for his nephew, and no invitation would have dissuaded him from going home to dine at his own table, which was in reality theirs. But he never took his luncheon at home. Every day at noon he was at the Grand Hotel. The fact of the matter was that he was keeping, as other men keep a chorus-girl from the opera, an embryo waiter of much the same type as the pages of whom we have spoken, and who made us think of the young Israelites in*Esther* and *Athalie*. It is true that the forty years' difference in age between M. Nis-sim Bernard and the young waiter ought to have preserved the latter from a contact that was scarcely pleasant. But, as Racine so wisely observes in those same choruses:

Great God, with what uncertain tread
A budding virtue 'mid such perils goes!
What stumbling-blocks do lie before a soul
That seeks Thee and would fain be innocent.

The young waiter might indeed have been brought up 'remote from the world' in the Temple-Caravanserai of Balbec, he had not followed the advice of Joad:

In riches and in gold put not thy trust.

He had perhaps justified himself by saying: "The wicked cover the earth." However that might be, and albeit M. Nissim Bernard had not expected so rapid a conquest, on the very first day,

Were't in alarm, or anxious to caress,
He felt those childish arms about him thrown.

And by the second day, M. Nissim Bernard having taken the young waiter

out,

The dire assault his innocence destroyed.

From that moment the boy's life was altered. He might indeed carry bread and salt, as his superior bade him, his whole face sang:

From flowers to flowers, from joys to keener joys
Let our desires now range.
Uncertain is our tale of fleeting years.
Haste we then to enjoy this life!
Honours and fame are the reward
Of blind and meek obedience.
For moping innocence
Who now would raise his voice!

Since that day, M. Nissim Bernard had never failed to come and occupy his seat at the luncheon-table (as a man would occupy his in the stalls who was keeping a dancer, a dancer in this case of a distinct and special type, which still awaits its Degas). It was M. Nissim Bernard's delight to follow over the floor of the restaurant and down the remote vista to where beneath her palm the cashier sat enthroned, the evolutions of the adolescent hurrying in service, in the service of everyone, and, less than anyone, of M. Nissim Bernard, now that the latter was keeping him, whether because the young chorister did not think it necessary to display the same friendliness to a person by whom he supposed himself to be sufficiently well loved, or because that love annoyed him or he feared lest, if discovered, it might make him lose other opportunities. But this very coldness pleased M. Nissim Bernard, because of all that it concealed; whether from Hebraic atavism or from profanation of the Christian spirit, he took a singular pleasure, were it Jewish or Catholic, in the Racinian ceremony. Had it been a real performance of *Esther* or *Athalie*, M. Bernard would have regretted that the gulf of centuries must prevent him from making the acquaintance of the author, Jean Racine, so that he might obtain for his protégé a more substantial part. But as the luncheon ceremony came from no author's pen, he contented himself with being on good terms with the manager and Aimé, so that the 'young Israelite' might be promoted to the coveted post of under-waiter, or even full waiter to a row of tables. The post of wine waiter had been offered him. But M. Bernard made him decline it, for he would no longer have been able to come every day to watch him race about the green dining-room and to be waited upon by him like a stranger. Now this pleasure was so keen that every year M. Bernard returned to Balbec and took his luncheon away from home, habits in which M. Bloch saw,

in the former a poetical fancy for the bright sunshine, the sunsets of this coast favoured above all others, in the latter the inveterate mania of an old bachelor.

As a matter of fact, the mistake made by M. Nissim Bernard's relatives, who never suspected the true reason for his annual return to Balbec and for what the pedantic Mme. Bloch called his absentee palate, was really a more profound and secondary truth. For M. Nissim Bernard himself was unaware how much there was of love for the beach at Balbec, for the view one enjoyed from the restaurant over the sea, and of maniacal habits in the fancy that he had for keeping, like a dancing girl of another kind which still lacks a Degas, one of his servants the rest of whom were still girls. And so M. Nissim Bernard maintained, with the director of this theatre which was the hotel at Balbec, and with the stage-manager and producer Aimé— whose part in all this affair was anything but simple — excellent relations. One day they would intrigue to procure an important part, a place perhaps as headwaiter. In the meantime M. Nissim Bernard's pleasure, poetical and calmly contemplative as it might be, reminded one a little of those women-loving men who always know — Swann, for example, in the past — that if they go out to a party they will meet their mistress. No sooner had M. Nissim Bernard taken his seat than he would see the object of his affections appear on the scene, bearing in his hand fruit or cigars upon a tray. And so every morning, after kissing his niece, bothering my friend Bloch about his work and feeding his horses with lumps of sugar from the palm of his outstretched hand, he would betray a feverish haste to arrive in time for luncheon at the Grand Hotel. Had the house been on fire, had his niece had a stroke, he would doubtless have started off just the same. So that he dreaded like the plague a cold that would confine him to his bed — for he was a hypochondriac — and would oblige him to ask Aimé to send his young friend across to visit him at home, between luncheon and tea-time.

He loved moreover all the labyrinth of corridors, private offices, reception-rooms, cloakrooms, larders, galleries which composed the hotel at Balbec. With a strain of oriental atavism he loved a seraglio, and when he went out at night might be seen furtively exploring its passages. While, venturing down to the basement and endeavouring at the same time to escape notice and to avoid a scandal, M. Nissim Bernard, in his quest of the young Lévites, put one in mind of those lines in La Juive:

O God of our Fathers, come down to us again,
Our mysteries veil from the eyes of wicked men!

I on the contrary would go up to the room of two sisters who had come to

Balbec, as her maids, with an old lady, a foreigner. They were what the language of hotels called ‘couriers,’ and that of Françoise, who imagined that a courier was a person who was there to run his course, two ‘coursers.’ The hotels have remained, more nobly, in the period when people sang: “*C’est un courrier de cabinet*.”

Difficult as it was for a visitor to penetrate to the servants’ quarters, I had very soon formed a mutual bond of friendship, as strong as it was pure, with these two young persons, Mademoiselle Marie Gineste and Madame Céleste Albaret. Born at the foot of the high mountains in the centre of France, on the banks of rivulets and torrents (the water passed actually under their old home, turning a millwheel, and the house had often been damaged by floods), they seemed to embody the features of that region. Marie Gineste was more regularly rapid and abrupt, Céleste Albaret softer and more languishing, spread out like a lake, but with terrible boiling rages in which her fury suggested the peril of spates and gales that sweep everything before them. They often came in the morning to see me when I was still in bed. I have never known people so deliberately ignorant, who had learned absolutely nothing at school, and yet whose language was somehow so literary that, but for the almost savage naturalness of their tone, one would have thought their speech affected. With a familiarity which I reproduce verbatim, notwithstanding the praises (which I set down here in praise not of myself but of the strange genius of Céleste) and the criticisms, equally unfounded, in which her remarks seem to involve me, while I dipped crescent rolls in my milk, Céleste would say to me: “Oh! Little black devil with hair of jet, O profound wickedness! I don’t know what your mother was thinking of when she made you, for you are just like a bird. Look, Marie, wouldn’t you say he was preening his feathers, and turning his head right round, so light he looks, you would say he was just learning to fly. Ah! It’s fortunate for you that those who bred you brought you into the world to rank and riches; what would ever have become of you, so wasteful as you are. Look at him throwing away his crescent because it touched the bed. There he goes, now, look, he’s spilling his milk, wait till I tie a napkin round you, for you could never do it for yourself, never in my life have I seen anyone so helpless and so clumsy as you.” I would then hear the more regular sound of the torrent of Marie Gineste who was furiously reprimanding her sister: “Will you hold your tongue, now, Céleste. Are you mad, talking to Monsieur like that?” Céleste merely smiled; and as I detested having a napkin tied round my neck: “No, Marie, look at him, bang, he’s shot straight up on end like a serpent. A proper serpent, I tell you.” These

were but a few of her zoological similes, for, according to her, it was impossible to tell when I slept, I fluttered about all night like a butterfly, and in the day time I was as swift as the squirrels. “You know, Marie, the way we see them at home, so nimble that even with your eyes you can’t follow them.” “But, Céleste, you know he doesn’t like having a napkin when he’s eating.” “It isn’t that he doesn’t like it, it’s so that he can say nobody can make him do anything against his will. He’s a grand gentleman and he wants to shew that he is. They can change the sheets ten times over, if they must, but he won’t give way. Yesterday’s had served their time, but to-day they have only just been put on the bed and they’ll have to be changed already. Oh, I was right when I said that he was never meant to be born among the poor. Look, his hair’s standing on end, swelling with rage like a bird’s feathers. Poor *ploumissou*!” Here it was not only Marie that protested, but myself, for I did not feel in the least like a grand gentleman. But Céleste would never believe in the sincerity of my modesty and cut me short. “Oh! The story-teller! Oh! The flatterer! Oh! The false one! The cunning rogue! Oh! Molière!” (This was the only writer’s name that she knew, but she applied it to me, meaning thereby a person who was capable both of writing plays and of acting them.) “Céleste!” came the imperious cry from Marie, who, not knowing the name of Molière, was afraid that it might be some fresh insult. Céleste continued to smile: “Then you haven’t seen the photograph of him in his drawer, when he was little. He tried to make us believe that he was always dressed quite simply. And there, with his little cane, he’s all furs and laces, such as no Prince ever wore. But that’s nothing compared with his tremendous majesty and kindness which is even more profound.” “So then,” scolded the torrent Marie, “you go rummaging in his drawers now, do you?” To calm Marie’s fears I asked her what she thought of M. Nissim Bernard’s behaviour.... “Ah! Monsieur, there are things I wouldn’t have believed could exist. One has to come here to learn.” And, for once outrivalling Céleste by an even more profound observation: “Ah! You see, Monsieur, one can never tell what there may be in a person’s life.” To change the subject, I spoke to her of the life led by my father, who toiled night and day. “Ah! Monsieur, there are people who keep nothing of their life for themselves, not one minute, not one pleasure, the whole thing is a sacrifice for others, they are lives that are *given away*.” “Look, Marie, he has only to put his hand on the counterpane and take his crescent, what distinction. He can do the most insignificant things, you would say that the whole nobility of France, from here to the Pyrenees, was stirring in each of his movements.”

Overpowered by this portrait so far from lifelike, I remained silent; Céleste

interpreted my silence as a further instance of guile: “Oh! Brow that looks so pure, and hides so many things, nice, cool cheeks like the inside of an almond, little hands of satin all velvety, nails like claws,” and so forth. “There, Marie, look at him sipping his milk with a devoutness that makes me want to say my prayers. What a serious air! They ought really to take his portrait as he is just now. He’s just like a child. Is it drinking milk, like them, that has kept you their bright colour? Oh! Youth! Oh! Lovely skin. You will never grow old. You are a lucky one, you will never need to raise your hand against anyone, for you have a pair of eyes that can make their will be done. Look at him now, he’s angry. He shoots up, straight as a sign-post.”

Françoise did not at all approve of what she called the two ‘tricksters’ coming to talk to me like this. The manager, who made his staff keep watch over everything that went on, even gave me a serious warning that it was not proper for a visitor to talk to servants. I, who found the ‘tricksters’ far better than any visitor in the hotel, merely laughed in his face, convinced that he would not understand my explanations. And the sisters returned. “Look, Marie, at his delicate lines. Oh, perfect miniature, finer than the most precious you could see in a glass case, for he can move, and utters words you could listen to for days and nights.”

It was a miracle that a foreign lady could have brought them there, for, without knowing anything of history or geography, they heartily detested the English, the Germans, the Russians, the Italians, all foreign vermin, and cared, with certain exceptions, for French people alone. Their faces had so far preserved the moisture of the pliable clay of their native river beds, that, as soon as one mentioned a foreigner who was staying in the hotel, in order to repeat what he had said, Céleste and Marie imposed upon their faces his face, their mouths became his mouth, their eyes his eyes, one would have liked to preserve these admirable comic masks. Céleste indeed, while pretending merely to be repeating what the manager had said, or one of my friends, would insert in her little narrative fictitious remarks in which were maliciously portrayed all the defects of Bloch, the chief magistrate, etc., while apparently unconscious of doing so. It was, under the form of the delivery of a simple message which she had obligingly undertaken to convey, an inimitable portrait. They never read anything, not even a newspaper. One day, however, they found lying on my bed a book. It was a volume of the admirable but obscure poems of Saint-Léger Léger. Céleste read a few pages and said to me: “But are you quite sure that these are poetry, wouldn’t they just be riddles?” Obviously, to a person who had

learned in her childhood a single poem: “Down here the lilacs die,” there was a gap in evolution. I fancy that their obstinate refusal to learn anything was due in part to the unhealthy climate of their early home. They had nevertheless all the gifts of a poet with more modesty than poets generally shew. For if Céleste had said something noteworthy and, unable to remember it correctly, I asked her to repeat it, she would assure me that she had forgotten. They will never read any books, but neither will they ever write any.

Françoise was considerably impressed when she learned that the two brothers of these humble women had married, one the niece of the Archbishop of Tours, the other a relative of the Bishop of Rodez. To the manager, this would have conveyed nothing. Céleste would sometimes reproach her husband with his failure to understand her, and as for me, I was astonished that he could endure her. For at certain moments, raging, furious, destroying everything, she was detestable. It is said that the salt liquid which is our blood is only an internal survival of the primitive marine element. Similarly, I believe that Céleste, not only in her bursts of fury, but also in her hours of depression preserved the rhythm of her native streams. When she was exhausted, it was after their fashion; she had literally run dry. Nothing could then have revived her. Then all of a sudden the circulation was restored in her large body, splendid and light. The water flowed in the opaline transparence of her bluish skin. She smiled at the sun and became bluer still. At such moments she was truly celestial.

Bloch's family might never have suspected the reason which made their uncle never take his luncheon at home and have accepted it from the first as the mania of an elderly bachelor, due perhaps to the demands of his intimacy with some actress; everything that concerned M. Nissim Bernard was tabu to the manager of the Balbec hotel. And that was why, without even referring to the uncle, he had finally not ventured to find fault with the niece, albeit recommending her to be a little more circumspect. And so the girl and her friend who, for some days, had pictured themselves as excluded from the casino and the Grand Hotel, seeing that everything was settled, were delighted to shew those fathers of families who held aloof from them that they might with impunity take the utmost liberties. No doubt they did not go so far as to repeat the public exhibition which had revolted everybody. But gradually they returned to their old ways. And one evening as I came out of the casino which was half in darkness with Albertine and Bloch whom we had met there, they came towards us, linked together, kissing each other incessantly, and, as they passed us, crowed and laughed, uttering indecent cries. Bloch lowered his eyes, so as to seem not to have recognised his cousin, and as for myself I was tortured by the thought that this occult, appalling language was addressed perhaps to Albertine.

Another incident turned my thoughts even more in the direction of Gomorrah. I had noticed upon the beach a handsome young woman, erect and pale, whose eyes, round their centre, scattered rays so geometrically luminous that one was reminded, on meeting her gaze, of some constellation. I thought

how much more beautiful this girl was than Albertine, and that it would be wiser to give up the other. Only, the face of this beautiful young woman had been smoothed by the invisible plane of an utterly low life, of the constant acceptance of vulgar expedients, so much so that her eyes, more noble however than the rest of her face, could radiate nothing but appetites and desires. Well, on the following day, this young woman being seated a long way away from us in the casino, I saw that she never ceased to fasten upon Albertine the alternate, circling fires of her gaze. One would have said that she was making signals to her from a lighthouse. I dreaded my friend's seeing that she was being so closely observed, I was afraid that these incessantly rekindled glances might have the conventional meaning of an amorous assignation for the morrow. For all I knew, this assignation might not be the first. The young woman with the radiant eyes might have come another year to Balbec. It was perhaps because Albertine had already yielded to her desires, or to those of a friend, that this woman allowed herself to address to her those flashing signals. If so, they did more than demand something for the present, they found a justification in pleasant hours in the past.

This assignation, in that case, must be not the first, but the sequel to adventures shared in past years. And indeed her glance did not say: "Will you?" As soon as the young woman had caught sight of Albertine, she had turned her head and beamed upon her glances charged with recollection, as though she were terribly afraid that my friend might not remember. Albertine, who could see her plainly, remained phlegmatically motionless, with the result that the other, with the same sort of discretion as a man who sees his old mistress with a new lover, ceased to look at her and paid no more attention to her than if she had not existed.

But, a day or two later, I received a proof of this young woman's tendencies, and also of the probability of her having known Albertine in the past. Often, in the hall of the casino, when two girls were smitten with mutual desire, a luminous phenomenon occurred, a sort of phosphorescent train passing from one to the other. Let us note in passing that it is by the aid of such materialisations, even if they be imponderable, by these astral signs that set fire to a whole section of the atmosphere, that the scattered Gomorrah tends, in every town, in every village, to reunite its separated members, to reform the biblical city while everywhere the same efforts are being made, be it in view of but a momentary reconstruction, by the nostalgic, the hypocritical, sometimes by the courageous exiles from Sodom.

Once I saw the stranger whom Albertine had appeared not to recognise, just

at the moment when Bloch's cousin was approaching her. The young woman's eyes flashed, but it was quite evident that she did not know the Israelite maiden. She beheld her for the first time, felt a desire, a shadow of doubt, by no means the same certainty as in the case of Albertine, Albertine upon whose comradeship she must so far have reckoned that, in the face of her coldness, she had felt the surprise of a foreigner familiar with Paris but not resident there, who, having returned to spend a few weeks there, on the site of the little theatre where he was in the habit of spending pleasant evenings, sees that they have now built a bank.

Bloch's cousin went and sat down at a table where she turned the pages of a magazine. Presently the young woman came and sat down, with an abstracted air, by her side. But under the table one could presently see their feet wriggling, then their legs and hands, in a confused heap. Words followed, a conversation began, and the young woman's innocent husband, who had been looking everywhere for her, was astonished to find her making plans for that very evening with a girl whom he did not know. His wife introduced Bloch's cousin to him as a friend of her childhood, by an inaudible name, for she had forgotten to ask her what her name was. But the husband's presence made their intimacy advance a stage farther, for they addressed each other as tu, having known each other at their convent, an incident at which they laughed heartily later on, as well as at the hoodwinked husband, with a gaiety which afforded them an excuse for more caresses.

As for Albertine, I cannot say that anywhere in the casino or on the beach was her behaviour with any girl unduly free. I found in it indeed an excess of coldness and indifference which seemed to be more than good breeding, to be a ruse planned to avert suspicion. When questioned by some girl, she had a quick, icy, decent way of replying in a very loud voice: "Yes, I shall be going to the tennis court about five. I shall bathe to-morrow morning about eight," and of at once turning away from the person to whom she had said this — all of which had a horrible appearance of being meant to put people off the scent, and either to make an assignation, or, the assignation already made in a whisper, to utter this speech, harmless enough in itself, aloud, so as not to attract attention. And when later on I saw her mount her bicycle and scorch away into the distance, I could not help thinking that she was hurrying to overtake the girl to whom she had barely spoken.

Only, when some handsome young woman stepped out of a motor-car at the end of the beach, Albertine could not help turning round. And she at once

explained: “I was looking at the new flag they’ve put up over the bathing place. The old one was pretty moth-eaten. But I really think this one is mouldier still.”

On one occasion Albertine was not content with cold indifference, and this made me all the more wretched. She knew that I was annoyed by the possibility of her sometimes meeting a friend of her aunt, who had a ‘bad style’ and came now and again to spend a few days with Mme. Bontemps. Albertine had pleased me by telling me that she would not speak to her again. And when this woman came to Incarville, Albertine said: “By the way, you know she’s here. Have they told you?” as though to shew me that she was not seeing her in secret. One day, when she told me this, she added: “Yes, I ran into her on the beach, and knocked against her as I passed, on purpose, to be rude to her.” When Albertine told me this, there came back to my mind a remark made by Mme. Bontemps, to which I had never given a second thought, when she had said to Mme. Swann in my presence how brazen her niece Albertine was, as though that were a merit, and told her how Albertine had reminded some official’s wife that her father had been employed in a kitchen. But a thing said by her whom we love does not long retain its purity; it withers, it decays. An evening or two later, I thought again of Albertine’s remark, and it was no longer the ill breeding of which she was so proud — and which could only make me smile — that it seemed to me to signify, it was something else, to wit that Albertine, perhaps even without any definite object, to irritate this woman’s senses, or wantonly to remind her of former proposals, accepted perhaps in the past, had swiftly brushed against her, thought that I had perhaps heard of this as it had been done in public, and had wished to forestall an unfavourable interpretation.

However, the jealousy that was caused me by the women whom Albertine perhaps loved was abruptly to cease.

***

We were waiting, Albertine and I, at the Balbec station of the little local railway. We had driven there in the hotel omnibus, because it was raining. Not far away from us was M. Nissim Bernard, with a black eye. He had recently forsaken the chorister from *Athalie* for the waiter at a much frequented farmhouse in the neighbourhood, known as the ‘Cherry Orchard.’ This rubicund youth, with his blunt features, appeared for all the world to have a tomato instead of a head. A tomato exactly similar served as head to his twin brother. To the detached observer there is this attraction about these perfect resemblances

between pairs of twins, that nature, becoming for the moment industrialised, seems to be offering a pattern for sale. Unfortunately M. Nissim Bernard looked at it from another point of view, and this resemblance was only external. Tomato II shewed a frenzied zeal in furnishing the pleasures exclusively of ladies, Tomato I did not mind condescending to meet the wishes of certain gentlemen. Now on each occasion when, stirred, as though by a reflex action, by the memory of pleasant hours spent with Tomato I, M. Bernard presented himself at the Cherry Orchard, being short-sighted (not that one need be short-sighted to mistake them), the old Israelite, unconsciously playing Amphitryon, would accost the twin brother with: “Will you meet me somewhere this evening?” He at once received a resounding smack in the face. It might even be repeated in the course of a single meal, when he continued with the second brother the conversation he had begun with the first. In the end this treatment so disgusted him, by association of ideas, with tomatoes, even of the edible variety, that whenever he heard a newcomer order that vegetable, at the next table to his own, in the Grand Hotel, he would murmur to him: “You must excuse me, Sir, for addressing you, without an introduction. But I heard you order tomatoes. They are stale to-day. I tell you in your own interest, for it makes no difference to me, I never touch them myself.” The stranger would reply with effusive thanks to this philanthropic and disinterested neighbour, call back the waiter, pretend to have changed his mind: “No, on second thoughts, certainly not, no tomatoes.” Aimé, who had seen it all before, would laugh to himself, and think: “He’s an old rascal, that Monsieur Bernard, he’s gone and made another of them change his order.” M. Bernard, as he waited for the already overdue tram, shewed no eagerness to speak to Albertine and myself, because of his black eye. We were even less eager to speak to him. It would however have been almost inevitable if, at that moment, a bicycle had not come dashing towards us; the lift-boy sprang from its saddle, breathless. Madame Verdurin had telephoned shortly after we left the hotel, to know whether I would dine with her two days later; we shall see presently why. Then, having given me the message in detail, the lift-boy left us, and, being one of these democratic ‘employees’ who affect independence with regard to the middle classes, and among themselves restore the principle of authority, explained: “I must be off, because of my chiefs.”

Albertine’s girl friends had gone, and would be away for some time. I was anxious to provide her with distractions. Even supposing that she might have found some happiness in spending the afternoons with no company but my own, at Balbec, I knew that such happiness is never complete, and that Albertine,

being still at the age (which some of us never outgrow) when we have not yet discovered that this imperfection resides in the person who receives the happiness and not in the person who gives it, might have been tempted to put her disappointment down to myself. I preferred that she should impute it to circumstances which, arranged by myself, would not give us an opportunity of being alone together, while at the same time preventing her from remaining in the casino and on the beach without me. And so I had asked her that day to come with me to Doncières, where I was going to meet Saint-Loup. With a similar hope of occupying her mind, I advised her to take up painting, in which she had had lessons in the past. While working she would not ask herself whether she was happy or unhappy. I would gladly have taken her also to dine now and again with the Verdurins and the Cambremers, who certainly would have been delighted to see any friend introduced by myself, but I must first make certain that Mme. Putbus was not yet at la Raspelière. It was only by going there in person that I could make sure of this, and, as I knew beforehand that on the next day but one Albertine would be going on a visit with her aunt, I had seized this opportunity to send Mme. Verdurin a telegram asking her whether she would be at home upon Wednesday. If Mme. Putbus was there, I would manage to see her maid, ascertain whether there was any danger of her coming to Balbec, and if so find out when, so as to take Albertine out of reach on the day. The little local railway, making a loop which did not exist at the time when I had taken it with my grandmother, now extended to Doncières-la-Goupil, a big station at which important trains stopped, among them the express by which I had come down to visit Saint-Loup, from Paris, and the corresponding express by which I had returned. And, because of the bad weather, the omnibus from the Grand Hotel took Albertine and myself to the station of the little tram, Balbec-Plage.

The little train had not yet arrived, but one could see, lazy and slow, the plume of smoke that it had left in its wake, which, confined now to its own power of locomotion as an almost stationary cloud, was slowly mounting the green slope of the cliff of Criquetot. Finally the little tram, which it had preceded by taking a vertical course, arrived in its turn, at a leisurely crawl. The passengers who were waiting to board it stepped back to make way for it, but without hurrying, knowing that they were dealing with a good-natured, almost human traveller, who, guided like the bicycle of a beginner, by the obliging signals of the station-master, in the strong hands of the engine-driver, was in no danger of running over anybody, and would come to a halt at the proper place.

My telegram explained the Verdurins' telephone message and had been all

the more opportune since Wednesday (the day I had fixed happened to be a Wednesday) was the day set apart for dinner-parties by Mme. Verdurin, at la Raspelière, as in Paris, a fact of which I was unaware. Mme. Verdurin did not give 'dinners,' but she had 'Wednesdays.' These Wednesdays were works of art. While fully conscious that they had not their match anywhere, Mme. Verdurin introduced shades of distinction between them. "Last Wednesday was not as good as the one before," she would say. "But I believe the next will be one of the best I have ever given." Sometimes she went so far as to admit: "This Wednesday was not worthy of the others. But I have a big surprise for you next week." In the closing weeks of the Paris season, before leaving for the country, the Mistress would announce the end of the Wednesdays. It gave her an opportunity to stimulate the faithful. "There are only three more Wednesdays left, there are only two more," she would say, in the same tone as though the world were coming to an end. "You aren't going to miss next Wednesday, for the finale." But this finale was a sham, for she would announce: "Officially, there will be no more Wednesdays. To-day was the last for this year. But I shall be at home all the same on Wednesday. We shall have a little Wednesday to ourselves; I dare say these little private Wednesdays will be the nicest of all." At la Raspelière, the Wednesdays were of necessity restricted, and since, if they had discovered a friend who was passing that way, they would invite him for one or another evening, almost every day of the week became a Wednesday. "I don't remember all the guests, but I know there's Madame la Marquise de Camembert," the liftboy had told me; his memory of our discussion of the name Cambremer had not succeeded in definitely supplanting that of the old world, whose syllables, familiar and full of meaning, came to the young employee's rescue when he was embarrassed by this difficult name, and were immediately preferred and readopted by him, not by any means from laziness or as an old and ineradicable usage, but because of the need for logic and clarity which they satisfied.

We hastened in search of an empty carriage in which I could hold Alber-tine in my arms throughout the journey. Having failed to find one, we got into a compartment in which there was already installed a lady with a massive face, old and ugly, with a masculine expression, very much in her Sunday best, who was reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Notwithstanding her commonness, she was eclectic in her tastes, and I found amusement in asking myself to what social category she could belong; I at once concluded that she must be the manager of some large brothel, a procuress on holiday. Her face, her manner, proclaimed the

fact aloud. Only, I had never yet supposed that such ladies read the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Albertine drew my attention to her with a wink and a smile. The lady wore an air of extreme dignity; and as I, for my part, bore within me the consciousness that I was invited, two days later, to the terminal point of the little railway, by the famous Mme. Verdurin, that at an intermediate station I was awaited by Robert de Saint-Loup, and that a little farther on I had it in my power to give great pleasure to Mme. de Cambremer, by going to stay at Féterne, my eyes sparkled with irony as I studied this self-important lady who seemed to think that, because of her elaborate attire, the feathers in her hat, her *Revue des Deux Mondes*, she was a more considerable personage than myself. I hoped that the lady would not remain in the train much longer than M. Nissim Bernard, and that she would alight at least at Toutainville, but no. The train stopped at Evreville, she remained seated. Similarly at Montmartin-sur-Mer, at Parville-la-Bingard, at Incarville, so that in despair, when the train had left Saint-Frichoux, which was the last station before Doncières, I began to embrace Albertine without bothering about the lady. At Doncières, Saint-Loup had come to meet me at the station, with the greatest difficulty, he told me, for, as he was staying with his aunt, my telegram had only just reached him and he could not, having been unable to make any arrangements beforehand, spare me more than an hour of his time. This hour seemed to me, alas, far too long, for as soon as we had left the train Albertine devoted her whole attention to Saint-Loup. She never talked to me, barely answered me if I addressed her, repulsed me when I approached her. With Robert, on the other hand, she laughed her provoking laugh, talked to him volubly, played with the dog he had brought with him, and, as she excited the animal, deliberately rubbed against its master. I remembered that, on the day when Albertine had allowed me to kiss her for the first time, I had had a smile of gratitude for the unknown seducer who had wrought so profound a change in her and had so far simplified my task. I thought of him now with horror. Robert must have noticed that I was not unconcerned about Albertine, for he offered no response to her provocations, which made her extremely annoyed with myself; then he spoke to me as though I had been alone, which, when she realised it, raised me again in her esteem. Robert asked me if I would not like to meet those of his friends with whom he used to make me dine every evening at Doncières, when I was staying there, who were still in the garrison. And as he himself adopted that irritating manner which he rebuked in others: “What is the good of your having worked so hard to *charm* them if you don’t want to see them again?” I declined his offer, for I did not wish to run any risk of being parted

from Albertine, but also because now I was detached from them. From them, which is to say from myself. We passionately long that there may be another life in which we shall be similar to what we are here below. But we do not pause to reflect that, even without waiting for that other life, in this life, after a few years we are unfaithful to what we have been, to what we wished to remain immortally. Even without supposing that death is to alter us more completely than the changes that occur in the course of a lifetime, if in that other life we were to encounter the self that we have been, we should turn away from ourselves as from those people with whom we were once on friendly terms but whom we have not seen for years — such as Saint-Loup's friends whom I used so much to enjoy meeting again every evening at the Faisan Doré, and whose conversation would now have seemed to me merely a boring importunity. In this respect, and because I preferred not to go there in search of what had pleased me there in the past, a stroll through Doncières. might have seemed to me a préfiguration of an arrival in Paradise. We dream much of Paradise, or rather of a number of successive Paradises, but each of them is, long before we die, a Paradise lost, in which we should feel ourselves lost also.

He left us at the station. "But you may have about an hour to wait," he told me. "If you spend it here, you will probably see my uncle Charlus, who is going by the train to Paris, ten minutes before yours. I have said good-bye to him already, because I have to go back before his train starts. I didn't tell him about you, because I hadn't got your telegram." To the reproaches which I heaped upon Albertine when Saint-Loup had left us, she replied that she had intended, by her coldness towards me, to destroy any idea that he might have formed if, at the moment when the train stopped, he had seen me leaning against her with my arm round her waist. He had indeed noticed this attitude (I had not caught sight of him, otherwise I should have adopted one that was more correct), and had had time to murmur in my ear: "So that's how it is, one of those priggish little girls you told me about, who wouldn't go near Mlle. de Stermaria because they thought her fast?" I had indeed mentioned to Robert, and in all sincerity, when I went down from Paris to visit him at Doncières, and when we were talking about our time at Balbec, that there was nothing to be had from Albertine, that she was the embodiment of virtue. And now that I had long since discovered for myself that this was false, I was even more anxious that Robert should believe it to be true. It would have been sufficient for me to tell Robert that I was in love with Albertine. He was one of those people who are capable of denying themselves a pleasure to spare their friend sufferings which they would feel even more keenly

if they themselves were the victims. “Yes, she is still rather childish. But you don’t know anything against her?” I added anxiously. “Nothing, except that I saw you clinging together like a pair of lovers.”

“Your attitude destroyed absolutely nothing,” I told Albertine when Saint-Loup had left us. “Quite true,” she said to me, “it was stupid of me, I hurt your feelings, I’m far more unhappy about it than you are. You’ll see, I shall never be like that again; forgive me,” she pleaded, holding out her hand with a sorrowful air. At that moment, from the entrance to the waiting-room in which we were sitting, I saw advance slowly, followed at a respectful distance by a porter loaded with his baggage, M. de Charlus.

In Paris, where I encountered him only in evening dress, immobile, straitlaced in a black coat, maintained in a vertical posture by his proud aloofness, his thirst for admiration, the soar of his conversation, I had never realised how far he had aged. Now, in a light travelling suit which made him appear stouter, as he swaggered through the room, balancing a pursy stomach and an almost symbolical behind, the cruel light of day broke up into paint, upon his lips, rice-powder fixed by cold cream, on the tip of his nose, black upon his dyed moustaches whose ebon tint formed a contrast to his grizzled hair, all that by artificial light had seemed the animated colouring of a man who was still young.

While I stood talking to him, though briefly, because of his train, I kept my eye on Albertine’s carriage to shew her that I was coming. When I turned my head towards M. de Charlus, he asked nie to be so kind as to summon a soldier, a relative of his, who was standing on the other side of the platform, as though he were waiting to take our train, but in the opposite direction, away from Balbec. “He is in his regimental band,” said M. de Charlus. “As you are so fortunate as to be still young enough, and I unfortunately am old enough for you to save me the trouble of going across to him.” I took it upon myself to go across to the soldier he pointed out to me, and saw from the lyres embroidered on his collar that he was a bandsman. But, just as I was preparing to execute my commission, what was my surprise, and, I may say, my pleasure, on recognising Morel, the son of my uncle’s valet, who recalled to me so many memories. They made me forget to convey M. de Charlus’s message. “What, you are at Doncières?” “Yes, and they’ve put me in the band attached to the batteries.” But he made this answer in a dry and haughty tone. He had become an intense ‘poseur,’ and evidently the sight of myself, reminding him of his father’s profession, was not pleasing to him. Suddenly I saw M. de Charlus descending upon us. My delay

had evidently taxed his patience. “I should like to listen to a little music this evening,” he said to Morel without any preliminaries, “I pay five hundred francs for the evening, which may perhaps be of interest to one of your friends, if you have any in the band.” Knowing as I did the insolence of M. de Charlus, I was astonished at his not even saying how d’ye do to his young friend. The Baron did not however give me time to think. Holding out his hand in the friendliest manner: “Good-bye, my dear fellow,” he said, as a hint that I might now leave them. I had, as it happened, left my dear Albertine too long alone. “D’you know,” I said to her as I climbed into the carriage, “life by the sea-side and travelling make me realise that the theatre of the world is stocked with fewer settings than actors, and with fewer actors than situations.” “What makes you say that?” “Because M. de Charlus asked me just now to fetch one of his friends, whom, this instant, on the platform of this station, I have just discovered to be one of my own.” But as I uttered these words, I began to wonder how the Baron could have bridged the social gulf to which I had not given a thought. It occurred to me first of all that it might be through Jupien, whose niece, as the reader may remember, had seemed to shew a preference for the violinist. What did baffle me completely was that, when due to leave for Paris in five minutes, the Baron should have asked for a musical evening. But, visualising Jupien’s niece again in my memory, I was beginning to find that ‘recognitions’ did indeed play an important part in life, when all of a sudden the truth flashed across my mind and I realised that I had been absurdly innocent. M. de Charlus had never in his life set eyes upon Morel, nor Morel upon M. de Charlus, who, dazzled but also terrified by a warrior, albeit he bore no weapon but a lyre, had called upon me in his emotion to bring him the person whom he never suspected that I already knew. In any case, the offer of five hundred francs must have made up to Morel for the absence of any previous relations, for I saw that they continued to talk, without reflecting that they were standing close beside our tram. As I recalled the manner in which M. de Charlus had come up to Morel and myself, I saw at once the resemblance to certain of his relatives, when they picked up a woman in the street. Only the desired object had changed its sex. After a certain age, and even if different evolutions are occurring in us, the more we become ourselves, the more our characteristic features are accentuated. For Nature, while harmoniously contributing the design of her tapestry, breaks the monotony of the composition thanks to the variety of the intercepted forms. Besides, the arrogance with which M. de Charlus had accosted the violinist is relative, and depends upon the point of view one adopts. It would have been recognised by

three out of four of the men in society who nodded their heads to him, not by the prefect of police who, a few years later, was to keep him under observation.

"The Paris train is signalled, Sir," said the porter who was carrying his luggage. "But I am not going by the train, put it in the cloakroom, damn you!" said M. de Charlus, as he gave twenty francs to the porter, astonished by the change of plan and charmed by the tip. This generosity at once attracted a flower-seller. "Buy these carnations, look, this lovely rose, kind gentlemen, it will bring you luck." M. de Charlus, out of patience, handed her a couple of francs, in exchange for which the woman gave him her blessing, and her flowers as well. "Good God, why can't she leave us alone," said M. de Charlus, addressing himself in an ironical and complaining tone, as of a man distraught, to Morel, to whom he found a certain comfort in appealing. "We've quite enough to talk about as it is." Perhaps the porter was not yet out of earshot, perhaps M. de Charlus did not care to have too numerous an audience, perhaps these incidental remarks enabled his lofty timidity not to approach too directly the request for an assignation. The musician, turning with a frank, imperative and decided air to the flower-seller, raised a hand which repulsed her and indicated to her that they did not want her flowers and that she was to get out of their way as quickly as possible. M. de Charlus observed with ecstasy this authoritative, virile gesture, made by the graceful hand for which it ought still to have been too weighty, too massively brutal, with a precocious firmness and suppleness which gave to this still beardless adolescent the air of a young David capable of waging war against Goliath. The Baron's admiration was unconsciously blended with the smile with which we observe in a child an expression of gravity beyond his years. "This is a person whom I should like to accompany me on my travels and help me in my business. How he would simplify my life," M. de Charlus said to himself.

The train for Paris (which M. de Charlus did not take) started. Then we took our seats in our own train, Albertine and I, without my knowing what had become of M. de Charlus and Morel. "We must never quarrel any more, I beg your pardon again," Albertine repeated, alluding to the Saint-Loup incident. "We must always be nice to each other," she said tenderly. "As for your friend Saint-Loup, if you think that I am the least bit interested in him, you are quite mistaken. All that I like about him is that he seems so very fond of you." "He's a very good fellow," I said, taking care not to supply Robert with those imaginary excellences which I should not have failed to invent, out of friendship for himself, had I been with anybody but Albertine. "He's an excellent creature,

frank, devoted, loyal, a person you can rely on to do anything." In saying this I confined myself, held in check by my jealousy, to telling the truth about Saint-Loup, but what I said was literally true. It found expression in precisely the same terms that Mme. de Villeparisis had employed in speaking to me of him, when I did not yet know him, imagined him to be so different, so proud, and said to myself: "People think him good because he is a great gentleman." Just as when she had said to me: "He would be so pleased," I imagined, after seeing him outside the hotel, preparing to drive away, that his aunt's speech had been a mere social banality, intended to natter me. And I had realised afterwards that she had said what she did sincerely, thinking of the things that interested me, of my reading, and because she knew that that was what Saint-Loup liked, as it was to be my turn to say sincerely to somebody who was writing a history of his ancestor La Rochefoucauld, the author of the *Maximes*, who wished to consult Robert about him: "He will be so pleased." It was simply that I had learned to know him. But, when I set eyes on him for the first time, I had not supposed that an intelligence akin to my own could be enveloped in so much outward elegance of dress and attitude. By his feathers I had judged him to be a bird of another species. It was Albertine now who, perhaps a little because Saint-Loup, in his kindness to myself, had been so cold to her, said to me what I had already thought: "Ah! He is as devoted as all that! I notice that people always find all the virtues in other people, when they belong to the Faubourg Saint-Germain." Now that Saint-Loup belonged to the Faubourg Saint-Germain was a thing of which I had never once thought in the course of all these years in which, stripping himself of his prestige, he had displayed to me his virtues. A change in our perspective in looking at other people, more striking already in friendship than in merely social relations, but how much more striking still in love, where desire on so vast a scale increases to such proportions the slightest signs of coolness, that far less than the coolness Saint-Loup had shewn me in the beginning had been enough to make me suppose at first that Albertine scorned me, imagine her friends to be creatures marvellously inhuman, and ascribe merely to the indulgence that people feel for beauty and for a certain elegance, Elstir's judgment when he said to me of the little band, with just the same sentiment as Mme. de Villeparisis speaking of Saint-Loup: "They are good girls." But this was not the opinion that I would instinctively have formed when I heard Albertine say: "In any case, whether he's devoted or not, I sincerely hope I shall never see him again, since he's made us quarrel. We must never quarrel again. It isn't nice." I felt, since she had seemed to desire Saint-Loup, almost cured for

the time being of the idea that she cared for women, which I had supposed to be incurable. And, faced by Albertine's mackintosh in which she seemed to have become another person, the tireless vagrant of rainy days, and which, close-fitting, malleable and grey, seemed at that moment not so much intended to protect her garments from the rain as to have been soaked by her and to be clinging to my mistress's body as though to take the imprint of her form for a sculptor, I tore apart that tunic which jealously espoused a longed-for bosom and, drawing Albertine towards me: "But won't you, indolent traveller, dream upon my shoulder, resting your brow upon it?" I said, taking her head in my hands, and shewing her the wide meadows, flooded and silent, which extended in the gathering dusk to the horizon closed by the parallel openings of valleys far and blue.

Two days later, on the famous Wednesday, in that same little train, which I had again taken, at Balbec, to go and dine at la Raspelière, I was taking care not to miss Cottard at Graincourt-Saint-Vast, where a second telephone message from Mme. Verdurin had told me that I should find him. He was to join my train and would tell me where we had to get out to pick up the carriages that would be sent from la Raspelière to the station. And so, as the little train barely stopped for a moment at Graincourt, the first station after Doncières, I was standing in readiness at the open window, so afraid was I of not seeing Cottard or of his not seeing me. Vain fears! I had not realised to what an extent the little clan had moulded all its regular members after the same type, so that they, being moreover in full evening dress, as they stood waiting upon the platform, let themselves be recognised immediately by a certain air of assurance, fashion and familiarity, by a look in their eyes which seemed to sweep, like an empty space in which there was nothing to arrest their attention, the serried ranks of the common herd, watched for the arrival of some fellow-member who had taken the train at an earlier station, and sparkled in anticipation of the talk that was to come. This sign of election, with which the habit of dining together had marked the members of the little group, was not all that distinguished them; when numerous, in full strength, they were massed together, forming a more brilliant patch in the midst of the troop of passengers — what Brichot called the *pecus* — upon whose dull countenances could be read no conception of what was meant by the name Verdurin, no hope of ever dining at la Raspelière. To be sure, these common travellers would have been less interested than myself had anyone quoted in their hearing — notwithstanding the notoriety that several of them had achieved — the names of those of the faithful whom I was astonished to see

continuing to dine out, when many of them had already been doing so, according to the stories that I had heard, before my birth, at a period at once so distant and so vague that I was inclined to exaggerate its remoteness. The contrast between the continuance not only of their existence, but of the fulness of their powers, and the annihilation of so many friends whom I had already seen, in one place or another, pass away, gave me the same sentiment that we feel when in the stop-press column of the newspapers we read the very announcement that we least expected, for instance that of an untimely death, which seems to us fortuitous because the causes that have led up to it have remained outside our knowledge. This is the feeling that death does not descend upon all men alike, but that a more oncoming wave of its tragic tide carries off a life placed at the same level as others which the waves that follow will long continue to spare. We shall see later on that the diversity of the forms of death that circulate invisibly is the cause of the peculiar unexpectedness presented, in the newspapers, by their obituary notices. Then I saw that, with the passage of time, not only do the real talents that may coexist with the most commonplace conversation reveal and impose themselves, but furthermore that mediocre persons arrive at those exalted positions, attached in the imagination of our childhood to certain famous elders, when it never occurred to us that, after a certain number of years, their disciples, become masters, would be famous also, and would inspire the respect and awe that once they felt. But if the names of the faithful were unknown to the *pecus*, their aspect still singled them out in its eyes. Indeed in the train (when the coincidence of what one or another of them might have been doing during the day, assembled them all together), having to collect at a subsequent station only an isolated member, the carriage in which they were gathered, ticketed with the elbow of the sculptor Ski, flagged with Cottard's *Temps*, stood out in the distance like a special saloon, and rallied at the appointed station the tardy comrade. The only one who might, because of his semi-blindness, have missed these welcoming signals, was Brichot. But one of the party would always volunteer to keep a look-out for the blind man, and, as soon as his straw hat, his green umbrella and blue spectacles caught the eye, he would be gently but hastily guided towards the chosen compartment. So that it was inconceivable that one of the faithful, without exciting the gravest suspicions of his being 'on the loose,' or even of his not having come 'by the train,' should not pick up the others in the course of the journey. Sometimes the opposite process occurred: one of the faithful had been obliged to go some distance down the line during the afternoon and was obliged in consequence to make part of the journey alone before being

joined by the group; but even when thus isolated, alone of his kind, he did not fail as a rule to produce a certain effect. The Future towards which he was travelling marked him out to the person on the seat opposite, who would say to himself: “That must be somebody,” would discern, round the soft hat of Cottard or of the sculptor Ski, a vague aureole and would be only half-astonished when at the next station an elegant crowd, if it were their terminal point, greeted the faithful one at the carriage door and escorted him to one of the waiting carriages, all of them reverently saluted by the factotum of Douville station, or, if it were an intermediate station, invaded the compartment. This was what was done, and with precipitation, for some of them had arrived late, just as the train which was already in the station was about to start, by the troop which Cottard led at a run towards the carriage in the window of which he had seen me signalling. Brichot, who was among these faithful, had become more faithful than ever in the course of these years which had diminished the assiduity of others. As his sight became steadily weaker, he had been obliged, even in Paris, to reduce more and more his working hours after dark. Besides he was out of sympathy with the modern Sorbonne, where ideas of scientific exactitude, after the German model, were beginning to prevail over humanism. He now confined himself exclusively to his lectures and to his duties as an examiner; and so had a great deal more time to devote to social pursuits. That is to say, to evenings at the Verdurins’, or to those parties that now and again were offered to the Verdurins by one of the faithful, tremulous with emotion. It is true that on two occasions love had almost succeeded in achieving what his work could no longer do, in detaching Brichot from the little clan. But Mme. Verdurin, who kept her eyes open, and moreover, having acquired the habit in the interests of her salon, had come to take a disinterested pleasure in this sort of drama and execution, had immediately brought about a coolness between him and the dangerous person, being skilled in (as she expressed it) ‘putting things in order’ and ‘applying the red hot iron to the wound.’ This she had found all the more easy in the case of one of the dangerous persons, who was simply Brichot’s laundress, and Mme. Verdurin, having the right of entry into the Professor’s fifth floor rooms, crimson with rage, when she deigned to climb his stairs, had only had to shut the door in the wretched woman’s face. “What!” the Mistress had said to Brichot, “a woman like myself does you the honour of calling upon you, and you receive a creature like that?” Brichot had never forgotten the service that Mme. Verdurin had rendered him by preventing his old age from foundering in the mire, and became more and more strongly attached to her, whereas, in contrast to this revival of

affection and possibly because of it, the Mistress was beginning to be tired of a too docile follower, and of an obedience of which she could be certain beforehand. But Brichot derived from his intimacy with the Verdurins a distinction which set him apart from all his colleagues at the Sorbonne. They were dazzled by the accounts that he gave them of dinner-parties to which they would never be invited, by the mention made of him in the reviews, the exhibition of his portrait in the Salon, by some writer or painter of repute whose talent the occupants of the other chairs in the Faculty of Arts esteemed, but without any prospect of attracting his attention, not to mention the elegance of the mundane philosopher's attire, an elegance which they had mistaken at first for slackness until their colleague kindly explained to them that a tall hat is naturally laid on the floor, when one is paying a call, and is not the right thing for dinners in the country, however smart, where it should be replaced by a soft hat, which goes quite well with a dinner-jacket. For the first few moments after the little group had plunged into the carriage, I could not even speak to Cottard, for he was suffocated, not so much by having run in order not to miss the train as by his astonishment at having caught it so exactly. He felt more than the joy inherent in success, almost the hilarity of an excellent joke. "Ah! That was a good one!" he said when he had recovered himself. "A minute later! 'Pon my soul, that's what they call arriving in the nick of time!" he added, with a wink intended not so much to inquire whether the expression were apt, for he was now overflowing with assurance, but to express his satisfaction. At length he was able to introduce me to the other members of the little clan. I was annoyed to see that they were almost all in the dress which in Paris is called smoking. I had forgotten that the Verdurins were beginning a timid evolution towards fashionable ways, retarded by the Dreyfus case, accelerated by the 'new' music, an evolution which for that matter they denied, and continued to deny until it was complete, like those military objectives which a general does not announce until he has reached them, so as not to appear defeated if he fails. In addition to which, Society was quite prepared to go half way to meet them. It went so far as to regard them as people to whose house nobody in Society went but who were not in the least perturbed by the fact. The Verdurin salon was understood to be a Temple of Music. It was there, people assured you, that Vinteuil had found inspiration, encouragement. Now, even if Vinteuil's sonata remained wholly unappreciated, and almost unknown, his name, quoted as that of the greatest of modern composers, had an extraordinary effect. Moreover, certain young men of the Faubourg having decided that they ought to be more intellectual than the

middle classes, there were three of them who had studied music, and among these Vinteuil's sonata enjoyed an enormous vogue. They would speak of it, on returning to their homes, to the intelligent mothers who had incited them to acquire culture. And, taking an interest in what interested their sons, at a concert these mothers would gaze with a certain respect at Mme. Verdurin in her front box, following the music in the printed score. So far, this social success latent in the Verdurins was revealed by two facts only. In the first place, Mme. Verdurin would say of the Principessa di Caprarola: "Ah! She is intelligent, she is a charming woman. What I cannot endure, are the imbeciles, the people who bore me, they drive me mad." Which would have made anybody at all perspicacious realise that the Principessa di Caprarola, a woman who moved in the highest society, had called upon Mme. Verdurin. She had even mentioned her name in the course of a visit of condolence which she had paid to Mme. Swann after the death of her husband, and had asked whether she knew them. "What name did you say?" Odette had asked, with a sudden wistfulness. "Verdurin? Oh, yes, of course," she had continued in a plaintive tone, "I don't know them, or rather, I know them without really knowing them, they are people I used to meet at people's houses, years ago, they are quite nice." When the Principessa di Caprarola had gone, Odette would fain have spoken the bare truth. But the immediate falsehood was not the fruit of her calculations, but the revelation of her fears, of her desires. She denied not what it would have been adroit to deny, but what she would have liked not to have happened, even if the other person was bound to hear an hour later that it was a fact. A little later she had recovered her assurance, and would indeed anticipate questions by saying, so as not to appear to be afraid of them: "Mme. Verdurin, why, I used to know her terribly well!" with an affectation of humility, like a great lady who tells you that she has taken the tram. "There has been a great deal of talk about the Verdurins lately," said Mme. de Souvré. Odette, with the smiling disdain of a Duchess, replied: "Yes, I do seem to have heard a lot about them lately. Every now and then there are new people who arrive like that in society," without reflecting that she herself was among the newest. "The Principessa di Caprarola has dined there," Mme. de Souvré went on. "Ah!" replied Odette, accentuating her smile, "that does not surprise me. That sort of thing always begins with the Principessa di Caprarola, and then some one else follows suit, like Comtesse Mole." Odette, in saying this, appeared to be filled with a profound contempt for the two great ladies who made a habit of 'house-warming' in recently established drawing-rooms. One felt from her tone that the implication was that she, Odette, was, like

Mme. de Souvré, not the sort of person to let herself in for that sort of thing.

After the admission that Mme. Verdurin had made of the Principessa di Caprarola's intelligence, the second indication that the Verdurins were conscious of their future destiny was that (without, of course, their having formally requested it) they became most anxious that people should now come to dine with them in evening dress. M. Verdurin could now have been greeted without shame by his nephew, the one who was 'in the cart.' Among those who entered my carriage at Graincourt was Saniette, who long ago had been expelled from the Verdurins' by his cousin Forcheville, but had since returned. His faults, from the social point of view, had originally been — notwithstanding his superior qualities — something like Cottard's, shyness, anxiety to please, fruitless attempts to succeed in doing so. But if the course of life, by making Cottard assume, if not at the Verdurins', where he had, because of the influence that past associations exert over us when we find ourselves in familiar surroundings, remained more or less the same, at least in his practice, in his hospital ward, at the Academy of Medicine, a shell of coldness, disdain, gravity, that became more accentuated while he rewarded his appreciative students with puns, had made a clean cut between the old Cottard and the new, the same defects had on the contrary become exaggerated in Saniette, the more he sought to correct them. Conscious that he was frequently boring, that people did not listen to him, instead of then slackening his pace as Cottard would have done, of forcing their attention by an air of authority, not only did he try by adopting a humorous tone to make them forgive the unduly serious turn of his conversation, he increased his pace, cleared the ground, used abbreviations in order to appear less long-winded, more familiar with the matters of which he spoke, and succeeded only, by making them unintelligible, in seeming interminable. His self-assurance was not like that of Cottard, freezing his patients, who, when other people praised his social graces, would reply: "He is a different man when he receives you in his consulting room, you with your face to the light, and he with his back to it, and those piercing eyes." It failed to create an effect, one felt that it was cloaking an excessive shyness, that the merest trifle would be enough to dispel it. Saniette, whose friends had always told him that he was wanting in self-confidence, and who had indeed seen men whom he rightly considered greatly inferior to himself, attain with ease to the success that was denied to him, never began telling a story without smiling at its drollery, fearing lest a serious air might make his hearers underestimate the value of his wares. Sometimes, giving him credit for the comic element which he himself appeared to find in what he was

about to say, people would do him the honour of a general silence. But the story would fall flat. A fellow-guest who was endowed with a kind heart would sometimes convey to Saniette the private, almost secret encouragement of a smile of approbation, making it reach him furtively, without attracting attention, as one passes a note from hand to hand. But nobody went so far as to assume the responsibility, to risk the glaring publicity of an honest laugh. Long after the story was ended and had fallen flat, Saniette, crestfallen, would remain smiling to himself, as though relishing in it and for himself the delectation which he pretended to find adequate and which the others had not felt. As for the sculptor Ski, so styled on account of the difficulty they found in pronouncing his Polish surname, and because he himself made an affectation, since he had begun to move in a certain social sphere, of not wishing to be confused with certain relatives, perfectly respectable but slightly boring and very numerous, he had, at forty-four and with no pretension to good looks, a sort of boyishness, a dreamy wistfulness which was the result of his having been, until the age of ten, the most charming prodigal imaginable, the darling of all the ladies. Mme. Verdurin maintained that he was more of an artist than Elstir. Any resemblance that there may have been between them was, however, purely external. It was enough to make Elstir, who had met Ski once, feel for him the profound repulsion that is inspired in us less by the people who are our exact opposite than by those who résemble us in what is least good, in whom are displayed our worst qualities, the faults of which we have cured ourselves, who irritate by reminding us of how we may have appeared to certain other people before we became what we now are. But Mme. Verdurin thought that Ski had more temperament than Elstir because there was no art in which he had not a facility of expression, and she was convinced that he would have developed that facility into talent if he had not been so lazy. This seemed to the Mistress to be actually an additional gift, being the opposite of hard work which she regarded as the lot of people devoid of genius. Ski would paint anything you asked, on cuff-links or on the panels over doors. He sang with the voice of a composer, played from memory, giving the piano the effect of an orchestra, less by his virtuosity than by his vamped basses, which suggested the inability of the fingers to indicate that at a certain point the cornet entered, which, for that matter, he would imitate with his lips. Choosing his words when he spoke so as to convey an odd impression, just as he would pause before banging out a chord to say ‘Ping!’ so as to let the brasses be heard, he was regarded as marvellously intelligent, but as a matter of fact his ideas could be boiled down to two or three, extremely limited. Bored with his

reputation for whimsicality, he had set himself to shew that he was a practical, matter-of-fact person, whence a triumphant affectation of false precision, of false common sense, aggravated by his having no memory and a fund of information that was always inaccurate. The movements of his head, neck, limbs, would have been graceful if he had been still nine years old, with golden curls, a wide lace collar and little boots of red leather. Having reached Graincourt station with Cottard and Brichot, with time to spare, he and Cottard had left Brichot in the waiting-room and had gone for a stroll. When Cottard proposed to turn back, Ski had replied: “But there is no hurry. It isn’t the local train to-day, it’s the departmental train.” Delighted by the effect that this refinement of accuracy produced upon Cottard, he added, with reference to himself: “Yes, because Ski loves the arts, because he models in clay, people think he’s not practical. Nobody knows this line better than I do.” Nevertheless they had turned back towards the station when, all of a sudden, catching sight of the smoke of the approaching train, Cottard, with a wild shout, had exclaimed: “We shall have to put our best foot foremost.” They did as a matter of fact arrive with not a moment to spare, the distinction between local and departmental trains having never existed save in the mind of Ski. “But isn’t the Princess on the train?” came in ringing tones from Brichot, whose huge spectacles, resplendent as the reflectors that laryngologists attach to their foreheads to throw a light into the throats of their patients, seemed to have taken their life from the Professor’s eyes, and possibly because of the effort that he was making to adjust his sight to them, seemed themselves, even at the most trivial moments, to be gazing at themselves with a sustained attention and an extraordinary fixity. Brichot’s malady, as it gradually deprived him of his sight, had revealed to him the beauties of that sense, just as, frequently, we have to have made up our minds to part with some object, to make a present of it for instance, before we can study it, regret it, admire it. “No, no, the Princess went over to Maineville with some of Mme. Verdurin’s guests who were taking the Paris train. It is within the bounds of possibility that Mme. Verdurin, who had some business at Saint-Mars, may be with her! In that case, she will be coming with us, and we shall all travel together, which will be delightful. We shall have to keep our eyes skinned at Maineville and see what we shall see! Oh, but that’s nothing, you may say that we came very near to missing the bus. When I saw the train I was dumbfoundered. That’s what is called arriving at the psychological moment. Can’t you picture us missing the train, Mme. Verdurin seeing the carriages come back without us: Tableau!” added the doctor, who had not yet recovered from his emotion. “That would be a pretty

good joke, wouldn't it? Now then, Brichot, what have you to say about our little escapade?" inquired the doctor with a note of pride. "Upon my soul," replied Brichot, "why, yes, if you had found the train gone, that would have been what the late Villemain used to call a wipe in the eye!" But I, distracted at first by these people who were strangers to me, was suddenly reminded of what Cottard had said to me in the ball-room of the little casino, and, just as though there were an invisible link uniting an organ to our visual memory, the vision of Albertine leaning her breasts against Andrée's caused my heart a terrible pain. This pain did not last: the idea of Albertine's having relations with women seemed no longer possible since the occasion, forty-eight hours earlier, when the advances that my mistress had made to Saint-Loup had excited in me a fresh jealousy which had made me forget the old. I was simple enough to suppose that one taste of necessity excludes another. At Harambouville, as the tram was full, a farmer in a blue blouse who had only a third class ticket got into our compartment. The doctor, feeling that the Princess must not be allowed to travel with such a person, called a porter, shewed his card, describing him as medical officer to one of the big railway companies, and obliged the station-master to make the farmer get out. This incident so pained and alarmed Saniette's timid spirit that, as soon as he saw it beginning, fearing already lest, in view of the crowd of peasants on the platform, it should assume the proportions of a rising, he pretended to be suffering from a stomach-ache, and, so that he might not be accused of any share in the responsibility for the doctor's violence, wandered down the corridor, pretending to be looking for what Cottard called the 'water.' Failing to find one, he stood and gazed at the scenery from the other end of the 'twister.' "If this is your first appearance at Mme. Verdurin's, Sir," I was addressed by Brichot, anxious to shew off his talents before a newcomer, "you will find that there is no place where one feels more the 'amenities of life,' to quote one of the inventors of dilettantism, of pococurantism, of all sorts of words in — ism that are in fashion among our little snobbesses, I refer to M. le Prince de Talleyrand." For, when he spoke of these great noblemen of the past, he thought it clever and 'in the period' to prefix a 'M.' to their titles, and said 'M. le Duc de La Rochefoucauld,' 'M. le Cardinal de Retz,' referring to these also as 'That struggle-for-lifer de Gondi,' 'that Boulangist de Marcillac.' And he never failed to call Montesquieu, with a smile, when he referred to him: "Monsieur le Président Secondât de Montesquieu." An intelligent man of the world would have been irritated by a pedantry which reeked so of the lecture-room. But in the perfect manners of the man of the world when speaking of a Prince, there is a

pedantry also, which betrays a different caste, that in which one prefixes ‘the Emperor’ to the name ‘William’ and addresses a Royal Highness in the third person. “Ah, now that is a man,” Brichot continued, still referring to ‘Monsieur le Prince de Talleyrand’—”to whom we take off our hats. He is an ancestor.” “It is a charming house,” Cottard told me, “you will find a little of everything, for Mme. Verdurin is not exclusive, great scholars like Brichot, the high nobility, such as the Princess Sherbatoff, a great Russian lady, a friend of the Grand Duchess Eudoxie, who even sees her alone at hours when no one else is admitted.” As a matter of fact the Grand Duchess Eudoxie, not wishing Princess Sherbatoff, who for years past had been cut by everyone, to come to her house when there might be other people, allowed her to come only in the early morning, when Her Imperial Highness was not at home to any of those friends to whom it would have been as unpleasant to meet the Princess as it would have been awkward for the Princess to meet them. As, for the last three years, as soon as she came away, like a manicurist, from the Grand Duchess, Mme. Sherbatoff would go on to Mme. Verdurin, who had just awoken, and stuck to her for the rest of the day, one might say that the Princess’s loyalty surpassed even that of Brichot, constant as he was at those Wednesdays, both in Paris, where he had the pleasure of fancying himself a sort of Chateaubriand at l’Abbaye-aux-Bois, and in the country, where he saw himself becoming the equivalent of what might have been in the salon of Mme. de Châtelet the man whom he always named (with an erudite sarcasm and satisfaction): “M. de Voltaire.”

Her want of friends had enabled Princess Sherbatoff to shew for some years past to the Verdurins a fidelity which made her more than an ordinary member of the ‘faithful,’ the type of faithfulness, the ideal which Mme. Verdurin had long thought unattainable and which now, in her later years, she at length found incarnate in this new feminine recruit. However keenly the Mistress might feel the pangs of jealousy, it was without precedent that the most assiduous of her faithful should not have ‘failed’ her at least once. The most stay-at-home yielded to the temptation to travel; the most continent fell from virtue; the most robust might catch influenza, the idlest be caught for his month’s soldiering, the most indifferent go to close the eyes of a dying mother. And it was in vain that Mme. Verdurin told them then, like the Roman Empress, that she was the sole general whom her legion must obey, like the Christ or the Kaiser that he who loved his father or mother more than her and was not prepared to leave them and follow her was not worthy of her, that instead of slacking in bed or letting themselves be made fools of by bad women they would do better to remain in her company, by

her, their sole remedy and sole delight. But destiny which is sometimes pleased to brighten the closing years of a life that has passed the mortal span had made Mme. Verdurin meet the Princess Sherbatoff. Out of touch with her family, an exile from her native land, knowing nobody but the Baroness Putbus and the Grand Duchess Eudoxie, to whose houses, because she herself had no desire to meet the friends of the former, and the latter no desire that her friends should meet the Princess, she went only in the early morning hours when Mme. Verdurin was still asleep, never once, so far as she could remember, having been confined to her room since she was twelve years old, when she had had the measles, having on the 3lst of December replied to Mme. Verdurin who, afraid of being left alone, had asked her whether she would not 'shake down' there for the night, in spite of its being New Year's Eve: "Why, what is there to prevent me, any day of the year? Besides, to-morrow is a day when one stays at home, and this is my home," living in a boarding-house, and moving from it whenever the Verdurins moved, accompanying them upon their holidays, the Princess had so completely exemplified to Mme. Verdurin the line of Vigny:

Thou only didst appear that which one seeks always,

that the Lady President of the little circle, anxious to make sure of one of her 'faithful' even after death, had made her promise that whichever of them survived the other should be buried by her side. Before strangers — among whom we must always reckon him to whom we lie most barefacedly because he is the person whose scorn we should most dread: ourself — Princess Sherbatoff took care to represent her only three friendships — with the Grand Duchess, the Verdurins, and the Baroness Putbus — as the only ones, not which cataclysms beyond her control had allowed to emerge from the destruction of all the rest, but which a free choice had made her elect in preference to any other, and to which a certain love of solitude and simplicity had made her confine herself. "I see *nobody* else," she would say, insisting upon the inflexible character of what appeared to be rather a rule that one imposes upon oneself than a necessity to which one submits. She would add: "I visit only three houses," as a dramatist who fears that it may not run to a fourth announces that there will be only three performances of his play. Whether or not M. and Mme. Verdurin believed in the truth of this fiction, they had helped the Princess to instil it into the minds of the faithful. And they in turn were persuaded both that the Princess, among the thousands of invitations that were offered her, had chosen the Verdurins alone, and that the Verdurins, courted in vain by all the higher aristocracy, had consented to make but a single exception, in favour of the Princess.

In their eyes, the Princess, too far superior to her native element not to find it boring, among all the people whose society she might have enjoyed, found the Verdurins alone entertaining, while they, in return, deaf to the overtures with which they were bombarded by the entire aristocracy, had consented to make but a single exception, in favour of a great lady of more intelligence than the rest of her kind, the Princess Sherbatoff.

The Princess was very rich; she engaged for every first night a large box, to which, with the assent of Mme. Verdurin, she invited the faithful and nobody else. People would point to this pale and enigmatic person who had grown old without turning white, turning red rather like certain sere and shrivelled hedgerow fruits. They admired both her influence and her humility, for, having always with her an Academician, Brichot, a famous scientist, Cottard, the leading pianist of the day, at a later date M. de Charlus, she nevertheless made a point of securing the least prominent box in the theatre, remained in the background, paid no attention to the rest of the house, lived exclusively for the little group, who, shortly before the end of the performance, would withdraw in the wake of this strange sovereign, who was not without a certain timid, fascinating, faded beauty. But if Mme. Sherbatoff did not look at the audience, remained in shadow, it was to try to forget that there existed a living world which she passionately desired and was unable to know: the *coterie* in a box was to her what is to certain animals their almost corpselike immobility in the presence of danger. Nevertheless the thirst for novelty and for the curious which possesses people in society made them pay even more attention perhaps to this mysterious stranger than to the celebrities in the front boxes to whom everybody paid a visit. They imagined that she must be different from the people whom they knew, that a marvellous intellect combined with a discerning bounty retained round about her that little circle of eminent men. The Princess was compelled, if you spoke to her about anyone, or introduced anyone to her, to feign an intense coldness, in order to keep up the fiction of her horror of society. Nevertheless, with the support of Cottard or Mme. Verdurin, several newcomers succeeded in making her acquaintance and such was her excitement at making a fresh acquaintance that she forgot the fable of her deliberate isolation, and went to the wildest extremes to please the newcomer. If he was entirely unimportant, the rest would be astonished. “How strange that the Princess, who refuses to know anyone, should make an exception of such an uninteresting person.” But these fertilising acquaintances were rare, and the Princess lived narrowly confined in the midst of the faithful.

Cottard said far more often: “I shall see him on Wednesday at the Verdurins’,” than: “I shall see him on Tuesday at the Academy.” He spoke, too, of the Wednesdays as of an engagement equally important and inevitable. But Cottard was one of those people, little sought after, who make it as imperious a duty to respond to an invitation as if such invitations were orders, like a military or judicial summons. It required a call from a very important patient to make him “fail” the Verdurins on a Wednesday, the importance depending moreover rather upon the rank of the patient than upon the gravity of his complaint. For Cottard, excellent fellow as he was, would forego the delights of a Wednesday not for a workman who had had a stroke, but for a Minister’s cold. Even then he would say to his wife: “Make my apologies to Mme. Verdurin. Tell her that I shall be coming later on. His Excellency might really have chosen some other day to catch cold.” One Wednesday their old cook having opened a vein in her arm, Cottard, already in his dinner-jacket to go to the Verdurins’, had shrugged his shoulders when his wife had timidly inquired whether he could not bandage the cut: “Of course I can’t, Léontine,” he had groaned; “can’t you see I’ve got my white waistcoat on?” So as not to annoy her husband, Mme. Cottard had sent post haste for his chief dresser. He, to save time, had taken a cab, with the result that, his carriage entering the courtyard just as Cottard’s was emerging to take him to the Verdurins’, five minutes had been wasted in backing to let one another pass. Mme. Cottard was worried that the dresser should see his master in evening dress. Cottard sat cursing the delay, from remorse perhaps, and started off in a villainous temper which it took all the Wednesday’s pleasures to dispel.

If one of Cottard's patients were to ask him: "Do you ever see the Guermantes?" it was with the utmost sincerity that the Professor would reply: "Perhaps not actually the Guermantes, I can't be certain. But I meet all those people at the house of some friends of mine. You must, of course, have heard of the Verdurins. They know everybody. Besides, they certainly are not people who've come down in the world. They've got the goods, all right. It is generally estimated that Mme. Verdurin is worth thirty-five million. Gad, thirty-five million, that's a pretty figure. And so she doesn't make two bites at a cherry. You mentioned the Duchesse de Guermantes. Let me explain the difference. Mme. Verdurin is a great lady, the Duchesse de Guermantes is probably a nobody. You see the distinction, of course. In any case, whether the Guermantes go to Mme. Verdurin's or not, she entertains all the very best people, the d'Sherbatôffs, the d'Forchevilles, *e tutti quanti*, people of the highest flight, all the nobility of France and Navarre, with whom you would see me conversing as man to man. Of course, those sort of people are only too glad to meet the princes of science," he added, with a smile of fatuous conceit, brought to his lips by his proud satisfaction not so much that the expression formerly reserved for men like Potain and Charcot should now be applicable to himself, as that he knew at last how to employ all these expressions that were authorised by custom, and, after a long course of study, had learned them by heart. And so, after mentioning to me Princess Sherbatoff as one of the people who went to Mme. Verdurin's, Cottard added with a wink: "That gives you an idea of the style of the house, if you see what I mean?" He meant that it was the very height of fashion. Now, to entertain a Russian lady who knew nobody but the Grand Duchess Eudoxie was not fashionable at all. But Princess Sherbatoff might not have known even her, it would in no way have diminished Cottard's estimate of the supreme elegance of the Verdurin salon or his joy at being invited there. The splendour that seems to us to invest the people whose houses we visit is no more intrinsic than that of kings and queens on the stage, in dressing whom it is useless for a producer to spend hundreds and thousands of francs in purchasing authentic costumes and real jewels, when a great designer will procure a far more sumptuous impression by focussing a ray of light on a doublet of coarse cloth studded with lumps of glass and on a cloak of paper. A man may have spent his life among the great ones of the earth, who to him have been merely boring relatives or tiresome acquaintances, because a familiarity engendered in the cradle had stripped them of all distinction in his eyes. The same man, on the other hand, need only have

been led by some chance to mix with the most obscure people, for innumerable Cottards to be permanently dazzled by the ladies of title whose drawing-rooms they imagined as the centres of aristocratic elegance, ladies who were not even what Mme. de Villeparisis and her friends were (great ladies fallen from their greatness, whom the aristocracy that had been brought up with them no longer visited); no, those whose friendship has been the pride of so many men, if these men were to publish their memoirs and to give the names of those women and of the other women who came to their parties, Mme. de Cambremer would be no more able than Mme. de Guermantes to identify them. But what of that! A Cottard has thus his Marquise, who is to him "the Baronne," as in Marivaux, the Baronne whose name is never mentioned, so much so that nobody supposes that she ever had a name. Cottard is all the more convinced that she embodies the aristocracy — which has never heard of the lady — in that, the more dubious titles are, the more prominently coronets are displayed upon wineglasses, silver, notepaper, luggage. Many Cottards who have supposed that they were living in the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Germain have had their imagination perhaps more enchanted by feudal dreams than the men who did really live among Princes, just as with the small shopkeeper who, on Sundays, goes sometimes to look at "old time" buildings, it is sometimes from those buildings every stone of which is of our own time, the vaults of which have been, by the pupils of Viollet-le-Duc, painted blue and sprinkled with golden stars, that they derive the strongest sensation of the middle ages. "The Princess will be at Maineville. She will be coming with us. But I shall not introduce you to her at once. It will be better to leave that to Mme. Verdurin. Unless I find a loophole. Then you can rely on me to take the bull by the horns." "What were you saying?" asked Saniette, as he rejoined us, pretending to have gone out to take the air. "I was quoting to this gentleman," said Brichot, "a saying, which you will remember, of the man who, to my mind, is the first of the *fins-de-siècle* (of the eighteenth century, that is), by name Charles Maurice, Abbé de Perigord. He began by promising to be an excellent journalist. But he made a bad end, by which I mean that he became a Minister! Life has these tragedies. A far from serapulous politician to boot who, with the lofty contempt of a thoroughbred nobleman, did not hesitate to work in his time for the King of Prussia, there are no two ways about it, and died in the skin of a 'Left Centre.'"

At Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs we were joined by a glorious girl who, unfortunately, was not one of the little group. I could not tear my eyes from her magnolia skin, her dark eyes, her bold and admirable outlines. A moment later she wanted to

open a window, for it was hot in the compartment, and not wishing to ask leave of everybody, as I alone was without a greatcoat, she said to me in a quick, cool, jocular voice: “Do you mind a little fresh air, Sir?” I would have liked to say to her: “Come with us to the Verdurins’?” or “Give me your name and address.” I answered: “No, fresh air doesn’t bother me, Mademoiselle.” Whereupon, without stirring from her seat: “Do your friends object to smoke?” and she lit a cigarette. At the third station she sprang from the carriage. Next day, I inquired of Albertine, who could she be. For, stupidly thinking that people could have but one sort of love, in my jealousy of Albertine’s attitude towards Robert, I was reassured so far as other women were concerned. Albertine told me, I believe quite sincerely, that she did not know. “I should so much like to see her again,” I exclaimed. “Don’t worry, one always sees people again,” replied Albertine. In this particular instance, she was wrong; I never saw again, nor did I ever identify, the pretty girl with the cigarette. We shall see, moreover, why, for a long time, I ceased to look for her. But I have not forgotten her. I find myself at times, when I think of her, seized by a wild longing. But these recurrences of desire oblige us to reflect that if we wish to rediscover these girls with the same pleasure we must also return to the year which has since been followed by ten others in the course of which her bloom has faded. We can sometimes find a person again, but we cannot abolish time. And so on until the unforeseen day, gloomy as a winter night, when we no longer seek for that girl, or for any other, when to find her would actually frighten us. For we no longer feel that we have sufficient attraction to appeal to her, or strength to love her. Not, of course, that we are, in the strict sense of the word, impotent. And as for loving, we should love her more than ever. But we feel that it is too big an undertaking for the little strength that we have left. Eternal rest has already fixed intervals which we can neither cross nor make our voice be heard across them. To set our foot on the right step is an achievement like not missing the perilous leap. To be seen in such a state by a girl we love, even if we have kept the features and all the golden locks of our youth! We can no longer undertake the strain of keeping pace with youth. All the worse if our carnal desire increases instead of failing! We procure for it a woman whom we need make no effort to attract, who will share our couch for one night only and whom we shall never see again.

“Still no news, I suppose, of the violinist,” said Cottard. The event of the day in the little clan was, in fact, the failure of Mme. Verdurin’s favourite violinist. Employed on military service near Doncières, he came three times a week to dine at la Raspelière, having a midnight pass. But two days ago, for the

first time, the faithful had been unable to discover him on the tram. It was supposed that he had missed it. But albeit Mme. Verdurin had sent to meet the next tram, and so on until the last had arrived, the carriage had returned empty. “He’s certain to have been shoved into the guard-room, there’s no other explanation of his desertion. Gad! In soldiering, you know, with those fellows, it only needs a bad-tempered serjeant.” “It will be all the more mortifying for Mme. Verdurin,” said Brichot, “if he fails again this evening, because our kind hostess has invited to dinner for the first time the neighbours from whom she has taken la Raspelière, the Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer.” “This evening, the Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer!” exclaimed Cottard. “But I knew absolutely nothing about it. Naturally, I knew like everybody else that they would be coming one day, but I had no idea that it was to be so soon. Sapristi!” he went on, turning to myself, “what did I tell you? The Princess Sherbatoff, the Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer.” And, after repeating these names, lulling himself with their melody: “You see that we move in good company,” he said to me. “However, as it’s your first appearance, you’ll be one of the crowd. It is going to be an exceptionally brilliant gathering.” And, turning to Brichot, he went on: “The Mistress will be furious. It is time we appeared to lend her a hand.” Ever since Mme. Verdurin had been at la Raspelière she had pretended for the benefit of the faithful to be at once feeling and regretting the necessity of inviting her landlords for one evening. By so doing she would obtain better terms next year, she explained, and was inviting them for business reasons only. But she pretended to regard with such terror, to make such a bugbear of the idea of dining with people who did not belong to the little group that she kept putting off the evil day. The prospect did for that matter alarm her slightly for the reasons which she professed, albeit exaggerating them, if at the same time it enchanted her for reasons of snobbishness which she preferred to keep to herself. She was therefore partly sincere, she believed the little clan to be something so matchless throughout the world, one of those perfect wholes which it takes centuries of time to produce, that she trembled at the thought of seeing introduced into its midst these provincials, people ignorant of the Ring and the Meistersinger, who would be unable to play their part in the concert of conversation and were capable, by coming to Mme. Verdurin’s, of ruining one of those famous Wednesdays, masterpieces of art incomparable and frail, like those Venetian glasses which one false note is enough to shatter. “Besides, they are bound to be absolutely *anti*, and militarists,” M. Verdurin had said. “Oh, as for that, I don’t mind, we’ve heard quite enough about all that business,” had replied

Mme. Verdurin, who, a sincere Dreyfusard, would nevertheless have been glad to discover a social counterpoise to the preponderant Dreyfusism of her salon. For Dreyfusism was triumphant politically, but not socially. Labori, Reinach, Picquart, Zola were still, to people in society, more or less traitors, who could only keep them aloof from the little nucleus. And so, after this incursion into politics, Mme. Verdurin was determined to return to the world of art. Besides were not Indy, Debussy, on the 'wrong' side in the Case? "So far as the Case goes, we need only remember Brichot," she said (the Don being the only one of the faithful who had sided with the General Staff, which had greatly lowered him in the esteem of Madame Verdurin). "There is no need to be eternally discussing the Dreyfus case. No, the fact of the matter is that the Cambremers bore me." As for the faithful, no less excited by their unconfessed desire to make the Cambremers' acquaintance than dupes of the affected reluctance which Mme. Verdurin said she felt to invite them, they returned, day after day, in conversation with her, to the base arguments with which she herself supported the invitation, tried to make them irresistible. "Make up your mind to it once and for all," Cottard repeated, "and you will have better terms for next year, they will pay the gardener, you will have the use of the meadow. That will be well worth a boring evening. I am thinking only of yourselves," he added, albeit his heart had leaped on one occasion, when, in Mme. Verdurin's carriage, he had met the carriage of the old Mme. de Cambremer and, what was more, he had been abased in the sight of the railwaymen when, at the station, he had found himself standing beside the Marquis. For their part, the Cambremers, living far too remote from the social movement ever to suspect that certain ladies of fashion were speaking with a certain consideration of Mme. Verdurin, imagined that she was a person who could know none but Bohemians, was perhaps not even legally married, and so far as people of birth were concerned would never meet any but themselves. They had resigned themselves to the thought of dining with her only to be on good terms with a tenant who, they hoped, would return again for many seasons, especially after they had, in the previous month, learned that she had recently inherited all those millions. It was in silence and without any vulgar pleasantries that they prepared themselves for the fatal day. The faithful had given up hope of its ever coming, so often had Mme. Verdurin already fixed in their hearing a date that was invariably postponed. These false decisions were intended not merely to make a display of the boredom that she felt at the thought of this dinner-party, but to keep in suspense those members of the little group who were staying in the neighbourhood and were sometimes inclined to fail. Not that the Mistress

guessed that the “great day” was as delightful a prospect to them as to herself, but in order that, having persuaded them that this dinner-party was to her the most terrible of social duties, she might make an appeal to their devotion. “You are not going to leave me all alone with those Chinese mandarins! We must assemble in full force to support the boredom. Naturally, we shan’t be able to talk about any of the things in which we are interested. It will be a Wednesday spoiled, but what is one to do!”

“Indeed,” Brichot explained to me, “I fancy that Mme. Verdurin, who is highly intelligent and takes infinite pains in the elaboration of her Wednesdays, was by no means anxious to see these bumpkins of ancient lineage but scanty brains. She could not bring herself to invite the dowager Marquise, but has resigned herself to having the son and daughter-in-law.” “Ah! We are to see the Marquise de Cambremer?” said Cottard with a smile into which he saw fit to introduce a leer of sentimentality, albeit he had no idea whether Mme. de Cambremer were good-looking or not. But the title Marquise suggested to him fantastic thoughts of gallantry. “Ah! I know her,” said Ski, who had met her once when he was out with Mme. Verdurin. “Not in the biblical sense of the word, I trust,” said the doctor, darting a sly glance through his eyeglass; this was one of his favourite pleasantries. “She is intelligent,” Ski informed me. “Naturally,” he went on, seeing that I said nothing, and dwelling with a smile upon each word, “she is intelligent and at the same time she is not, she lacks education, she is frivolous, but she has an instinct for beautiful things. She may say nothing, but she will never say anything silly. And besides, her colouring is charming. She would be an amusing person to paint,” he added, half shutting his eyes, as though he saw her posing in front of him. As my opinion of her was quite the opposite of what Ski was expressing with so many fine shades, I observed merely that she was the sister of an extremely distinguished engineer, M. Legrandin. “There, you see, you are going to be introduced to a pretty woman,” Brichot said to me, “and one never knows what may come of that. Cleopatra was not even a great lady, she was a little woman, the unconscious, terrible little woman of our Meilhac, and just think of the consequences, not only to that idiot Antony, but to the whole of the ancient world.” “I have already been introduced to Mme. de Cambremer,” I replied. “Ah! In that case, you will find yourself on familiar ground.” “I shall be all the more delighted to meet her,” I answered him, “because she has promised me a book by the former curé of Com-bray about the place-names of this district, and I shall be able to remind her of her promise. I am interested in that priest, and also in etymologies.” “Don’t put any faith in the

ones he gives," replied Brichot, "there is a copy of the book at la Raspelière, which I have glanced through, but without finding anything of any value; it is a mass of error. Let me give you an example. The word Bricq is found in a number of place-names in this neighbourhood. The worthy cleric had the distinctly odd idea that it comes from Briga, a height, a fortified place. He finds it already in the Celtic tribes, Latobriges, Nemetobriges, and so forth, and traces it down to such names as Briand, Brion, and so forth. To confine ourselves to the region in which we have the pleasure of your company at this moment, Bricquebose means the wood on the height, Bricqueville the habitation on the height, Bricquebec, where we shall be stopping presently before coming to Maineville, the height by the stream. Now there is not a word of truth in all this, for the simple reason that *bricq* is the old Norse word which means simply a bridge. Just as fleur, which Mme. de Cambremer's protégé takes infinite pains to connect, in one place with the Scandinavian words *floi*, *flo*, in another with the Irish word *ae* or *aer*, is, beyond any doubt, the *fjord* of the Danes, and means harbour. So too, the excellent priest thinks that the station of Saint-Mars-le-Vetu, which adjoins la Raspelière, means Saint-Martin-le-Vieux (*vetus*). It is unquestionable that the word *vieux* has played a great part in the toponymy of this region. *Vieux* comes as a rule from *vadum*, and means a passage, as at the place called les Vieux. It is what the English call *ford* (Oxford, Hereford). But, in this particular instance, Vêtu is derived not from *vetus*, but from *vas-tatus*, a place that is devastated and bare. You have, round about here, Sottevast, the *vast* of Setold, Brillevast, the *vast* of Berold. I am all the more certain of the cure's mistake, in that Saint-Mars-le-Vetu was formerly called Saint-Mars du Cast and even Saint-Mars-de-Terregate. Now the *v* and the *g* in these words are the same letter. We say *dévaster*, but also *gâcher*. *Jâchères* and *gatines* (from the High German *wastinna*) have the same meaning: Terregate is therefore *terra vasta*. As for Saint-Mars, formerly (save the mark) Saint-Merd, it is Saint-Medardus, which appears variously as Saint-Médard, Saint-Mard, Saint-Marc, Cinq-Mars, and even Dammas. Nor must we forget that quite close to here, places bearing the name of Mars are proof simply of a pagan origin (the god Mars) which has remained alive in this country but which the holy man refuses to see. The high places dedicated to the gods are especially frequent, such as the mount of Jupiter (Jeumont). Your curé declines to admit this, but, on the other hand, wherever Christianity has left traces, they escape his notice. He has gone so far afield as to Loctudy, a barbarian name, according to him, whereas it is simply *Locus Sancti Tudeni*, nor has he in Sammarcoles divined *Sanctus Martialis*. Your curé,"

Brichot continued, seeing that I was interested, “derives the terminations *hon*, *home*, *holm*, from the word *holl* (*hullus*), a hill, whereas it cornes from the Norse *holm*, an island, with which you are familiar in Stockholm, and which is so widespread throughout this district, la Houlme, Engohomme, Tahoume, Robehomme, Néhomme, Quettehon, and so forth.” These names made me think of the day when Albertine had wished to go to Amfreville-la-Bigot (from the name of two successive lords of the manor, Brichot told me), and had then suggested that we should dine together at Robehomme. As for Maineville, we were just coming to it. “Isn’t Néhomme,” I asked, “somewhere near Carquethuit and Clitourps?” “Precisely; Néhomme is the *holm*, the island or peninsula of the famous Viscount Nigel, whose name has survived also in Neville. The Carquethuit and Clitourps that you mention furnish Mme. de Cambremer’s protégé with an occasion for further blunders. No doubt he has seen that *carque* is a church, the *Kirche* of the Germans. You will remember Querqueville, not to mention Dun-kerque. For there we should do better to stop and consider the famous word Dun, which to the Celts meant high ground. And that you will find over the whole of France. Your abbé was hypnotised by Duneville, which recurs in the Eure-et-Loir; he would have found Châteaudun, Dun-le-Roi in the Cher, Duneau in the Sarthe, Dun in the Ariège, Dune-les-Places in the Nièvre, and many others. This word Dun leads him into a curious error with regard to Douville where we shall be alighting, and shall find Mme. Verdurin’s comfortable carriages awaiting us. Douville, in Latin *donvilla*, says he. As a matter of fact, Douville does lie at the foot of high hills. Your curé, who knows everything, feels all the same that he has made a blunder. He has, indeed, found in an old cartulary, the name *Domvilla*. Whereupon he retracts; Douville, according to him, is a fief belonging to the Abbot, *Domino Abbati*, of Mont Saint-Michel. He is delighted with the discovery, which is distinctly odd when one thinks of the scandalous life that, according to the Capitulary of Sainte-Claire sur Epte, was led at Mont Saint-Michel, though no more extraordinary than to picture the King of Denmark as suzerain of all this coast, where he encouraged the worship of Odin far more than that of Christ. On the other hand, the supposition that the *n* has been changed to *m* does not shock me, and requires less alteration than the perfectly correct Lyon, which also is derived from *Dun* (*Lugdunum*). But the fact is, the abbé is mistaken. Douville was never Donville, but Doville, *Eudonis villa*, the village of Eudes. Douville was formerly called Escalecliff, the steps up the cliff. About the year 1233, Eudes le Bouteiller, Lord of Escalecliff, set out for the Holy Land; on the eve of his departure he made

over the church to the Abbey of Blanche-lande. By an exchange of courtesies, the village took his name, whence we have Douville to-day. But I must add that toponymy, of which moreover I know little or nothing, is not an exact science; had we not this historical evidence, Douville might quite well come from Ouville, that is to say the Waters. The forms in ai (Aiguës-Mortes), from *aqua*, are constantly changed to *eu* or *ou*. Now there were, quite close to Douville, certain famous springs, Carquethuit. You might suppose that the curé was only too ready to detect there a Christian origin, especially as this district seems to have been pretty hard to convert, since successive attempts were made by Saint Ursal, Saint Gofroi, Saint Barsanore, Saint Laurent of Brèvedent, who finally handed over the task to the monks of Beaubec. But as regards *thuit* the writer is mistaken, he sees in it a form of *toft*, a building, as in Cricquetot, Ectot, Yvetot, whereas it is the *thveit*, the clearing, the reclaimed land, as in Braquetuit, le Thuit, Regnetuit, and so forth. Similarly, if he recognises in Clitourps the Norman *thorp* which means village, he insists that the first syllable of the word must come from*clivus*, a slope, whereas it comes from *cliff*, a precipice. But his biggest blunders are due not so much to his ignorance as to his prejudices. However loyal a Frenchman one is, there is no need to fly in the face of the evidence and take Saint-Laurent en Bray to be the Roman priest, so famous at one time, when he is actually Saint Lawrence ‘Toot, Archbishop of Dublin. But even more than his patriotic sentiments, your friend’s religious bigotry leads him into strange errors. Thus you have not far from our hosts at la Raspelière two places called Montmartin, Montmartin-sur-Mer and Mont-martin-en-Graignes. In the case of Craignes, the good curé has been quite right, he has seen that Craignes, in Latin *Crania*, in Greek*Krene*, means ponds, marshes; how many instances of Cresmays, Croen, Gremeville, Lengronne, might we not adduce? But, when he comes to Montmartin, your self-styled linguist positively insists that these must be parishes dedicated to Saint Martin. He bases his opinion upon the fact that the Saint is their patron, but does not realise that he was only adopted subsequently; or rather he is blinded by his hatred of paganism; he refuses to see that we should say Mont-Saint-Martin as we say Mont-Saint-Michel, if it were a question of Saint Martin, whereas the name Montmartin refers in a far more pagan fashion to temples consecrated to the god Mars, temples of which, it is true, no other vestige remains, but which the undisputed existence in the neighbourhood of vast Roman camps would render highly probable even without the name Montmartin, which removes all doubt. You see that the little pamphlet which you will find at la Raspelière is far from perfect.” I

protested that at Combray the curé had often told us interesting etymologies. “He was probably better on his own ground, the move to Normandy must have made him lose his bearings.” “Nor did it do him any good,” I added, “for he came here with neurasthenia and went away again with rheumatism.” “Ah, his neurasthenia is to blame. He has lapsed from neurasthenia to philology, as my worthy master Pocquelin would have said. Tell us, Cottard, do you suppose that neurasthenia can have a disturbing effect on philology, philology a soothing effect on neurasthenia and the relief from neurasthenia lead to rheumatism?” “Undoubtedly, rheumatism and neurasthenia are subordinate forms of neuro-arthritism. You may pass from one to the other by metastasis.” “The eminent Professor,” said Brichot, “expresses himself in a French as highly infused with Latin and Greek as M. Purgon himself, of Molièresque memory! My uncle, I refer to our national Sarcey...” But he was prevented from finishing his sentence. The Professor had leaped from his seat with a wild shout: “The devil!” he exclaimed on regaining his power of articulate speech, “we have passed Maineville (d’you hear?) and Renneville too.” He had just noticed that the train was stopping at Saint-Mars-le-Vetu, where most of the passengers alighted. “They can’t have run through without stopping. We must have failed to notice it while we were talking about the Cambremers. Listen to me, Ski, pay attention, I am going to tell you ‘a good one,’” said Cottard, who had taken a fancy to this expression, in common use in certain medical circles. “The Princess must be on the train, she can’t have seen us, and will have got into another compartment. Come along and find her. Let’s hope this won’t land us in trouble!” And he led us all off in search of Princess Sherbatoff. He found her in the corner of an empty compartment, reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. She had long ago, from fear of rebuffs, acquired the habit of keeping in her place, or remaining in her corner, in life as on the train, and of not offering her hand until the other person had greeted her. She went on reading as the faithful trooped into her carriage. I recognised her immediately; this woman who might have forfeited her position but was nevertheless of exalted birth, who in any event was the pearl of a salon such as the Verdurins’, was the lady whom, on the same train, I had put down, two days earlier, as possibly the keeper of a brothel. Her social personality, which had been so vague, became clear to me as soon as I learned her name, just as when, after racking our brains over a puzzle, we at length hit upon the word which clears up all the obscurity, and which, in the case of a person, is his name. To discover two days later who the person is with whom one has travelled in the train is a far more amusing surprise than to read in the next

number of a magazine the clue to the problem set in the previous number. Big restaurants, casinos, local trains, are the family portrait galleries of these social enigmas. “Princess, we must have missed you at Maineville! May we come and sit in your compartment?” “Why, of course,” said the Princess who, upon hearing Cottard address her, but only then, raised from her magazine a pair of eyes which, like the eyes of M. de Charlus, although gentler, saw perfectly well the people of whose presence she pretended to be unaware. Cottard, coming to the conclusion that the fact of my having been invited to meet the Cambremers was a sufficient recommendation, decided, after a momentary hesitation, to intro-duce me to the Princess, who bowed with great courtesy but appeared to be hearing my name for the first time. “Cré nom!” cried the doctor, “my wife has forgotten to make them change the buttons on my white waist-coat. Ah! Those women, they never remember anything. Don’t you ever marry, my boy,” he said to me. And as this was one of the pleasantries which he considered appropriate when he had nothing else to say, he peeped out of the corner of his eye at the Princess and the rest of the faithful, who, because he was a Professor and an Academician, smiled back, admiring his good temper and freedom from pride. The Princess informed us that the young violinist had been found. He had been confined to bed the evening before by a sick headache, but was coming that evening and bringing with him a friend of his father whom he had met at Doncières. She had learned this from Mme. Verdurin with whom she had taken luncheon that morning, she told us in a rapid voice, rolling her *r_s, with her Russian accent, softly at the back of her throat, as though they were not* r_s but *l_s. “Ah! You had luncheon with her this morning,” Cottard said to the Princess; but turned his eyes to myself, the purport of this remark being to shew me on what intimate terms the Princess was with the Mistress. “You are indeed a faithful adherent!” “Yes, I love the little cirlcle, so intelligent, so agleeable, neverl spiteful, quite simple, not at all snobbish, and clevel to theirl fingle-tips.” “Nom d’une pipe! I must have lost my ticket, I can’t find it anywhere,” cried Cottard, with an agitation that was, in the circumstances, quite unjustified. He knew that at Douville, where a couple of landaus would be awaiting us, the collector would let him pass without a ticket, and would only bare his head all the more humbly, so that the salute might furnish an explanation of his indulgence, to wit that he had of course recognised Cottard as one of the Verdurins’ regular guests. “They won’t shove me in the lock-up for that,” the doctor concluded. “You were saying, Sir,” I inquired of Brichot, “that there used to be some famous waters near here; how do we know that?” “The name of the*

next station is one of a multitude of proofs. It is called Fervaches." "I don't undlestand what he's talking about," mumbled the Princess, as though she were saying to me out of politeness: "He's rather a bore, ain't he?" "Why, Princess, Fervaches means hot springs. Fervidae aquae. But to return to the young violinist," Brichot went on, "I was quite forgetting, Cottard, to tell you the great news. Had you heard that our poor friend Dechambre, who used to be Mme. Verdurin's favourite pianist, has just died? It is terribly sad." "He was quite young," replied Cottard, "but he must have had some trouble with his liver, there must have been something sadly wrong in that quarter, he had been looking very queer indeed for a long time past." "But he was not so young as all that," said Brichot; "in the days when Elstir and Swann used to come to Mme. Verdurin's, Dechambre had already made himself a reputation in Paris, and, what is remarkable, without having first received the baptism of success abroad. Ah! He was no follower of the Gospel according to Saint Barnum, that fellow." "You are mistaken, he could not have been going to Mme. Verdurin's, at that time, he was still in the nursery." "But, unless my old memory plays me false, I was under the impression that Dechambre used to play Vinteuil's sonata for Swann, when that clubman, who had broken with the aristocracy, had still no idea that he was one day to become the embourgeoised Prince Consort of our national Odette." "It is impossible, Vinteuil's sonata was played at Mme. Verdurin's long after Swann ceased to come there," said the doctor, who, like all people who work hard and think that they remember many things which they imagine to be of use to them, forget many others, a condition which enables them to go into ecstasies over the memories of people who have nothing else to do. "You are hopelessly muddled, though your brain is as sound as ever," said the doctor with a smile. Brichot admitted that he was mistaken. The train stopped. We were at la Sogne. The name stirred my curiosity. "How I should like to know what all these names mean," I said to Cottard. "You must ask M. Brichot, he may know, perhaps." "Why, la Sogne is la Cicogne, *Siconia*," replied Brichot, whom I was burning to interrogate about many other names.

Forgetting her attachment to her 'corner,' Mme. Sherbatoff kindly offered to change places with me, so that I might talk more easily with Brichot, whom I wanted to ask about other etymologies that interested me, and assured me that she did not mind in the least whether she travelled with her face or her back to the engine, standing, or seated, or anyhow. She remained on the defensive until she had discovered a newcomer's intentions, but as soon as she had realised that these were friendly, she would do everything in her power to oblige. At length

the train stopped at the station of Douville-Féterne, which being more or less equidistant from the villages of Féterne and Douville, bore for this reason their hyphenated name. “Saperlipopette!” exclaimed Doctor Cottard, when we came to the barrier where the tickets were collected, and, pretending to have only just discovered his loss, “I can’t find my ticket, I must have lost it.” But the collector, taking off his cap, assured him that it did not matter and smiled respectfully. The Princess (giving instructions to the coachman, as though she were a sort of lady in waiting to Mme. Verdurin, who, because of the Cambremers, had not been able to come to the station, as, for that matter, she rarely did) took me, and also Brichot, with herself in one of the carriages. The doctor, Saniette and Ski got into the other.

The driver, although quite young, was the Verdurins’ first coachman, the only one who had any right to the title; he took them, in the daytime, on all their excursions, for he knew all the roads, and in the evening went down to meet the faithful and took them back to the station later on. He was accompanied by extra helpers (whom he selected if necessary). He was an excellent fellow, sober and capable, but with one of those melancholy faces on which a fixed stare indicates that the merest trifle will make the person fly into a passion, not to say nourish dark thoughts. But at the moment he was quite happy, for he had managed to secure a place for his brother, another excellent type of fellow, with the Verdurins. We began by driving through Douville. Grassy knolls ran down from the village to the sea, in wide slopes to which their saturation in moisture and salt gave a richness, a softness, a vivacity of extreme tones. The islands and indentations of Rivebelle, far nearer now than at Balbec, gave this part of the coast the appearance, novel to me, of a relief map. We passed by some little bungalows, almost all of which were let to painters; turned into a track upon which some loose cattle, as frightened as were our horses, barred our way for ten minutes, and emerged upon the cliff road. “But, by the immortal gods,” Brichot suddenly asked, “let us return to that poor Dechambre; do you suppose Mme. Verdurin *knows*? Has anyone told*her*?” Mme. Verdurin, like most people who move in society, simply because she needed the society of other people, never thought of them again for a single day, as soon as, being dead, they could no longer come to the Wednesdays, nor to the Saturdays, nor dine without dressing. And one could not say of the little clan, a type in this respect of all salons, that it was composed of more dead than living members, seeing that, as soon as one was dead, it was as though one had never existed. But, to escape the nuisance of having to speak of the deceased, in other words to postpone one of the dinners

— a thing impossible to the mistress — as a token of mourning, M. Verdurin used to pretend that the death of the faithful had such an effect on his wife that, in the interest of her health, it must never be mentioned to her. Moreover, and perhaps just because the death of other people seemed to him so conclusive, so vulgar an accident, the thought of his own death filled him with horror and he shunned any consideration that might lead to it. As for Brichot, since he was the soul of honesty and completely taken in by what M. Verdurin said about his wife, he dreaded for his friend's sake the emotions that such a bereavement must cause her. "Yes, she *knew the worst* this morning," said the Princess, "it was impossible to *keep it from her*." "Ah! Thousand thunders of Zeus!" cried Brichot. "Ah! it must have been a terrible blow, a friend of twenty-five years' standing. There was a man who was one of us." "Of course, of course, what can you expect? Such incidents are bound to be painful; but Madame Verdurin is a brave woman, she is even more cerebral than emotive." "I don't altogether agree with the Doctor," said the Princess, whose rapid speech, her murmured accents, certainly made her appear both sullen and rebellious. "Mme. Verdurin, beneath a cold exterior, conceals treasures of sensibility. M. Verdurin told me that he had had great difficulty in preventing her from going to Paris for the funeral; he was obliged to let her think that it was all to be held in the country." "The devil! She wanted to go to Paris, did she? Of course, I know that she has a heart, too much heart perhaps. Poor Dechambre! As Madame Verdurin remarked not two months ago: 'Compared with him, Planté, Paderewski, Risler himself are nowhere!' Ah, he could say with better reason than that limelighter Nero, who has managed to take in even German scholarship:*Qualis artifex pereo*! But he at least, Dechambre, must have died in the fulfilment of his priesthood, in the odour of Beethovenian devotion; and gallantly, I have no doubt; he had every right, that interpreter of German music, to pass away while celebrating the Mass in D. But he was, when all is said, the man to greet the unseen with a cheer, for that inspired performer would produce at times from the Parisianised Champagne stock of which he came, the swagger and smartness of a guardsman."

From the height we had now reached, the sea suggested no longer, as at Balbec, the undulations of swelling mountains, but on the contrary the view, beheld from a mountain-top or from a road winding round its flank, of a blue-green glacier or a glittering plain, situated at a lower level. The lines of the currents seemed to be fixed upon its surface, and to have traced there for ever their concentric circles; the enamelled face of the sea which changed imperceptibly in colour, assumed towards the head of the bay, where an estuary

opened, the blue whiteness of milk, in which little black boats that did not move seemed entangled like flies. I felt that from nowhere could one discover a vaster prospect. But at each turn in the road a fresh expanse was added to it and when we arrived at the Douville toll-house, the spur of the cliff which until then had concealed from us half the bay, withdrew, and all of a sudden I descried upon my left a gulf as profound as that which I had already had before me, but one that changed the proportions of the other and doubled its beauty. The air at this lofty point acquired a keenness and purity that intoxicated me. I adored the Verdurins; that they should have sent a carriage for us seemed to me a touching act of kindness. I should have liked to kiss the Princess. I told her that I had never seen anything so beautiful. She professed that she too loved this spot more than any other. But I could see that to her as to the Verdurins the thing that really mattered was not to gaze at the view like tourists, but to partake of good meals there, to entertain people whom they liked, to write letters, to read books, in short to live in these surroundings, passively allowing the beauty of the scene to soak into them rather than making it the object of their attention.

After the toll-house, where the carriage had stopped for a moment at such a height above the sea that, as from a mountain-top, the sight of the blue gulf beneath almost made one dizzy, I opened the window; the sound, distinctly caught, of each wave that broke in turn had something sublime in its softness and precision. Was it not like an index of measurement which, upsetting all our ordinary impressions, shews us that vertical distances may be coordinated with horizontal, in contradiction of the idea that our mind generally forms of them; and that, though they bring the sky nearer to us in this way, they are not great; that they are indeed less great for a sound which traverses them as did the sound of those little waves, the medium through which it has to pass being purer. And in fact if one went back but a couple of yards below the toll-house, one could no longer distinguish that sound of waves, which six hundred feet of cliff had not robbed of its delicate, minute and soft precision. I said to myself that my grandmother would have listened to it with the delight that she felt in all manifestations of nature or art, in the simplicity of which one discerns grandeur. I was now at the highest pitch of exaltation, which raised everything round about me accordingly. It melted my heart that the Verdurins should have sent to meet us at the station. I said as much to the Princess, who seemed to think that I was greatly exaggerating so simple an act of courtesy. I know that she admitted subsequently to Cottard that she found me very enthusiastic; he replied that I was too emotional, required sedatives and ought to take to knitting. I pointed out

to the Princess every tree, every little house smothered in its mantle of roses, I made her admire everything, I would have liked to take her in my arms and press her to my heart. She told me that she could see that I had a gift for painting, that of course I must sketch, that she was surprised that nobody had told her about it. And she confessed that the country was indeed pic-I turesque. We drove through, where it perched upon its height, the little I village of Englesqueville (*Engleberti villa*, Brichot informed us). “But are you quite sure that there will be a party this evening, in spite of Dechambre’s death, Princess?” he went on, without stopping to think that the presence at the station of the carriage in which we were sitting was in itself an answer to his question. “Yes,” said the Princess, “M. Verldulin insisted that it should not be put off, simply to keep his wife from *thinking*. And besides, after never failing for all these years to entertain on Wednesdays, such a change in her habits would have been bound to upset her. Her nerves are velly bad just now. M. Verdurin was particularly pleased that you were coming to dine this evening, because he knew that it would be a great distraction for Mme. Verdurin,” said the Princess, forgetting her pretence of having never heard my name before. “I think that it will be as well not to say*anything* in front of Mme. Verdurin,” the Princess added. “Ah! I am glad you warned me,” Brichot artlessly replied. “I shall pass on your suggestion to Cottard.” The carriage stopped for a moment. It moved on again, but the sound that the wheels had been making in the village street had ceased. We had turned into the main avenue of la Raspelière where M. Verdurin stood waiting for us upon the steps. “I did well to put on a dinner-jacket,” he said, observing with pleasure that the faithful had put on theirs, “since I have such smart gentlemen in my party.” And as I apologised for not having changed: “Why, that’s quite all right. We’re all friends here. I should be delighted to offer you one of my own dinner-jackets, but it wouldn’t fit you.” The handclasp throbbing with emotion which, as he entered the hall of la Raspelière, and by way of condolence at the death of the pianist, Brichot gave our host elicited no response from the latter. I told him how greatly I admired the scenery. “Ah! All the better, and you’ve seen nothing, we must take you round. Why not come and spend a week or two here, the air is excellent.” Brichot was afraid that his handclasp had not been understood. “Ah! Poor Dechambre!” he said, but in an undertone, in case Mme. Verdurin was within earshot. “It is terrible,” replied M. Verdurin lightly. “So young,” Brichot pursued the point. Annoyed at being detained over these futilities, M. Verdurin replied in a hasty tone and with an embittered groan, not of grief but of irritated impatience: “Why yes, of course, but what’s to be done about it, it’s no use crying over spilt milk,

talking about him won't bring him back to life, will it?" And, his civility returning with his joviality: "Come along, my good Brichot, get your things off quickly. We have a bouillabaisse which mustn't be kept waiting. But, in heaven's name, don't start talking about Dechambre to Madame Verdurin. You know that she always hides her feelings, but she is quite morbidly sensitive. I give you my word, when she heard that Dechambre was dead, she almost cried," said M. Verdurin in a tone of profound irony. One might have concluded, from hearing him speak, that it implied a form of insanity to regret the death of a friend of thirty years' standing, and on the other hand one gathered that the perpetual union of M. Verdurin and his wife did not preclude his constantly criticising her and her frequently irritating him. "If you mention it to her, she will go and make herself ill again. It is deplorable, three weeks after her bronchitis. When that happens, it is I who have to be sick-nurse. You can understand that I have had more than enough of it. Grieve for Dechambre's fate in your heart as much as you like. Think of him, but do not speak about him. I was very fond of Dechambre, but you cannot blame me for being fonder still of my wife. Here's Cottard, now, you can ask him." And indeed, he knew that a family doctor can do many little services, such as prescribing that one must not give way to grief.

The docile Cottard had said to the Mistress: "Upset yourself like that, and to-morrow you will *give me* a temperature of 102," as he might have said to the cook: "To-morrow you will give me a *riz de veau*." Medicine, when it fails to cure the sick, busies itself with changing the sense of verbs and pronouns.

M. Verdurin was glad to find that Saniette, notwithstanding the snubs that he had had to endure two days earlier, had not deserted the little nucleus. And indeed Mme. Verdurin and her husband had acquired, in their idleness, cruel instincts for which the great occasions, occurring too rarely, no longer sufficed. They had succeeded in effecting a breach between Odette and Swann, between Brichot and his mistress. They would try it again with some one else, that was understood. But the opportunity did not present itself every day. Whereas, thanks to his shuddering sensibility, his timorous and quickly aroused shyness, Saniette provided them with a whipping-block for every day in the year. And so, for fear of his failing them, they took care always to invite him with friendly and persuasive words, such as the bigger boys at school, the old soldiers in a regiment, address to a recruit whom they are anxious to beguile so that they may get him into their clutches, with the sole object of flattering him for the moment and bullying him when he can no longer escape. "Whatever you do," Brichot reminded Cottard, who had not heard what M. Verdurin was saying, "mum's the

word before Mme. Verdurin. Have no fear, O Cottard, you are dealing with a sage, as Theocritus says. Besides, M. Verdurin is right, what is the use of lamentations," he went on, for, being capable of assimilating forms of speech and the ideas which they suggested to him, but having no finer perception, he had admired in M. Verdurin's remarks the most courageous stoicism. "All the same, it is a great talent that has gone from the world." "What, are you still talking about Dechambre," said M. Verdurin, who had gone on ahead of us, and, seeing that we were not following him, had turned back. "Listen," he said to Brichot, "nothing is gained by exaggeration. The fact of his being dead is no excuse for making him out a genius, which he was not. He played well, I admit, and what is more, he was in his proper element here; transplanted, he ceased to exist. My wife was infatuated with him and made his reputation. You know what she is. I will go farther, in the interest of his own reputation he has died at the right moment, he is done to a turn, as the demoiselles de Caen, grilled according to the incomparable recipe of Pampilles, are going to be, I hope (unless you keep us standing here all night with your jeremiads in this Kasbah exposed to all the winds of heaven). You don't seriously expect us all to die of hunger because Dechambre is dead, when for the last year he was obliged to practise scales before giving a concert; to recover for the moment, and for the moment only, the suppleness of his wrists. Besides, you are going to hear this evening, or at any rate to meet, for the rascal is too fond of deserting his art, after dinner, for the card-table, somebody who is a far greater artist than Dechambre, a youngster whom my wife has discovered" (as she had discovered Dechambre, and Paderewski, and everybody else): "Morel. He has not arrived yet, the devil. He is coming with an old friend of his family whom he has picked up, and who bores him to tears, but otherwise, not to get into trouble with his father, he would have been obliged to stay down at Doncières and keep him company: the Baron de Charlus." The faithful entered the drawing-room. M. Verdurin, who had remained behind with me while I took off my things, took my arm by way of a joke, as one's host does at a dinner-party when there is no lady for one to take in. "Did you have a pleasant journey?" "Yes, M. Brichot told me things which interested me greatly," said I, thinking of the etymologies, and because I had heard that the Verdurins greatly admired Brichot. "I am surprised to hear that he told you anything," said M. Verdurin, "he is such a retiring man, and talks so little about the things he knows." This compliment did not strike me as being very apt. "He seems charming," I remarked. "Exquisite, delicious, not the sort of man you meet every day, such a light, fantastic touch, my wife adores him, and

so do I!" replied M. Verdurin in an exaggerated tone, as though repeating a lesson. Only then did I grasp that what he had said to me about Brichot was ironical. And I asked myself whether M. Verdurin, since those far-off days of which I had heard reports, had not shaken off the yoke of his wife's tutelage.

The sculptor was greatly astonished to learn that the Verdurins were willing to have M. de Charlus in their house. Whereas in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where M. de Charlus was so well known, nobody ever referred to his morals (of which most people had no suspicion, others remained doubtful, crediting him rather with intense but Platonic friendships, with behaving imprudently, while the enlightened few strenuously denied, shrugging their shoulders, any insinuation upon which some malicious Gallardon might venture), those morals, the nature of which was known perhaps to a few intimate friends, were, on the other hand, being denounced daily far from the circle in which he moved, just as, at times, the sound of artillery fire is audible only beyond a zone of silence. Moreover, in those professional and artistic circles where he was regarded as the typical instance of inversion, his great position in society, his noble origin were completely unknown, by a process analogous to that which, among the people of Rumania, has brought it about that the name of Ron-sard is known as that of a great nobleman, while his poetical work is unknown there. Not only that, the Rumanian estimate of Ronsard's nobility is founded upon an error. Similarly, if in the world of painters and actors M. de Charlus had such an evil reputation, that was due to their confusing him with a certain Comte Leblois de Charlus who was not even related to him (or, if so, the connexion was extremely remote), and who had been arrested, possibly by mistake, in the course of a police raid which had become historic. In short, all the stories related of our M. de Charlus referred to the other. Many professionals swore that they had had relations with M. de Charlus, and did so in good faith, believing that the false M. de Charlus was the true one, the false one possibly encouraging, partly from an affectation of nobility, partly to conceal his vice, a confusion which to the true one (the Baron whom we already know) was for a long time damaging, and afterwards, when he had begun to go down the hill, became a convenience, for it enabled him likewise to say: "That is not myself." And in the present instance it was not he to whom the rumours referred. Finally, what enhanced the falsehood of the reports of an actual fact (the Baron's tendencies), he had had an intimate and perfectly pure friendship with an author who, in the theatrical world, had for some reason acquired a similar reputation which he in no way deserved. When they were seen together at a first night, people would say: "You see," just as it was supposed

that the Duchesse de Guermantes had immoral relations with the Princesse de Parme; an indestructible legend, for it would be disproved only in the presence of those two great ladies themselves, to which the people who repeated it would presumably never come any nearer than by staring at them through their glasses in the theatre and slandering them to the occupant of the next stall. Given M. de Charlus's morals, the sculptor concluded all the more readily that the Baron's social position must be equally low, since he had no sort of information whatever as to the family to which M. de Charlus belonged, his title or his name. Just as Cottard imagined that everybody knew that the degree of Doctor of Medicine implied nothing, the title of Consultant to a Hospital meant something, so people in society are mistaken when they suppose that everybody has the same idea of the social importance of their name as they themselves and the other people of their set.

The Prince d'Agrigente was regarded as a swindler by a club servant to whom he owed twenty-five louis, and regained his importance only in the Faubourg Saint-Germain where he had three sisters who were Duchesses, for it is not among the humble people in whose eyes he is of small account, but among the smart people who know what is what, that the great nobleman creates an effect. M. de Charlus, for that matter, was to learn in the course of the evening that his host had the vaguest ideas about the most illustrious ducal families.

Certain that the Verdurins were making a grave mistake in allowing an individual of tarnished reputation to be admitted to so 'select' a household as theirs, the sculptor felt it his duty to take the Mistress aside. "You are entirely mistaken, besides I never pay any attention to those tales, and even if it were true, I may be allowed to point out that it could hardly compromise me!" replied Mme. Verdurin, furious, for Morel being the principal feature of the Wednesdays, the chief thing for her was not to give any offence to him. As for Cottard, he could not express an opinion, for he had asked leave to go upstairs for a moment to 'do a little job' in the*buen retiro*, and after that, in M. Verdurin's bedroom, to write an extremely urgent letter for a patient.

A great publisher from Paris who had come to call, expecting to be invited to stay to dinner, withdrew abruptly, quickly, realising that he was not smart enough for the little clan. He was a tall, stout man, very dark, with a studious and somewhat cutting air. He reminded one of an ebony paper-knife.

Mme. Verdurin who, to welcome us in her immense drawing-room, in which displays of grasses, poppies, field-flowers, plucked only that morning, alternated with a similar theme painted on the walls, two centuries earlier, by an artist of

exquisite taste, had risen for a moment from a game of cards which she was playing with an old friend, begged us to excuse her for just one minute while she finished her game, talking to us the while. What I told her about my impressions did not, however, seem altogether to please her. For one thing I was shocked to observe that she and her husband came indoors every day long before the hour of those sunsets which were considered so fine when seen from that cliff, and finer still from the terrace of la Raspelière, and which I would have travelled miles to see. “Yes, it’s incomparable,” said Mme. Verdurin carelessly, with a glance at the huge windows which gave the room a wall of glass. “Even though we have it always in front of us, we never grow tired of it,” and she turned her attention back to her cards. Now my very enthusiasm made me exacting. I expressed my regret that I could not see from the drawing-room the rocks of Darnetal, which, Elstir had told me, were quite lovely at that hour, when they reflected so many colours. “Ah! You can’t see them from here, you would have to go to the end of the park, to the ‘view of the bay.’ From the seat there, you can take in the whole panorama. But you can’t go there by yourself, you will lose your way. I can take you there, if you like,” she added kindly. “No, no, you are not satisfied with the illness you had the other day, you want to make yourself ill again. He will come back, he can see the view of the bay another time.” I did not insist, and understood that it was enough for the Verdurins to know that this sunset made its way into their drawing-room or dining-room, like a magnificent painting, like a priceless Japanese enamel, justifying the high rent that they were paying for la Raspelière, with plate and linen, but a thing to which they rarely raised their eyes; the important thing, here, for them was to live comfortably, to take drives, to feed well, to talk, to entertain agreeable friends whom they provided with amusing games of billiards, good meals, merry tea-parties. I noticed, however, later on, how intelligently they had learned to know the district, taking their guests for excursions as ‘novel’ as the music to which they made them listen. The part which the flowers of la Raspelière, the roads by the sea’s edge, the old houses, the undiscovered churches, played in the life of M. Verdurin was so great that those people who saw him only in Paris and who, themselves, substituted for the life by the seaside and in the country the refinements of life in town could barely understand the idea that he himself formed of his own life, or the importance that his pleasures gave him in his own eyes. This importance was further enhanced by the fact that the Verdurins were convinced that la Raspelière, which they hoped to purchase, was a property without its match in the world. This superiority which their self-esteem made them attribute to la

Raspelière justified in their eyes my enthusiasm which, but for that, would have annoyed them slightly, because of the disappointments which it involved (like my disappointment when long ago I had first listened to Berma) and which I frankly admitted to them.

"I hear the carriage coming back," the Mistress suddenly murmured. Let us state briefly that Mme. Verdurin, quite apart from the inevitable changes due to increasing years, no longer resembled what she had been at the time when Swann and Odette used to listen to the little phrase in her house. Even when she heard it played, she was no longer obliged to assume the air of attenuated admiration which she used to assume then, for that had become her normal expression. Under the influence of the countless neuralgias which the music of Bach, Wagner, Vinteuil, Debussy had given her, Mme. Verdurin's brow had assumed enormous proportions, like limbs that are finally crippled by rheumatism. Her temples, suggestive of a pair of beautiful, pain-stricken, milk-white spheres, in which Harmony rolled endlessly, flung back upon either side her silvered tresses, and proclaimed, on the Mistress's behalf, without any need for her to say a word: "I know what is in store for me to-night." Her features no longer took the trouble to formulate successively aesthetic impressions of undue violence, for they had themselves become their permanent expression on a countenance ravaged and superb. This attitude of resignation to the ever impending sufferings inflicted by Beauty, and of the courage that was required to make her dress for dinner when she had barely recovered from the effects of the last sonata, had the result that Mme. Verdurin, even when listening to the most heartrending music, preserved a disdainfully impassive countenance, and actually withdrew into retirement to swallow her two spoonfuls of aspirin.

"Why, yes, here they are!" M. Verdurin cried with relief when he saw the door open to admit Morel, followed by M. de Charlus. The latter, to whom dining with the Verdurins meant not so much going into society as going into questionable surroundings, was as frightened as a schoolboy making his way for the first time into a brothel with the utmost deference towards its mistress. Moreover the persistent desire that M. de Charlus felt to appear virile and frigid was overcome (when he appeared in the open doorway) by those traditional ideas of politeness which are awakened as soon as shyness destroys an artificial attitude and makes an appeal to the resources of the subconscious. When it is a Charlus, whether he be noble or plebeian, that is stirred by such a sentiment of instinctive and atavistic politeness to strangers, it is always the spirit of a relative of the female sex, attendant like a goddess, or incarnate as a double, that

undertakes to introduce him into a strange drawing-room and to mould his attitude until he comes face to face with his hostess. Thus a young painter, brought up by a godly, Protestant, female cousin, will enter a room, his head aslant and quivering, his eyes raised to the ceiling, his hands gripping an invisible muff, the remembered shape of which and its real and tutelary presence will help the frightened artist to cross without agoraphobia the yawning abyss between the hall and the inner drawing-room. Thus it was that the pious relative, whose memory is helping him to-day, used to enter a room years ago, and with so plaintive an air that one was asking oneself what calamity she had come to announce, when from her first words one realised, as now in the case of the painter, that she had come to pay an after-dinner call. By virtue of the same law, which requires that life, in the interests of the still unfulfilled act, shall bring into play, utilise, adulterate, in a perpetual prostitution, the most respectable, it may be the most sacred, sometimes only the most innocent legacies from the past, and albeit in this instance it engendered a different aspect, the one of Mme. Cottard's nephews who distressed his family by his effeminate ways and the company he kept would always make a joyous entry as though he had a surprise in store for you or were going to inform you that he had been left a fortune, radiant with a happiness which it would have been futile to ask him to explain, it being due to his unconscious heredity and his misplaced sex. He walked upon tiptoe, was no doubt himself astonished that he was not holding a cardcase, offered you his hand parting his lips as he had seen his aunt part hers, and his uneasy glance was directed at the mirror in which he seemed to wish to make certain, albeit he was bare-headed, whether his hat, as Mme. Cottard had once inquired of Swann, was not askew. As for M. de Charlus, whom the society in which he had lived furnished, at this critical moment, with different examples, with other patterns of affability, and above all with the maxim that one must, in certain cases, when dealing with people of humble rank, bring into play and make use of one's rarest graces, which one normally holds in reserve, it was with a flutter, archly, and with the same sweep with which a skirt would have enlarged and impeded his waddling motion that he advanced upon Mme. Verdurin with so flattered and honoured an air that one would have said that to be taken to her house was for him a supreme favour. One would have thought that it was Mme. de Marsantes who was entering the room, so prominent at that moment was the woman whom a mistake on the part of Nature had enshrined in the body of M. de Charlus. It was true that the Baron had made every effort to obliterate this mistake and to assume a masculine appearance. But no sooner had

he succeeded than, he having in the meantime kept the same tastes, this habit of looking at things through a woman's eyes gave him a fresh feminine appearance, due this time not to heredity but to his own way of living. And as he had gradually come to regard even social questions from the feminine point of view, and without noticing it, for it is not only by dint of lying to other people, but also by lying to oneself that one ceases to be aware that one is lying, albeit he had called upon his body to manifest (at the moment of his entering the Verdurins' drawing-room) all the courtesy of a great nobleman, that body which had fully understood what M. de Charlus had ceased to apprehend, displayed, to such an extent that the Baron would have deserved the epithet 'ladylike,' all the attractions of a great lady. Not that there need be any connexion between the appearance of M. de Charlus and the fact that sons, who do not always take after their fathers, even without being inverts, and though they go after women, may consummate upon their faces the profanation of their mothers. But we need not consider here a subject that deserves a chapter to itself: the Profanation of the Mother.

Albeit other reasons dictated this transformation of M. de Charlus, and purely physical ferments set his material substance 'working' and made his body pass gradually into the category of women's bodies, nevertheless the change that we record here was of spiritual origin. By dint of supposing yourself to be ill you become ill, grow thin, are too weak to rise from your bed, suffer from nervous enteritis. By dint of thinking tenderly of men you become a woman, and an imaginary spirit hampers your movements. The obsession, just as in the other instance it affects your health, may in this instance alter your sex. Morel, who accompanied him, came to shake hands with me. From that first moment, owing to a twofold change that occurred in him I formed (alas, I was not warned in time to act upon it!) a bad impression of him. I have said that Morel, having risen above his father's menial status, was generally pleased to indulge in a contemptuous familiarity. He had talked to me on the day when he brought me the photographs without once addressing me as Monsieur, treating me as an inferior. What was my surprise at Mme. Verdurin's to see him bow very low before me, and before me alone, and to hear, before he had even uttered a syllable to anyone else, words of respect, most respectful — such words as I thought could not possibly flow from his pen or fall from his lips — addressed to myself. I at once suspected that he had some favour to ask of me. Taking me aside a minute later: "Monsieur would be doing me a very great service," he said to me, going so far this time as to address me in the third person, "by keeping

from Mme. Verdurin and her guests the nature of the profession that my father practised with his uncle. It would be best to say that he was, in your family, the agent for estates so considerable as to put him almost on a level with your parents," Morel's request annoyed me intensely because it obliged me to magnify not his father's position, in which I took not the slightest interest, but the wealth — the apparent wealth of my own, which I felt to be absurd. But he appeared so unhappy, so pressing, that I could not refuse him. "No, before dinner," he said in an imploring tone, "Monsieur can easily find some excuse for taking Mme. Verdurin aside." This was what, in the end, I did, trying to enhance to the best of my ability the distinction of Morel's father, without unduly exaggerating the 'style,' the 'worldly goods' of my own family. It went like a letter through the post, notwithstanding the astonishment of Mme. Verdurin, who had had a nodding acquaintance with my grandfather. And as she had no tact, hated family life (that dissolvent of the little nucleus), after telling me that she remembered, long ago, seeing my great-grandfather, and after speaking of him as of somebody who was almost an idiot, who would have been incapable of understanding the little group, and who, to use her expression, "was not one of us," she said to me: "Families are such a bore, the only thing is to get right away from them;" and at once proceeded to tell me of a trait in my great-grandfather's character of which I was unaware, although I might have suspected it at home (I had never seen him, but they frequently spoke of him), his remarkable stinginess (in contrast to the somewhat excessive generosity of my great-uncle, the friend of the lady in pink and Morel's father's employer): "Why, of course, if your grandparents had such a grand agent, that only shews that there are all sorts of people in a family. Your grandfather's father was so stingy that, at the end of his life, when he was almost half-witted — between you and me, he was never anything very special, you are worth the whole lot of them — he could not bring himself to pay a penny for his ride on the omnibus. So that they were obliged to have him followed by somebody who paid his fare for him, and to let the old miser think that his friend M. de Persigny, the Cabinet Minister, had given him a permit to travel free on the omnibuses. But I am delighted to hear that *our* Morel's father held such a good position. I was under the impression that he had been a schoolmaster, but that's nothing, I must have misunderstood. In any case, it makes not the slightest difference, for I must tell you that here we appreciate only true worth, the personal contribution, what I call the participation. Provided that a person is artistic, provided in a word that he is one of the brotherhood, nothing else matters." The way in which Morel was one of the brotherhood was

— so far as I have been able to discover — that he was sufficiently fond of both women and men to satisfy either sex with the fruits of his experience of the other. But what it is essential to note here is that as soon as I had given him my word that I would speak on his behalf to Mme. Verdurin, as soon, moreover, as I had actually done so, and without any possibility of subsequent retractation, Morel's 'respect' for myself vanished as though by magic, the formal language of respect melted away, and indeed for some time he avoided me, contriving to appear contemptuous of me, so that if Mme. Verdurin wanted me to give him a message, to ask him to play something, he would continue to talk to one of the faithful, then move on to another, changing his seat if I approached him. The others were obliged to tell him three or four times that I had spoken to him, after which he would reply, with an air of constraint, briefly, that is to say unless we were by ourselves. When that happened, he was expansive, friendly, for there was a charming side to him. I concluded all the same from this first evening that his must be a vile nature, that he would not, at a pinch, shrink from any act of meanness, was incapable of gratitude. In which he resembled the majority of mankind. But inasmuch as I had inherited a strain of my grandmother's nature, and enjoyed the diversity of other people without expecting anything of them or resenting anything that they did, I overlooked his baseness, rejoiced in his gaiety when it was in evidence, and indeed in what I believe to have been a genuine affection on his part when, having gone the whole circuit of his false ideas of human nature, he realised (with a jerk, for he shewed strange reversions to a blind and primitive savagery) that my kindness to him was disinterested, that my indulgence arose not from a want of perception but from what he called goodness; and, more important still, I was enraptured by his art which indeed was little more than an admirable virtuosity, but which made me (without his being in the intellectual sense of the word a real musician) hear again or for the first time so much good music. Moreover a manager — M. de Charlus (whom I had not suspected of such talents, albeit Mme. de Guermantes, who had known him a very different person in their younger days, asserted that he had composed a sonata for her, painted a fan, and so forth), modest in regard to his true merits, but possessing talents of the first order, contrived to place this virtuosity at the service of a versatile artistic sense which increased it tenfold. Imagine a merely skilful performer in the Russian ballet, formed, educated, developed in all directions by M. Diaghileff.

I had just given Mme. Verdurin the message with which Morel had charged me and was talking to M. de Charlus about Saint-Loup, when Cottard burst into

the room announcing, as though the house were on fire, that the Cambremers had arrived. Mme. Verdurin, not wishing to appear before strangers such as M. de Charlus (whom Cottard had not seen) and myself to attach any great importance to the arrival of the Cambremers, did not move, made no response to the announcement of these tidings, and merely said to the doctor, fanning herself gracefully, and adopting the tone of a Marquise in the Théâtre Français: “The Baron has just been telling us...” This was too much for Cottard! Less abruptly than he would have done in the old days, for learning and high positions had added weight to his utterance, but with the emotion, nevertheless, which he recaptured at the Verdurins’, he exclaimed: “A Baron! What Baron? Where’s the Baron?” staring around the room with an astonishment that bordered on incredulity. Mme. Verdurin, with the affected indifference of a hostess when a servant has, in front of her guests, broken a valuable glass, and with the artificial, highfalutin tone of a conservatoire prize-winner acting in a play by the younger Dumas, replied, pointing with her fan to Morel’s patron: “Why, the Baron de Charlus, to whom let me introduce you, M. le Professeur Cottard.” Mme. Verdurin was, for that matter, by no means sorry to have an opportunity of playing the leading lady. M. de Charlus proffered two fingers which the Professor clasped with the kindly smile of a ‘Prince of Science.’ But he stopped short upon seeing the Cambremers enter the room, while M. de Charlus led me into a corner to tell me something, not without feeling my muscles, which is a German habit. M. de Cambremer bore no resemblance to the old Marquise. To anyone who had only heard of him, or of letters written by him, well and forcibly expressed, his personal appearance was startling. No doubt, one would grow accustomed to it. But his nose had chosen to place itself aslant above his mouth, perhaps the only crooked line, among so many, which one would never have thought of tracing upon his face, and one that indicated a vulgar stupidity, aggravated still further by the proximity of a Norman complexion on cheeks that were like two ripe apples. It is possible that the eyes of M. de Cambremer retained behind their eyelids a trace of the sky of the Cotentin, so soft upon sunny days when the wayfarer amuses himself in watching, drawn up by the roadside, and counting in their hundreds the shadows of the poplars, but those eyelids, heavy, bleared and drooping, would have prevented the least flash of intelligence from escaping. And so, discouraged by the meagreness of that azure glance, one returned to the big crooked nose. By a transposition of the senses, M. de Cambremer looked at you with his nose. This nose of his was not ugly, it was if anything too handsome, too bold, too proud of its own importance. Arched,

polished, gleaming, brand new, it was amply prepared to atone for the inadequacy of his eyes. Unfortunately, if the eyes are sometimes the organ through which our intelligence is revealed, the nose (to leave out of account the intimate solidarity and the unsuspected repercussion of one feature upon the rest), the nose is generally the organ in which stupidity is most readily displayed.

The propriety of the dark clothes which M. de Cambremer invariably wore, even in the morning, might well reassure those who were dazzled and exasperated by the insolent brightness of the seaside attire of people whom they did not know; still it was impossible to understand why the chief magistrate's wife should have declared with an air of discernment and authority, as a person who knows far more than you about the high society of Alençon, that on seeing M. de Cambremer one immediately felt oneself, even before one knew who he was, in the presence of a man of supreme distinction, of a man of perfect breeding, a change from the sort of person one saw at Balbec, a man in short in whose company one could breathe freely. He was to her, stifled by all those Balbec tourists who did not know her world, like a bottle of smelling salts. It seemed to me on the contrary that he was one of the people whom my grandmother would at once have set down as 'all wrong,' and that, as she had no conception of snobbishness, she would no doubt have been stupefied that he could have succeeded in winning the hand of Mlle. Legrandin, who must surely be difficult to please, having a brother who was 'so refined.' At best one might have said of M. de Cambremer's plebeian ugliness that it was redolent of the soil and preserved a very ancient local tradition; one was reminded, on examining his faulty features, which one would have liked to correct, of those names of little Norman towns as to the etymology of which my friend the curé was mistaken because the peasants, mispronouncing the names, or having misunderstood the Latin or Norman words that underlay them, have finally fixed in a barbarism to be found already in the cartularies, as Brichot would have said, a wrong meaning and a fault of pronunciation. Life in these old towns may, for all that, be pleasant enough, and M. de Cambremer must have had his good points, for if it was in a mother's nature that the old Marquise should prefer her son to her daughter-in-law, on the other hand, she, who had other children, of whom two at least were not devoid of merit, was often heard to declare that the Marquis was, in her opinion, the best of the family. During the short time he had spent in the army, his messmates, finding Cambremer too long a name to pronounce, had given him the nickname Cancan, implying a flow of chatter, which he in no way merited. He knew how to brighten a dinner-party to which he was invited by saying when

the fish (even if it were stale) or the entrée came in: “I say, that looks a fine animal.” And his wife, who had adopted upon entering the family everything that she supposed to form part of their customs, put herself on the level of her husband’s friends and perhaps sought to please him, like a mistress, and as though she had been involved in his bachelor existence, by saying in a careless tone when she was speaking of him to officers: “You shall see Cancan presently. Cancan has gone to Balbec, but he will be back this evening.” She was furious at having compromised herself by coming to the Verdurins’ and had done so only upon the entreaties of her mother-in-law and husband, in the hope of renewing the lease. But, being less well-bred than they, she made no secret of the ulterior motive and for the last fortnight had been making fun of this dinner-party to her women friends. “You know we are going to dine with our tenants. That will be well worth an increased rent. As a matter of fact, I am rather curious to see what they have done to our poor old la Raspelière” (as though she had been born in the house, and would find there all her old family associations). “Our old keeper told me only yesterday that you wouldn’t know the place. I can’t bear to think of all that must be going on there. I am sure we shall have to have the whole place disinfected before we move in again.” She arrived haughty and morose, with the air of a great lady whose castle, owing to a state of war, is occupied by the enemy, but who nevertheless feels herself at home and makes a point of shewing the conquerors that they are intruding. Mme. de Cambremer could not see me at first for I was in a bay at the side of the room with M. de Charlus, who was telling me that he had heard from Morel that Morel’s father had been an ‘agent’ in my family, and that he, Charlus, credited me with sufficient intelligence and magnanimity (a term common to himself and Swann) to forego the mean and ignoble pleasure which vulgar little idiots (I was warned) would not have failed, in my place, to give themselves by revealing to our hosts details which they might regard as derogatory. “The mere fact that I take an interest in him and extend my protection over him, gives him a pre-eminence and wipes out the past,” the Baron concluded. As I listened to him and promised the silence which I would have kept even without any hope of being considered in return intelligent and magnanimous, I was looking at Mme. de Cambremer. And I had difficulty in recognising the melting, savoury morsel which I had had beside me the other afternoon at teatime, on the terrace at Balbec, in the Norman rock-cake that I now saw, hard as a rock, in which the faithful would in vain have tried to set their teeth. Irritated in anticipation by the knowledge that her husband inherited his mother’s simple kindliness, which would make him assume a

flattered expression whenever one of the faithful was presented to him, anxious however to perform her duty as a leader of society, when Brichot had been named to her she decided to make him and her husband acquainted, as she had seen her more fashionable friends do, but, anger or pride prevailing over the desire to shew her knowledge of the world, she said, not, as she ought to have said: “Allow me to introduce my husband,” but: “I introduce you to my husband,” holding aloft thus the banner of the Cambremers, without avail, for her husband bowed as low before Brichot as she had expected. But all Mme. de Cambremer’s ill humour vanished in an instant when her eye fell on M. de Charlus, whom she knew by sight. Never had she succeeded in obtaining an introduction, even at the time of her intimacy with Swann. For as M. de Charlus always sided with the woman, with his sister-in-law against M. de Guermantes’s mistresses, with Odette, at that time still unmarried, but an old flame of Swann’s, against the new, he had, as a stern defender of morals and faithful protector of homes, given Odette — and kept — the promise that he would never allow himself to be presented to Mme. de Cambremer. She had certainly never guessed that it was at the Verdurins’ that she was at length to meet this unapproachable person. M. de Cambremer knew that this was a great joy to her, so great that he himself was moved by it and looked at his wife with an air that implied: “You are glad now you decided to come, aren’t you?” He spoke very little, knowing that he had married a superior woman. “I, all unworthy,” he would say at every moment, and spontaneously quoted a fable of La Fontaine and one of Florian which seemed to him to apply to his ignorance, and at the same time enable him, beneath the outward form of a contemptuous flattery, to shew the men of science who were not members of the Jockey that one might be a sportsman and yet have read fables. The unfortunate thing was that he knew only two of them. And so they kept cropping up. Mme. de Cambremer was no fool, but she had a number of extremely irritating habits. With her the corruption of names bore absolutely no trace of aristocratic disdain. She was not the person to say, like the Duchesse de Guermantes (whom the mere fact of her birth ought to have preserved even more than Mme. de Cambremer from such an absurdity), with a pretence of not remembering the unfashionable name (albeit it is now that of one of the women whom it is most difficult to approach) of Julien de Monchâteau: “a little Madame... Pica della Mirandola.” No, when Mme. de Cambremer said a name wrong it was out of kindness of heart, so as not to appear to know some damaging fact, and when, in her sincerity, she admitted it, she tried to conceal it by altering it. If, for instance, she was defending a woman, she would try to

conceal the fact, while determined not to lie to the person who had asked her to tell the truth, that Madame So-and-so was at the moment the mistress of M. Sylvain Levy, and would say: “No... I know absolutely nothing about her, I fancy that people used to charge her with having inspired a passion in a gentleman whose name I don’t know, something like Cahn, Kohn, Kuhn; anyhow, I believe the gentleman has been dead for years and that there was never anything between them.” This is an analogous, but contrary process to that adopted by liars who think that if they alter their statement of what they have been doing when they make it to a mistress or merely to another man, their listener will not immediately see that the expression (like her Cahn, Kohn, Kuhn) is interpolated, is of a different texture from the rest of the conversation, has a double meaning.

Mme. Verdurin whispered in her husband’s ear: “Shall I offer my arm to the Baron de Charlus? As you will have Mme. de Cambremer on your right, we might divide the honours.” “No,” said M. Verdurin, “since the other is higher in rank” (meaning that M. de Cambremer was a Marquis), “M. de Charlus is, strictly speaking, his inferior.” “Very well, I shall put him beside the Princess.” And Mme. Verdurin introduced Mme. Sherbatoff to M. de Charlus; each of them bowed in silence, with an air of knowing all about the other and of promising a mutual secrecy. M. Verdurin introduced me to M. de Cambremer. Before he had even begun to speak in his loud and slightly stammering voice, his tall figure and high complexion displayed in their oscillation the martial hesitation of a commanding officer who tries to put you at your ease and says: “I have heard about you, I shall see what can be done; your punishment shall be remitted; we don’t thirst for blood here; it will be all right.” Then, as he shook my hand: “I think you know my mother,” he said to me. The word ‘think’ seemed to him appropriate to the discretion of a first meeting, but not to imply any uncertainty, for he went on: “I have a note for you from her.” M. de Cambremer took a childish pleasure in revisiting a place where he had lived for so long. “I am at home again,” he said to Mme. Verdurin, while his eyes marvelled at recognising the flowers painted on panels over the doors, and the marble busts on their high pedestals. He might, all the same, have felt himself at sea, for Mme. Verdurin had brought with her a quantity of fine old things of her own. In this respect, Mme. Verdurin, while regarded by the Cambremers as having turned everything upside down, was not revolutionary but intelligently conservative in a sense which they did not understand. They were thus wrong in accusing her of hating the old house and of degrading it by hanging plain cloth curtains instead of their rich plush, like an ignorant parish priest reproaching a diocesan architect with

putting back in its place the old carved wood which the cleric had thrown on the rubbish heap, and had seen fit to replace with ornaments purchased in the Place Saint-Sulpice. Furthermore, a herb garden was beginning to take the place, in front of the mansion, of the borders that were the pride not merely of the Cambremers but of their gardener. The latter, who regarded the Cambremers as his sole masters, and groaned beneath the yoke of the Verdurins, as though the place were under occupation for the moment by an invading army, went in secret to unburden his griefs to its dispossessed mistress, grew irate at the scorn that was heaped upon his araucarias, begonias, house-leeks, double dahlias, and at anyone's daring in so grand a place to grow such common plants as camomile and maidenhair. Mme. Verdurin felt this silent opposition and had made up her mind, if she took a long lease of la Raspelière or even bought the place, to make one of her conditions the dismissal of the gardener, by whom his old mistress, on the contrary, set great store. He had worked for her without payment, when times were bad, he adored her; but by that odd multiformity of opinion which we find in the lower orders, among whom the most profound moral scorn is embedded in the most passionate admiration, which in turn overlaps old and undying grudges, he used often to say of Mme. de Cambremer who, in '70, in a house that she owned in the East of France, surprised by the invasion, had been obliged to endure for a month the contact of the Germans: "What many people can't forgive Mme. la Marquise is that during the war she took the side of the Prussians and even had them to stay in her house. At any other time, I could understand it; but in war time, she ought not to have done it. It is not right." So that he was faithful to her unto death, venerated her for her goodness, and firmly believed that she had been guilty of treason. Mme. Verdurin was annoyed that M. de Cambremer should pretend to feel so much at home at la Raspelière. "You must notice a good many changes, all the same," she replied. "For one thing there were those big bronze Barbedienne devils and some horrid little plush chairs which I packed off at once to the attic, though even that is too good a place for them." After this bitter retort to M. de Cambremer, she offered him her arm to go in to dinner. He hesitated for a moment, saying to himself: "I can't, really, go in before M. de Charlus." But supposing the other to be an old friend of the house, seeing that he was not set in the post of honour, he decided to take the arm that was offered him and told Mme. Verdurin how proud he felt to be admitted into the symposium (so it was that he styled the little nucleus, not without a smile of satisfaction at his knowledge of the term). Cottard, who was seated next to M. de Charlus, beamed at him through his glass, to make his

acquaintance and to break the ice, with a series of winks far more insistent than they would have been in the old days, and not interrupted by fits of shyness. And these engaging glances, enhanced by the smile that accompanied them, were no longer dammed by the glass but overflowed on all sides. The Baron, who readily imagined people of his own kind everywhere, had no doubt that Cottard was one, and was making eyes at him. At once he turned on the Professor the cold shoulder of the invert, as contemptuous of those whom he attracts as he is ardent in pursuit of such as attract him. No doubt, albeit each one of us speaks mendaciously of the pleasure, always refused him by destiny, of being loved, it is a general law, the application of which is by no means confined to the Charlus type, that the person whom we do not love and who does love us seems to us quite intolerable. To such a person, to a woman of whom we say not that she loves us but that she bores us, we prefer the society of any other, who has neither her charm, nor her looks, nor her brains. She will recover these, in our estimation, only when she has ceased to love us. In this light, we might see only the transposition, into odd terms, of this universal rule in the irritation aroused in an invert by a man who displeases him and runs after him. And so, whereas the ordinary man seeks to conceal what he feels, the invert is implacable in making it felt by the man who provokes it, as he would certainly not make it felt by a woman, M. de Charlus for instance by the Princesse de Guermantes, whose passion for him bored him, but flattered him. But when they see another man shew a peculiar liking for them, then, whether because they fail to realise that this liking is the same as their own, or because it annoys them to be reminded that this liking, which they glorify so long as it is they themselves that feel it, is regarded as a vice, or from a desire to rehabilitate themselves by a sensational display in circumstances in which it costs them nothing, or from a fear of being unmasked which they at once recover as soon as desire no longer leads them blindfold from one imprudence to another, or from rage at being subjected, by the equivocal attitude of another person, to the injury which, by their own attitude, if that other person attracted them, they would not be afraid to inflict on him, the men who do not in the least mind following a young man for miles, never taking their eyes off him in the theatre, even if he is with friends, and there is therefore a danger of their compromising him with them, may be heard, if a man who does not attract them merely looks at them, to say: “Sir, for what do you take me?” (simply because he takes them for what they are) “I don’t understand, no, don’t attempt to explain, you are quite mistaken,” pass if need be from words to blows, and, to a person who knows the imprudent stranger, wax

indignant: “What, you know that loathsome creature. He stares at one so!... A fine way to behave!” M. de Charlus did not go quite as far as this, but assumed the offended, glacial air adopted, when one appears to be suspecting them, by women who are not of easy virtue, even more by women who are. Furthermore, the invert brought face to face with an invert sees not merely an unpleasing image of himself which, being purely inanimate, could at the worst only injure his self-esteem, but a second self, living, acting in the same sphere, capable therefore of injuring him in his loves. And so it is from an instinct of self-preservation that he will speak evil of the possible rival, whether to people who are able to do him some injury (nor does invert the first mind being thought a liar when he thus denounces invert the second before people who may know all about his own case), or to the young man whom he has ‘picked up,’ who is perhaps going to be snatched away from him and whom it is important to persuade that the very things which it is to his advantage to do with the speaker would be the bane of his life if he allowed himself to do them with the other person. To M. de Charlus, who was thinking perhaps of the — wholly imaginary — dangers in which the presence of this Cottard whose smile he misinterpreted might involve Morel, an invert who did not attract him was not merely a caricature of himself, but was a deliberate rival. A tradesman, practising an uncommon trade, who, on his arrival in the provincial town where he intends to settle for life discovers that, in the same square, directly opposite, the same trade is being carried on by a competitor, is no more discomfited than a Charlus who goes down to a quiet spot to make love unobserved and, on the day of his arrival, catches sight of the local squire or the barber, whose aspect and manner leave no room for doubt. The tradesman often comes to regard his competitor with hatred; this hatred degenerates at times into melancholy, and, if there be but a sufficient strain of heredity, one has seen in small towns the tradesman begin to shew signs of insanity which is cured only by his deciding to sell his stock and goodwill and remove to another place. The invert’s rage is even more agonising. He has realised that from the first moment the squire and the barber have desired his young companion. Even though he repeat to him a hundred times daily that the barber and the squire are scoundrels whose contact would dishonour him, he is obliged, like Harpagon, to watch over his treasure, and rises in the night to make sure that it is not being stolen. And it is this no doubt that, even more than desire, or the convenience of habits shared in common, and almost as much as that experience of oneself which is the only true experience, makes one invert detect another with a rapidity and certainty that are almost infallible. He may be

mistaken for a moment, but a rapid divination brings him back to the truth. And so M. de Charlus's error was brief. His divine discernment shewed him after the first minute that Cottard was not of his kind, and that he need not fear his advances either for himself, which would merely have annoyed him, or for Morel, which would have seemed to him a more serious matter. He recovered his calm, and as he was still beneath the influence of the transit of Venus Androgyne, now and again, he smiled a faint smile at the Verdurins without taking the trouble to open his mouth, merely curving his lips at one corner, and for an instant kindled a coquettish light in his eyes, he so obsessed with virility, exactly as his sister-in-law the Duchesse de Guermantes might have done. "Do you shoot much, Sir?" said M. Verdurin with a note of contempt to M. de Cambremer. "Has Ski told you of the near shave we had to-day?" Cottard inquired of the mistress. "I shoot mostly in the forest of Chantepie," replied M. de Cambremer. "No, I have told her nothing," said Ski. "Does it deserve its name?" Brichot asked M. de Cambremer, after a glance at me from the corner of his eye, for he had promised me that he would introduce the topic of derivations, begging me at the same time not to let the Cambremers know the scorn that he felt for those furnished by the Combray curé. "I am afraid I must be very stupid, but I don't grasp your question," said M. de Cambremer. "I mean to say: do many pies sing in it?" replied Brichot. Cottard meanwhile could not bear Mme. Verdurin's not knowing that they had nearly missed the train. "Out with it," Mme. Cottard said to her husband encouragingly, "tell us your odyssey." "Well, really, it is quite out of the Ordinary," said the doctor, and repeated his narrative from the beginning. "When I saw that the train was in the station, I stood thunderstruck. It was all Ski's fault. You are somewhat wide of the mark in your information, my dear fellow! And there was Brichot waiting for us at the station!" "I assumed," said the scholar, casting around him what he could still muster of a glance and smiling with his thin lips, "that if you had been detained at Graincourt, it would mean that you had encountered some peripatetic siren." "Will you hold your tongue, if my wife were to hear you!" said the Professor. "This wife of mine, it is jealous." "Ah! That Brichot," cried Ski, moved to traditional merriment by Brichot's spicy witticism, "he is always the same;" albeit he had no reason to suppose that the university don had ever indulged in obscenity. And, to embellish this consecrated utterance with the ritual gesture, he made as though he could not resist the desire to pinch Brichot's leg. "He never changes, the rascal," Ski went on, and without stopping to think of the effect, at once tragic and comic, that the don's semi-blindness gave to his words: "Always

a sharp look-out for the ladies." "You see," said M. de Cambremer, "what it is to meet with a scholar. Here have I been shooting for fifteen years in the forest of Chantepie, and I've never even thought of what the name meant." Mme. de Cambremer cast a stern glance at her husband; she did not like him to humble himself thus before Brichot. She was even more annoyed when, at every 'ready-made' expression that Cancan employed, Cottard, who knew the ins and outs of them all, having himself laboriously acquired them, pointed out to the Marquis, who admitted his stupidity, that they meant nothing. "Why 'stupid as a cabbage?' Do you suppose cabbages are stupider than anything else? You say:'repeat the same thing thirty-six times.' Why thirty-six? Why do you say:'sleep like a top?' Why 'Thunder of Brest?' Why 'play four hundred tricks?'" But at this, the defence of M. de Cambremer was taken up by Brichot who explained the origin of each of these expressions. But Mme. de Cambremer was occupied principally in examining the changes that the Verdurins had introduced at la Raspelière, in order that she might be able to criticise some, and import others, or possibly the same ones, to Féterne. "I keep wondering what that lustre is that's hanging all crooked. I can hardly recognise my old Raspelière," she went on, with a familiarly aristocratic air, as she might have spoken of an old servant meaning not so much to indicate his age as to say that she had seen him in his cradle. And, as she was a trifle bookish in her speech: "All the same," she added in an undertone, "I can't help feeling that if I were inhabiting another person's house, I should feel some compunction about altering everything like this." "It is a pity you didn't come with them," said Mme. Verdurin to M. de Charlus and Morel, hoping that M. de Charlus was now 'enrolled' and would submit to the rule that they must all arrive by the same train. "You are sure that Chantepie means the singing magpie, Chochotte?" she went on, to shew that, like the great hostess that she was, she could join in every conversation at the same time. "Tell me something about this violinist," Mme. de Cambremer said to me, "he interests me; I adore music, and it seems to me that I have heard of him before, complete my education." She had heard that Morel had come with M. de Charlus and hoped, by getting the former to come to her house, to make friends with the latter. She added, however, so that I might not guess her reason for asking, "M. Brichot, too, interests me." For, even if she was highly cultivated, just as certain persons inclined to obesity eat hardly anything, and take exercise all day long without ceasing to grow visibly fatter, so Mme. de Cambremer might in vain master, and especially at Féterne, a philosophy that became ever more esoteric, music that became ever more subtle, she emerged from these studies only to

weave plots that would enable her to cut the middle-class friends of her girlhood and to form the connexions which she had originally supposed to be part of the social life of her 'in laws,' and had then discovered to be far more exalted and remote. A philosopher who was not modern enough for her, Leibnitz, has said that the way is long from the intellect to the heart. This way Mme. de Cambremer had been no more capable than her brother of traversing. Abandoning the study of John Stuart Mill only for that of Lachelier, the less she believed in the reality of the external world, the more desperately she sought to establish herself, before she died, in a good position in it. In her passion for realism in art, no object seemed to her humble enough to serve as a model to painter or writer. A fashionable picture or novel would have made her feel sick; Tolstoi's mujiks, or Millet's peasants, were the extreme social boundary beyond which she did not allow the artist to pass. But to cross the boundary that limited her own social relations, to raise herself to an intimate acquaintance with Duchesses, this was the goal of all her efforts, so ineffective had the spiritual treatment to which she subjected herself, by the study of great masterpieces, proved in overcoming the congenital and morbid snobbishness that had developed in her. This snobbishness had even succeeded in curing certain tendencies to avarice and adultery to which in her younger days she had been inclined, just as certain peculiar and permanent pathological conditions seem to render those who are subject to them immune to other maladies. I could not, all the same, refrain, as I listened to her, from giving her credit, without deriving any pleasure from them, for the refinement of her expressions. They were those that are used, at a given date, by all the people of the same intellectual breadth, so that the refined expression provides us at once, like the arc of a circle, with the means to describe and limit the entire circumference. And so the effect of these expressions is that the people who employ them bore me immediately, because I feel that I already know them, but are generally regarded as superior persons, and have often been offered me as delightful and unappreciated companions. "You cannot fail to be aware, Madame, that many forest regions take their name from the animals that inhabit them. Next to the forest of Chantepie, you have the wood Chantereine." "I don't know who the queen may be, but you are not very polite to her," said M. de Cambremer. "One for you, Chochotte," said Mme. de Verdurin. "And apart from that, did you have a pleasant journey?" "We encountered only vague human beings who thronged the train. But I must answer M. de Cambremer's question; *reine*, in this instance, is not the wife of a king, but a frog. It is the name that the frog has long retained in

this district, as is shewn by the station, Renneville, which ought to be spelt Reineville." "I say, that seems a fine animal," said M. de Cambremer to Mme. Verdurin, pointing to a fish. (It was one of the compliments by means of which he considered that he paid his scot at a dinner-party, and gave an immediate return of hospitality. "There is no need to invite them," he would often say, in speaking of one or other couple of their friends to his wife. "They were delighted to have us. It was they that thanked me for coming.") "I must tell you, all the same, that I have been going every day for years to Renneville, and I have never seen any more frogs there than anywhere else. Madame de Cambremer brought the curé here from a parish where she owns a considerable property, who has very much the same turn of mind as yourself, it seems to me. He has written a book." "I know, I have read it with immense interest," Brichot replied hypocritically. The satisfaction that his pride received indirectly from this answer made M. de Cambremer laugh long and loud. "Ah! well, the author of, what shall I say, this geography, this glossary, dwells at great length upon the name of a little place of which we were formerly, if I may say so, the Lords, and which is called Pont-a-Couleuvre. Of course I am only an ignorant rustic compared with such a fountain of learning, but I have been to Pont-à-Couleuvre a thousand times if he's been there once, and devil take me if I ever saw one of his beastly serpents there, I say beastly, in spite of the tribute the worthy La Fontaine pays them." (*The Man and the Serpent* was one of his two fables.) "You have not seen any, and you have been quite right," replied Brichot. "Undoubtedly, the writer you mention knows his subject through and through, he has written a remarkable book." "There!" exclaimed Mme. de Cambremer, "that book, there's no other word for it, is a regular Benedictine *opus*." "No doubt he has consulted various polyptychs (by which we mean the lists of benefices and cures of each diocese), which may have furnished him with the names of lay patrons and ecclesiastical collators. But there are other sources. One of the most learned of my friends has delved into them. He found that the place in question was named Pont-a-Quileuvre. This odd name encouraged him to carry his researches farther, to a Latin text in which the bridge that your friend supposes to be infested with serpents is styled *Pons cui aperit*: A closed bridge that was opened only upon due payment." "You were speaking of frogs. I, when I find myself among such learned folk, feel like the frog before the areopagus," (this being his other fable) said Cancan who often indulged, with a hearty laugh, in this pleasantry thanks to which he imagined himself to be making, at one and the same time, out of humility and with aptness, a profession of ignorance and a display of learning.

As for Cottard, blocked upon one side by M. de Charlus's silence, and driven to seek an outlet elsewhere, he turned to me with one of those questions which so impressed his patients when it hit the mark and shewed them that he could put himself so to speak inside their bodies; if on the other hand it missed the mark, it enabled him to check certain theories, to widen his previous point of view. "When you come to a relatively high altitude, such as this where we now are, do you find that the change increases your tendency to choking fits?" he asked me with the certainty of either arousing admiration or enlarging his own knowledge. M. de Cambremer heard the question and smiled. "I can't tell you how amused I am to hear that you have choking fits," he flung at me across the table. He did not mean that it made him happy, though as a matter of fact it did. For this worthy man could not hear any reference to another person's sufferings without a feeling of satisfaction and a spasm of hilarity which speedily gave place to the instinctive pity of a kind heart. But his words had another meaning which was indicated more precisely by the clause that followed. "It amuses me," he explained, "because my sister has them too." And indeed it did amuse him, as it would have amused him to hear me mention as one of my friends a person who was constantly coming to their house. "How small the world is," was the reflexion which he formed mentally and which I saw written upon his smiling face when Cottard spoke to me of my choking fits. And these began to establish themselves, from the evening of this dinner-party, as a sort of interest in common, after which M. de Cambremer never failed to inquire, if only to hand on a report to his sister. As I answered the questions with which his wife kept plying me about Morel, my thoughts returned to a conversation I had had with my mother that afternoon. Having, without any attempt to dissuade me from going to the Verdurins' if there was a chance of my being amused there, suggested that it was a house of which my grandfather would not have approved, which would have made him exclaim: "On guard!" my mother had gone on to say: "Listen, Judge Toureuil and his wife told me they had been to luncheon with Mme. Bon-temps. They asked me no questions. But I seemed to gather from what was said that your marriage to Albertine would be the joy of her aunt's life. I think the real reason is that they are all extremely fond of you. At the same time the style in which they suppose that you would be able to keep her, the sort of friends they more or less know that we have, all that is not, I fancy, left out of account, although it may be a minor consideration. I should not have mentioned it to you myself, because I attach no importance to it, but as I imagine that people will mention it to you, I prefer to get a word in first." "But you yourself,

what do you think of her?" I asked my mother. "Well, it's not I that am going to marry her. You might certainly do a thousand times better. But I feel that your grandmother would not have liked me to influence you. As a matter of fact, I cannot tell you what I think of Albertine; I don't think of her. I shall say to you, like Madame de Sévigné: 'She has good qualities, at least I suppose so. But at this first stage I can praise her only by negatives. One thing she is not, she has not the Rennes accent. In time, I shall perhaps say, she is something else. And I shall always think well of her if she can make you happy.'" But by these very words which left it to myself to decide my own happiness, my mother had plunged me in that state of doubt in which I had been plunged long ago when, my father having allowed me to go to *Phèdre* and, what was more, to take to writing, I had suddenly felt myself burdened with too great a responsibility, the fear of distressing him, and that melancholy which we feel when we cease to obey orders which, from one day to another, keep the future hidden, and realise that we have at last begun to live in real earnest, as a grown-up person, the life, the only life that any of us has at his disposal.

Perhaps the best thing would be to wait a little longer, to begin by regarding Albertine as in the past, so as to find out whether I really loved her. I might take her, as a distraction, to see the Verdurins, and this thought reminded me that I had come there myself that evening only to learn whether Mme. Putbus was staying there or was expected. In any case, she was not dining with them. "Speaking of your friend Saint-Loup," said Mme. de Cambremer, using an expression which shewed a closer sequence in her ideas than her remarks might have led one to suppose, for if she spoke to me about music she was thinking about the Guermantes; "you know that everybody is talking about his marriage to the niece of the Princesse de Guermantes. I may tell you that, so far as I am concerned, all that society gossip leaves me cold." I was seized by a fear that I might have spoken unfeelingly to Robert about the girl in question, a girl full of sham originality, whose mind was as mediocre as her actions were violent. Hardly ever do we hear anything that does 'not make us regret something that we have said. I replied to Mme. de Cambremer, truthfully as it happened, that I knew nothing about it, and that anyhow I thought that the girl was still too young to be engaged. "That is perhaps why it is not yet official, anyhow there is a lot of talk about it." "I ought to warn you," Mme. Verdurin observed dryly to Mme. de Cambremer, having heard her talking to me about Morel and supposing, when Mme. de Cambremer lowered her voice to speak of Saint-Loup's engagement, that Morel was still under discussion. "You needn't expect any light music here.

In matters of art, you know, the faithful who come to my Wednesdays, my children as I call them, are all fearfully advanced," she added with an air of proud terror. "I say to them sometimes: My dear people, you move too fast for your Mistress, not that she has ever been said to be afraid of anything daring. Every year it goes a little farther; I can see the day coming when they will have no more use for Wagner or Indy." "But it is splendid to be advanced, one can never be advanced enough," said Mme. de Cambremer, scrutinising as she spoke every corner of the dining-room, trying to identify the things that her mother-in-law had left there, those that Mme. Verdurin had brought with her, and to convict the latter red-handed of want of taste. At the same time, she tried to get me to talk of the subject that interested her most, M. de Charlus. She thought it touching that he should be looking after a violinist. "He seems intelligent." "Why, his mind is extremely active for a man of his age," said I. "Age? But he doesn't seem at all old, look, the hair is still young." (For, during the last three or four years, the word hair had been used with the article by one of those unknown persons who launch the literary fashions, and everybody at the same radius from the centre as Mme. de Cambremer would say 'the hair,' not without an affected smile. At the present day, people still say 'the hair' but, from an excessive use of the article, the pronoun will be born again.) "What interests me most about M. de Charlus," she went on, "is that one can feel that he has the gift. I may tell you that I attach little importance to knowledge. Things that can be learned do not interest me." This speech was not incompatible with Mme. de Cambremer's own distinction which was, in the fullest sense, imitated and acquired. But it so happened that one of the things which one had to know at that moment was that knowledge is nothing, and is not worth a straw when compared with originality. Mme. de Cambremer had learned, with everything else, that one ought not to learn anything. "That is why," she explained to me, "Brichot, who has an interesting side to him, for I am not one to despise a certain spicy erudition, interests me far less." But Brichot, at that moment, was occupied with one thing only; hearing people talk about music, he trembled lest the subject should remind Mme. Verdurin of the death of Dechambre. He decided to say something that would avert that harrowing memory. M. de Cambremer provided him with an opportunity with the question: "You mean to say that wooded places always take their names from animals?" "Not at all," replied Brichot, proud to display his learning before so many strangers, among whom, I had told him, he would be certain to interest one at least. "We have only to consider how often, even in the names of people, a tree is preserved, like a fern in a piece of coal. One of our

Conscript Fathers is called M. de Saulces de Freycinet, which means, if I be not mistaken, a spot planted with willows and ashes, *salix et fraxinetum*; his nephew M. de Selves combines more trees still, since he is named de Selves, *de sylvis*." Saniette was delighted to see the conversation take so animated a turn. He could, since Brichot was talking all the time, preserve a silence which would save him from being the butt of M. and Mme. Verdurin's wit. And growing even more sensitive in his joy at being set free, he had been touched when he heard M. Verdurin, notwithstanding the formality of so grand a dinner-party, tell the butler to put a decanter of water in front of M. Saniette who never drank anything else. (The generals responsible for the death of most soldiers insist upon their being well fed.) Moreover, Mme. Verdurin had actually smiled once at Saniette. Decidedly, they were kind people. He was not going to be tortured any more. At this moment the meal was interrupted by one of the party whom I have forgotten to mention, an eminent Norwegian philosopher who spoke French very well but very slowly, for the twofold reason that, in the first place, having learned the language only recently and not wishing to make mistakes (he did, nevertheless, make some), he referred each word to a sort of mental dictionary, and secondly, being a metaphysician, he always thought of what he intended to say while he was saying it, which, even in a Frenchman, causes slowness of utterance. He was, otherwise, a charming person, although similar in appearance to many other people, save in one respect. This man so slow in his diction (there was an interval of silence after every word) acquired a startling rapidity in escaping from the room as soon as he had said good-bye. His haste made one suppose, the first time one saw him, that he was suffering from colic or some even more urgent need.

"My dear — colleague," he said to Brichot, after deliberating in his mind whether colleague was the correct term, "I have a sort of — desire to know whether there are other trees in the — nomenclature of your beautiful French — Latin — Norman tongue. Madame" (lie meant Madame Verdurin, although he dared not look at her) "has told me that you know everything. Is not this precisely the moment?" "No, it is the moment for eating," interrupted Mme. Verdurin, who saw the dinner becoming interminable. "Very well," the Scandinavian replied, bowing his head over his plate with a resigned and sorrowful smile. "But I must point out to Madame that if I have permitted myself this questionnaire — pardon me, this questation — it is because I have to return to-morrow to Paris to dine at the Tour d'Argent or at the Hôtel Meurice, My French — brother — M. Boutroux is to address us there about certain seances of

spiritualism — pardon me, certain spirituous evocations which he has controlled." "The Tour d'Argent is not nearly as good as they make out," said Mme. Verdurin sourly. "In fact, I have had some disgusting dinners there." "But am I mistaken, is not the food that one consumes at Madame's table an example of the finest French cookery?" "Well, it is not positively bad," replied Mme. Verdurin, sweetening. "And if you come next Wednesday, it will be better." "But I am leaving on Monday for Algiers, and from there I am going to the Cape. And when I am at the Cape of Good Hope, I shall no longer be able to meet my illustrious colleague — pardon me, I shall no longer be able to meet my brother." And he set to work obediently, after offering these retrospective apologies, to devour his food at a headlong pace. But Brichot was only too delighted to be able to furnish other vegetable etymologies, and replied, so greatly interesting the Norwegian that he again stopped eating, but with a sign to the servants that they might remove his plate and help him to the next course. "One of the Forty," said Brichot, "is named Houssaye, or a place planted with hollies; in the name of a brilliant diplomat, d'Ormesson, you will find the elm, the*ulmus* beloved of Virgil, which has given its name to the town of Ulm; in the names of his colleagues, M. de la Boulaye, the birch (*bouleau*), M. d'Aunay, the alder (*aune*), M. de Buissière, the box (*buis*), M. Albaret, the sapwood (*aubier*)" (I made a mental note that I must tell this to Céleste), "M. de Cholet, the cabbage (*chou*), and the apple-tree (*pommier*) in the name of M. de la Pommeraye, whose lectures we used to attend, do you remember, Saniette, in the days when the worthy Porel had been sent to the farthest ends of the earth, as Proconsul in Odeonia?" "You said that Cholet was derived from *chou*," I remarked to Brichot. "Am I to suppose that the name of a station I passed before reaching Doncières, Saint-Frichoux, comes from *chou* also?" "No, Saint-Frichoux is *Sanctus Fructuosus*, as*Sanctus Ferreolus* gave rise to Saint-Fargeau, but that is not Norman in the least." "He knows too much, he's boring us," the Princess muttered softly. "There are so many other names that interest me, but I can't ask you everything at once." And, turning to Cottard, "Is Madame Putbus here?" I asked him. On hearing Brichot utter the name of Saniette, M. Verdurin cast at his wife and at Cottard an ironical glance which confounded their timid guest. "No, thank heaven," replied Mme. Verdurin, who had overheard my question, "I have managed to turn her thoughts in the direction of Venice, we are rid of her for this year." "I shall myself be entitled presently to two trees," said M. de Charlus, "for I have more or less taken a little house between Saint-Martin-du-Chene and Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs." "But that is quite close to here, I hope that you will come

over often with Charlie Morel. You have only to come to an arrangement with our little group about the trains, you are only a step from Doncières," said Mme. Verdurin, who hated people's not coming by the same train and not arriving at the hours when she sent carriages to meet them. She knew how stiff the climb was to la Raspelière, even if you took the zigzag path, behind Féterne, which was half-an-hour longer; she was afraid that those of her guests who kept to themselves might not find carriages to take them, or even, having in reality stayed away, might plead the excuse that they had not found a carriage at Douville-Féterne, and had not felt strong enough to make so stiff a climb on foot. To this invitation M. de Charlus responded with a silent bow. "He's not the sort of person you can talk to any day of the week, he seems a tough customer," the doctor whispered to Ski, for having remained quite simple, notwithstanding a surface-dressing of pride, he made no attempt to conceal the fact that Charlus had snubbed him. "He is doubtless unaware that at all the watering-places, and even in Paris in the wards, the physicians, who naturally regard me as their 'chief,' make it a point of honour to introduce me to all the noblemen present, not that they need to be asked twice. It makes my stay at the spas quite enjoyable," he added carelessly. "Indeed at Doncières the medical officer of the regiment, who is the doctor who attends the Colonel, invited me to luncheon to meet him, saying that I was fully entitled to dine with the General. And that General is a Monsieur *de* something. I don't know whether his title-deeds are more or less ancient than those of this Baron." "Don't you worry about him, his is a very humble coronet," replied Ski in an undertone, and added some vague statement including a word of which I caught only the last syllable, -ast, being engaged in listening to what Brichot was saying to M. de Charlus. "No, as for that, I am sorry to say, you have probably one tree only, for if Saint-Martin-du-Chêne is obviously*Sanctus Martinus juxta quercum*, on the other hand, the word *if* may be simply the root *ave*, *eve*, which means moist, as in Aveyron, Lodève, Yvette, and which you see survive in our kitchen-sinks (éviers). It is the word *eau* which in Breton is represented by *ster*, Ster-maria, Sterlaer, Sterbouest, Ster-en-Dreuchen." I heard no more, for whatever the pleasure I might feel on hearing again the name Stermaria, I could not help listening to Cottard, next to whom I was seated, as he murmured to Ski: "Indeed! I was not aware of it. So he is a gentleman who has learned to look behind! He is one of the happy band, is he? He hasn't got rings of fat round his eyes, all the same. I shall have to keep my feet well under me, or he may start squeezing them. But I'm not at all surprised. I am used to seeing noblemen in the bath, in their birthday suits, they

are all more or less degenerates. I don't talk to them, because after all I am in an official position and it might do me harm. But they know quite well who I am." Saniette, whom Brichot's appeal had frightened, was beginning to breathe again, like a man who is afraid of the storm when he finds that the lightning has not been followed by any sound of thunder, when he heard M. Verdurin interrogate him, fastening upon him a stare which did not spare the wretch until he had finished speaking, so as to put him at once out of countenance and prevent him from recovering his composure. "But you never told us that you went to those *matinées* at the Odéon, Saniette?" Trembling like a recruit before a bullying serjeant, Saniette replied, making his speech as diminutive as possible, so that it might have a better chance of escaping the blow: "Only once, to the *Chercheuse*." "What's that he says?" shouted M. Verdurin, with an air of disgust and fury combined, knitting his brows as though it was all he could do to grasp something unintelligible. "It is impossible to understand what you say, what have you got in your mouth?" inquired M. Verdurin, growing more and more furious, and alluding to Saniette's defective speech. "Poor Saniette, I won't have him made unhappy," said Mme. Verdurin in a tone of false pity, so as to leave no one in doubt as to her husband's insolent intention. "I was at the Ch... Che.." "Che, che, try to speak distinctly," said M. Verdurin, "I can't understand a word you say." Almost without exception, the faithful burst out laughing and they suggested a band of cannibals in whom the sight of a wound on a white man's skin has aroused the thirst for blood. For the instinct of imitation and absence of courage govern society and the mob alike. And we all of us laugh at a person whom we see being made fun of, which does not prevent us from venerating him ten years later in a circle where he is admired. It is in like manner that the populace banishes or acclaims its kings. "Come, now, it is not his fault," said Mme. Verdurin. "It is not mine either, people ought not to dine out if they can't speak properly." "I was at the *Chercheuse d'Esprit* by Favart." "What! It's the*Chercheuse d'Esprit* that you call the *Chercheuse*? Why, that's marvellous! I might have tried for a hundred years without guessing it," cried M. Verdurin, who all the same would have decided immediately that you were not literary, were not artistic, were not 'one of us,' if he had heard you quote the full title of certain works. For instance, one was expected to say the *Malade*, the *Bourgeois*; and whoso would have added *imaginaire* or*gentilhomme* would have shewn that he did not understand 'shop,' just as in a drawing-room a person proves that he is not in society by saying 'M. de Montesquiou-Fézensac' instead of 'M. de Montesquieu.' "But it is not so extraordinary," said Saniette, breathless with

emotion but smiling, albeit he was in no smiling mood. Mme. Verdurin could not contain herself. “Yes, indeed!” she cried with a titter. “You may be quite sure that nobody would ever have guessed that you meant the *Chercheuse d’Esprit*.” M. Verdurin went on in a gentler tone, addressing both Saniette and Brichot: “It is quite a pretty piece, all the same, the *Chercheuse d’Esprit*.” Uttered in a serious tone, this simple phrase, in which one could detect no trace of malice, did Saniette as much good and aroused in him as much gratitude as a deliberate compliment. He was unable to utter a single word and preserved a happy silence. Brichot was more loquacious. “It is true,” he replied to M. Verdurin, “and if it could be passed off as the work of some Sarmatian or Scandinavian author, we might put forward the *Chercheuse d’Esprit* as a candidate for the vacant post of masterpiece. But, be it said without any disrespect to the shade of the gentle Favart, he had not the Ibsenian temperament.” (Immediately he blushed to the roots of his hair, remembering the Norwegian philosopher who appeared troubled because he was seeking in vain to discover what vegetable the *buis* might be that Brichot had cited a little earlier in connexion with the name Bussière.) “However, now that Porel’s satrapy is filled by a functionary who is a Tolstoist of rigorous observance, it may come to pass that we shall witness*Anna Karenina* or *Resurrection* beneath the Odéonian architrave.” “I know the portrait of Favart to which you allude,” said M. de Charlus. “I have seen a very fine print of it at Comtesse Molé’s.” The name of Comtesse Molé made a great impression upon Mme. Verdurin. “Oh! So you go to Mme. de Molé’s!” she exclaimed. She supposed that people said Comtesse Molé, Madame Molé, simply as an abbreviation, as she heard people say ‘the Rohans’ or in contempt, as she herself said: ‘Madame la Trémoïlle.’ She had no doubt that Comtesse Molé, who knew the Queen of Greece and the Principessa di Caprarola, had as much right as anybody to the particle, and for once in a way had decided to bestow it upon so brilliant a personage, and one who had been extremely civil to herself. And so, to make it clear that she had spoken thus on purpose and did not grudge the Comtesse her ‘de,’ she went on: “But I had no idea that you knew Madame de Molé!” as though it had been doubly extraordinary, both that M. de Charlus should know the lady, and that Mme. Verdurin should not know that he knew her. Now society, or at least the people to whom M. de Charlus gave that name, forms a relatively homogeneous and compact whole. And so it is comprehensible that, in the incongruous vastness of the middle classes, a barrister may say to somebody who knows one of his school friends: “But how in the world do you come to know him?” whereas to be surprised at a

Frenchman's knowing the meaning of the word *temple*or *forest* would be hardly more extraordinary than to wonder at the hazards that might have brought together M. de Charlus and the Comtesse Molé. What is more, even if such an acquaintance had not been derived quite naturally from the laws that govern society, how could there be anything strange in the fact of Mme. Verdurin's not knowing of it, since she was meeting M. de Charlus for the first time, and his relations with Mme. Molé were far from being the only thing that she did not know with regard to him, about whom, to tell the truth, she knew nothing. "Who was it that played this *Chercheuse d'Esprit*, my good Saniette?" asked M. Verdurin. Albeit he felt that the storm had passed, the old antiquarian hesitated before answering. "There you go," said Mme. Verdurin, "you frighten him, you make fun of everything that he says, and then you expect him to answer. Come along, tell us who played the part, and you shall have some galantine to take home," said Mme. Verdurin, making a cruel allusion to the penury into which Saniette had plunged himself by trying to rescue the family of a friend. "I can remember only that it was Mme. Samary who played the Zerbine," said Saniette. "The Zerbine? What in the world is that," M. Verdurin shouted, as though the house were on fire. "It is one of the parts in the old repertory, like Captain Fracasse, as who should say the Fire-eater, the Pedant." "Ah, the pedant, that's yourself. The Zerbine! No, really the man's mad," exclaimed M. Verdurin. Mme. Verdurin looked at her guests and laughed as though to apologise for Saniette. "The Zerbine, he imagines that everybody will know at once what it means. You are like M. de Longepierre, the stupidest man I know, who said to us quite calmly the other day 'the Banat.' Nobody had any idea what he meant. Finally we were informed that it was a province in Serbia." To put an end to Saniette's torture, which hurt me 'more than it hurt him, I asked Brichot if he knew what the word Balbec meant. "Balbec is probably a corruption of Dalbec," he told me. "One would have to consult the charters of the Kings of England, Overlords of Normandy, for Balbec was held of the Barony of Dover, for which reason it was often styled Balbec d'Outre-Mer, Balbec-en-Terre. But the Barony of Dover was itself held of the Bishopric of Bayeux, and, notwithstanding the rights that were temporarily enjoyed in the abbey by the Templars, from the time of Louis d'Harcourt, Patriarch of Jerusalem and Bishop of Bayeux; it was the Bishops of that diocese who collated to the benefice of Balbec. So it was explained to me by the incumbent of Douville, a bald person, eloquent, fantastic, and a devotee of the table, who lives by the Rule of Brillat-Savarin, and who expounded to me in slightly sibylline language a loose pedagogy, while he fed me upon some

admirable fried potatoes." While Brichot smiled to shew how witty it was to combine matters so dissimilar and to employ an ironically lofty diction in treating of commonplace things, Saniette was trying to find a loophole for some clever remark which would raise him from the abyss into which he had fallen. The witty remark was what was known as a 'comparison,' but had changed its form, for there is an evolution in wit as in literary styles, an epidemic that disappears has its place taken by another, and so forth.... At one time the typical 'comparison' was the 'height of.... ' But this was out of date, no one used it any more, there was only Cottard left to say still, on occasion, in the middle of a game of piquet: "Do you know what is the height of absent-mindedness, it is to think that the Edict (*l'edit*) of Nantes was an Englishwoman." These 'heights' had been replaced by nicknames. In reality it was still the old 'comparison,' but, as the nickname was in fashion, people did not observe the survival. Unfortunately for Saniette, when these 'comparisons' were not his own, and as a rule were unknown to the little nucleus, he produced them so timidly that, notwithstanding the laugh with which he followed them up to indicate their humorous nature, nobody saw the point. And if on the other hand the joke was his own, as he had generally hit upon it in conversation with one of the faithful, and the latter had repeated it, appropriating the authorship, the joke was in that case known, but not as being Saniette's. And so when he slipped in one of these it was recognised, but, because he was its author, he was accused of plagiarism. "Very well, then," Brichot continued, "Bee, in Norman, is a stream; there is the Abbey of Bee, Mobec, the stream from the marsh (Mor or Mer meant a marsh, as in Morville, or in Bricquemar, Alvimare, Cambremer), Bricquebac the stream from the high ground coming from Briga, a fortified place, as in Bricqueville, Bricquebose, le Bric, Briand, or indeed Brice, bridge, which is the same as*bruck* in German (Innsbruck), and as the English *bridge* which ends so many place-names (Cambridge, for instance). You have moreover in Normandy many other instances of bec: Caudebec, Bolbec, le Robec, le Bec-Hellouin, Becquerel. It is the Norman form of the German *bach*, Offenbach, Anspach. Varaguebec, from the old word *varaigne*, equivalent to *warren*, preserved woods or ponds. As for Dal," Brichot went on, "it is a form of *thal*, a valley: Darnetal, Rosendal, and indeed, close to Louviers, Becdal. The river that has given its name to Balbec, is, by the way, charming. Seen from a *falaise* (*fels* in German, you have indeed, not far from here, standing on a height, the picturesque town of Falaise), it runs close under the spires of the church, which is actually a long way from it, and seems to be reflecting them." "I should think," said I, "that is an effect that Elstir

admires greatly. I have seen several sketches of it in his studio." "Elstir! You know Tiche," cried Mme. Verdurin. "But do you know that we used to be the dearest friends? Thank heaven, I never see him now. No, but ask Cottard, Brichot, he used to have his place laid at my table, he came every day. Now, there's a man of whom you can say that it has done him no good to leave our little nucleus. I shall shew you presently some flowers he painted for me; you shall see the difference from the things he is doing now, which I don't care for at all, not at all! Why! I made him do me a portrait of Cottard, not to mention all the sketches he has made of me." "And he gave the Professor purple hair," said Mme. Cottard, forgetting that at the time her husband had not been even a Fellow of the College. "I don't know, Sir, whether you find that my husband has purple hair." "That doesn't matter," said Mme. Verdurin, raising her chin with an air of contempt for Mme. Cottard and of admiration for the man of whom she was speaking, "he was a brave colourist, a fine painter. Whereas," she added, turning again to myself, "I don't know whether you call it painting, all those huge she-devils of composition, those vast structures he exhibits now that he has given up coming to me. For my part, I call it daubing, it's all so hackneyed, and besides, it lacks relief, personality. It's anybody's work." "He revives the grace of the eighteenth century, but in a modern form," Saniette broke out, fortified and reassured by my affability. "But I prefer Helleu." "He's not in the least like Helleu," said Mme. Verdurin. "Yes, he has the fever of the eighteenth century. He's a steam Watteau," and he began to laugh. "Old, old as the hills, I've had that served up to me for years," said M. Verdurin, to whom indeed Ski had once repeated the remark, but as his own invention. "It's unfortunate that when once in a way you say something quite amusing and make it intelligible, it is not your own." "I'm sorry about it," Mme. Verdurin went on, "because he was really gifted, he has wasted a charming temperament for painting. Ah! if he had stayed with us! Why, he would have become the greatest landscape painter of our day. And it is a woman that has dragged him down so low! Not that that surprises me, for he was a pleasant enough man, but common. At bottom, he was a mediocrity. I may tell you that I felt it at once. Really, he never interested me. I was very fond of him, that was all. For one thing, he was so dirty. Tell me, do you, now, really like people who never wash?" "What is this charmingly coloured thing that we are eating?" asked Ski. "It is called strawberry mousse," said Mme. Verdurin. "But it is ex-qui-site. You ought to open bottles of Château-Margaux, Château-Lafite, port wine." "I can't tell you how he amuses me, he never drinks anything but water," said Mme. Verdurin, seeking to cloak with her delight at

such a flight of fancy her alarm at the thought of so prodigal an outlay. “But not to drink,” Ski went on, “you shall fill all our glasses, they will bring in marvelous peaches, huge nectarines, there against the sunset; it will be as gorgeous as a fine Veronese.” “It would cost almost as much,” M. Verdurin murmured. “But take away those cheeses with their hideous colour,” said Ski, trying to snatch the plate from before his host, who defended his gruyère with his might and main. “You can realise that I don’t regret Elstir,” Mme. Verdurin said to me, “that one is far more gifted. Elstir is simply hard work, the man who can’t make himself give up painting when he would like to. He is the good student, the slavish competitor. Ski, now, only follows his own fancy. You will see him light a cigarette in the middle of dinner.” “After all, I can’t see why you wouldn’t invite his wife,” said Cottard, “he would be with us still.” “Will you mind what you’re saying, please, I don’t open my doors to street-walkers, Monsieur le Professeur,” said Mme. Verdurin, who had, on the contrary, done everything in her power to make Elstir return, even with his wife. But before they were married she had tried to make them quarrel, had told Elstir that the woman he loved was stupid, dirty, immoral, a thief. For once in a way she had failed to effect a breach. It was with the Verdurin salon that Elstir had broken; and he was glad of it, as converts bless the illness or misfortune that has withdrawn them from the world and has made them learn the way of salvation. “He really is magnificent, the Professor,” she said. “Why not declare outright that I keep a disorderly house? Anyone would think you didn’t know what Madame Elstir was like. I would sooner have the lowest street-walker at my table! Oh no, I don’t stand for that sort of thing. Besides I may tell you that it would have been stupid of me to overlook the wife, when the husband no longer interests me, he is out of date, he can’t even draw.” “That is extraordinary in a man of his intelligence,” said Cottard. “Oh, no!” replied Mme. Verdurin, “even at the time when he had talent, for he had it, the wretch, and to spare, what was tiresome about him was that he had not a spark of intelligence.” Mme. Verdurin, in passing this judgment upon Elstir, had not waited for their quarrel, or until she had ceased to care for his painting. The fact was that, even at the time when he formed part of the little group, it would happen that Elstir spent the whole day in the company of some woman whom, rightly or wrongly, Mme. Verdurin considered a goose, which, in her opinion, was not the conduct of an intelligent man. “No,” she observed with an air of finality, “I consider that his wife and he are made for one another. Heaven knows, there isn’t a more boring creature on the face of the earth, and I should go mad if I had to spend a couple of hours

with her. But people say that he finds her very intelligent. There's no use denying it, our Tiche was *extremely stupid*. I have seen him bowled over by people you can't conceive, worthy idiots we should never have allowed into our little clan. Well! He wrote to them, he argued with them, he, Elstir! That doesn't prevent his having charming qualities, oh, charming and deliciously absurd, naturally." For Mme. Verdurin was convinced that men who are truly remarkable are capable of all sorts of follies. A false idea in which there is nevertheless a grain of truth. Certainly, people's follies are insupportable. But a want of balance which we discover only in course of time is the consequence of the entering into a human brain of delicacies for which it is not regularly adapted. So that the oddities of charming people exasperate us, but there are few if any charming people who are not, at the same time, odd. "Look, I shall be able to shew you his flowers now," she said to me, seeing that her husband was making signals to her to rise. And she took M. de Cambremer's arm again. M. Verdurin tried to apologise for this to M. de Charlus, as soon as he had got rid of Mme. de Cambremer, and to give him his reasons, chiefly for the pleasure of discussing these social refinements with a gentleman of title, momentarily the inferior of those who assigned to him the place to which they considered him entitled. But first of all he was anxious to make it clear to M. de Charlus that intellectually he esteemed him too highly to suppose that he could pay any attention to these trivialities. "Excuse my mentioning so small a point," he began, "for I can understand how little such things mean to you. Middle-class minds pay attention to them, but the others, the artists, the people who are really of our sort, don't give a rap for them. Now, from the first words we exchanged, I realised that you were one of us!" M. de Charlus, who gave a widely different meaning to this expression, drew himself erect. After the doctor's oglings, he found his host's insulting frankness suffocating. "Don't protest, my dear Sir, you are one of us, it is plain as daylight," replied M. Verdurin. "Observe that I have no idea whether you practise any of the arts, but that is not necessary. It is not always sufficient. Dechambre, who has just died, played exquisitely, with the most vigorous execution, but he was not one of us, you felt at once that he was not one of us. Brichot is not one of us. Morel is, my wife is, I can feel that you are..." "What were you going to tell me?" interrupted M. de Charlus, who was beginning to feel reassured as to M. Verdurin's meaning, but preferred that he should not utter these misleading remarks quite so loud. "Only that we put you on the left," replied M. Verdurin. M. de Charlus, with a comprehending, genial, insolent smile, replied: "Why! That is not of the slightest importance,*here*!" And he gave

a little laugh that was all his own — a laugh that came to him probably from some Bavarian or Lorraine grandmother, who herself had inherited it, in identical form, from an ancestress, so that it had been sounding now, without change, for not a few centuries in little old-fashioned European courts, and one could relish its precious quality like that of certain old musical instruments that have now grown rare. There are times when, to paint a complete portrait of some one, we should have to add a phonetic imitation to our verbal description, and our portrait of the figure that M. de Charlus presented is liable to remain incomplete in the absence of that little laugh, so delicate, so light, just as certain compositions are never accurately rendered because our orchestras lack those 'small trumpets,' with a sound so entirely their own, for which the composer wrote this or that part. "But," M. Verdurin explained, stung by his laugh, "we did it on purpose. I attach no importance whatever to title of nobility," he went on, with that contemptuous smile which I have seen so many people whom I have known, unlike my grandmother and my mother, assume when they spoke of anything that they did not possess, before others who thus, they supposed, would be prevented from using that particular advantage to crow over them. "But, don't you see, since we happened to have M. de Cambremer here, and he is a Marquis, while you are only a Baron..." "Pardon me," M. de Charlus replied with an arrogant air to the astonished Verdurin, "I am also Duc de Brabant, Damoiseau de Montargis, Prince d'Oloron, de Carency, de Viareggio and des Dunes. However, it is not of the slightest importance. Please do not distress yourself," he concluded, resuming his subtle smile which spread itself over these final words: "I could see at a glance that you were not accustomed to society."

Mme. Verdurin came across to me to shew me Elstir's flowers. If this action, to which I had grown so indifferent, of going out to dinner, had on the contrary, taking the form that made it entirely novel, of a journey along the coast, followed by an ascent in a carriage to a point six hundred feet above the sea, produced in me a sort of intoxication, this feeling had not been dispelled at la Raspelière. "Just look at this, now," said the Mistress, shewing me some huge and splendid roses by Elstir, whose unctuous scarlet and rich white stood out, however, with almost too creamy a relief from the flower-stand upon which they were arranged. "Do you suppose he would still have to touch to get that? Don't you call that striking? And besides, it's fine as matter, it would be amusing to handle. I can't tell you how amusing it was to watch him painting them. One could feel that he was interested in trying to get just that effect." And the Mistress's gaze rested musingly on this present from the artist in which were

combined not merely his great talent but their long friendship which survived only in these mementoes of it which he had bequeathed to her; behind the flowers which long ago he had picked for her, she seemed to see the shapely hand that had painted them, in the course of a morning, in their freshness, so that, they on the table, it leaning against the back of a chair, had been able to meet face to face at the Mistress's luncheon party, the roses still alive and their almost lifelike portrait. Almost only, for Elstir was unable to look at a flower without first transplanting it to that inner garden in which we are obliged always to remain. He had shewn in this water-colour the appearance of the roses which he had seen, and which, but for him, no one would ever have known; so that one might say that they were a new variety with which this painter, like a skilful gardener, had enriched the family of the Roses. "From the day he left the little nucleus, he was finished. It seems, my dinners made him waste his time, that I hindered the development of his *genius*," she said in a tone of irony. "As if the society of a woman like myself could fail to be beneficial to an artist," she exclaimed with a burst of pride. Close beside us, M. de Cambremer, who was already seated, seeing that M. de Charlus was standing, made as though to rise and offer him his chair. This offer may have arisen, in the Marquis's mind, from nothing more than a vague wish to be polite. M. de Charlus preferred to attach to it the sense of a duty which the plain gentleman knew that he owed to a Prince, and felt that he could not establish his right to this precedence better than by declining it. And so he exclaimed: "What are you doing? I beg of you! The idea!" The astutely vehement tone of this protest had in itself something typically 'Guermantes' which became even more evident in the imperative, superfluous and familiar gesture with which he brought both his hands down, as though to force him to remain seated, upon the shoulders of M. de Cambremer who had not risen. "Come, come, my dear fellow," the Baron insisted, "this is too much. There is no reason for it! In these days we keep that for Princes of the Blood." I made no more effect on the Cambremers than on Mme. Verdurin by my enthusiasm for their house. For I remained cold to the beauties which they pointed out to me and grew excited over confused reminiscences; at times I even confessed my disappointment at not finding something correspond to what its name had made me imagine. I enraged Mme. de Cambremer by telling her that I had supposed the place to be more in the country. On the other hand I broke off in an ecstasy to sniff the fragrance of a breeze that crept in through the chink of the door. "I see you like draughts," they said to me. My praise of the patch of green lining-cloth that had been pasted over a broken pane met with no greater

success: “How frightful!” cried the Marquise. The climax came when I said: “My greatest joy was when I arrived. When I heard my step echoing along the gallery, I felt that I had come into some village council-office, with a map of the district on the wall.” This time, Mme. de Cambremer resolutely turned her back on me. “You don’t think the arrangement too bad?” her husband asked her with the same compassionate anxiety with which he would have inquired how his wife had stood some painful ceremony. “They have some fine things.” But, inasmuch as malice, when the hard and fast rules of sure taste do not confine it within fixed limits, finds fault with everything, in the persons or in the houses, of the people who have supplanted the critic: “Yes, but they are not in the right places. Besides, are they really as fine as all that?” “You noticed,” said M. de Cambremer, with a melancholy that was controlled by a note of firmness, “there are some Jouy hangings that are worn away, some quite threadbare things in this drawing-room!” “And that piece of stuff with its huge roses, like a peasant woman’s quilt,” said Mme. de Cambremer whose purely artificial culture was confined exclusively to idealist philosophy, impressionist painting and Debussy’s music. And, so as not to criticise merely in the name of smartness but in that of good taste: “And they have put up windscreens! Such bad style! What can you expect of such people, they don’t know, where could they have learned? They must be retired tradespeople. It’s really not bad for them.” “I thought the chandeliers good,” said the Marquis, though it was not evident why he should make an exception of the chandeliers, just as inevitably, whenever anyone spoke of a church, whether it was the Cathedral of Chartres, or of Rheims, or of Amiens, or the church at Balbec, what he would always make a point of mentioning as admirable would be: “the organ-loft, the pulpit and the misericords.” “As for the garden, don’t speak about it,” said Mme. de Cambremer. “It’s a massacre. Those paths running all crooked.” I seized the opportunity while Mme. Verdurin was pouring out coffee to go and glance over the letter which M. de Cambremer had brought me, and in which his mother invited me to dinner. With that faint trace of ink, the handwriting revealed an individuality which in the future I should be able to recognise among a thousand, without any more need to have recourse to the hypothesis of special pens, than to suppose that rare and mysteriously blended colours are necessary to enable a painter to express his original vision. Indeed a paralytic, stricken with agraphia after a seizure, and compelled to look at the script as at a drawing without being able to read it, would have gathered that Mme. de Cambremer belonged to an old family in which the zealous cultivation of literature and the arts had supplied a

margin to its artistocratic traditions. He would have guessed also the period in which the Marquise had learned simultaneously to write and to play Chopin's music. It was the time when well-bred people observed the rule of affability and what was called the rule of the three adjectives. Mme. de Cambremer combined the two rules in one. A laudatory adjective was not enough for her, she followed it (after a little stroke of the pen) with a second, then (after another stroke), with a third. But, what was peculiar to herself was that, in defiance of the literary and social object at which she aimed, the sequence of the three epithets assumed in Mme. de Cambremer's notes the aspect not of a progression but of a diminuendo. Mme. de Cambremer told me in this first letter that she had seen Saint-Loup and had appreciated more than ever his 'unique — rare — real' qualities, that he was coming to them again with one of his friends (the one who was in love with her daughter-in-law), and that if I cared to come, with or without them, to dine at Féterne she would be 'delighted — happy — pleased.' Perhaps it was because her desire to be friendly outran the fertility of her imagination and the riches of her vocabulary that the lady, while determined to utter three exclamations, was incapable of making the second and third anything more than feeble echoes of the first. Add but a fourth adjective, and, of her initial friendliness, there would be nothing left. Moreover, with a certain refined simplicity which cannot have failed to produce a considerable impression upon her family and indeed in her circle of acquaintance, Mme. de Cambremer had acquired the habit of substituting for the word (which might in time begin to ring false) 'sincere,' the word 'true.' And to shew that it was indeed by sincerity that she was impelled, she broke the conventional rule that would have placed the adjective 'true' before its noun, and planted it boldly after. Her letters ended with: "*Croyez à mon amitié vraie*." "*Croyez à ma sympathie vraie*." Unfortunately, this had become so stereotyped a formula that the affectation of frankness was more suggestive of a polite fiction than the time-honoured formulas, of the meaning of which people have ceased to think. I was, however, hindered from reading her letter by the confused sound of conversation over which rang out the louder accents of M. de Charlus, who, still on the same topic, was saying to M. de Cambremer: "You reminded me, when you offered me your chair, of a gentleman from whom I received a letter this morning, addressed: 'To His Highness, the Baron de Charlus,' and beginning 'Monseigneur.'" "To be sure, your correspondent was slightly exaggerating," replied M. de Cambremer, giving way to a discreet show of mirth. M. de Charlus had provoked this; he did not partake in it. "Well, if it comes to that, my dear fellow," he said, "I may

observe that, heraldically speaking, he was entirely in the right. I am not regarding it as a personal matter, you understand. I should say the same of anyone else. But one has to face the facts, history is history, we can't alter it and it is not in our power to rewrite it. I need not cite the case of the Emperor William, who at Kiel never ceased to address me as 'Monseigneur.' I have heard it said that he gave the same title to all the Dukes of France, which was an abuse of the privilege, but was perhaps simply a delicate attention aimed over our heads at France herself." "More delicate, perhaps, than sincere," said M. de Cambremer. "Ah! There I must differ from you. Observe that, personally, a gentleman of the lowest rank such as that Hohenzollern, a Protestant to boot, and one who has usurped the throne of my cousin the King of Hanover, can be no favourite of mine," added M. de Charlus, with whom the annexation of Hanover seemed to rankle more than that of Alsace-Lorraine. "But I believe the feeling that turns the Emperor in our direction to be profoundly sincere. Fools will tell you that he is a stage emperor. He is on the contrary marvellously intelligent; it is true that he knows nothing about painting, and has forced Herr Tschudi to withdraw the Elstirs from the public galleries. But Louis XIV did not appreciate the Dutch Masters, he had the same fondness for display, and yet he was, when all is said, a great Monarch. Besides, William II has armed his country from the military and naval point of view in a way that Louis XIV failed to do, and I hope that his reign will never know the reverses that darkened the closing days of him who is fatuously styled the Roi Soleil. The Republic made a great mistake, to my mind, in rejecting the overtures of the Hohenzollern, or responding to them only in driblets. He is very well aware of it himself and says, with that gift that he has for the right expression: 'What I want is a clasped hand, not a raised hat.' As a man, he is vile; he has abandoned, surrendered, denied his best friends, in circumstances in which his silence was as deplorable as theirs was grand," continued M. de Charlus, who was irresistibly drawn by his own tendencies to the Eulenburg affair, and remembered what one of the most highly placed of the culprits had said to him: "The Emperor must have relied upon our delicacy to have dared to allow such a trial. But he was not mistaken in trusting to our discretion. We would have gone to the scaffold with our lips sealed." "All that, however, has nothing to do with what I was trying to explain, which is that, in Germany, mediatised Princes like ourselves are *Durchlaucht*, and in France our rank of Highness was publicly recognised. Saint-Simon tries to make out that this was an abuse on our part, in which he is entirely mistaken. The reason that he gives, namely that Louis XIV forbade us to style him the Most Christian King

and ordered us to call him simply the King, proves merely that we held our title from him, and not that we had not the rank of Prince. Otherwise, it would have to be withheld from the Duc de Lorraine and ever so many others. Besides, several of our titles come from the House of Lorraine through Thérèse d'Espinay, my great-grandmother, who was the daughter of the Damoiseau de Commercy." Observing that Morel was listening, M. de Charlus proceeded to develop the reasons for his claim. "I have pointed out to my brother that it is not in the third part of Gotha, but in the second, not to say the first, that the account of our family ought to be included," he said, without stopping to think that Morel did not know what 'Gotha' was. "But that is his affair, he is the Head of my House, and so long as he raises no objection and allows the matter to pass, I have only to shut my eyes." "M. Brichot interests me greatly," I said to Mme. Verdurin as she joined me, and I slipped Mme. de Cambremer's letter into my pocket. "He has a cultured mind and is an excellent man," she replied coldly. "Of course what he lacks is originality and taste, he has a terrible memory. They used to say of the 'forebears' of the people we have here this evening, the émigrés, that they had forgotten nothing. But they had at least the excuse," she said, borrowing one of Swann's epigrams, "that they had learned nothing. Whereas Brichot knows everything, and hurls chunks of dictionary at our heads during dinner. I'm sure you know everything now about the names of all the towns and villages." While Mme. Verdurin was speaking, it occurred to me that I had determined to ask her something, but I could not remember what it was. I could not at this moment say what Mme. Verdurin was wearing that evening. Perhaps even then I was no more able to say, for I have not an observant mind. But feeling that her dress was not unambitious I said to her something polite and even admiring. She was like almost all women, who imagine that a compliment that is paid to them is a literal statement of the truth, and is a judgment impartially, irresistibly pronounced, as though it referred to a work of art that has no connexion with a person. And so it was with an earnestness which made me blush for my own hypocrisy that she replied with the proud and artless question, habitual in the circumstances: "You like it?" "I know you're talking about Brichot. Eh, Chantepie, Freycinet, he spared you nothing. I had my eye on you, my little Mistress!" "I saw you, it was all I could do not to laugh." "You are talking about Chantepie, I am certain," said M. Verdurin, as he came towards us. I had been alone, as I thought of my strip of green cloth and of a scent of wood, in failing to notice that, while he discussed etymologies, Brichot had been provoking derision. And inasmuch as the expressions which, for me, gave their

value to things were of the sort which other people either do not feel or reject without thinking of them, as unimportant, they were entirely useless to me and had the additional drawback of making me appear stupid in the eyes of Mme. Verdurin who saw that I had 'swallowed' Brichot, as before I had appeared stupid to Mme. de Guermantes, because I enjoyed going to see Mme. d'Arpajon. With Brichot, however, there was another reason. I was not one of the little clan. And in every clan, whether it be social, political, literary, one contracts a perverse facility in discovering in a conversation, in an official speech, in a story, in a sonnet, everything that the honest reader would never have dreamed of finding there. How many times have I found myself, after reading with a certain emotion a tale skilfully told by a learned and slightly old-fashioned Academician, on the point of saying to Bloch or to Mme. de Guermantes: "How charming this is!" when before I had opened my mouth they exclaimed, each in a different language: "If you want to be really amused, read a tale by So-and-so. Human stupidity has never sunk to greater depths." Bloch's scorn was aroused principally by the discovery that certain effects of style, pleasant enough in themselves, were slightly faded; that of Mme. de Guermantes because the tale seemed to prove the direct opposite of what the author meant, for reasons of fact which she had the ingenuity to deduce but which would never have occurred to me. I was no less surprised to discover the irony that underlay the Verdurins' apparent friendliness for Brichot than to hear, some days later, at Féterne, the Cambremers say to me, on hearing my enthusiastic praise of la Raspelière: "It's impossible that you can be sincere, after all they've done to it." It is true that they admitted that the china was good. Like the shocking windscreens, it had escaped my notice. "Anyhow, when you go back to Balbec, you will know what Balbec means," said M. Verdurin ironically. It was precisely the things Brichot had told me that interested me. As for what they called his mind, it was exactly the same mind that had at one time been so highly appreciated by the little clan. He talked with the same irritating fluency, but his words no longer carried, having to overcome a hostile silence or disagreeable echoes; what had altered was not the things that he said but the acoustics of the room and the attitude of his audience. "Take care," Mme. Verdurin murmured, pointing to Brichot. The latter, whose hearing remained keener than his vision, darted at the mistress the hastily withdrawn gaze of a short-sighted philosopher. If his bodily eyes were less good, his mind's eye on the contrary had begun to take a larger view of things. He saw how little was to be expected of human affection, and resigned himself to it. Undoubtedly the discovery pained him. It may happen that even the

man who on one evening only, in a circle where he is usually greeted with joy, realises that the others have found him too frivolous or too pedantic or too loud, or too forward, or whatever it may be, returns home miserable. Often it is a difference of opinion, or of system, that has made him appear to other people absurd or old-fashioned. Often he is perfectly well aware that those others are inferior to himself. He could easily dissect the sophistries with which he has been tacitly condemned, he is tempted to pay a call, to write a letter: on second thoughts, he does nothing, awaits the invitation for the following week. Sometimes, too, these discomfitures, instead of ending with the evening, last for months. Arising from the instability of social judgments, they increase that instability further. For the man who knows that Mme. X despises him, feeling that he is respected at Mme. Y's, pronounces her far superior to the other and emigrates to her house. This however is not the proper place to describe those men, superior to the life of society but lacking the capacity to realise their own worth outside it, glad to be invited, embittered by being disparaged, discovering annually the faults of the hostess to whom they have been offering incense and the genius of her whom they have never properly appreciated, ready to return to the old love when they shall have felt the drawbacks to be found equally in the new, and when they have begun to forget those of the old. We may judge by these temporary discomfitures the grief that Brichot felt at one which he knew to be final. He was not unaware that Mme. Verdurin sometimes laughed at him publicly, even at his infirmities, and knowing how little was to be expected of human affection, submitting himself to the facts, he continued nevertheless to regard the Mistress as his best friend. But, from the blush that swept over the scholar's face, Mme. Verdurin saw that he had heard her, and made up her mind to be kind to him for the rest of the evening. I could not help remarking to her that she had not been very kind to Saniette. "What! Not kind to him! Why, he adores us, you can't imagine what we are to him. My husband is sometimes a little irritated by his stupidity, and you must admit that he has every reason, but when that happens why doesn't he rise in revolt, instead of cringing like a whipped dog? It is not honest. I don't like it. That doesn't mean that I don't always try to calm my husband, because if he went too far, all that would happen would be that Saniette would stay away; and I don't want that because I may tell you that he hasn't a penny in the world, he needs his dinners. But after all, if he does mind, he can stay away, it has nothing to do with me, when a person depends on other people he should try not to be such an idiot." "The Duchy of Aumale was in our family for years before passing to the House of France," M.

de Charlus was explaining to M. de Cambremer, before a speechless Morel, for whom, as a matter of fact, the whole of this dissertation was, if not actually addressed to him, intended. “We took precedence over all foreign Princes; I could give you a hundred examples. The Princesse de Croy having attempted, at the burial of Monsieur, to fall on her knees after my great-great-grandmother, that lady reminded her sharply that she had not the privilege of the hassock, made the officer on duty remove it, and reported the matter to the King, who ordered Mme. de Croy to call upon Mme. de Guermantes and offer her apologies. The Duc de Bourgogne having come to us with ushers with raised wands, we obtained the King’s authority to have them lowered. I know it is not good form to speak of the merits of one’s own family. But it is well known that our people were always to the fore in the hour of danger. Our battle-cry, after we abandoned that of the Dukes of Brabant, was *Passavant*! So that it is fair enough after all that this right to be everywhere the first, which we had established for so many centuries in war, should afterwards have been confirmed to us at Court. And, egad, it has always been admitted there. I may give you a further instance, that of the Princess of Baden. As she had so far forgotten herself as to attempt to challenge the precedence of that same Duchesse de Guermantes of whom I was speaking just now, and had attempted to go in first to the King’s presence, taking advantage of a momentary hesitation which my relative may perhaps have shewn (although there could be no reason for it), the King called out: ‘Come in, cousin, come in; Mme. de Baden knows very well what her duty is to you.’ And it was as Duchesse de Guermantes that she held this rank, albeit she was of no mean family herself, since she was through her mother niece to the Queen of Poland, the Queen of Hungary, the Elector Palatine, the Prince of Savoy-Carignano and the Elector of Hanover, afterwards King of England.” “*Maecenas atavis édite regibus*!” said Brichot, addressing M. de Charlus, who acknowledged the compliment with a slight inclination of his head. “What did you say?” Mme. Verdurin asked Brichot, anxious to make amends to him for her previous speech. “I was referring, Heaven forgive me, to a dandy who was the pick of the basket” (Mme. Verdurin winced) “about the time of Augustus” (Mme. Verdurin, reassured by the remoteness in time of this basket, assumed a more serene expression), “of a friend of Virgil and Horace who carried their sycophancy to the extent of proclaiming to his face his more than aristocratic, his royal descent, in a word I was referring to Maecenas, a bookworm who was the friend of Horace, Virgil, Augustus. I am sure that M. de Charlus knows all about Maecenas.” With a gracious, sidelong glance at Mme. Verdurin, because he had

heard her make an appointment with Morel for the day after next and was afraid that she might not invite him also, “I should say,” said M. de Charlus, “that Maecenas was more or less the Verdurin of antiquity.” Mme. Verdurin could not altogether suppress a smile of satisfaction. She went over to Morel. “He’s nice, your father’s friend,” she said to him. “One can see that he’s an educated man, and well bred. He will get on well in our little nucleus. What is his address in Paris?” Morel preserved a haughty silence and merely proposed a game of cards. Mme. Verdurin insisted upon a little violin music first. To the general astonishment, M. de Charlus, who never referred to his own considerable gifts, accompanied, in the purest style, the closing passage (uneasy, tormented, Schumannesque, but, for all that, earlier than Franck’s Sonata) of the Sonata for piano and violin by Fauré. I felt that he would furnish Morel, marvellously endowed as to tone and virtuosity, with just those qualities that he lacked, culture and style. But I thought with curiosity of this combination in a single person of a physical blemish and a spiritual gift. M. de Charlus was not very different from his brother, the Duc de Guermantes. Indeed, a moment ago (though this was rare), he had spoken as bad French as his brother. He having reproached me (doubtless in order that I might speak in glowing terms of Morel to Mme. Verdurin) with never coming to see him, and I having pleaded discretion, he had replied: “But, since it is I that asks you, there is no one but I who am in a position to take offence.” This might have been said by the Duc de Guermantes. M. de Charlus was only a Guermantes when all was said. But it had been enough that nature should upset the balance of his nervous system sufficiently to make him prefer to the woman that his brother the Duke would have chosen one of Virgil’s shepherds or Plato’s disciples, and at once qualities unknown to the Duc de Guermantes and often combined with this want of balance had made M. de Charlus an exquisite pianist, an amateur painter who was not devoid of taste, an eloquent talker. Who would ever have detected that the rapid, eager, charming style with which M. de Charlus played the Schumannesque passage of Fauré’s Sonata had its equivalent — one dares not say its cause — in elements entirely physical, in the nervous defects of M. de Charlus? We shall explain later on what we mean by nervous defects, and why it is that a Greek of the time of Socrates, a Roman of the time of Augustus might be what we know them to have been and yet remain absolutely normal men, and not men-women such as we see around us to-day. Just as he had genuine artistic tendencies, which had never come to fruition, so M. de Charlus had, far more than the Duke, loved their mother, loved his own wife, and indeed, years after her death, if anyone spoke of her to him

would shed tears, but superficial tears, like the perspiration of an over-stout man, whose brow will glisten with sweat at the slightest exertion. With this difference, that to the latter we say: “How hot you are,” whereas we pretend not to notice other people’s tears. We, that is to say, people in society; for the humbler sort are as distressed by the sight of tears as if a sob were more serious than a hemorrhage. His sorrow after the death of his wife, thanks to the habit of falsehood, did not debar M. de Charlus from a life which was not in harmony with it. Indeed later on, he sank so low as to let it be known that, during the funeral rites, he had found an opportunity of asking the acolyte for his name and address. And it may have been true.

When the piece eame to an end, I ventured to ask for some Franck, which appeared to cause Mme. de Cambremer such acute pain that I did not insist. “You can’t admire that sort of thing,” she said to me. Instead she asked for Debussy’s *Fêtes*, which made her exclaim: “Ah! How sublime!” from the first note. But Morel discovered that he remembered the opening bars only, and in a spirit of mischief, without any intention to deceive, began a March by Meyerbeer. Unfortunately, as he left little interval and made no announcement, everybody supposed that he was still playing Debussy, and continued to exclaim ‘Sublime!’ Morel, by revealing that the composer was that not of *Pelléas* but of *Robert le Diable* created a certain chill. Mme. de Cambremer had scarcely time to feel it, for she had just discovered a volume of Scarlatti, and had flung herself upon it with an hysterical impulse. “Oh! Play this, look, this piece, it’s divine,” she cried. And yet, of this composer long despised, recently promoted to the highest honours, what she had selected in her feverish impatience was one of those infernal pieces which have so often kept us from sleeping, while a merciless pupil repeats them indefinitely on the next floor. But Morel had had enough music, and as he insisted upon cards, M. de Charlus, to be able to join in, proposed a game of whist. “He was telling the Master just now that he is a Prince,” said Ski to Mme. Verdurin, “but it’s not true, they’re quite a humble family of architects.” “I want to know what it was you were saying about Maecenas. It interests me, don’t you know!” Mme. Verdurin repeated to Brichot, with an affability that carried him off his feet. And so, in order to shine in the Mistress’s eyes, and possibly in mine: “Why, to tell you the truth, Madame, Maecenas interests me chiefly because he is the earliest apostle of note of that Chinese god who numbers more followers in France to-day than Brahma, than Christ himself, the all-powerful God Ubedamd.” Mme. Verdurin was no longer content, upon these occasions, with burying her head in her hands. She would

descend with the suddenness of the insects called ephemeral upon Princess Sherbatoff; were the latter within reach the Mistress would cling to her shoulder, dig her nails into it, and hide her face against it for a few moments like a child playing at hide and seek. Concealed by this protecting screen, she was understood to be laughing until she cried and was as well able to think of nothing at all as people are who while saying a prayer that is rather long take the wise precaution of burying their faces in their hands. Mme. Verdurin used to imitate them when she listened to Beethoven quartets, so as at the same time to let it be seen that she regarded them as a prayer and not to let it be seen that she was asleep. “I am quite serious, Madame,” said Brichot. “Too numerous, I consider, to-day is become the person who spends his time gazing at his navel as though it were the hub of the universe. As a matter of doctrine, I have no objection to offer to some Nirvana which will dissolve us in the great Whole (which, like Munich and Oxford, is considerably nearer to Paris than Asnières or Bois-Colombes), but it is unworthy either of a true Frenchman, or of a true European even, when the Japanese are possibly at the gates of our Byzantium, that socialised anti-militarists should be gravely discussing the cardinal virtues of free verse.” Mme. Verdurin felt that she might dispense with the Princess’s mangled shoulder, and allowed her face to become once more visible, not without pretending to wipe her eyes and gasping two or three times for breath. But Brichot was determined that I should have my share in the entertainment, and having learned, from those oral examinations which he conducted so admirably, that the best way to flatter the young is to lecture them, to make them feel themselves important, to make them regard you as a reactionary: “I have no wish to blaspheme against the Gods of Youth,” he said, with that furtive glance at myself which a speaker turns upon a member of his audience whom he has mentioned by name. “I have no wish to be damned as a heretic and renegade in the Mallarméan chapel in which our new friend, like all the young men of his age, must have served the esoteric mass, at least as an acolyte, and have shewn himself deliquescent or Rosicrucian. But, really, we have seen more than enough of these intellectuals worshipping art with a big A, who, when they can no longer intoxicate themselves upon Zola, inject themselves with Verlaine. Become etheromaniacs out of Baude-lairean devotion, they would no longer be capable of the virile effort which the country may, one day or another, demand of them, anaesthetised as they are by the great literary neurosis in the heated, enervating atmosphere, heavy with unwholesome vapours, of a symbolism of the opium-pipe.” Feeling incapable of feigning any trace of admiration for Brichot’s

inept and motley tirade, I turned to Ski and assured him that he was entirely mistaken as to the family to which M. de Charlus belonged; he replied that he was certain of his facts, and added that I myself had said that his real name was Gandin, Le Gandin. “I told you,” was my answer, “that Mme. de Cambremer was the sister of an engineer, M. Legrandin. I never said a word to you about M. de Charlus. There is about as much connexion between him and Mme. de Cambremer as between the Great Condé and Racine.” “Indeed! I thought there was,” said Ski lightly, with no more apology for his mistake than he had made a few hours earlier for the mistake that had nearly made his party miss the train. “Do you intend to remain long on this coast?” Mme. Verdurin asked M. de Charlus, in whom she foresaw an addition to the faithful and trembled lest he should be returning too soon to Paris. “Good Lord, one never knows,” replied M. de Charlus in a nasal drawl. “I should like to stay here until the end of September.” “You are quite right,” said Mme. Verdurin; “that is the time for fine storms at sea.” “To tell you the truth, that is not what would influence me. I have for some time past unduly neglected the Archangel Saint Michael, my patron, and I should like to make amends to him by staying for his feast, on the 29th of September, at the Abbey on the Mount.” “You take an interest in all that sort of thing?” asked Mme. Verdurin, who might perhaps have succeeded in hushing the voice of her outraged anti-clericalism, had she not been afraid that so long an expedition might make the violinist and the Baron ‘fail’ her for forty-eight hours. “You are perhaps afflicted with intermittent deafness,” M. de Charlus replied insolently. “I have told you that Saint Michael is one of my glorious patrons.” Then, smiling with a benevolent ecstasy, his eyes gazing into the distance, his voice strengthened by an excitement which seemed now to be not merely aesthetic but religious: “It is so beautiful at the offertory when Michael stands erect by the altar, in a white robe, swinging a golden censer heaped so high with perfumes that the fragrance of them mounts up to God.” “We might go there in a party,” suggested Mme. Verdurin, notwithstanding her horror of the clergy. “At that moment, when the offertory begins,” went on M. de Charlus who, for other reasons but in the same manner as good speakers in Parliament, never replied to an interruption and would pretend not to have heard it, “it would be wonderful to see our young friend Palestrinising, indeed performing an aria by Bach. The worthy Abbot, too, would be wild with joy, and that is the greatest homage, at least the greatest public homage that I can pay to my Holy Patron. What an edification for the faithful! We must mention it presently to the young Angelico of music, a warrior like Saint Michael.”

Saniette, summoned to make a fourth, declared that he did not know how to play whist. And Cottard, seeing that there was not much time left before our train, embarked at once on a game of écarté with Morel. M. Verdurin was furious, and bore down with a terrible expression upon Saniette. “Is there anything in the world that you can play?” he cried, furious at being deprived of the opportunity for a game of whist, and delighted to have found one to insult the old registrar. He, in his terror, did his best to look clever. “Yes, I can play the piano,” he said. Cottard and Morel were seated face to face. “Your deal,” said Cottard. “Suppose we go nearer to the card-table,” M. de Charlus, worried by the sight of Morel in Cottard’s company, suggested to M. de Cambremer. “It is quite as interesting as those questions of etiquette which in these days have ceased to count for very much. The only kings that we have left, in France at least, are the kings in the pack of cards, who seem to me to be positively swarming in the hand of our young virtuoso,” he added a moment later, from an admiration for Morel which extended to his way of playing cards, to flatter him also, and finally to account for his suddenly turning to lean over the young violinist’s shoulder. “I-ee cut,” said (imitating the accent of a cardsharper) Cottard, whose children burst out laughing, like his students and the chief dresser, whenever the master, even by the bedside of a serious case, uttered with the emotionless face of an epileptic one of his hackneyed witticisms. “I don’t know what to play,” said Morel, seeking advice from M. de Charlus. “Just as you please, you’re bound to lose, whatever you play, it’s all the same (*c’est égal*).” “*Egal*... Ingalli?” said the doctor, with an insinuating, kindly glance at M. de Cambremer. “She was what we call a true diva, she was a dream, a Carmen such as we shall never see again. She was wedded to the part. I used to enjoy too listening to Ingalli — married.” The Marquis drew himself up with that contemptuous vulgarity of well-bred people who do not realise that they are insulting their host by appearing uncertain whether they ought to associate with his guests, and adopt English manners by way of apology for a scornful expression: “Who is that gentleman playing cards, what does he do for a living, what does he *sell*? I rather like to know whom I am meeting, so as not to make friends with any Tom, Dick or Harry. But I didn’t catch his name when you did me the honour of introducing me to him.” If M. Verdurin, availing himself of this phrase, had indeed introduced M. de Cambremer to his fellow-guests, the other would have been greatly annoyed. But, knowing that it was the opposite procedure that was observed, he thought it gracious to assume a genial and modest air, without risk to himself. The pride that M. Verdurin took in his intimacy with Cottard had

increased if anything now that the doctor had become an eminent professor. But it no longer found expression in the artless language of earlier days. Then, when Cottard was scarcely known to the public, if you spoke to M. Verdurin of his wife's facial neuralgia: "There is nothing to be done," he would say, with the artless self-satisfaction of people who assume that anyone whom they know must be famous, and that everybody knows the name of their family singing-master. "If she had an ordinary doctor, one might look for a second opinion, but when that doctor is called Cottard" (a name which he pronounced as though it were Bouchard or Charcot) "one has simply to bow to the inevitable." Adopting a reverse procedure, knowing that M. de Cambremer must certainly have heard of the famous Professor Cottard, M. Verdurin adopted a tone of simplicity. "He's our family doctor, a worthy soul whom we adore and who would let himself be torn in pieces for our sakes; he is not a doctor, he is a friend, I don't suppose you have ever heard of him or that his name would convey anything to you, in any case to us it is the name of a very good man, of a very dear friend, Cottard." This name, murmured in a modest tone, took in M. de Cambremer who supposed that his host was referring to some one else. "Cottard? You don't mean Professor Cottard?" At that moment one heard the voice of the said Professor who, at an awkward point in the game, was saying as he looked at his cards: "This is where Greek meets Greek." "Why, yes, to be sure, he is a professor," said M. Verdurin. "What! Professor Cottard! You are not making a mistake?-You are quite sure it's the same man? The one who lives in the Rue du Bac?" "Yes, his address is 43, Rue du Bac. You know him?" "But everybody knows Professor Cottard. He's at the top of the tree! You might as well ask me if I knew Bouffe de Saint-Biaise or Courtois-Suffit. I could see when I heard him speak that he was not an ordinary person, that is why I took the liberty of asking you." "Come now, what shall I play, trumps?" asked Cottard. Then abruptly, with a vulgarity which would have been offensive even in heroic circumstances, as when a soldier uses a coarse expression to convey his contempt for death, but became doubly stupid in the safe pastime of a game of cards, Cottard, deciding to play a trump, assumed a sombre, suicidal air, and, borrowing the language of people who are risking their skins, played his card as though it were his life, with the exclamation: "There it is, and be damned to it!" It was not the right card to play, but he had a consolation. In the middle of the room, in a deep armchair, Mme. Cottard, yielding to the effect, which she always found irresistible, of a good dinner, had succumbed after vain efforts to the vast and gentle slumbers that were overpowering her. In vain might she sit up now and again, and smile, whether at

her own absurdity or from fear of leaving unanswered some polite speech that might have been addressed to her, she sank back, in spite of herself, into the clutches of the implacable and delicious malady. More than the noise, what awakened her thus for an instant only, was the glance (which, in her wifely affection she could see even when her eyes were shut, and foresaw, for the same scene occurred every evening and haunted her dreams like the thought of the hour at which one will have to rise), the glance with which the Professor drew the attention of those present to his wife's slumbers. To begin with, he merely looked at her and smiled, for if as a doctor he disapproved of this habit of falling asleep after dinner (or at least gave this scientific reason for growing annoyed later on, but it is not certain whether it was a determining reason, so many and diverse were the views that he held about it), as an all-powerful and teasing husband, he was delighted to be able to make a fool of his wife, to rouse her only partly at first, so that she might fall asleep again and he have the pleasure of waking her afresh.

By this time, Mme. Cottard was sound asleep. "Now then, Léontine you're snoring," the professor called to her. "I am listening to Mme. Swann, my dear," Mme. Cottard replied faintly, and dropped back into her lethargy. "It's perfect nonsense," exclaimed Cottard, "she'll be telling us presently that she wasn't asleep. She's like the patients who come to consult us and insist that they never sleep at all." "They imagine it, perhaps," said M. de Cambremer with a laugh. But the doctor enjoyed contradicting no less than teasing, and would on no account allow a layman to talk medicine to him. "People do not imagine that they never sleep," he promulgated in a dogmatic tone. "Ah!" replied the Marquis with a respectful bow, such as Cottard at one time would have made. "It is easy to see," Cottard went on, "that you have never administered, as I have, as much as two grains of trional without succeeding in provoking som-nolescence." "Quite so, quite so," replied the Marquis, laughing with a superior air, "I have never taken trional, or any of those drugs which soon cease to have any effect but ruin your stomach. When a man has been out shooting all night, like me, in the forest of Chantepie, I can assure you he doesn't need any trional to make him sleep." "It is only fools who say that," replied the Professor. "Trional frequently has a remarkable effect on the nervous tone. You mention trional, have you any idea what it is?" "Well... I've heard people say that it is a drug to make one sleep." "You are not answering my question," replied the Professor, who, thrice weekly, at the Faculty, sat on the board of examiners. "I don't ask you whether it makes you sleep or not, but what it is. Can you tell me what percentage it

contains of amyl and ethyl?" "No," replied M. de Cambremer with embarrassment. "I prefer a good glass of old brandy or even 345 Port." "Which are ten times as toxic," the Professor interrupted. "As for trional," M. de Cambremer ventured, "my wife goes in for all that sort of thing, you'd better talk to her about it." "She probably knows just as much about it as yourself. In any case, if your wife takes trional to make her sleep, you can see that mine has no need of it. Come along, Léontine, wake up, you're getting ankylosed, did you ever see me fall asleep after dinner? What will you be like when you're sixty, if you fall asleep now like an old woman? You'll go and get fat, you're arresting the circulation. She doesn't even hear what I'm saying." "They're bad for one's health, these little naps after dinner, ain't they, Doctor?" said M. de Cambremer, seeking to rehabilitate himself with Cottard. "After a heavy meal one ought to take exercise." "Stuff and nonsense!" replied the Doctor. "We have taken identical quantities of food from the stomach of a dog that has lain quiet and from the stomach of a dog that has been running about and it is in the former that digestion is more advanced." "Then it is sleep that stops digestion." "That depends upon whether you mean oesophagic digestion, stomachic digestion, intestinal digestion; it is useless to give you explanations which you would not understand since you have never studied medicine. Now then, Léontine, quick march, it is time we were going." This was not true, for the doctor was going merely to continue his game, but he hoped thus to cut short in a more drastic fashion the slumbers of the deaf mute to whom he had been addressing without a word of response the most learned exhortations. Whether a determination to remain awake survived in Mme. Cottard, even in the state of sleep, or because the armchair offered no support to her head, it was jerked mechanically from left to right, and up and down, in the empty air, like a lifeless object, and Mme. Cottard, with her nodding poll, appeared now to be listening to music, now to be in the last throes of death. Where her husband's increasingly vehement admonitions failed of their effect, her sense of her own stupidity proved successful. "My bath is nice and hot," she murmured, "but the feathers in the dictionary..." she exclaimed as she sat bolt upright. "Oh! Good lord, what a fool I am. Whatever have I been saying, I was thinking about my hat, I'm sure I said something silly, in another minute I should have been asleep, it's that wretched fire." Everybody began to laugh, for there was no fire in the room.

[Note: In the French text of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Volume II ends at this point.]

"You are making fun of me," said Mme. Cottard, herself laughing, and

raising her hand to her brow to wipe away, with the light touch of a hypnotist and the sureness of a woman putting her hair straight, the last traces of sleep, “I must offer my humble apologies to dear Mme. Verdurin and ask her to tell me the truth.” But her smile at once grew sorrowful, for the Professor who knew that his wife sought to please him and trembled lest she should fail, had shouted at her: “Look at yourself in the glass, you are as red as if you had an eruption of acne, you look just like an old peasant.” “You know, he is charming,” said Mme. Verdurin, “he has such a delightfully sarcastic side to his character. And then, he snatched my husband from the jaws of death when the whole Faculty had given him up. He spent three nights by his bedside, without ever lying down. And so Cottard to me, you know,” she went on, in a grave and almost menacing tone, raising her hand to the twin spheres, shrouded in white tresses, of her musical temples, and as though we had wished to assault the doctor, “is sacred! He could ask me for anything in the world! As it is, I don’t call him Doctor Cottard, I call him Doctor God! And even in saying that I am slandering him, for this God does everything in his power to remedy some of the disasters for which the other is responsible.” “Play a trump,” M. de Charlus said to Morel with a delighted air. “A trump, here goes,” said the violinist. “You ought to have declared your king first,” said M. de Charlus, “you’re not paying attention to the game, but how well you play!” “I have the king,” said Morel. “He’s a fine man,” replied the Professor. “What’s all that business up there with the sticks?” asked Mme. Verdurin, drawing M. de Cambremer’s attention to a superb escutcheon carved over the mantelpiece. “Are they your arms?” she added with an ironical disdain. “No, they are not ours,” replied M. de Cambremer. “We bear, *barry of five, embattled counter-embattled or and gules, as many trefoils countercharged*. No, those are the arms of the Arrachepels, who were not of our stock, but from whom we inherited the house, and nobody of our line has ever made any changes here. The Arrachepels (formerly Pelvilains, we are told) bore *or five piles couped in base gules*. When they allied themselves with the Féterne family, their blazon changed, but remained*cantoned within twenty cross crosslets fitchee in base or, a dexter canton ermine*.” “That’s one for her!” muttered Mme. de Cambremer. “My great-grandmother was a d’Arrachepel or de Rachepel, as you please, for both forms are found in the old charters,” continued M. de Cambremer, blushing vividly, for only then did the idea for which his wife had given him credit occur to him, and he was afraid that Mme. Verdurin might have applied to herself a speech which had been made without any reference to her. “The history books say that, in the eleventh century, the first Arrachepel, Mace,

named Pelvilain, shewed a special aptitude, in siege warfare, in tearing up piles. Whence the name Arrachepel by which he was ennobled, and the piles which you see persisting through the centuries in their arms. These are the piles which, to render fortifications more impregnable, used to be driven, plugged, if you will pardon the expression, into the ground in front of them, and fastened together laterally. They are what you quite rightly called sticks, though they had nothing to do with the floating sticks of our good Lafontaine. For they were supposed to render a stronghold unassailable. Of course, with our modern artillery, they make one smile. But you must bear in mind that I am speaking of the eleventh century." "It is all rather out of date," said Mme. Verdurin, "but the little campanile has a character." "You have," said Cottard, "the luck of... turlututu," a word which he gladly repeated to avoid using Molière's. "Do you know why the king of diamonds was turned out of the army?" "I shouldn't mind being in his shoes," said Morel, who was tired of military service. "Oh! What a bad patriot," exclaimed M. de Charlus, who could not refrain from pinching the violinist's ear. "No, you don't know why the king of diamonds was turned out of the army," Cottard pursued, determined to make his joke, "it's because he has only one eye." "You are up against it, Doctor," said M. de Cambremer, to shew Cottard that he knew who he was. "This young man is astonishing," M. de Charlus interrupted innocently. "He plays like a god." This observation did not find favour with the doctor, who replied: "Never too late to mend. Who laughs last, laughs longest." "Queen, ace," Morel, whom fortune was favouring, announced triumphantly. The doctor bowed his head as though powerless to deny this good fortune, and admitted, spellbound: "That's fine." "We are so pleased to have met M. de Charlus," said Mme. de Cambremer to Mme. Verdurin. "Had you never met him before? He is quite nice, he is unusual, he is *of a period*" (she would have found it difficult to say which), replied Mme. Verdurin with the satisfied smile of a connoisseur, a judge and a hostess. Mme. de Cambremer asked me if I was coming to Féterne with Saint-Loup. I could not suppress a cry of admiration when I saw the moon hanging like an orange lantern beneath the vault of oaks that led away from the house. "That's nothing, presently, when the moon has risen higher and the valley is lighted up, it will be a thousand times better." "Are you staying any time in this neighbourhood, Madame?" M. de Cambremer asked Mme. Cottard, a speech that might be interpreted as a vague intention to invite and dispensed him for the moment from making any more precise engagement. "Oh, certainly, Sir, I regard this annual exodus as most important for the children. Whatever you may say, they must have fresh air. The Faculty wanted to

send me to Vichy; but it is too stuffy there, and I can look after my stomach when those big boys of mine have grown a little bigger. Besides, the Professor, with all the examinations he has to hold, has always got his shoulder to the wheel, and the hot weather tires him dreadfully. I feel that a man needs a thorough rest after he has been on the go all the year like that. Whatever happens we shall stay another month at least." "Ah! In that case we shall meet again." "Besides, I shall be all the more obliged to stay here as my husband has to go on a visit to Savoy, and won't be finally settled here for another fortnight." "I like the view of the valley even more than the sea view," Mme. Verdurin went on. "You are going to have a splendid night for your journey." "We ought really to find out whether the carriages are ready, if you are absolutely determined to go back to Balbec to-night," M. Verdurin said to me, "for I see no necessity for it myself. We could drive you over to-morrow morning. It is certain to be fine. The roads are excellent." I said that it was impossible. "But in any case it is not time yet," the Mistress protested. "Leave them alone, they have heaps of time. A lot of good it will do them to arrive at the station with an hour to wait. They are far happier here. And you, my young Mozart," she said to Morel, not venturing to address M. de Charlus directly, "won't you stay the night? We have some nice rooms facing the sea." "No, he can't," M. de Gharlus replied on behalf of the absorbed card-player who had not heard. "He has a pass until midnight only. He must go back to bed like a good little boy, obedient, and well-behaved," he added in a complaisant, mannered, insistent voice, as though he derived some sadic pleasure from the use of this chaste comparison and also from letting his voice dwell, in passing, upon any reference to Morel, from touching him with (failing his fingers) words that seemed to explore his person.

From the sermon that Brichot had addressed to me, M. de Cambremer had concluded that I was a Dreyfusard. As he himself was as anti-Dreyfusard as possible, out of courtesy to a foe, he began to sing me the praises of a Jewish colonel who had always been very decent to a cousin of the Chevregny and had secured for him the promotion he deserved. "And my cousin's opinions were the exact opposite," said M. de Cambremer; he omitted to mention what those opinions were, but I felt that they were as antiquated and misshapen as his own face, opinions which a few families in certain small towns must long have entertained. "Well, you know, I call that really fine!" was M. de Cambremer's conclusion. It is true that he was hardly employing the word 'fine' in the aesthetic sense in which it would have suggested to his wife and mother different works, but works, anyhow, of art. M. de Cambremer often made use of this term,

when for instance he was congratulating a delicate person who had put on a little flesh. “What, you have gained half-a-stone in two months. I say, that’s fine!” Refreshments were set out on a table. Mme. Verdurin invited the gentlemen to go and choose whatever drinks they preferred. M. de Charlus went and drank his glass and at once returned to a seat by the card-table from which he did not stir. Mme. Verdurin asked him: “Have you tasted my orangeade?” Upon which M. de Charlus, with a gracious smile, in a crystalline tone which he rarely sounded and with endless motions of his lips and body, replied: “No, I preferred its neighbour, it was strawberry-juice, I think, it was delicious.” It is curious that a certain order of secret actions has the external effect of a manner of speaking or gesticulating which reveals them. If a gentleman believes or disbelieves in the Immaculate Conception, or in the innocence of Dreyfus, or in a plurality of worlds, and wishes to keep his opinion to himself, you will find nothing in his voice or in his movements that will let you read his thoughts. But on hearing M. de Charlus say in that shrill voice and with that smile and waving his arms: “No, I preferred its neighbour, the strawberry-juice,” one could say: “There, he likes the stronger sex,” with the same certainty as enables a judge to sentence a criminal who has not confessed, a doctor a patient suffering from general paralysis who himself is perhaps unaware of his malady but has made some mistake in pronunciation from which one can deduce that he will be dead in three years. Perhaps the people who conclude from a man’s way of saying: “No, I preferred its neighbour, the strawberry-juice,” a love of the kind called unnatural, have no need of any such scientific knowledge. But that is because there is a more direct relation between the revealing sign and the secret. Without saying it in so many words to oneself, one feels that it is a gentle, smiling lady who is answering and who appears mannered because she is pretending to be a man and one is not accustomed to seeing men adopt such mannerisms. And it is perhaps more pleasant to think that for long years a certain number of angelic women have been included by mistake in the masculine sex where, in exile, ineffectually beating their wings towards men in whom they inspire a physical repulsion, they know how to arrange a drawing-room, compose ‘interiors.’ M. de Charlus was not in the least perturbed that Mme. Verdurin should be standing, and remained installed in his armchair so as to be nearer to Morel. “Don’t you think it criminal,” said Mme. Verdurin to the Baron, “that that creature who might be enchanting us with his violin should be sitting there at a card-table. When anyone can play the violin like that!” “He plays cards well, he does everything well, he is so intelligent,” said M. de Charlus, keeping his eye on the game, so as

to be able to advise Morel. This was not his only reason, however, for not rising from his chair for Mme. Verdurin. With the singular amalgam that he had made of the social conceptions at once of a great nobleman and an amateur of art, instead of being polite in the same way that a man of his world would be, he would create a sort of tableau-vivant for himself after Saint-Simon; and at that moment was amusing himself by impersonating the Maréchal d'Uxelles, who interested him from other aspects also, and of whom it is said that he was so proud as to remain seated, with a pretence of laziness, before all the most distinguished persons at court. "By the way, Charlus," said Mme. Verdurip, who was beginning to grow familiar, "you don't know of any ruined old nobleman in your Faubourg who would come to me as porter?" "Why, yes... why, yes," replied M. de Charlus with a genial smile, "but I don't advise it." "Why not?" "I should be afraid for your sake, that your smart visitors would call at the lodge and go no farther." This was the first skirmish between them. Mme. Verdurin barely noticed it. There were to be others, alas, in Paris. M. de Charlus remained glued to his chair. He could not, moreover, restrain a faint smile, seeing how his favourite maxims as to aristocratic prestige and middle-class cowardice were confirmed by the so easily won submission of Mme. Verdurin. The Mistress appeared not at all surprised by the Baron's posture, and if she left him it was only because she had been perturbed by seeing me taken up by M. de Cambremer. But first of all, she wished to clear up the mystery of M. de Charlus's relations with Comtesse Mole. "You told me that you knew Mme. de Molê. Does that mean, you go there?" she asked, giving to the words 'go there' the sense of being received there, of having received authority from the lady to go and call upon her. M. de Charlus replied with an inflexion of disdain, an affectation of precision and in a sing-song tone: "Yes, sometimes." This 'sometimes' inspired doubts in Mme. Verdurin, who asked: "Have you ever met the Duc de Guermantes there?" "Ah! That I don't remember." "Oh!" said Mme. Verdurin, "you don't know the Duc de Guermantes?" "And how should I not know him?" replied M. de Charlus, his lips curving in a smile. This smile was ironical; but as the Baron was afraid of letting a gold tooth be seen, he stopped it with a reverse movement of his lips, so that the resulting sinuosity was that of a good-natured smile. "Why do you say: 'How should I not know him?' " "Because he is my brother," said M. de Charlus carelessly, leaving Mme. Verdurin plunged in stupefaction and in the uncertainty whether her guest was making fun of her, was a natural son, or a son by another marriage. The idea that the brother of the Duc de Guermantes might be called Baron de Charlus never

entered her head. She bore down upon me. “I heard M. de Cambremer invite you to dinner just now. It has nothing to do with me, you understand. But for your own sake, I do hope you won’t go. For one thing, the place is infested with bores. Oh! If you like dining with provincial Counts and Marquises whom nobody knows, you will be supplied to your heart’s content.” “I think I shall be obliged to go there once or twice. I am not altogether free, however, for I have a young cousin whom I cannot leave by herself” (I felt that this fictitious kinship made it easier for me to take Albertine about). “But as for the Cambremers, as I have been introduced to them...” “You shall do just as you please. One thing I can tell you: it’s extremely unhealthy; when you have caught pneumonia, or a nice little chronic rheumatism, you’ll be a lot better off!” “But isn’t the place itself very pretty?” “Mmmmyess.... If you like. For my part, I confess frankly that I would a hundred times rather have the view from here over this valley. To begin with, if they’d paid us I wouldn’t have taken the other house because the sea air is fatal to M. Verdurin. If your cousin suffers at all from nerves.... But you yourself have bad nerves, I think you have choking fits. Very well! You shall see. Go there once, you won’t sleep for a week after it; but it’s not my business.” And without thinking of the inconsistency with what she had just been saying: “If it would amuse you to see the house, which is not bad, pretty is too strong a word, still it is amusing with its old moat, and the old drawbridge, as I shall have to sacrifice myself and dine there once, very well, come that day, I shall try to bring all my little circle, then it will be quite nice. The day after to-morrow we are going to Harambouville in the carriage. It’s a magnificent drive, the cider is delicious. Come with us. You, Brichot, you shall come too. And you too, Ski. That will make a party which, as a matter of fact, my husband must have arranged already. I don’t know whom all he has invited, Monsieur de Charlus, are you one of them?” The Baron, who had not heard the whole speech, and did not know that she was talking of an excursion to Harambouville, gave a start. “A strange question,” he murmured in a mocking tone by which Mme. Verdurin felt hurt. “Anyhow,” she said to me, “before you dine with the Cambremers, why not bring her here, your cousin? Does she like conversation, and clever people? Is she pleasant? Yes, very well then. Bring her with you. The Cambremers aren’t the only people in the world. I can understand their being glad to invite her, they must find it difficult to get anyone. Here she will have plenty of fresh air, and lots of clever men. In any case, I am counting on you not to fail me next Wednesday. I heard you were having a tea-party at Rivebelle with your cousin, and M. de Charlus, and I forget who’ else. You must arrange to bring the whole

lot on here, it would be nice if you all came in a body. It's the easiest thing in the world to get here, the roads are charming; if you like I can send down for you. I can't imagine what you find attractive in Rivebelle, it's infested with mosquitoes. You are thinking perhaps of the reputation of the rock-cakes. My cook makes them far better. I can let you have them, here, Norman rock-cakes, the real article, and shortbread; I need say no more. Ah! If you like the filth they give you at Rivebelle, that I won't give you, I don't poison my guests, Sir, and even if I wished to, my cook would refuse to make such abominations and would leave my service. Those rock-cakes you get down there, you can't tell what they are made of. I knew a poor girl who got peritonitis from them, which carried her off in three days. She was only seventeen. It was sad for her poor mother," added Mme. Verdurin with a melancholy air beneath the spheres of her temples charged with experience and suffering. "However, go and have tea at Rivebelle, if you enjoy being fleeced and flinging money out of the window. But one thing I beg of you, it is a confidential mission I am charging you with, on the stroke of six, bring all your party here, don't allow them to go straggling away by themselves. You can bring whom you please. I wouldn't say that to everybody. But I am sure that your friends are nice, I can see at once that we understand one another. Apart from the little nucleus, there are some very pleasant people coming on Wednesday. You don't know little Madame de Longpont. She is charming, and so witty, not in the least a snob, you will find, you'll like her immensely. And she's going to bring a whole troop of friends too," Mme. Verdurin added to shew me that this was the right thing to do and encourage me by the other's example. "We shall see which has most influence and brings most people, Barbe de Longpont or you. And then I believe somebody's going to bring Bergotte," she added with a vague air, this meeting with a celebrity being rendered far from likely by a paragraph which had appeared in the papers that morning, to the effect that the great writer's health was causing grave anxiety. "Anyhow, you will see that it will be one of my most successful Wednesdays, I don't want to have any boring women. You mustn't judge by this evening, it has been a complete failure. Don't try to be polite, you can't have been more bored than I was, I thought myself it was deadly. It won't always be like to-night, you know! I'm not thinking of the Cambremers, who are impossible, but I have known society people who were supposed to be pleasant, well, compared with my little nucleus, they didn't exist. I heard you say that you thought Swann clever. I must say, to my mind, his cleverness was greatly exaggerated, but without speaking of the character of the man, which I have always found fundamentally antipathetic,

sly, underhand, I have often had him to dinner on Wednesdays. Well, you can ask the others, even compared with Brichot, who is far from being anything wonderful, a good assistant master, whom I got into the Institute, Swann was simply nowhere. He was so dull!" And, as I expressed a contrary opinion: "It's the truth. I don't want to say a word against him to you, since he was your friend, indeed he was very fond of you, he has spoken to me about you in the most charming way, but ask the others here if he ever said anything interesting, at our dinners. That, after all, is the supreme test. Well, I don't know why it was, but Swann, in my house, never seemed to come off, one got nothing out of him. And yet anything there ever was in him he picked up here." I assured her that he was highly intelligent. "No, you only think that, because you haven't known him as long as I have. One got to the end of him very soon. I was always bored to death by him." (Which may be interpreted: "He went to the La Trémoïlles and the Guermantes and knew that I didn't.") "And I can put up with anything, except being bored. That, I cannot and will not stand!" Her horror of boredom was now the reason upon which Mme. Verdurin relied to explain the composition of the little group. She did not yet entertain duchesses because she was incapable of enduring boredom, just as she was unable to go for a cruise, because of sea-sickness. I thought to myself that what Mme. Verdurin said was not entirely false, and, whereas the Guermantes would have declared Brichot to be the stupidest man they had ever met, I remained uncertain whether he were not in reality superior, if not to Swann himself, at least to the other people endowed with the wit of the Guermantes who would have had the good taste to avoid and the modesty to blush at his pedantic pleasantries; I asked myself the question as though a fresh light might be thrown on the nature of the intellect by the answer that I should make, and with the earnestness of a Christian influenced by Port-Royal when he considers the problem of Grace. "You will see," Mme. Verdurin continued, "when one has society people together with people of real intelligence, people of our set, that's where one has to see them, the society man who is brilliant in the kingdom of the blind, is only one-eyed here. Besides, the others don't feel at home any longer. So much so that I'm inclined to ask myself whether, instead of attempting mixtures that spoil everything, I shan't start special evenings confined to the bores so as to have the full benefit of my little nucleus. However: you are coming again with your cousin. That's settled. Good. At any rate you will both find something to eat here. Féterne is starvation corner. Oh, by the way, if you like rats, go there at once, you will get as many as you want. And they will keep you there as long as you are prepared to stay. Why,

you'll die of hunger. I'm sure, when I go there, I shall have my dinner before I start. The more the merrier, you must come here first and escort me. We shall have high tea, and supper when we get back. Do you like apple-tarts? Yes, very well then, our chef makes the best in the world. You see, I was quite right when I told you that you were meant to live here. So come and stay. You know, there is far more room in the house than people think. I don't speak of it, so as not to let myself in for bores. You might bring your cousin to stay. She would get a change of air from Balbec. With this air here, I maintain I can cure incurables. I have cured them, I may tell you, and not only this time. For I have stayed quite close to here before, a place I discovered and got for a mere song, a very different style of house from their Raspelicre. I can shew you it if we go for a drive together. But I admit that even here the air is invigorating. Still, I don't want to say too much about it, the whole of Paris would begin to take a fancy to my little corner. That has always been my luck. Anyhow, give your cousin my message. We shall put you in two nice rooms looking over the valley, you ought to see it in the morning, with the sun shining on the mist! By the way, who is this Robert de Saint-Loup of whom you were speaking?" she said with a troubled air, for she had heard that I was to pay him a visit at Doncières, and was afraid that he might make me fail her. "Why not bring him here instead, if he's not a bore. I have heard of him from Morel; I fancy he's one of his greatest friends," said Mme. Verdurin with entire want of truth, for Saint-Loup and Morel were not even aware of one another's existence. But having heard that Saint-Loup knew M. de Charlus, she supposed that it was through the violinist, and wished to appear to know all about them. "He's not taking up medicine, by any chance, or literature? You know, if you want any help about examinations, Cottard can do anything, and I make what use of him I please. As for the Academy later on, for I suppose he's not old enough yet, I have several notes in my pocket. Your friend would find himself on friendly soil here, and it might amuse him perhaps to see over the house. Life's not very exciting at Doncières. But you shall do just what you please, then you can arrange what you think best," she concluded, without insisting, so as not to appear to be trying to know people of noble birth, and because she always maintained that the system by which she governed the faithful, to wit despotism, was named liberty. "Why, what's the matter with you," she said, at the sight of M. Verdurin who, with gestures of impatience, was making for the wooden terrace that ran along the side of the drawing-room above the valley, like a man who is bursting with rage and must have fresh air. "Has Saniette been annoying you again? But you know what an idiot he is, you

have to resign yourself to him, don't work yourself up into such a state. I dislike this sort of thing," she said to me, "because it is bad for him, it sends the blood to his head. But I must say that one would need the patience of an angel at times to put up with Saniette, and one must always remember that it is a charity to have him in the house. For my part I must admit that he's so gloriously silly, I can't help enjoying him. I dare say you heard what he said after dinner: 'I can't play whist, but I can the piano.' Isn't it superb? It is positively colossal, and incidentally quite untrue, for he knows nothing at all about either. But my husband, beneath his rough exterior, is very sensitive, very kind-hearted, and Saniette's self-centred way of always thinking about the effect he is going to make drives him*crazy*. Come, dear, calm yourself, you know Cottard told you that it was bad for your liver. And it is I that will have to bear the brunt of it all," said Mme. Verdurin. "To-morrow Saniette will come back all nerves and tears. Poor man, he is very ill indeed. Still, that is no reason why he should kill other people. Besides, even at times when he is in pain, when one would like to be sorry for him, his silliness hardens one's heart. He is really too stupid. You have only to tell him quite politely that these scenes make you both ill, and he is not to come again, since that's what he's most afraid of, it will have a soothing effect on his nerves," Mme. Verdurin whispered to her husband.

One could barely make out the sea from the windows on the right. But those on the other side shewed the valley, now shrouded in a snowy cloak of moonlight. Now and again one heard the voices of Morel and Cottard. "You have a trump?" "Yes." "Ah! You're in luck, you are," said M. de Cambremer to Morel, in answer to his question, for he had seen that the doctor's hand was full of trumps. "Here comes the lady of diamonds," said the doctor. "That's a trump, you know? My trick. But there isn't a Sorbonne any longer," said the doctor to M. de Cambremer; "there's only the University of Paris." M. de Cambremer confessed his inability to understand why the doctor made this remark to him. "I thought you were talking about the Sorbonne," replied the doctor. "I heard you say: *tu nous la sors bonne*," he added, with a wink, to shew that this was meant for a pun. "Just wait a moment," he said, pointing to his adversary, "I have a Trafalgar in store for him." And the prospect must have been excellent for the doctor, for in his joy his shoulders began to shake rapturously with laughter, which in his family, in the 'breed' of the Cottards, was an almost zoological sign of satisfaction. In the previous generation the gesture of rubbing the hands together as though one were soaping them used to accompany this movement. Cottard himself had originally employed both forms simultaneously, but one fine

day, nobody ever knew by whose intervention, wifely, professorial perhaps, the rubbing of the hands had disappeared. The doctor even at dominoes, when he got his adversary on the run, and made him take the double six, which was to him the keenest of pleasures, contented himself with shaking his shoulders. And when — which was as seldom as possible — he went down to his native village for a few days, and met his first cousin, who was still at the hand-rubbing stage, he would say to Mme. Cottard on his return: “I thought poor René very common.” “Have you the little dee-ar?” he said, turning to Morel. “No? Then I play this old David.” “Then you have five, you have won!” “That’s a great victory, Doctor,” said the Marquis. “A Pyrrhic victory,” said Cottard, turning to face the Marquis and looking at him over his glasses to judge the effect of his remark. “If there is still time,” he said to Morel, “I give you your revenge. It is my deal. Ah! no, here come the carriages, it will have to be Friday, and I shall shew you a trick you don’t see every day.” M. and Mme. Verdurin accompanied us to the door. The Mistress was especially coaxing with Saniette so as to make certain of his returning next time. “But you don’t look to me as if you were properly wrapped up, my boy,” said M. Verdurin, whose age allowed him to address me in this paternal tone. “One would say the weather had changed.” These words filled me with joy, as though the profoundly hidden life, the uprising of different combinations which they implied in nature, hinted at other changes, these occurring in my own life, and created fresh possibilities in it. Merely by opening the door upon the park, before leaving, one felt that a different ‘weather’ had, at that mo-merit, taken possession of the scene; cooling breezes, one of the joys of summer, were rising in the fir plantation (where long ago Mme. de Cambremer had dreamed of Chopin) and almost imperceptibly, in caressing coils, capricious eddies, were beginning their gentle nocturnes. I declined the rug which, on subsequent evenings, I was to accept when Albertine was with me, more to preserve the secrecy of my pleasure than to avoid the risk of cold. A vain search was made for the Norwegian philosopher. Had he been seized by a colic? Had he been afraid of missing the train? Had an aeroplane come to fetch him? Had he been carried aloft in an Assumption? In any case he had vanished without anyone’s noticing his departure, like a god. “You are unwise,” M. de Cambremer said to me, “it’s as cold as charity.” “Why charity?” the doctor inquired. “Beware of choking,” the Marquis went on. “My sister never goes out at night. However, she is in a pretty bad state at present. In any case you oughtn’t to stand about bare-headed, put your tile on at once.” “They are not frigorifie chokings,” said Cottard sententiously. “Oh, indeed!” M. de

Cambremer bowed. “Of course, if that’s your opinion...” “Opinions of the press!” said the doctor, smiling round his glasses. M. de Cambremer laughed, but, feeling certain that he was in the right, insisted: “All the same,” he said, “whenever my sister goes out after dark, she has an attack.” “It’s no use quibbling,” replied the doctor, regardless of his want of manners. “However, I don’t practise medicine by the seaside, unless I am called in for a consultation. I am here on holiday.” He was perhaps even more on holiday than he would have liked. M. de Cambremer having said to him as they got into the carriage together: “We are fortunate in having quite close to us (not on your side of the Day, on the opposite side, but it is quite narrow at that point) another medical celebrity, Doctor du Boulbon,” Cottard, who, as a rule, from ‘deontology,’ abstained from criticising his colleagues, could not help exclaiming, as he had exclaimed to me on the fatal day when we had visited the little casino: “But he is not a doctor. He practises ‘a literary medicine, it is all fantastic therapeutics, charlatanism. All the same, we are on quite good terms. I should take the boat and go over and pay him a visit, if I weren’t leaving.” But, from the air which Cottard assumed in speaking of du Boulbon to M. de Cambremer, I felt that the boat which he would gladly have taken to call upon him would have greatly resembled that vessel which, in order to go and ruin the waters discovered by another literary doctor, Virgil (who took all their patients from them as well), the doctors of Salerno had chartered, but which sank with them on the voyage. “Good-bye, my dear Saniette, don’t forget to come to-morrow, you know how my husband enjoys seeing you. He enjoys your wit, your intellect; yes indeed, you know quite well, he takes sudden moods, but he can’t live without seeing you. It’s always the first thing he asks me: ‘Is Saniette coming? I do so enjoy seeing him.’” “I never said anything of the sort,” said M. Verdurin to Saniette with a feigned frankness which seemed perfectly to reconcile what the Mistress had just said with the manner in which he treated Saniette. Then looking at his watch, doubtless so as not to prolong the leave-taking in the damp night air, he warned the coachmen not to lose any time, but to be careful when going down the hill, and assured us that we should be in plenty of time for our train. This was to set down the faithful, one at one station, another at another, ending with myself, for no one else was going as far as Balbec, and beginning with the Cambremers. They, so as not to bring their horses all the way up to la Raspelière at night, took the train with us at Douville-Féterne. The station nearest to them was indeed not this, which, being already at some distance from the village, was farther still from the mansion, but la Sogne. On arriving at the station of

Douville-Féterne, M. de Cambremer made a point of giving a ‘piece,’ as Françoise used to say, to the Verdurins’ coachman (the nice, sensitive coachman, with melancholy thoughts), for M. de Cambremer was generous, and in that respect took, rather, ‘after his mamma.’ But, possibly because his ‘papa’s’ strain intervened at this point, he felt a scruple, or else that there might be a mistake — either on his part, if, for instance, in the dark, he were to give a you instead of a franc, or on the recipient’s who might not perceive the importance of the present that was being given him. And so he drew attention to it: “It is a franc I’m giving you, isn’t it?” he said to the coachman, turning the coin until it gleamed in the lamplight, and so that the faithful might report his action to Mme. Verdurin. “Isn’t it? Twenty sous is right, as it’s only a short drive.” He and Mme. de Cambremer left us at la Sogne. “I shall tell my sister,” he repeated to me, “that you have choking fits, I am sure she will be interested.” I understood that he meant: ‘will be pleased.’ As for his wife, she employed, in saying good-bye to me, two abbreviations which, even in writing, used to shock me at that time in a letter, although one has grown accustomed to them since, but which, when spoken, seem to me to-day even to contain in their deliberate carelessness, in their acquired familiarity, something insufferably pedantic: “Pleased to have met you,” she said to me; “greetings to Saint-Loup, if you see him.” In making this speech, Mme. de Cambremer pronounced the name ‘Saint-Loupe.’ I have never discovered who had pronounced it thus in her hearing, or what had led her to suppose that it ought to be so pronounced. However it may be, for some weeks afterwards, she continued to say ‘Saint-Loupe’ and a man who had a great admiration for her and echoed her in every way did the same. If other people said ‘Saint-Lou,’ they would insist, would say emphatically ‘Saint-Loupe,’ whether to teach the others an indirect lesson or to be different from them. But, no doubt, women of greater brilliance than Mme. de Cambremer told her, or gave her indirectly to understand that this was not the correct pronunciation, and that what she regarded as a sign of originality was a mistake which would make people think her little conversant with the usages of society, for shortly afterwards Mme. de Cambremer was again saying ‘Saint-Lou,’ and her admirer similarly ceased to hold out, whether because she had lectured him, or because he had noticed that she no longer sounded the final consonant, and had said to himself that if a woman of such distinction, energy and ambition had yielded, it must have been on good grounds. The worst of her admirers was her husband. Mme. de Cambremer loved to tease other people in a way that was often highly impertinent. As soon as she began to attack me, or anyone else, in this fashion,

M. de Cambremer would start watching her victim, laughing the while. As the Marquis had a squint — a blemish which gives an effect of wit to the mirth even of imbeciles — the effect of this laughter was to bring a segment of pupil into the otherwise complete whiteness of his eye. So a sudden rift brings a patch of blue into an otherwise clouded sky. His monocle moreover protected, like the glass over a valuable picture, this delicate operation. As for the actual intention of his laughter, it was hard to say whether it was friendly: “Ah! You rascal! You’re in an enviable position, aren’t you. You have won the favour of a lady who has a pretty wit!” Or coarse: “Well, Sir, I hope you’ll learn your lesson, you’ve got to eat a slice of humble pie.” Or obliging: “I’m here, you know, I take it with a laugh because it’s all pure fun, but I shan’t let you be ill-treated.” Or cruelly accessory: “I don’t need to add my little pinch of salt, but you can see, I’m revelling in all the insults she is showering on you. I’m wriggling like a hunchback, therefore I approve, I, the husband. And so, if you should take it into your head to answer back, you would have me to deal with, my young Sir. I should first of all give you a pair of resounding smacks, well aimed, then we should go and cross swords in the forest of Chantepie.”

Whatever the correct interpretation of the husband’s merriment, the wife’s whimsies soon came to an end. Whereupon M. de Cambremer ceased to laugh, the temporary pupil vanished and as one had forgotten for a minute or two to expect an entirely white eyeball, it gave this ruddy Norman an air at once anaemic and ecstatic, as though the Marquis had just undergone an operation, or were imploring heaven, through his monocle, for the palms of martyrdom.

Chapter 3

I was dropping with sleep. I was taken up to my floor not by the liftboy, but by the squinting page, who to make conversation informed me that his sister was still with the gentleman who was so rich, and that, on one occasion, when she had made up her mind to return home instead of sticking to her business, her gentleman friend had paid a visit to the mother of the squinting page and of the other more fortunate children, who had very soon made the silly creature return to her protector. “You know, Sir, she’s a fine lady, my sister is. She plays the piano, she talks Spanish. And you would never take her for the sister of the humble employee who brings you up in the lift, she denies herself nothing; Madame has a maid to herself, I shouldn’t be surprised if one day she keeps her carriage. She is very pretty, if you could see her, a little too high and mighty, but, good lord, you can understand that. She’s full of fun. She never leaves a hotel without doing something first in a wardrobe or a drawer, just to leave a little keepsake with the chambermaid who will have to wipe it up. Sometimes she does it in a cab, and after she’s paid her fare, she’ll hide behind a tree, and she doesn’t half laugh when the cabby finds he’s got to clean his cab after her. My father had another stroke of luck when he found my young brother that Indian Prince he used to know long ago. It’s not the same style of thing, of course. But it’s a superb position. The travelling by itself would be a dream. I’m the only one still on the shelf. But you never know. We’re a lucky family; perhaps one day I shall be President of the Republic. But I’m keeping you talking” (I had not uttered a single word and was beginning to fall asleep as I listened to the flow of his). “Good-night, Sir. Oh! Thank you, Sir. If everybody had as kind a heart as you, there wouldn’t be any poor people left. But, as my sister says, ‘there will always have to be the poor so that now I’m rich I can s — t on them.’ You’ll pardon the expression. Goodnight, Sir.”

Perhaps every night we accept the risk of facing, while we are asleep, sufferings which we regard as unreal and unimportant because they will be felt in the course of a sleep which we suppose to be unconscious. And indeed on these evenings when I came back late from la Raspelière I was very sleepy. But

after the weather turned cold I could not get to sleep at once, for the fire lighted up the room as though there were a lamp burning in it. Only it was nothing more than a blazing log, and — like a lamp too, for that matter, like the day when night gathers — its too bright light was not long in fading; and I entered a state of slumber which is like a second room that we take, into which, leaving our own room, we go when we want to sleep. It has noises of its own and we are sometimes violently awakened by the sound of a bell, perfectly heard by our ears, although nobody has rung. It has its servants, its special visitors who call to take us out so that we are ready to get up when we are compelled to realise, by our almost immediate transmigration into the other room, the room of overnight, that it is empty, that nobody has called.

The race that inhabits it is, like that of our first human ancestors, androgynous. A man in it appears a moment later in the form of a woman. Things in it shew a tendency to turn into men, men into friends and enemies. The time that elapses for the sleeper, during these spells of slumber, is absolutely different from the time in which the life of the waking man is passed. Sometimes its course is far more rapid, a quarter of an hour seems a day, at other times far longer, we think we have taken only a short nap, when we have slept through the day. Then, in the chariot of sleep, we descend into depths in which memory can no longer overtake it, and on the brink of which the mind has been obliged to retrace its steps. The horses of sleep, like those of the sun, move at so steady a pace, in an atmosphere in which there is no longer any resistance, that it requires some little aerolith extraneous to ourselves (hurled from the azure by some Unknown) to strike our regular sleep (which otherwise Would have no reason to stop, and would continue with a similar motion world without end) and to make it swing sharply round, return towards reality, travel without pause, traverse the regions bordering on life in which presently the sleeper will hear the sounds that come from life, quite vague still, but already perceptible, albeit corrupted — and come to earth suddenly and awake. Then from those profound slumbers we awake in a dawn, not knowing who we are, being nobody, newly born, ready for anything, our brain being emptied of that past which was previously our life. And perhaps it is more pleasant still when our landing at the waking-point is abrupt and the thoughts of our sleep, hidden by a cloak of oblivion, have not time to return to us in order, before sleep ceases. Then, from the black tempest through which we seem to have passed (but we do not even say*we*), we emerge prostrate, without a thought, a we that is void of content. What hammer-blow has the person or thing that is lying there received to make it unconscious of

anything, stupefied until the moment when memory, flooding back, restores to it consciousness or personality? Moreover, for both these kinds of awakening, we must avoid falling asleep, even into deep slumber, under the law of habit. For everything that habit ensnares in her nets, she watches closely, we must escape her, take our sleep at a moment when we thought we were doing anything else than sleeping, take, in a word, a sleep that does not dwell under the tutelage of foresight, in the company, albeit latent, of reflexion. At least, in these awakenings which I have just described, and which I experienced as a rule when I had been dining overnight at la Raspelière, everything occurred as though by this process, and I can testify to it, I the strange human being who, while he waits for death to release him, lives behind closed shutters, knows nothing of the world, sits motionless as an owl, and like that bird begins to see things a little plainly only when darkness falls. Everything occurs as though by this process, but perhaps only a layer of wadding has prevented the sleeper from taking in the internal dialogue of memories and the incessant verbiage of sleep. For (and this may be equally manifest in the other system, vaster, more mysterious, more astral) at the moment of his entering the waking state, the sleeper hears a voice inside him saying: “Will you come to this dinner to-night, my dear friend, it would be such fun?” and thinks: “Yes, what fun it will be, I shall go”; then, growing wider awake, he suddenly remembers: “My grandmother has only a few weeks to live, the Doctor assures us.” He rings, he weeps at the thought that it will not be, as in the past, his grandmother, his dying grandmother, but an indifferent waiter that will come in answer to his summons. Moreover, when sleep bore him so far away from the world inhabited by memory and thought, through an ether in which he was alone, more than alone; not having that companion in whom we perceive things, ourself, he was outside the range of time and its measures. But now the footman is in the room, and he dares not ask him the time, for he does not know whether he has slept, for how many hours he has slept (he asks himself whether it should not be how many days, returning thus with weary body and mind refreshed, his heart sick for home, as from a journey too distant not to have taken a long time). We may of course insist that there is but one time, for the futile reason that it is by looking at the clock that we have discovered to have been merely a quarter of an hour what we had supposed a day. But at the moment when we make this discovery we are a man awake, plunged in the time of waking men, we have deserted the other time. Perhaps indeed more than another time: another life. The pleasures that we enjoy in sleep, we do not include them in the list of the pleasures that we have felt in

the course of our existence. To allude only to the most grossly sensual of them all, which of us, on waking, has not felt a certain irritation at having experienced in his sleep a pleasure which, if he is anxious not to tire himself, he is not, once he is awake, at liberty to repeat indefinitely during the day. It seems a positive waste. We have had pleasure, in another life, which is not ours. Sufferings and pleasures of the dream-world (which generally vanish soon enough after our waking), if we make them figure in a budget, it is not in the current account of our life.

Two times, I have said; perhaps there is only one after all, not that the time of the waking man has any validity for the sleeper, but perhaps because the other life, the life in which he sleeps, is not — in its profounder part — included in the category of time. I came to this conclusion when on the mornings after dinners at la Raspelière I used to lie so completely asleep. For this reason. I was beginning to despair, on waking, when I found that, after I had rung the bell ten times, the waiter did not appear. At the eleventh ring he came. It was only the first after all. The other ten had been mere suggestions in my sleep which still hung about me, of the peal that I had been meaning to sound. My numbed hands had never even moved. Well, on those mornings (and this is what makes me say that sleep is perhaps unconscious of the law of time) my effort to awaken consisted chiefly in an effort to make the obscure, undefined mass of the sleep in which I had just been living enter into the scale of time. It is no easy task; sleep, which does not know whether we have slept for two hours or two days, cannot provide any indication. And if we do not find one outside, not being able to re-enter time, we fall asleep again, for five minutes which seem to us three hours.

I have always said — and have proved by experiment — that the most powerful soporific is sleep itself. After having slept profoundly for two hours, having fought against so many giants, and formed so many lifelong friendships, it is far more difficult to awake than after taking several grammes of veronal. And so, reasoning from one thing to the other, I was surprised to hear from the Norwegian philosopher, who had it from M. Boutroux, “my eminent colleague — pardon me, my brother,” what M. Bergson thought of the peculiar effects upon the memory of soporific drugs. “Naturally,” M. Bergson had said to M. Boutroux, if one was to believe the Norwegian philosopher, “soporifics, taken from time to time in moderate doses, have no effect upon that solid memory of our everyday life which is so firmly established within us. But there are other forms of memory, loftier, but also more unstable. One of my colleagues lectures upon ancient history. He tells me that if, overnight, he has taken a tablet to make

him sleep, he has great difficulty, during his lecture, in recalling the Greek quotations that he requires. The doctor who recommended these tablets assured him that they had no effect upon the memory. ‘That is perhaos because you do not have to quote Greek,’ the historian answered, not without a note of derisive pride.”

I cannot say whether this conversation between M. Bergson and M. Boutroux is accurately reported. The Norwegian philosopher, albeit so profound and so lucid, so passionately attentive, may have misunderstood. Personally, in my own experience I have found the opposite result. The moments of oblivion that come to us in the morning after we have taken certain narcotics have a resemblance that is only partial, though disturbing, to the oblivion that reigns during a night of natural and profound sleep. Now what I find myself forgetting in either case is not some line of Baudelaire, which on the other hand keeps sounding in my ear, it is not some concept of one of the philosophers above-named, it is the actual reality of the ordinary things that surround me — if I am asleep — my non-perception of which makes me an idiot; it is, if I am awakened and proceed to emerge from an artificial slumber, not the system of Porphyry or Plotinus, which I can discuss as fluently as at any other time, but the answer that I have promised to give to an invitation, the memory of which is replaced by a universal blank. The lofty thought remains in its place; what the soporific has put out of action is the power to act in little things, in everything that demands activity in order to-seize at the right moment, to grasp some memory of everyday life. In spite of all that may be said about survival after the destruction of the brain, I observe that each alteration of the brain is a partial death. We possess all our memories, but not the faculty of recalling them, said, echoing M. Bergson, the eminent Norwegian philosopher whose language I have made no attempt to imitate in order not to prolong my story unduly. But not the faculty of recalling them. But what, then, is a memory which we do not recall? Or, indeed, let us go farther. We do not recall our memories of the last thirty years; but we are wholly steeped in them; why then stop short at thirty years, why not prolong back to before out birth this anterior life? The moment that I do not know a whole section of the memories that are behind me, the moment that they are invisible to me, that I have not the faculty of calling them to me, who can assure me that in that *mass* unknown to me there are not some that extend back much farther than my human life. If I can have in me and round me so many memories which I do not remember, this oblivion (a *de facto* oblivion, at least, since I have not the faculty of seeing anything) may extend over a life which I have lived in the body

of another man, even upon another planet. A common oblivion effaces all. But what, in that case, signifies that immortality of the soul the reality of which the Norwegian philosopher affirmed? The person that I shall be after death has no more reason to remember the man whom I have been since my birth than the latter to remember what I was before it.

The waiter came in. I did not mention to him that I had rung several times, for I was beginning to realise that hitherto I had only dreamed that I was ringing. I was alarmed nevertheless by the thought that this dream had had the clear precision of experience. Experience would, reciprocally, have the irreality of a dream.

Instead I asked him who it was that had been ringing so often during the night. He told me: “Nobody,” and could prove his statement, for the bell-board would have registered any ring. And yet I could hear the repeated, almost furious peals which were still echoing in my ears and were to remain perceptible for several days. It is however seldom that sleep thus projects into our waking life memories that do not perish with it. We can count these aeroliths. If it is an idea that sleep has forged, it soon breaks up into slender, irrecoverable fragments. But, in this instance, sleep had fashioned sounds. More material and simpler, they lasted longer. I was astonished by the relative earliness of the hour, as told me by the waiter. I was none the less refreshed. It is the light sleeps that have a long duration, because, being an intermediate state between waking and sleeping, preserving a somewhat faded but permanent impression of the former, they require infinitely more time to refresh us than a profound sleep, which may be short. I felt quite comfortable for another reason. If remembering that we are tired is enough to make us feel our tiredness, saying to oneself: “I am refreshed,” is enough to create refreshment. Now I had been dreaming that M. de Charlus was a hundred and ten years old, and had just boxed the ears of his own mother, Madame Verdurin, because she had paid five thousand millions for a bunch of violets; I was therefore assured that I had slept profoundly, had dreamed the reverse of what had been in my thoughts overnight and of all the possibilities of life at the moment; this was enough to make me feel entirely refreshed.

I should greatly have astonished my mother, who could not understand M. de Charlus’s assiduity in visiting the Verdurins, had I told her whom (on the very day on which Albertine’s toque had been ordered, without a word about it to her, in order that it might come as a surprise) M. de Charlus had brought to dine in a private room at the Grand Hotel, Balbec. His guest was none other than the footman of a lady who was a cousin of the Cambremers. This footman was very

smartly dressed, and, as he crossed the hall, with the Baron, ‘did the man of fashion’ as Saint-Loup would have said in the eyes of the visitors. Indeed, the young page-boys, the Lévites who were swarming down the temple steps at that moment because it was the time when they came on duty, paid no attention to the two strangers, one of whom, M. de Charlus, kept his eyes lowered to shew that he was paying little if any to them. He appeared to be trying to carve his way through their midst. “Prosper, dear hope of a sacred nation,” he said, recalling a passage from Racine, and applying to it a wholly different meaning. “Pardon?” asked the footman, who was not well up in the classics. M. de Charlus made no reply, for he took a certain pride in never answering questions and in marching straight ahead as though there were no other visitors in the hotel, or no one existed in the world except himself, Baron de Charlus. But, having continued to quote the speech of Josabeth: “Come, come, my children,” he felt a revulsion and did not, like her, add: “Bid them approach,” for these young people had not yet reached the age at which sex is completely developed, and which appealed to M. de Charlus. Moreover, if he had written to Madame de Chevregny’s footman, because he had had no doubt of his docility, he had hoped to meet some one more virile. On seeing him, he found him more effeminate than he would have liked. He told him that he had been expecting some one else, for he knew by sight another of Madame de Chevregny’s footmen, whom he had noticed upon the box of her carriage. This was an extremely rustic type of peasant, the very opposite of him who had come, who, on the other hand, regarding his own effeminate ways as adding to his attractiveness, and never doubting that it was this man-of-the-world air that had captivated M. de Charlus, could not even guess whom the Baron meant. “But there is no one else in the house, except one that you can’t have given the eye to, he is hideous, just like a great peasant.” And at the thought that it was perhaps this rustic whom the Baron had seen, he felt his self-esteem wounded. The Baron guessed this, and, widening his quest: “But I have not taken a vow that I will know only Mme. de Chevregny’s men,” he said. “Surely there are plenty of fellows in one house or another here or in Paris, since you are leaving soon, that you could introduce to me?” “Oh, no!” replied the footman, “I never go with anyone of my own class. I only speak to them on duty. But there is one very nice person I can make you know.” “Who?” asked the Baron. “The Prince de Guermantes.” M. de Guermantes was vexed at being offered only a man so advanced in years, one, moreover, to whom he had no need to apply to a footman for an introduction. And so he declined the offer in a dry tone and, not letting himself be discouraged by the menial’s social

pretensions, began to explain to him again what he wanted, the style, the type, a jockey, for instance, and so on.... Fearing lest the solicitor, who went past at that moment, might have heard them, he thought it cunning to shew that he was speaking of anything in the world rather than what his hearer might suspect, and said with emphasis and in ringing tones, but as though he were simply continuing his conversation: “Yes, in spite of my age, I still keep up a passion for collecting, a passion for pretty things, I will do anything to secure an old bronze, an early lustre. I adore the Beautiful.” But to make the footman understand the change of subject he had so rapidly executed, M. de Charlus laid such stress upon each word, and what was more, to be heard by the solicitor, he shouted his words so loud that this charade should in itself have been enough to reveal what it concealed from ears more alert than those of the officer of the court. He suspected nothing, any more than any of the other residents in the hotel, all of whom saw a fashionable foreigner in the footman so smartly attired. On the other hand, if the gentlemen were deceived and took him for a distinguished American, no sooner did he appear before the servants than he was spotted by them, as one convict recognises another, indeed scented afar off, as certain animals scent one another. The head waiters raised their eyebrows. Aimé cast a suspicious glance. The wine waiter, shrugging his shoulders, uttered behind his hand (because he thought it polite) an offensive expression which everybody heard. And even our old Françoise, whose sight was failing and who went past at that moment at the foot of the staircase to dine with the *courriers*, raised her head, recognised a servant where the hotel guests never suspected one — as the old nurse Euryclea recognises Ulysses long before the suitors seated at the banquet — and seeing, arm in arm with him, M. de Charlus, assumed an appalled expression, as though all of a sudden slanders which she had heard repeated and had not believed had acquired a heartrending probability in her eyes. She never spoke to me, nor to anyone else, of this incident, but it must have caused a considerable commotion in her brain, for afterwards, whenever in Paris she happened to see ‘Julien,’ to whom until then she had been so greatly attached, she still treated him with politeness, but with a politeness that had cooled and was always tempered with a strong dose of reserve. This same incident led some one else to confide in me: this was Aimé. When I encountered M. de Charlus, he, not having expected to meet me, raised his hand and called out “Good evening” with the indifference — outwardly, at least — of a great nobleman who believes that everything is allowed him and thinks it better not to appear to be hiding anything. Aimé, who at that moment was watching him with

a suspicious eye and saw that I greeted the companion of the person in whom he was certain that he detected a. servant, asked me that same evening who he was. For, for some time past, Aimé had shewn a fondness for talking, or rather, as he himself put it, doubtless in order to emphasise the character — philosophical, according to him — of these talks, ‘discussing’ with me. And as I often said to him that it distressed me that he should have to stand beside the table while I ate instead of being able to sit down and share my meal, he declared that he had never seen a guest shew such ‘sound reasoning.’ He was talking at that moment to two waiters. They had bowed to me, I did not know why their faces were unfamiliar, albeit their conversation sounded a note which seemed to me not to be novel. Aimé was scolding them both because of their matrimonial engagements, of which he disapproved. He appealed to me, I said that I could not have any opinion on the matter since I did not know them. They told me their names, reminded me that they had often waited upon me at Rivebelle. But one had let his moustache grow, the other had shaved his off and had had his head cropped; and for this reason, albeit it was the same head as before that rested upon the shoulders of each of them (and not a different head as in the faulty restorations of Notre-Dame), it had remained almost as invisible to me as those objects which escape the most minute search and are actually staring everybody in the face where nobody notices them, on the mantelpiece. As soon as I knew their names, I recognised exactly the uncertain music of their voices because I saw once more the old face which made it clear. “They want to get married and they haven’t even learned English!” Aimé said to me, without reflecting that I was little versed in the ways of hotel service, and could not be aware that a person who does not know foreign languages cannot be certain of getting a situation. I, who supposed that he would have no difficulty in finding out that the newcomer was M. de Charlus, and indeed imagined that he must remember him, having waited upon him in the dining-room when the Baron came, during my former visit to Balbec, to see Mme. de Villeparisis, I told him his name. Not only did Aimé not remember the Baron de Charlus, but the name appeared to make a profound impression upon him. He told me that he would look for a letter next day in his room which I might perhaps be able to explain to him. I was all the more astonished in that M. de Charlus, when he had wished to give me one of Bergotte’s books, at Balbec, the other year, had specially asked for Aimé, whom he must have recognised later on in that Paris restaurant where I had taken luncheon with Saint-Loup and his mistress and where M. de Charlus had come to spy upon us. It is true that Aimé had not been able to execute these

commissions in person, being on the former occasion in bed, and on the latter engaged in waiting. I had nevertheless grave doubts as to his sincerity, when he pretended not to know M. de Charlus. For one thing, he must have appealed to the Baron. Like all the upstairs waiters of the Balbec Hotel, like several of the Prince de Guermantes's footmen, Aimé belonged to a race more ancient than that of the Prince, therefore more noble. When you asked for a sitting-room, you thought at first that you were alone. But presently, in the service-room you caught sight of a sculptural waiter, of that ruddy Etruscan kind of which Aimé was typical, slightly aged by excessive consumption of champagne and seeing the inevitable hour approach for Contrexéville water. Not all the visitors asked them merely to wait upon them. The underlings who were young, conscientious, busy, who had mistresses waiting for them outside, made off. Whereupon Aimé reproached them with not being serious. He had every right to do so. He himself was serious. He had a wife and children, and was ambitious on their behalf. And so the advances made to him by a strange lady or gentleman he never repulsed, though it meant his staying all night. For business must come before everything. He was so much of the type that attracted M. de Charlus that I suspected him of falsehood when he told me that he did not know him. I was wrong. The page had been perfectly truthful when he told the Baron that Aimé (who had given him a dressing-down for it next day) had gone to bed (or gone out), and on the other occasion was busy waiting. But imagination outreaches reality. And the page-boy's embarrassment had probably aroused in M. de Charlus doubts as to the sincerity of his excuses that had wounded sentiments of which Aimé had no suspicion. We have seen moreover that Saint-Loup had prevented Aimé from going out to the carriage in which M. de Charlus, who had managed somehow or other to discover the waiter's new address, received a further disappointment. Aimé, who had not noticed him, felt an astonishment that may be imagined when, on the evening of that very day on which I had taken luncheon with Saint-Loup and his mistress, he received a letter sealed with the Guermantes arms, from which I shall quote a few passages here as an example of unilateral insanity in an intelligent man addressing an imbecile endowed with sense. "Sir, I have been unsuccessful, notwithstanding efforts that would astonish many people who have sought in vain to be greeted and welcomed by myself, in persuading you to listen to certain explanations which you have not asked of me but which I have felt it to be incumbent upon my dignity and your own to offer you. I am going therefore to write down here what it would have been more easy to say to you in person. I shall not conceal from you that, the first time that I set eyes upon you at

Balbec, I found your face frankly antipathetic." Here followed reflexions upon the resemblance — remarked only on the following day — to a deceased friend to whom M. de Charlus had been deeply attached. "The thought then suddenly occurred to me that you might, without in any way encroaching upon the demands of your profession, come to see me and, by joining me in the card games with which his mirth used to dispel my gloom, give me the illusion that he was not dead. Whatever the nature of the more or less fatuous suppositions which you probably formed, suppositions more within the mental range of a servant (who does not even deserve the name of servant since he has declined to serve) than the comprehension of so lofty a sentiment, you probably thought that you were giving yourself importance, knowing not who I was nor what I was, by sending word to me, when I asked you to fetch me a book, that you were in bed; but it is a mistake to imagine that impolite behaviour ever adds to charm, in which you moreover are entirely lacking. I should have ended matters there had I not, by chance, the following morning, found an opportunity of speaking to you. Your resemblance to my poor friend was so accentuated, banishing even the Intolerable protuberance of your too prominent chin, that I realised that it was the deceased who at that moment was lending you his own kindly expression so as to permit you to regain your hold over me and to prevent you from missing the unique opportunity that was being offered you. Indeed, although I have no wish, since there is no longer any object and it is unlikely that I shall meet you again in this life, to introduce coarse questions of material interest, I should have been only too glad to obey the prayer of my dead friend (for I believe in the Communion of Saints and in their deliberate intervention in the destiny of the living), that I should treat you as I used to treat him, who had his carriage, his servants, and to whom it was quite natural that I should consecrate the greater part of my fortune since I loved him as a father loves his son. You have decided otherwise. To my request that you should fetch me a book you sent the reply that you were obliged to go out. And this morning when I sent to ask you to come to my carriage, you then, if I may so speak without blasphemy, denied me for the third time. You will excuse my not enclosing in this envelope the lavish gratuity which I intended to give you at Balbec and to which it would be too painful to me to restrict myself in dealing with a person with whom I had thought for a moment of sharing all that I possess. At least you might spare me the trouble of making a fourth vain attempt to find you at your restaurant, to which my patience will not extend." (Here M. de Charlus gave his address, stated the hours at which he would be at home, etc.) "Farewell, Sir. Since I assume that,

resembling so strongly the friend whom I have lost, you cannot be entirely stupid, otherwise physiognomy would be a false science, I am convinced that if, one day, you think of this incident again, it will not be without feeling some regret and some remorse. For my part, believe that I am quite sincere in saying that I retain no bitterness. I should have preferred that we should part with a less unpleasant memory than this third futile endeavour. It will soon be forgotten. We are like those vessels which you must often have seen at Balbec, which have crossed one another's course for a moment; it might have been to the advantage of each of them to stop; but one of them has decided otherwise; presently they will no longer even see one another on the horizon and their meeting is a thing out of mind; but, before this final parting, each of them salutes the other, and so at this point, Sir, wishing you all good fortune, does

THE BARON DE CHARLUS."

Aimé had not even read this letter through, being able to make nothing of it and suspecting a hoax. When I had explained to him who the Baron was, he appeared to be lost in thought and to be feeling the regret that M. de Charlus had anticipated. I would not be prepared to swear that he would not at that moment have written a letter of apology to a man who gave carriages to his friends. But in the interval M. de Charlus had made Morel's acquaintance. It was true that, his relations with Morel being possibly Platonic, M. de Charlus occasionally sought to spend an evening in company such as that in which I had just met him in the hall. But he was no longer able to divert from Morel the violent sentiment which, at liberty a few years earlier, had asked nothing better than to fasten itself upon Aimé and had dictated the letter which had distressed me, for its writer's sake, when the head waiter shewed me it. It was, in view of the anti-social nature of M. de Charlus's love, a more striking example of the insensible, sweeping force of these currents of passion by which the lover, like a swimmer, is very soon carried out of sight of land. No doubt the love of a normal man may also, when the lover, by the successive invention of his desires, regrets, disappointments, plans, constructs a whole romance about a woman whom he does not know, allow the two legs of the compass to gape at a quite remarkably wide angle. All the same, such an angle was singularly enlarged by the character of a passion which is not generally shared and by the difference in social position between M. de Charlus and Aime.

Every day I went out with Albertine. She had decided to take up painting again and had chosen as the subject of her first attempts the church of Saint-Jean de la Haise which nobody ever visited and very few had even heard of, a spot

difficult to describe, impossible to discover without a guide, slow of access in its isolation, more than half an hour from the Epreville station, after one had long left behind one the last houses of the village of Quetteholme. As to the name Epreville I found that the curé's book and Brichot's information were at variance. According to one, Epreville was the ancient Sprevilla; the other derived the name from Aprivilla. On our first visit we took a little train in the opposite direction from Féterne, that is to say towards Grattevast. But we were in the dog days and it had been a terrible strain simply to go out of doors immediately after luncheon. I should have preferred not to start so soon; the luminous and burning air provoked thoughts of indolence and cool retreats. It filled my mother's room and mine, according to their exposure, at varying temperatures, like rooms in a Turkish bath. Mamma's dressing-room, festooned by the sun with a dazzling, Moorish whiteness, appeared to be sunk at the bottom of a well, because of the four plastered walls on which it looked out, while far above, in the empty space, the sky, whose fleecy white waves one saw slip past, one behind another, seemed (because of the longing that one felt), whether built upon a terrace or seen reversed in a mirror hung above the window, a tank filled with blue water, reserved for bathers. Notwithstanding this scorching temperature, we had taken the one o'clock train. But Albertine had been very hot in the carriage, hotter still in the long walk across country, and I was afraid of her catching cold when she proceeded to sit still in that damp hollow where the sun's rays did not penetrate. Having, on the other hand, as long ago as our first visits to Elstir, made up my mind that she would appreciate not merely luxury but even a certain degree of comfort of which her want of money deprived her, I had made arrangements with a Balbec jobmaster that a carriage was to be sent every day to take us out. To escape from the heat we took the road through the forest of Chantepie. The invisibility of the innumerable birds, some of them almost sea-birds, that conversed with one another from the trees on either side of us, gave the same impression of repose that one has when one shuts one's eyes. By Albertine's side, enchained by her arms within the carriage, I listened to these Oceanides. And when by chance I caught sight of one of these musicians as he flitted from one leaf to the shelter of another, there was so little apparent connexion between him and his songs that I could not believe that I beheld their cause in the little body, fluttering, humble, startled and unseeing. The carriage could not take us all the way to the church. I stopped it when we had passed through Quetteholme and bade Albertine good-bye. For she had alarmed me by saying to me of this church as of other buildings, of certain

pictures: “What a pleasure it would be to see that with you!” This pleasure was one that I did not feel myself capable of giving her. I felt it myself in front of beautiful things only if I was alone or pretended to be alone and did not speak. But since she supposed that she might, thanks to me, feel sensations of art which are not communicated thus — I thought it more prudent to say that I must leave her, would come back to fetch her at the end of the day, but that in the meantime I must go back with the carriage to pay a call on Mme. Verdurin or on the Cambremers, or even spend an hour with Mamma at Balbec, but never farther afield. To begin with, that is to say. For, Albertine having once said to me petulantly: “It’s a bore that Nature has arranged things so badly and put Saint-Jean de la Haise in one direction, la Raspelière in another, so that you’re imprisoned for the whole day in the part of the country you’ve chosen;” as soon as the toque and veil had come I ordered, to my eventual undoing, a motor-car from Saint-Fargeau (*Sanctus Ferreolus*, according to the curé’s book). Albertine, whom I had kept in ignorance and who had come to call for me, was surprised when she heard in front of the hotel the purr of the engine, delighted when she learned that this motor was for ourselves. I made her come upstairs for a moment to my room. She jumped for joy. “We are going to pay a call on the Verdurins.” “Yes, but you’d better not go dressed like that since you are going to have your motor. There, you will look better in these.” And I brought out the toque and veil which I had hidden. “They’re for me? Oh! You are an angel,” she cried, throwing her arms round my neck. Aimé who met us on the stairs, proud of Albertine’s smart attire and of our means of transport, for these vehicles were still comparatively rare at Balbec, gave himself the pleasure of coming downstairs behind us. Albertine, anxious to display herself in her new garments, asked me to have the car opened, as we could shut it later on when we wished to be more private. “Now then,” said Aimé to the driver, with whom he was not acquainted and who had not stirred, “don’t you (*tu*) hear, you’re to open your roof?” For Aimé, sophisticated by hotel life, in which moreover he had won his way to exalted rank, was not as shy as the cab driver to whom Françoise was a ‘lady’; notwithstanding the want of any formal introduction, plebeians whom he had never seen before he addressed as tu, though it was hard to say whether this was aristocratic disdain on his part or democratic fraternity. “I am engaged,” replied the chauffeur, who did not know me by sight. “I am ordered for Mlle. Simonet. I can’t take this gentleman.” Aimé burst out laughing: “Why, you great pumpkin,” he said to the driver, whom he at once convinced, “this is Mademoiselle Simonet, and Monsieur, who tells you to open the roof of your

car, is the person who has engaged you." And as Aimé, although personally he had no feeling for Albertine, was for my sake proud of the garments she was wearing, he whispered to the chauffeur: "Don't get the chance of driving a Princess like that every day, do you?" On this first occasion it was not I alone that was able to go to la Raspelière as I did on other days, while Albertine painted; she decided to go there with me. She did indeed think that we might stop here and there on our way, but supposed it to be impossible to start by going to Saint-Jean de la Haise. That is to say in another direction, and to make an excursion which seemed to be reserved for a different day. She learned on the contrary from the driver that nothing could be easier than to go to Saint-Jean, which he could do in twenty minutes, and that we might stay there if we chose for hours, or go on much farther, for from Quetteholme to la Raspelière would not take more than thirty-five minutes. We realised this as soon as the vehicle, starting off, covered in one bound twenty paces of an excellent horse. Distances are only the relation of space to time and vary with that relation. We express the difficulty that we have in getting to a place in a system of miles or kilometres which becomes false as soon as that difficulty decreases. Art is modified by it also, when a village which seemed to be in a different world from some other village becomes its neighbour in a landscape whose dimensions are altered. In any case the information that there may perhaps exist a universe in which two and two make five and the straight line is not the shortest way between two points would have astonished Albertine far less than to hear the driver say that it was easy to go in a single afternoon to Saint-Jean and la Raspelière, Douville and Quetteholme, Saint-Mars le Vieux and Saint-Mars le Vêtu, Gourville and Old Balbec, Tourville and Féterne, prisoners hitherto as hermetically confined in the cells of distinct days as long ago were Méséglise and Guermantes, upon which the same eyes could not gaze in the course of one afternoon, delivered now by the giant with the seven-league boots, came and clustered about our tea-time their towers and steeples, their old gardens which the encroaching wood sprang back to reveal.

Coming to the foot of the cliff road, the car took it in its stride, with a continuous sound like that of a knife being ground, while the sea falling away grew broader beneath us. The old rustic houses of Montsurvent ran towards us, clasping to their bosoms vine or rose-bush; the firs of la Raspelière, more agitated than when the evening breeze was rising, ran in every direction to escape from us and a new servant whom I had never seen before came to open the door for us on the terrace, while the gardener's son, betraying a precocious

bent, devoured the machine with his gaze. As it was not a Monday we did not know whether we should find Mme. Verdurin, for except upon that day, when he was at home, it was unsafe to call upon her without warning. No doubt she was ‘principally’ at home, but this expression, which Mme. Swann employed at the time when she too was seeking to form her little clan, and to draw visitors to herself without moving towards them, an expression which she interpreted as meaning ‘on principle,’ meant no more than ‘as a general rule,’ that is to say with frequent exceptions. For not only did Mme. Verdurin like going out, but she carried her duties as a hostess to extreme lengths, and when she had had people to luncheon, immediately after the coffee, liqueurs and cigarettes (notwithstanding the first somnolent effects of the heat and of digestion in which they would have preferred to watch through the leafy boughs of the terrace the Jersey packet passing over the enamelled sea), the programme included a series of excursions in the course of which her guests, installed by force in carriages, were conveyed, willy-nilly, to look at one or other of the views that abound in the neighbourhood of Douville.

This second part of the entertainment was, as it happened (once the effort to rise and enter the carriage had been made), no less satisfactory than the other to the guests, already prepared by the succulent dishes, the vintage wines or sparkling cider to let themselves be easily intoxicated by the purity of the breeze and the magnificence of the views. Mme. Verdurin used to make strangers visit these rather as though they were portions (more or less detached) of her property, which you could not help going to see the moment you came to luncheon with her and which conversely you would never have known had you not been entertained by the Mistress. This claim to arrogate to herself the exclusive right over walks and drives, as over Morel’s and formerly Dechambre’s playing, and to compel the landscapes to form part of the little clan, was not for that matter so absurd as it appears at first sight. Mme. Verdurin deplored the want of taste which, according to her, the Cambremers shewed in the furnishing of la Raspelière and the arrangement of the garden, but still more their want of initiative in the excursions that they took or made their guests take in the surrounding country. Just as, according to her, la Raspelière was only beginning to become what it should always have been now that it was the asylum of the little clan, so she insisted that the Cambremers, perpetually exploring in their barouche, along the railway line, by the shore, the one ugly road that there was in the district, had been living in the place all their lives but did not know it. There was a grain of truth in this assertion. From force of habit, lack of

imagination, want of interest in a country which seemed hackneyed because it was so near, the Cambremers when they left their home went always to the same places and by the same roads. To be sure they laughed heartily at the Verdurins' offer to shew them their native country. But when it came to that, they and even their coachman would have been incapable of taking us to the splendid, more or less secret places, to which M. Verdurin brought us, now forcing the barrier of a private but deserted property upon which other people would not have thought it possible to venture, now leaving the carriage to follow a path which was not wide enough for wheeled traffic, but in either case with the certain recompense of a marvellous view. Let us say in passing that the garden at la Raspelière was in a sense a compendium of all the excursions to be made in a radius of many miles. For one thing because of its commanding position, overlooking on one side the valley, on the other the sea, and also because, on one and the same side, the seaward side for instance, clearings had been made through the trees in such a way that from one point you embraced one horizon, from another another. There was at each of these points of view a bench; you went and sat down in turn upon the bench from which there was the view of Balbec, or Parville, or Douville. Even to command a single view one bench would have been placed more or less on the edge of the cliff, another farther back. From the latter you had a foreground of verdure and a horizon which seemed already the vastest imaginable, but which became infinitely larger if, continuing along a little path, you went to the next bench from which you scanned the whole amphitheatre of the sea. There you could make out exactly the sound of the waves which did not penetrate to the more secluded parts of the garden, where the sea was still visible but no longer audible. These resting-places bore at la Raspelière among the occupants of the house the name of 'views.' And indeed they assembled round the mansion the finest views of the neighbouring places, coastline or forest, seen greatly diminished by distance, as Hadrian collected in his villa reduced models of the most famous monuments of different countries. The name that followed the word 'view' was not necessarily that of a place on the coast, but often that of the opposite shore of the bay which you could make out, standing out in a certain relief notwithstanding the extent of the panorama. Just as you took a book from M. Verdurin's library to go and read for an hour at the 'view of Balbec,' so if the sky was clear the liqueurs would be served at the 'view of Rivebelle,' on condition however that the wind was not too strong, for, in spite of the trees planted on either side, the air up there was keen. To come back to the carriage parties that Mme. Verdurin used to organise for the afternoons, the Mistress, if

on her return she found the cards of some social butterfly ‘on a flying visit to the coast,’ would pretend to be overjoyed, but was actually broken-hearted at having missed his visit and (albeit people at this date came only to ‘see the house’ or to make the acquaintance for a day of a woman whose artistic salon was famous, but outside the pale in Paris) would at once make M. Verdurin invite him to dine on the following Wednesday. As the tourist was often obliged to leave before that day, or was afraid to be out late, Mme. Verdurin had arranged that on Mondays she was always to be found at teatime. These tea-parties were not at all large, and I had known more brilliant gatherings of the sort in Paris, at the Princesse de Guermantes’s, at Mme. de Gallifet’s or Mme. d’Arpajon’s. But this was not Paris, and the charm of the setting enhanced, in my eyes, not merely the pleasantness of the party but the merits of the visitors. A meeting with some social celebrity, which in Paris would have given me no pleasure, but which at la Raspelière, whither he had come from a distance by Féterne or the forest of Chantepie, changed in character, in importance, became an agreeable incident. Sometimes it was a person whom I knew quite well and would not have gone a yard to meet at the Swanns’. But his name sounded differently upon this cliff, like the name of an actor whom one has constantly heard in a theatre, printed upon the announcement, in a different colour, of an extraordinary gala performance, where his notoriety is suddenly multiplied by the unexpectedness of the rest. As in the country people behave without ceremony, the social celebrity often took it upon him to bring the friends with whom he was staying, murmuring the excuse in Mme. Verdurin’s ear that he could not leave them behind as he was living in their house; to his hosts on the other hand he pretended to offer, as a sort of courtesy, the distraction, in a monotonous seaside life, of being taken to a centre of wit and intellect, of visiting a magnificent mansion and of making an excellent tea. This composed at once an assembly of several persons of semi-distinction; and if a little slice of garden with a few trees, which would seem shabby in the country, acquires an extraordinary charm in the Avenue Gabriel or let us say the Rue de Monceau, where only multi-millionaires can afford such a luxury, inversely gentlemen who are of secondary importance at a Parisian party stood out at their full value on a Monday afternoon at la Raspelière. No sooner did they sit down at the table covered with a cloth embroidered in red, beneath the painted panels, to partake of the rock cakes, Norman puff pastry, tartlets shaped like boats filled with cherries like beads of coral, ‘diplomatic’ cakes, than these guests were subjected, by the proximity of the great bowl of azure upon which the window opened, and which

you could not help seeing when you looked at them, to a profound alteration, a transmutation which changed them into something more precious than before. What was more, even before you set eyes on them, when you came on a Monday to Mme. Verdurin's, people who in Paris would scarcely turn their heads to look, so familiar was the sight of a string of smart carriages waiting outside a great house, felt their hearts throb at the sight of the two or three broken-down dog-carts drawn up in front of la Raspelière, beneath the tall firs. No doubt this was because the rustic setting was different, and social impressions thanks to this transposition regained a kind of novelty. It was also because the broken-down carriage that one hired to pay a call upon Mme. Verdurin called to mind a pleasant drive and a costly bargain struck with a coachman who had demanded 'so much' for the whole day. But the slight stir of curiosity with regard to fresh arrivals, whom it was still impossible to distinguish, made everybody ask himself: "Who can this be?" a question which it was difficult to answer, when one did not know who might have come down to spend a week with the Cambremers or elsewhere, but which people always enjoy putting to themselves in rustic, solitary lives where a meeting with a human creature whom one has not seen for a long time ceases to be the tiresome affair that it is in the life of Paris, and forms a delicious break in the empty monotony of lives that are too lonely, in which even the postman's knock becomes a pleasure. And on the day on which we arrived in a motor-car at la Raspelière, as it was not Monday, M. and Mme. Verdurin must have been devoured by that craving to see people which attacks men and women and inspires a longing to throw himself out of the window in the patient who has been shut up away from his family and friends, for a cure of strict isolation. For the new and more swift-footed servant, who had already made himself familiar with these expressions, having replied that "if Madame has not gone out she must be at the view of Douville," and that he would go and look for her, came back immediately to tell us that she was coming to welcome us. We found her slightly dishevelled, for she came from the flower beds, farmyard and kitchen garden, where she had gone to feed her peacocks and poultry, to hunt for eggs, to gather fruit and flowers to 'make her table-centre,' which would suggest her park in miniature; but on the table it conferred the distinction of making it support the burden of only such things as were useful and good to eat; for round those other presents from the garden which were the pears, the whipped eggs, rose the tall stems of bugloss, carnations, roses and coreopsis, between which one saw, as between blossoming boundary posts, move from one to another beyond the glazed windows, the ships at sea. From the

astonishment which M. and Mme. Verdurin, interrupted while arranging their flowers to receive the visitors that had been announced, shewed upon finding that these visitors were merely Albertine and myself, it was easy to see that the new servant, full of zeal but not yet familiar with my name, had repeated it wrongly and that Mme. Verdurin, hearing the names of guests whom she did not know, had nevertheless bidden him let them in, in her need of seeing somebody, no matter whom. And the new servant stood contemplating this spectacle from the door in order to learn what part we played in the household. Then he made off at a run, taking long strides, for he had entered upon his duties only the day before. When Albertine had quite finished displaying her toque and veil to the Verdurins, she gave me a warning look to remind me that we had not too much time left for what we meant to do. Mme. Verdurin begged us to stay to tea, but we refused, when all of a sudden a suggestion was mooted which would have made an end of all the pleasures that I promised myself from my drive with Albertine: the Mistress, unable to face the thought of tearing herself from us, or perhaps of allowing a novel distraction to escape, decided to accompany us. Accustomed for years past to the experience that similar offers on her part were not well received, and being probably dubious whether this offer would find favour with us, she concealed beneath an excessive assurance the timidity that she felt when addressing us and, without even appearing to suppose that there could be any doubt as to our answer, asked us no question, but said to her husband, speaking of Albertine and myself, as though she were conferring a favour on us: “I shall see them home, myself.” At the same time there hovered over her lips a smile that did not belong to them, a smile which I had already seen on the faces of certain people when they said to Bergotte with a knowledgeable air: “I have bought your book, it’s not bad,” one of those collective, universal smiles which, when they feel the need of them — as we make use of railways and removal vans — individuals borrow, except a few who are extremely refined, like Swann or M. de Charlus on whose lips I have never seen that smile settle. From that moment my visit was poisoned. I pretended not to have understood. A moment later it became evident that M. Verdurin was to be one of the party. “But it will be too far for M. Verdurin,” I objected. “Not at all,” replied Mme. Verdurin with a condescending, cheerful air, “he says it will amuse him immensely to go with you young people over a road he has travelled so many times; if necessary, he will sit beside the engineer, that doesn’t frighten him, and we shall come back quietly by the train like a good married couple. Look at him, he’s quite delighted.” She seemed to be speaking of an aged and

famous painter full of friendliness, who, younger than the youngest, takes a delight in scribbling figures on paper to make his grandchildren laugh. What added to my sorrow was that Albertine seemed not to share it and to find some amusement in the thought of dashing all over the countryside like this with the Verdurins. As for myself, the pleasure that I had vowed that I would take with her was so imperious that I refused to allow the Mistress to spoil it; I invented falsehoods which the irritating threats of Mme. Verdurin made excusable, but which Albertine, alas, contradicted. “But we have a call to pay,” I said. “What call?” asked Albertine. “You shall hear about it later, there’s no getting out of it.” “Very well, we can wait outside,” said Mme. Verdurin, resigned to anything. At the last minute my anguish at seeing wrested from me a happiness for which I had so longed gave me the courage to be impolite. I refused point blank, alleging in Mme. Verdurin’s ear that because of some trouble which had befallen Albertine and about which she wished to consult me, it was absolutely necessary that I should be alone with her. The Mistress appeared vexed: “All right, we shan’t come,” she said to me in a voice tremulous with rage. I felt her to be so angry that, so as to appear to be giving way a little: “But we might perhaps...” I began. “No,” she replied, more furious than ever, “when I say no, I mean no.” I supposed that I was out of favour with her, but she called us back at the door to urge us not to ‘fail’ on the following Wednesday, and not to come with that contraption, which was dangerous at night, but by the train with the little group, and she made me stop the car, which was moving down hill across the park, because the footman had forgotten to put in the hood the slice of tart and the shortbread which she had had made into a parcel for us. We started off, escorted for a moment by the little houses that came running to meet us with their flowers. The face of the countryside seemed to us entirely changed, so far, in the topographical image that we form in our minds of separate places, is the notion of space from being the most important factor. We have said that the notion of time segregates them even farther. It is not the only factor either. Certain places which we see always in isolation seem to us to have no common measure with the rest, to be almost outside the world, like those people whom we have known in exceptional periods of our life, during our military service, in our childhood, and whom we associate with nothing. In my first year at Balbec there was a piece of high ground to which Mme. de Villeparisis liked to take us because from it you saw only the water and the woods, and which was called Beaumont. As the road that she took to approach it, and preferred to other routes because of its old trees, went up hill all the way, her carriage was obliged to go at a crawling

pace and took a very long time. When we reached the top we used to alight, stroll about for a little, get into the carriage again, return by the same road, without seeing a single village, a single country house. I knew that Beaumont was something very special, very remote, very high, I had no idea of the direction in which it was to be found, having never taken the Beaumont road to go anywhere else; besides, it took a very long time to get there in a carriage. It was obviously in the same Department (or in the same Province) as Balbec, but was situated for me on another plane, enjoyed a special privilege of extra-territoriality. But the motor-car respects no mystery, and, having passed beyond Incarville, whose houses still danced before my eyes, as we were going down the cross road that leads to Parville (*Paterni villa*), catching sight of the sea from a natural terrace over which we were passing, I asked the name of the place, and before the chauffeur had time to reply recognised Beaumont, close by which I passed thus unconsciously whenever I took the little train, for it was within two minutes of Parville. Like an officer of my regiment who might have seemed to me a creature apart, too kindly and simple to be of a great family, too remote already and mysterious to be simply of a great family, and of whom I was afterwards to learn that he was the brother-in-law, the cousin of people with whom I was dining, so Beaumont, suddenly brought in contact with places from which I supposed it to be so distinct, lost its mystery and took its place in the district, making me think with terror that Madame Bovary and the Sanseverina might perhaps have seemed to me to be like ordinary people, had I met them elsewhere than in the close atmosphere of a novel. It may be thought that my love of magic journeys by train ought to have prevented me from sharing Albertine's wonder at the motor-car which takes even the invalid wherever he wishes to go and destroys our conception — which I had held hitherto — of position in space as the individual mark, the irreplaceable essence of irremovable beauties. And no doubt this position in space was not to the motor-car, as it had been to the railway train, when I came from Paris to Balbec, a goal exempt from the contingencies of ordinary life, almost ideal at the moment of departure, and, as it remains so at that of arrival, at our arrival in that great dwelling where no one dwells and which bears only the name of the town, the station, seeming to promise at last the accessibility of the town, as though the station were its materialisation. No, the motor-car did not convey us thus by magic into a town which we saw at first in the whole that is summarised by ite name, and with the illusions of a spectator in a theatre. It made us enter that theatre by the wings which were the streets, stopped to ask the way of an inhabitant. But, as a

compensation for so familiar a progress one has the gropings of the chauffeur uncertain of his way and retracing his course, the ‘general post’ of perspective which sets a castle dancing about with a hill, a church and the sea, while one draws nearer to it, in spite of its vain efforts to hide beneath its primeval foliage; those ever narrowing circles which the motor-car describes round a spellbound town which darts off in every direction to escape it and upon which finally it drops down, straight, into the heart of the valley where it lies palpitating on the ground; so that this position in space, this unique point, which the motor-car seems to have stripped of the mystery of express trains, it gives us on the contrary the impression of discovering, of determining for ourselves as with a compass, of helping us to feel with a more fondly exploring hand, with a finer precision, the true geometry, the fair measure of the earth.

What unfortunately I did not know at that moment and did not learn until more than two years later was that one of the chauffeur’s patrons was M. de Charlus, and that Morel, instructed to pay him and keeping part of the money for himself (making the chauffeur triple and quintuple the mileage), had become very friendly with him (while pretending not to know him before other people) and made use of his car for long journeys. If I had known this at the time, and that the confidence which the Verdurins were presently to feel in this chauffeur came, unknown to them, from that source, perhaps many of the sorrows of my life in Paris, in the year that followed, much of my trouble over Albertine would have been avoided, but I had not the slightest suspicion of it. In themselves M. de Charlus’s excursions by motor-car with Morel were of no direct interest to me. They were moreover confined as a rule to a luncheon or dinner in some restaurant along the coast where M. de Charlus was regarded as an old and penniless servant and Morel, whose duty it was to pay the bill, as a too kind-hearted gentleman. I report the conversation at one of these meals, which may give an idea of the others. It was in a restaurant of elongated shape at Saint-Mars le Vêtu. “Can’t you get them to remove this thing?” M. de Charlus asked Morel, as though appealing to an intermediary without having to address the staff directly. ‘This thing’ was a vase containing three withered roses with which a well-meaning head waiter had seen fit to decorate the table. “Yes...” said Morel in embarrassment. “You don’t like roses?” “My request ought on the contrary to prove that I do like them, since there are no roses here” (Morel appeared surprised) “but as a matter of fact I do not care much for them. I am rather sensitive to names; and whenever a rose is at all beautiful, one learns that it is called Baronne de Rothschild or Maréchale Niel, which casts a chill. Do you like

names? Have you found beautiful titles for your little concert numbers?" "There is one that is called *Poème triste*." "That is horrible," replied M. de Charlus in a shrill voice that rang out like a blow. "But I ordered champagne?" he said to the head waiter who had supposed he was obeying the order by placing by the diners two glasses of foaming liquid. "Yes, Sir." "Take away that filth, which has no connexion with the worst champagne in the world. It is the emetic known as *cup*, which consists, as a rule, of three rotten strawberries swimming in a mixture of vinegar and soda-water. Yes," he went on, turning again to Morel, "you don't seem to know what a title is. And even in the interpretation of the things you play best, you seem not to be aware of the mediumistic side." "You mean to say?" asked Morel, who, not having understood one word of what the Baron had said, was afraid that he might be missing something of importance, such as an invitation to luncheon. M. de Charlus having failed to regard "You mean to say?" as a question, Morel, having in Consequence received no answer, thought it best to change the conversation and to give it a sensual turn: "There, look at the fair girl selling the flowers you don't like; I'm certain she's got a little mistress. And the old woman dining at the table at the end, too." "But how do you know all that?" asked M. de Charlus, amazed at Morel's intuition. "Oh! I can spot them in an instant. If we went out together in a crowd, you would see that I never make a mistake." And anyone looking at Morel at that moment, with his girlish air enshrined in his masculine beauty, would have understood the obscure divination which made him no less obvious to certain women than them to him. He was anxious to supplant Jupien, vaguely desirous of adding to his regular income the profits which, he supposed, the tailor derived from the Baron. "And with boys I am surer still, I could save you from making any mistake. We shall be having the fair soon at Balbec, we shall find lots of things there. And in Paris too, you'll see, you'll have a fine time." But the inherited caution of a servant made him give a different turn to the sentence on which he had already embarked. So that M. de Charlus supposed that he was still referring to girls. "Listen," said Morel, anxious to excite in a fashion which he considered less compromising for himself (albeit it was actually more immoral) the Baron's senses, "what I should like would be to find a girl who was quite pure, make her fall in love with me, and take her virginity." M. de Charlus could not refrain from pinching Morel's ear affectionately, but added innocently: "What good would that be to you? If you took her maidenhead, you would be obliged to marry her." "Marry her?" cried Morel, guessing that the Baron was fuddled, or else giving no thought to the man, more scrupulous in reality than he supposed,

to whom he was speaking. “Marry her? Balls! I should promise, but once the little operation was performed, I should clear out and leave her.” M. de Charlus was in the habit, when a fiction was capable of causing him a momentary sensual pleasure, of believing in its truth, while keeping himself free to withdraw his credulity altogether a minute later, when his pleasure was at an end. “You would really do that?” he said to Morel with a laugh, squeezing him more tightly still. “And why not?” said Morel, seeing that he was not shocking the Baron by continuing to expound to him what was indeed one of his desires. “It is dangerous,” said M. de Charlus. “I should have my kit packed and ready, and buzz off and leave no address.” “And what about me?” asked M. de Charlus. “I should take you with me, of course,” Morel made haste to add, never having thought of what would become of the Baron who was the least of his responsibilities. “I say, there’s a kid I should love to try that game on, she’s a little seamstress who keeps a shop in M. le Due’s *hôtel*.” “Jupien’s girl,” the Baron exclaimed, as the wine-waiter entered the room. “Oh! Never,” he added, whether because the presence of a third person had cooled his ardour, or because even in this sort of black mass in which he took a delight in defiling the most sacred things, he could not bring himself to allow the mention of people to whom he was bound by ties of friendship. “Jupien is a good man, the child is charming, it would be a shame to make them unhappy.” Morel felt that he had gone too far and was silent, but his gaze continued to fix itself in imagination upon the girl for whose benefit he had once begged me to address him as ‘dear great master’ and from whom he had ordered a waistcoat. An industrious worker, the child had not taken any holiday, but I learned afterwards that while the violinist was in the neighbourhood of Balbec she never ceased to think of his handsome face, ennobled by the accident that having seen Morel in my company she had taken him for a ‘gentleman.’

“I never heard Chopin play,” said the Baron, “and yet I might have done so, I took lessons from Stamati, but he forbade me to go and hear the Master of the Nocturnes at my aunt Chimay’s.” “That was damned silly of him,” exclaimed Morel. “On the contrary,” M. de Charlus retorted warmly, in a shrill voice. “He shewed his intelligence. He had realised that I had a ‘nature’ and that I would succumb to Chopin’s influence. It made no difference, because when I was quite young I gave up music, and everything else, for that matter. Besides one can more or less imagine him,” he added in a slow, nasal, drawling tone, “there are still people who did hear him, who can give you an idea. However, Chopin was only an excuse to come back to the mediumistic aspect which you are

neglecting."

The reader will observe that, after an interpolation of common parlance, M. de Charlus had suddenly become as precious and haughty in his speech as ever. The idea of Morel's 'dropping' without compunction a girl whom he had outraged had given him a sudden and entire pleasure. From that moment his sensual appetites were satisfied for a time and the sadist (a true medium, he, if you like) who had for a few moments taken the place of M. de Charlus had fled, leaving a clear field for the real M. de Charlus, full of artistic refinement, sensibility, goodness. "You were playing the other day the transposition for the piano of the Fifteenth Quartet, which is absurd in itself because nothing could be less pianistic. It is meant for people whose ears are hurt by the too highly strained chords of the glorious Deaf One. Whereas it is precisely that almost bitter mysticism that is divine. In any case you played it very badly and altered all the movements. You ought to play it as though you were composing it: the young Morel, afflicted with a momentary deafness and with a non-existent genius stands for an instant motionless. Then, seized by the divine frenzy, he plays, he composes the opening bars. After which, exhausted by this initial effort, he gives way, letting droop his charming forelock to please Mme. Verdurîn, and, what is more, gives himself time to recreate the prodigious quantity of grey matter which he has commandeered for the Pythian objectivation. Then, having regained his strength, seized by a fresh and overmastering inspiration, he flings himself upon the sublime, imperishable phrase which the virtuoso of Berlin" (we suppose M. de Charlus to have meant by this expression Mendelssohn) "was to imitate without ceasing. It is in this, the only really transcendent and animating fashion, that I shall make you play in Paris." When M. de Charlus gave him advice of this sort, Morel was far more alarmed than when he saw the head waiter remove his scorned roses and 'cup,' for he asked himself with anxiety what effect it would create among his 'class.' But he was unable to dwell upon these reflexions, for M. de Charlus said to him imperiously: "Ask the head waiter if he has a Bon Chrétien." "A good Christian, I don't understand." "Can't you see we've reached the dessert, it's a pear. You may be sure, Mme. de Cambremer has them in her garden, for the Comtesse d'Escarbagnas whose double she is had them. M. Thibaudier sends her them, saying: 'Here is a Bon Chrétien which is worth tasting.'" "No, I didn't know." "I can see that you know nothing. If you have never even read Molière.... Oh, well, since you are no more capable of ordering food than of anything else, ask simply for a pear which is grown in this neighbourhood, the Louise-Bonne

d'Avranches." "The?" "Wait a minute, since you are so stupid, I shall ask him myself for others, which I prefer. Waiter, have you any Doyennée des Cornices? Charlie, you must read the exquisite passage about that pear by the Duchesse Emilie de Clermont-Tonnerre." "No, Sir, there aren't any." "Have you Triomphe de Jodoigne?" "No, Sir." "Any Virginie-Dallet? Or Passe-Colmar? No? Very well, since you've nothing, we may as well go. The Duchesse d'Angoulême is not in season yet, come along, Charlie." Unfortunately for M. de Charlus, his want of common sense, perhaps too the chastity of what were probably his relations with Morel, made him go out of his way at this period to shower upon the violinist strange bounties which the other was incapable of understanding, and to which his nature, impulsive in its own way, but mean and ungrateful, could respond only by a harshness or a violence that were steadily intensified and plunged M. de Charlus — formerly so proud, now quite timid — in fits of genuine despair. We shall see how, in the smallest matters, Morel, who fancied himself a M. de Charlus a thousand times more important, completely misunderstood, by taking it literally, the Baron's arrogant information with regard to the aristocracy. Let us for the moment say simply this, while Albertine waits for me at Saint-Jean de la Haise, that if there was one thing which Morel set above nobility (and this was in itself distinctly noble, especially in a person whose pleasure was to pursue little girls — on the sly — with the chauffeur), it was his artistic reputation and what the others might think of him in the violin class. No doubt it was an ugly trait in his character that because he felt M. de Charlus to be entirely devoted to him he appeared to disown him, to make fun of him, in the same way as, when I had promised not to reveal the secret of his father's position with my great-uncle, he treated me with contempt. But on the other hand his name, as that of a recognised artist, Morel, appeared to him superior to a 'name.' And when M. de Charlus, in his dreams of Platonic affection, tried to make him adopt one of his family titles, Morel stoutly refused.

When Albertine thought it better to remain at Saint-Jean de la Haise and paint, I would take the car, and it was not merely to Gourville and Féterne, but to Saint-Mars le Vêtu and as far as Criquetot that I was able to penetrate before returning to fetch her. While pretending to be occupied with anything rather than herself, and to be obliged to forsake her for other pleasures, I thought only of her. As often as not I went no farther than the great plain which overlooks Gourville, and as it resembles slightly the plain that begins above Combray, in the direction of Méséglise, even at a considerable distance from Albertine, I had the joy of thinking that if my gaze could not reach her, still, travelling farther

than in my vision, that strong and gentle sea breeze which was sweeping past me must be flowing down, without anything to arrest it as far as Quetteholme, until it stirred the branches of the trees that bury Saint-Jean de la Haise in their foliage, caressing the face of my mistress, and must thus be extending a double tie between her and myself in this retreat indefinitely enlarged, but without danger, as in those games in which two children find themselves momentarily out of sight and earshot of one another, and yet, while far apart, remain together. I returned by those roads from which there is a view of the sea, and on which in the past, before it appeared among the branches, I used to shut my eyes to reflect that what I was going to see was indeed the plaintive ancestress of the earth, pursuing as in the days when no living creature yet existed its lunatic, immemorial agitation. Now, these roads were no longer, simply the means of rejoining Albertine; when I recognised each of them in their uniformity, knowing how far they would run in a straight line, where they would turn, I remembered that I had followed them while I thought of Mlle, de Stermaria, and also that this same eagerness to find Albertine I had felt in Paris as I walked the streets along which Mme. de Guermantes might pass; they assumed for me the profound monotony, the moral significance of a sort of ruled line that my character must follow. It was natural, and yet it was not without importance; they reminded me that it was my fate to pursue only phantoms, creatures whose reality existed to a great extent in my imagination; there are people indeed — and this had been my case from my childhood — for whom all the things that have a fixed value, assessable by others, fortune, success, high positions, do not count; what they must have, is phantoms. They sacrifice all the rest, leave no stone unturned, make everything else subservient to the capture of some phantom. But this soon fades away; then they run after another, prepared to return later on to the first. It was not the first time that I had gone in quest of Albertine, the girl I had seen that first year outlined against the sea. Other women, it is true, had been interposed between the Albertine whom I had first loved and her from whom I was scarcely separated at this moment; other women, notably the Duchesse de Guermantes. But, the reader will say, why give yourself so much anxiety with regard to Gilberte, take so much trouble over Madame de Guermantes, if, when you have become the friend of the latter, it is with the sole result of thinking no more of her, but only of Albertine? Swann, before his own death, might have answered the question, he who had been a lover of phantoms. Of phantoms pursued, forgotten, sought afresh sometimes for a single meeting and in order to establish contact with an unreal life which at once escaped, these Balbec roads

were full. When I thought that their trees, pear trees, apple trees, tamarisks, would outlive me, I seemed to receive from them the warning to set myself to work at last, before the hour should strike of rest everlasting.

I left the carriage at Quetteholme, ran down the sunken path, crossed the brook by a plank and found Albertine painting in front of the church all spires and crockets, thorny and red, blossoming like a rose bush. The lantern alone shewed an unbroken front; and the smiling surface of the stone was abloom with angels who continued, before the twentieth century couple that we were, to celebrate, taper in hand, the ceremonies of the thirteenth. It was they that Albertine was endeavouring to portray on her prepared canvas, and, imitating Elstir, she was laying on the paint in sweeping strokes, trying to obey the noble rhythm set, the great master had told her, by those angels so different from any that he knew. Then she collected her things. Leaning upon one another we walked back up the sunken path, leaving the little church, as quiet as though it had never seen us, to listen to the perpetual sound of the brook. Presently the car started, taking us home by a different way. We passed Marcouville l'Orgueilleuse. Over its church, half new, half restored, the setting sun spread its patina as fine as that of centuries. Through it the great has-reliefs seemed to be visible only through a floating layer, half liquid, half luminous; the Blessed Virgin, Saint Elizabeth, Saint Joachim swam in the impalpable tide, almost on dry land, on the water's or the sunlight's surface. Rising in a warm dust, the many modern statues reached, on their pillars, halfway up the golden webs of sunset. In front of the church a tall cypress seemed to be in a sort of consecrated enclosure. We left the car for a moment to look at it and strolled for a little. No less than of her limbs, Albertine was directly conscious of her toque of Leghorn straw and of the silken veil (which were for her the source of no less satisfaction), and derived from them, as we strolled round the church, a different sort of impetus, revealed by a contentment which was inert but in which I found a certain charm; veil and toque which were but a recent, adventitious part of my friend, but a part that was already dear to me, as I followed its trail with my eyes, past the cypress in the evening air. She herself could not see it, but guessed that the effect was pleasing, for she smiled at me, harmonising the poise of her head with the headgear that completed it. "I don't like it, it's restored," she said to me, pointing to the church and remembering what Elstir had said to her about the priceless, inimitable beauty of old stone. Albertine could tell a restoration at a glance. One could not help feeling surprised at the sureness of the taste she had already acquired in architecture, as contrasted with the deplorable taste she still

retained in music. I cared no more than Elstir for this church, it was with no pleasure to myself that its sunlit front had come and posed before my eyes, and I had got out of the car to examine it only out of politeness to Albertine. I found, however, that the great impressionist had contradicted himself; why exalt this fetish of its objective architectural value, and not take into account the transfiguration of the church by the sunset? “No, certainly not,” said Albertine, “I don’t like it; I like its name *orgueilleuse*. But what I must remember to ask Brichot is why Saint-Mars is called *le Vêtu*. We shall be going there next, shan’t we?” she said, gazing at me out of her black eyes over which her toque was pulled down, like her little polo cap long ago. Her veil floated behind her. I got back into the car with her, happy in the thought that we should be going next day to Saint-Mars, where, in this blazing weather when one could think only of the delights of a bath, the two ancient steeples, salmon-pink, with their lozenge-shaped tiles, gaping slightly as though for air, looked like a pair of old, sharp-snouted fish, coated in scales, moss-grown and red, which without seeming to move were rising in a blue, transparent water. On leaving Marcouville, to shorten the road, we turned aside at a crossroads where there is a farm. Sometimes Albertine made the car stop there and asked me to go alone to fetch, so that she might drink it in the car, a bottle of calvados or cider, which the people assured me was not effervescent, and which proceeded to drench us from head to foot. We sat pressed close together. The people of the farm could scarcely see Albertine in the closed car, I handed them back their bottles; we moved on again, as though to continue that private life by ourselves, that lovers’ existence which they might suppose us to lead, and of which this halt for refreshment had been only an insignificant moment; a supposition that would have appeared even less far-fetched if they had seen us after Albertine had drunk her bottle of cider; she seemed then positively unable to endure the existence of an interval between herself and me which as a rule did not trouble her; beneath her linen skirt her legs were pressed against mine, she brought close against my cheeks her own cheeks which had turned pale, warm and red over the cheekbones, with something ardent and faded about them such as one sees in girls from the slums. At such moments, almost as quickly as her personality, her voice changed also, she forsook her own voice to adopt another, raucous, bold, almost dissolute. Night began to fall. What a pleasure to feel her leaning against me, with her toque and her veil, reminding me that it is always thus, seated side by side, that we meet couples who are in love. I was perhaps in love with Albertine, but as I did not venture to let her see my love, although it existed in

me, it could only be like an abstract truth, of no value until one has succeeded in checking it by experiment; as it was, it seemed to me unrealisable and outside the plane of life. As for my jealousy, it urged me to leave Albertine as little as possible, although I knew that it would not be completely cured until I had parted from her for ever. I could even feel it in her presence, but would then take care that the circumstances should not be repeated which had aroused it. Once, for example, on a fine morning, we went to luncheon at Rivebelle. The great glazed doors of the dining-room and of that hall in the form of a corridor in which tea was served stood open revealing the sunlit lawns beyond, of which the huge restaurant seemed to form a part. The waiter with the flushed face and black hair that writhed like flames was flying from end to end of that vast expanse less rapidly than in the past, for he was no longer an assistant but was now in charge of a row of tables; nevertheless, owing to his natural activity, sometimes far off, in the dining-room, at other times nearer, but out of doors, serving visitors who had preferred to feed in the garden, one caught sight of him, now here, now there, like successive statues of a young god running, some in the interior, which for that matter was well lighted, of a mansion bounded by a vista of green grass, others beneath the trees, in the bright radiance of an open air life. For a moment he was close to ourselves. Albertine replied absent mindedly to what I had just said to her. She was gazing at him with rounded eyes. For a minute or two I felt that one may be close to the person whom one loves and yet not have her with one. They had the appearance of being engaged in a mysterious conversation, rendered mute by my presence, and the sequel possibly of meetings in the past of which I knew nothing, or merely of a glance that he had given her — at which I was the *terzo incomodo*, from whom the others try to hide things. Even when, forcibly recalled by his employer, he had withdrawn from us, Albertine while continuing her meal seemed to be regarding the restaurant and its gardens merely as a lighted running-track, on which there appeared here and there amid the varied scenery the swift-foot god with the black tresses. At one moment I asked myself whether she was not going to rise up and follow him, leaving me alone at my table. But in the days that followed I began to forget for ever this painful impression, for I had decided never to return to Rivebelle, I had extracted a promise from Albertine, who assured me that she had never been there before and would never return there. And I denied that the nimble-footed waiter had had eyes only for her, so that she should not believe that my company had deprived her of a pleasure. It happened now and again that I would revisit Rivebelle, but alone, and drink too much, as I had done there in

the past. As I drained a final glass I gazed at a round pattern painted on the white wall, concentrated upon it the pleasure that I felt. It alone in the world had any existence for me; I pursued it, touched it and lost it by turns with my wavering glance, and felt indifferent to the future, contenting myself with my painted pattern like a butterfly circling about a poised butterfly with which it is going to end its life in an act of supreme consummation. The moment was perhaps particularly well chosen for giving up a woman whom no very recent or very keen suffering obliged me to ask for this balm for a malady which they possess who have caused it. I was calmed by these very drives, which, even if I did not think of them at the moment save as a foretaste of a morrow which itself, notwithstanding the longing with which it filled me, was not to be different from to-day, had the charm of having been torn from the places which Albertine had frequented hitherto and where I had not been with her, her aunt's house, those of her girl friends. The charm not of a positive joy, but only of the calming of an anxiety, and quite strong nevertheless. For at an interval of a few days, when my thoughts turned to the farm outside which we had sat drinking cider, or simply to the stroll we had taken round Saint-Mars le Vêtu, remembering that Albertine had been walking by my side in her toque, the sense of her presence added of a sudden so strong a virtue to the trivial image of the modern church that at the moment when the sunlit front came thus of its own accord to pose before me in memory, it was like a great soothing compress laid upon my heart. I dropped Albertine at Parville, but only to join her again in the evening and lie stretched out by her side, in the darkness, upon the beach. No doubt I did not see her every day, still I could say to myself: "If she were to give an account of how she spent her time, of her life, it would still be myself that played the largest part in it;" and we spent together long hours on end which brought into my days so sweet an intoxication that even when, at Parville, she jumped from the car which I was to send to fetch her an hour later, I no more felt myself to be alone in it than if before leaving me she had strewn it with flowers. I might have dispensed with seeing her every day; I was going to be happy when I left her, and I knew that the calming effect of that happiness might be prolonged over many days. But at that moment I heard Albertine as she left me say to her aunt or to a girl friend: "Then to-morrow at eight-thirty. We mustn't be late, the others will be ready at a quarter past." The conversation of a woman one loves is like the soil that covers a subterranean and dangerous water; one feels at every moment beneath the words the presence, the penetrating chill of an invisible pool; one perceives here and there its treacherous percolation, but the water itself remains hidden. The

moment I heard these words of Albertine, my calm was destroyed. I wanted to ask her to let me see her the following morning, so as to prevent her from going to this mysterious rendezvous at half-past eight which had been mentioned in my presence only in covert terms. She would no doubt have begun by obeying me, while regretting that she had to give up her plans; in time she would have discovered my permanent need to upset them; I should have become the person from whom one hides everything. Besides, it is probable that these gatherings from which I was excluded amounted to very little, and that it was perhaps from the fear that I might find one of the other girls there vulgar or boring that I was not invited to them. Unfortunately this life so closely involved with Albertine's had a reaction not only upon myself; to me it brought calm; to my mother it caused an anxiety, her confession of which destroyed my calm. As I entered the hotel happy in my own mind, determined to terminate, one day soon, an existence the end of which I imagined to depend upon my own volition, my mother said to me, hearing me send a message to the chauffeur to go and fetch Albertine: "How you do waste your money." (Françoise in her simple and expressive language said with greater force: "That's the way the money goes.") "Try," Mamma went on, "not to become like Charles de Sévigné, of whom his mother said: 'His hand is a crucible in which money melts.' Besides, I do really think you have gone about quite enough with Albertine. I assure you, you're overdoing it, even to her it may seem ridiculous. I was delighted to think that you found her a distraction, I am not asking you never to see her again, but simply that it may not be impossible to meet one of you without the other." My life with Albertine, a life devoid of keen pleasures — that is to say of keen pleasures that I could feel — that life which I intended to change at any moment, choosing a calm interval, became once again suddenly and for a time necessary to me when, by these words of Mamma's, it found itself threatened. I told my mother that what she had just said would delay for perhaps two months the decision for which she asked, which otherwise I would have reached before the end of that week. Mamma began to laugh (so as not to depress me) at this instantaneous effect of her advice, and promised not to speak of the matter to me again so as not to prevent the rebirth of my good intentions. But since my grandmother's death, whenever Mamma allowed herself to laugh, the incipient laugh would be cut short and would end in an almost heartbroken expression of sorrow, whether from remorse at having been able for an instant to forget, or else from the recrudescence which this brief moment of oblivion had given to her cruel obsession. But to the thoughts aroused in her by the memory of my

grandmother, which was rooted in my mother's mind, I felt that on this occasion there were added others, relative to myself, to what my mother dreaded as the sequel of my intimacy with Albertine; an intimacy to which she dared not, however, put a stop, in view of what I had just told her. But she did not appear convinced that I was not mistaken. She remembered all the years in which my grandmother and she had refrained from speaking to me of my work, and of a more wholesome rule of life which, I said, the agitation into which their exhortations threw me alone prevented me from beginning, and which, notwithstanding their obedient silence, I had failed to pursue. After dinner the car brought Albertine back; there was still a glimmer of daylight; the air was not so warm, but after a scorching day we both dreamed of strange and delicious coolness; then to our fevered eyes the narrow slip of moon appeared at first (as on the evening when I had gone to the Princesse de Guermantes's and Albertine had telephoned to me) like the slight, fine rind, then like the cool section of a fruit which an invisible knife was beginning to peel in the sky. Sometimes too, it was I that went in search of my mistress, a little later in that case; she would be waiting for me before the arcade of the market at Maineville. At first I could not make her out; I would begin to fear that she might not be coming, that she had misunderstood me. Then I saw her in her white blouse with blue spots spring into the car by my side with the light bound of a young animal rather than a girl. And it was like a dog too that she began to caress me interminably. When night had fallen and, as the manager of the hotel remarked to me, the sky was all 'studied' with stars, if we did not go for a drive in the forest with a bottle of champagne, then, without heeding the strangers who were still strolling upon the faintly lighted front, but who could not have seen anything a yard away on the dark sand, we would lie down in the shelter of the dunes; that same body in whose suppleness abode all the feminine, marine and sportive grace of the girls whom I had seen for the first time pass before a horizon of waves, I held pressed against my own, beneath the same rug, by the edge of the motionless sea divided by a tremulous path of light; and we listened to the sea without tiring and with the same pleasure, both when it held its breath, suspended for so long that one thought the reflux would never come, and when at last it gasped out at our feet the long awaited murmur. Finally I took Albertine back to Parville. When we reached her house, we were obliged to break off our kisses for fear lest some one should see us; not wishing to go to bed she returned with me to Balbec, from where I took her back for the last time to Parville; the chauffeurs of those early days of the motor-car were people who went to bed at all hours. And as a matter

of fact I returned to Balbec only with the first dews of morning, alone this time, but still surrounded with the presence of my mistress, gorged with an inexhaustible provision of kisses. On my table I would find a telegram or a postcard. Albertine again! She had written them at Quetteholme when I had gone off by myself in the car, to tell me that she was thinking of me. I got into bed as I read them over. Then I caught sight, over the curtains, of the bright streak of daylight and said to myself that we must be in love with one another after all, since we had spent the night in one another's arms. When next morning I caught sight of Albertine on the front, I was so afraid of her telling me that she was not free that day, and could not accede to my request that we should go out together, that I delayed as long as possible making the request. I was all the more uneasy since she wore a cold, preoccupied air; people were passing whom she knew; doubtless she had made plans for the afternoon from which I was excluded. I looked at her, I looked at that charming body, that blushing head of Albertine, rearing in front of me the enigma of her intentions, the unknown decision which was to create the happiness or misery of my afternoon. It was a whole state of the soul, a whole future existence that had assumed before my eyes the allegorical and fatal form of a girl. And when at last I made up my mind, when with the most indifferent air that I could muster, I asked: "Are we to go out together now, and again this evening?" and she replied: "With the greatest pleasure," then the sudden replacement, in the rosy face, of my long uneasiness by a-delicious sense of ease made even more precious to me those outlines to which I was perpetually indebted for the comfort, the relief that we feel after a storm has broken. I repeated to myself: "How sweet she is, what an adorable creature!" in an excitement less fertile than that caused by intoxication, scarcely more profound than that of friendship, but far superior to the excitement of social life. We cancelled our order for the car only on the days when there was a dinner-party at the Verdurins' and on those when, Albertine not being free to go out with me, I took the opportunity to inform anybody who wished to see me that I should be remaining at Balbec. I gave Saint-Loup permission to come on these days, but on these days only. For on one occasion when he had arrived unexpectedly, I had preferred to forego the pleasure of seeing Albertine rather than run the risk of his meeting her, than endanger the state of happy calm in which I had been dwelling for some time and see my jealousy revive. And I had been at my ease only after Saint-Loup had gone. And so he pledged himself, with regret, but with scrupulous observance, never to come to Balbec unless summoned there by myself. In the past, when I thought with longing of the hours

that Mme. de Guermantes passed in his company, how I valued the privilege of seeing him! Other people never cease to change places in relation to ourselves. In the imperceptible but eternal march of the world, we regard them as motionless in a moment of vision, too short for us to perceive the motion that is sweeping them on. But we have only to select in our memory two pictures taken of them at different moments, close enough together however for them not to have altered in themselves — perceptibly, that is to say — and the difference between the two pictures is a measure of the displacement that they have undergone in relation to us. He alarmed me dreadfully by talking to me of the Verdurins, I was afraid that he might ask me to take him there, which would have been quite enough, what with the jealousy that I should be feeling all the time, to spoil all the pleasure that I found in going there with Albertine. But fortunately Robert assured me that, on the contrary, the one thing he desired above all others was not to know them. “No,” he said to me, “I find that sort of clerical atmosphere maddening.” I did not at first understand the application of the adjective clerical to the Verdurins, but the end of Saint-Loup’s speech threw a light on his meaning, his concessions to those fashions in words which one is often astonished to see adopted by intelligent men. “I mean the houses,” he said, “where people form a tribe, a religious order, a chapel. You aren’t going to tell me that they’re not a little sect; they’re all butter and honey to the people who belong, no words bad enough for those who don’t. The question is not, as for Hamlet, to be or not to be, but to belong or not to belong. You belong, my uncle Charlus belongs. I can’t help it, I never have gone in for that sort of thing, it isn’t my fault.”

I need hardly say that the rule which I had imposed upon Saint-Loup, never to come and see me unless I had expressly invited him, I promulgated no less strictly for all and sundry of the persons with whom I had gradually begun to associate at la Raspelière, Féterne, Montsurvent, and elsewhere; and when I saw from the hotel the smoke of the three o’clock train which in the anfractuosity of the cliffs of Parville left its stable plume which long remained hanging from the flank of the green slopes, I had no hesitation as to the identity of the visitor who was coming to tea with me and was still, like a classical deity, concealed from me by that little cloud. I am obliged to confess that this visitor, authorised by me beforehand to come, was hardly ever Saniette, and I have often reproached myself for this omission. But Saniette’s own consciousness of his being a bore (far more so, naturally, when he came to pay a call than when he told a story) had the effect that, albeit he was more learned, more intelligent and a better man

all round than most people, it seemed impossible to feel in his company, I do not say any pleasure, but anything save an almost intolerable irritation which spoiled one's whole afternoon. Probably if Saniette had frankly admitted this boredom which he was afraid of causing, one would not have dreaded his visits. Boredom is one of the least of the evils that we have to endure, his boringness existed perhaps only in the imagination of other people, or had been inoculated into him by them by some process of suggestion which had taken root in his charming modesty. But he was so anxious not to let it be seen that he was not sought after, that he dared not offer himself. Certainly he was right in not behaving like the people who are so glad to be able to raise their hats in a public place, that when, not having seen you for years, they catch sight of you in a box with smart people whom they do not know, they give you a furtive but resounding good-evening, seeking an excuse in the pleasure, the emotion that they felt on seeing you, on learning that you are going about again, that you are looking well, etc. Saniette, on the contrary, was lacking in courage. He might, at Mme. Verdurin's or in the little tram, have told me that it would give him great pleasure to come and see me at Balbec, were he not afraid of disturbing me. Such a suggestion would not have alarmed me. On the contrary, he offered nothing, but with a tortured expression on his face and a stare as indestructible as a fired enamel, into the composition of which, however, there entered, with a passionate desire to see one — provided he did not find some one else who was more entertaining — the determination not to let this desire be manifest, said to me with a detached air: "You don't happen to know what you will be doing in the next few days, because I shall probably be somewhere in the neighbourhood of Balbec? Not that it makes the slightest difference, I just thought I would ask you." This air deceived nobody, and the inverse signs whereby we express our sentiments by their opposites are so clearly legible that we ask ourselves how there can still be people who say, for instance: "I have so many invitations that I don't know where to lay my head" to conceal the fact that they have been invited nowhere. But what was more, this detached air, probably on account of the heterogeneous elements that had gone to form it, gave you, what you would never have felt in the fear of boredom or in a frank admission of the desire to see you, that is to say that sort of distaste, of repulsion, which in the category of relations of simple social courtesy corresponds to — in that of love — the disguised offer made to a lady by the lover whom she does not love to see her on the following day, he protesting the while that it does not really matter, or indeed not that offer but an attitude of false coldness. There emanated at once from San-iette's person

something or other which made you answer him in the ten-derest of tones: “No, unfortunately, this week, I must explain to you...” And I allowed to call upon me instead people who were a long way his inferiors but had not his gaze charged with melancholy or his mouth wrinkled with all the bitterness of all the calls which he longed, while saying nothing about them, to pay upon this person and that. Unfortunately it was very rarely that Saniette did not meet in the ‘crawler’ the guest who was coming to see me, if indeed the latter had not said to me at the Verdurins’: “Don’t forget, I’m coming to see you on Thursday,” the very day on which I had just told Saniette that I should not be at home. So that he came in the end to imagine life as filled with entertainments arranged behind his back, if not actually at his expense. On the other hand, as none of us is ever a single person, this too discreet of men was morbidly indiscreet. On the one occasion on which he happened to come and see me uninvited, a letter, I forget from whom, had been left lying on my table. After the first few minutes, I saw that he was paying only the vaguest attention to what I was saying. The letter, of whose subject he knew absolutely nothing, fascinated him and at every moment I expected his glittering eyeballs to detach themselves from their sockets and fly to the letter which, of no importance in itself, his curiosity had made magnetic. You would have called him a bird about to dash into the jaws of a serpent. Finally he could restrain himself no longer, he began by altering its position, as though he were trying to tidy my room. This not sufficing him, he took it up, turned it over, turned it back again, as though mechanically. Another form of his indiscretion was that once he had fastened himself to you he could not tear himself away. As I was feeling unwell that day, I asked him to go back by the next train, in half-an-hour’s time. He did not doubt that I was feeling unwell, but replied: “I shall stay for an hour and a quarter, and then I shall go.” Since then I have regretted that I did not tell him, whenever I had an opportunity, to come and see me. Who knows? Possibly I might have charmed away his ill fortune, other people would have invited him for whom he would immediately have deserted myself, so that my invitations would have had the twofold advantage of giving him pleasure and ridding me of his company.

On the days following those on which I had been ‘at home,’ I naturally did not expect any visitors and the motor-car would come to fetch us, Albertine and myself. And, when we returned, Aimé, on the lowest step of the hotel, could not help looking, with passionate, curious, greedy eyes, to see what tip I was giving the chauffeur. It was no use my enclosing my coin or note in my clenched fist, Aimé’s gaze tore my fingers apart. He turned his head away a moment later, for

he was discreet, well bred, and indeed was himself content with relatively small wages. But the money that another person received aroused in him an irrepressible curiosity and made his mouth water. During these brief moments, he wore the attentive, feverish air of a boy reading one of Jules Verne's tales, or of a diner seated at a neighbouring table in a restaurant who, seeing the waiter carving for you a pheasant which he himself either could not afford or would not order, abandons for an instant his serious thoughts to fasten upon the bird a gaze which love and longing cause to smile.

And so, day after day, these excursions in the motor-car followed one another. But once, as I was being taken up to my room, the lift-boy said to me: "That gentleman has been, he gave me a message for you." The lift-boy uttered these words in an almost inaudible voice, coughing and expectorating in my face. "I haven't half caught cold!" he went on, as though I were incapable of perceiving this for myself. "The doctor says it's whooping-cough," and he began once more to cough and expectorate over me. "Don't tire yourself by trying to speak," I said to him with an air of kindly interest, which was feigned. I was afraid of catching the whooping-cough which, with my tendency to choking fits, would have been a serious matter to me. But he made a point of honour, like a virtuoso who refuses to let himself be taken to hospital, of talking and expectorating all the time. "No, it doesn't matter," he said ("Perhaps not to you," I thought, "but to me it does"). "Besides, I shall be returning soon to Paris." ("Excellent, provided he doesn't give it to me first.") "It seems," he went on, "that Paris is quite superb. It must be even more superb than here or Monte-Carlo, although pages, in fact visitors, and even head waiters who have been to Monte-Carlo for the season have often told me that Paris was not so superb as Monte-Carlo. They were cheated, perhaps, and yet, to be a head waiter, you've got to have your wits about you; to take all the orders, reserve tables, you need a head! I've heard it said that it's even more terrible than writing plays and books." We had almost reached my landing when the lift-boy carried me down again to the ground floor because he found that the button was not working properly, and in a moment had put it right. I told him that I preferred to walk upstairs, by which I meant, without putting it in so many words, that I preferred not to catch whooping-cough. But with a cordial and contagious burst of coughing the boy thrust me back into the lift. "There's no danger now, I've fixed the button." Seeing that he was not ceasing to talk, preferring to learn the name of my visitor and the message that he had left, rather than the comparative beauties of Balbec, Paris and Monte-Carlo, I said to him (as one might say to a

tenor who is wearying one with Benjamin Godard, “Won’t you sing me some Debussy?”) “But who is the person that called to see me?” “It’s the gentleman you went out with yesterday. I am going to fetch his card, it’s with my porter.” As, the day before, I had dropped Robert de Saint-Loup at Doncières station before going to meet Albertine, I supposed that the lift-boy was referring to him, but it was the chauffeur. And by describing him in the words: “The gentleman you went out with,” he taught me at the same time that a working man is just as much a gentleman as a man about town. A lesson in the use of words only. For in point of fact I had never made any distinction between the classes. And if I had felt, on hearing a chauffeur called a gentleman, the same astonishment as Comte X who had only held that rank for a week and whom, by saying: “the Comtesse looks tired,” I made turn his head round to see who it was that I meant, it was simply because I was not familiar with that use of the word; I had never made any difference between working men, professional men and noblemen, and I should have been equally ready to make any of them my friends. With a certain preference for the working men, and after them for the noblemen, not because I liked them better, but because I knew that one could expect greater courtesy from them towards the working men than one finds among professional men, whether because the great nobleman does not despise the working man as the professional man does or else because they are naturally polite to anybody, as beautiful women are glad to bestow a smile which they know to be so joyfully received. I cannot however pretend that this habit that I had of putting people of humble station on a level with people in society, even if it was quite understood by the latter, was always entirely satisfactory to my mother. Not that, humanly speaking, she made any difference between one person and another, and if Françoise was ever in sorrow or in pain she was comforted and tended by Mamma with the same devotion as her best friend. But my mother was too much my grandmother’s daughter not to accept, in social matters, the rule of caste. People at Combray might have kind hearts, sensitive natures, might have adopted the most perfect theories of human equality, my mother, when a footman became emancipated, began to say ‘you’ and slipped out of the habit of addressing me in the third person, was moved by these presumptions to the same wrath that breaks out in Saint-Simon’s *Memoirs*, whenever a nobleman who is not entitled to it seizes a pretext for assuming the style of ‘Highness’ in an official document, or for not paying dukes the deference he owes to them and is gradually beginning to lay aside. There was a ‘Combray spirit’ so refractory that it will require centuries of good nature (my mother’s was boundless), of theories

of equality, to succeed in dissolving it. I cannot swear that in my mother certain particles of this spirit had not remained insoluble. She would have been as reluctant to give her hand to a footman as she would have been ready to give him ten francs (which for that matter he was far more glad to receive). To her, whether she admitted it or not, masters were masters, and servants were the people who fed in the kitchen. When she saw the driver of a motor-car dining with me in the restaurant, she was not altogether pleased, and said to me: “It seems to me you might have a more suitable friend than a mechanic,” as she might have said, had it been a question of my marriage: “You might find somebody better than that.” This particular chauffeur (fortunately I never dreamed of inviting him to dinner) had come to tell me that the motor-car company which had sent him to Balbec for the season had ordered him to return to Paris on the following day. This excuse, especially as the chauffeur was charming and expressed himself so simply that one would always have taken anything he said for Gospel, seemed to us to be most probably true. It was only half so. There was as a matter of fact no more work for him at Balbec. And in any case, the Company being only half convinced of the veracity of the young Evangelist, bowed over the consecration cross of his steering-wheel, was anxious that he should return as soon as possible to Paris. And indeed if the young Apostle wrought a miracle in multiplying his mileage when he was calculating it for M. de Charlus, when on the other hand it was a matter of rendering his account to the Company, he divided what he had earned by six. In consequence of which the Company, coming to the conclusion either that nobody wanted a car now at Balbec, which, so late in the season, was quite probable, or that it was being robbed, decided that, upon either hypothesis, the best thing was to recall him to Paris, not that there was very much work for him there. What the chauffeur wished was to avoid, if possible, the dead season. I have said — though I was unaware of this at the time, when the knowledge of it would have saved me much annoyance — that he was on intimate terms (without their ever shewing any sign of acquaintance before other people) with Morel. Starting from the day on which he was ordered back, before he realised that there was still a way out of going, we were obliged to content ourselves for our excursions with hiring a carriage, or sometimes, as an amusement for Albertine and because she was fond of riding, a pair of saddle-horses. The carriages were unsatisfactory. “What a rattle-trap,” Albertine would say. I would often, as it happened, have preferred to be driving by myself. Without being ready to fix a date, I longed to put an end to this existence which I blamed for

making me renounce not so much work as pleasure. It would happen also, however, that the habits which bound me were suddenly abolished, generally when some former self, full of the desire to live a merry life, took the place of what was my self at the moment. I felt this longing to escape especially strong one day when, having left Albertine at her aunt's, I had gone on horseback to call on the Verdurins and had taken an unfrequented path through the woods the beauty of which they had extolled to me. Clinging to the outline of the cliffs, it alternately climbed and then, hemmed in by dense woods on either side, dived into savage gorges. For a moment the barren rocks by which I was surrounded, the sea visible in their jagged intervals, swam before my eyes, like fragments of another universe: I had recognised the mountainous and marine landscape which Elstir had made the scene of those two admirable water colours: 'Poet meeting a Muse,' 'Young Man meeting a Centaur' which I had seen at the Duchesse de Guermantes's. The thought of them transported the place in which I was so far beyond the world of to-day that I should not have been surprised if, like the young man of the prehistoric age that Elstir painted, I had in the course of my ride come upon a mythological personage. Suddenly, my horse gave a start; he had heard a strange sound; it was all I could do to hold him and remain in the saddle, then I raised in the direction from which the sound seemed to come my eyes filled with tears and saw, not two hundred feet above my head, against the sun, between two great wings of flashing metal which were carrying him on, a creature whose barely visible face appeared to me to resemble that of a man. I was as deeply moved as a Greek upon seeing for the first time a demigod. I cried also, for I was ready to cry the moment I realised that the sound came from above my head — aeroplanes were still rare in those days — at the thought that what I was going to see for the first time was an aeroplane. Then, just as when in a newspaper one feels that one is coming to a moving passage, the mere sight of the machine was enough to make me burst into tears. Meanwhile the airman seemed to be uncertain of his course; I felt that there lay open before him — before me, had not habit made me a prisoner — all the routes in space, in life itself; he flew on, let himself glide for a few moments, over the sea, then quickly making up his mind, seeming to yield to some attraction the reverse of gravity, as though returning to his native element, with a slight movement of his golden wings, rose sheer into the sky.

To come back to the mechanic, he demanded of Morel that the Verdurins should not merely replace their break by a motor-car (which, granted their generosity towards the faithful, was comparatively easy), but, what was less

easy, replace their head coachman, the sensitive young man who was inclined to dark thoughts, by himself, the chauffeur. This change was carried out in a few days by the following device. Morel had begun by seeing that the coachman was robbed of everything that he needed for the carriage. One day it was the bit that was missing, another day the curb. At other times it was the cushion of his box-seat that had vanished, or his whip, his rug, his hammer, sponge, chamois-leather. But he always managed to borrow what he required from a neighbour; only he was late in bringing round the carriage, which put him in M. Verdurin's bad books and plunged him in a state of melancholy and dark thoughts. The chauffeur, who was in a hurry to take his place, told Morel that he would have to return to Paris. It was time to do something desperate. Morel persuaded M. Verdurin's servants that the young coachman had declared that he would set a trap for the lot of them, boasting that he could take on all six of them at once, and assured them that they could not overlook such an insult. He himself could not take any part in the quarrel, but he warned them so that they might be on their guard. It was arranged that while M. and Mme. Verdurin and their guests were out walking the servants should fall upon the young man in the coach house. I may mention, although it was only the pretext for what was bound to happen, but because the people concerned interested me later on, that the Verdurins had a friend staying with them that day whom they had promised to take for a walk before his departure, which was fixed for that same evening.

What surprised me greatly when we started off for our walk was that Morel, who was coming with us, and was to play his violin under the trees, said to me: "Listen, I have a sore arm, I don't want to say anything about it to Mme. Verdurin, but you might ask her to send for one of her footmen, Howsler for instance, he can carry my things." "I think you ought to suggest some one else," I replied. "He will be wanted here for dinner." A look of anger passed over Morel's face. "No, I'm not going to trust my violin to any Tom, Dick or Harry." I realised later on his reason for this selection. Howsler was the beloved brother of the young coachman, and, if he had been left at home, might have gone to his rescue. During our walk, dropping his voice so that the elder Howsler should not overhear: "What a good fellow he is," said Morel. "So is his brother, for that matter. If he hadn't that fatal habit of drinking..." "Did you say drinking?" said Mme. Verdurin, turning pale at the idea of having a coachman who drank. "You've never noticed it. I always say to myself it's a miracle that he's never had an accident while he's been driving you." "Does he drive anyone else, then?" "You can easily see how many spills he's had, his face to-day is a mass of

bruises. I don’t know how he’s escaped being killed, he’s broken his shafts.” “I haven’t seen him to-day,” said Mme.’ Verdurin, trembling at the thought of what might have happened to her, “you appal me.” She tried to cut short the walk so as to return at once, but Morel chose an aria by Bach with endless variations to keep her away from the house. As soon as we got back she went to the stable, saw the new shaft and Howsler streaming with blood. She was on the point of telling him, without making any comment on what she had seen, that she did not require a coachman any longer, and of paying him his wages, but of his own accord, not wishing to accuse his fellow-servants, to whose animosity he attributed retrospectively the theft of all his saddlery, and seeing that further patience would only end in his being left for dead on the ground, he asked leave to go at once, which made everything quite simple. The chauffeur began his duties next day and, later on, Mme. Verdurin (who had been obliged to engage another) was so well satisfied with him that she recommended him to me warmly, as a man on whom I might rely. I, knowing nothing of all this, used to engage him by the day in Paris, but I am anticipating events, I shall come to all this when I reach the story of Albertine. At the present moment we are at la Raspelière, where I have just been dining for the first time with my mistress, and M. de Charlus with Morel, the reputed son of an ‘Agent’ who drew a fixed salary of thirty thousand francs annually, kept his carriage, and had any number of major-domos, subordinates, gardeners, bailiffs and farmers at his beck and call. But, since I have so far anticipated, I do not wish to leave the reader under the impression that Morel was entirely wicked. He was, rather, a mass of contradictions, capable on certain days of being genuinely kind.

I was naturally greatly surprised to hear that the coachman had been dismissed, and even more surprised when I recognised his successor as the chauffeur who had been taking Albertine and myself in his car. But he poured out a complicated story, according to which he had thought that he was summoned back to Paris, where an order had come for him to go to the Verdurins, and I did not doubt his word for an instant. The coachman’s dismissal was the cause of Morel’s talking to me for a few minutes, to express his regret at the departure of that worthy fellow. However, even apart from the moments when I was alone, and he literally bounded towards me beaming with joy, Morel, seeing that everybody made much of me at la Raspelière and feeling that he was deliberately cutting himself off from the society of a person who could in no way imperil him, since he had made me burn my boats and had destroyed all possibility of my treating him with an air of patronage (which I had never, for

that matter, dreamed of adopting), ceased to hold aloof from me. I attributed his change of attitude to the influence of M. de Charlus, which as a matter of fact did make him in certain respects less limited, more of an artist, but in others, when he interpreted literally the eloquent, insincere, and moreover transient formulas of his master, made him stupider than ever. That M. de Charlus might have said something to him was as a matter of fact the only thing that occurred to me. How was I to have guessed then what I was told afterwards (and have never been certain of its truth, Andrée's assertions as to everything that concerned Albertine, especially later on, having always seemed to me to be statements to be received with caution, for, as we have already seen, she was not genuinely fond of my mistress and was jealous of her), a thing which in any event, even if it was true, was remarkably well concealed from me by both of them: that Albertine was on the best of terms with Morel? The novel attitude which, about the time of the coachman's dismissal, Morel adopted with regard to myself, enabled me to change my opinion of him. I retained the ugly impression of his character which had been suggested by the servility which this young man had shewn me when he needed my services, followed, as soon as the service had been rendered, by a scornful aloofness as though he did not even see me. I still lacked evidence of his venal relations with M. de Charlus, and also of his bestial and purposeless instincts, the non-gratification of which (when it occurred) or the complications that they involved, were the cause of his sorrows; but his character was not so uniformly vile and was full of contradictions. He resembled an old book of the middle ages, full of mistakes, of absurd traditions, of obscenities; he was extraordinarily composite. I had supposed at first that his art, in which he was really a past-master, had given him superiorities that went beyond the virtuosity of the mere performer. Once when I spoke of my wish to start work: "Work, become famous," he said to me. "Who said that?" I inquired. "Fontanes, to Chateaubriand." He also knew certain love letters of Napoleon. Good, I thought to myself, he reads. But this phrase which he had read I know not where was doubtless the only one that he knew in the whole of ancient or modern literature, for he repeated it to me every evening. Another which he quoted even more frequently to prevent me from breathing a word about him to anybody was the following, which he considered equally literary, whereas it is barely grammatical, or at any rate makes no kind of sense, except perhaps to a mystery-loving servant: "Beware of the wary." As a matter of fact, if one cast back from this stupid maxim to what Fontanes had said to Chateaubriand, one explored a whole side, varied but less contradictory than one might suppose, of

Morel's character. This youth who, provided there was money to be made by it, would have done anything in the world, and without remorse — perhaps not without an odd sort of vexation, amounting to nervous excitement, to which however the name remorse could not for a moment be applied — who would, had it been to his advantage, have plunged in distress, not to say mourning, whole families, this youth who set money above everything, above, not to speak of unselfish kindness, the most natural sentiments of common humanity, this same youth nevertheless set above money his certificate as first-prize winner at the Conservatoire and the risk of there being anything said to his discredit in the flute or counterpoint class. And so his most violent rages, his most sombre and unjustifiable fits of ill-temper arose from what he himself (generalising doubtless from certain particular cases in which he had met with spiteful people) called universal treachery. He flattered himself that he escaped from this fault by never speaking about anyone, by concealing his tactics, by distrusting everybody. (Alas for me, in view of what was to happen after my return to Paris, his distrust had not 'held' in the case of the Balbec chauffeur, in whom he had doubtless recognised a peer, that is to say, in contradiction of his maxim, a wary person in the good sense of the word, a wary person who remains obstinately silent before honest folk and at once comes to an understanding with a blackguard.) It seemed to him — and he was not absolutely wrong — that his distrust would enable him always to save his bacon, to slip unscathed out of the most perilous adventures, without anyone's being able not indeed to prove but even to suggest anything against him, in the institution in the Rue Bergère. He would work, become famous, would perhaps be one day, with his respectability still intact, examiner in the violin on the Board of that great and glorious Conservatoire.

But it is perhaps crediting Morel's brain with too much logic to attempt to discriminate between these contradictions. As a matter of fact his nature was just like a sheet of paper that has been folded so often in every direction that it is impossible to straighten it out. He seemed to act upon quite lofty principles, and in a magnificent hand, marred by the most elementary mistakes in spelling, spent hours writing to his brother that he had behaved badly to his sisters, that he was their elder, their natural support, etc., and to his sisters that they had shewn a want of respect for himself.

Presently, as summer came to an end, when one got out of the train at Douville, the sun dimmed by the prevailing mist had ceased to be anything more in a sky that was uniformly mauve than a lump of redness. To the great peace which descends at nightfall over these tufted salt-marshes, and had tempted a

number of Parisians, painters mostly, to spend their holidays at Douville, was added a moisture which made them seek shelter early in their little bungalows. In several of these the lamp was already lighted. Only a few cows remained out of doors gazing at the sea and lowing, while others, more interested in humanity, turned their attention towards our carriages. A single painter who had set up his easel where the ground rose slightly was striving to render that great calm, that hushed luminosity. Perhaps the cattle were going to serve him unconsciously and kindly as models, for their contemplative air and their solitary presence when the human beings had withdrawn, contributed in their own way to enhance the strong impression of repose that evening conveys. And, a few weeks later, the transposition was no less agreeable when, as autumn advanced, the days became really short, and we were obliged to make our journey m the dark. If I had been out anywhere in the afternoon, I had to go back to change my clothes, at the latest, by five o'clock, when at this season the round, red sun had already sunk half way down the slanting sheet of glass, which formerly I had detested, and, like a Greek fire, was inflaming the sea in the glass fronts of all my bookcases. Some wizard's gesture having revived, as I put on my dinner-jacket, the alert and frivolous self that was mine when I used to go with Saint-Loup to dine at Rivebelle and on the evening when I looked forward to taking Mme. de Stermaria to dine on the island in the Bois, I began unconsciously to hum the same tune that I had hummed then; and it was only when I realised this that by the song I recognised the resurrected singer, who indeed knew no other tune. The first time that I sang it, I was beginning to be in love with Albertine, but I imagined that I would never get to know her. Later on, in Paris, it was when I had ceased to be in love with her and some days after I had enjoyed her for the first time. Now it was when I was in love with her again and on the point of going out to dinner with her, to the great regret of the manager who supposed that I would end by staying at la Raspelière altogether and deserting his hotel, and assured me that he had heard that fever was prevalent in that neighbourhood, due to the marshes of the Bac and their 'stagnous' water. I was delighted by the multiplicity in which I saw my life thus spread over three planes; and besides, when one becomes for an instant one's former self, that is to say different from what one has been for some time past, one's sensibility, being no longer dulled by habit, receives the slightest shocks of those vivid impressions which make everything that has preceded them fade into insignificance, and to which, because of their intensity, we attach ourselves with the momentary enthusiasm of a drunken man. It was already night when we got into the omnibus or carriage

which was to take us to the station where we would find the little train. And in the hall the chief magistrate was saying to us: “Ah! You are going to la Raspelière! Sapristi, she has a nerve, your Mme. Verdurin, to make you travel an hour by train in the dark, simply to dine with her. And then to start off again at ten o’clock at night, with a wind blowing like the very devil. It is easy to see that you have nothing else to do,” he added, rubbing his hands together. No doubt he spoke thus from annoyance at not having been invited, and also from the satisfaction that people feel who are ‘busy’— though it be with the most idiotic occupation — at ‘not having time’ to do what you are doing.

Certainly it is only right that the man who draws up reports, adds up figures, answers business letters, follows the movements of the stock exchange, should feel when he says to you with a sneer: “It’s all very well for you; you have nothing better to do,” an agreeable sense of his own superiority. But this would be no less contemptuous, would be even more so (for dining out is a thing that the busy man does also) were your recreation writing *Hamlet* or merely reading it. Wherein busy men shew a want of reflexion. For the disinterested culture which seems to them a comic pastime of idle people at the moment when they find them engaged in it is, they ought to remember, the same that in their own profession brings to the fore men who may not be better magistrates or administrators than themselves but before whose rapid advancement they bow their heads, saying: “It appears he’s a great reader, a most distinguished individual.” But above all the chief magistrate did not take into account that what pleased me about these dinners at la Raspelière was that, as he himself said quite rightly, though as a criticism, they ‘meant a regular journey,’ a journey whose charm appeared to me all the more thrilling in that it was not an object in itself, and no one made any attempt to find pleasure in it — that being reserved for the party for which we were bound, and greatly modified by all the atmosphere that surrounded it. It was already night now when I exchanged the warmth of the hotel — the hotel that had become my home — for the railway carriage into which I climbed with Albertine, in which a glimmer of lamplight on the window shewed, at certain halts of the panting little train, that we had arrived at a station. So that there should be no risk of Cottard’s missing us, and not having heard the name of the station, I opened the door, but what burst headlong into the carriage was not any of the faithful, but the wind, the rain, the cold. In the darkness I could make out fields, I could hear the sea, we were in the open country. Albertine, before we were engulfed in the little nucleus, examined herself in a little mirror, extracted from a gold bag which she carried about with

her. The fact was that on our first visit, Mme. Verdurin having taken her upstairs to her dressing-room so that she might make herself tidy before dinner, I had felt, amid the profound calm in which I had been living for some time, a slight stir of uneasiness and jealousy at being obliged to part from Albertine at the foot of the stair, and had become so anxious while I was by myself in the drawing-room, among the little clan, and asking myself what my mistress could be doing, that I had sent a telegram the next day, after finding out from M. de Charlus what the correct thing was at the moment, to order from Cartier's a bag which was the joy of Alber-tine's life and also of mine. It was for me a guarantee of peace of mind, and also of my mistress's solicitude. For she had evidently seen that I did not like her to be parted from me at Mme. Verdurin's and arranged to make in the train all the toilet that was necessary before dinner.

Included in the number of Mme. Verdurin's regular frequenters, and reckoned the most faithful of them all, had been, for some months now, M. de Charlus. Regularly, thrice weekly, the passengers who were sitting in the waiting-rooms or standing upon the platform at Doncières-Ouest used to see that stout gentleman go past with his grey hair, his black moustaches, his lips reddened with a salve less noticeable at the end of the season than in summer when the daylight made it more crude and the heat used to melt it. As he made his way towards the little train, he could not refrain (simply from force of habit, as a connoisseur, since he now had a sentiment which kept him chaste, or at least, for most of the time, faithful) from casting at the labourers, soldiers, young men in tennis flannels, a furtive glance at once inquisitorial and timorous, after which he immediately let his eyelids droop over his half-shut eyes with the unction of an ecclesiastic engaged in telling his beads, with the modesty of a bride vowed to the one love of her life or of a well-brought-up girl. The faithful were all the more convinced that he had not seen them, since he got into a different compartment from theirs (as, often enough, did Princess Sherbatoff also), like a man who does not know whether people will be pleased or not to be seen with him and leaves them the option of coming and joining him if they choose. This option had not been taken, at first, by the Doctor, who had asked us to leave him by himself in his compartment. Making a virtue of his natural hesitation now that he occupied a great position in the medical world, it was with a smile, throwing back his head, looking at Ski over his glasses, that he said, either from malice or in the hope of eliciting the opinion of the 'comrades': "You can understand that if I was by myself, a bachelor, but for my wife's sake I ask myself whether I ought to allow him to travel with us after what you have told

me," the Doctor whispered. "What's that you're saying?" asked Mme. Cottard. "Nothing, it doesn't concern you, it's not meant for ladies to hear," the Doctor replied with a wink, and with a majestic self-satisfaction which held the balance between the dryly malicious air he adopted before his pupils and patients and the uneasiness that used in the past to accompany his shafts of wit at the Verdurins', and went on talking in a lowered tone. Mme. Cottard could make out only the words 'one of the brotherhood' and '*tapette*,' and as in the Doctor's vocabulary the former expression denoted the Jewish race and the latter a wagging tongue, Mme. Cottard concluded that M. de Charlus must be a garrulous Israelite. She could not understand why people should keep aloof from the Baron for that reason, felt it her duty as the senior lady of the clan to insist that he should not be left alone, and so we proceeded in a body to M. de Charlus's compartment, led by Cottard who was still perplexed. From the corner in which he was reading a volume of Balzac, M. de Charlus observed this hesitation; and yet he had not raised his eyes. But just as deaf-mutes detect, from a movement of the air imperceptible to other people, that some one is standing behind them, so he had to warn him of other people's coldness towards him, a positive hyperaesthesia. This had, as it habitually does in every sphere, developed in M. de Charlus imaginary sufferings. Like those neuropaths who, feeling a slight lowering of the temperature, induce from this that there must be a window open on the floor above, become violently excited and start sneezing, M. de Charlus, if a person appeared preoccupied in his presence, concluded that somebody had repeated to that person a remark that he had made about him. But there was no need even for the other person to have a distracted, or a sombre, or a smiling air, he would invent them. On the other hand, cordiality completely concealed from him the slanders of which he had not heard.

Having begun by detecting Cottard's hesitation, if, greatly to the surprise of the faithful who did not suppose that their presence had yet been observed by the reader's lowered gaze, he held out his hand to them when they were at a convenient distance, he contented himself with a forward inclination of his whole person which he quickly drew back for Cottard, without taking in his own gloved hand the hand which the Doctor had held out to him. "We felt we simply must come and keep you company, Sir, and not leave you alone like that in your little corner. It is a great pleasure to us," Mme. Cottard began in a friendly tone to the Baron. "I am greatly honoured," the Baron intoned, bowing coldly. "I was so pleased to hear that you have definitely chosen this neighbourhood to set up your taber..." She was going to say 'tabernacle' but it occurred to her that the word was Hebraic and discourteous to a Jew who might see an allusion in it. And so she paused for a moment to choose another of the expressions that were familiar to her, that is to say a consecrated expression: "to set up, I should say, your *penates*." (It is true that these deities do not appertain to the Christian religion either, but to one which has been dead for so long that it no longer claims any devotees whose feelings one need be afraid of hurting.) "We, unfortunately, what with term beginning, and the Doctor's hospital duties, can never choose our domicile for very long in one place." And glancing at a cardboard box: "You see too how we poor women are less fortunate than the sterner sex, to go only such a short distance as to our friends the Verdurins', we are obliged to take a whole heap of impedimenta." I meanwhile was examining the Baron's volume of Balzac. It was not a paper-covered copy, picked up on a bookstall, like the volume of Bergotte which he had lent me at our first meeting. It was a book from his own library, and as such bore the device: "I belong to the Baron de Charlus," for which was substituted at times, to shew the studious tastes of the Guermantes: "*In proeliis non semper*," or yet another motto: "*Non sine labore*." But we shall see these presently replaced by others, in an attempt to please Morel. Mme. Cottard, a little later, hit upon a subject which she felt to be of more personal interest to the Baron. "I don't know whether you agree with me, Sir," she said to him presently, "but I hold very broad views, and, to my mind, there is a great deal of good in all religions. I am not one of the people who get hydrophobia at the sight of a... Protestant." "I was taught that mine is the true religion," replied M. de Charlus. "He's a fanatic," thought Mme. Cottard, "Swann, until recently, was more tolerant; it is true that he was a converted one." Now, so far from this being the case, the Baron was not only a

Christian, as we know, but pious with a mediaeval fervour. To him as to the sculptors of the middle ages, the Christian church was, in the living sense of the word, peopled with a swarm of beings, whom he believed to be entirely real, Prophets, Apostles, Anpels, holy personages of every sort, surrounding the Incarnate Word, His Mother and Her Spouse, the Eternal Father, all the Martyrs and Doctors of the Church, as they may be seen carved in high relief, thronging the porches or lining the naves of the cathedrals. Out of all these M. de Charlus had chosen as his patrons and intercessors the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, to whom he made frequent appeals that they would convey his prayers to the Eternal Father, about Whose Throne they stand. And so Mme. Cottard's mistake amused me greatly.

To leave the religious sphere, let us mention that the Doctor, who had come to Paris meagrely equipped with the counsels of a peasant mother, and had then been absorbed in the almost purely materialistic studies to which those who seek to advance in a medical career are obliged to devote themselves for a great many years, had never become cultured, had acquired increasing authority but never any experience, took the word 'honoured' in its literal meaning and was at once flattered by it because he was vain and distressed because he had a kind heart. "That poor de Charlus," he said to his wife that evening, "made me feel sorry for him when he said he was honoured by travelling with us. One feels, poor devil, that he knows nobody, that he has to humble himself."

But presently, without any need to be guided by the charitable Mme. Cottard, the faithful had succeeded in overcoming the qualms which they had all more or less felt at first, on finding themselves in the company of M. de Charlus. No doubt in his presence they were incessantly reminded of Ski's revelations, and conscious of the sexual abnormality embodied in their travelling companion. But this abnormality itself had a sort of attraction for them. It gave for them to the Baron's conversation, remarkable in itself but in ways which they could scarcely appreciate, a savour which made the most interesting conversation, that of Brichot himself, appear slightly insipid in comparison. From the very outset, moreover, they had been pleased to admit that he was intelligent. "The genius that is perhaps akin to madness," the Doctor declaimed, and albeit the Princess, athirst for knowledge, insisted, said not another word, this axiom being all that he knew about genius and seeming to him less supported by proof than our knowledge of typhoid fever and arthritis. And as he had become proud and remained ill-bred: "No questions, Princess, do not interrogate me, I am at the seaside for a rest. Besides, you would not understand, you know nothing about

medicine.” And the Princess held her peace with apologies, deciding that Cottard was a charming man and realising that celebrities were not always approachable. In this initial period, then, they had ended by finding M. de Charlus an agreeable person notwithstanding his vice (or what is generally so named). Now it was, quite unconsciously, because of that vice that they found him more intelligent than the rest. The most simple maxims to which, adroitly provoked by the sculptor or the don, M. de Charlus gave utterance concerning love, jealousy, beauty, in view of the experience, strange, secret, refined and monstrous, upon which he founded them, assumed for the faithful that charm of unfamiliarity with which a psychology analogous to that which our own dramatic literature has always offered us bedecks itself in a Russian or Japanese play performed by native actors. One might still venture, when he was not listening, upon a malicious witticism at his expense. “Oh!” whispered the sculptor, seeing a young railwayman with the sweeping eyelashes of a dancing girl at whom M. de Charlus could not help staring, “if the Baron begins making eyes at the conductor, we shall never get there, the train will start going backwards. Just look at the way he’s staring at him, this is not a steam-tram we’re on, it’s a funicular.” But when all was said, if M. de Charlus did not appear, it was almost a disappointment to be travelling only with people who were just like everybody else, and not to have by one’s side this painted, paunchy, tightly-buttoned personage, reminding one of a box of exotic and dubious origin from which escapes the curious odour of fruits the mere thought of tasting which stirs the heart. From this point of view, the faithful of the masculine sex enjoyed a keener satisfaction in the short stage of the journey between Saint-Martin du Chêne, where M. de Charlus got in, and Doncières, the station at which Morel joined the party. For so long as the violinist was not there (and provided the ladies and Albertine, keeping to themselves so as not to disturb our conversation, were out of hearing), M. de Charlus made no attempt to appear to be avoiding certain subjects and did not hesitate to speak of ‘what it is customary to call degenerate morals.’ Albertine could not hamper him, for she was always with the ladies, like a well-bred girl who does not wish her presence to restrict the freedom of grown-up conversation. And I was quite resigned to not having her by my side, on condition however that she remained in the same carriage. For I, who no longer felt any jealousy and scarcely any love for her, never thought of what she might be doing on the days when I did not see her; on the other hand, when I was there, a mere partition which might at a pinch be concealing a betrayal was intolerable to me, and if she retired with the ladies to the next compartment, a moment later,

unable to remain in my seat any longer, at the risk of offending whoever might be talking, Brichot, Cottard or Charlus, to whom I could not explain the reason for my flight, I would rise, leave them without ceremony, and, to make certain that nothing abnormal was going on, walk down the corridor. And, till we came to Doncières, M. de Charlus, without any fear of shocking his audience, would speak sometimes in the plainest terms of morals which, he declared, for his own part he did not consider either good or evil. He did this from cunning, to shew his breadth of mind, convinced as he was that his own morals aroused no suspicion in the minds of the faithful. He was well aware that there did exist in the world several persons who were, to use an expression which became habitual with him later on, 'in the know' about himself. But he imagined that these persons were not more than three or four, and that none of them was at that moment upon the coast of Normandy. This illusion may appear surprising in so shrewd, so suspicious a man. Even in the case of those whom he believed to be more or less well informed, he flattered himself that their information was all quite vague, and hoped, by telling them this or that fact about anyone, to clear the person in question from all suspicion on the part of a listener who out of politeness pretended to accept his statements. Indeed, being uncertain as to what I might know or guess about him, he supposed that my opinion, which he imagined to be of far longer standing than it actually was, was quite general, and that it was sufficient for him to deny this or that detail to be believed, whereas on the contrary, if our knowledge of the whole always precedes our knowledge of details, it makes our investigation of the latter infinitely easier and having destroyed his cloak of invisibility no longer allows the pretender to conceal what he wishes to keep secret. Certainly when M. de Charlus, invited to a dinner-party by one of the faithful or of their friends, took the most complicated precautions to introduce among the names of ten people whom he mentioned that of Morel, he never imagined that for the reasons, always different, which he gave for the pleasure or convenience which he would find that evening in being invited to meet him, his hosts, while appearing to believe him implicitly, substituted a single reason, always the same, of which he supposed them to be ignorant, namely that he was in love with him. Similarly, Mme. Verdurin, seeming always entirely to admit the motives, half artistic, half charitable, with which M. de Charlus accounted to her for the interest that he took in Morel, never ceased to thank the Baron with emotion for his kindness — his touching kindness, she called it — to the violinist. And how astonished M. de Charlus would have been, if, one day when Morel and he were delayed and had not come by the train, he

had heard the Mistress say: “We’re all here now except the young ladies.” The Baron would have been all the more stupefied in that, going hardly anywhere save to la Raspelière, he played the part there of a family chaplain, like the abbé in a stock company, and would sometimes (when Morel had 48 hours’ leave) sleep there for two nights in succession. Mme. Verdurin would then give them communicating rooms and, to put them at their ease, would say: “If you want to have a little music, don’t worry about us, the walls are as thick as a fortress, you have nobody else on your floor, and my husband sleeps like lead.” On such days M. de Charlus would relieve the Princess of the duty of going to meet strangers at the station, apologise for Mme. Verdurin’s absence on the grounds of a state of health which he described so vividly that the guests entered the drawing-room with solemn faces, and uttered cries of astonishment on finding the Mistress up and doing and wearing what was almost a low dress.

For M. de Charlus had for the moment become for Mme. Verdurin the faithfullest of the faithful, a second Princess Sherbatoff. Of his position in society she was not nearly so certain as of that of the Princess, imagining that if the latter cared to see no one outside the little nucleus it was out of contempt for other people and preference for it. As this pretence was precisely the Verdurins’ own, they treating as bores everyone to whose society they were not admitted, it is incredible that the Mistress can have believed the Princess to possess a heart of steel, detesting what was fashionable. But she stuck to her guns, and was convinced that in the case of the great lady also it was in all sincerity and from a love of things intellectual that she avoided the company of bores. The latter were, as it happened, diminishing in numbers from the Verdurins’ point of view. Life by the seaside robbed an introduction of the ulterior consequences which might be feared in Paris. Brilliant men who had come down to Balbec without their wives (which made everything much easier) made overtures to la Raspelière and, from being bores, became too charming. This was the case with the Prince de Guermantes, whom the absence of his Princess would not, however, have decided to go ‘as a bachelor’ to the Verdurins’, had not the lodestone of Dreyfusism been so powerful as to carry him in one stride up the steep ascent to la Raspelière, unfortunately upon a day when the Mistress was not at home. Mme. Verdurin as it happened was not certain that he and M. de Charlus moved in the same world. The Baron had indeed said that the Duc de Guermantes was his brother, but this was perhaps the untruthful boast of an adventurer. Man of the world as he had shewn himself to be, so friendly, so ‘faithful’ to the Verdurins, the Mistress still almost hesitated to invite him to

meet the Prince de Guermantes. She consulted Ski and Brichot: “The Baron and the Prince de Guermantes, will they be all right together?” “Good gracious, Madame, as to one of the two I think I can safely say.” “What good is that to me?” Mme. Verdurin had retorted crossly. “I asked you whether they would mix well together.” “Ah! Madame, that is one of the things that it is hard to tell.” Mme. Verdurin had been impelled by no malice. She was certain of the Baron’s morals, but when she expressed herself in these terms had not been thinking about them for a moment, but had merely wished to know whether she could invite the Prince and M. de Charlus on the same evening, without their clashing. She had no malevolent intention when she employed these ready-made expressions which are popular in artistic ‘little clans.’ To make the most of M. de Guermantes, she proposed to take him in the afternoon, after her luncheon-party, to a charity entertainment at which sailors from the neighbourhood would give a representation of a ship setting sail. But, not having time to attend to everything, she delegated her duties to the faithfullest of the faithful, the Baron. “You understand, I don’t want them to hang about like mussels on a rock, they must keep moving, we must see them weighing anchor, or whatever it’s called. Now you are always going down to the harbour at Balbec-Plage, you can easily arrange a dress rehearsal without tiring yourself. You must know far more than I do, M. de Charlus, about getting hold of sailors. But after all, we’re giving ourselves a great deal of trouble for M. de Guermantes. Perhaps he’s only one of those idiots from the Jockey Club. Oh! Heavens, I’m running down the Jockey Club, and I seem to remember that you’re one of them. Eh, Baron, you don’t answer me, are you one of them? You don’t care to come out with us? Look, here is a book that has just come, I think you’ll find it interesting. It is by Roujon. The title is attractive: *Life among men*.”

For my part, I was all the more glad that M. de Charlus often took the place of Princess Sherbatoff, inasmuch as I was thoroughly in her bad books, for a reason that was at once trivial and profound. One day when I was in the little train, paying every attention, as was my habit, to Princess Sherbatoff, I saw Mme. de Villeparisis get in. She had as a matter of fact come down to spend some weeks with the Princesse de Luxembourg, but, chained to the daily necessity of seeing Albertine, I had never replied to the repeated invitations of the Marquise and her royal hostess. I felt remorse at the sight of my grandmother’s friend, and, purely from a sense of duty (without deserting Princess Sherbatoff), sat talking to her for some time. I was, as it happened, entirely unaware that Mme. de Villeparisis knew quite well who my companion

was but did not wish to speak to her. At the next station, Mme. de Villeparisis left the carriage, indeed I reproached myself with not having helped her on to the platform; I resumed my seat by the side of the Princess. But one would have thought — a cataclysm frequent among people whose position is far from stable and who are afraid that one may have heard something to their discredit, and may be looking down upon them — that the curtain had risen upon a fresh scene. Buried in her *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Madame Sherbatoff barely moved her lips in reply to my questions and finally told me that I was making her head ache. I had not the faintest idea of the nature of my crime. When I bade the Princess good-bye, the customary smile did not light up her face, her chin drooped in a dry acknowledgment, she did not even offer me her hand, nor did she ever speak to me again. But she must have spoken — though what she said I cannot tell — to the Verdurins; for as soon as I asked them whether I ought not to say something polite to Princess Sherbatoff, they replied in chorus: “No! Nol No! Nothing of the sort! She does not care for polite speeches!” They did not say this to effect a breach between us, but she had succeeded in making them believe that she was unmoved by civilities, that hers was a spirit unassailed by the vanities of this world. One needs to have seen the politician who was reckoned the most single-minded, the most uncompromising, the most unapproachable, so long as he was in office, one must have seen him in the hour of his disgrace, humbly soliciting, with a bright, affectionate smile, the haughty greeting of some unimportant journalist, one must have seen Cottard (whom his new patients regarded as a rod of iron) draw himself erect, one must know out of what disappointments in love, what rebuffs to snobbery were built up the apparent pride, the universally acknowledged anti-snobbery of Princess Sherbatoff, in order to grasp that among the human race the rule — which admits of exceptions, naturally — is that the reputedly hard people are weak people whom nobody wants, and that the strong, caring little whether they are wanted or not, have alone that meekness which the common herd mistake for weakness.

However, I ought not to judge Princess Sherbatoff severely. Her case is so common! One day, at the funeral of a Guermantes, a distinguished man who was standing next to me drew my attention to a slim person with handsome features. “Of all the Guermantes,” my neighbour informed me, “that is the most astonishing, the most singular. He is the Duke’s brother.” I replied imprudently that he was mistaken, that the gentleman in question, who was in no way related to the Guermantes, was named Journier-Sarlovèze. The distinguished man turned his back upon me, and has never even bowed to me since.

A great musician, a member of the Institute, occupying a high official position, who was acquainted with Ski, came to Harambouville, where he had a niece staying, and appeared at one of the Verdurins' Wednesdays. M. de Charlus was especially polite to him (at Morel's request), principally in order that on his return to Paris the Academician might enable him to attend various private concerts, rehearsals and so forth, at which the violinist would be playing. The Academician, who was flattered, and was naturally a charming person, promised, and kept his promise. The Baron was deeply touched by all the consideration which this personage (who, for his own part, was exclusively and passionately a lover of women) shewed him, all the facilities that he procured to enable him to see Morel in those official quarters which the profane world may not enter, all the opportunities by which the celebrated artist secured that the young virtuoso might shew himself, might make himself known, by naming him in preference to others of equal talent for auditions which were likely to make a special stir. But M. de Charlus never suspected that he ought to be all the more grateful to the maestro in that the latter, doubly deserving, or, if you prefer it, guilty twice over, was completely aware of the relations between the young violinist and his noble patron. He favoured them, certainly without any sympathy for them, being unable to comprehend any other love than that for the woman who had inspired the whole of his music, but from moral indifference, a professional readiness to oblige, social affability, snobbishness. As for his doubts as to the character of those relations, they were so scanty that, at his first dinner at la Raspelière, he had inquired of Ski, speaking of M. de Charlus and Morel, as he might have spoken of a man and his mistress: "Have they been long together?" But, too much the man of the world to let the parties concerned see what was in his mind, prepared, should any gossip arise among Morel's fellow-students, to rebuke them, and to reassure Morel by saying to him in a fatherly tone: "One hears that sort of thing about everybody nowadays," he did not cease to load the Baron with civilities which the latter thought charming, but quite natural, being incapable of suspecting the eminent maestro of so much vice or of so much virtue. For the things that were said behind M. de Charlus's back, the expressions used about Morel, nobody was ever base enough to repeat to him. And yet this simple situation is enough to shew that even that thing universally decried, which would find no defender anywhere: the breath of scandal, has itself, whether it be aimed at us and so become especially disagreeable to us, or inform us of something about a third person of which we were unaware, a psychological value of its own. It prevents the mind from falling asleep over the

fictitious idea that it has of what it supposes things to be when it is actually no more than their outward appearance. It turns this appearance inside out with the magic dexterity of an idealist philosopher and rapidly presents to our gaze an unsuspected corner of the reverse side of the fabric. How could M. de Charlus have imagined the remark made of him by a certain tender relative: “How on earth can you suppose that Mémé is in love with me, you forget that I am a woman!” And yet she was genuinely, deeply attached to M. de Charlus. Why then need we be surprised that in the case of the Verdurins, whose affection and goodwill he had no title to expect, the remarks which they made behind his back (and they did not, as we shall see, confine themselves to remarks), were so different from what he imagined them to be, that is to say from a mere repetition of the remarks that he heard when he was present? The latter alone decorated with affectionate inscriptions the little ideal tent to which M. de Charlus retired at times to dream by himself, when he introduced his imagination for a moment into the idea that the Verdurins held of him. Its atmosphere was so congenial, so cordial, the repose it offered so comforting, that when M. de Charlus, before going to sleep, had withdrawn to it for a momentary relief from his worries, he never emerged from it without a smile. But, for each one of us, a tent of this sort has two sides: as well as the side which we suppose to be the only one, there is the other which is normally invisible to us, the true front, symmetrical with the one that we know, but very different, whose decoration, in which we should recognise nothing of what we-expected to see, would horrify us, as being composed of the hateful symbols of an unsuspected hostility. What a shock for M. de Charlus, if he had found his way into one of these enemy tents, by means of some piece of scandal as though by one of those service stairs where obscene drawings are scribbled outside the back doors of flats by unpaid tradesmen or dismissed servants. But, just as we do not possess that sense of direction with which certain birds are endowed, so we lack the sense of our own visibility as we lack that of distances, imagining as quite close to us the interested attention of the people who on the contrary never give us a thought, and not suspecting that we are at the same time the sole preoccupation of others. And so M. de Charlus lived in a state of deception like the fish which thinks that the water in which it is swimming extends beyond the glass wall of its aquarium which mirrors it, while it does not see close beside it in the shadow the human visitor who is amusing himself by watching its movements, or the all-powerful keeper who, at the unforeseen and fatal moment, postponed for the present in the case of the Baron (for whom the keeper, in Paris, will be Mme. Verdurin), will extract it

without compunction from the place in which it was happily living to cast it into another. Moreover, the races of mankind, in so far as they are not merely collections of individuals, may furnish us with examples more vast, but identical in each of their parts, of this profound, obstinate and disconcerting blindness. Up to the present, if it was responsible for M. de Charlus's discoursing to the little clan remarks of a wasted subtlety or of an audacity which made his listeners smile at him in secret, it had not yet caused him, nor was it to cause him at Balbec any serious inconvenience. A trace of albumen, of sugar, of cardiac arythmia, does not prevent life from remaining normal for the man who is not even conscious of it, when only the physician sees in it a prophecy of catastrophes in store. At present the fondness — whether Platonic or not — that M. de Charlus felt for Morel merely led the Baron to say spontaneously in Morel's absence that he thought him very good looking, supposing that this would be taken in all innocence, and thereby acting like a clever man who when summoned to make a statement before a Court of Law will not be afraid to enter into details which are apparently to his disadvantage but for that very reason are more natural and less vulgar than the conventional protestations of a stage culprit. With the same freedom, always between Saint-Martin du Châne and Doncières-Ouest — or conversely on the return journey — M. de Charlus would readily speak of men who had, it appeared, very strange morals, and would even add: "After all, I say strange, I don't know why, for there's nothing so very strange about that," to prove to himself how thoroughly he was at his ease with his audience. And so indeed he was, provided that it was he who retained the initiative, and that he knew his gallery to be mute and smiling, disarmed by credulity or good manners.

When M. de Charlus was not speaking of his admiration for Morel's beauty, as though it had no connexion with an inclination — called a vice — he would refer to that vice, but as though he himself were in no way addicted to it. Sometimes indeed he did not hesitate to call it by its name. As after examining the fine binding of his volume of Balzac I asked him which was his favourite novel in the *Comédie Humaine*, he replied, his thoughts irresistibly attracted to the same topic: "Either one thing or the other, a tiny miniature like the *Curé de Tours* and the *Femme abandonnée*, or one of the great frescoes like the series of *Illusions perdues*. What! You've never read *Illusions perdues*? It's wonderful. The scene where Carlos Herrera asks the name of the château he is driving past, and it turns out to be Rastignac, the home of the young man he used to love. And then the abbé falls into a reverie which Swann once called, and very aptly, the

Tristesse d'Olympia of paederasty. And the death of Lucien! I forgot who the man of taste was who, when he was asked what event in his life had most distressed him, replied: 'The death of Lucien de Rubempré in *Splendeurs et Misères*.'" "I know that Balzac is all the rage this year, as pessimism was last," Brichot interrupted. "But, at the risk of distressing the hearts that are smitten with the Balzacian fever, without laying any claim, damme, to being a policeman of letters, or drawing up a list of offences against the laws of grammar, I must confess that the copious improviser whose alarming lucubrations you appear to me singularly to overrate, has always struck me as being an insufficiently meticulous scribe. I have read these *Illusions perdues* of which you are telling us, Baron, flagellating myself to attain to the fervour of an initiate, and I confess in all simplicity of heart that those serial instalments of bombastic balderdash, written in double Dutch — and in triple Dutch: *Esther heureuse, Où mènent les mauvais chemins, A combien l'amour revient aux vieillards*, have always had the effect on me of the *Mystères de Rocambole*, exalted by an inexplicable preference to the precarious position of a masterpiece." "You say that because you know nothing of life," said the Baron, doubly irritated, for he felt that Brichot would not understand either his aesthetic reasons or the other kind. "I quite realise," replied Brichot, "that, to speak like Master François Rabelais, you mean that I am *moult sorbonagre, sorbonicole et sorboniforme*. And yet, just as much as any of the comrades, I like a book to give an impression of sincerity and real life, I am not one of those clerks..." "The *quart d'heure de Rabelais*," the Doctor broke in, with an air no longer of uncertainty but of assurance as to his own wit. "... who take a vow of literature following the rule of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, yielding obedience to M. le Vicomte de Chateaubriand, Grand Master of common form, according to the strict rule of the humanists. M. le Vicomte de Chateaubriand's mistake..." "With fried potatoes?" put in Dr. Cottard. "He is the patron saint of the brotherhood," continued Brichot, ignoring the wit of the Doctor, who, on the other hand, alarmed by the don's phrase, glanced anxiously at M. de Charlus. Brichot had seemed wanting in tact to Cottard, whose pun had brought a delicate smile to the lips of Princess Sherbatoff. "With the Professor, the mordant irony of the complete sceptic never forfeits its rights," she said kindly, to shew that the scientist's witticism had not passed unperceived by herself. "The sage is of necessity sceptical," replied the Doctor. "It's not my fault. *Gnothi seauton*, said Socrates. He was quite right, excess in anything is a mistake. But I am dumbfoundered when I think that those words have sufficed to keep Socrates's name alive all this time. What is there in his philosophy, very

little when all is said. When one reflects that Charcot and others have done work a thousand times more remarkable, work which moreover is at least founded upon something, upon the suppression of the pupillary reflex as a syndrome of general paralysis, and that they are almost forgotten. After all, Socrates was nothing out of the common. They were people who had nothing better to do, and spent their time strolling about and splitting hairs. Like Jesus Christ: 'Love one another!' it's all very pretty." "My dear," Mme. Cottard implored. "Naturally my wife protests, women are all neurotic." "But, my dear Doctor, I am not neurotic," murmured Mme. Cottard. "What, she is not neurotic! When her son is ill, she exhibits phenomena of insomnia. Still, I quite admit that Socrates, and all the rest of them, are necessary for a superior culture, to acquire the talent of exposition. I always quote his *gnothi seauton* to my pupils at the beginning of the course. Père Bouchard, when he heard of it, congratulated me." "I am not one of those who hold to form for form's sake, any more than I should treasure in poetry the rhyme millionaire," replied Brichot. "But all the same the *Comédie Humaine* — which is far from human — is more than the antithesis of those works in which the art exceeds the matter, as that worthy hack Ovid says. And it is permissible to choose a middle course, which leads to the presbytery of Meudon or the hermitage of Ferney, equidistant from the Valley of Wolves, in which René superbly performed the duties of a merciless pontificate, and from les Jardies, where Honoré de Balzac, browbeaten by the bailiffs, never ceased voiding upon paper to please a Polish woman, like a zealous apostle of balderdash."

"Chateaubriand is far more alive now than you say, and Balzac is, after all, a great writer," replied M. de Charlus, still too much impregnated with Swann's tastes not to be irritated by Brichot, "and Balzac was acquainted with even those passions which the rest of the world ignores, or studies only to castigate them. Without referring again to the immortal *Illusions perdues; Sarrazine, La Fille aux yeux d'or, Une passion dans le désert*, even the distinctly enigmatic *Fausse Maîtresse* can be adduced in support of my argument. When I spoke of this 'unnatural' aspect of Balzac to Swann, he said to me: 'You are of the same opinion as Taine.' I never had the honour of knowing Monsieur Taine," M. de Charlus continued, with that irritating habit of inserting an otiose 'Monsieur' to which people in society are addicted, as though they imagine that by styling a great writer 'Monsieur' they are doing him an honour, perhaps keeping him at his proper distance, and making it evident that they do not know him personally. "I never knew Monsieur Taine, but I felt myself greatly honoured by being of the

same opinion as he." However, in spite of these ridiculous social affectations, M. de Charlus was extremely intelligent, and it is probable that if some remote marriage had established a connexion between his family and that of Balzac, he would have felt (no less than Balzac himself, for that matter) a satisfaction which he would have been unable to help displaying as a praiseworthy sign of condescension.

Now and again, at the station after Saint-Martin du Chêne, some young men would get into the train. M. de Charlus could not refrain from looking at them, but as he cut short and concealed the attention that he was paying them, he gave it the air of hiding a secret, more personal even than his real secret; one would have said that he knew them, allowed his acquaintance to appear in spite of himself, after he had accepted the sacrifice, before turning again to us, like children who, in consequence of a quarrel among their respective parents, have been forbidden to speak to certain of their schoolfellows, but who when they meet them cannot forego the temptation to raise their heads before lowering them again before their tutor's menacing cane.

At the word borrowed from the Greek with which M. de Charlus in speaking of Balzac had ended his comparison of the *Tristesse d'Olympio*with the *Splendeurs et Misères*, Ski, Brichot and Cottard had glanced at one another with a smile perhaps less ironical than stamped with that satisfaction which people at a dinner-party would shew who had succeeded in making Dreyfus talk about his own case, or the Empress Eugénie about her reign. They were hoping to press him a little further upon this subject, but we were already at Doncières, where Morel joined us. In his presence, M. de Charlus kept a careful guard over his conversation and, when Ski tried to bring it back to the love of Carlos Herrera for Lucien de Rubempré, the Baron assumed the vexed, mysterious, and finally (seeing that nobody was listening to him) severe and judicial air of a father who hears people saying something indecent in front of his daughter. Ski having shewn some determination to pursue the subject, M. de Charlus, his eyes starting out of his head, raised his voice and said, in a significant tone, looking at Albertine, who as a matter of fact could not hear what we were saying, being engaged in conversation with Mme. Cottard and Princess Sherbatoff, and with the suggestion of a double meaning of a person who wishes to teach ill-bred people a lesson: "I think it is high time we began to talk of subjects that are likely to interest this young lady." But I quite realised that, to him, the young lady was not Albertine but Morel; he proved, as it happened, later on, the accuracy of my interpretation by the expressions that he employed when he

begged that there might be no more of such conversation in front of Morel. “You know,” he said to me, speaking of the violinist, “that he is not at all what you might suppose, he is a very respectable youth who has always behaved himself, he is very serious.” And one gathered from these words that M. de Charlus regarded sexual inversion as a danger as menacing to young men as prostitution is to women, and that if he employed the epithet ‘respectable,’ of Morel it was in the sense that it has when applied to a young shop-girl. Then Brichot, to change the conversation, asked me whether I intended to remain much longer at Incarville. I had pointed out to him more than once, but in vain, that I was staying not at Incarville but at Balbec, he always repeated the mistake, for it was by the name of Incarville or Balbec-Incarville that he described this section of the coast. There are people like that, who speak of the same things as ourselves but call them by a slightly different name. A certain lady of the Faubourg Saint-Germain used invariably to ask me, when she meant to refer to the Duchesse de Guermantes, whether I had seen Zénaïde lately, or Oriane-Zénaïde, the effect of which was that at first I did not understand her. Probably there had been a time when, some relative of Mme. de Guermantes being named Oriane, she herself, to avoid confusion, had been known as Oriane-Zénaïde. Perhaps, too, there had originally been a station only at Incarville, from which one went in a carriage to Balbec. “Why, what have you been talking about?” said Albertine, astonished at the solemn, paternal tone which M. de Charlus had suddenly adopted. “About Balzac,” the Baron hastily replied, “and you are wearing this evening the very same clothes as the Princesse de Cadignan, not her first gown, which she wears at the dinnerparty, but the second.” This coincidence was due to the fact that, in choosing Albertine’s clothes, I sought inspiration in the taste that she had acquired thanks to Elstir, who greatly appreciated a sobriety which might have been called British, had it not been tempered with a gentler, more flowing grace that was purely French. As a rule the garments that he chose offered to the eye a harmonious combination of grey tones like the dress of Diane de Cadignan. M. de Charlus was almost the only person capable of appreciating Albertine’s clothes at their true value; at a glance, his eye detected what constituted their rarity, justified their price; he would never have said the name of one stuff instead of another, and could always tell who had made them. Only he preferred — in women — a little more brightness and colour than Elstir would allow. And so this evening she cast a glance at me half smiling, half troubled, wrinkling her little pink cat’s nose. Indeed, meeting over her skirt of grey crêpe de chine, her jacket of grey cheviot gave the impression that Albertine was dressed entirely in

grey. But, making a sign to me to help her, because her puffed sleeves needed to be smoothed down or pulled up, for her to get into or out of her jacket, she took it off, and as her sleeves were of a Scottish plaid in soft colours, pink, pale blue, dull green, pigeon's breast, the effect was as though in a grey sky there had suddenly appeared a rainbow. And she asked herself whether this would find favour with M. de Charlus. "Ah!" he exclaimed in delight, "now we have a ray, a prism of colour. I offer you my sincerest compliments." "But it is this gentleman who has earned them," Albertine replied politely, pointing to myself, for she liked to shew what she had received from me. "It is only women who do not know how to dress that are afraid of colours," went on M. de Charlus. "A dress may be brilliant without vulgarity and quiet without being dull. Besides, you have not the same reasons as Mme. de Cadignan for wishing to appear detached from life, for that was the idea which she wished to instil into d'Arthez by her grey gown." Albertine, who was interested in this mute language of clothes, questioned M. de Charlus about the Princesse de Cadignan. "Ohl It is a charming tale," said the Baron in a dreamy tone. "I know the little garden in which Diane de Cadignan used to stroll with M. d'Espard. It belongs to one of my cousins." "All this talk about his cousin's garden," Brichot murmured to Cottard, "may, like his pedigree, be of some importance to this worthy Baron. But what interest can it have for us who are not privileged to walk in it, do not know the lady, and possess no titles of nobility?" For Brichot had no suspicion that one might be interested in a gown and in a garden as works of art, and that it was in the pages of Balzac that M, de Charlus saw, in his mind's eye, the garden paths of Mme. de Cadignan. The Baron went on: "But you know her," he said to me, speaking of this cousin, and, by way of flattering me, addressing himself to me as to a person who, exiled amid the little clan, was to M. de Charlus, if not a citizen of his world, at any rate a visitor to it. "Anyhow you must have seen her at Mme. de Villeparisis's." "Is that the Marquise de Villeparisis who owns the chateau at Baucreux?" asked Brichot with a captivated air. "Yes, do you know her?" inquired M. de Charlus dryly. "No, not at all," replied Brichot, "but our colleague Norpois spends part of his holidays every year at Baucreux. I have had occasion to write to him there." I told Morel, thinking to interest him, that M. de Norpois was a friend of my father. But not a movement of his features shewed that he had heard me, so little did he think of my parents, so far short did they fall in his estimation of what my great-uncle had been, who had employed Morel's father as his valet, and, as a matter of fact, being, unlike the rest of the family, fond of not giving trouble, had left a golden memory among his servants.

“It appears that Mme. de Villeparisis is a superior woman; but I have never been allowed to judge of that for myself, nor for that matter have any of my colleagues. For Norpois, who is the soul of courtesy and affability at the Institute, has never introduced any of us to the Marquise. I know of no one who has been received by her except our friend Thureau-Dangin, who had an old family connexion with her, and also Gaston Boissier, whom she was anxious to meet because of an essay which interested her especially. He dined with her once and came back quite enthralled by her charm. Mme. Boissier, however, was not invited.” At the sound of these names, Morel melted in a smile. “Ah! Thureau-Dangin,” he said to me with an air of interest as great as had been his indifference when he heard me speak of the Marquis de Norpois and my father. “Thureau-Dangin; why, he and your uncle were as thick as thieves. Whenever a lady wanted a front seat for a reception at the Academy, your uncle would say: ‘I shall write to Thureau-Dangin.’ And of course he got the ticket at once, for you can understand that M. Thureau-Dangin would never have dared to refuse anything to your uncle, who would have been certain to pay him out for it afterwards if he had. I can’t help smiling, either, when I hear the name Boissier, for that was where your uncle ordered all the presents he used to give the ladies at the New Year. I know all about it, because I knew the person he used to send for them.” He had not only known him, the person was his father. Some of these affectionate allusions by Morel to my uncle’s memory were prompted by the fact that we did not intend to remain permanently in the Hôtel de Guermantes, where we had taken an apartment only on account of my grandmother. Now and again there would be talk of a possible move. Now, to understand the advice that Charlie Morel gave me in this connexion, the reader must know that my great-uncle had lived, in his day, at 40_bis Boulevard Malesherbes. The consequence was that, in the family, as we were in the habit of frequently visiting my uncle Adolphe until the fatal day when I made a breach between my parents and him by telling them the story of the lady in pink, instead of saying ‘at your uncle’s’ we used to say ‘at 40_bis.’ If I were going to call upon some kinswoman, I would be warned to go first of all ‘to 40_bis,’ in order that my uncle might not be offended by my not having begun my round with him. He was the owner of the house and was, I must say, very particular as to the choice of his tenants, all of whom either were or became his personal friends. Colonel the Baron de Vatry used to look in every day and smoke a cigar with him in the hope of making him consent to pay for repairs. The carriage entrance was always kept shut. If my uncle caught sight of a cloth or a rug hanging from one of the windowsills he

would dash into the room and have it removed in less time than the police would take to do so nowadays. All the same, he did let part of the house, reserving for himself only two floors and the stables. In spite of this, knowing that he was pleased when people praised the house, we used always to talk of the comfort of the ‘little mansion’ as though my uncle had been its sole occupant, and he allowed us to speak, without uttering the formal contradiction that might have been expected. The ‘little mansion’ was certainly comfortable (my uncle having installed in it all the most recent inventions). But there was nothing extraordinary about it. Only, my uncle, while saying with a false modesty ‘my little hovel,’ was convinced, or in any case had instilled into his valet, the latter’s wife, the coachman, the cook, the idea that there was no place in Paris to compare, for comfort, luxury, and general attractiveness, with the little mansion. Charles Morel had grown up in this belief. Nor had he outgrown it. And so, even on days when he was not talking to me, if in the train I mentioned to anyone else the possibility of our moving, at once he would smile at me and, with a wink of connivance, say: “Ah! What you want is something in the style of 40_bis! That’s a place that would suit you down to the ground! Your uncle knew what he was about. I am quite sure that in the whole of Paris there’s nothing to compare with 40_bis.”

The melancholy air which M. de Charlus had assumed in speaking of the Princesse de Cadignan left me in no doubt that the tale in question had not reminded him only of the little garden of a cousin-to whom he was not particularly attached. He became lost in meditation, and, as though he were talking to himself: “The secrets of the Princesse de Cadignan!” he exclaimed, “What a masterpiece! How profound, how heartrending the evil reputation of Diane, who is afraid that the man she loves may hear of it. What an eternal truth, and more universal than might appear, how far it extends!” He uttered these words with a sadness in which nevertheless one felt that he found a certain charm. Certainly M. de Charlus, unaware to what extent precisely his habits were or were not known, had been trembling for some time past at the thought that when he returned to Paris and was seen there in Morel’s company, the latter’s family might intervene and so his future happiness be jeopardised. This eventuality had probably not appeared to him hitherto save as something profoundly disagreeable and painful. But the Baron was an artist to his finger tips. And now that he had begun to identify his own position with that described by Balzac, he took refuge, in a sense, in the tale, and for the calamity which was perhaps in store for him and did not in any case cease to alarm him, he had the

consolation of finding in his own anxiety what Swann and also Saint-Loup would have called something ‘quite Balzacian.’ This identification of himself with the Princesse de Cadignan had been made easy for M. de Charlus by virtue of the mental transposition which was becoming habitual with him and of which he had already furnished several examples. It was enough in itself, moreover, to make the mere conversion of a woman, as the beloved object, into a young man immediately set in motion about him the whole sequence of social complications which develop round a normal love affair. When, for any reason, we introduce once and for all time a change in the calendar, or in the daily time-table, if we make the year begin a few weeks later, or if we make midnight strike a quarter of an hour earlier, as the days will still consist of twenty-four hours and the months of thirty days, everything that depends upon the measure of time will remain unaltered. Everything may have been changed without causing any disturbance, since the ratio of the figures is still the same. So it is with lives which adopt Central European time, or the Eastern calendar. It seems even that the gratification a man derives from keeping an actress played a part in these relations. When, after their first meeting, M. de Charlus had made inquiries as to Morel’s actual position, he must certainly have learned that he was of humble extraction, but a girl with whom we are in love does not forfeit our esteem because she is the child of poor parents. On the other hand, the well known musicians to whom he had addressed his inquiries, had — and not even from any personal motive, unlike the friends who, when introducing Swann to Odette, had described her to him as more difficult and more sought after than she actually was — simply in the stereotyped manner of men in a prominent position overpraising a beginner, answered the Baron: “Ah! Great talent, has made a name for himself, of course he is still quite young, highly esteemed by the experts, will go far.” And, with the mania which leads people who are innocent of inversion to speak of masculine beauty: “Besides, it is charming to watch him play; he looks better than anyone at a concert; he has lovely hair, holds himself so well; his head is exquisite, he reminds one of a violinist in a picture.” And so M. de Charlus, raised to a pitch of excitement moreover by Morel himself, who did not fail to let him know how many offers had been addressed to him, was flattered by the prospect of taking him home with him, of making a little nest for him to which he would often return. For during the rest of the time he wished him to enjoy his freedom, which was necessary to his career, which M. de Charlus meant him, however much money he might feel bound to give him, to continue, either because of the thoroughly ‘Guermantes’ idea that a man ought to

do something, that he acquires merit only by his talent, and that nobility or money is simply the additional cypher that multiplies a figure, or because he was afraid lest, having nothing to do and remaining perpetually in his company, the violinist might grow bored. Moreover he did not wish to deprive himself of the pleasure which he found, at certain important concerts, in saying to himself: "The person they are applauding at this moment is coming home with me to-night." Fashionable people, when they are in love and whatever the nature of their love, apply their vanity to anything that may destroy the anterior advantages from which their vanity would have derived satisfaction.

Morel, feeling that I bore him no malice, being sincerely attached to M. de Charlus, and at the same time absolutely indifferent physically to both of us, ended by treating me with the same display of warm friendship as a courtesan who knows that you do not desire her and that her lover has a sincere friend in you who will not attempt to part him from her. Not only did he speak to me exactly as Rachel, Saint-Loup's mistress, had spoken to me long ago, but what was more, to judge by what M. de Charlus reported to me, he used to say to him about me in my absence the same things that Rachel had said about me to Robert. In fact M. de Charlus said to me: "He likes you so much," as Robert had said: "She likes you so much." And just as the nephew on behalf of his mistress, so it was on Morel's behalf that the uncle often invited me to come and dine with them. There were, for that matter, just as many storms between them as there had been between Robert and Rachel. To be sure, after Charlie (Morel) had left us, M. de Charlus would sing his praises without ceasing, repeating — the thought of it was flattering to him — that the violinist was so good to him. But it was evident nevertheless that often Charlie, even in front of all the faithful, wore an irritated expression, instead of always appearing happy and submissive as the Baron would have wished. This irritation became so violent in course of time, owing to the weakness which led M. de Charlus to forgive Morel his want of politeness, that the violinist made no attempt to conceal, if he did not even deliberately assume it. I have seen M. de Charlus, on entering a railway carriage in which Morel was sitting with some of his soldier friends, greeted with a shrug of the musician's shoulders, accompanied by a wink in the direction of his comrades. Or else he would pretend to be asleep, as though this incursion bored him beyond words. Or he would begin to cough, and the others would laugh, derisively mimicking the affected speech of men like M. de Charlus; would draw Charlie into a corner, from which he would return, as though under compulsion, to sit by M. de Charlus, whose heart was pierced by all these cruelties. It is

inconceivable how he can have put up with them; and these ever varied forms of suffering set the problem of happiness in fresh terms for M. de Charlus, compelled him not only to demand more, but to desire something else, the previous combination being vitiated by a horrible memory. And yet, painful as these scenes came to be, it must be admitted that at first the genius of the humble son of France traced for Morel, made him assume charming forms of simplicity, of apparent frankness, even of an independent pride which seemed to be inspired by disinterestedness. This was not the case, but the advantage of this attitude was all the more on Morel's side since, whereas the person who is in love is continually forced to return to the charge, to increase his efforts, it is on the other hand easy for him who is not in love to proceed along a straight line, inflexible and graceful. It existed by virtue of the privilege of the race in the face — so open — of this Morel whose heart was so tightly shut, that face imbued with the neo-Hellenic grace which blooms in the basilicas of Champagne. Notwithstanding his affectation of pride, often when he caught sight of M. de Charlus at a moment when he was not expecting to see him, he would be embarrassed by the presence of the little clan, would blush, lower his eyes, to the delight of the Baron, who saw in this an entire romance. It was simply a sign of irritation and shame. The former sometimes found expression; for, calm and emphatically decent as Morel's attitude generally was, it was not without frequent contradictions. Sometimes, indeed, at something which the Baron said to him, Morel would come out, in the harshest tone, with an insolent retort which shocked everybody. M. de Charlus would lower his head with a sorrowful air, make no reply, and with that faculty which doting fathers possess of believing that the coldness, the rudeness of their children has passed unnoticed, would continue undeterred to sing the violinist's praises. M. de Charlus was not, indeed, always so submissive, but as a rule his attempts at rebellion proved abortive, principally because, having lived among people in society, in calculating the reactions that he might provoke he made allowance for the baser instincts, whether original or acquired. Now, instead of these, he encountered in Morel a plebeian tendency to spells of indifference. Unfortunately for M. de Charlus, he did not understand that, with Morel, everything else must give place when the Conservatoire (and the good reputation of the Conservatoire, but with this, which was to be a more serious matter, we are not at present concerned) was in question. Thus, for instance, people of the middle class will readily change their surnames out of vanity, noblemen for personal advantage. To the young violinist, on the contrary, the name Morel was inseparably linked with his

first prize for the violin, and so impossible to alter. M. de Charlus would have liked Morel to take everything from himself, including a name. Going upon the facts that Morel's other name was Charles, which resembled Charlus, and that the place where they were in the habit of meeting was called les Charmes, he sought to persuade Morel that, a pleasant name, easy to pronounce, being half the battle for artistic fame, the virtuoso ought without hesitation to take the name Charmel, a discreet allusion to the scene of their intimacy. Morel shrugged his shoulders. As a conclusive argument, M. de Charlus was unfortunately inspired to add that he had a footman of that name. He succeeded only in arousing the furious indignation of the young man. "There was a time when my ancestors were proud of the title of groom, of butler to the King." "There was also a time," replied Morel haughtily, "when my ancestors cut off your ancestors' heads." M. de Charlus would have been greatly surprised had he been told that even if, abandoning the idea of 'Channel,' he made up his mind to adopt Morel and to confer upon him one of the titles of the Guermantes family which were at his disposal but which circumstances, as we shall see, did not permit him to offer the violinist, the other would decline, thinking of the artistic reputation attached to the name Morel, and of the things that would be said about him in 'the class.' So far above the Faubourg Saint-Germain did he place the Rue Bergère. And so M. de Charlus was obliged to content himself with having symbolical rings made for Morel, bearing the antique device: PLVS VLTRA CAR'LVS. Certainly, in the face of an adversary of a sort with which he was unfamiliar, M. de Charlus ought to have changed his tactics. But which of us is capable of that? Moreover, if M. de Charlus made blunders, Morel was not guiltless of them either. Far more than the actual circumstance which brought about the rupture between them, what was destined, provisionally, at least (but this provisional turned out to be final), to ruin him with M. de Charlus was that his nature included not only the baseness which made him lie down under harsh treatment and respond with insolence to kindness. Running parallel to this innate baseness, there was in him a complicated neurasthenia of ill breeding, which, roused to activity on every occasion when he was in the wrong or was becoming a nuisance, meant that at the very moment when he had need of all his politeness, gentleness, gaiety, to disarm the Baron, he became sombre, petulant, tried to provoke discussions on matters where he knew that the other did not agree with him, maintained his own hostile attitude with a weakness of argument and a slashing violence which enhanced that weakness. For, very soon running short of arguments, he invented fresh ones as he went along, in which he displayed the full extent of his

ignorance and folly. These were barely noticeable when he was in a friendly mood and sought only to please. On the contrary, nothing else was visible in his fits of sombre humour, when, from being inoffensive, they became odious. Whereupon M. de Charlus felt that he could endure no more, that his only hope lay in a brighter morrow, while Morel, forgetting that the Baron was enabling him to live in the lap of luxury, gave an ironical smile, of condescending pity, and said: “I have never taken anything from anybody. Which means that there is nobody to whom I owe a word of thanks.”

In the meantime, and as though he had been dealing with a man of the world, M. de Charlus continued to give vent to his rage, whether genuine or feigned, but in either case ineffective. It was not always so, however. Thus one day (which must be placed, as a matter of fact, subsequent to this initial period) when the Baron was returning with Charlie and myself from a luncheon party at the Verdurins’, and expecting to spend the rest of the afternoon and the evening with the violinist at Doncières, the latter’s dismissal of him, as soon as we left the train, with: “No, I’ve an engagement,” caused M. de Charlus so keen a disappointment, that in spite of all his attempts to meet adversity with a brave face, I saw the tears trickling down and melting the paint beneath his eyes, as he stood helpless by the carriage door. Such was his grief that, since we intended, Albertine and I, to spend the rest of the day at Doncières, I whispered to her that I would prefer that we did not leave M. de Charlus by himself, as he seemed, I could not say why, to be unhappy. The dear girl readily assented. I then asked M. de Charlus if he would not like me to accompany him for a little. He also assented, but declined to put my ‘cousin’ to any trouble. I found a certain charm (and one, doubtless, not to be repeated, since I had made up my mind to break with her), in saying to her quietly, as though she were my wife: “Go back home by yourself, I shall see you this evening,” and in hearing her, as a wife might, give me permission to do as I thought fit, and authorise me, if M. de Charlus, to whom she was attached, needed my company, to place myself at his disposal. We proceeded, the Baron and I, he waddling obesely, his Jesuitical eyes downcast, and I following him, to a café where we were given beer. I felt M. de Charlus’s eyes turning uneasily towards the execution of some plan. Suddenly he called for paper and ink, and began to write at an astonishing speed. While he covered sheet after sheet, his eyes glittered with furious fancies. When he had written eight pages: “May I ask you to do me a great service?” he said to me. “You will excuse my sealing this note. I am obliged to do so. You will take a carriage, a motor-car if you can find one, to get there as quickly as possible. You

are certain to find Morel in his quarters, where he has gone to change his clothes. Poor boy, he tried to bluster a little when we parted, but you may be sure that his heart is fuller than mine. You will give him this note, and, if he asks you where you met me, you will tell him that you stopped at Doncières (which, for that matter, is the truth) to see Robert, which is not quite the truth perhaps, but that you met me with a person whom you do not know, that I seemed to be extremely angry, that you thought you heard something about sending seconds (I am, as a matter of fact, fighting a duel to-morrow). Whatever you do, don't say that I am asking for him, don't make any effort to bring him here, but if he wishes to come with you, don't prevent him from doing so. Go, my boy, it is for his good, you may be the means of averting a great tragedy. While you are away, I am going to write to my seconds. I have prevented you from spending the afternoon with your cousin. I hope that she will bear me no ill will for that, indeed I am sure of it. For hers is a noble soul, and I know that she is one of the people who are strong enough not to resist the greatness of circumstances. You must thank her on my behalf. I am personally indebted to her, and I am glad that it should be so." I was extremely sorry for M. de Charlus; it seemed to me that Charlie might have prevented this duel, of which he was perhaps the cause, and I was revolted, if that were the case, that he should have gone off with such indifference, instead of staying to help his protector. My indignation was increased when, on reaching the house in which Morel lodged, I recognised the voice of the violinist, who, feeling the need of an outlet for his happiness, was singing boisterously: "Some Sunday morning, when the wedding-bells rrring!" If poor M. de Charlus had heard him, he who wished me to believe, and doubtless believed himself, that Morel's heart at that moment was full! Charlie began to dance with joy when he caught sight of me. "Hallo, old boy I (excuse me, addressing you like that; in this damned military life, one picks up bad habits) what luck, seeing you. I have nothing to do all evening. Do let's go somewhere together. We can stay here if you like, or take a boat if you prefer that, or we can have some music, it's all the same to me." I told him that I was obliged to dine at Balbec, he seemed anxious that I should invite him to dine there also, but I refrained from doing so. "But if you're in such a hurry, why have you come here?" "I have brought you a note from M. de Charlus." At that moment all his gaiety vanished; his face contracted. "What! He can't leave me alone even here. So I'm a slave, am I? Old boy, be a sport. I'm not going to open his letter. You can tell him that you couldn't find me." "Wouldn't it be better to open it, I fancy it contains something serious." "No, certainly not, you don't know all the lies, the infernal tricks that

old scoundrel's up to. It's a dodge to make me go and see him. Very well! I'm not going, I want to have an evening in peace." "But isn't there going to be a duel to-morrow?" I asked Morel, whom I supposed to be equally well informed. "A duel?" he repeated with an air of stupefaction. "I never heard a word about it. After all, it doesn't matter a damn to me, the dirty old beast can go and get plugged in the guts if he likes. But wait a minute, this is interesting, I'm going to look at his letter after all. You can tell him that you left it here for me, in case I should come in." While Morel was speaking to me, I was looking with amazement at the beautiful books which M. de Charlus had given him, and which littered his room. The violinist having refused to accept those labelled: "I belong to the Baron" etc., a device which he felt to be insulting to himself, as a mark of vassalage, the Baron, with the sentimental ingenuity in which his ill-starred love abounded, had substituted others, originated by his ancestors, but ordered from the binder according to the circumstances of a melancholy friendship. Sometimes they were terse and confident, as *Spes mea* or*Expectata non eludet*. Sometimes merely resigned, as *J'attendrai*. Others were gallant: *Mesmes plaisir du mestre*, or counselled chastity, such as that borrowed from the family of Simiane, sprinkled with azure towers and lilies, and given a fresh meaning: *Sus-tendant lilia turres*. Others, finally, were despairing, and appointed a meeting in heaven with him who had spurned the donor upon earth: *Manet ultima caelo*, and (finding the grapes which he had failed to reach too sour, pretending not to have sought what he had not secured) M. de Charlus said in one: *Non mortale quod opto*. But I had not time to examine them all.

If M. de Charlus, in dashing this letter down upon paper had seemed to be carried away by the demon that was inspiring his flying pen, as soon as Morel had broken the seal (a leopard between two roses gules, with the motto: *atavis et armis*) he began to read the letter as feverishly as M. de Charlus had written it, and over those pages covered at breakneck speed his eye ran no less rapidly than the Baron's pen. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "this is the last straw! But where am I to find him? Heaven only knows where he is now." I suggested that if he made haste he might still find him perhaps at a tavern where he had ordered beer as a restorative. "I don't know whether I shall be coming back," he said to his landlady, and added *in petto*, "it will depend on how the cat jumps." A few minutes later we reached the café. I remarked M. de Charlus's expression at the moment when he caught sight of me. When he saw that I did not return unaccompanied, I could feel that his breath, his life were restored to him. Feeling that he could not get on that evening without Morel, he had pretended that

somebody had told him that two officers of the regiment had spoken evil of him in connexion with the violinist and that he was going to send his seconds to call upon them. Morel had foreseen the scandal, his life in the regiment made impossible, and had hastened to the spot. In doing which he had not been altogether wrong. For to make his falsehood more plausible, M. de Charlus had already written to two of his friends (one was Cottard) asking them to be his seconds. And, if the violinist had not appeared, we may be certain that, in the frantic state in which M. de Charlus then was (and to change his sorrow into rage), he would have sent them with a challenge to some officer or other with whom it would have been a relief to him to fight. During the interval, M. de Charlus, remembering that he came of a race that was of purer blood than the House of France, told himself that it was really very good of him to take so much trouble over the son of a butler whose employer he would not have condescended to know. On the other hand, if his only amusement, almost, was now in the society of disreputable persons, the profoundly ingrained habit which such persons have of not replying to a letter, of failing to keep an appointment without warning you beforehand, without apologising afterwards, aroused in him, since, often enough, his heart was involved, such a wealth of emotion and the rest of the time caused him such irritation, inconvenience and anger, that he would sometimes begin to regret the endless letters over nothing at all, the scrupulous exactitude of Ambassadors and Princes, who, even if, unfortunately, their personal charms left him cold, gave him at any rate some sort of peace of mind. Accustomed to Morel’s ways, and knowing how little hold he had over him, how incapable he was of insinuating himself into a life in which friendships that were vulgar but consecrated by force of habit occupied too much space and time to leave a stray hour for the great nobleman, evicted, proud, and vainly imploring, M. de Charlus was so convinced that the musician was not coming, was so afraid of losing him for ever if he went too far, that he could barely repress a cry of joy when he saw him appear. But feeling himself the victor, he felt himself bound to dictate the terms of peace and to extract from them such advantages as he might. “What are you doing here?” he said to him. “And you?” he went on, gazing at myself, “I told you, whatever you did, not to bring him back with you.” “He didn’t want to bring me,” said Morel, turning upon M. de Charlus, in the artlessness of his coquetry, a glance conventionally mournful and languorously old-fashioned, with an air, which he doubtless thought to be irresistible, of wanting to kiss the Baron and to burst into tears. “It was I who insisted on coming in spite of him. I come, in the name of our friendship, to

implore you on my bended knees not to commit this rash act." M. de Charlus was wild with joy. The reaction was almost too much for his nerves; he managed, however, to control them. "The friendship to which you appeal at a somewhat inopportune moment," he replied in a dry tone, "ought, on the contrary, to make you support me when I decide that I cannot allow the impertinences of a fool to pass unheeded. However, even if I chose to yield to the prayers of an affection which I have known better inspired, I should no longer be in a position to do so, my letters to my seconds have been sent off and I have no doubt of their consent. You have always behaved towards me like a little idiot and, instead of priding yourself, as you had every right to do, upon the predilection which I had shewn for you, instead of making known to the mob of serjeants or servants among whom the law of military service compels you to live, what a source of incomparable satisfaction a friendship such as mine was to you, you have sought to make excuses for yourself, almost to make an idiotic merit of not being grateful enough. I know that in so doing," he went on, in order not to let it appear how deeply certain scenes had humiliated him, "you are guilty merely of having let yourself be carried away by the jealousy of others. But how is it that at your age you are childish enough (and a child ill-bred enough) not to have seen at once that your election by myself and all the advantages that must result for you from it were bound to excite jealousies, that all your comrades while they egged you on to quarrel with me were plotting to take your place? I have not thought it necessary to tell you of the letters that I have received in that connexion from all the people in whom you place most confidence. I scorn the overtures of those flunkeys as I scorn their ineffective mockery. The only person for whom I care is yourself, since I am fond of you, but affection has its limits and you ought to have guessed as much." Harsh as the word flunkey might sound in the ears of Morel, whose father had been one, but precisely because his father had been one, the explanation of all social misadventures by 'jealousy,' an explanation fatuous and absurd, but of inexhaustible value, which with a certain class never fails to 'catch on' as infallibly as the old tricks of the stage with a theatrical audience or the threat of the clerical peril in a parliament, found in him an adherence hardly less solid than in Françoise, or the servants of Mme. de Guermantes, for whom jealousy was the sole cause of the misfortunes that beset humanity. He had no doubt that his comrades had tried to oust him from his position and was all the more wretched at the thought of this disastrous, albeit imaginary duel. "Oh! How dreadful!" exclaimed Charlie. "I shall never hold up my head again. But oughtn't

they to see you before they go and call upon this officer?" "I don't know, I suppose they ought. I've sent word to one of them that I shall be here all evening and can give him his instructions." "I hope that before he comes I can make you listen to reason; you will, anyhow, let me stay with you," Morel asked him tenderly. This was all that M. de Charlus wanted. He did not however yield at once. "You would do wrong to apply in this case the 'Whoso loveth well, chasteneth well' of the proverb, for it is yourself whom I loved well, and I intend to chasten even after our parting those who have basely sought to do you an injury. Until now, their inquisitive insinuations, when they dared to ask me how a man like myself could mingle with a boy of your sort, sprung from the gutter, I have answered only in the words of the motto of my La Rochefoucauld cousins: '"Tis my pleasure.' I have indeed pointed out to you more than once that this pleasure was capable of becoming my chiefest pleasure, without there resulting from your arbitrary elevation any degradation of myself." And in an impulse of almost insane pride he exclaimed, raising his arms in the air: "*Tantus ab uno splendor*! To condescend is not to descend," he went on in a calmer tone, after this delirious outburst of pride and joy. "I hope at least that my two adversaries, notwithstanding their inferior rank, are of a blood that I can shed without reproach. I have made certain discreet inquiries in that direction which have reassured me. If you retained a shred of gratitude towards me, you ought on the contrary to be proud to see that for your sake I am reviving the bellicose humour of my ancestors, saying like them in the event of a fatal issue, now that I have learned what a little rascal you are: 'Death to me is life.'" And M. de Charlus said this sincerely, not only because of his love for Morel, but because a martial instinct which he quaintly supposed to have come down to him from his ancestors filled him with such joy at the thought of fighting that this duel, which he had originally invented with the sole object of making Morel come to him, he could not now abandon without regret. He had never engaged in any affair of the sort without at once imagining himself the victor, and identifying himself with the illustrious Constable de Guermantes, whereas in the case of anyone else this same action of taking the field appeared to him to be of the utmost insignificance. "I am sure it will be a fine sight," he said to us in all sincerity, dwelling upon each word. "To see Sarah Bernhardt in *L'Aiglon*, what is that but tripe? Mounet-Sully in *Oedipus*, tripe! At the most it assumes a certain pallid transfiguration when it is performed in the Arena of Nîmes. But what is it compared to that unimaginable spectacle, the lineal descendant of the Constable engaged in battle." And at the mere thought of such a thing, M. de Charlus,

unable to contain himself for joy, began to make passes in the air which recalled Molière, made us take the precaution of drawing our glasses closer, and fear that, when the swords crossed, the combatants, doctor and seconds would at once be wounded. “What a tempting spectacle it would be for a painter. You who know Monsieur Elstir,” he said to me, “you ought to bring him.” I replied that he was not in the neighbourhood. M. de Charlus suggested that he might be summoned by telegraph. “Oh! I say it in his interest,” he added in response to my silence. “It is always interesting for a master — which he is, in my opinion — to record such an instance of racial survival. And they occur perhaps once in a century.”

But if M. de Charlus was enchanted at the thought of a duel which he had meant at first to be entirely fictitious, Morel was thinking with terror of the stories that might be spread abroad by the regimental band and might, thanks to the stir that would be made by this duel, penetrate to the holy of holies in the Rue Bergère. Seeing in his mind’s eye the ‘class’ fully informed, he became more and more insistent with M. de Charlus, who continued to gesticulate before the intoxicating idea of a duel. He begged the Baron to allow him not to leave him until the day after the next, the supposed day of the duel, so that he might keep him within sight and try to make him listen to the voice of reason. So tender a proposal triumphed over M. de Charlus’s final hesitations. He said that he would try to find a way out of it, that he would postpone his final decision for two days. In this fashion, by not making any definite arrangement at once, M. de Charlus knew that he could keep Charlie with him for at least two days, and make use of the time to fix future engagements with him in exchange for his abandoning the duel, an exercise, he said, which in itself delighted him and which he would not forego without regret. And in saying this he was quite sincere, for he had always enjoyed taking the field when it was a question of crossing swords or exchanging shots with an adversary. Cottard arrived at length, although extremely late, for, delighted to act as second but even more upset by the prospect, he had been obliged to halt at all the cafés or farms by the way, asking the occupants to be so kind as to shew him the way to ‘No. 100’ or ‘a certain place.’ As soon as he arrived, the Baron took him into another room, for he thought it more correct that Charlie and I should not be present at the interview, and excelled in making the most ordinary room serve for the time being as throne-room or council chamber. When he was alone with Cottard he thanked him warmly, but informed him that it seemed probable that the remark which had been repeated to him had never really been made, and requested that, in view of this, the Doctor would be so good as let the other second know that,

barring possible complications, the incident might be regarded as closed. Now that the prospect of danger was withdrawn, Cottard was disappointed. He was indeed tempted for a moment to give vent to anger, but he remembered that one of his masters, who had enjoyed the most successful medical career of his generation, having failed to enter the Academy at his first election by two votes only, had put a brave face on it and had gone and shaken hands with his successful rival. And so the Doctor refrained from any expression of indignation which could have made no difference, and, after murmuring, he the most timorous of men, that there were certain things which one could not overlook, added that it was better so, that this solution delighted him. M. de Charlus, desirous of shewing his gratitude to the Doctor, just as the Duke his brother would have straightened the collar of my father's greatcoat or rather as a Duchess would put her arm round the waist of a plebeian lady, brought his chair close to the Doctor's, notwithstanding the dislike that he felt for the other. And, not only without any physical pleasure, but having first to overcome a physical repulsion, as a Guermantes, not as an invert, in taking leave of the Doctor, he clasped his hand and caressed it for a moment with the affection of a rider rubbing his horse's nose and giving it a lump of sugar. But Cottard, who had never allowed the Baron to see that he had so much as heard the vaguest rumours as to his morals, but nevertheless regarded him in his private judgment as one of the class of 'abnormals' (indeed, with his habitual inaccuracy in the choice of terms, and in the most serious tone, he said of one of M. Verdurin's footmen: "Isn't he the Baron's mistress?"), persons of whom he had little personal experience; imagined that this stroking of his hand was the immediate prelude to an act of violence in anticipation of which, the duel being a mere pretext, he had been enticed into a trap and led by the Baron into this remote apartment where he was about to be forcibly outraged. Not daring to stir from his chair, to which fear kept him glued, he rolled his eyes in terror, as though he had fallen into the hands of a savage who, for all he could tell, fed upon human flesh. At length M. de Charlus, releasing his hand and anxious to be hospitable to the end, said: "Won't you come and take something with us, as the saying is, what in the old days used to be called a *mazagran* or a *gloria*, drinks that are no longer to be found, as archaeological curiosities, except in the plays of Labiche and the cafés of Doncières. A *gloria* would be distinctly suitable to the place, eh, and to the occasion, what do you say?" "I am President of the Anti-Alcohol League," replied Cottard. "Some country sawbones has only got to pass, and it will be said that I do not practise what I preach. *Os homini sublime dedit*

coelumque tueri," he added, not that this had any bearing on the matter, but because his stock of Latin quotations was extremely limited, albeit sufficient to astound his pupils. M. de Charlus shrugged his shoulders and led Cottard back to where we were, after exacting a promise of secrecy which was all the more important to him since the motive for the abortive duel was purely imaginary. It must on no account reach the ears of the officer whom he had arbitrarily selected as his adversary. While the four of us sat there drinking, Mme. Cottard, who had been waiting for her husband outside, where M. de Charlus could see her quite well, though he had made no effort to summon her, came in and greeted the Baron, who held out his hand to her as though to a housemaid, without rising from his chair, partly in the manner of a king receiving homage, partly as a snob who does not wish a woman of humble appearance to sit down at his table, partly as an egoist who enjoys being alone with his friends, and does not wish to be bothered. So Mme. Cottard remained standing while she talked to M. de Charlus and her husband. But, possibly because politeness, the knowledge of what 'ought to be done,' is not the exclusive privilege of the Guermantes, and may all of a sudden illuminate and guide the most uncertain brains, or else because, himself constantly unfaithful to his wife, Cottard felt at odd moments, as a sort of compensation, the need to protect her against anyone else who failed in his duty to her, the Doctor quickly frowned, a thing I had never seen him do before, and, without consulting M. de Charlus, said in a tone of authority: "Come, Léontine, don't stand about like that, sit down." "But are you sure I'm not disturbing you?" Mme. Cottard inquired timidly of M. de Charlus, who, surprised by the Doctor's tone, had made no observation. Whereupon, without giving him a second chance, Cottard repeated with authority: "I told you to sit down."

Presently the party broke up, and then M. de Charlus said to Morel: "I conclude from all this business, which has ended more happily than you deserved, that you are incapable of looking after yourself and that, at the expiry of your military service, I must lead you back myself to your father, like the Archangel Raphael sent by God to the young Tobias." And the Baron began to smile with an air of grandeur, and a joy which Morel, to whom the prospect of being thus led home afforded no pleasure, did not appear to share. In the exhilaration of comparing himself to the Archangel, and Morel to the son of Tobit, M. de Charlus no longer thought of the purpose of his speech which had been to explore the ground and see whether, as he hoped, Morel would consent to come with him to Paris. Intoxicated with his love or with his self-love, the

Baron did not see or pretended not to see the violinist's wry grimace, for, leaving him by himself in the café, he said to me with a proud smile: "Did you notice how, when I compared him to the son of Tobit, he became wild with joy? That was because, being extremely intelligent, he at once understood that the Father in whose company he was henceforth to live was not his father after the flesh, who must be some horrible valet with moustaches, but his spiritual father, that is to say Myself. What a triumph for him! How proudly he reared his head! What joy he felt at having understood me. I am sure that he will now repeat day by day: 'O God Who didst give the blessed Archangel Raphael as guide to thy servant Tobias, upon a long journey, grant to us, Thy servants, that we may ever be protected by him and armed with his succour.' I had no need even," added the Baron, firmly convinced that he would one day sit before the Throne of God, "to tell him that I was the heavenly messenger, he realised it for himself, and was struck dumb with joy!" And M. de Charlus (whom his joy, on the contrary, did not deprive of speech), regardless of the passers-by who turned to stare at him, supposing that he must be a lunatic, cried out by himself and at the top of his voice raising his hands in the air: "Alleluia!"

This reconciliation gave but a temporary respite to M. de Charlus's torments; often, when Morel had gone out on training too far away for M. de Charlus to be able to go and visit him or to send me to talk to him, he would write the Baron desperate and affectionate letters, in which he assured him that he was going to put an end to his life because, owing to a ghastly affair, he must have twenty-five thousand francs. He did not mention what this ghastly affair was, and had he done so, it would doubtless have been an invention. As far as the money was concerned, M. de Charlus would willingly have sent him it, had he not felt that it would make Charlie independent of him and free to receive the favours of some one else. And so he refused, and his telegrams had the dry, cutting tone of his voice. When he was certain of their effect, he hoped that Morel would never forgive him, for, knowing very well that it was the contrary that would happen, he could not help dwelling upon all the drawbacks that would be revived with this inevitable tie. But, if no answer came from Morel, he lay awake all night, had not a moment's peace, so great is the number of the things of which we live in ignorance, and of the interior and profound realities that remain hidden from us. And so he would form every conceivable supposition as to the enormity which put Morel in need of twenty-five thousand francs, gave it every possible shape, labelled it with, one after another, many proper names. I believe that at such moments M. de Charlus (in spite of the fact

that his snobbishness, which was now diminishing, had already been overtaken if not outstripped by his increasing curiosity as to the ways of the lower orders) must have recalled with a certain longing the lovely, many-coloured whirl of the fashionable gatherings at which the most charming men and women sought his company only for the disinterested pleasure that it afforded them, where nobody would have dreamed of 'doing him down,' of inventing a 'ghastly affair,' on the strength of which one is prepared to take one's life, if one does not at once receive twenty-five thousand francs. I believe that then, and perhaps because he had after all remained more 'Combray' at heart than myself, and had grafted a feudal dignity upon his Germanic pride, he must have felt that one cannot with impunity lose one's heart to a servant, that the lower orders are by no means the same thing as society, that in short he did not 'get on' with the lower orders as I have always done.

The next station upon the little railway, Maineville, reminds me of an incident in which Morel and M. de Charlus were concerned. Before I speak of it, I ought to mention that the halt of the train at Maineville (when one was escorting to Balbec a fashionable stranger, who, to avoid giving trouble, preferred not to stay at la Raspelière) was the occasion of scenes less painful than that which I am just about to describe. The stranger, having his light luggage with him in the train, generally found that the Grand Hotel was rather too far away, but, as there was nothing until one came to Balbec except small bathing places with uncomfortable villas, had, yielding to a preference for comfortable surroundings, resigned himself to the long journey when, as the train came to a standstill at Maineville, he saw the Palace staring him in the face, and never suspected that it was a house of ill fame. "But don't let us go any farther," he would invariably say to Mme. Cottard, a woman well-known for her practical judgment and sound advice. "There is the very thing I want. What is the use of going on to Balbec, where I certainly shan't find anything better. I can tell at a glance that it has all the modern comforts; I can quite well invite Mme. Verdurin there, for I intend, in return for her hospitality, to give a few little parties in her honour. She won't have so far to come as if I stay at Balbec. This seems to me the very place for her, and for your wife, my dear Professor. There are bound to be sitting rooms, we can have the ladies there. Between you and me, I can't imagine why Mme, Verdurin didn't come and settle here instead of taking la Raspelière. It is far healthier than an old house like la Raspelière, which is bound to be damp, and is not clean either, they have no hot water laid on, one can never get a wash. Now, Maineville strikes me as being far more attractive.

Mme. Verdurin would have played the hostess here to perfection. However, tastes differ; I intend, anyhow, to remain here. Mme. Cottard, won't you come along with me; we shall have to be quick, for the train will be starting again in a minute. You can pilot me through that house, which you must know inside out, for you must often have visited it. It is the ideal setting for you." The others would have the greatest difficulty in making the unfortunate stranger hold his tongue, and still more in preventing him from leaving the train, while he, with the obstinacy which often arises from a blunder, insisted, gathered his luggage together and refused to listen to a word until they had assured him that neither Mme. Verdurin nor Mme. Cottard would ever come to call upon him there. "Anyhow, I am going to make my headquarters there. Mme. Verdurin has only to write, if she wishes to see me."

The incident that concerns Morel was of a more highly specialised order. There were others, but I confine myself at present, as the train halts and the porter calls out 'Doncières,' 'Grattevast,' 'Maineville,' etc., to noting down the particular memory that the watering-place or garrison town recalls to me. I have already mentioned Maineville (media villa) and the importance that it had acquired from that luxurious establishment of women which had recently been built there, not without arousing futile protests from the mothers of families. But before I proceed to say why Maineville is associated in my memory with Morel and M. de Char-lus, I must make a note of the disproportion (which I shall have occasion to examine more thoroughly later on) between the importance that Morel attached to keeping certain hours free, and the triviality of the occupations to which he pretended to devote to them, this same disproportion recurring amid the explanations of another sort which he gave to M. de Charlus. He, who played the disinterested artist for the Baron's benefit (and might do so without risk, in view of the generosity of his protector), when he wished to have the evening to himself, in order to give a lesson, etc., never failed to add to his excuse the following words, uttered with a smile of cupidity: "Besides, there may be forty francs to be got out of it. That's always something. You will let me go, for, don't you see it's all to my advantage. Damn it all, I haven't got a regular income like you, I have my way to make in the world, it's a chance of earning a little money." Morel, in professing his anxiety to give his lesson, was not altogether insincere. For one thing, it is false to say that money has no colour. A new way of earning them gives a fresh lustre to coins that are tarnished with use. Had he really gone out to give a lesson, it is probable that a couple of louis handed to him as he left the house by a girl pupil would have produced a different effect on

him from a couple of louis coming from the hand of M. de Charlus. Besides, for a couple of louis the richest of men would travel miles, which become leagues when one is the son of a valet. But frequently M. de Charlus had his doubts as to the reality of the violin lesson, doubts which were increased by the fact that often the musician pleaded excuses of another sort, entirely disinterested from the material point of view, and at the same time absurd. In this Morel could not help presenting an image of his life, but one that deliberately, and unconsciously too, he so darkened that only certain parts of it could be made out. For a whole month he placed himself at M. de Charlus's disposal, on condition that he might keep his evenings free, for he was anxious to put in a regular attendance at a course of algebra. Come and see M. de Charlus after the class? Oh, that was impossible, the classes went on, sometimes, very late. "Even after two o'clock in the morning?" the Baron asked. "Sometimes." "But you can learn algebra just as easily from a book." "More easily, for I don't get very much out of the lectures." "Very well, then! Besides, algebra can't be of any use to you." "I like it. It soothes my nerves." "It cannot be algebra that makes him ask leave to go out at night," M. de Charlus said to himself. "Can he be working for the police?" In any case Morel, whatever objection might be made, reserved certain evening hours, whether for algebra or for the violin. On one occasion it was for neither, but for the Prince de Guermantes who, having come down for a few days to that part of the coast, to pay the Princesse de Luxembourg a visit, picked up the musician, without knowing who he was or being recognised by him either, and offered him fifty francs to spend the night with him in the brothel at Maineville; a twofold pleasure for Morel, in the profit received from M. de Guermantes and in the delight of being surrounded by women whose sunburned breasts would be visible to the naked eye. In some way or other M. de Charlus got wind of what had occurred and of the place appointed, but did not discover the name of the seducer. Mad with jealousy, and in the hope of finding out who he was, he telegraphed to Jupien, who arrived two days later, and when, early in the following week, Morel announced that he would again be absent, the Baron asked Jupien if he would undertake to bribe the woman who kept the establishment, and make her promise to hide the Baron and himself in some place where they could witness what occurred. "That's all right. I'll see to it, dearie," Jupien assured the Baron. It is hard to imagine to what extent this anxiety was agitating, and by so doing had momentarily enriched the mind of M. de Charlus. Love is responsible in this way for regular volcanic upheavals of the mind. In his, which, a few days earlier, resembled a plain so uniform that as far

as the eye could reach it would have been impossible to make out an idea rising above the level surface, there had suddenly sprung into being, hard as stone, a chain of mountains, but mountains as elaborately carved as if some sculptor, instead of quarrying and carting his marble from them, had chiselled it on the spot, in which there writhed in vast titanic groups Fury, Jealousy, Curiosity, Envy, Hatred, Suffering, Pride, Terror and Love.

Meanwhile the evening on which Morel was to be absent had come. Jupien's mission had proved successful. He and the Baron were to be there about eleven o'clock, and would be put in a place of concealment. When they were still three streets away from this gorgeous house of prostitution (to which people came from all the fashionable resorts in the neighbourhood), M. de Charlus had begun to walk upon tiptoe, to disguise his voice, to beg Jupien not to speak so loud, lest Morel should hear them from inside. Whereas, on creeping stealthily into the entrance hall, M. de Charlus, who was not accustomed to places of the sort, found himself, to his terror and amazement, in a gathering more clamorous than the Stock Exchange or a sale room. It was in vain that he begged the girls who gathered round him to moderate their voices; for that matter their voices were drowned by the stream of announcements and awards made by an old 'assistant matron' in a very brown wig, her face crackled with the gravity of a Spanish attorney or priest, who kept shouting at every minute in a voice of thunder, ordering the doors to be alternately opened and shut, like a policeman regulating the flow of traffic: "Take this gentleman to twenty-eight, the Spanish room." "Let no more in." "Open the door again, these gentlemen want Mademoiselle Noémie. She's expecting them in the Persian parlour." M. de Charlus was as terrified as a countryman who has to cross the boulevards; while, to take a simile infinitely less sacrilegious than the subject represented on the capitals of the porch of the old church of Corleville, the voices of the young maids repeated in a lower tone, unceasingly, the assistant matron's orders, like the catechisms that we hear school-children chanting beneath the echoing vault of a parish church in the country. However great his alarm, M. de Charlus who, in the street, had been trembling lest he should make himself heard, convinced in his own mind that Morel was at the window, was perhaps not so frightened after all in the din of those huge staircases on which one realised that from the rooms nothing could be seen. Coming at length to the end of his calvary, he found Mlle. Noémie, who was to conceal him with Jupien, but began by shutting him up in a sumptuously furnished Persian sitting-room from which he could see nothing at all. She told him that Morel had asked for some orangeade, and that as soon as he was served

the two visitors would be taken to a room with a transparent panel. In the meantime, as some one was calling for her, she promised them, like a fairy godmother, that to help them to pass the time she was going to send them a ‘clever little lady.’ For she herself was called away. The clever little lady wore a Persian wrapper, which she proposed to remove. M. de Charlus begged her to do nothing of the sort, and she rang for champagne which cost 40 francs a bottle. Morel, as a matter of fact, was, during this time, with the Prince de Guermantes; he had, for form’s sake, pretended to go into the wrong room by mistake, had entered one in which there were two women, who had made haste to leave the two gentlemen undisturbed. M. de Charlus knew nothing of this, but was fidgeting with rage, trying to open the doors, sent for Mlle. Noémie, who, hearing the clever little lady give M. de Charlus certain information about Morel which was not in accordance with what she herself had told Jupien, banished her promptly, and sent presently, as a substitute for the clever little lady, a ‘dear little lady’ who exhibited nothing more but told them how respectable the house was and called, like her predecessor, for champagne. The Baron, foaming with rage, sent again for Mlle. Noémie, who said to them: “Yes, it is taking rather long, the ladies are doing poses, he doesn’t look as if he wanted to do anything.” Finally, yielding to the promises, the threats of the Baron, Mlle. Noémie went away with an air of irritation, assuring them that they would not be kept waiting more than five minutes. The five minutes stretched out into an hour, after which Noémie came and tiptoed in front of M. de Charlus, blind with rage, and Jupien plunged in misery, to a door which stood ajar, telling them: “You’ll see splendidly from here. However, it’s not very interesting just at present, he is with three ladies, he is telling them about life in his regiment.” At length the Baron was able to see through the cleft of the door and also the reflexion in the mirrors beyond. But a deadly terror forced him to lean back against the wall. It was indeed Morel that he saw before him, but, as though the pagan mysteries and Enchantments still existed, it was rather the shade of Morel, Morel embalmed, not even Morel restored to life like Lazarus, an apparition of Morel, a phantom of Morel, Morel ‘walking’ or ‘called up’ in that room (in which the walls and couches everywhere repeated the emblems of sorcery), that was visible a few feet away from him, in profile. Morel had, as though he were already dead, lost all his colour; among these women, with whom one might have expected him to be making merry, he remained livid, fixed in an artificial immobility; to drink the glass of champagne that stood before him, his arm, sapped of its strength, tried in vain to reach out, and dropped back again. One had the impression of that ambiguous state implied

by a religion which speaks of immorality but means by it something that does not exclude annihilation. The women were plying him with questions. “You see,” Mlle. Noémie whispered to the Baron, “they are talking to him about his life in the regiment, it’s amusing, isn’t it?”— here she laughed —”You’re glad you came? He is calm, isn’t he,” she added, as though she were speaking of a dying man. The women’s questions came thick and fast, but Morel, inanimate, had not the strength to answer them. Even the miracle of a whispered word did not occur. M. de Charlus hesitated for barely a moment before he grasped what had really happened, namely that, whether from clumsiness on Jupien’s part when he had called to make the arrangements, or from the expansive power of a secret lodged in any breast, which means that no secret is ever kept, or from the natural indiscretion of these ladies, or from their fear of the police, Morel had been told that two gentlemen had paid a large sum to be allowed to spy on him, unseen hands had spirited away the Prince de Guermantes, metamorphosed into three women, and had placed the unhappy Morel, trembling, paralysed with fear, in such a position that if M. de Charlus had but a poor view of him, he, terrorised, speechless, not daring to lift his glass for fear of letting it fall, had a perfect view of the Baron.

The story moreover had no happier ending for the Prince de Guermantes. When he had been sent away, so that M. de Charlus should not see him, furious at his disappointment, without suspecting who was responsible for it, he had implored Morel, still without letting him know who he was, to make an appointment with him for the following night in the tiny villa which he had taken and which, despite the shortness of his projected stay in it, he had, obeying the same insensate habit which we have already observed in Mme. de Villeparisis, decorated with a number of family keepsakes, so that he might feel more at home. And so, next day, Morel, turning his head every moment, trembling with fear of being followed and spied upon by M. de Charlus, had finally, having failed to observe any suspicious passer-by, entered the villa. A valet shewed him into the sitting-room, telling him that he would inform ‘Monsieur’ (his master had warned him not to utter the word ‘Prince’ for fear of arousing suspicions). But when Morel found himself alone, and went to the mirror to see that his forelock was not disarranged, he felt as though he were the victim of a hallucination. The photographs on the mantelpiece (which the violinist recognised, for he had seen them in M. de Charlus’s room) of the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duchesse de Luxembourg, Mme. de Villeparisis, left him at first petrified with fright. At the same moment he caught sight of the photograph

of M. de Charlus, which was placed a little behind the rest. The Baron seemed to be concentrating upon Morel a strange, fixed glare. Mad with terror, Morel, recovering from his first stupor, never doubting that this was a trap into which M. de Charlus had led him in order to put his fidelity to the test, sprang at one bound down the steps of the villa and set off along the road as fast as his legs would carry him, and when the Prince (thinking he had kept a casual acquaintance waiting sufficiently long, and not without asking himself whether it were quite prudent and whether the person might not be dangerous) entered the room, he found nobody there. In vain did he and his valet, afraid of burglary, and armed with revolvers, search the whole house, which was not large, every corner of the garden, the basement; the companion of whose presence he had been certain had completely vanished. He met him several times in the course of the week that followed. But on each occasion it was Morel, the dangerous person, who turned tail and fled, as though the Prince were more dangerous still. Confirmed in his suspicions, Morel never outgrew them, and even in Paris the sight of the Prince de Guermantes was enough to make him take to his heels. Whereby M. de Charlus was protected from a betrayal which filled him with despair, and avenged, without ever having imagined such a thing, still less how it came about.

But already my memories of what I have been told about all this are giving place to others, for the B. A. G., resuming its slow crawl, continues to set down or take up passengers at the following stations.

At Grattevast, where his sister lived with whom he had been spending the afternoon, there would sometimes appear M. Pierre de Verjus, Comte de Crécy (who was called simply the Comte de Crécy), a gentleman without means but of the highest nobility, whom I had come to know through the Cambremers, although he was by no means intimate with them. As he was reduced to an extremely modest, almost a penurious existence, I felt that a cigar, a ‘drink’ were things that gave him so much pleasure that I formed the habit, on the days when I could not see Albertine, of inviting him to Balbec. A man of great refinement, endowed with a marvellous power of self-expression, snow-white hair, and a pair of charming blue eyes, he generally spoke in a faint murmur, very delicately, of the comforts of life in a country house, which he had evidently known from experience, and also of pedigrees. On my inquiring what was the badge engraved on his ring, he told me with a modest smile: “It is a branch of verjuice.” And he added with a relish, as though sipping a vintage: “Our arms are a branch of verjuice — symbolic, since my name is Verjus — slipped and leaved vert.” But I

fancy that he would have been disappointed if at Balbec I had offered him nothing better to drink than verjuice. He liked the most expensive wines, because he had had to go without them, because of his profound knowledge of what he was going without, because he had a palate, perhaps also because he had an exorbitant thirst. And so when I invited him to dine at Balbec, he would order the meal with a refinement of skill, but ate a little too much, and drank copiously, made them warm the wines that needed warming, place those that needed cooling upon ice. Before dinner and after he would give the right date or number for a port or an old brandy, as he would have given the date of the creation of a marquisate which was not generally known but with which he was no less familiar.

As I was in Airne's eyes a favoured customer, he was delighted that I should give these special dinners and would shout to the waiters: "Quick, lay number 25"; he did not even say 'lay' but 'lay me,' as though the table were for his own use. And, as the language of head waiters is not quite the same as of that of sub-heads, assistants, boys, and so forth, when the time came for me to ask for the bill he would say to the waiter who had served us, making a continuous, soothing gesture with the back of his hand, as though he were trying to calm a horse that was ready to take the bit in its teeth: "Don't go too fast" (in adding up the bill), "go gently, very gently." Then, as the waiter was retiring with this guidance, Aimé, fearing lest his recommendations might not be carried out to the letter, would call him back: "Here, let me make it out." And as I told him not to bother: "It's one of my principles that we ought never, as the saying is, to sting a customer." As for the manager, since my guest was attired simply, always in the same clothes, which were rather threadbare (albeit nobody would so well have practised the art of dressing expensively, like one of Balzac's dandies, had he possessed the means), he confined himself, out of respect for me, to watching from a distance to see that everything was all right, and ordering, with a glance, a wedge to be placed under one leg of the table which was not steady. This was not to say that he was not qualified, though he concealed his early struggles, to lend a hand like anyone else. It required some exceptional circumstance nevertheless to induce him one day to carve the turkey-poults himself. I was out, but I heard afterwards that he carved them with a sacerdotal majesty, surrounded, at a respectful distance from the service-table, by a ring of waiters who were endeavouring thereby not so much to learn the art as to make themselves conspicuously visible, and stood gaping in open-mouthed admiration. Visible to the manager, for that matter (as he plunged a slow gaze into the flanks of his

victims, and no more removed his eyes, filled with a sense of his exalted mission, from them than if he had been expected to read in them some augury), they were certainly not. The hierophant was not conscious of my absence even. When he heard of it, he was distressed: “What, you didn’t see me carving the turkey-poults myself?” I replied that having failed, so far, to see Rome, Venice, Siena, the Prado, the Dresden gallery, the Indies, Sarah in *Phèdre*, I had learned to resign myself, and that I would add his carving of turkey-poults to my list. The comparison with the dramatic art (Sarah in *Phèdre*) was the only one that he seemed to understand, for he had already been told by me that on days of gala performances the elder Coque-lin had accepted a beginner’s parts, even that of a character who says but a single line or nothing at all. “It doesn’t matter, I am sorry for your sake. When shall I be carving again? It will need some great event, it will need a war.” (It did, as a matter of fact, need the armistice.) From that day onwards, the calendar was changed, time was reckoned thus: “That was the day after the day I carved the turkeys myself.” “That’s right, a week after the manager carved the turkeys himself.” And so this prosectomy furnished, like the Nativity of Christ or the Hegira, the starting point for a calendar different from the rest, but neither so extensively adopted nor so long observed.

The sadness of M. de Crécy’s life was due, just as much as to his no longer keeping horses and a succulent table, to his mixing exclusively with people who were capable of supposing that Cambremers and Guermantes were one and the same thing. When he saw that I knew that Legrandin, who had now taken to calling himself Legrand de Méséglise, had no sort of right to that name, being moreover heated by the wine that he was drinking, he broke out in a transport of joy. His sister said to me with an understanding air: “My brother is never so happy as when he has a chance of talking to you.” He felt indeed that he was alive now that he had discovered somebody who knew the unimportance of the Cambremers and the greatness of the Guermantes, somebody for whom the social universe existed. So, after the burning of all the libraries on the face of the globe and the emergence of a race entirely unlettered, an old Latin scholar would recover his confidence in life if he heard somebody quoting a line of Horace. And so, if he never left the train without saying to me: “When is our next little gathering?”, it was not so much with the hunger of a parasite as with the gluttony of a savant, and because he regarded our symposia at Balbec as an opportunity for talking about subjects which were precious to him and of which he was never able to talk to anyone else, and analogous in that way to those dinners at which assemble on certain specified dates, round the particularly succulent board of the

Union Club, the Society of Bibliophiles. He was extremely modest, so far as his own family was concerned, and it was not from M. de Crécy that I learned that it was a very great family indeed, and a genuine branch transplanted to France of the English family which bears the title of Crecy. When I learned that he was a true Crécy, I told him that one of Mme. de Guermantes's nieces had married an American named Charles Crecy, and said that I did not suppose there was any connexion between them. "None," he said. "Any more than — not, of course, that my family is so distinguished — heaps of Americans who call themselves Montgomery, Berry, Chandos or Capel have with the families of Pembroke, Buckingham or Essex, or with the Duc de Berry." I thought more than once of telling him, as a joke, that I knew Mme. Swann, who as a courtesan had been known at one time by the name Odette de Crécy; but even if the Duc d'Alencon had shewn no resentment when people mentioned in front of him Émilienne d'Alencon, I did not feel that I was on sufficiently intimate terms with M. de Crécy to carry a joke so far. "He comes of a very great family," M. de Montsurvent said to me one day. "His family name is Saylor." And he went on to say that on the wall of his old castle above Incarville, which was now almost uninhabitable and which he, although born to a great fortune, was now too much impoverished to put in repair, was still to be read the old motto of the family. I thought this motto very fine, whether applied to the impatience of a predatory race niched in that eyrie from which its members must have swooped down in the past, or at the present day, to its contemplation of its own decline, awaiting the approach of death in that towering, grim retreat. It is, indeed, in this double sense that this motto plays upon the name Saylor, in the words: "*Ne sçais l'heure*."

At Hermenonville there would get in sometimes M. de Chevregny, whose name, Brichot told us, signified like that of Mgr. de Cabrières, a place where goats assemble. He was related to the Cambremers, for which reason, and from a false idea of what was fashionable, the latter often invited him to Féterne, but only when they had no other guests to dazzle. Living all the year round at Beausoleil, M. de Chevregny had remained more provincial than they. And so when he went for a few weeks to Paris, there was not a moment to waste if he was to 'see everything' in the time; so much so that occasionally, a little dazed by the number of spectacles too rapidly digested, when he was asked if he had seen a particular play he would find that he was no longer sure. But this uncertainty was rare, for he had that detailed knowledge of Paris only to be found in people who seldom go there. He advised me which of the 'novelties' I

ought to see ("It's worth your while"), regarding them however solely from the point of view of the pleasant evening that they might help to spend, and so completely ignoring the aesthetic point of view as never to suspect that they might indeed constitute a 'novelty' occasionally in the history of art. So it was that, speaking of everything in the same tone, he told us: "We went once to the Opéra-Comique, but the show there is nothing much. It's called *Pelléas et Mélisande*. It's rubbish. Périer always acts well, but it's better to see him in something else. At the Gymnase, on the other hand, they're doing *La Châtelaine*. We went again to it twice; don't miss it, whatever you do, it's well worth seeing; besides, it's played to perfection; you have Frévalles, Marie Magnier, Baron fils"; and he went on to quote the names of actors of whom I had never heard, and without prefixing Monsieur, Madame or Mademoiselle, like the Duc de Guermantes, who used to speak in the same ceremoniously contemptuous tone of the 'songs of Mademoiselle Yvette Guilbert' and the 'experiments of Monsieur Charcot.' This was not M. de Chevregny's way, he said "Cornaglia and Dehelly," as he might have said "Voltaire and Montesquieu." For in him, with regard to actors as to everything that was Parisian, the aristocrat's desire to shew his scorn was overcome by the desire to appear on familiar terms of the provincial.

Immediately after the first dinner-party that I had attended at la Raspelière with what was still called at Féterne 'the young couple,' albeit M. and Mme. de Cambremer were no longer, by any means, in their first youth, the old Marquise had written me one of those letters which one can pick out by their handwriting from among a thousand. She said to me: "Bring your delicious — charming — nice cousin. It will be a delight, a pleasure," always avoiding, and with such unerring dexterity, the sequence that the recipient of her letter would naturally have expected, that I finally changed my mind as to the nature of these diminuendoes, decided that they were deliberate, and found in them the same corruption of taste — transposed into the social key — that drove Sainte-Beuve to upset all the normal relations between words, to alter any expression that was at all conventional. Two methods, taught probably by different masters, came into conflict in this epistolary style, the second making Mme. de Cambremer redeem the monotony of her multiple adjectives by employing them in a descending scale, by avoiding an ending upon the perfect chord. On the other hand, I was inclined to see in these inverse gradations, not an additional refinement, as when they were the handiwork of the Dowager Marquise, but an additional clumsiness whenever they were employed by the Marquis her son or

by his lady cousins. For throughout the family, to quite a remote degree of kinship and in admiring imitation of aunt Zélia, the rule of the three adjectives was held in great honour, as was a certain enthusiastic way of catching your breath when you were talking. An imitation that had passed into the blood, moreover; and whenever, in the family circle, a little girl, while still in the nursery, stopped short while she was talking to swallow her saliva, her parents would say: "She takes after aunt Zélia," would feel that as she grew up, her upper lip would soon tend to hide itself beneath a faint moustache, and would make up their minds to cultivate her inherited talent for music. It was not long before the Cambremers were on less friendly terms with Mme. Verdurin than with myself, for different reasons. They felt, they must invite her to dine. The 'young' Marquise said to me contemptuously: "I don't see why we shouldn't invite that woman, in the country one meets anybody, it needn't involve one in anything." But being at heart considerably impressed, they never ceased to consult me as to the way in which they should carry out their desire to be polite. I thought that as they had invited Albertine and myself to dine with some friends of Saint-Loup, smart people of the neighbourhood, who owned the château of Gourville, and represented a little more than the cream of Norman society, for which Mme. Verdurin, while pretending never to look at it, thirsted, I advised the Cambremers to invite the Mistress to meet them. But the lord and lady of Féterne, in their fear (so timorous were they) of offending their noble friends, or (so simple were they) that M. and Mme. Verdurin might be bored by people who were not intellectual, or yet again (since they were impregnated with a spirit of routine which experience had not fertilised) of mixing different kinds of people, and making a social blunder, declared that it would not be a success, and that it would be much better to keep Mme. Verdurin (whom they would invite with all her little group) for another evening. For this coming evening — the smart one, to meet Saint-Loup's friends — they invited nobody from the little nucleus but Morel, in order that M. de Charlus might indirectly be informed of the brilliant people whom they had in their house, and also that the musician might help them to entertain their guests, for he was to be asked to bring his violin. They threw in Cottard as well, because M. de Cambremer declared that he had 'a go' about him, and would be a success at the dinner-table; besides, it might turn out useful to be on friendly terms with a doctor, if they should ever have anybody ill in the house. But they invited him by himself, so as not to 'start any complications with the wife.' Mme. Verdurin was furious when she heard that two members of the little group had been invited without herself to dine at Féterne 'quite quietly.'

She dictated to the doctor, whose first impulse had been to accept, a stiff reply in which he said: “We are dining that evening with Mme. Verdurin,” a plural which was to teach the Cambremers a lesson, and to shew them that he was not detachable from Mme. Cottard. As for Morel, Mme. Verdurin had no need to outline a course of impolite behaviour for him, he found one of his own accord, for the following reason. If he preserved, with regard to M. de Charlus, in so far as his pleasures were concerned, an independence which distressed the Baron, we have seen that the latter’s influence was making itself felt more and more in other regions, and that he had for instance enlarged the young virtuoso’s knowledge of music and purified his style. But it was still, at this point in our story, at least, only an influence. At the same time there was one subject upon which anything that M. de Charlus might say was blindly accepted and put into practice by Morel. Blindly and foolishly, for not only were M. de Charlus’s instructions false, but, even had they been justifiable in the case of a great gentleman, when applied literally by Morel they became grotesque. The subject as to which Morel was becoming so credulous and obeyed his master with such docility was that of social distinction. The violinist, who, before making M. de Charlus’s acquaintance, had had no conception of society, had taken literally the brief and arrogant sketch of it that the Baron had outlined for him. “There are a certain number of outstanding families,” M. de Charlus had told him, “first and foremost the Guermantes, who claim fourteen alliances with the House of France, which is flattering to the House of France if anything, for it was to Aldonce de Guermantes and not to Louis the Fat, his consanguineous but younger brother, that the Throne of France should have passed. Under Louiv XIV, we ‘draped’ at the death of Monsieur, having the same grandmother as the king; a long way below the Guermantes, one may however mention the families of La Trémoïlle, descended from the Kings of Naples and the Counts of Poitiers; of d’Uzès, scarcely old as a family, but the premier peers; of Luynes, who are of entirely recent origin, but have distinguished themselves by good marriages; of Choiseul, Harcourt, La Rochefoucauld. Add to these the family of the Noailles (notwithstanding the Comte de Toulouse), Montesquieu and Castellane, and, I think I am right in saying, those are all. As for all the little people who call themselves Marquis de Cambremerde or de Vatefairefiche, there is no difference between them and the humblest private in your regiment. It doesn’t matter whether you go and p — at Comtesse S— t’s or s — t at Baronne P—’s, it’s exactly the same, you will have compromised yourself and have used a dirty rag instead of toilet paper. Which is not nice.” Morel had piously taken in this

history lesson, which was perhaps a trifle cursory, and looked upon these matters as though he were himself a Guermantes and hoped that he might some day have an opportunity of meeting the false La Tour d'Auvergnes in order to let them see, by the contemptuous way in which he shook hands, that he did not take them very seriously. As for the Cambremers, here was his very chance to prove to them that they were no better than 'the humblest private in his regiment.' He did not answer their invitation, and on the evening of the dinner declined at the last moment by telegram, as pleased with himself as if he had behaved like a Prince of Blood. It must be added here that it is impossible to imagine how intolerable and interfering M. de Charlus could be, in a more general fashion, and even, he who was so clever, how stupid, on all occasions when the flaws in his character came into play. We may say indeed that these flaws are like an intermittent malady of the mind. Who has not observed the fact among women, and even among men, endowed with remarkable intelligence but afflicted with nerves, when they are happy, calm, satisfied with their surroundings, we cannot help admiring their precious gifts, the words that fall from their lips are the literal truth. A touch of headache, the slightest injury to their self-esteem is enough to alter everything. The luminous intelligence, become abrupt, convulsive and narrow, reflects nothing but an irritated, suspicious, teasing self, doing everything that it can to give trouble. The Cambremers were extremely angry; and in the interval other incidents brought about a certain tension in their relations with the little clan. As we were returning, the Cottards, Charlus, Brichot, Morel and I, from a dinner at la Raspelière, one evening after the Cambremers who had been to luncheon with friends at Harambouville had accompanied us for part of our outward journey: "You who are so fond of Balzac, and can find examples of him in the society of to-day," I had remarked to M. de Charlus, "you must feel that those Cambremers come straight out of the *Scènes de la Vie de Province*." But M. de Charlus, for all the world as though he had been their friend, and I had offended him by my remark, at once cut me short: "You say that because the wife is superior to the husband," he informed me in a dry tone. "Oh, I wasn't suggesting that she was the *Muse du département*, or Mme. de Bargeton, although..." M. de Charlus again interrupted me: "Say rather, Mme. de Mortsauf." The train stopped and Brichot got out. "Didn't you see us making signs to you? You are incorrigible." "What do you mean?" "Why, have you never noticed that Brichot is madly in love with Mme. de Cambremer?" I could see from the attitude of Cottard and Charlie that there was not a shadow of doubt about this in the little nucleus. I felt that it shewed a

trace of malice on their part. “What, you never noticed how distressed he became when you mentioned her,” went on M. de Charlus, who liked to shew that he had experience of women, and used to speak of the sentiment which they inspire with a natural air and as though this were the sentiment which he himself habitually felt. But a certain equivocally paternal tone in addressing all young men — notwithstanding his exclusive affection for Morel — gave the lie to the views of a woman-loving man which he expressed. “Oh! These children,” he said in a shrill, mincing, sing-song voice, “one has to teach them everything, they are as innocent as a newborn babe, they can’t even tell when a man is in love with a woman. I wasn’t such a chicken at your age,” he added, for he liked to use the expressions of the underworld, perhaps because they appealed to him, perhaps so as not to appear, by avoiding them, to admit that he consorted with people whose current vocabulary they were. A few days later, I was obliged to yield to the force of evidence, and admit that Brichot was enamoured of the Marquise. Unfortunately he accepted several invitations to luncheon with her. Mme. Verdurin decided that it was time to put a stop to these proceedings. Quite apart from the importance of such an intervention to her policy in controlling the little nucleus, explanations of this sort and the dramas to which they gave rise caused her an ever increasing delight which idleness breeds just as much in the middle classes as in the aristocracy. It was a day of great emotion at la Raspelière when Mme. Verdurin was seen to disappear for a whole hour with Brichot, whom (it was known) she proceeded to inform that Mme. de Cambremer was laughing at him, that he was the joke of her drawing-room, that he would end his days in disgrace, having forfeited his position in the teaching world. She went so far as to refer in touching terms to the laundress with whom he was living in Paris, and to their little girl. She won the day, Brichot ceased to go to Féterne, but his grief was such that for two days it was thought that he would lose his sight altogether, while in any case his malady increased at a bound and held the ground it had won. In the meantime, the Cambremers, who were furious with Morel, invited M. de Charlus on one occasion, deliberately, without him. Receiving no reply from the Baron, they began to fear that they had committed a blunder, and, deciding that malice made an evil counsellor, wrote, a little late in the day, to Morel, an ineptitude which made M. de Charlus smile, as it proved to him the extent of his power. “You shall answer for us both that I accept,” he said to Morel. When the evening of the dinner came, the party assembled in the great drawing-room of Féterne. In reality, the Cambremers were giving this dinner for those fine flowers of fashion M. and Mme. Féré. But

they were so much afraid of displeasing M. de Charlus, that although she had got to know the Férés through M. de Chevregny, Mme. de Cambremer went into a fever when, on the afternoon before the dinner, she saw him arrive to pay a call on them at Féterne. She made every imaginable excuse for sending him back to Beausoleil as quickly as possible, not so quickly, however, that he did not pass, in the courtyard, the Férés, who were as shocked to see him dismissed like this as he himself was ashamed. But, whatever happened, the Cambremers wished to spare M. de Charlus the sight of M. de Chevregny, whom they judged to be provincial because of certain little points which are overlooked in the family circle and become important only in the presence of strangers, who are the last people in the world to notice them. But we do not like to display to them relatives who have remained at the stage which we ourselves have struggled to outgrow. As for M. and Mme. Féré, they were, in the highest sense of the words, what are called ‘really nice people.’ In the eyes of those who so defined them, no doubt the Guermantes, the Rohans and many others were also really nice people, but their name made it unnecessary to say so. As everybody was not aware of the exalted birth of Mme. Féré’s mother, and the extraordinarily exelusive circle in which she and her husband moved, when you mentioned their name, you invariably added by way of explanation that they were ‘the very best sort.’ Did their obscure name prompt them to a sort of haughty reserve? However that may be, the fact remains that the Férés refused to know people on whom a La Trémoïlle would have called. It needed the position of queen of her particular stretch of coast, which the old Marquise de Cambremer held in the Manche, to make the Férés consent to come to one of her afternoons every year. The Cambremers had invited them to dinner and were counting largely on the effect that would be made on them by M. de Charlus. It was discreetly announced that he was to be one of the party. As it happened, Mme. Féré had never met him. Mme. de Cambremer, on learning this, felt a keen satisfaction, and the smile of the chemist who is about to bring into contact for the first time two particularly important bodies hovered over her face. The door opened, and Mme. de Cambremer almost fainted when she saw Morel enter the room alone. Like a private secretary charged with apologies for his Minister, like a morganatic wife v*ho expresses the Prince’s regret that he is unwell (so Mme. de Clinchamp used to apologise for the Duc d’Aumale), Morel said in the airiest of tones: “The Baron can’t come. He is not feeling very well, at least I think that is why, I haven’t seen him this week,” he added, these last words completing the despair of Mme. de Cambremer, who had told M. and Mme. Féré that Morel saw M. de*

Charlus at every hour of the day. The Cambremers pretended that the Baron's absence gave an additional attraction to their party, and without letting Morel hear them, said to their other guests: "We can do very well without him, can't we, it will be all the better." But they were furious, suspected a plot hatched by Mme. Verdurin, and, tit for tat, when she invited them again to la Raspelière, M. de Cambremer, unable to resist the pleasure of seeing his house again and of mingling with the little group, came, but came alone, saying that the Marquise was so sorry, but her doctor had ordered her to stay in her room. The Cambremers hoped by this partial attendance at once to teach M. de Charlus a lesson, and to shew the Verdurins that they were not obliged to treat them with more than a limited politeness, as Princesses of the Blood used in the old days to 'shew out' Duchesses, but only to the middle of the second saloon. After a few weeks, they were scarcely on speaking terms. M. de Cambremer explained this to me as follows: "I must tell you that with M. de Charlus it was rather difficult. He is an extreme Dreyfusard..." "Oh, no!" "Yes.... Anyhow his cousin the Prince de Guermantes is, they've come in for a lot of abuse over that. I have some relatives who are very particular about that sort of thing. I can't afford to mix with those people, I should quarrel with the whole of my family." "Since the Prince de Guermantes is a Dreyfusard, that will make it all the easier," said Mme. de Cambremer, "for Saint-Loup, who is said to be going to marry his niece, is one too. Indeed, that is perhaps why he is marrying her." "Come now, my dear, you mustn't say that Saint-Loup, who is a great friend of ours, is a Dreyfusard. One ought not to make such allegations lightly," said M. de Cambremer. "You would make him highly popular in the army!" "He was once, but he isn't any longer," I explained to M. de Cambremer. "As for his marrying Mlle, de Guermantes-Brassac, is there any truth in that?" "People are talking of nothing else, but you should be in a position to know." "But I repeat that he told me himself, he was a Dreyfusard," said Mme. de Cambremer. "Not that there isn't every excuse for him, the Guermantes are half German." "The Guermantes in the Rue de Varenne, you can say, are entirely German," said Cancan. "But Saint-Loup is a different matter altogether; he may have any amount of German blood, his father insisted upon maintaining his title as a great nobleman of France, he rejoined the service in 1871 and was killed in the war in the most gallant fashion. I may take rather a strong line about these matters, but it doesn't do to exaggerate either one way or the other. In medio... virtus, ah, I forget the exact words. It's a remark Doctor Cottard made. Now, there's a man who can always say the appropriate thing. You ought to have a small Larousse in the house." To avoid

having to give an opinion as to the Latin quotation, and to get away from the subject of Saint-Loup, as to whom her husband seemed to think that she was wanting in tact, Mme. de Cambremer fell back upon the Mistress whose quarrel with them was even more in need of an explanation. “We were delighted to let la Raspelière to Mme, Verdurin,” said the Marquise. “The only trouble is, she appears to imagine that with the house, and everything else that she has managed to tack on to it, the use of the meadow, the old hangings, all sorts of things which weren’t in the lease at all, she should also be entitled to make friends with us. The two things are entirely distinct. Our mistake lay in our not having done everything quite simply through a lawyer or an agency. At Féterne it doesn’t matter, but I can just imagine the face my aunt de Ch’nouville would make if she saw old mother Verdurin come marching in, on one of my days, with her hair streaming. As for M. de Charlus, of course, he knows some quite nice people, but he knows some very nasty people too.” I asked for details. Driven into a corner, Mme. de Cambremer finally admitted: “People say that it was he who maintained a certain Monsieur Moreau, Morille, Morue, I don’t remember. Nothing to do, of course, with Morel, the violinist,” she added, blushing. “When I realised that Mme. Verdurin imagined that because she was our tenant in the Manche, she would have the right to come and call upon me in Paris, I saw that it was time to cut the cable.”

Notwithstanding this quarrel with the Mistress, the Cambremers were on quite good terms with the faithful, and would readily get into our carriage when they were travelling by the train. Just before we reached Douville, Albertine, taking out her mirror for the last time, would sometimes feel obliged to change her gloves, or to take off her hat for a moment, and, with the tortoiseshell comb which I had given her and which she wore in her hair, would smooth the plaits, pull out the puffs, and if necessary, over the undulations which descended in regular valleys to the nape of her neck, push up her chignon. Once we were in the carriages which had come to meet us, we no longer had any idea where we were; the roads were not lighted; we could tell by the louder sound of the wheels that we were passing through a village, we thought we had arrived, we found ourselves once more in the open country, we heard bells in the distance, we forgot that we were in evening dress, and had almost fallen asleep when, at the end of this wide borderland of darkness which, what with the distance we had travelled and the incidents characteristic of all railway journeys, seemed to have carried us on to a late hour of the night and almost half way back to Paris, suddenly after the crunching of the carriage wheels over a finer gravel had

revealed to us that we had turned into the park, there burst forth, reintroducing us into a social existence, the dazzling lights of the drawing-room, then of the dining-room where we were suddenly taken aback by hearing eight o'clock strike, that hour which we supposed to have so long since passed, while the endless dishes and vintage wines followed one another round men in black and women with bare arms, at a dinner-party ablaze with light like any real dinner-party, surrounded only, and thereby changing its character, by the double veil, sombre and strange, that was woven for it, with a sacrifice of their first solemnity to this social purpose, by the nocturnal, rural, seaside hours of the journey there and back. The latter indeed obliged us to leave the radiant and soon forgotten splendour of the lighted drawing-room for the carriages in which I arranged to sit beside Albertine so that my mistress might not be left with other people in my absence, and often for another reason as well, which was that we could both do many things in a dark carriage, in which the jolts of the downward drive would moreover give us an excuse, should a sudden ray of light fall upon us, for clinging to one another. When M. de Cambremer was still on visiting terms with the Verdurins, he would ask me: "You don't think that this fog will bring on your choking fits? My sister was terribly bad this morning. Ah! You have been having them too," he said with satisfaction. "I shall tell her that to-night. I know that, as soon as I get home, the first thing she will ask will be whether you have had any lately." He spoke to me of my sufferings only to lead up to his sister's, and made me describe mine in detail simply that he might point out the difference between them and hers. But notwithstanding these differences, as he felt that his sister's choking fits entitled him to speak with authority, he could not believe that what 'succeeded' with hers was not indicated as a cure for mine, and it irritated him that I would not try these remedies, for if there is one thing more difficult than submitting oneself to a regime it is refraining from imposing it upon other people. "Not that I need speak, a mere outsider, when you are here before the areopagus, at the fountainhead of wisdom. What does Professor Cottard think about them?" I saw his wife once again, as a matter of fact, because she had said that my 'cousin' had odd habits, and I wished to know what she meant by that. She denied having said it, but finally admitted that she had been speaking of a person whom she thought she had seen with my cousin. She did not know the person's name and said faintly that, if she was not mistaken, it was the wife of a banker, who was called Lina, Linette, Lisette, Lia, anyhow something like that. I felt that 'wife of a banker' was inserted merely to put me off the scent. I decided to ask Albertine whether this were true. But I

preferred to speak to her with an air of knowledge rather than of curiosity. Besides Albertine would not have answered me at all, or would have answered me only with a ‘no’ of which the ‘n’ would have been too hesitating and the ‘o’ too emphatic. Albertine never related facts that were capable of injuring her, but always other facts which could be explained only by them, the truth being rather a current which flows from what people say to us, and which we apprehend, invisible as it may be, than the actual thing that they say. And so when I assured her that a woman whom she had known at Vichy had a bad reputation, she swore to me that this woman was not at all what I supposed, and had never attempted to make her do anything improper. But she added, another day, when I was speaking of my curiosity as to people of that sort, that the Vichy lady had a friend, whom she, Albertine, did not know, but whom the lady had ‘*promised* to introduce to her.’ That she should have promised her this, could only mean that Albertine wished it, or that the lady had known that by offering the introduction she would be giving her pleasure. But if I had pointed this out to Albertine, I should have appeared to be depending for my information upon her, I should have put an end to it at once, I should never have learned anything more, I should have ceased to make myself feared. Besides, we were at Balbec, the Vichy lady and her friend lived at Menton; the remoteness, the impossibility of the danger made short work of my suspicions. Often when M. de Cambremer hailed me from the station I had been with Albertine making the most of the darkness, and with all the more difficulty as she had been inclined to resist, fearing that it was not dark enough. “You know, I’m sure Cottard saw us, anyhow, if he didn’t, he must have noticed how breathless we were from our voices, just when they were talking about your other kind of breathlessness,” Albertine said to me when we arrived at the Douville station where we were to take the little train home. But this homeward, like the outward journey, if, by giving me a certain poetical feeling, it awakened in me the desire to travel, to lead a new life, and so made me decide to abandon any intention of marrying Albertine, and even to break off our relations finally, also, and by the very fact of their contradictory nature, made this bleach more easy. For, on the homeward journey just as much as on the other, at every station there joined us in the train or greeted us from the platform people whom we knew; the furtive pleasures of the imagination were outweighed by those other, continual pleasures of sociability which are so soothing, so soporific. Already, before the stations themselves, their names (which had suggested so many fancies to me since the day on which I first heard them, the evening on which I travelled down to Balbec

with my grandmother), had grown human, had lost their strangeness since the evening when Brichot, at Albertine's request, had given us a more complete account of their etymology. I had been charmed by the 'flower' that ended certain names, such as Fiquefleur, Ronfleur, Fiers, Barfleur, Harfleur, etc., and amused by the.'beef that comes at the end of Bricqueboeuf. But the flower vanished, and also the beef, when Brichot (and this he had told me on the first day in the train) informed us that *fleur* means a harbour (like *fiord*), and that*boeuf*, in Norman *budh*, means a hut. As he cited a number of examples, what had appeared to me a particular instance became general, Bricqueboeuf took its place by the side of Elbeuf, and indeed in a name that was at first sight as individual as the place itself, like the name Pennedepie, in which the obscurities most impossible for the mind to elucidate seemed to me to have been amalgamated from time immemorial in a word as coarse, savoury and hard as a certain Norman cheese, I was disappointed to find the Gallic *pen* which means mountain and is as recognisable in Pennemarck as in the Apennines. As at each halt of the train I felt that we should have friendly hands to shake if not visitors to receive in our carriage, I said to Albertine: "Hurry up and ask Brichot about the names you want to know. You mentioned to me Mar-couville l'Orgueilleuse." "Yes, I love that *orgueil*, it's a proud village," said Albertine. "You would find it," Brichot replied, "prouder still if, instead of turning it into French or even adopting a low Latinity, as we find in the Cartulary of the Bishop of Bayeux, *Marcouvilla superba*, you were to take the older form, more akin to the Norman, *Marculplinvilla superba*, the village, the domain of Merculph. In almost all these names which end in ville, you might see still marshalled upon this coast, the phantoms of the rude Norman invaders. At Hermenonville, you had, standing by the carriage door, only our excellent Doctor, who, obviously, has nothing of the Nordic chief about him. But, by shutting your eyes, you might have seen the illustrious Hérimund (*Herimundivilla*). Although I can never understand why people choose those roads, between Loigny and Balbec-Plage, rather than the very picturesque roads that lead from Loigny to Old Balbec, Mme. Verdurin has perhaps taken you out that way in her carriage. If so, you have seen Incarville, or the village of Wiscar; and Tourville, before you come to Mme. Verdurin's, is the village of Turold. And besides, there were not only the Normans. It seems that the Germans (*Alemanni*) came as far as here: Aumenancourt, *Alemanicurtis* — don't let us speak of it to that young officer I see there; he would be capable of refusing to visit his cousins there any more. There were also Saxons, as is proved by the springs of Sissonne" (the goal of

one of Mme. Verdurin's favourite excursions, and quite rightly), "just as in England you have Middlesex, Wessex. And what is inexplicable, it seems that the Goths, miserable wretches as they are said to have been, came as far as this, and even the Moors, for Mortagne comes from *Mauretania*. Their trace has remained at Gourville — *Gothorunvilla*. Some vestige of the Latins subsists also, Lagny (*Latiniacum*)." "What I should like to have is an explanation of Thorpehomme," said M. de Charlus. "I understand *homme*," he added, at which the sculptor and Cottard exchanged significant glances. "But *Thorpe*?" "*Homme* does not in the least mean what you are naturally led to suppose, Baron," replied Brichot, glancing maliciously at Cottard and the sculptor. "*Homme* has nothing to do, in this instance, with the sex to which I am not indebted for my mother.*Homme* is *holm* which means a small island, etc.... As for *Thorpe*, or village, we find that in a hundred words with which I have already bored our young friend. Thus in Thorpehomme there is not the name of a Norman chief, but words of the Norman language. You see how the whole of this country has been Germanised." "I think that is an exaggeration," said M. de Charlus. "Yesterday I was at Orgeville." "This time I give you back the man I took from you in Thorpehomme, Baron. Without wishing to be pedantic, a Charter of Robert I gives us, for Orgeville, *Otgervilla*, the domain of Otger. All these names are those of ancient lords. Octeville la Venelle is a corruption of l'Avenel. The Avenels were a family of repute in the middle ages. Bour-guenolles, where Mme. Verdurin took us the other day, used to be written Bourg de Môles, for that village belonged in the eleventh century to Baudoin de Môles, as also did la Chaise-Baudoin, but here we are at Doncières." "Heavens, look at all these subalterns trying to get in," said M. de Charlus with feigned alarm. "I am thinking of you, for it doesn't affect me, I am getting out here." "You hear, Doctor?" said Brichot. "The Baron is afraid of officers passing over his body. And yet they have every right to appear here in their strength, for Doncières is precisely the same as Saint-Cyr, *Dominus Cyriacus*. There are plenty of names of towns in which *Sanctus* and *Sancta* are replaced by *Dominus* and *Domina*. Besides, this peaceful military town has sometimes a false air of Saint-Cyr, of Versailles, and even of Fontainebleau."

During these homeward (as on the outward) journeys I used to tell Albertine to put on her things, for I knew very well that at Aumenancourt, Doncières, Epreville, Saint-Vast we should be receiving brief visits from friends. Nor did I at all object to these, when they took the form of (at Hermenonville — the domain of Herimund) a visit from M. de Chevregny, seizing the opportunity,

when he had come down to meet other guests, of asking me to come over to luncheon next day at Beausoleil, or (at Doncières) the sudden irruption of one of Saint-Loup's charming friends sent by him (if he himself was not free) to convey to me an invitation from Captain de Borodino, from the officers' mess at the Cocq-Hardi, or the serjeants' at the Faisan Doré. If Saint-Loup often came in person, during the whole of the time that he was stationed there, I contrived, without attracting attention, to keep Albertine a prisoner under my own watch and ward, not that my vigilance was of any use. On one occasion however my watch was interrupted. When there was a long stop, Bloch, after greeting us, was making off at once to join his father, who, having just succeeded to his uncle's fortune, and having leased a country house by the name of La Commanderie, thought it befitting a country gentleman always to go about in a post chaise, with postilions in livery. Bloch begged me to accompany him to the carriage. "But make haste, for these quadrupeds are impatient, come, O man beloved of the gods, thou wilt give pleasure to my father." But I could not bear to leave Albertine in the train with Saint-Loup; they might, while my back was turned, get into conversation, go into another compartment, smile at one another, touch one another; my eyes, glued to Albertine, could not detach themselves from her so long as Saint-Loup was there. Now I could see quite well that Bloch, who had asked me, as a favour, to go and say how d'ye do to his father, in the first place thought it not very polite of me to refuse when there was nothing to prevent me from doing so, the porters having told us that the train would remain for at least a quarter of an hour in the station, and almost all the passengers, without whom it would not start, having alighted; and, what was more, had not the least doubt that it was because quite decidedly — my conduct on this occasion furnished him with a definite proof of it — I was a snob. For he was well aware of the names of the people in whose company I was. In fact M. de Charlus had said to me, some time before this and without remembering or caring that the introduction had been made long ago: "But you must introduce your friend to me, you are shewing a want of respect for myself," and had talked to Bloch, who had seemed to please him immensely, so much so that he had gratified him with an: "I hope to meet you again." "Then it is irrevocable, you won't walk a hundred yards to say how d'ye do to my father, who would be so pleased," Bloch said to me. I was sorry to appear to be wanting in good fellowship, and even more so for the reason for which Bloch supposed that I was wanting, and to feel that he imagined that I was not the same towards my middle class friends when I was with people of 'birth.' From that day he ceased to shew me the same

friendly spirit and, what pained me more, had no longer the same regard for my character. But, in order to undeceive him as to the motive which made me remain in the carriage, I should have had to tell him something — to wit, that I was jealous of Albertine — which would have distressed me even more than letting him suppose that I was stupidly worldly. So it is that in theory we find that we ought always to explain ourselves frankly, to avoid misunderstandings. But very often life arranges these in such a way that, in order to dispel them, in the rare circumstances in which it might be possible to do so, we must reveal either — which was not the case here — something that would annoy our friend even more than the injustice that he imputes to us, or a secret the disclosure of which — and this was my predicament — appears to us even worse than the misunderstanding. Besides, even without my explaining to Bloch, since I could not, my reason for not going with him, if I had begged him not to be angry with me, I should only have increased his anger by shewing him that I had observed it. There was nothing to be done but to bow before the decree of fate which had willed that Albertine's presence should prevent me from accompanying him, and that he should suppose that it was on the contrary the presence of people of distinction, the only effect of which, had they been a hundred times more distinguished, would have been to make me devote my attention exclusively to Bloch and reserve all my civility for him. It is sufficient that accidentally, absurdly, an incident (in this case the juxtaposition of Albertine and Saint-Loup) be interposed between two destinies whose lines have been converging towards one another, for them to deviate, stretch farther and farther apart, and never converge again. And there are friendships more precious than Bloch's for myself which have been destroyed without the involuntary author of the offence having any opportunity to explain to the offended party what would no doubt have healed the injury to his self-esteem and called back his fugitive affection.

Friendships more precious than Bloch's is not, for that matter, saying very much. He had all the faults that most annoyed me. It so happened that my affection for Albertine made them altogether intolerable. Thus in that brief moment in which I was talking to him, while keeping my eye on Robert, Bloch told me that he had been to luncheon with Mme. Bontemps and that everybody had spoken about me with the warmest praise until the 'decline of Helios.' "Good," thought I, "as Mme. Bontemps regards Bloch as a genius, the enthusiastic support that he must have given me will do more than anything that the others can have said, it will come round to Albertine. Any day now she is bound to learn, and I am surprised that her aunt has not repeated it to her already,

that I am a ‘superior person.’” “Yes,” Bloch went on, “everybody sang your praises. I alone preserved a silence as profound as though I had absorbed, in place of the repast (poor, as it happened) that was set before us, poppies, dear to the blessed brother of Thanatos and Lethe, the divine Hypnos, who enwraps in pleasant bonds the body and the tongue. It is not that I admire you less than the band of hungry dogs with whom I had been bidden to feed. But I admire you because I understand you, and they admire you without understanding you. To tell the truth, I admire you too much to speak of you thus in public, it would have seemed to me a profanation to praise aloud what I carry in the profoundest depths of my heart. In vain might they question me about you, a sacred Pudor, daughter of Kronion, made me remain mute.” I had not the bad taste to appear annoyed, but this Pudor seemed to me akin — far more than to Kronion — to the modesty that prevents a critic who admires you from speaking of you because the secret temple in which you sit enthroned would be invaded by the mob of ignorant readers and journalists — to the modesty of the statesman who does not recommend you for a decoration because you would be lost in a crowd of people who are not your equals, to the modesty of the academician who refrains from voting for you in order to spare you the shame of being the colleague of X—— who is devoid of talent, to the modesty in short, more respectable and at the same time more criminal, of the sons who implore us not to write about their dead father who abounded in merit, so that we shall not prolong his life and create a halo of glory round the poor deceased who would prefer that his name should be borne upon the lips of men to the wreaths, albeit laid there by pious hands, upon his tomb.

If Bloch, while he distressed me by his inability to understand the reason that prevented me from going to speak to his father, had exasperated me by confessing that he had depreciated me at Mme. Bontemps’s (I now understood why Albertine had never made any allusion to this luncheon-party and remained silent when I spoke to her of Bloch’s affection for myself), the young Israelite had produced upon M. de Charlus an impression that was quite the opposite of annoyance.

Certainly Bloch now believed not only that I was unable to remain for a second out of the company of smart people, but that, jealous of the advances that they might make to him (M. de Charlus, for instance), I was trying to put a spoke in his wheel and to prevent him from making friends with them; but for his part the Baron regretted that he had not seen more of my friend. As was his habit, he took care not to betray this feeling. He began by asking me various questions

about Bloch, but in so casual a tone, with an interest that seemed so assumed, that one would have thought he did not hear the answers. With an air of detachment, an intonation that expressed not merely indifference but complete distraction, and as though simply out of politeness to myself: “He looks intelligent, he said he wrote, has he any talent?” I told M. de Charlus that it had been very kind of him to say that he hoped to see Bloch again. The Baron made not the slightest sign of having heard my remark, and as I repeated it four times without eliciting a reply, I began to wonder whether I had not been the dupe of an acoustic mirage when I thought I heard M. de Charlus utter those words. “He lives at Balbec?” intoned the Baron, with an air so far from questioning that it is a nuisance that the written language does not possess a sign other than the mark of interrogation with which to end these speeches which are apparently so little interrogative. It is true that such a sign would scarcely serve for M. de Charlus. “No, they have taken a place near here, La Commanderie.” Having learned what he wished to know, M. de Charlus pretended to feel a contempt for Bloch. “How appalling,” he exclaimed, his voice resuming all its clarion strength. “All the places or properties called La Commanderie were built or owned by the Knights of the Order of Malta (of whom I am one), as the places called Temple or Cavalerie were by the Templars. That I should live at La Commanderie would be the most natural thing in the world. But a Jew! However, I am not surprised; it comes from a curious instinct for sacrilege, peculiar to that race. As soon as a Jew has enough money to buy a place in the country he always chooses one that is called Priory, Abbey, Minster, Chantry. I had some business once with a Jewish official, guess where he lived: at Pont-l’Evêque. When he came to grief, he had himself transferred to Brittany, to Pont-l’Abbé. When they perform in Holy Week those indecent spectacles that are called ‘the Passion,’ half the audience are Jews, exulting in the thought that they are going to hang Christ a second time on the Cross, at least in effigy. At one of the Lamoureux concerts, I had a wealthy Jewish banker sitting next to me. They played the *Boyhood of Christ* by Berlioz, he was quite shocked. But he soon recovered his habitually blissful expression when he heard the Good Friday music. So your friend lives at the Commanderie, the wretch! What sadism! You shall shew me the way to it,” he went on, resuming his air of indifference, “so that I may go there one day and see how our former domains endure such a profanation. It is unfortunate, for he has good manners, he seems to have been well brought up. The next thing I shall hear will be that his address in Paris is Rue du Temple!” M. de Charlus gave the impression, by these words, that he was seeking merely to find a fresh example

in support of his theory; as a matter of fact he was aiming at two birds with one stone, his principal object being to find out Bloch's address. "You are quite right," put in Brichot, "the Rue du Temple used to be called Rue de la Chevalerie-du-Temple. And in that connexion will you allow me to make a remark, Baron?" said the don. "What? What is it?" said M. de Charlus tartly, the proffered remark preventing him from obtaining his information. "No, it's nothing," replied Brichot in alarm. "It is with regard to the etymology of Balbec, about which they were asking me. The Rue du Temple was formerly known as the Rue Barre-du-Bac, because the Abbey of Bac in Normandy had its Bar of Justice there in Paris." M. de Charlus made no reply and looked as if he had not heard, which was one of his favourite forms of insolence. "Where does your friend live, in Paris? As three streets out of four take their name from a church or an abbey, there seems every chance of further sacrilege there. One can't prevent Jews from living in the Boulevard de la Madeleine, Faubourg Saint-Honoré or Place Saint-Augustin. So long as they do not carry their perfidy a stage farther, and pitch their tents in the Place du Parvis Notre-Dame, Quai de l'Archevêché, Rue Chanoinesse or Rue de l'Avemaria, we must make allowance for their difficulties." We could not enlighten M. de Charlus, not being aware of Bloch's address at the time. But I knew that his father's office was in the Rue des Blancs-Manteaux. "Oh! Is not that the last word in perversity?" exclaimed M. de Charlus, who appeared to find a profound satisfaction in his own cry of ironical indignation. "Rue des Blancs-Manteaux!" he repeated, dwelling with emphasis upon each syllable and laughing as he spoke. "What sacrilege! Imagine that these White Mantles polluted by M. Bloch were those of the mendicant brethren, styled Serfs of the Blessed Virgin, whom Saint Louis established there. And the street has always housed some religious Order. The profanation is all the more diabolical since within a stone's throw of the Rue des Blancs-Manteaux there is a street whose name escapes me, which is entirely conceded to the Jews, there are Hebrew characters over the shops, bakeries for unleavened bread, kosher butcheries, it is positively the Judengasse of Paris. That is where M. Bloch ought to reside. Of course," he went on in an emphatic, arrogant tone, suited to the discussion of aesthetic matters, and giving, by an unconscious strain of heredity, the air of an old musketeer of Louis XIII to his backward-tilted face, "I take an interest in all that sort of thing only from the point of view of art. Politics are not in my line, and I cannot condemn wholesale, because Bloch belongs to it, a nation that numbers Spinoza among its illustrious sons. And I admire Rembrandt too much not to realise the beauty that can be derived from frequenting the

synagogue. But after all a ghetto is all the finer, the more homogeneous and complete it is. You may be sure, moreover, so far are business instincts and avarice mingled in that race with sadism, that the proximity of the Hebraic street of which I was telling you, the convenience of having close at hand the fleshpots of Israel will have made your friend choose the Rue des Blancs-Manteaux. How curious it all is! It was there, by the way, that there lived a strange Jew who used to boil the Host, after which I think they boiled him, which is stranger still, since it seems to suggest that the body of a Jew can be equivalent to the Body of Our Lord. Perhaps it might be possible to arrange with your friend to take us to see the church of the White Mantles. Just think that it was there that they laid the body of Louis d'Orléans after his assassination by Jean sans Peur, which unfortunately did not rid us of the Orléans. Personally, I have always been on the best of terms with my cousin the Duc de Chartres; still, after all, they are a race of usurpers who caused the assassination of Louis XVI and dethroned Charles X and Henri V. One can see where they get that from, when their ancestors include Monsieur, who was so styled doubtless because he was the most astounding old woman, and the Regent and the rest of them. What a family!" This speech, anti-Jew or pro-Hebrew — according as one regards the outward meaning of its phrases or the intentions that they concealed — had been comically interrupted for me by a remark which Morel whispered to me, to the fury of M. de Charlus. Morel, who had not failed to notice the impression that Bloch had made, murmured his thanks in my ear for having 'given him the push,' adding cynically: "He wanted to stay, it's all jealousy, he would like to take my place. Just like a yid!" "We might have taken advantage of this halt, which still continues, to ask your friend for some explanations of his ritual. Couldn't you fetch him back?" M. de Charlus asked me, with the anxiety of uncertainty. "No, it's impossible, he has gone away in a carriage, and besides, he is vexed with me." "Thank you, thank you," Morel breathed. "Your excuse is preposterous, one can always overtake a carriage, there is nothing to prevent your taking a motor-car," replied M. de Charlus, in the tone of a man accustomed to see everyone yield before him. But, observing my silence: "What is this more or less imaginary carriage?" he said to me insolently, and with a last ray of hope. "It is an open post chaise which must by this time have reached La Commanderie." Before the impossible, M. de Charlus resigned himself and made a show of jocularity. "I can understand their recoiling from the idea of a new brougham. It might have swept them clean." At last we were warned that the train was about to start, and Saint-Loup left us. But this was the only day when by getting into

our carriage he, unconsciously, caused me pain, when I thought for a moment of leaving him with Albertine in order to go with Bloch. The other times his presence did not torment me. For of her own accord Albertine, to save me from any uneasiness, would upon some pretext or other place herself in such, a position that she could not even unintentionally brush against Robert, almost too far away to have to hold out her hand to him, and turning her eyes away from him would plunge, as soon as he appeared, into ostentatious and almost affected conversation with any of the other passengers, continuing this make-believe until Saint-Loup had gone. So that the visits which he paid us at Doncières, causing me no pain, no inconvenience even, were in no way discordant from the rest, all of which I found pleasing because they brought me so to speak the homage and invitation of this land. Already, as the summer drew to a close, on our journey from Balbec to Douville, when I saw in the distance the watering-place at Saint-Pierre des Ifs where, for a moment in the evening, the crest of the cliffs glittered rosy pink as the snow upon a mountain glows at sunset, it no longer recalled to my mind, I do not say the melancholy which the sight of its strange, sudden elevation had aroused in me on the first evening, when it filled me with such a longing to take the train back to Paris instead of going on to Balbec, but the spectacle that in the morning, Elstir had told me, might be enjoyed from there, at the hour before sunrise, when all the colours of the rainbow are refracted from the rocks, and when he had so often wakened the little boy who had served him, one year, as model, to paint him, nude, upon the sands. The name Saint-Pierre des Ifs announced to me merely that there would presently appear a strange, intelligent, painted man of fifty with whom I should be able to talk about Chateaubriand and Balzac. And now in the mists of evening, behind that cliff of Incarville, which had filled my mind with so many dreams in the past, what I saw, as though its old sandstone wall had become transparent, was the comfortable house of an uncle of M. de Cambremer in which I knew that I should always find a warm welcome if I did not wish to dine at la Raspelière or to return to Balbec. So that it was not merely the place-names of this district that had lost their initial mystery, but the places themselves. The names, already half-stripped of a mystery which etymology had replaced by reason, had now come down a stage farther still. On our homeward journeys, at Hermenonville, at Incarville, at Harambouville, as the train came to a standstill, we could make out shadowy forms which we did not at first identify, and which Brichot, who could see nothing at all, might perhaps have mistaken in the darkness for the phantoms of Herimund, Wiscar and Herimbald. But they came up to our carriage. It was

merely M. de Cambremer, now completely out of touch with the Verdurins, who had come to see off his own guests and, as ambassador for his wife and mother, came to ask me whether I would not let him ‘carry me off’ to keep me for a few days at Féterne where I should find successively a lady of great musical talent, who would sing me the whole of Gluck, and a famous chess-player, with whom I could have some splendid games, which would not interfere with the fishing expeditions and yachting trips on the bay, nor even with the Verdurin dinner-parties, for which the Marquis gave me his word of honour that he would ‘lend’ me, sending me there and fetching me back again, for my greater convenience and also to make sure of my returning. “But I cannot believe that it is good for you to go so high up. I know my sister could never stand it. She would come back in a fine state! She is not at all well just now. Indeed, you have been as bad as that! To-morrow you won’t be able to stand up!” And he shook with laughter, not from malevolence but for the same reason which made him laugh whenever he saw a lame man hobbling along the street, or had to talk to a deaf person. “And before this? What, you haven’t had an attack for a fortnight. Do you know, that is simply marvellous. Really, you ought to come and stay at Féterne, you could talk about your attacks to my sister.” At Incarville it was the Marquis de Montpeyroux who, not having been able to go to Féterne, for he had been away shooting, had come ‘to meet the train’ in top boots, with a pheasant’s feather in his hat, to shake hands with the departing guests and at the same time with myself, bidding me expect, on the day of the week that would be most convenient to me, a visit from his son, whom he thanked me for inviting, adding that he would be very glad if I would make the boy read a little; or else M. de Crécy, come out to digest his dinner, he explained, smoking his pipe, accepting a cigar or indeed more than one, and saying to me: “Well, you haven’t named a day for our next Lucullus evening? We have nothing to discuss? Allow me to remind you that we left unsettled the question of the two families of Montgomery. We really must settle it. I am relying upon you.” Others had come simply to buy newspapers. And many others came and chatted with us who, I have often suspected, were to be found upon the platform of the station nearest to their little mansion simply because they had nothing better to do than to converse for a moment with people of their acquaintance. A scene of social existence like any other, in fact, these halts on the little railway. The train itself appeared conscious of the part that had devolved upon it, had contracted a sort of human kindliness; patient, of a docile nature, it waited as long as they pleased for the stragglers, and even after it had started would stop to pick up those who

signalled to it; they would then run after it panting, in which they resembled itself, but differed from it in that they were running to overtake it at full speed whereas it employed only a wise slowness. And so Hermenonville, Harambouville, Incarville no longer suggested to me even the rugged grandeurs of the Norman Conquest, not content with having entirely rid themselves of the unaccountable melancholy in which I had seen them steeped long ago in the moist evening air. Doncières! To me, even after I had come to know it and had awakened from my dream, how much had long survived in that name of pleasantly glacial streets, lighted windows, succulent flesh of birds. Doncières! Now it was nothing more than the station at which Morel joined the train, Egleville (*Aquilae villa*) that at which we generally found waiting for us Princess Sherbatoff, Maineville, the station at which Albertine left the train on fine evenings, when, if she was not too tired, she felt inclined to enjoy a moment more of my company, having, if she took a footpath, little if any farther to walk than if she had alighted at Parville (*Paterni villa*). Not only did I no longer feel the anxious dread of isolation which had gripped my heart the first evening, I had no longer any need to fear its reawakening, nor to feel myself a stranger or alone in this land productive not only of chestnut trees and tamarisks, but of friendships which from beginning to end of the journey formed a long chain, interrupted like that of the blue hills, hidden here and there in the anfractuosity of the rock or behind the lime trees of the avenue, but delegating at each stage an amiable gentleman who came to interrupt my course with a cordial handclasp, to prevent me from feeling it too long, to offer if need be to continue the journey with me. Another would be at the next station, so that the whistle of the little tram parted us from one friend only to enable us to meet others. Between the most isolated properties and the railway which skirted them almost at the pace of a person who is walking fast, the distance was so slight that at the moment when, from the platform, outside the waiting-room, their owners hailed us, we might almost have imagined that they were doing so from their own doorstep, from their bedroom window, as though the little departmental line had been merely a street in a country town and the isolated mansion-house the town residence of a family; and even at the few stations where no ‘good evening’ sounded, the silence had a nourishing and calming fulness, because I knew that it was formed from the slumber of friends who had gone to bed early in the neighbouring manor, where my arrival would have been greeted with joy if I had been obliged to arouse them to ask for some hospitable office. Not to mention that a sense of familiarity so fills up our time that we have not, after a few months, a free

moment in a town where on our first arrival the day offered us the absolute disposal of all its twelve hours, if one of these had by any chance fallen vacant, it would no longer have occurred to me to devote it to visiting some church for the sake of which I had come to Bal-bec in the past, nor even to compare a scene painted by Elstir with the sketch that I had seen of it in his studio, but rather to go and play one more game of chess at M. Féré's. It was indeed the degrading influence, as it was also the charm that this country round Balbec had had, that it should become for me in the true sense a friendly country; if its territorial distribution, its sowing, along the whole extent of the coast, with different forms of cultivation, gave of necessity to the visits which I paid to these different friends the form of a journey, they also reduced that journey to nothing more than the social amusement of a series of visits. The same place-names, so disturbing to me in the past that the mere Country House Year Book, when I turned over the chapter devoted to the Department of the Manche, caused me as keen an emotion as the railway time-table, had become so familiar to me that, in the time-table itself, I could have consulted the page headed: *Balbec to Douville via Doncières,* with the same happy tranquillity as a directory of addresses. In. this too social valley, along the sides of which I felt assembled, whether visible or not, a numerous company of friends, the poetical cry of the evening was no longer that of the owl or frog, but the 'How goes it?' of M. de Criquetot or the 'Chaire!' of Brichot. Its atmosphere no longer aroused my anguish, and, charged with effluvia that were purely human, was easily breathable, indeed unduly soothing. The benefit that I did at least derive from it was that of looking at things only from a practical point of view. The idea of marrying Albertine appeared to me to be madness.

Chapter 4

I was only waiting for an opportunity for a final rupture. And, one evening, as Mamma was starting next day for Combray, where she was to attend the deathbed of one of her mother's sisters, leaving me behind so that I might get the benefit, as my grandmother would have wished, of the sea air, I had announced to her that I had irrevocably decided not to marry Albertine and would very soon stop seeing her. I was glad to have been able, by these words, to give some satisfaction to my mother on the eve of her departure. She had not concealed from me that this satisfaction was indeed extreme. I had also to come to an understanding with Albertine. As I was on my way back with her from la Raspelière, the faithful having alighted, some at Saint-Mars le Vêtu, others at Saint-Pierre des Ifs, others again at Doncières, feeling particularly happy and detached from her, I had decided, now that there were only our two selves in the carriage, to embark at length upon this subject. The truth, as a matter of fact, is that the girl of the Balbec company whom I really loved, albeit she was absent at that moment, as were the rest of her friends, but who was coming back there (I enjoyed myself with them all, because each of them had for me, as on the day when I first saw them, something of the essential quality of all the rest, as though they belonged to a race apart), was Andrée. Since she was coming back again, in a few days' time, to Balbec, it was certain that she would at once pay me a visit, and then, to be left free not to marry her if I did not wish to do so, to be able to go to Venice, but at the same time to have her, while she was at Balbec, entirely to myself, the plan that I would adopt would be that of not seeming at all eager to come to her, and as soon as she arrived, when we were talking together, I would say to her: "What a pity it is that I didn't see you a few weeks earlier. I should have fallen in love with you; now my heart is bespoke. But that makes no difference, we shall see one another frequently, for I am unhappy about my other love, and you will help to console me." I smiled inwardly as I thought of this conversation, by this stratagem I should be giving Andrée the impression that I was not really in love with her; and so she would not grow tired of me and I should take a joyful and pleasant advantage of her affection. But all this only

made it all the more necessary that I should at length speak seriously to Albertine, so as not to behave indelicately, arid, since I had decided to consecrate myself to her friend, she herself must be given clearly to understand that I was not in love with her. I must tell her so at once, as Andrée might arrive any day. But as we were getting near Parville, I felt that we should not have time that evening and that it was better to put off until the morrow what was now irrevocably settled. I confined myself, therefore, to discussing with her our dinner that evening at the Verdurins'. As she put on her cloak, the train having just left Incarville, the last station before Parville, she said to me: "To-morrow then, more Verdurin, you won't forget that you are coming to call for me." I could not help answering rather sharply: "Yes, that is if I don't 'fail' them, for I am beginning to find this sort of life really stupid. In any case, if we go there, so that my time at la Raspelière may not be absolutely wasted, I must remember to ask Mme. Verdurin about something that may prove of great interest to myself, provide me with a subject for study, and give me pleasure as well, for I have really had very little this year at Balbec." "You are not very polite to me, but I forgive you, because I can see that your nerves are bad. What is this pleasure?" "That Mme. Verdurin should let me hear some things by a musician whose work she knows very well. I know one of his things myself, but it seems there are others and I should like to know if the rest of his work is printed, if it is different from what I know." "What musician?" "My dear child, when I have told you that his name is Vinteuil, will you be any the wiser?" We may have revolved every possible idea in our minds, and yet the truth has never occurred to us, and it is from without, when we are least expecting it, that it gives us its cruel stab and wounds us for all time. "You can't think how you amuse me," replied Albertine as she rose, for the train was slowing down. "Not only does it mean a great deal more to me than you suppose, but even without Mme. Verdurin I can get you all the information that you require. You remember my telling you about a friend older than myself, who has been a mother, a sister to me, with whom I spent the happiest years of my life at Trieste, and whom for that matter I am expecting to join in a few weeks at Cherbourg, when we shall start on our travels together (it sounds a little odd, but you know how I love the sea), very well, this friend (oh! not at all the type of woman you might suppose!), isn't this extraordinary, she is the dearest and most intimate friend of your Vinteuil's daughter, and I know Vinteuil's daughter almost as well as I know her. I always call them my two big sisters. I am not sorry to let you see that your little Albertine can be of use to you in this question of music, about which you say, and quite rightly for that matter,

that I know nothing at all." At the sound of these words, uttered as we were entering the station of Parville, so far from Combray and Montjouvain, so long after the death of Vinteuil, an image stirred in my heart, an image which I had kept in reserve for so many years that even if I had been able to guess, when I stored it up, long ago, that it had a noxious power, I should have supposed that in the Course of time it had entirely lost it; preserved alive in the depths of my being — like Orestes whose death the gods had prevented in order that, on the appointed day, he might return to his native land to punish the murderer of Agamemnon — as a punishment, as a retribution (who can tell?) for my having allowed my grandmother to die, perhaps; rising up suddenly from the black night in which it seemed for ever buried, and striking, like an Avenger, in order to inaugurate for me a novel, terrible and merited existence, perhaps also to making dazzlingly clear to my eyes the fatal consequences which evil actions indefinitely engender, not only for those who have committed them, but for those who have done no more, have thought that they were doing no more than look on at a curious and entertaining spectacle, like myself, alas, on that afternoon long ago at Montjouvain, concealed behind a bush where (as when I complacently listened to an account of Swann's love affairs), I had perilously allowed to expand within myself the fatal road, destined to cause me suffering, of Knowledge. And at the same time, from my bitterest grief I derived a sentiment almost of pride, almost joyful, that of a man whom the shock he has just received has carried at a bound to a point to which no voluntary effort could have brought him. Albertine the friend of Mlle. Vinteuil and of her friend, a practising and professional Sapphist, was, compared to what I had imagined when I doubted her most, as are, compared to the little acousticon of the 1889 Exhibition with which one barely hoped to be able to transmit sound from end to end of a house, the telephones that soar over streets, cities, fields, seas, uniting one country to another. It was a terrible terra incognita this on which I had just landed, a fresh phase of undreamed-of sufferings that was opening before me. And yet this deluge of reality that engulfs us, if it is enormous compared with our timid and microscopic suppositions, was anticipated by them. It was doubtless something akin to what I had just learned, something akin to Albertine's friendship with Mlle. Vinteuil, something which my mind would never have been capable of inventing, but which I obscurely apprehended when I became uneasy at the sight of Albertine and Andrée together. It is often simply from want of the creative spirit that we do not go to the full extent of suffering. And the most terrible reality brings us, with our suffering, the joy of a great

discovery, because it merely gives a new and clear form to what we have long been ruminating without suspecting it. The train had stopped at Parville, and, as we were the only passengers in it, it was in a voice lowered by a sense of the futility of his task, by the force of habit which nevertheless made him perform it, and inspired in him simultaneously exactitude and indolence, and even more by a longing for sleep, that the porter shouted: “Parville!” Albertine, who stood facing me, seeing that she had arrived at her destination stepped across the compartment in which we were and opened the door. But this movement which she was making to alight tore my heart unendurably, just as if, notwithstanding the position independent of my body which Albertine’s body seemed to be occupying a yard away from it, this separation in space, which an accurate draughtsman would have been obliged to indicate between us, was only apparent, and anyone who wished to make a fresh drawing of things as they really were would now have had to place Albertine, not at a certain distance from me, but inside me. She distressed me so much by her withdrawal that, overtaking her, I caught her desperately by the arm. “Would it be materially impossible,” I asked her, “for you to come and spend the night at Balbec?” “Materially, no. But I’m dropping with sleep.” “You would be doing me an immense service...” “Very well, then, though I don’t in the least understand; why didn’t you tell me sooner? I’ll come, though.” My mother was asleep when, after engaging a room for Albertine on a different floor, I entered my own. I sat down by the window, suppressing my sobs, so that my mother, who was separated from me only by a thin partition, might not hear me. I had not even remembered to close the shutters, for at one moment, raising my eyes, I saw facing me in the sky that same faint glow as of a dying fire which one saw in the restaurant at Rivebelle in a study that Elstir had made of a sunset effect. I remembered how thrilled I had been when I had seen from the railway on the day of my first arrival at Balbec, this same image of an evening which preceded not the night but a new day. But no day now would be new to me any more, would arouse in me the desire for an unknown happiness; it would only prolong my sufferings, until the point when I should no longer have the strength to endure them. The truth of what Cottard had said to me in the casino at Parville was now confirmed beyond a shadow of doubt. What I had long dreaded, vaguely suspected of Albertine, what my instinct deduced from her whole personality and my reason controlled by my desire had gradually made me deny, was true! Behind Albertine I no longer saw the blue mountains of the sea, but the room at Montjouvain where she was falling into the arms of Mlle. Vinteuil with that

laugh in which she gave utterance to the strange sound of her enjoyment. For, with a girl as pretty as Albertine, was it possible that Mlle. Vinteuil, having the desires she had, had not asked her to gratify them? And the proof that Albertine had not been shocked by the request but had consented, was that they had not quarrelled, indeed their intimacy had steadily increased. And that graceful movement with which Albertine laid her chin upon Rosemonde's shoulder, gazed at her smilingly, and deposited a kiss upon her throat, that movement which had reminded me of Mlle. Vinteuil, in interpreting which I had nevertheless hesitated to admit that an identical line traced by a gesture must of necessity be due to an identical inclination, for all that I knew, Albertine might simply have learned it from Mlle. Vinteuil. Gradually, the lifeless sky took fire. I who until then had never awakened without a smile at the humblest things, the bowl of coffee and milk, the sound of the rain, the thunder of the wind, felt that the day which in a moment was to dawn, and all the days to come would never bring me any more the hope of an unknown happiness, but only the prolongation of my martyrdom. I clung still to life; I knew that I had nothing now that was not cruel to expect from it. I ran to the lift, regardless of the hour, to ring for the liftboy who acted as night watchman, and asked him to go to Albertine's room, and to tell her that I had something of importance to say to her, if she could see me there. "Mademoiselle says she would rather come to you," was his answer. "She will be here in a moment." And presently, sure enough, in came Albertine in her dressing-gown. "Albertine," I said to her in a whisper, warning her not to raise her voice so as not to arouse my mother, from whom we were separated only by that partition whose thinness, to-day a nuisance, because it confined us to whispers, resembled in the past, when it so clearly expressed my grandmother's intentions, a sort of musical transparency, "I am ashamed to have disturbed you. Listen. To make you understand, I must tell you something which you do not know. When I came here, I left a woman whom I ought to have married, who was ready to sacrifice everything for me. She was to start on a journey this morning, and every day for the last week I have been wondering whether I should have the courage not to telegraph to her that I was coming back. I have had that courage, but it made me so wretched that I thought I would kill myself. That is why I asked you last night if you could not come and sleep at Balbec. If I had to die, I should have liked to bid you farewell." And I gave free vent to the tears which my fiction rendered natural. "My poor boy, if I had only known, I should have spent the night beside you," cried Albertine, to whom the idea that I might perhaps marry this woman, and that her own chance of making

a ‘good marriage’ was thus vanishing, never even occurred, so sincerely was she moved by a grief the cause of which I was able to conceal from her, but not its reality and strength. “Besides,” she told me, “last night, all the time we were coming from la Raspelière, I could see that you were nervous and unhappy, I was afraid there must be something wrong.” As a matter of fact my grief had begun only at Parville, and my nervous trouble, which was very different but which fortunately Albertine identified with it, arose from the boredom of having to spend a few more days in her company. She added: “I shan’t leave you any more, I am going to spend all my time here.” She was offering me, in fact — and she alone could offer me — the sole remedy for the poison that was burning me, a remedy akin, as it happened, to the poison, for, though one was sweet, the other bitter, both were alike derived from Albertine. At that moment, Albertine — my malady — ceasing to cause me to suffer, left me — she, Albertine the remedy — as weak as a convalescent. But I reflected that she would presently be leaving Balbec for Cherbourg, and from there going to Trieste. Her old habits would be reviving. What I wished above all things was to prevent Albertine from taking the boat, to make an attempt to carry her off to Paris. It was true that from Paris, more easily even than from Balbec, she might, if she wished, go to Trieste, but at Paris we should see; perhaps I might ask Mme. de Guermantes to exert her influence indirectly upon Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend so that she should not remain at Trieste, to make her accept a situation elsewhere, perhaps with the Prince de ——, whom I had met at Mme. de Villeparisis’s and, indeed, at Mme. de Guermantes’s. And he, even if Albertine wished to go to his house to see her friend, might, warned by Mme. de Guermantes, prevent them from meeting. Of course I might have reminded myself that in Paris, if Albertine had those tastes, she would find many other people with whom to gratify them. But every impulse of jealousy is individual and bears the imprint of the creature — in this instance Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend — who has aroused it. It was Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend who remained my chief preoccupation. The mysterious passion with which I had thought in the past about Austria because it was the country from which Albertine came (her uncle had been a Counsellor of Embassy there), because its geographical peculiarities, the race that inhabited it, its historical buildings, its scenery, I could study, as in an atlas, as in an album of photographs, in Albertine’s smile, her ways; this mysterious passion I still felt but, by an inversion of symbols, in the realm of horror. Yes, it was from there that Albertine came. It was there that, in every house, she could be sure of finding, if not Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend, others of the sort. The habits of her childhood would revive,

they would be meeting in three months' time for Christmas, then for the New Year, dates which were already painful to me in themselves, owing to an instinctive memory of the misery that I had felt on those days when, long ago, they separated me, for the whole of the Christmas holidays, from Gilberte. After the long dinner-parties, after the midnight revels, when everybody was joyous, animated, Albertine would adopt the same attitudes with her friends there that I had seen her adopt with Andrée, albeit her friendship for Andrée was innocent, the same attitudes, possibly, that I had seen Mlle. Vinteuil adopt, pursued by her friend, at Montjouvain. To Mlle. Vinteuil, while her friend titillated her desires before subsiding upon her, I now gave the inflamed face of Albertine, of an Albertine whom I heard utter as she fled, then as she surrendered herself, her strange, deep laugh. What, in comparison with the anguish that I was now feeling, was the jealousy that I might have felt on the day when Saint-Loup had met Albertine with myself at Doncières and she had made teasing overtures to him, or that I had felt when I thought of the unknown initiator to whom I was indebted for the first kisses that she had given me in Paris, on the day when I was waiting for a letter from Mme. de Stermaria? That other kind of jealousy provoked by Saint-Loup, by a young man of any sort, was nothing. I should have had at the most in that case to fear a rival over whom I should have attempted to prevail. But here the rival was not similar to myself, bore different weapons, I could not compete upon the same ground, give Albertine the same pleasures, nor indeed conceive what those pleasures might be. In many moments of our life, we would barter the whole of our future for a power that in itself is insignificant. I would at one time have foregone all the good things in life to make the acquaintance of Mme. Blatin, because she was a friend of Mme. Swann. To-day, in order that Albertine might not go to Trieste, I would have endured every possible torment, and if that proved insufficient, would have inflicted torments upon her, would have isolated her, kept her under lock and key, would have taken from her the little money that she had so that it should be materially impossible for her to make the journey. Just as long ago, when I was anxious to go to Balbec, what urged me to start was the longing for a Persian church, for a stormy sea at daybreak, so what was now rending my heart as I thought that Albertine might perhaps be going to Trieste, was that she would be spending the night of Christmas there with Mlle. Vinteuil's friend: for imagination, when it changes its nature and turns to sensibility, does not for that reason acquire control of a larger number of simultaneous images. Had anyone told me that she was not at that moment either at Cherbourg or at Trieste, that there was no

possibility of her seeing Albertine, how I should have wept for joy. How my whole life and its future would have been changed! And yet I knew quite well that this localisation of my jealousy was arbitrary, that if Albertine had these desires, she could gratify them with other girls. And perhaps even these very girls, if they could have seen her elsewhere, would not have tortured my heart so acutely. It was Trieste, it was that unknown world in which I could feel that Albertine took a delight, in which were her memories, her friendships, her childish loves, that exhaled that hostile, inexplicable atmosphere, like the atmosphere that used to float up to my bedroom at Combray, from the dining-room in which I could hear talking and laughing with strangers, amid the clatter of knives and forks, Mamma who would not be coming upstairs to say good-night to me; like the atmosphere that had filled for Swann the houses to which Odette went at night in search of inconceivable joys. It was no longer as of a delicious place in which the people were pensive, the sunsets golden, the church bells melancholy, that I thought now of Trieste, but as of an accursed city which I should have liked to see go up in flames, and to eliminate from the world of real things. That city was embedded in my heart as a fixed and permanent point. The thought of letting Albertine start presently for Cherbourg and Trieste filled me with horror; as did even that of remaining at Balbec. For now that the revelation of my mistress's intimacy with Mlle. Vinteuil became almost a certainty, it seemed to me that at every moment when Albertine was not with me (and there were whole days on which, because of her aunt, I was unable to see her), she was giving herself to Bloch's sister and cousin, possibly to other girls as well. The thought that that very evening she might be seeing the Bloch girls drove me mad. And so, after she had told me that for the next few days she would stay with me all the time, I replied: "But the fact is, I want to go back to Paris. Won't you come with me? And wouldn't you like to come and stay with us for a while in Paris?" At all costs I must prevent her from being by herself, for some days at any rate, I must keep her with me, so as to be certain that she could not meet Mlle. Vinteuil's friend. She would as a matter of fact be alone in the house with myself, for my mother, taking the opportunity of a tour of inspection which my father had to make, had taken it upon herself as a duty, in obedience to my grandmother's wishes, to go down to Combray and spend a few days there with one of my grandmother's sisters. Mamma had no love for her aunt, because she had not been to my grandmother, who was so loving to her, what a sister should be. So, when they grow up, children remember with resentment the people who have been unkind to them. But Mamma, having become my

grandmother, was incapable of resentment; her mother's life was to her like a pure and innocent childhood from which she would extract those memories whose sweetness or bitterness regulated her actions towards other people. Our aunt might have been able to furnish Mamma with certain priceless details, but now she would have difficulty in obtaining them, her aunt being seriously ill (they spoke of cancer), and she reproached herself for not having gone sooner, to keep my father company, found only an additional reason for doing what her mother would have done, just as she went on the anniversary of the death of my grandmother's father, who had been such a bad parent, to lay upon his grave the flowers which my grandmother had been in the habit of taking there. And so, to the side of the grave which was about to open, my mother wished to convey the kind words which my aunt had not come to offer to my grandmother. While she was at Combray, my mother would busy herself with certain things which my grandmother had always wished to be done, but only if they were done under her daughter's supervision. So that they had never yet been begun, Mamma not wishing, by leaving Paris before my father, to make him feel too keenly the burden of a grief in which he shared, but which could not afflict him as it afflicted her. "Ah! That wouldn't be possible just at present," Albertine assured me. "Besides, why should you need to go back to Paris so soon, if the lady has gone?" "Because I shall feel more at my ease in a place where I have known her than at Balbec, which she has never seen and which I have begun to loathe." Did Albertine realise later on that this other woman had never existed, and that if that night I had really longed for death, it was because she had stupidly revealed to me that she had been on intimate terms with Mlle. Vinteuil's friend? It is possible. There are moments when it appears to me probable. Anyhow, that morning, she believed in the existence of this other woman. "But you ought to marry this lady," she told me, "my dear boy, it would make you happy, and I'm sure it would make her happy as well." I replied that the thought that I might be making the other woman happy had almost made me decide; when, not long since, I had inherited a fortune which would enable me to provide my wife with ample luxury and pleasures, I had been on the point of accepting the sacrifice of her whom I loved. Intoxicated by the gratitude that I felt for Albertine's kindness, coming so soon after the atrocious suffering that she had caused me, just as one would think nothing of promising a fortune to the waiter who pours one out a sixth glass of brandy, I told her that my wife would have a motor-car, a yacht, that from that point of view, since Albertine was so fond of motoring and yachting, it was unfortunate that she was not the woman I loved, that I should

have been the perfect husband for her, but that we should see, we should no doubt be able to meet on friendly terms. After all, as even when we are drunk we refrain from addressing the passers-by, for fear of blows, I was not guilty of the imprudence (if such it was) that I should have committed in Gilberte's time, of telling her that it was she, Albertine, whom I loved. "You see, I came very near to marrying her. But I did not dare do it, after all, I should not like to make a young woman live with anyone so sickly and troublesome as myself." "But you must be mad, anybody would be delighted to live with you, just look how people run after you. They're always talking about you at Mme. Verdurin's, and in high society too, I'm told. She can't have been at all nice to you, that lady, to make you lose confidence in yourself like that. I can see what she is, she's a wicked woman, I detest her. I'm sure, if I were in her shoes!" "Not at all, she is very kind, far too kind. As for the Verdurins and all that, I don't care a hang. Apart from the woman I love, whom moreover I have given up, I care only for my little Albertine, she is the only person in the world who, by letting me see a great deal of her — that is, during the first few days," I added, in order not to alarm her and to be able to ask anything of her during those days, "— can bring me a little consolation." I made only a vague allusion to the possibility of marriage, adding that it was quite impracticable since we should never agree. Being, in spite of myself, still pursued in my jealousy by the memory of Saint-Loup's relations with 'Rachel, when from the Lord,' and of Swann's with Odette, I was too much inclined to believe that, from the moment that I was in love, I could not be loved in return, and that pecuniary interest alone could attach a woman to me. No doubt it was foolish to judge Albertine by Odette and Rachel. But it was not she; it was myself; it was the sentiments that I was capable of inspiring that my jealousy made me underestimate. And from this judgment, possibly erroneous, sprang no doubt many of the calamities that were to overwhelm us. "Then you decline my invitation to Paris?" "My aunt would not like me to leave just at present. Besides, even if I can come, later on, wouldn't it look rather odd, my staying with you like that? In Paris everybody will know that I'm not your cousin." "Very well, then. We can say that we're practically engaged. It can't make any difference, since you know that it isn't true." Albertine's throat which emerged bodily from her nightgown, was strongly built, sunburned, of coarse grain. I kissed her as purely as if I had been kissing my mother to charm away a childish grief which as a child I did not believe that I would ever be able to eradicate from my heart. Albertine left me, in order to go and dress. Already, her devotion was beginning to falter; a moment ago she had told me that she would

not leave me for a second. (And I felt sure that her resolution would not last long, since I was afraid, if we remained at Balbec, that she would that very evening, in my absence, be seeing the Bloch girls.) Now, she had just told me that she wished to call at Maineville and that she would come back and see me in the afternoon. She had not looked in there the evening before, there might be letters lying there for her, besides, her aunt might be anxious about her. I had replied: “If that is all, we can send the lift-boy to tell your aunt that you are here and to call for your letters.” And, anxious to shew herself obliging but annoyed at being tied down, she had wrinkled her brow, then, at once, very sweetly, said: “All right” and had sent the lift-boy. Albertine had not been out of the room a moment before the boy came and tapped gently on my door. I had not realised that, while I was talking to Albertine, he had had time to go to Maineville and return. He came now to tell me that Albertine had written a note to her aunt and that she could, if I wished, come to Paris that day. It was unfortunate that she had given him this message orally, for already, despite the early hour, the manager was about, and came to me in a great state to ask me whether there was anything wrong, whether I was really leaving; whether I could not stay just a few days longer, the wind that day being rather ‘tiring’ (trying). I did not wish to explain to him that the one thing that mattered to me was that Albertine should have left Balbec before the hour at which the Bloch girls took the air, especially since Andrée, who alone might have protected her, was not there, and that Balbec was like one of those places in which a sick man who has difficulty in breathing is determined, should he die on the journey, not to spend another night. I should have to struggle against similar entreaties, in the hotel first of all, where the eyes of Marie Gineste and Céleste Albaret were red. (Marie, moreover, was giving vent to the swift sob of a mountain torrent. Céleste, who was gentler, urged her to keep calm; but, Marie having murmured the only poetry that she knew: “Down here the lilacs die,” Céleste could contain herself no longer, and a flood of tears spilled over her lilac-hued face; I dare say they had forgotten my existence by that evening.) After which, on the little local railway, despite all my precautions against being seen, I met M. de Cambremer who, at the sight of my boxes, turned pale, for he was counting upon me for the day after the next; he infuriated me by trying to persuade me that my choking fits were caused by the change in the weather, and that October would do them all the good in the world, and asked me whether I could not ‘postpone my departure by a week,’ an expression the fatuity of which enraged me perhaps only because what he was suggesting to me made me feel ill. And while he talked to me in the railway

carriage, at each station I was afraid of seeing, more terrible than Heribald or Guiscard, M. de Crécy imploring me to invite him, or, more dreadful still, Mme. Verdurin bent upon inviting me. But this was not to happen for some hours. I had not got there yet. I had to face only the despairing entreaties of the manager. I shut the door on him, for I was afraid that, although he lowered his voice, he would end by disturbing Mamma. I remained alone in my room, that room with the too lofty ceiling in which I had been so wretched on my first arrival, in which I had thought with such longing of Mme. de Stermaria, had watched for the appearance of Albertine and her friends, like migratory birds alighting upon the beach, in which I had enjoyed her with so little enjoyment after I had sent the lift-boy to fetch her, in which I had experienced my grandmother's kindness, then realised that she was dead; those shutters at the foot of which the morning light fell, I had opened the first time to look out upon the first ramparts of the sea (those shutters which Albertine made me close in case anybody should see us kissing). I became aware of my own transformations as I compared them with the identity of my surroundings. We grow accustomed to these as to people and when, all of a sudden, we recall the different meaning that they used to convey to us, then, after they had lost all meaning, the events very different from those of to-day which they enshrined, the diversity of actions performed beneath the same ceiling, between the same glazed bookshelves, the change in our heart and in our life that diversity implies, seem to be increased still further by the unalterable permanence of the setting, reinforced by the unity of scene.

Two or three times it occurred to me, for a moment, that the world in which this room and these bookshelves were situated and in which Albertine counted for so little, was perhaps an intellectual world, which was the sole reality, and my grief something like what we feel when we read a novel, a thing of which only a madman would make a lasting and permanent grief that prolonged itself through his life; that a tiny movement of my will would suffice, perhaps, to attain to that real world, to re-enter it, passing through my grief, as one breaks through a paper hoop, and to think no more about what Albertine had done than we think about the actions of the imaginary heroine of a novel after we have finished reading it. For that matter, the mistresses whom I have loved most passionately have never coincided with my love for them. That love was genuine, since I subordinated everything else to the need of seeing them, of keeping them to myself, and would weep aloud if, one evening, I had waited for them in vain. But it was more because they had the faculty of arousing that love, of raising it to a paroxysm, than because they were its image. When I saw them,

when I heard their voices, I could find nothing in them which resembled my love and could account for it. And yet my sole joy lay in seeing them, my sols anxiety in waiting for them to come. One would have said that a virtue that had no connexion with them had been attached to them artificially by nature, and that this virtue, this quasi-electric power had the effect upon me of exciting my love, that is to say of controlling all my actions and causing all my sufferings. But from this, the beauty, or the intelligence, or the kindness of these women was entirely distinct. As by an electric current that gives us a shock, I have been shaken by my love affairs, I have lived them, I have felt them: never have I succeeded in arriving at the stage of seeing or thinking them. Indeed I am inclined to believe that in these love affairs (I leave out of account the physical pleasure which is their habitual accompaniment but is not enough in itself to constitute them), beneath the form of the woman, it is to those invisible forces which are attached to her that we address ourselves as to obscure deities. It is they whose goodwill is necessary to us, with whom we seek to establish contact without finding any positive pleasure in it. With these goddesses, the woman, during our assignation with her, puts us in touch and does little more. We have, by way of oblation, promised jewels, travels, uttered formulas which mean that we adore and, at the same time, formulas which mean that we are indifferent. We have used all our power to obtain a fresh assignation, but on condition that no trouble is involved. Now would the woman herself, if she were not completed by these occult forces, make us give ourselves so much trouble, when, once she has left us, we are unable to say how she was dressed and realise that we never even looked at her?

As our vision is a deceiving sense, a human body, even when it is loved as Albertine's was, seems to us to be at a few yards', at a few inches' distance from us. And similarly with the soul that inhabits it. But something need only effect a violent change in the relative position of that soul to ourselves, to shew us that she is in love with others and not with us, then by the beating of our dislocated heart we feel that it is not a yard away from us but within us that the beloved creature was. Within us, in regions more or less superficial. But the words: 'That friend is Mlle. Vinteuil' had been the *Open sesame* which I should have been incapable of discovering by myself, which had made Albertine penetrate to the depths of my shattered heart. And the door that had closed behind her, I might seek for a hundred years without learning how it might be opened.

I had ceased for a moment to hear these words ringing in my ears while Albertine was with me just now. While I was kissing her, as I used to kiss my

mother, at Combray, to calm my anguish, I believed almost in Albertine's innocence, or at least did not think continuously of the discovery that I had made of her vice. But now that I was alone the words began to sound afresh like those noises inside the ear which we hear as soon as the other person stops talking. Her vice now seemed to me to be beyond any doubt. The light of the approaching sunrise, by altering the appearance of the things round me, made me once again, as though it shifted my position for a moment, yet even more painfully conscious of my suffering. I had never seen the dawn of so beautiful or so painful a morning. And thinking of all the nondescript scenes that were about to be lighted up, scenes which, only yesterday, would have filled me simply with the desire to visit them, I could not repress a sob when, with a gesture of oblation mechanically performed which appeared to me to symbolise the bloody sacrifice which I should have to make of all joy, every morning, until the end of my life, a solemn renewal, celebrated as each day dawned, of my daily grief and of the blood from my wound, the golden egg of the sun, as though propelled by the breach of equilibrium brought about at the moment of coagulation by a change of density, barbed with tongues of flame as in a painting, came leaping through the curtain behind which one had felt that it was quivering with impatience, ready to appear on the scene and to spring aloft, the mysterious, ingrained purple of which it flooded with waves of light. I heard the sound of my weeping. But at that moment, to my astonishment, the door opened and, with a throbbing heart, I seemed to see my grandmother standing before me, as in one of those apparitions that had already visited me, but only in my sleep. Was all this but a dream, then? Alas, I was wide awake. "You see a likeness to your poor grandmother," said Mamma, for it was she, speaking gently to calm my fear, admitting moreover the resemblance, with a fine smile of modest pride which had always been innocent of coquetry. Her dishevelled hair, the grey locks in which were not hidden and strayed about her troubled eyes, her ageing cheeks, my grandmother's own dressing-gown which she was wearing, all these had for a moment prevented me from recognising her and had made me uncertain whether I was still asleep or my grandmother had come back to life. For a long time past my mother had resembled my grandmother, far more than the young and smiling Mamma that my childhood had known. But I had ceased to think of this resemblance. So, when we have long been sitting reading, our mind absorbed, we have not noticed how the time was passing, and suddenly we see round about us the sun that shone yesterday at the same hour call up the same harmonies, the same effects of colour that precede a sunset. It was with a smile

that my mother made me aware of my mistake, for it was pleasing to her that she should bear so strong a resemblance to her mother. “I came,” said my mother, “because when I was asleep I thought I heard some one crying. It wakened me. But how is it that you aren’t in bed? And your eyes are filled with tears. What is the matter?” I took her head in my arms: “Mamma, listen, I’m afraid you’ll think me very changeable. But first of all, yesterday I spoke to you not at all nicely about Albertine; what I said was unfair.” “But what difference can that make?” said my mother, and, catching sight of the rising sun, she smiled sadly as she thought of her own mother, and, so that I might not lose the benefit of a spectacle which my grandmother used to regret that I never watched, she pointed to the window. But beyond the beach of Balbec, the sea, the sunrise, which Mamma was pointing out to me, I saw, with movements of despair which did not escape her notice, the room at Montjouvain where Albertine, rosy and round like a great cat, with her rebellious nose, had taken the place of Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend and was saying amid peals of her voluptuous laughter: “Well! If they do see us, it will be all the better. I? I wouldn’t dare to spit upon that old monkey?” It was this scene that I saw, beyond the scene that was framed in the open window and was no more than a dim veil drawn over the other, superimposed upon it like a reflexion. It seemed indeed almost unreal, like a painted view. Facing us, where the cliff of Parville jutted out, the little wood in which we had played ‘ferret’ thrust down to the sea’s edge, beneath the varnish, still all golden, of the water, the picture of its foliage, as at the hour when often, at the close of day, after I had gone there to rest in the shade with Albertine, we had risen as we saw the sun sink in the sky. In the confusion of the night mists which still hung in rags of pink and blue over the water littered with the pearly fragments of the dawn, boats were going past smiling at the slanting light which gilded their sails and the point of their bowsprits as when they are homeward bound at evening: a scene imaginary, chilling and deserted, a pure evocation of the sunset which did not rest, as at evening, upon the sequence of the hours of the day which I was accustomed to see precede it, detached, interpolated, more unsubstantial even than the horrible image of Montjouvain which it did not succeed in cancelling, covering, concealing — a poetical, vain image of memory and dreams. “But come,” my mother was saying, “you said nothing unpleasant about her, you told me that she bored you a little, that you were glad you had given up the idea of marrying her. There is no reason for you to cry like that. Remember, your Mamma is going away to-day and can’t bear to leave her big baby in such a state. Especially, my poor boy, as I haven’t time to comfort you. Even if my

things are packed, one has never any time on the morning of a journey." "It is not that." And then, calculating the future, weighing well my desires, realising that such an affection on Albertine's part for Mlle. Vinteuil's friend, and one of such long standing, could not have been innocent, that Albertine had been initiated, and, as every one of her instinctive actions made plain to me, had moreover been born with a predisposition towards that vice which in my uneasiness I had only too often dreaded, in which she could never have ceased to indulge (in which she was indulging perhaps at that moment, taking advantage of an instant in which I was not present), I said to my mother, knowing the pain that I was causing her, which she did not shew, and which revealed itself only by that air of serious preoccupation which she wore when she was weighing the respective seriousness of making me unhappy or making me unwell, that air which she had assumed at Combray for the first time when she had resigned herself to spending the night in my room, that air which at this moment was extraordinarily like my grandmother's when she allowed me to drink brandy, I said to my mother: "I know how what I am going to say will distress you. First of all, instead of remaining here as you wished, I want to leave by the same train as you. But that is nothing. I am not feeling well here, I would rather go home. But listen to me, don't make yourself too miserable. This is what I want to say. I was deceiving myself, I deceived you in good faith, yesterday, I have been thinking over it all night. It is absolutely necessary, and let us decide the matter at once, because I am quite clear about it now in my own mind, because I shall not change again, and I could not live without it, it is absolutely necessary that I marry Albertine."

The Captive [Volume 5]

La Prisonnière (1929)
Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (1889-1930)

Chapter 1 — Life with Albertine

At daybreak, my face still turned to the wall, and before I had seen above the big inner curtains what tone the first streaks of light assumed, I could already tell what sort of day it was. The first sounds from the street had told me, according to whether they came to my ears dulled and distorted by the moisture of the atmosphere or quivering like arrows in the resonant and empty area of a spacious, crisply frozen, pure morning; as soon as I heard the rumble of the first tramcar, I could tell whether it was sodden with rain or setting forth into the blue. And perhaps these sounds had themselves been forestalled by some swifter and more pervasive emanation which, stealing into my slumber, diffused in it a melancholy that seemed to presage snow, or gave utterance (through the lips of a little person who occasionally reappeared there) to so many hymns to the glory of the sun that, having first of all begun to smile in my sleep, having prepared my eyes, behind their shut lids, to be dazzled, I awoke finally amid deafening strains of music. It was, moreover, principally from my bedroom that I took in the life of the outer world during this period. I know that Bloch reported that, when he called to see me in the evenings, he could hear the sound of conversation; as my mother was at Combray and he never found anybody in my room, he concluded that I was talking to myself. When, much later, he learned that Albertine had been staying with me at the time, and realised that I had concealed her presence from all my friends, he declared that he saw at last the reason why, during that episode in my life, I had always refused to go out of doors. He was wrong. His mistake was, however, quite pardonable, for the truth, even if it is inevitable, is not always conceivable as a whole. People who learn some accurate detail of another person’s life at once deduce consequences which are not accurate, and see in the newly discovered fact an explanation of things that have no connexion with it whatsoever.

When I reflect now that my mistress had come, on our return from Balbec, to live in Paris under the same roof as myself, that she had abandoned the idea of going on a cruise, that she was installed in a bedroom within twenty paces of my own, at the end of the corridor, in my father’s tapestried study, and that late

every night, before leaving me, she used to slide her tongue between my lips like a portion of daily bread, a nourishing food that had the almost sacred character of all flesh upon which the sufferings that we have endured on its account have come in time to confer a sort of spiritual grace, what I at once call to mind in comparison is not the night that Captain de Borodino allowed me to spend in barracks, a favour which cured what was after all only a passing distemper, but the night on which my father sent Mamma to sleep in the little bed by the side of my own. So it is that life, if it is once again to deliver us from an anguish that has seemed inevitable, does so in conditions that are different, so diametrically opposed at times that it is almost an open sacrilege to assert the identity of the grace bestowed upon us.

When Albertine had heard from Françoise that, in the darkness of my still curtained room, I was not asleep, she had no scruple about making a noise as she took her bath, in her own dressing-room. Then, frequently, instead of waiting until later in the day, I would repair to a bathroom adjoining hers, which had a certain charm of its own. Time was, when a stage manager would spend hundreds of thousands of francs to begem with real emeralds the throne upon which a great actress would play the part of an empress. The Russian ballet has taught us that simple arrangements of light will create, if trained upon the right spot, jewels as gorgeous and more varied. This decoration, itself immaterial, is not so graceful, however, as that which, at eight o'clock in the morning, the sun substitutes for what we were accustomed to see when we did not arise before noon. The windows of our respective bathrooms, so that their occupants might not be visible from without, were not of clear glass but clouded with an artificial and old — fashioned kind of frost. All of a sudden, the sun would colour this drapery of glass, gild it, and discovering in myself an earlier young man whom habit had long concealed, would intoxicate me with memories, as though I were out in the open country gazing at a hedge of golden leaves in which even a bird was not lacking. For I could hear Albertine ceaselessly humming:

For melancholy Is but folly,

And he who heeds it is a fool.

I loved her so well that I could spare a joyous smile for her bad taste in music. This song had, as it happened, during the past summer, delighted Mme. Bontemps, who presently heard people say that it was silly, with the result that, instead of asking Albertine to sing it, when she had a party, she would substitute:

A song of farewell rises from troubled springs,

which in its turn became 'an old jingle of Massenet's, the child is always

dinning into our ears.’

A cloud passed, blotting out the sun; I saw extinguished and replaced by a grey monochrome the modest, screening foliage of the glass.

The partition that divided our two dressing-rooms (Albertine’s, identical with my own, was a bathroom which Mamma, who had another at the other end of the flat, had never used for fear of disturbing my rest) was so slender that we could talk to each other as we washed in double privacy, carrying on a conversation that was interrupted only by the sound of the water, in that intimacy which, in hotels, is so. often permitted by the smallness and proximity of the rooms, but which, in private houses in Paris, is so rare.

On other mornings, I would remain in bed, drowsing for as long as I chose, for orders had been given that no one was to enter my room until I had rung the bell, an act which, owing to the awkward position in which the electric bulb had been hung above my bed, took such a time that often, tired of feeling for it and glad to be left alone, I would lie back for some moments and almost fall asleep again. It was not that I was wholly indifferent to Albertine’s presence in the house. Her separation from her girl friends had the effect of sparing my heart any fresh anguish. She kept it in a state of repose, in a semi-immobility which would help it to recover. But after all, this calm which my mistress was procuring for me was a release from suffering rather than a positive joy. Not that it did not permit me to taste many joys, from which too keen a grief had debarred me, but these joys, so far from my owing them to Albertine, in whom for that matter I could no longer see any beauty and who was beginning to bore me, with whom I was now clearly conscious that I was not in love, I tasted on the contrary when Albertine was not with me. And so, to begin the morning, I did not send for her at once, especially if it was a fine day. For some moments, knowing that he would make me happier than Albertine, I remained closeted with the little person inside me, hymning the rising sun, of whom I have already spoken. Of those elements which compose our personality, it is not the most obvious that are most essential. In myself, when ill health has succeeded in uprooting them one after another, there will still remain two or three, endowed with a hardier constitution than the rest, notably a certain philosopher who is happy only when he has discovered in two works of art, in two sensations, a common element. But the last of all, I have sometimes asked myself whether it would not be this little mannikin, very similar to another whom the optician at Combray used to set up in his shop window to forecast the weather, and who, doffing his hood when the sun shone, would put it on again if it was going to rain. This little mannikin, I

know his egoism; I may be suffering from a choking fit which the mere threat of rain would calm; he pays no heed, and, at the first drops so impatiently awaited, losing his gaiety, sullenly pulls down his hood. Conversely, I dare say that in my last agony, when all my other 'selves' are dead, if a ray of sunshine steals into the room, while I am drawing my last breath, the little fellow of the barometer will feel a great relief, and will throw back his hood to sing: "Ah! Fine weather at last!"

I rang for Françoise. I opened the *Figaro*. I scanned its columns and made sure that it did not contain an article, or so-called article, which I had sent to the editor, and which was no more than a slightly revised version of the page that had recently come to light, written long ago in Dr. Percepied's carriage, as I gazed at the spires of Martinville. Then I read Mamma's letter. She felt it to be odd, in fact shocking, that a girl should be staying in the house alone with me. On the first day, at the moment of leaving Balbec, when she saw how wretched I was, and was distressed by the prospect of leaving me by myself, my mother had perhaps been glad when she heard that Albertine was travelling with us, and saw that, side by side with our own boxes (those boxes among which I had passed a night in tears in the Balbec hotel), there had been hoisted into the 'Twister' Albertine's boxes also, narrow and black, which had seemed to me to have the appearance of coffins, and as to which I knew not whether they were bringing to my house life or death. But I had never even asked myself the question, being all overjoyed, in the radiant morning, after the fear of having to remain at Balbec, that I was taking Albertine with me. But to this proposal, if at the start my mother had not been hostile (speaking kindly to my friend like a mother whose son has been seriously wounded and who is grateful to the young mistress who is nursing him with loving care), she had acquired hostility now that it had been too completely realised, and the girl was prolonging her sojourn in our house, and moreover in the absence of my parents. I cannot, however, say that my mother ever made this hostility apparent. As in the past, when she had ceased to dare to reproach me with my nervous instability, my laziness, now she felt a hesitation — which I perhaps did not altogether perceive at the moment or refused to perceive — to run the risk, by offering any criticism of the girl to whom I had told her that I intended to make an offer of marriage, of bringing a shadow into my life, making me in time to come less devoted to my wife, of sowing perhaps for a season when she herself would no longer be there, the seeds of remorse at having grieved her by marrying Albertine. Mamma preferred to seem to be approving a choice which she felt herself powerless to make me

reconsider. But people who came in contact with her at this time have since told me that in addition to her grief at having lost her mother she had an air of constant preoccupation. This mental strife, this inward debate, had the effect of overheating my mother's brow, and she was always opening the windows to let in the fresh air. But she did not succeed in coming to any decision, for fear of influencing me in the wrong direction and so spoiling what she believed to be my happiness. She could not even bring herself to forbid me to keep Albertine for the time being in our house. She did not wish to appear more strict than Mme. Bontemps, who was the person principally concerned, and who saw no harm in the arrangement, which greatly surprised my mother. All the same, she regretted that she had been obliged to leave us together, by departing at that very time for Combray where she might have to remain (and did in fact remain) for months on end, during which my great-aunt required her incessant attention by day and night. Everything was made easy for her down there, thanks to the kindness, the devotion of Legrandin who, gladly undertaking any trouble that was required, kept putting off his return to Paris from week to week, not that he knew my aunt at all well, but simply, first of all, because she had been his mother's friend, and also because he knew that the invalid, condemned to die, valued his attentions and could not get on without him. Snobbishness is a serious malady of the spirit, but one that is localised and does not taint it as a whole. I, on the other hand, unlike Mamma, was extremely glad of her absence at Combray, but for which I should have been afraid (being unable to warn Albertine not to mention it) of her learning of the girl's friendship with Mlle. Vinteuil. This would have been to my mother an insurmountable obstacle, not merely to a marriage as to which she had, for that matter, begged me to say nothing definite as yet to Albertine, and the thought of which was becoming more and more intolerable to myself, but even to the latter's being allowed to stay for any length of time in the house. Apart from so grave a reason, which in this case did not apply, Mamma, under the dual influence of my grandmother's liberating and edifying example, according to whom, in her admiration of George Sand, virtue consisted in nobility of heart, and of my own corruption, was now indulgent towards women whose conduct she would have condemned in the past, or even now, had they been any of her own middle-class friends in Paris or at Combray, but whose lofty natures I extolled to her and to whom she pardoned much because of their affection for myself. But when all is said, and apart from any question of propriety, I doubt whether Albertine could have put up with Mamma who had acquired from Combray, from my aunt Léonie, from

all her kindred, habits of punctuality and order of which my mistress had not the remotest conception.

She would never think of shutting a door and, on the other hand, would no more hesitate to enter a room if the door stood open than would a dog or a cat. Her somewhat disturbing charm was, in fact, that of taking the place in the household not so much of a girl as of a domestic animal which comes into a room, goes out, is to be found wherever one does not expect to find it and (in her case) would — bringing me a profound sense of repose — come and lie down on my bed by my side, make a place for herself from which she never stirred, without being in my way as a person would have been. She ended, however, by conforming to my hours of sleep, and not only never attempted to enter my room but would take care not to make a sound until I had rung my bell. It was Françoise who impressed these rules of conduct upon her.

She was one of those Combray servants, conscious of their master's place in the world, and that the least that they can do is to see that he is treated with all the respect to which they consider him entitled. When a stranger on leaving after a visit gave Françoise a gratuity to be shared with the kitchenmaid, he had barely slipped his coin into her hand before Françoise, with an equal display of speed, discretion and energy, had passed the word to the kitchenmaid who came forward to thank him, not in a whisper, but openly and aloud, as Françoise had told her that she must do. The parish priest of Combray was no genius, but he also knew what was due him. Under his instruction, the daughter of some Protestant cousins of Mme. Sazerat had been received into the Church, and her family had been most grateful to him: it was a question of her marriage to a young nobleman of Méséglise. The young man's relatives wrote to inquire about her in a somewhat arrogant letter, in which they expressed their dislike of her Protestant origin. The Combray priest replied in such a tone that the Méséglise nobleman, crushed and prostrate, wrote a very different letter in which he begged as the most precious favour the award of the girl's hand in marriage.

Françoise deserved no special credit for making Albertine respect my slumbers. She was imbued with tradition. From her studied silence, or the peremptory response that she made to a proposal to enter my room, or to send in some message to me, which Albertine had expressed in all innocence, the latter realised with astonishment that she was now living in an alien world, where strange customs prevailed, governed by rules of conduct which one must never dream of infringing. She had already had a foreboding of this at Balbec, but, in Paris, made no attempt to resist, and would wait patiently every morning for the

sound of my bell before venturing to make any noise.

The training that Françoise gave her was of value also to our old servant herself, for it gradually stilled the lamentations which, ever since our return from Balbec, she had not ceased to utter. For, just as we were boarding the tram, she remembered that she had forgotten to say good-bye to the housekeeper of the Hotel, a whiskered dame who looked after the bedroom floors, barely knew Françoise by sight, but had been comparatively civil to her. Françoise positively insisted upon getting out of the tram, going back to the Hotel, saying good-bye properly to the housekeeper, and not leaving for Paris until the following day. Common sense, coupled with my sudden horror of Balbec, restrained me from granting her this concession, but my refusal had infected her with a feverish distemper which the change of air had not sufficed to cure and which lingered on in Paris. For, according to Françoise's code, as it is illustrated in the carvings of Saint-André-des-Champs, to wish for the death of an enemy, even to inflict it is not forbidden, but it is a horrible sin not to do what is expected of you, not to return a civility, to refrain, like a regular churl, from saying good-bye to the housekeeper before leaving a hotel. Throughout the journey, the continually recurring memory of her not having taken leave of this woman had dyed Françoise's cheeks with a scarlet flush that was quite alarming. And if she refused to taste bite or sup until we reached Paris, it was perhaps because this memory heaped a 'regular load' upon her stomach (every class of society has a pathology of its own) even more than with the intention of punishing us.

Among the reasons which led Mamma to write me a daily letter, and a letter which never failed to include some quotation from Mme. de Sévigné, there was the memory of my grandmother. Mamma would write to me: "Mme. Sazerat gave us one of those little luncheons of which she possesses the secret and which, as your poor grandmother would have said, quoting Mme. de Sévigné, deprive us of solitude without affording us company." In one of my own earlier letters I was so inept as to write to Mamma: "By those quotations, your mother would recognise you at once." Which brought me, three days later, the reproof: "My poor boy, if it was only to speak to me of *my mother*, your reference to Mme. de Sévigné was most inappropriate. She would have answered you as she answered Mme. de Grignan: 'So she was nothing to you? I had supposed that you were related.'"

By this time, I could hear my mistress leaving or returning to her room. I rang the bell, for it was time now for Andrée to arrive with the chauffeur, Morel's friend, lent me by the Verdurins, to take Albertine out. I had spoken to

the last-named of the remote possibility of our marriage; but I had never made her any formal promise; she herself, from discretion, when I said to her: “I can’t tell, but it might perhaps be possible,” had shaken her head with a melancholy sigh, as much as to say: “Oh, no, never,” in other words: “I am too poor.” And so, while I continued to say: “It is quite indefinite,” when speaking of future projects, at the moment I was doing everything in my power to amuse her, to make life pleasant to her, with perhaps the unconscious design of thereby making her wish to marry me. She herself laughed at my lavish generosity. “Andrée’s mother would be in a fine state if she saw me turn into a rich lady like herself, what she calls a lady who has her own ‘horses, carriages, pictures.’ What? Did I never tell you that she says that. Oh, she’s a character! What surprises me is that she seems to think pictures just as important as horses and carriages.” We shall see in due course that, notwithstanding the foolish ways of speaking that she had not outgrown, Albertine had developed to an astonishing extent, which left me unmoved, the intellectual superiority of a woman friend having always interested me so little that if I have ever complimented any of my friends upon her own, it was purely out of politeness. Alone, the curious genius of Céleste might perhaps appeal to me. In spite of myself, I would continue to smile for some moments, when, for instance, having discovered that Françoise was not in my room, she accosted me with: “Heavenly deity reclining on a bed!” “But why, Céleste,” I would say, “why deity?” “Oh, if you suppose that you have anything in common with the mortals who make their pilgrimage on our vile earth, you are greatly mistaken!” “But why ‘reclining’ on a bed, can’t you see that I’m lying in bed?” “You never lie. Who ever saw anybody lie like that? You have just alighted there. With your white pyjamas, and the way you twist your neck, you look for all the world like a dove.”

Albertine, even in the discussion of the most trivial matters, expressed herself very differently from the little girl that she had been only a few years earlier at Balbec. She went so far as to declare, with regard to a political incident of which she disapproved: “I consider that ominous.” And I am not sure that it was not about this time that she learned to say, when she meant that she felt a book to be written in a bad style: “It is interesting, but really, it might have been written *by a pig*.”

The rule that she must not enter my room until I had rung amused her greatly. As she had adopted our family habit of quotation, and in following it drew upon the plays in which she had acted at her convent and for which I had expressed admiration, she always compared me to Assuérus:

And death is the reward of whoso dares
To venture in his presence unawares....
None is exempt; nor is there any whom
Or rank or sex can save from such a doom;
Even I myself...
Like all the rest, I by this law am bound;
And, to address him, I must first be found
By him, or he must call me to his side.

Physically, too, she had altered. Her blue, almond-shaped eyes, grown longer, had not kept their form; they were indeed of the same colour, but seemed to have passed into a liquid state. So much so that, when she shut them it was as though a pair of curtains had been drawn to shut out a view of the sea. It was no doubt this one of her features that I remembered most vividly each night after we had parted. For, on the contrary, every morning the ripple of her hair continued to give me the same surprise, as though it were some novelty that I had never seen before. And yet, above the smiling eyes of a girl, what could be more beautiful than that clustering coronet of black violets? The smile offers greater friendship; but the little gleaming tips of blossoming hair, more akin to the flesh, of which they seem to be a transposition into tiny waves, are more provocative of desire.

As soon as she entered my room, she sprang upon my bed and sometimes would expatiate upon my type of intellect, would vow in a transport of sincerity that she would sooner die than leave me: this was on mornings when I had shaved before sending for her. She was one of those women who can never distinguish the cause of their sensations. The pleasure that they derive from a smooth cheek they explain to themselves by the moral qualities of the man who seems to offer them a possibility of future happiness, which is capable, however, of diminishing and becoming less necessary the longer he refrains from shaving.

I inquired where she was thinking of going.

“I believe Andrée wants to take me to the Buttes-Chaumont; I have never been there.”

Of course it was impossible for me to discern among so many other words whether beneath these a falsehood lay concealed. Besides, I could trust Andrée to tell me of all the places that she visited with Albertine.

At Balbec, when I felt that I was utterly tired of Albertine, I had made up my mind to say, untruthfully, to Andrée: “My little Andrée, if only I had met you again sooner! It is you that I would have loved. But now my heart is pledged in

another quarter. All the same, we can see a great deal of each other, for my love for another is causing me great anxiety, and you will help me to find consolation." And lo, these identical lying words had become true within the space of three weeks. Perhaps, Andrée had believed in Paris that it was indeed a lie and that I was in love with her, as she would doubtless have believed at Balbec. For the truth is so variable for each of us, that other people have difficulty in recognising themselves in it. And as I knew that she would tell me everything that she and Albertine had done, I had asked her, and she had agreed to come and call for Albertine almost every day. In this way I might without anxiety remain at home.

Also, Andrée's privileged position as one of the girls of the little band gave me confidence that she would obtain everything that I might require from Albertine. Truly, I could have said to her now in all sincerity that she would be capable of setting my mind at rest.

At the same time, my choice of Andrée (who happened to be staying in Paris, having given up her plan of returning to Balbec) as guide and companion to my mistress was prompted by what Albertine had told me of the affection that her friend had felt for me at Balbec, at a time when, on the contrary, I had supposed that I was boring her; indeed, if I had known this at the time, it is perhaps with Andrée that I would have fallen in love.

"What, you never knew," said Albertine, "but we were always joking about it. Do you mean to say you never noticed how she used to copy all your ways of talking and arguing? When she had just been with you, it was too obvious. She had no need to tell us whether she had seen you. As soon as she joined us, we could tell at once. We used to look at one another, and laugh. She was like a coalheaver who tries to pretend that he isn't one. He is black all over. A miller has no need to say that he is a miller, you can see the flour all over his clothes; and the mark of the sacks he has carried on his shoulder. Andrée was just the same, she would knit her eyebrows the way you do, and stretch out her long neck, and I don't know what all. When I take up a book that has been in your room, even if I'm reading it out of doors, I can tell at once that it belongs to you because it still reeks of your beastly fumigations. It's only a trifle, still it's rather a nice trifle, don't you know. Whenever anybody spoke nicely about you, seemed to think a lot of you, Andrée was in ecstasies."

Notwithstanding all this, in case there might have been some secret plan made behind my back, I advised her to give up the Buttes-Chaumont for that day and to go instead to Saint-Cloud or somewhere else.

It was certainly not, as I was well aware, because I was the least bit in love with Albertine. Love is nothing more perhaps than the stimulation of those eddies which, in the wake of an emotion, stir the soul. Certain such eddies had indeed stirred my soul through and through when Albertine spoke to me at Balbec about Mlle. Vinteuil, but these were now stilled. I was no longer in love with Albertine, for I no longer felt anything of the suffering, now healed, which I had felt in the tram at Balbec, upon learning how Albertine had spent her girlhood, with visits perhaps to Montjouvain. All this, I had too long taken for granted, was healed. But, now and again, certain expressions used by Albertine made me suppose — why, I cannot say — that she must in the course of her life, short as it had been, have received declarations of affection, and have received them with pleasure, that is to say with sensuality. Thus, she would say, in any connexion: “Is that true? Is it really true?” Certainly, if she had said, like an Odette: “Is it really true, that thumping lie?” I should not have been disturbed, for the absurdity of the formula would have explained itself as a stupid inanity of feminine wit. But her questioning air: “Is that true?” gave on the one hand the strange impression of a creature incapable of judging things by herself, who appeals to you for your testimony, as though she were not endowed with the same faculties as yourself (if you said to her: “Why, we’ve been out for a whole hour,” or “It is raining,” she would ask: “Is that true?”). Unfortunately, on the other hand, this want of facility in judging external phenomena for herself could not be the real origin of her “Is that true? Is it really true?” It seemed rather that these words had been, from the dawn of her precocious adolescence, replies to: “You know, I never saw anybody as pretty as you.” “You know I am madly in love with you, I am most terribly excited.”— affirmations that were answered, with a coquettishly consenting modesty, by these repetitions of: “Is that true? Is it really true?” which no longer served Albertine, when in my company, save to reply by a question to some such affirmation as: “You have been asleep for more than an hour.” “Is that true?”

Without feeling that I was the least bit in the world in love with Albertine, without including in the list of my pleasures the moments that we spent together, I was still preoccupied with the way in which she disposed of her time; had I not, indeed, fled from Balbec in order to make certain that she could no longer meet this or that person with whom I was so afraid of her misbehaving, simply as a joke (a joke at my expense, perhaps), that I had adroitly planned to sever, at one and the same time, by my departure, all her dangerous entanglements? And Albertine was so entirely passive, had so complete a faculty of forgetting things

and submitting to pressure, that these relations had indeed been severed and I myself relieved of my haunting dread. But that dread is capable of assuming as many forms as the undefined evil that is its cause. So long as my jealousy was not reincarnate in fresh people, I had enjoyed after the passing of my anguish an interval of calm. But with a chronic malady, the slightest pretext serves to revive it, as also with the vice of the person who is the cause of our jealousy the slightest opportunity may serve her to practise it anew (after a lull of chastity) with different people. I had managed to separate Albertine from her accomplices, and, by so doing, to exorcise my hallucinations; even if it was possible to make her forget people, to cut short her attachments, her sensual inclination was, itself also, chronic and was perhaps only waiting for an opportunity to afford itself an outlet. Now Paris provided just as many opportunities as Balbec.

In any town whatsoever, she had no need to seek, for the evil existed not in Albertine alone, but in others to whom any opportunity for enjoyment is good. A glance from one, understood at once by the other, brings the two famished souls in contact. And it is easy for a clever woman to appear not to have seen, then five minutes later to join the person who has read her glance and is waiting for her in a side street, and, in a few words, to make an appointment. Who will ever know? And it was so simple for Albertine to tell me, in order that she might continue these practices, that she was anxious to see again some place on the outskirts of Paris that she had liked. And so it was enough that she should return later than usual, that her expedition should have taken an unaccountable time, although it was perfectly easy perhaps to account for it without introducing any sensual reason, for my malady to break out afresh, attached this time to mental pictures which were not of Balbec, and which I would set to work, as with their predecessors, to destroy, as though the destruction of an ephemeral cause could put an end to a congenital malady. I did not take into account the fact that in these acts of destruction, in which I had as an accomplice, in Albertine, her faculty of changing, her ability to forget, almost to hate the recent object of her love, I was sometimes causing a profound grief to one or other of those persons unknown with whom in turn she had taken her pleasure, and that this grief I was causing them in vain, for they would be abandoned, replaced, and, parallel to the path strewn with all the derelicts of her light-hearted infidelities, there would open for me another, pitiless path broken only by an occasional brief respite; so that my suffering could end only with Albertine’s life or with my own. Even in the first days after our return to Paris, not satisfied by the information that Andrée and the chauffeur had given me as to their expeditions with my mistress,

I had felt the neighbourhood of Paris to be as tormenting as that of Balbec, and had gone off for a few days in the country with Albertine. But everywhere my uncertainty as to what she might be doing was the same; the possibility that it was something wrong as abundant, vigilance even more difficult, with the result that I returned with her to Paris. In leaving Balbec, I had imagined that I was leaving Gomorrah, plucking Albertine from it; in reality, alas, Gomorrah was dispersed to all the ends of the earth. And partly out of jealousy, partly out of ignorance of such joys (a case which is rare indeed), I had arranged unawares this game of hide and seek in which Albertine was always to escape me.

I questioned her point-blank: “Oh, by the way, Albertine, am I dreaming, or did you tell me that you knew Gilberte Swann?” “Yes; that is to say, she used to talk to me at our classes, because she had a set of the French history notes, in fact she was very nice about it, and let me borrow them, and I gave them back the next time I saw her.” “Is she the kind of woman that I object to?” “Oh, not at all, quite the opposite.” But, rather than indulge in this sort of criminal investigation, I would often devote to imagining Albertine’s excursion the energy that I did not employ in sharing it, and would speak to my mistress with that ardour which remains intact in our unfulfilled designs. I expressed so keen a longing to see once again some window in the Sainte-Chapelle, so keen a regret that I was not able to go there with her alone, that she said to me lovingly: “Why, my dear boy, since you seem so keen about it, make a little effort, come with us. We can start as late as you like, whenever you’re ready. And if you’d rather be alone with me, I have only to send Andrée home, she can come another time.” But these very entreaties to me to go out added to the calm which allowed me to yield to my desire to remain indoors.

It did not occur to me that the apathy that was indicated by my delegating thus to Andrée or the chauffeur the task of soothing my agitation by leaving them to keep watch over Albertine, was paralysing in me, rendering inert all those imaginative impulses of the mind, all those inspirations of the will, which enable us to guess, to forestall, what some one else is about to do; indeed the world of possibilities has always been more open to me than that of real events. This helps us to understand the human heart, but we are apt to be taken in by individuals. My jealousy was born of mental images, a form of self torment not based upon probability. Now there may occur in the lives of men and of nations (and there was to occur, one day, in my own life) a moment when we need to have within us a superintendent of police, a clear-sighted diplomat, a master-detective, who instead of pondering over the concealed possibilities that extend

to all the points of the compass, reasons accurately, says to himself: “If Germany announces this, it means that she intends to do something else, not just ‘something’ in the abstract but precisely this or that or the other, which she may perhaps have begun already to do.” “If So-and-So has fled, it is not in the direction *a* or *b* or *d*, but to the point *c*, and the place to which we must direct our search for him is c.” Alas, this faculty which was not highly developed in me, I allowed to grow slack, to lose its power, to vanish, by acquiring the habit of growing calm the moment that other people were engaged in keeping watch on my behalf.

As for the reason for my reluctance to leave the house, I should not have liked to explain it to Albertine. I told her that the doctor had ordered me to stay in bed. This was not true. And if it had been true, his prescription would have been powerless to prevent me from accompanying my mistress. I asked her to excuse me from going out with herself and Andrée. I shall mention only one of my reasons, which was dictated by prudence. Whenever I went out with Albertine, if she left my side for a moment, I became anxious, began to imagine that she had spoken to, or simply cast a glance at somebody. If she was not in the best of tempers, I thought that I was causing her to miss or to postpone some appointment. Reality is never more than an allurement to an unknown element in quest of which we can never progress very far. It is better not to know, to think as little as possible, not to feed our jealousy with the slightest concrete detail. Unfortunately, even when we eliminate the outward life, incidents are created by the inward life also; though I held aloof from Albertine’s expeditions, the random course of my solitary reflexions furnished me at times with those tiny fragments of the truth which attract to themselves, like a magnet, an inkling of the unknown, which, from that moment, becomes painful. Even if we live in a hermetically sealed compartment, associations of ideas, memories continue to act upon us. But these internal shocks did not occur immediately; no sooner had Albertine started on her drive than I was revivified, were it only for a few moments, by the stimulating virtues of solitude.

I took my share of the pleasures of the new day; the arbitrary desire — the capricious and purely spontaneous inclination to taste them would not have sufficed to place them within my reach, had not the peculiar state of the weather not merely reminded me of their images in the past but affirmed their reality in the present, immediately accessible to all men whom a contingent and consequently negligible circumstance did not compel to remain at home. On certain fine days the weather was so cold, one was in such full communication

with the street that it seemed as though a breach had been made in the outer walls of the house, and, whenever a tramcar passed, the sound of its bell throbbed like that of a silver knife striking a wall of glass. But it was most of all in myself that I heard, with intoxication, a new sound rendered by the hidden violin. Its strings are tightened or relaxed by mere changes of temperature, of light, in the world outside. In our person, an instrument which the uniformity of habit has rendered silent, song is born of these digressions, these variations, the source of all music: the change of climate on certain days makes us pass at once from one note to another. We recapture the forgotten air the mathematical inevitability of which we might have deduced, and which for the first few moments we sing without recognising it. By themselves these modifications (which, albeit coming from without, were internal) refashioned for me the world outside. Communicating doors, long barred, opened themselves in my brain. The life of certain towns, the gaiety of certain expeditions resumed their place in my consciousness. All athrob in harmony with the vibrating string, I would have sacrificed my dull life in the past, and all my life to come, erased with the india-rubber of habit, for one of these special, unique moments.

If I had not gone out with Albertine on her long drive, my mind would stray all the farther afield, and, because I had refused to savour with my senses this particular morning, I enjoyed in imagination all the similar mornings, past or possible, or more precisely a certain type of morning of which all those of the same kind were but the intermittent apparition which I had at once recognised; for the keen air blew the book open of its own accord at the right page, and I found clearly set out before my eyes, so that I might follow it from my bed, the Gospel for the day. This ideal morning filled my mind full of a permanent reality, identical with all similar mornings, and infected me with a cheerfulness which my physical ill-health did not diminish: for, inasmuch as our sense of well-being is caused not so much by our sound health as by the unemployed surplus of our strength, we can attain to it, just as much as by increasing our strength, by diminishing our activity. The activity with which I was overflowing and which I kept constantly charged as I lay in bed, made me spring from side to side, with a leaping heart, like a machine which, prevented from moving in space, rotates on its own axis.

Françoise came in to light the fire, and to make it draw, threw upon it a handful of twigs, the scent of which, forgotten for a year past, traced round the fireplace a magic circle within which, perceiving myself poring over a book, now at Combray, now at Doncières, I was as joyful, while remaining in my

bedroom in Paris, as if I had been on the point of starting for a walk along the Méséglise way, or of going to join Saint-Loup and his friends on the training-ground. It often happens that the pleasure which everyone takes in turning over the keepsakes that his memory has collected is keenest in those whom the tyranny of bodily ill-health and the daily hope of recovery prevent, on the one hand, from going out to seek in nature scenes that resemble those memories, and, on the other hand, leave so convinced that they will shortly be able to do so that they can remain gazing at them in a state of desire, of appetite, and not regard them merely as memories, as pictures. But, even if they were never to be anything more than memories to me, even if I, as I recalled them, saw merely pictures, immediately they recreated in me, of me as a whole, by virtue of an identical sensation, the boy, the youth who had first seen them. There had been not merely a change in the weather outside, or, inside the room, the introduction of a fresh scent, there had been in myself a difference of age, the substitution of another person. The scent, in the frosty air, of the twigs of brushwood, was like a fragment of the past, an invisible floe broken off from the ice of an old winter that stole into my room, often variegated moreover with this perfume or that light, as though with a sequence of different years, in which I found myself plunged, overwhelmed, even before I had identified them, by the eagerness of hopes long since abandoned. The sun’s rays fell upon my bed and passed through the transparent shell of my attenuated body, warmed me, made me as hot as a sheet of scorching crystal. Whereupon, a famished convalescent who has already begun to batten upon all the dishes that are still forbidden him, I asked myself whether marriage with Albertine would not spoil my life, as well by making me assume the burden, too heavy for my shoulders, of consecrating myself to another person, as by forcing me to live in absence from myself because of her continual presence and depriving me, forever, of the delights of solitude.

And not of these alone. Even when we ask of the day nothing but desires, there are some — those that are excited not by things but by people — whose character it is to be unlike any other. If, on rising from my bed, I went to the window and drew the curtain aside for a moment, it was not merely, as a pianist for a moment turns back the lid of his instrument, to ascertain whether, on the balcony and in the street, the sunlight was tuned to exactly the same pitch as in my memory, it was also to catch a glimpse of some laundress carrying her linen-basket, a bread-seller in her blue apron, a dairymaid in her tucker and sleeves of white linen, carrying the yoke from which her jugs of milk are suspended, some

haughty golden-haired miss escorted by her governess, a composite image, in short, which the differences of outline, numerically perhaps insignificant, were enough to make as different from any other as, in a phrase of music, the difference between two notes, an image but for the vision of which I should have impoverished my day of the objects which it might have to offer to my desires of happiness. But, if the surfeit of joy, brought me by the spectacle of women whom it was impossible to imagine *a priori*, made more desirable, more deserving of exploration, the street, the town, the world, it set me longing, for that very reason, to recover my health, to go out of doors and, without Albertine, to be a free man. How often, at the moment when the unknown woman who was to haunt my dreams passed beneath the window, now on foot, now at the full speed of her motor-car, was I made wretched that my body could not follow my gaze which kept pace with her, and falling upon her as though shot from the embrasure of my window by an arquebus, arrest the flight of the face that held out for me the offer of a happiness which, cloistered thus, I should never know.

Of Albertine, on the other hand, I had nothing more to learn. Every day, she seemed to me less attractive. Only, the desire that she aroused in other people, when, upon hearing of it, I began to suffer afresh and was impelled to challenge their possession of her, raised her in my sight to a lofty pinnacle. Pain, she was capable of causing me; joy, never. Pain alone kept my tedious attachment alive. As soon as my pain vanished, and with it the need to soothe it, requiring all my attention, like some agonising distraction, I felt that she meant absolutely nothing to me, that I must mean absolutely nothing to her. It made me wretched that this state should persist, and, at certain moments, I longed to hear of something terrible that she had done, something that would be capable of keeping us at arms-length until I was cured, so that we might then be able to be reconciled, to refashion in a different and more flexible form the chain that bound us.

In the meantime, I was employing a thousand circumstances, a thousand pleasures to procure for her in my society the illusion of that happiness which I did not feel myself capable of giving her. I should have liked, as soon as I was cured, to set off for Venice, but how was I to manage it, if I married Albertine, I, who was so jealous of her that even in Paris whenever I decided to stir from my room it was to go out with her? Even when I stayed in the house all the afternoon, my thoughts accompanied her on her drive, traced a remote, blue horizon, created round the centre that was myself a fluctuating zone of vague uncertainty. “How completely,” I said to myself, “would Albertine spare me the

anguish of separation if, in the course of one of these drives, seeing that I no longer say anything to her about marriage, she decided not to come back, and went off to her aunt's, without my having to bid her good-bye!" My heart, now that its scar had begun to heal, was ceasing to adhere to the heart of my mistress; I could by imagination shift her, separate her from myself without pain. No doubt, failing myself, some other man would be her husband, and in her freedom she would meet perhaps with those adventures which filled me with horror. But the day was so fine, I was so certain that she would return in the evening, that even if the idea of possible misbehaviour did enter my mind, I could, by an exercise of free will, imprison it in a part of my brain in which it had no more importance than would have had in my real life the vices of an imaginary person; bringing into play the supple hinges of my thought, I had, with an energy which I felt in my head to be at once physical and mental, as it were a muscular movement and a spiritual impulse, broken away from the state of perpetual preoccupation in which I had until then been confined, and was beginning to move in a free atmosphere, in which the idea of sacrificing everything in order to prevent Albertine from marrying some one else and to put an obstacle in the way of her fondness for women seemed as unreasonable to my own mind as to that of a person who had never known her.

However, jealousy is one of those intermittent maladies, the cause of which is capricious, imperative, always identical in the same patient, sometimes entirely different in another. There are asthmatic persons who can soothe their crises only by opening the windows, inhaling the full blast of the wind, the pure air of the mountains, others by taking refuge in the heart of the city, in a room heavy with smoke. Rare indeed is the jealous man whose jealousy does not allow certain concessions. One will consent to infidelity, provided that he is told of it, another provided that it is concealed from him, wherein they appear to be equally absurd, since if the latter is more literally deceived inasmuch as the truth is not disclosed to him, the other demands in that truth the food, the extension, the renewal of his sufferings.

What is more, these two parallel manias of jealousy extend often beyond words, whether they implore or reject confidences. We see a jealous lover who is jealous only of the women with whom his mistress has relations in his absence, but allows her to give herself to another man, if it is done with his authorisation, near at hand, and, if not actually before his eyes, under his roof. This case is not at all uncommon among elderly men who are in love with young women. Such a man feels the difficulty of winning her favour, sometimes his inability to satisfy

her, and, rather than be betrayed, prefers to admit to his house, to an adjoining room, some man whom he considers incapable of giving her bad advice, but not incapable of giving her pleasure. With another man it is just the opposite; never allowing his mistress to go out by herself for a single minute in a town that he knows, he keeps her in a state of bondage, but allows her to go for a month to a place which he does not know, where he cannot form any mental picture of what she may be doing. I had with regard to Albertine both these sorts of sedative mania. I should not have been jealous if she had enjoyed her pleasures in my company, with my encouragement, pleasures over the whole of which I could have kept watch, thus avoiding any fear of falsehood; I might perhaps not have been jealous either if she had removed to a place so unfamiliar and remote that I could not imagine nor find any possibility, feel any temptation to know the manner of her life. In either alternative, my uncertainty would have been killed by a knowledge or an ignorance equally complete.

The decline of day plunging me back by an act of memory in a cool atmosphere of long ago, I breathed it with the same delight with which Orpheus inhaled the subtle air, unknown upon this earth, of the Elysian Fields.

But already the day was ending and I was overpowered by the desolation of the evening. Looking mechanically at the clock to see how many hours must elapse before Albertine's return, I saw that I had still time to dress and go downstairs to ask my landlady, Mme. de Guermantes, for particulars of various becoming garments which I was anxious to procure for my mistress. Sometimes I met the Duchess in the courtyard, going out for a walk, even if the weather was bad, in a close-fitting hat and furs. I knew quite well that, to many people of intelligence, she was merely a lady like any other, the name Duchesse de Guermantes signifying nothing, now that there are no longer any sovereign Duchies or Principalities, but I had adopted a different point of view in my method of enjoying people and places. All the castles of the territories of which she was Duchess, Princess, Viscountess, this lady in furs defying the weather teemed to me to be carrying them on her person, as a figure carved over the lintel of a church door holds in his hand the cathedral that he has built or the city that he has defended. But these castles, these forests, my mind's eye alone could discern them in the left hand of the lady in furs, whom the King called cousin. My bodily eyes distinguished in it only, on days when the sky was threatening, an umbrella with which the Duchess was not afraid to arm herself. "One can never be certain, it is wiser, I may find myself miles from home, with a cabman demanding a fare *beyond my means*." The words 'too dear' and 'beyond my

means' kept recurring all the time in the Duchess's conversation, as did also: 'I am too poor'— without its being possible to decide whether she spoke thus because she thought it amusing to say that she was poor, being so rich, or because she thought it smart, being so aristocratic, in spite of her affectation of peasant ways, not to attach to riches the importance that people give them who are merely rich and nothing else, and who look down upon the poor. Perhaps it was, rather, a habit contracted at a time in her life when, already rich, but not rich enough to satisfy her needs, considering the expense of keeping up all those properties, she felt a certain shortage of money which she did not wish to appear to be concealing. The things about which we most often jest are generally, on the contrary, the things that embarrass us, but we do not wish to appear to be embarrassed by them, and feel perhaps a secret hope of the further advantage that the person to whom we are talking, hearing us treat the matter as a joke, will conclude that it is not true.

But upon most evenings, at this hour, I could count upon finding the Duchess at home, and I was glad of this, for it was more convenient for me to ask her in detail for the information that Albertine required. And down I went almost without thinking how extraordinary it was that I should be calling upon that mysterious Mme. de Guermantes of my boyhood, simply in order to make use of her for a practical purpose, as one makes use of the telephone, a supernatural instrument before whose miracles we used to stand amazed, and which we now employ without giving it a thought, to summon our tailor or to order ices for a party.

Albertine delighted in any sort of finery. I could not deny myself the pleasure of giving her some new trifle every day. And whenever she had spoken to me with rapture of a scarf, a stole, a sunshade which, from the window or as they passed one another in the courtyard, her eyes that so quickly distinguished anything smart, had seen round the throat, over the shoulders, in the hand of Mme. de Guermantes, knowing how the girl's naturally fastidious taste (refined still further by the lessons in elegance of attire which Elstir's conversation had been to her) would not be at all satisfied by any mere substitute, even of a pretty thing, such as fills its place in the eyes of the common herd, but differs from it entirely, I went in secret to make the Duchess explain to me where, how, from what model the article had been created that had taken Albertine's fancy, how I should set about to obtain one exactly similar, in what the creator's secret, the charm (what Albertine called the '*chic*' the 'style') of his manner, the precise name — the beauty of the material being of importance also — and quality of

the stuffs that I was to insist upon their using.

When I mentioned to Albertine, on our return from Balbec, that the Duchesse de Guermantes lived opposite to us, in the same mansion, she had assumed, on hearing the proud title and great name, that air more than indifferent, hostile, contemptuous, which is the sign of an impotent desire in proud and passionate natures. Splendid as Albertine's nature might be, the fine qualities which it contained were free to develop only amid those hindrances which are our personal tastes, or that lamentation for those of our tastes which we have been obliged to relinquish — in Albertine's case snobbishness — which is called antipathy. Albertine's antipathy to people in society occupied, for that matter, but a very small part in her nature, and appealed to me as an aspect of the revolutionary spirit — that is to say an embittered love of the nobility — engraved upon the opposite side of the French character to that which displays the aristocratic manner of Mme. de Guermantes. To this aristocratic manner Albertine, in view of the impossibility of her acquiring it, would perhaps not have given a thought, but remembering that Elstir had spoken to her of the Duchess as the best dressed woman in Paris, her republican contempt for a Duchess gave place in my mistress to a keen interest in a fashionable woman. She was always asking me to tell her about Mme. de Guermantes, and was glad that I should go to the Duchess to obtain advice as to her own attire. No doubt I might have got this from Mme. Swann and indeed I did once write to her with this intention. But Mme. de Guermantes seemed to me to carry to an even higher pitch the art of dressing. If, on going down for a moment to call upon her, after making sure that she had not gone out and leaving word that I was to be told as soon as Albertine returned, I found the Duchess swathed in the mist of a garment of grey crêpe de chine, I accepted this aspect of her which I felt to be due to complex causes and to be quite inevitable, I let myself be overpowered by the atmosphere which it exhaled, like that of certain late afternoons cushioned in pearly grey by a vaporous fog; if, on the other hand, her indoor gown was Chinese with red and yellow flames, I gazed at it as at a glowing sunset; these garments were not a casual decoration alterable at her pleasure, but a definite and poetical reality like that of the weather, or the light peculiar to a certain hour of the day.

Of all the outdoor and indoor gowns that Mme. de Guermantes wore, those which seemed most to respond to a definite intention, to be endowed with a special significance, were the garments made by Fortuny from old Venetian models. Is it their historical character, is it rather the fact that each one of them is

unique that gives them so special a significance that the pose of the woman who is wearing one while she waits for you to appear or while she talks to you assumes an exceptional importance, as though the costume had been the fruit of a long deliberation and your conversation was detached from the current of everyday life like a scene in a novel? In the novels of Balzac, we see his heroines purposely put on one or another dress on the day on which they are expecting some particular visitor. The dresses of to-day have less character, always excepting the creations of Fortuny. There is no room for vagueness in the novelist's description, since the gown does really exist, and the merest sketch of it is as naturally preordained as a copy of a work of art. Before putting on one or another of them, the woman has had to make a choice between two garments, not more or less alike but each one profoundly individual, and answering to its name. But the dress did not prevent me from thinking of the woman.

Indeed, Mme. de Guermantes seemed to me at this time more attractive than in the days when I was still in love with her. Expecting less of her (whom I no longer went to visit for her own sake), it was almost with the ease and comfort of a man in a room by himself, with his feet on the fender, that I listened to her as though I were reading a book written in the speech of long ago. My mind was sufficiently detached to enjoy in what she said that pure charm of the French language which we no longer find either in the speech or in the literature of the present day. I listened to her conversation as to a folk song deliciously and purely French, I realised that I would have allowed her to belittle Maeterlinck (whom for that matter she now admired, from a feminine weakness of intellect, influenced by those literary fashions whose rays spread slowly), as I realised that Mérimée had belittled Baudelaire, Stendhal Balzac, Paul-Louis Courier Victor Hugo, Meilhac Mallarmé. I realised that the critic had a far more restricted outlook than his victim, but also a purer vocabulary. That of Mme. de Guermantes, almost as much as that of Saint-Loup's mother, was purified to an enchanting degree. It is not in the bloodless formulas of the writers of to-day, who say: *au fait* (for 'in reality'), *singulièrement* (for 'in particular'), étonné (for 'struck with amazement'), and the like, that we recapture the old speech and the true pronunciation of words, but in conversing with a Mme. de Guermantes or a Françoise; I had learned from the latter, when I was five years old, that one did not say 'the Tarn' but 'the Tar'; not 'Beam' but 'Bear.' The effect of which was that at twenty, when I began to go into society, I had no need to be taught there that one ought not to say, like Mme. Bontemps: 'Madame de Beam.'

It would be untrue to pretend that of this territorial and semi-peasant quality

which survived in her the Duchess was not fully conscious, indeed she displayed a certain affectation in emphasising it. But, on her part, this was not so much the false simplicity of a great lady aping the countrywoman or the pride of a Duchess bent upon snubbing the rich ladies who express contempt for the peasants whom they do not know as the almost artistic preference of a woman who knows the charm of what belongs to her, and is not going to spoil it with a coat of modern varnish. In the same way, everybody will remember at Dives a Norman innkeeper, landlord of the Guillaume le Conquérant, who carefully refrained — which is very rare — from giving his hostelry the modern comforts of an hotel, and, albeit a millionaire, retained the speech, the blouse of a Norman peasant and allowed you to enter his kitchen and watch him prepare with his own hands, as in a farmhouse, a dinner which was nevertheless infinitely better and even more expensive than are the dinners in the most luxurious hotels.

All the local sap that survives in the old noble families is not enough, there must also be born of them a person of sufficient intelligence not to despise it, not to conceal it beneath the varnish of society. Mme. de Guermantes, unfortunately clever and Parisian, who, when I first knew her, retained nothing of her native soil but its accent, had at least, when she wished to describe her life as a girl, found for her speech one of those compromises (between what would have seemed too spontaneously provincial on the one hand or artificially literary on the other), one of those compromises which form the attraction of George Sand's *La Petite Fadette*or of certain legends preserved by Chateaubriand in his *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*. My chief pleasure was in hearing her tell some anecdote which brought peasants into the picture with herself. The historic names, the old customs gave to these blendings of the castle with the village a distinctly attractive savour. Having remained in contact with the lands over which it once ruled, a certain class of the nobility has remained regional, with the result that the simplest remark unrolls before our eyes a political and physical map of the whole history of France.

If there was no affectation, no desire to fabricate a special language, then this manner of pronouncing words was a regular museum of French history displayed in conversation. 'My great-uncle Fitt-jam' was not at all surprising, for we know that the Fitz-James family are proud to boast that they are French nobles, and do not like to hear their name pronounced in the English fashion. One must, incidentally, admire the touching docility of the people who had previously supposed themselves obliged to pronounce certain names phonetically, and who, all of a sudden, after hearing the Duchesse de

Guermantes pronounce them otherwise, adopted the pronunciation which they could never have guessed. Thus the Duchess, who had had a great-grandfather in the suite of the Comte de Chambord, liked to tease her husband for having turned Orleanist by proclaiming: “We old Frochedorf people...” The visitor, who had always imagined that he was correct in saying ‘Frohsdorf,’ at once turned his coat, and ever afterwards might be heard saying ‘Frochedorf.’

On one occasion when I asked Mme. de Guermantes who a young blood was whom she had introduced to me as her nephew but whose name I had failed to catch, I was none the wiser when from the back of her throat the Duchess uttered in a very loud but quite inarticulate voice: “*C’est l’... Eon... l... b... frère à Robert*. He makes out that he has the same shape of skull as the ancient Gauls.” Then I realised that she had said: “*C’est le petit Léon*,” and that this was the Prince de Léon, who was indeed Robert de Saint-Loup’s brother-in-law. “I know nothing about his skull,” she went on, “but the way he dresses, and I must say he does dress quite well, is not at all in the style of those parts. Once when I was staying at Josselin, with the Rohans, we all went over to one of the pilgrimages, where there were peasants from every part of Brittany. A great hulking fellow from one of the Léon villages stood gaping open-mouthed at Robert’s brother-in-law in his beige breeches! ‘What are you staring at me like that for?’ said Léon. ‘I bet you don’t know who I am?’ The peasant admitted that he did not. ‘Very well,’ said Léon, ‘I’m your Prince.’ ‘Oh!’ said the peasant, taking off his cap and apologising. ‘I thought you were an *Englische*.’”

And if, taking this opportunity, I led Mme. de Guermantes on to talk about the Rohans (with whom her own family had frequently intermarried), her conversation would become impregnated with a hint of the wistful charm of the Pardons, and (as that true poet Pampille would say) with “the harsh savour of pancakes of black grain fried over a fire of rushes.”

Of the Marquis du Lau (whose tragic decline we all know, when, himself deaf, he used to be taken to call on Mme. H... who was blind), she would recall the less tragic years when, after the day’s sport, at Guermantes, he would change into slippers before taking tea with the Prince of Wales, to whom he would not admit himself inferior, and with whom, as we see, he stood upon no ceremony. She described all this so picturesquely that she seemed to invest him with the plumed musketeer bonnet of the somewhat vainglorious gentlemen of the Périgord.

But even in the mere classification of different people, her care to distinguish and indicate their native provinces was in Mme. de Guermantes,

when she was her natural self, a great charm which a Parisian-born woman could never have acquired, and those simple names Anjou, Poitou, the Périgord, filled her conversation with pictorial landscapes.

To revert to the pronunciation and vocabulary of Mme. de Guermantes, it is in this aspect that the nobility shews itself truly conservative, with everything that the word implies at once somewhat puerile and somewhat perilous, stubborn in its resistance to evolution but interesting also to an artist. I was anxious to know the original spelling of the name Jean. I learned it when I received a letter from a nephew of Mme. de Villeparisis who signs himself — as he was christened, as he figures in Gotha — Jehan de Villeparisis, with the same handsome, superfluous, heraldic h that we admire, illuminated in vermilion or ultramarine in a Book of Hours or in a window.

Unfortunately, I never had time to prolong these visits indefinitely, for I was anxious, if possible, not to return home after my mistress. But it was only in driblets that I was able to obtain from Mme. de Guermantes that information as to her garments which was of use in helping me to order garments similar in style, so far as it was possible for a young girl to wear them, for Albertine. “For instance, Madame, that evening when you dined with Mme. de Saint-Euverte, and then went on to the Princesse de Guermantes, you had a dress that was all red, with red shoes, you were marvellous, you reminded me of a sort of great blood-red blossom, a blazing ruby — now, what was that dress? Is it the sort of thing that a girl can wear?”

The Duchess, imparting to her tired features the radiant expression that the Princesse des Laumes used to assume when Swann, in years past, paid her compliments, looked, with tears of merriment in her eyes, quizzingly, questioningly and delightedly at M. de Bréauté who was always there at that hour and who set beaming from behind his monocle a smile that seemed to pardon this outburst of intellectual trash for the sake of the physical excitement of youth which seemed to him to lie beneath it. The Duchess appeared to be saying: “What is the matter with him? He must be mad.” Then turning to me with a coaxing air: “I wasn’t aware that I looked like a blazing ruby or a blood-red blossom, but I do remember, as it happens, that I had on a red dress: it was red satin, which was being worn that season. Yes, a girl can wear that sort of thing at a pinch, but you told me that your friend never went out in the evening. That is a full evening dress, not a thing that she can put on to pay calls.”

What is extraordinary is that of the evening in question, which after all was not so very remote, Mme. de Guermantes should remember nothing but what she

had been wearing, and should have forgotten a certain incident which nevertheless, as we shall see presently, ought to have mattered to her greatly. It seems that among men and women of action (and people in society are men and women of action on a minute, a microscopic scale, but are nevertheless men and women of action), the mind, overcharged by the need of attending to what is going to happen in an hour's time, confides only a very few things to the memory. As often as not, for instance, it was not with the object of putting his questioner in the wrong and making himself appear not to have been mistaken that M. de Norpois, when you reminded him of the prophecies he had uttered with regard to an alliance with Germany of which nothing had ever come, would say: "You must be mistaken, I have no recollection of it whatever, it is not like me, for in that sort of conversation I am always most laconic, and I would never have predicted the success of one of those *coups d'éclat* which are often nothing more than *coups de tête* and almost always degenerate into *coups de force*. It is beyond question that in the remote future a Franco-German *rapprochement* might come into being and would be highly profitable to both countries, nor would France have the worse of the bargain, I dare say, but I have never spoken of it because the fruit is not yet ripe, and if you wish to know my opinion, in asking our late enemies to join with us in solemn wedlock, I consider that we should be setting out to meet a severe rebuff, and that the attempt could end only in disaster." In saying this M. de Norpois was not being untruthful, he had simply forgotten. We quickly forget what we have not deeply considered, what has been dictated to us by the spirit of imitation, by the passions of our neighbours. These change, and with them our memory undergoes alteration. Even more than diplomats, politicians are unable to remember the point of view which they adopted at a certain moment, and some of their palinodes are due less to a surfeit of ambition than to a shortage of memory. As for people in society, there are very few things that they remember.

Mme. de Guermantes assured me that, at the party to which she had gone in a red gown, she did not remember Mme. de Chaussepierre's being present, and that I must be mistaken. And yet, heaven knows, the Chaussepierres had been present enough in the minds of both Duke and Duchess since then. For the following reason. M. de Guermantes had been the senior vice-president of the Jockey, when the president died. Certain members of the club who were not popular in society and whose sole pleasure was to blackball the men who did not invite them to their houses started a campaign against the Duc de Guermantes who, certain of being elected, and relatively indifferent to the presidency which

was a small matter for a man in his social position, paid no attention. It was urged against him that the Duchess was a Dreyfusard (the Dreyfus case had long been concluded, but twenty years later people were still talking about it, and so far only two years had elapsed), and entertained the Rothschilds, that so much consideration had been shewn of late to certain great international magnates like the Duc de Guermantes, who was half German. The campaign found its ground well prepared, clubs being always jealous of men who are in the public eye, and detesting great fortunes.

Chaussepierre's own fortune was no mere pittance, but nobody could take offence at it; he never spent a penny, the couple lived in a modest apartment, the wife went about dressed in black serge. A passionate music-lover, she did indeed give little afternoon parties to which many more singers were invited than to the Guermantes. But no one ever mentioned these parties, no refreshments were served, the husband did not put in an appearance even, and everything went off quite quietly in the obscurity of the Rue de la Chaise. At the Opera, Mme. de Chaussepierre passed unnoticed, always among people whose names recalled the most 'die-hard' element of the intimate circle of Charles X, but people quite obsolete, who went nowhere. On the day of the election, to the general surprise, obscurity triumphed over renown: Chaussepierre, the second vice-president, was elected president of the Jockey, and the Duc de Guermantes was left sitting — that is to say, in the senior vice-president's chair. Of course, being president of the Jockey means little or nothing to Princes of the highest rank such as the Guermantes. But not to be it when it is your turn, to see preferred to you a Chaussepierre to whose wife Oriane, two years earlier, had not merely refused to bow but had taken offence that an unknown scarecrow like that should bow to her, this the Duke did find hard to endure. He pretended to be superior to this rebuff, asserting moreover that it was his long-standing friendship with Swann that was at the root of it. Actually his anger never cooled.

One curious thing was that nobody had ever before heard the Duc de Guermantes make use of the quite commonplace expression 'out and out,' but ever since the Jockey election, whenever anybody referred to the Dreyfus case, pat would come 'out and out.'"Dreyfus case, Dreyfus case, that's soon said, and it's a misuse of the term. It is not a question of religion, it's *out and out* a political matter." Five years might go by without your hearing him say 'out and out' again, if during that time nobody mentioned the Dreyfus case, but if, at the end of five years, the name Dreyfus cropped up, 'out and out' would at once follow automatically. The Duke could not, anyhow, bear to hear any mention of

the case, “which has been responsible,” he would say, “for so many disasters” albeit he was really conscious of one and one only; his own failure to become president of the Jockey. And so on the afternoon in question, when I reminded Madame de Guermantes of the red gown that she had worn at her cousin’s party, M. de Bréauté was none too well received when, determined to say something, by an association of ideas which remained obscure and which he did not illuminate, he began, twisting his tongue about between his pursed lips: “Talking of the Dreyfus case —” (why in the world of the Dreyfus case, we were talking simply of a red dress, and certainly poor Bréauté, whose only desire was to make himself agreeable, can have had no malicious intention). But the mere name of Dreyfus made the Duc de Guermantes knit his Jupiterian brows. “I was told,” Bréauté went on, “a jolly good thing, damned clever, ‘pon my word, that was said by our friend Cartier” (we must warn the reader that this Cartier, Mme. de Villefranche’s brother, was in no way related to the jeweller of that name) “not that I’m in the least surprised, for he’s got plenty of brains to spare,” “Oh!” broke in Oriane, “he can spare me his brains. I hardly like to tell you how much your friend Cartier has always bored me, and I have never been able to understand the boundless charm that Charles de La Trémoïlle and his wife seem to find in the creature, for I meet him there every time that I go to their house.” “My dear Dutt-yess,” replied Bréauté, who was unable to pronounce the soft *c*, “I think you are very hard upon Cartier. It is true that he has perhaps made himself rather too mutt-y-at home at the La Tré-moïlles’, but after all he does provide Tyarles with a sort of — what shall I say? — a sort of *fidus Achates*, which has become a very rare bird indeed in these days. Anyhow, this is the story as it was told to me. Cartier appears to have said that if M. Zola had gone out of his way to stand his trial and to be convicted, it was in order to enjoy the only sensation he had never yet tried, that of being in prison.” “And so he ran away before they could arrest him,” Oriane broke in. “Your story doesn’t hold water. Besides, even if it was plausible, I think his remark absolutely idiotic. If that’s what you call being witty!” “Good grate-ious, my dear Oriane,” replied Bréauté who, finding himself contradicted, was beginning to lose confidence, “it’s not my remark, I’m telling you it as it was told to me, take it for what’s it worth. Anyhow, it earned M. Cartier a first rate blowing up from that excellent fellow La Trémoïlle who, and quite rightly, does not like people to discuss what one might call, so to speak, current events, in his drawing-room, and was all the more annoyed because Mme. Alphonse Rothschild was present. Cartier had to listen to a positive jobation from La Trémoïlle.” “I should think so,” said the

Duke, in the worst of tempers, “the Alphonse Rothschilds, even if they have the tact never to speak of that abominable affair, are Dreyfusards at heart, like all the Jews. Indeed that is an argument *ad hominem*” (the Duke was a trifle vague in his use of the expression *ad hominem*) “which is not sufficiently made use of to prove the dishonesty of the Jews. If a Frenchman robs or murders somebody, I do not consider myself bound, because he is a Frenchman like myself, to find him innocent. But the Jews will never admit that one of their fellow-countrymen is a traitor, although they know it perfectly well, and never think of the terrible repercussions” (the Duke was thinking, naturally, of that accursed defeat by Chaussepierre) “which the crime of one of their people can bring even to... Come, Oriane, you’re not going to pretend that it ain’t damning to the Jews that they all support a traitor. You’re not going to tell me that it ain’t because they’re Jews.” “Of course not,” retorted Oriane (feeling, with a trace of irritation, a certain desire to hold her own against Jupiter Tonans and also to set ‘intellect’ above the Dreyfus case). “Perhaps it is just because they are Jews and know their own race that they realise that a person can be a Jew and not necessarily a traitor and anti-French, as M. Drumont seems to maintain. Certainly, if he’d been a Christian, the Jews wouldn’t have taken any interest in him, but they did so because they knew quite well that if he hadn’t been a Jew people wouldn’t have been so ready to think him a traitor *a priori*, as my nephew Robert would say.” “Women never understand a thing about politics,” exclaimed the Duke, fastening his gaze upon the Duchess. “That shocking crime is not simply a Jewish cause, but *out and out* an affair of vast national importance which may lead to the most appalling consequences for France, which ought to have driven out all the Jews, whereas I am sorry to say that the measures taken up to the present have been directed (in an ignoble fashion, which will have to be overruled) not against them but against the most eminent of their adversaries, against men of the highest rank, who have been flung into the gutter, to the ruin of our unhappy country.”

I felt that the conversation had taken a wrong turning and reverted hurriedly to the topic of clothes.

“Do you remember, Madame,” I said, “the first time that you were friendly with me?” “The first time that I was friendly with him,” she repeated, turning with a smile to M. de Bréauté, the tip of whose nose grew more pointed, his smile more tender out of politeness to Mme. de Guermantes, while his voice, like a knife on the grindstone, emitted various vague and rusty sounds. “You were wearing a yellow gown with big black flowers.” “But, my dear boy, that’s

the same thing, those are evening dresses." "And your hat with the cornflowers that I liked so much! Still, those are all things of the past. I should like to order for the girl I mentioned to you a fur cloak like the one you had on yesterday morning. Would it be possible for me to see it?" "Of course; Hannibal has to be going in a moment. You shall come to my room and my maid will shew you anything you want to look at. Only, my dear boy, though I shall be delighted to lend you anything, I must warn you that if you have things from Callot's or Doucet's or Paquin's copied by some small dressmaker, the result is never the same." "But I never dreamed of going to a small dressmaker, I know quite well it wouldn't be the same thing, but I should be interested to hear you explain why." "You know quite well I can never explain anything, I am a perfect fool, I talk like a peasant. It is a question of handiwork, of style; as far as furs go, I can at least give you a line to my furrier, so that he shan't rob you. But you realise that even then it will cost you eight or nine thousand francs." "And that indoor gown that you were wearing the other evening, with such a curious smell, dark, fluffy, speckled, streaked with gold like a butterfly's wing?" "Ah! That is one of Fortuny's. Your young lady can quite well wear that in the house. I have heaps of them; you shall see them presently, in fact I can give you one or two if you like. But I should like you to see one that my cousin Talleyrand has. I must write to her for the loan of it." "But you had such charming shoes as well, are they Fortuny's too?" "No, I know the ones you mean, they are made of some gilded kid we came across in London, when I was shopping with Consuelo Manchester. It was amazing. I could never make out how they did it, it was just like a golden skin, simply that with a tiny diamond in front. The poor Duchess of Manchester is dead, but if it's any help to you I can write and ask Lady Warwick or the Duchess of Marlborough to try and get me some more. I wonder, now, if I haven't a piece of the stuff left. You might be able to have a pair made here. I shall look for it this evening, and let you know."

As I endeavoured as far as possible to leave the Duchess before Albertine had returned, it often happened that I met in the courtyard as I came away from her door M. de Charlus and Morel on their way to take tea at Jupien's, a supreme favour for the Baron. I did not encounter them every day but they went there every day. Here we may perhaps remark that the regularity of a habit is generally in proportion to its absurdity. The sensational things, we do as a rule only by fits and starts. But the senseless life, in which the maniac deprives himself of all pleasure and inflicts the greatest discomforts upon himself, is the type that alters least. Every ten years, if we had the curiosity to inquire, we should find the poor

wretch still asleep at the hours when he might be living his life, going out at the hours when there is nothing to do but let oneself be murdered in the streets, sipping iced drinks when he is hot, still trying desperately to cure a cold. A slight impulse of energy, for a single day, would be sufficient to change these habits for good and all. But the fact is that this sort of life is almost always the appanage of a person devoid of energy. Vices are another aspect of these monotonous existences which the exercise of will power would suffice to render less painful. These two aspects might be observed simultaneously when M. de Charlus came every day with Morel to take tea at Jupien's. A single outburst had marred this daily custom. The tailor's niece having said one day to Morel: "That's all right then, come to-morrow and I'll stand you a tea," the Baron had quite justifiably considered this expression very vulgar on the lips of a person whom he regarded as almost a prospective daughter-in-law, but as he enjoyed being offensive and became carried away by his own anger, instead of simply saying to Morel that he begged him to give her a lesson in polite manners, the whole of their homeward walk was a succession of violent scenes. In the most insolent, the most arrogant tone: "So your 'touch' which, I can see, is not necessarily allied to 'tact,' has hindered the normal development of your sense of smell, since you could allow that fetid expression 'stand a tea'— at fifteen centimes, I suppose — to waft its stench of sewage to my regal nostrils? When you have come to the end of a violin solo, have you ever seen yourself in my house rewarded with a fart, instead of frenzied applause, or a silence more eloquent still, since it is due to exhaustion from the effort to restrain, not what your young woman lavishes upon you, but the sob that you have brought to my lips?"

When a public official has had similar reproaches heaped upon him by his chief, he invariably loses his post next day. Nothing, on the contrary, could have been more painful to M. de Charlus than to dismiss Morel, and, fearing indeed that he had gone a little too far, he began to sing the girl's praises in detailed terms, with an abundance of good taste mingled with impertinence. "She is charming; as you are a musician, I suppose that she seduced you by her voice, which is very beautiful in the high notes, where she seems to await the accompaniment of your B sharp. Her lower register appeals to me less, and that must bear some relation to the triple rise of her strange and slender throat, which when it seems to have come to an end begins again; but these are trivial details, it is her outline that I admire. And as she is a dressmaker and must be handy with her scissors, you must make her give me a charming silhouette of herself cut out in paper."

Charlie had paid but little attention to this eulogy, the charms which it extolled in his betrothed having completely escaped his notice. But he said, in reply to M. de Charlus: “That’s all right, my boy, I shall tell her off properly, and she won’t talk like that again.” If Morel addressed M. de Charlus thus as his ‘boy,’ it was not that the good-looking violinist was unaware that his own years numbered barely a third of the Baron’s. Nor did he use the expression as Jupien would have done, but with that simplicity which in certain relations postulates that a suppression of the difference in age has tacitly preceded affection. A feigned affection on Morel’s part. In others, a sincere affection. Thus, about this time M. de Charlus received a letter worded as follows: “My dear Palamède, when am I going to see thee again? I am longing terribly for thee and always thinking of thee. PIERRE.” M. de Charlus racked his brains to discover which of his relatives it could be that took the liberty of addressing him so familiarly, and must consequently know him intimately, although he failed to recognise the handwriting. All the Princes to whom the Almanach de Gotha accords a few lines passed in procession for days on end through his mind. And then, all of a sudden, an address written on the back of the letter enlightened him: the writer was the page at a gambling club to which M. de Charlus sometimes went. This page had not felt that he was being discourteous in writing in this tone to M. de Charlus, for whom on the contrary he felt the deepest respect. But he thought that it would not be civil not to address in the second person singular a gentleman who had many times kissed one, and thereby — he imagined in his simplicity — bestowed his affection. M. de Charlus was really delighted by this familiarity. He even brought M. de Vaugoubert away from an afternoon party in order to shew him the letter. And yet, heaven knows that M. de Charlus did not care to go about with M. de Vaugoubert. For the latter, his monocle in his eye, kept gazing in all directions at every passing youth. What was worse, emancipating himself when he was with M. de Charlus, he employed a form of speech which the Baron detested. He gave feminine endings to all the masculine words and, being intensely stupid, imagined this pleasantry to be extremely witty, and was continually in fits of laughter. As at the same time he attached enormous importance to his position in the diplomatic service, these deplorable outbursts of merriment in the street were perpetually interrupted by the shock caused him by the simultaneous appearance of somebody in society, or, worse still, of a civil servant. “That little telegraph messenger,” he said, nudging the disgusted Baron with his elbow, “I used to know her, but she’s turned respectable, the wretch! Oh, that messenger from the Galeries Lafayette, what a

dream! Good God, there's the head of the Commercial Department. I hope he didn't notice anything. He's quite capable of mentioning it to the Minister, who would put me on the retired list, all the more as, it appears, he's so himself." M. de Charlus was speechless with rage. At length, to bring this infuriating walk to an end, he decided to produce the letter and give it to the Ambassador to read, but warned him to be discreet, for he liked to pretend that Charlie was jealous, in order to be able to make people think that he was enamoured. "And," he added with an indescribable air of benevolence, "we ought always to try to cause as little trouble as possible." Before we come back to Jupien's shop, the author would like to say how deeply he would regret it should any reader be offended by his portrayal of such unusual characters. On the one hand (and this is the less important aspect of the matter), it may be felt that the aristocracy is, in these pages, disproportionately accused of degeneracy in comparison with the other classes of society. Were this true, it would be in no way surprising. The oldest families end by displaying, in a red and bulbous nose, or a deformed chin, characteristic signs in which everyone admires 'blood.' But among these persistent and perpetually developing features, there are others that are not visible, to wit tendencies and tastes. It would be a more serious objection, were there any foundation for it, to say that all this is alien to us, and that we ought to extract truth from the poetry that is close at hand. Art extracted from the most familiar reality does indeed exist and its domain is perhaps the largest of any. But it is no less true that a strong interest, not to say beauty, may be found in actions inspired by a cast of mind so remote from anything that we feel, from anything that we believe, that we cannot ever succeed in understanding them, that they are displayed before our eyes like a spectacle without rhyme or reason. What could be more poetic than Xerxes, son of Darius, ordering the sea to be scourged with rods for having engulfed his fleet?

We may be certain that Morel, relying on the influence which his personal attractions give him over the girl, communicated to her, as coming from himself, the Baron's criticism, for the expression 'stand you a tea' disappeared as completely from the tailor's shop as disappears from a drawing-room some intimate friend who used to call daily, and with whom, for one reason or another, we have quarrelled, or whom we are trying to keep out of sight and meet only outside the house. M. de Charlus was satisfied by the cessation of 'stand you a tea.' He saw in it a proof of his own ascendancy over Morel and the removal of its one little blemish from the girl's perfection. In short, like everyone of his kind, while genuinely fond of Morel and of the girl who was all but engaged to

him, an ardent advocate of their marriage, he thoroughly enjoyed his power to create at his pleasure more or less inoffensive little scenes, aloof from and above which he himself remained as Olympian as his brother.

Morel had told M. de Charlus that he was in love with Jupien's niece, and wished to marry her, and the Baron liked to accompany his young friend upon visits in which he played the part of father-in-law to be, indulgent and discreet. Nothing pleased him better.

My personal opinion is that 'stand you a tea' had originated with Morel himself, and that in the blindness of her love the young seamstress had adopted an expression from her beloved which clashed horribly with her own pretty way of speaking. This way of speaking, the charming manners that went with it, the patronage of M. de Charlus brought it about that many customers for whom she had worked received her as a friend, invited her to dinner, introduced her to their friends, though the girl accepted their invitations only with the Baron's permission and on the evenings that suited him. "A young seamstress received in society?" the reader will exclaim, "how improbable!" If you come to think of it, it was no less improbable that at one time Albertine should have come to see me at midnight, and that she should now be living in my house. And yet this might perhaps have been improbable of anyone else, but not of Albertine, a fatherless and motherless orphan, leading so uncontrolled a life that at first I had taken her, at Balbec, for the mistress of a bicyclist, a girl whose next of kin was Mme. Bontemps who in the old days, at Mme. Swann's, had admired nothing about her niece but her bad manners and who now shut her eyes, especially if by doing so she might be able to get rid of her by securing for her a wealthy marriage from which a little of the wealth would trickle into the aunt's pocket (in the highest society, a mother who is very well-born and quite penniless, when she has succeeded in finding a rich bride for her son, allows the young couple to support her, accepts presents of furs, a motor-car, money from a daughter-in-law whom she does not like but whom she introduces to her friends).

The day may come when dressmakers — nor should I find it at all shocking — will move in society. Jupien's niece being an exception affords us no base for calculation, for one swallow does not make a summer. In any case, if the very modest advancement of Jupien's niece did scandalise some people, Morel was not among them, for, in certain respects, his stupidity was so intense that not only did he label 'rather a fool' this girl a thousand times cleverer than himself, and foolish only perhaps in her love for himself, but he actually took to be adventuresses, dressmakers' assistants in disguise playing at being ladies, the

persons of rank and position who invited her to their houses and whose invitations she accepted without a trace of vanity. Naturally these were not Guermantes, nor even people who knew the Guermantes, but rich and smart women of the middle-class, broad-minded enough to feel that it is no disgrace to invite a dressmaker to your house and at the same time servile enough to derive some satisfaction from patronising a girl whom His Highness the Baron de Charlus was in the habit — without any suggestion, of course, of impropriety — of visiting daily.

Nothing could have pleased the Baron more than the idea of this marriage, for he felt that in this way Morel would not be taken from him. It appears that Jupien's niece had been, when scarcely more than a child, 'in trouble.' And M. de Charlus, while he sang her praises to Morel, would have had no hesitation in revealing this secret to his friend, who would be furious, and thus sowing the seeds of discord. For M. de Charlus, although terribly malicious, resembled a great many good people who sing the praises of some man or woman, as a proof of their own generosity, but would avoid like poison the soothing words, so rarely uttered, that would be capable of putting an end to strife. Notwithstanding this, the Baron refrained from making any insinuation, and for two reasons. "If I tell him," he said to himself, "that his ladylove is not spotless, his vanity will be hurt, he will be angry with me. Besides, how am I to know that he is not in love with her? If I say nothing, this fire of straw will burn itself out before long, I shall be able to control their relations as I choose, he will love her only to the extent that I shall allow. If I tell him of his young lady's past transgression, who knows that my Charlie is not still sufficiently enamoured of her to become jealous. Then I shall by my own doing be converting a harmless and easily controlled flirtation into a serious passion, which is a difficult thing to manage." For these reasons, M. de Charlus preserved a silence which had only the outward appearance of discretion, but was in another respect meritorious, since it is almost impossible for men of his sort to hold their tongues.

Anyhow, the girl herself was charming, and M. de Charlus, who found that she satisfied all the aesthetic interest that he was capable of feeling in women, would have liked to have hundreds of photographs of her. Not such a fool as Morel, he was delighted to hear the names of the ladies who invited her to their houses, and whom his social instinct was able to place, but he took care (as he wished to retain his power) not to mention this to Charlie who, a regular idiot in this respect, continued to believe that, apart from the 'violin class' and the Verdurins, there existed only the Guermantes, and the few almost royal houses

enumerated by the Baron, all the rest being but ‘dregs’ or ‘scum.’ Charlie interpreted these expressions of M. de Charlus literally.

Among the reasons which made M. de Charlus look forward to the marriage of the young couple was this, that Jupien’s niece would then be in a sense an extension of Morel’s personality, and so of the Baron’s power over and knowledge of him. As for ‘betraying’ in the conjugal sense the violinist’s future wife, it would never for a moment have occurred to M. de Charlus to feel the slightest scruple about that. But to have a ‘young couple’ to manage, to feel himself the redoubtable and all-powerful protector of Morel’s wife, who if she regarded the Baron as a god would thereby prove that Morel had inculcated this idea into her, and would thus contain in herself something of Morel, added a new variety to the form of M. de Charlus’s domination and brought to light in his ‘creature,’ Morel, a creature the more, that is to say gave the Baron something different, new, curious, to love in him. Perhaps even this domination would be stronger now than it had ever been. For whereas Morel by himself, naked so to speak, often resisted the Baron whom he felt certain of reconquering, once he was married, the thought of his home, his house, his future would alarm him more quickly, he would offer to M. de Charlus’s desires a wider surface, an easier hold. All this, and even, failing anything else, on evenings when he was bored, the prospect of stirring up trouble between husband and wife (the Baron had never objected to battle-pictures) was pleasing to him. Less pleasing, however, than the thought of the state of dependence upon himself in which the young people would live. M. de Charlus’s love for Morel acquired a delicious novelty when he said to himself: “His wife too will be mine just as much as he is, they will always take care not to annoy me, they will obey my caprices, and thus she will be a sign (which hitherto I have failed to observe) of what I had almost forgotten, what is so very dear to my heart, that to all the world, to everyone who sees that I protect them, house them, to myself, Morel is mine.” This testimony in the eyes of the world and in his own pleased M. de Charlus more than anything. For the possession of what we love is an even greater joy than love itself. Very often those people who conceal this possession from the world do so only from the fear that the beloved object may be taken from them. And their happiness is diminished by this prudent reticence.

The reader may remember that Morel had once told the Baron that his great ambition was to seduce some young girl, and this girl in particular, that to succeed in his enterprise he would promise to marry her, and, the outrage accomplished, would ‘cut his hook’; but this confession, what with the

declarations of love for Jupien's niece which Morel had come and poured out to him, M. de Charlus had forgotten. What was more, Morel had quite possibly forgotten it himself. There was perhaps a real gap between Morel's nature — as he had cynically admitted, perhaps even artfully exaggerated it — and the moment at which it would regain control of him. As he became better acquainted with the girl, she had appealed to him, he began to like her. He knew himself so little that he doubtless imagined that he was in love with her, perhaps indeed that he would be in love with her always. To be sure his initial desire, his criminal intention remained, but glossed over by so many layers of sentiment that there is nothing to shew that the violinist would not have been sincere in saying that this vicious desire was not the true motive of his action. There was, moreover, a brief period during which, without his actually admitting it to himself, this marriage appeared to him to be necessary. Morel was suffering at the time from violent cramp in the hand, and found himself obliged to contemplate the possibility of his having to give up the violin. As, in everything but his art, he was astonishingly lazy, the question who was to maintain him loomed before him, and he preferred that it should be Jupien's niece rather than M. de Charlus, this arrangement offering him greater freedom and also a wider choice of several kinds of women, ranging from the apprentices, perpetually changing, whom he would make Jupien's niece debauch for him, to the rich and beautiful ladies to whom he would prostitute her. That his future wife might refuse to lend herself to these arrangements, that she could be so perverse never entered Morel's calculations for a moment. However, they passed into the background, their place being taken by pure love, now that his cramp had ceased. His violin would suffice, together with his allowance from M. de Charlus, whose claims upon him would certainly be reduced once he, Morel, was married to the girl. Marriage was the urgent thing, because of his love, and in the interest of his freedom. He made a formal offer of marriage to Jupien, who consulted his niece. This was wholly unnecessary. The girl's passion for the violinist streamed round about her, like her hair when she let it down, like the joy in her beaming eyes. In Morel, almost everything that was agreeable or advantageous to him awakened moral emotions and words to correspond, sometimes even melting him to tears. It was therefore sincerely — if such a word can be applied to him — that he addressed Jupien's niece in speeches as steeped in sentimentality (sentimental too are the speeches that so many young noblemen who look forward to a life of complete idleness address to some charming daughter of a middle-class millionaire) as had been steeped in unredeemed vileness the speech he had made

to M. de Charlus about the seduction and deflowering of a virgin. Only there was another side to this virtuous enthusiasm for a person who afforded him pleasure and the solemn engagement that he made with her. As soon as the person ceased to afford him pleasure, or indeed if, for example, the obligation to fulfil the promise that he had made caused him displeasure, she at once became the object ef an antipathy which he justified in his own eyes and which, after some neurasthenic disturbance, enabled him to prove to himself, as soon as the balance of his nervous system was restored, that he was, even looking at the matter from a purely virtuous point of view, released from any obligation. Thus, towards the end of his stay at Balbec, he had managed somehow to lose all his money and, not daring to mention the matter to M. de Charlus, looked about for some one to whom he might appeal. He had learned from his father (who at the same time had forbidden him ever to become a 'sponger') that in such circumstances the correct thing is to write to the person whom you intend to ask for a loan, "that you have to speak to him on business," to "ask him for a business appointment." This magic formula had so enchanted Morel that he would, I believe, have been glad to lose his money, simply to have the pleasure of asking for an appointment 'on business.' In the course of his life he had found that the formula had not quite the virtue that he supposed. He had discovered that certain people, to whom otherwise he would never have written at all, did not reply within five minutes of receiving his letter asking to speak to them 'on business.' If the afternoon went by without his receiving an answer, it never occurred to him that, to put the best interpretation on the matter, it was quite possible that the gentleman addressed had not yet come home, or had had other letters to write, if indeed he had not gone away from home altogether, fallen ill, or something of that sort. If by an extraordinary stroke of fortune Morel was given an appointment for the following morning, he would accost his intended creditor with: "I was quite surprised not to get an answer, I was wondering if there was anything wrong with you, I'm glad to see you're quite well," and so forth. Well then, at Balbec, and without telling me that he wished to talk 'business' to him, he had asked me to introduce him to that very Bloch to whom he had made himself so unpleasant a week earlier in the train. Bloch had not hesitated to lend him — or rather to secure a loan for him, from M. Nissim Bernard, of five thousand francs. From that moment Morel had worshipped Bloch. He asked himself with tears in his eyes how he could shew his indebtedness to a person who had saved his life. Finally, I undertook to ask on his behalf for a thousand francs monthly from M. de Charlus, a sum which he would at once forward to

Bloch who would thus find himself repaid within quite a short time. The first month, Morel, still under the impression of Bloch's generosity, sent him the thousand francs immediately, but after this he doubtless found that a different application of the remaining four thousand francs might be more satisfactory to himself, for he began to say all sorts of unpleasant things about Bloch. The mere sight of Bloch was enough to fill his mind with dark thoughts, and Bloch himself having forgotten the exact amount that he had lent Morel, and having asked him for 3,500 francs instead of 4,000 which would have left the violinist 500 francs to the good, the latter took the line that, in view of so preposterous a fraud, not only would he not pay another centime but his creditor might think himself very fortunate if Morel did not bring an action against him for slander. As he said this his eyes blazed. He did not content himself with asserting that Bloch and M. Nissim Bernard had no cause for complaint against him, but was soon saying that they might consider themselves lucky that he made no complaint against them. Finally, M. Nissim Bernard having apparently stated that Thibaut played as well as Morel, the last-named decided that he ought to take the matter into court, such a remark being calculated to damage him in his profession, then, as there was no longer any justice in France, especially against the Jews (anti-semitism being in Morel the natural effect of a loan of 5,000 francs from an Israelite), took to never going out without a loaded revolver. A similar nervous reaction, in the wake of keen affection, was soon to occur in Morel with regard to the tailor's niece. It is true that M. de Charlus may have been unconsciously responsible, to some extent, for this change, for he was in the habit of saying, without meaning what he said for an instant, and merely to tease them, that, once they were married, he would never set eyes on them again but would leave them to fly upon their own wings. This idea was, in itself, quite insufficient to detach Morel from the girl; but, lurking in his mind, it was ready when the time came to combine with other analogous ideas, capable, once the compound was formed, of becoming a powerful disruptive agent.

It was not very often, however, that I was fated to meet M. de Charlus and Morel. Often they had already passed into Jupien's shop when I came away from the Duchess, for the pleasure that I found in her society was such that I was led to forget not merely the anxious expectation that preceded Albertine's return, but even the hour of that return.

I shall set apart from the other days on which I lingered at Mme. de Guermantes's, one that was distinguished by a trivial incident the cruel significance of which entirely escaped me and did not enter my mind until long

afterwards. On this particular afternoon, Mme. de Guermantes had given me, knowing that I was fond of them, some branches of syringa which had been sent to her from the South. When I left the Duchess and went upstairs to our flat, Albertine had already returned, and on the staircase I ran into Andrée who seemed to be distressed by the powerful fragrance of the flowers that I was bringing home.

"What, are you back already?" I said. "Only this moment, but Albertine had letters to write, so she sent me away." "You don't think she's up to any mischief?" "Not at all, she's writing to her aunt, I think, but you know how she dislikes strong scents, she won't be particularly pleased to see those syringas." "How stupid of me! I shall tell Françoise to put them out on the service stair." "Do you imagine Albertine won't notice the scent of them on you? Next to tuberoses they've the strongest scent of any flower, I always think; anyhow, I believe Françoise has gone out shopping." "But in that case, as I haven't got my latchkey, how am I to get in?" "Oh, you've only got to ring the bell. Albertine will let you in. Besides, Françoise may have come back by this time."

I said good-bye to Andrée. I had no sooner pressed the bell than Albertine came to open the door, which required some doing, as Françoise had gone out and Albertine did not know where to turn on the light. At length she was able to let me in, but the scent of the syringas put her to flight. I took them to the kitchen, with the result that my mistress, leaving her letter unfinished (why, I did not understand), had time to go to my room, from which she called to me, and to lay herself down on my bed. Even then, at the actual moment, I saw nothing in all this that was not perfectly natural, at the most a little confused, but in any case unimportant. She had nearly been caught out with Andrée and had snatched a brief respite for herself by turning out the lights, going to my room so that I should not see the disordered state of her own bed, and pretending to be busy writing a letter. But we shall see all this later on, a situation the truth of which I never ascertained. In general, and apart from this isolated incident, everything was quite normal when I returned from my visit to the Duchess. Since Albertine never knew whether I might not wish to go out with her before dinner, I usually found in the hall her hat, cloak and umbrella, which she had left lying there in case they should be needed. As soon as, on opening the door, I caught sight of them, the atmosphere of the house became breathable once more. I felt that, instead of a rarefied air, it was happiness that filled it. I was rescued from my melancholy, the sight of these trifles gave me possession of Albertine, I ran to greet her.

On the days when I did not go down to Mme. de Guermantes, to pass the time somehow, during the hour that preceded the return of my mistress, I would take up an album of Elstir's work, one of Bergotte's books, Vinteuil's sonata.

Then, just as those works of art which seem to address themselves to the eye or ear alone require that, if we are to enjoy them, our awakened intelligence shall collaborate closely with those organs, I would unconsciously evoke from myself the dreams that Albertine had inspired in me long ago, before I knew her, dreams that had been stifled by the routine of everyday life. I cast them into the composer's phrase or the painter's image as into a crucible, or used them to enrich the book that I was reading. And no doubt the book appeared all the more vivid in consequence. But Albertine herself profited just as much by being thus transported out of one of the two worlds to which we have access, and in which we can place alternately the same object, by escaping thus from the crushing weight of matter to play freely in the fluid space of mind. I found myself suddenly and for the instant capable of feeling an ardent desire for this irritating girl. She had at that moment the appearance of a work by Elstir or Bergotte, I felt a momentary enthusiasm for her, seeing her in the perspective of imagination and art.

Presently some one came to tell me that she had returned; though there was a standing order that her name was not to be mentioned if I was not alone, if for instance I had in the room with me Bloch, whom I would compel to remain with me a little longer so that there should be no risk of his meeting my mistress in the hall. For I concealed the fact that she was staying in the house, and even that I ever saw her there, so afraid was I that one of my friends might fall in love with her, and wait for her outside, or that in a momentary encounter in the passage or the hall she might make a signal and fix an appointment. Then I heard the rustle of Albertine's petticoats on her way to her own room, for out of discretion and also no doubt in that spirit in which, when we used to go to dinner at la Raspelière, she took care that I should have no cause for jealousy, she did not come to my room, knowing that I was not alone. But it was not only for this reason, as I suddenly realised. I remembered; I had known a different Albertine, then all at once she had changed into another, the Albertine of to-day. And for this change I could hold no one responsible but myself. The admissions that she would have made to me, easily at first, then deliberately, when we were simply friends, had ceased to flow from her as soon as she had suspected that I was in love with her, or, without perhaps naming Love, had divined the existence in me of an inquisitorial sentiment that desires to know, is pained by the knowledge,

and seeks to learn yet more. Ever since that day, she had concealed everything from me. She kept away from my room if she thought that my companion was (rarely as this happened) not male but female, she whose eyes used at one time to sparkle so brightly whenever I mentioned a girl: “You must try and get her to come here. I should like to meet her.” “But she has what you call a bad style.” “Of course, that makes it all the more fun.” At that moment, I might perhaps have learned all that there was to know. And indeed when in the little Casino she had withdrawn her breast from Andrée’s, I believe that this was due not to my presence but to that of Cottard, who was capable, she doubtless thought, of giving her a bad reputation. And yet, even then, she had already begun to ‘set,’ the confiding speeches no longer issued from her lips, her gestures became reserved. After this, she had stripped herself of everything that could stir my emotions. To those parts of her life of which I knew nothing she ascribed a character the inoffensiveness of which my ignorance made itself her accomplice in accentuating. And now, the transformation was completed, she went straight to her room if I was not alone, not merely from fear of disturbing me, but in order to shew me that she did not care who was with me. There was one thing alone which she would never again do for me, which she would have done only in the days when it would have left me cold, which she would then have done without hesitation for that very reason, namely make me a detailed admission. I should always be obliged, like a judge, to draw indefinite conclusions from imprudences of speech that were perhaps not really inexplicable without postulating criminality. And always she would feel that I was jealous, and judging her.

As I listened to Albertine’s footsteps with the consoling pleasure of thinking that she would not be going out again that evening, I thought how wonderful it was that for this girl, whom at one time I had supposed that I could never possibly succeed in knowing, the act of returning home every day was nothing else than that of entering my home. The pleasure, a blend of mystery and sensuality, which I had felt, fugitive and fragmentary, at Balbec, on the night when she had come to sleep at the hotel, was completed, stabilised, filled my dwelling, hitherto void, with a permanent store of domestic, almost conjugal bliss (radiating even into the passages) upon which all my senses, either actively, or, when I was alone, in imagination as I waited for her to return, quietly battened. When I had heard the door of Albertine’s room shut behind her, if I had a friend with me, I made haste to get rid of him, not leaving him until I was quite sure that he was on the staircase, down which I might even escort him for a few

steps. He warned me that I would catch cold, informing me that our house was indeed icy, a cave of the winds, and that he would not live in it if he was paid to do so. This cold weather was a source of complaint because it had just begun, and people were not yet accustomed to it, but for that very reason it released in me a joy accompanied by an unconscious memory of the first evenings of winter when, in past years, returning from the country, in order to reestablish contact with the forgotten delights of Paris, I used to go to a café-concert. And so it was with a song on my lips that, after bidding my friend good-bye, I climbed the stair again and entered the flat. Summer had flown, carrying the birds with it. But other musicians, invisible, internal, had taken their place. And the icy blast against which Bloch had inveighed, which was whistling delightfully through the ill fitting doors of our apartment was (as the fine days of summer by the woodland birds) passionately greeted with snatches, irrepressibly hummed, from Fragson, Mayol or Paulus. In the passage, Albertine was coming towards me. “I say, while I’m taking off my things, I shall send you Andrée, she’s looked in for a minute to say how d’ye do.” And still swathed in the big grey veil, falling from her chinchilla toque, which I had given her at Balbec, she turned from me and went back to her room, as though she had guessed that Andrée, whom I had charged with the duty of watching over her, would presently, by relating their day’s adventures in full detail, mentioning their meeting with some person of their acquaintance, impart a certain clarity of outline to the vague regions in which that excursion had been made which had taken the whole day and which I had been incapable of imagining. Andrée’s defects had become more evident; she was no longer as pleasant a companion as when I first knew her. One noticed now, on the surface, a sort of bitter uneasiness, ready to gather like a swell on the sea, merely if I happened to mention something that gave pleasure to Albertine and myself. This did not prevent Andrée from being kinder to me, liking me better — and I have had frequent proof of this — than other more sociable people. But the slightest look of happiness on a person’s face, if it was not caused by herself, gave a shock to her nerves, as unpleasant as that given by a banging door. She could allow the pains in which she had no part, but not the pleasures; if she saw that I was unwell, she was distressed, was sorry for me, would have stayed to nurse me. But if I displayed a satisfaction as trifling as that of stretching myself with a blissful expression as I shut a book, saying: “Ah! I have spent a really happy afternoon with this entertaining book,” these words, which would have given pleasure to my mother, to Albertine, to Saint-Loup, provoked in Andrée a sort of disapprobation, perhaps simply a sort of nervous

irritation. My satisfactions caused her an annoyance which she was unable to conceal. These defects were supplemented by others of a more serious nature; one day when I mentioned that young man so learned in matters of racing and golf, so uneducated in all other respects, Andrée said with a sneer: “You know that his father is a swindler, he only just missed being prosecuted. They’re swaggering now more than ever, but I tell everybody about it. I should love them to bring an action for slander against me. I should be wonderful in the witness-box!” Her eyes sparkled. Well, I discovered that the father had done nothing wrong, and that Andrée knew this as well as anybody. But she had thought that the son looked down upon her, had sought for something that would embarrass him, put him to shame, had invented a long story of evidence which she imagined herself called upon to give in court, and, by dint of repeating the details to herself, was perhaps no longer aware that they were not true. And so, in her present state (and even without her fleeting, foolish hatreds), I should not have wished to see her, were it merely on account of that malicious susceptibility which clasped with a harsh and frigid girdle her warmer and better nature. But the information which she alone could give me about my mistress was of too great interest for me to be able to neglect so rare an opportunity of acquiring it. Andrée came into my room, shutting the door behind her; they had met a girl they knew, whom Albertine had never mentioned to me. “What did they talk about?” “I can’t tell you; I took the opportunity, as Albertine wasn’t alone, to go and buy some worsted.” “Buy some worsted?” “Yes, it was Albertine asked me to get it.” “All the more reason not to have gone, it was perhaps a plot to get you out of the way.” “But she asked me to go for it before we met her friend.” “Ah!” I replied, drawing breath again. At once my suspicion revived; she might, for all I knew, have made an appointment beforehand with her friend and have provided herself with an excuse to be left alone when the time came. Besides, could I be certain that it was not my former hypothesis (according to which Andrée did not always tell me the truth) that was correct? Andrée was perhaps in the plot with Albertine. Love, I used to say to myself, at Balbec, is what we feel for a person whose actions seem rather to arouse our jealousy; we feel that if she were to tell us everything, we might perhaps easily be cured of our love for her. However skilfully jealousy is concealed by him who suffers from it, it is at once detected by her who has inspired it, and who when the time comes is no less skilful. She seeks to lead us off the trail of what might make us unhappy, and succeeds, for, to the man who is not forewarned, how should a casual utterance reveal the falsehoods that lie beneath it? We do not distinguish this utterance from the rest;

spoken in terror, it is received without attention. Later on, when we are by ourselves, we shall return to this speech, it will seem to us not altogether adequate to the facts of the case. But do we remember it correctly? It seems as though there arose spontaneously in us, with regard to it and to the accuracy of our memory, an uncertainty of the sort with which, in certain nervous disorders, we can never remember whether we have bolted the door, no better after the fiftieth time than after the first, it would seem that we can repeat the action indefinitely without its ever being accompanied by a precise and liberating memory. At any rate, we can shut the door again, for the fifty-first time. Whereas the disturbing speech exists in the past in an imperfect hearing of it which it does not lie in our power to repeat. Then we concentrate our attention upon other speeches which conceal nothing and the sole remedy which we do not seek is to be ignorant of everything, so as to have no desire for further knowledge.

As soon as jealousy is discovered, it is regarded by her who is its object as a challenge which authorises deception. Moreover, in our endeavour to learn something, it is we who have taken the initiative in lying and deceit. Andrée, Aimé may promise us that they will say nothing, but will they keep their promise? Bloch could promise nothing because he knew nothing, and Albertine has only to talk to any of the three in order to learn, with the help of what Saint-Loup would have called cross-references, that we are lying to her when we pretend to be indifferent to her actions and morally incapable of having her watched. And so, replacing in this way my habitual boundless uncertainty as to what Albertine might be doing, an uncertainty too indeterminate not to remain painless, which was to jealousy what is to grief that beginning of forgetfulness in which relief is born of vagueness, the little fragment of response which Andrée had brought me at once began to raise fresh questions; the only result of my exploration of one sector of the great zone that extended round me had been to banish further from me that unknowable thing which, when we seek to form a definite idea of it, another person’s life invariably is to us. I continued to question Andrée, while Albertine, from discretion and in order to leave me free (was she conscious of this?) to question the other, prolonged her toilet in her own room. “I think that Albertine’s uncle and aunt both like me,” I stupidly said to Andrée, forgetting her peculiar nature.

At once I saw her gelatinous features change. Like a syrup that has turned, her face seemed permanently clouded. Her mouth became bitter. Nothing remained in Andrée of that juvenile gaiety which, like all the little band and notwithstanding her feeble health, she had displayed in the year of my first visit

to Balbec and which now (it is true that Andrée was now several years older) was so speedily eclipsed in her. But I was to make it reappear involuntarily before Andrée left me that evening to go home to dinner. “Somebody was singing your praises to me to-day in the most glowing language,” I said to her. Immediately a ray of joy beamed from her eyes, she looked as though she really loved me. She avoided my gaze but smiled at the empty air with a pair of eyes that suddenly became quite round. “Who was it?” she asked, with an artless, avid interest. I told her, and, whoever it was, she was delighted.

Then the time came for us to part, and she left me. Albertine came to my room; she had undressed, and was wearing one of the charming crêpe de chine wrappers, or one of the Japanese gowns which I had asked Mme. de Guermantes to describe to me, and for some of which supplementary details had been furnished me by Mme. Swann, in a letter that began: “After your long eclipse, I felt as I read your letter about my tea-gowns that I was receiving a message from the other world.”

Albertine had on her feet a pair of black shoes studded with brilliants which Françoise indignantly called ‘pattens,’ modelled upon the shoes which, from the drawing-room window, she had seen Mme. de Guermantes wearing in the evening, just as a little later Albertine took to wearing slippers, some of gilded kid, others of chinchilla, the sight of which was pleasant to me because they were all of them signs (which other shoes would not have been) that she was living under my roof. She had also certain things which had not come to her from me, including a fine gold ring. I admired upon it the outspread wings of an eagle. “It was my aunt gave me it,” she explained. “She can be quite nice sometimes after all. It makes me feel terribly old, because she gave it to me on my twentieth birthday.”

Albertine took a far keener interest in all these pretty things than the Duchess, because, like every obstacle in the way of possession (in my own case the ill health which made travel so difficult and so desirable), poverty, more generous than opulence, gives to women what is better than the garments that they cannot afford to buy, the desire for those garments which is the genuine, detailed, profound knowledge of them. She, because she had never been able to afford these things, I, because in ordering them for her I was seeking to give her pleasure, we were both of us like students who already know all about the pictures which they are longing to go to Dresden or Vienna to see. Whereas rich women, amid the multitude of their hats and gowns, are like those tourists to whom the visit to a gallery, being preceded by no desire, gives merely a

sensation of bewilderment, boredom and exhaustion.

A particular toque, a particular sable cloak, a particular Doucet wrapper, its sleeves lined with pink, assumed for Albertine, who had observed them, coveted them and, thanks to the exclusiveness and minute nicety that are elements of desire, had at once isolated them from everything else in a void against which the lining or the scarf stood out to perfection, and learned them by heart in every detail — and for myself who had gone to Mme. de Guermantes in quest of an explanation of what constituted the peculiar merit, the superiority, the smartness of the garment and the inimitable style of the great designer — an importance, a charm which they certainly did not possess for the Duchess, surfeited before she had even acquired an appetite and would not, indeed, have possessed for myself had I beheld them a few years earlier while accompanying some lady of fashion on one of her wearisome tours of the dressmakers' shops.

To be sure, a lady of fashion was what Albertine was gradually becoming. For, even if each of the things that I ordered for her was the prettiest of its kind, with all the refinements that had been added to it by Mme. de Guermantes or Mme. Swann, she was beginning to possess these things in abundance. But no matter, so long as she admired them from the first, and each of them separately.

When we have been smitten by one painter, then by another, we may end by feeling for the whole gallery an admiration that is not frigid, for it is made up of successive enthusiasms, each one exclusive in its day, which finally have joined forces and become reconciled in one whole.

She was not, for that matter, frivolous, read a great deal when she was by herself, and used to read aloud when she was with me. She had become extremely intelligent. She would say, though she was quite wrong in saying: "I am appalled when I think that but for you I should still be quite ignorant. Don't contradict. You have opened up a world of ideas to me which I never suspected, and whatever I may have become I owe entirely to you."

It will be remembered that she had spoken in similar terms of my influence over Andrée. Had either of them a sentimental regard for me? And, in themselves, what were Albertine and Andrée? To learn the answer, I should have to immobilise you, to cease to live in that perpetual expectation, ending always in a different presentment of you, I should have to cease to love you, in order to fix you, to cease to know your interminable and ever disconcerting arrival, oh girls, oh recurrent ray in the swirl wherein we throb with emotion upon seeing you reappear while barely recognising you, in the dizzy velocity of light. That velocity, we should perhaps remain unaware of it and everything would seem to

us motionless, did not a sexual attraction set us in pursuit of you, drops of gold always different, and always passing our expectation! On each occasion a girl so little resembles what she was the time before (shattering in fragments as soon as we catch sight of her the memory that we had retained of her and the desire that we were proposing to gratify), that the stability of nature which we ascribe to her is purely fictitious and a convenience of speech. We have been told that some pretty girl is tender, loving, full of the most delicate sentiments. Our imagination accepts this assurance, and when we behold for the first time, within the woven girdle of her golden hair, the rosy disc of her face, we are almost afraid that this too virtuous sister may chill our ardour by her very virtue, that she can never be to us the lover for whom we have been longing. What secrets, at least, we confide in her from the first moment, on the strength of that nobility of heart, what plans we discuss together. But a few days later, we regret that we were so confiding, for the rose-leaf girl, at our second meeting, addresses us in the language of a lascivious Fury. As for the successive portraits which after a pulsation lasting for some days the renewal of the rosy light presents to us, it is not even certain that a momentum external to these girls has not modified their aspect, and this might well have happened with my band of girls at Balbec.

People extol to us the gentleness, the purity of a virgin. But afterwards they feel that something more seasoned would please us better, and recommend her to shew more boldness. In herself was she one more than the other? Perhaps not, but capable of yielding to any number of different possibilities in the headlong current of life. With another girl, whose whole attraction lay in something implacable (which we counted upon subduing to our own will), as, for instance, with the terrible jumping girl at Balbec who grazed in her spring the bald pates of startled old gentlemen, what a disappointment when, in the fresh aspect of her, just as we were addressing her in affectionate speeches stimulated by our memory of all her cruelty to other people, we heard her, as her first move in the game, tell us that she was shy, that she could never say anything intelligent to anyone at a first introduction, so frightened was she, and that it was only after a fortnight or so that she would be able to talk to us at her ease. The steel had turned to cotton, there was nothing left for us to attempt to break, since she herself had lost all her consistency. Of her own accord, but by our fault perhaps, for the tender words which we had addressed to Severity had perhaps, even without any deliberate calculation on her part, suggested to her that she ought to be gentle.

Distressing as the change may have been to us, it was not altogether

maladroit, for our gratitude for all her gentleness would exact more from us perhaps than our delight at overcoming her cruelty. I do not say that a day will not come when, even to these luminous maidens, we shall not assign sharply differentiated characters, but that will be because they have ceased to interest us, because their entry upon the scene will no longer be to our heart the apparition which it expected in a different form and which leaves it overwhelmed every time by fresh incarnations. Their immobility will spring from our indifference to them, which will hand them over to the judgment of our mind. This will not, for that matter, be expressed in any more categorical terms, for after it has decided that some defect which was prominent in one is fortunately absent from the other, it will see that this defect had as its counterpart some priceless merit. So that the false judgment of our intellect, which comes into play only when we have ceased to take any interest, will define permanent characters of girls, which will enlighten us no more than the surprising faces that used to appear every day when, in the dizzy speed of our expectation, our friends presented themselves daily, weekly, too different to allow us, as they never halted in their passage, to classify them, to award degrees of merit. As for our sentiments, we have spoken of them too often to repeat again now that as often as not love is nothing more than the association of the face of a girl (whom otherwise we should soon have found intolerable) with the heartbeats inseparable from an endless, vain expectation, and from some trick that she has played upon us. All this is true not merely of imaginative young men brought into contact with changeable girls. At the stage that our narrative has now reached, it appears, as I have since heard, that Jupien’s niece had altered her opinion of Morel and M. de Charlus. My motorist, reinforcing the love that she felt for Morel, had extolled to her, as existing in the violinist, boundless refinements of delicacy in which she was all too ready to believe. And at the same time Morel never ceased to complain to her of the despotic treatment that he received from M. de Charlus, which she ascribed to malevolence, never imagining that it could be due to love. She was moreover bound to acknowledge that M. de Charlus was tyrannically present at all their meetings. In corroboration of all this, she had heard women in society speak of the Baron’s terrible spite. Now, quite recently, her judgment had been completely reversed. She had discovered in Morel (without ceasing for that reason to love him) depths of malevolence and perfidy, compensated it was true by frequent kindness and genuine feeling, and in M. de Charlus an unimaginable and immense generosity blended with asperities of which she knew nothing. And so she had been unable to arrive at any more definite judgment of what, each in

himself, the violinist and his protector really were, than I was able to form of Andrée, whom nevertheless I saw every day, or of Albertine who was living with me. On the evenings when the latter did not read aloud to me, she would play to me or begin a game of draughts, or a conversation, either of which I would interrupt with kisses. The simplicity of our relations made them soothing. The very emptiness of her life gave Albertine a sort of eagerness to comply with the only requests that I made of her. Behind this girl, as behind the purple light that used to filter beneath the curtains of my room at Balbec, while outside the concert blared, were shining the blue-green undulations of the sea. Was she not, after all (she in whose heart of hearts there was now regularly installed an idea of myself so familiar that, next to her aunt, I was perhaps the person whom she distinguished least from herself), the girl whom I had seen the first time at Balbec, in her flat polo-cap, with her insistent laughing eyes, a stranger still, exiguous as a silhouette projected against the waves? These effigies preserved intact in our memory, when we recapture them, we are astonished at their unlikeness to the person whom we know, and we begin to realise what a task of remodelling is performed every day by habit. In the charm that Albertine had in Paris, by my fireside, there still survived the desire that had been aroused in me by that insolent and blossoming parade along the beach, and just as Rachel retained in Saint-Loup's eyes, even after he had made her abandon it, the prestige of her life on the stage, so in this Albertine cloistered in my house, far from Balbec, from which I had hurried her away, there persisted the emotion, the social confusion, the uneasy vanity, the roving desires of life by the seaside. She was so effectively caged that on certain evenings I did not even ask her to leave her room for mine, her to whom at one time all the world gave chase, whom I had found it so hard to overtake as she sped past on her bicycle, whom the lift-boy himself was unable to capture for me, leaving me with scarcely a hope of her coming, although I sat up waiting for her all the night. Had not Albertine been — out there in front of the Hotel — like a great actress of the blazing beach, arousing jealousy when she advanced upon that natural stage, not speaking to anyone, thrusting past its regular frequenters, dominating the girls, her friends, and was not this so greatly coveted actress the same who, withdrawn by me from the stage, shut up in my house, was out of reach now of the desires of all the rest, who might hereafter seek for her in vain, sitting now in my room, now in her own, and engaged in tracing or cutting out some pattern?

No doubt, in the first days at Balbec, Albertine seemed to be on a parallel plane to that upon which I was living, but one that had drawn closer (after my

visit to Elstir) and had finally become merged in it, as my relations with her, at Balbec, in Paris, then at Balbec again, grew more intimate. Besides, between the two pictures of Balbec, at my first visit and at my second, pictures composed of the same villas from which the same girls walked down to the same sea, what a difference! In Albertine's friends at the time of my second visit, whom I knew so well, whose good and bad qualities were so clearly engraved on their features, how was I to recapture those fresh, mysterious strangers who at first could not, without making my heart throb, thrust open the door of their bungalow over the grinding sand and set the tamarisks shivering as they came down the path! Their huge eyes had, in the interval, been absorbed into their faces, doubtless because they had ceased to be children, but also because those ravishing strangers, those ravishing actresses of the romantic first year, as to whom I had gone ceaselessly in quest of information, no longer held any mystery for me. They had become obedient to my caprices, a mere grove of budding girls, from among whom I was quite distinctly proud of having plucked, and carried off from them all, their fairest rose.

Between the two Balbec scenes, so different one from the other, there was the interval of several years in Paris, the long expanse of which was dotted with all the visits that Albertine had paid me. I saw her in successive years of my life occupying, with regard to myself, different positions, which made me feel the beauty of the interposed gaps, that long extent of time in which I never set eyes on her and against the diaphanous background of which the rosy person that I saw before me was modelled with mysterious shadows and in bold relief. This was due also to the superimposition not merely of the successive images which Albertine had been for me, but also of the great qualities of brain and heart, the defects of character, all alike unsuspected by me, which Albertine, in a germination, a multiplication of herself, a carnal efflorescence in sombre colours, had added to a nature that formerly could scarcely have been said to exist, but was now deep beyond plumbing. For other people, even those of whom we have so often dreamed that they have become nothing more than a picture, a figure by Benozzo Gozzoli standing out upon a background of verdure, as to whom we were prepared to believe that the only variations depended upon the point of view from which we looked at them, their distance from us, the effect of light and shade, these people, while they change in relation to ourselves, change also in themselves, and there had been an enrichment, a solidification and an increase of volume in the figure once so simply outlined against the sea. Moreover, it was not only the sea at the close of day that came to

life for me in Albertine, but sometimes the drowsy murmur of the sea upon the shore on moonlit nights.

Sometimes, indeed, when I rose to fetch a book from my father's study, and had given my mistress permission to lie down while I was out of the room, she was so tired after her long outing in the morning and afternoon in the open air that, even if I had been away for a moment only, when I returned I found Albertine asleep and did not rouse her.

Stretched out at full length upon my bed, in an attitude so natural that no art could have designed it, she reminded me of a long blossoming stem that had been laid there, and so indeed she was: the faculty of dreaming which I possessed only in her absence I recovered at such moments in her presence, as though by falling asleep she had become a plant. In this way her sleep did to a certain extent make love possible. When she was present, I spoke to her, but I was too far absent from myself to be able to think. When she was asleep, I no longer needed to talk to her, I knew that she was no longer looking at me, I had no longer any need to live upon my own outer surface.

By shutting her eyes, by losing consciousness, Albertine had stripped off, one after another, the different human characters with which she had deceived me ever since the day when I had first made her acquaintance. She was animated now only by the unconscious life of vegetation, of trees, a life more different from my own, more alien, and yet one that belonged more to me. Her personality did not escape at every moment, as when we were talking, by the channels of her unacknowledged thoughts and of her gaze. She had called back into herself everything of her that lay outside, had taken refuge, enclosed, reabsorbed, in her body. In keeping her before my eyes, in my hands, I had that impression of possessing her altogether, which I never had when she was awake. Her life was submitted to me, exhaled towards me its gentle breath.

I listened to this murmuring, mysterious emanation, soft as a breeze from the sea, fairylike as that moonlight which was her sleep. So long as it lasted, I was free to think about her and at the same time to look at her, and, when her sleep grew deeper, to touch, to kiss her. What I felt then was love in the presence of something as pure, as immaterial in its feelings, as mysterious, as if I had been in the presence of those inanimate creatures which are the beauties of nature. And indeed, as soon as her sleep became at all heavy, she ceased to be merely the plant that she had been; her sleep, on the margin of which I remained musing, with a fresh delight of which I never tired, but could have gone on enjoying indefinitely, was to me an undiscovered country. Her sleep brought

within my reach something as calm, as sensually delicious as those nights of full moon on the bay of Balbec, turned quiet as a lake over which the branches barely stir, where stretched out upon the sand one could listen for hours on end to the waves breaking and receding.

When I entered the room, I remained standing in the doorway, not venturing to make a sound, and hearing none but that of her breath rising to expire upon her lips at regular intervals, like the reflux of the sea, but drowsier and more gentle. And at the moment when my ear absorbed that divine sound, I felt that there was, condensed in it, the whole person, the whole life of the charming captive, outstretched there before my eyes. Carriages went rattling past in the street, her features remained as motionless, as pure, her breath as light, reduced to the simplest expulsion of the necessary quantity of air. Then, seeing that her sleep would not be disturbed, I advanced cautiously, sat down upon the chair that stood by the bedside, then upon the bed itself.

I have spent charming evenings talking, playing games with Albertine. but never any so pleasant as when I was watching her sleep. Granted that she might have, as she chatted with me, or played cards, that spontaneity which no actress could have imitated, it was a spontaneity carried to the second degree that was offered me by her sleep. Her hair, falling all along her rosy face, was spread out beside her on the bed, and here and there a separate straight tress gave the same effect of perspective as those moonlit trees, lank and pale, which one sees standing erect and stiff in the backgrounds of Elstir’s Raphaelesque pictures. If Albertine’s lips were closed, her eyelids, on the other hand, seen from the point at which I was standing, seemed so loosely joined that I might almost have questioned whether she really was asleep. At the same time those drooping lids introduced into her face that perfect continuity, unbroken by any intrusion of eyes. There are people whose faces assume a quite unusual beauty and majesty the moment they cease to look out of their eyes.

I measured with my own Albertine outstretched at my feet. Now and then a slight, unaccountable tremor ran through her body, as the leaves of a tree are shaken for a few moments by a sudden breath of wind. She would touch her hair, then, not having arranged it to her liking, would raise her hand to it again with motions so consecutive, so deliberate, that I was convinced that she was about to wake. Not at all, she grew calm again in the sleep from which she had not emerged. After this she lay without moving. She had laid her hand on her bosom with a sinking of the arm so artlessly childlike that I was obliged, as I gazed at her, to suppress the smile that is provoked in us by the solemnity, the innocence

and the charm of little children.

I, who was acquainted with many Albertines in one person, seemed now to see many more again, reposing by my side. Her eyebrows, arched as I had never seen them, enclosed the globes of her eyelids like a halcyon's downy nest. Races, atavisms, vices reposed upon her face. Whenever she moved her head, she created a fresh woman, often one whose existence I had never suspected. I seemed to possess not one, but innumerable girls. Her breathing, as it became gradually deeper, was now regularly stirring her bosom and, through it, her folded hands, her pearls, displaced in a different way by the same movement, like the boats, the anchor chains that are set swaying by the movement of the tide. Then, feeling that the tide of her sleep was full, that I should not ground upon reefs of consciousness covered now by the high water of profound slumber, deliberately, I crept without a sound upon the bed, lay down by her side, clasped her waist in one arm, placed my lips upon her cheek and heart, then upon every part of her body in turn laid my free hand, which also was raised, like the pearls, by Albertine's breathing; I myself was gently rocked by its regular motion: I had embarked upon the tide of Albertine's sleep. Sometimes it made me taste a pleasure that was less pure. For this I had no need to make any movement, I allowed my leg to dangle against hers, like an oar which one allows to trail in the water, imparting to it now and again a gentle oscillation like the intermittent flap given to its wing by a bird asleep in the air. I chose, in gazing at her, this aspect of her face which no one ever saw and which was so pleasing.

It is I suppose comprehensible that the letters which we receive from a person are more or less similar and combine to trace an image of the writer so different from the person whom we know as to constitute a second personality. But how much stranger is it that a woman should be conjoined, like Rosita and Doodica, with another woman whose different beauty makes us infer another character, and that in order to behold one we must look at her in profile, the other in full face. The sound of her breathing as it grew louder might give the illusion of the breathless ecstasy of pleasure and, when mine was at its climax, I could kiss her without having interrupted her sleep. I felt at such moments that I had been possessing her more completely, like an unconscious and unresisting object of dumb nature. I was not affected by the words that she muttered occasionally in her sleep, their meaning escaped me, and besides, whoever the unknown person to whom they referred, it was upon my hand, upon my cheek that her hand, as an occasional tremor recalled it to life, stiffened for an instant. I relished her sleep with a disinterested, soothing love, just as I would remain for hours

listening to the unfurling of the waves.

Perhaps it is laid down that people must be capable of making us suffer intensely before, in the hours of respite, they can procure for us the same soothing calm as Nature. I had not to answer her as when we were engaged in conversation, and even if I could have remained silent, as for that matter I did when it was she that was talking, still while listening to her voice I did not penetrate so far into herself. As I continued to hear, to gather from moment to moment the murmur, soothing as a barely perceptible breeze, of her breath, it was a whole physiological existence that was spread out before me, for me; as I used to remain for hours lying on the beach, in the moonlight, so long could I have remained there gazing at her, listening to her.

Sometimes one would have said that the sea was becoming rough, that the storm was making itself felt even inside the bay, and like the bay I lay listening to the gathering roar of her breath. Sometimes, when she was too warm, she would take off, already half asleep, her kimono which she flung over my armchair. While she was asleep I would tell myself that all her correspondence was in the inner pocket of this kimono, into which she always thrust her letters. A signature, a written appointment would have sufficed to prove a lie or to dispel a suspicion. When I could see that Albertine was sound asleep, leaving the foot of the bed where I had been standing motionless in contemplation of her, I took a step forward, seized by a burning curiosity, feeling that the secret of this other life lay offering itself to me, flaccid and defenceless, in that armchair. Perhaps I took this step forward also because to stand perfectly still and watch her sleeping became tiring after a while. And so, on tiptoe, constantly turning round to make sure that Albertine was not waking, I made my way to the armchair. There I stopped short, stood for a long time gazing at the kimono, as I had stood for a long time gazing at Albertine. But (and here perhaps I was wrong) never once did I touch the kimono, put my hand in the pocket, examine the letters. In the end, realising that I would never make up my mind, I started back, on tiptoe, returned to Albertine’s bedside and began again to watch her sleeping, her who would tell me nothing, whereas I could see lying across an arm of the chair that kimono which would have told me much. And just as people pay a hundred francs a day for a room at the Hotel at Balbec in order to breathe the sea air, I felt it to be quite natural that I should spend more than that upon her since I had her breath upon my cheek, between her lips which I parted with my own, through which her life flowed against my tongue.

But this pleasure of seeing her sleep, which was as precious as that of

feeling her live, was cut short by another pleasure, that of seeing her wake. It was, carried to a more profound and more mysterious degree, the same pleasure that I felt in having her under my roof. It was gratifying, of course, in the afternoon, when she alighted from the carriage, that it should be to my address that she was returning. It was even more so to me that when from the underworld of sleep she climbed the last steps of the stair of dreams, it was in my room that she was reborn to consciousness and life, that she asked herself for an instant: "Where am I?" and, seeing all the things in the room round about her, the lamp whose light scarcely made her blink her eyes, was able to assure herself that she was at home, as soon as she realised that she was waking in my home. In that first delicious moment of uncertainty, it seemed to me that once again I took a more complete possession of her since, whereas after an outing it was to her own room that she returned, it was now my room that, as soon as Albertine should have recognised it, was about to enclose, to contain her, without any sign of misgiving in the eyes of my mistress, which remained as calm as if she had never slept at all.

The uncertainty of awakening revealed by her silence was not at all revealed in her eyes. As soon as she was able to speak she said: "My ——" or "My dearest ——" followed by my Christian name, which, if we give the narrator the same name as the author of this book, would be 'My Marcel,' or 'My dearest Marcel.' After this I would never allow my relatives, by calling me 'dearest,' to rob of their priceless uniqueness the delicious words that Albertine uttered to me. As she uttered them, she pursed her lips in a little pout which she herself transformed into a kiss. As quickly as, earlier in the evening, she had fallen asleep, so quickly had she awoken. No more than my own progression in time, no more than the act of gazing at a. girl seated opposite to me beneath the lamp, which shed upon her a different light from that of the sun when I used to behold her striding along the seashore, was this material enrichment, this autonomous progress of Albertine the determining cause of the difference between my present view of her and my original impression of her at Balbec. A longer term of years might have separated the two images without effecting so complete a change; it had come to pass, essential and sudden, when I learned that my mistress had been virtually brought up by Mlle. Vinteuil's friend. If at one time I had been carried away by excitement when I thought that I saw a trace of mystery in Albertine's eyes, now I was happy only at the moments when from those eyes, from her cheeks even, as mirroring as her eyes, so gentle now but quickly turning sullen, I succeeded in expelling every trace of mystery.

The image for which I sought, upon which I reposed, against which I would have liked to lean and die, was no longer that of Albertine leading a hidden life, it was that of an Albertine as familiar to me as possible (and for this reason my love could not be lasting unless it was unhappy, for in its nature it did not satisfy my need of mystery), an Albertine who did not reflect a distant world, but desired nothing else — there were moments when this did indeed appear to be the case — than to be with me, a person like myself, an Albertine the embodiment of what belonged to me and not of the unknown. When it is in this way, from an hour of anguish caused by another person, when it is from uncertainty whether we shall be able to keep her or she will escape, that love is born, such love bears the mark of the revolution that has created it, it recalls very little of what we had previously seen when we thought of the person in question. And my first impressions at the sight of Albertine, against a background of sea, might to some small extent persist in my love of her: actually, these earlier impressions occupy but a tiny place in a love of this sort; in its strength, in its agony, in its need of comfort and its return to a calm and soothing memory with which we would prefer to abide and to learn nothing more of her whom we love, even if there be something horrible that we ought to know — would prefer still more to consult only these earlier memories — such a love is composed of very different material!

Sometimes I put out the light before she came in. It was in the darkness, barely guided by the glow of a smouldering log, that she lay down by my side. My hands, my cheeks alone identified her without my eyes beholding her, my eyes that often were afraid of finding her altered. With the result that by virtue of this unseeing love she may have felt herself bathed in a warmer affection than usual. On other evenings, I undressed, I lay down, and, with Albertine perched on the side of my bed, we resumed our game or our conversation interrupted by kisses; and, in the desire that alone makes us take an interest in the existence and character of another person, we remain so true to our own nature (even if, at the same time, we abandon successively the different people whom we have loved in turn), that on one occasion, catching sight of myself in the glass at the moment when I was kissing Albertine and calling her my little girl, the sorrowful, passionate expression on my own face, similar to the expression it had assumed long ago with Gilberte whom I no longer remembered, and would perhaps assume one day with another girl, if I was fated ever to forget Albertine, made me think that over and above any personal considerations (instinct requiring that we consider the person of the moment as the only true person) I was performing

the duties of an ardent and painful devotion dedicated as an oblation to the youth and beauty of Woman. And yet with this desire, honouring youth with an *ex voto*, with my memories also of Balbec, there was blended, in the need that I felt of keeping Albertine in this way every evening by my side, something that had hitherto been unknown, at least in my amorous existence, if it was not entirely novel in my life.

It was a soothing power the like of which I had not known since the evenings at Combray long ago when my mother, stooping over my bed, brought me repose in a kiss. To be sure, I should have been greatly astonished at that time, had anyone told me that I was not wholly virtuous, and more astonished still to be told that I would ever seek to deprive some one else of a pleasure. I must have known myself very slightly, for my pleasure in having Albertine to live with me was much less a positive pleasure than that of having withdrawn from the world, where everyone was free to enjoy her in turn, the blossoming damsel who, if she did not bring me any great joy, was at least withholding joy from others. Ambition, fame would have left me unmoved. Even more was I incapable of feeling hatred. And yet to me to love in a carnal sense was at any rate to enjoy a triumph over countless rivals. I can never repeat it often enough; it was first and foremost a sedative.

For all that I might, before Albertine returned, have doubted her loyalty, have imagined her in the room at Montjouvain, once she was in her dressing-gown and seated facing my chair, or (if, as was more frequent, I had remained in bed) at the foot of my bed, I would deposit my doubts in her, hand them over for her to relieve me of them, with the abnegation of a worshipper uttering his prayer. All the evening she might have been there, huddled in a provoking ball upon my bed, playing with me, like a great cat; her little pink nose, the tip of which she made even tinier with a coquettish glance which gave it that sharpness which we see in certain people who are inclined to be stout, might have given her a fiery and rebellious air; she might have allowed a tress of her long, dark hair to fall over a cheek of rosy wax and, half shutting her eyes, unfolding her arms, have seemed to be saying to me: “Do with me what you please!”; when, as the time came for her to leave me, she drew nearer to say good night, it was a meekness that had become almost a part of my family life that I kissed on either side of her firm throat which now never seemed to me brown or freckled enough, as though these solid qualities had been in keeping with some loyal generosity in Albertine.

When it was Albertine’s turn to bid me good night, kissing me on either side

of my throat, her hair caressed me like a wing of softly bristling feathers. Incomparable as were those two kisses of peace, Albertine slipped into my mouth, making me the gift of her tongue, like a gift of the Holy Spirit, conveyed to me a viaticum, left me with a provision of tranquillity almost as precious as when my mother in the evening at Combray used to lay her lips upon my brow.

"Are you coming with us to-morrow, you naughty man?" she asked before leaving me. "Where are you going?" "That will depend on the weather and on yourself. But have you written anything to-day, my little darling? No? Then it was hardly worth your while, not coming with us. Tell me, by the way, when I came in, you knew my step, you guessed at once who it was?" "Of course. Could I possibly be mistaken, couldn't I tell my little sparrow's hop among a thousand? She must let me take her shoes off, before she goes to bed, it will be such a pleasure to me. You are so nice and pink in all that white lace."

Such was my answer; among the sensual expressions, we may recognise others that were peculiar to my grandmother and mother for, little by little, I was beginning to resemble all my relatives, my father who — in a very different fashion from myself, no doubt, for if things do repeat themselves, it is with great variations — took so keen an interest in the weather; and not my father only, I was becoming more and more like my aunt Léonie. Otherwise, Albertine could not but have been a reason for my going out of doors, so as not to leave her by herself, beyond my control. My aunt Léonie, wrapped up in her religious observances, with whom I could have sworn that I had not a single point in common, I so passionately keen on pleasure, apparently worlds apart from that maniac who had never known any pleasure in her life and lay mumbling her rosary all day long, I who suffered from my inability to embark upon a literary career whereas she had been the one person in the family who could never understand that reading was anything more than an amusing pastime, which made reading, even at the paschal season, lawful upon Sunday, when every serious occupation is forbidden, in order that the day may be hallowed by prayer alone. Now, albeit every day I found an excuse in some particular indisposition which made me so often remain in bed, a person (not Albertine, not any person that I loved, but a person with more power over me than any beloved) had migrated into me, despotic to the extent of silencing at times my jealous suspicions or at least of preventing me from going to find out whether they had any foundation, and this was my aunt Léonie. It was quite enough that I should bear an exaggerated resemblance to my father, to the extent of not being satisfied like him with consulting the barometer, but becoming an animated barometer

myself; it was quite enough that I should allow myself to be ordered by my aunt Léonie to stay at home and watch the weather, from my bedroom window or even from my bed; yet here I was talking now to Albertine, at one moment as the child that I had been at Combray used to talk to my mother, at another as my grandmother used to talk to me.

When we have passed a certain age, the soul of the child that we were and the souls of the dead from whom we spring come and bestow upon us in handfuls their treasures and their calamities, asking to be allowed to cooperate in the new sentiments which we are feeling and in which, obliterating their former image, we recast them in an original creation. Thus my whole past from my earliest years, and earlier still the past of my parents and relatives, blended with my impure love for Albertine the charm of an affection at once filial and maternal. We have to give hospitality, at a certain stage in our life, to all our relatives who have journeyed so far and gathered round us.

Before Albertine obeyed and allowed me to take off her shoes, I opened her chemise. Her two little upstanding breasts were so round that they seemed not so much to be an integral part of her body as to have ripened there like fruit; and her belly (concealing the place where a man's is marred as though by an iron clamp left sticking in a statue that has been taken down from its niche) was closed, at the junction of her thighs, by two valves of a curve as hushed, as reposeful, as cloistral as that of the horizon after the sun has set. She took off her shoes, and lay down by my side.

O mighty attitudes of Man and Woman, in which there seeks to be reunited, in the innocence of the world's first age and with the humility of clay, what creation has cloven apart, in which Eve is astonished and submissive before the Man by whose side she has awoken, as he himself, alone still, before God Who has fashioned him. Albertine folded her arms behind her dark hair, her swelling hip, her leg falling with the inflexion of a swan's neck that stretches upwards and then curves over towards its starting point. It was only when she was lying right on her side that one saw a certain aspect of her face (so good and handsome when one looked at it from in front) which I could not endure, hook-nosed as in some of Leonardo's caricatures, seeming to indicate the shiftiness, the greed for profit, the cunning of a spy whose presence in my house would have filled me with horror and whom that profile seemed to unmask. At once I took Albertine's face in my hands and altered its position.

"Be a good boy, promise me that if you don't come out to-morrow you will work," said my mistress as she slipped into her chemise. "Yes, but don't put on

your dressing-gown yet." Sometimes I ended by falling asleep by her side. The room had grown cold, more wood was wanted. I tried to find the bell above my head, but failed to do so, after fingering all the copper rods in turn save those between which it hung, and said to Albertine who had sprung from the bed so that Françoise should not find us lying side by side: "No, come back for a moment, I can't find the bell."

Comforting moments, gay, innocent to all appearance, and yet moments in which there accumulates in us the never suspected possibility of disaster, which makes the amorous life the most precarious of all, that in which the incalculable rain of sulphur and brimstone falls after the most radiant moments, after which, without having the courage to derive its lesson from our mishap, we set to work immediately to rebuild upon the slopes of the crater from which nothing but catastrophe can emerge. I was as careless as everyone who imagines that his happiness will endure.

It is precisely because this comfort has been necessary to bring grief to birth — and will return moreover at intervals to calm it — that men can be sincere with each other, and even with themselves, when they pride themselves upon a woman's kindness to them, although, taking things all in all, at the heart of their intimacy there lurks continually in a secret fashion, unavowed to the rest of the world, or revealed unintentionally by questions, inquiries, a painful uncertainty. But as this could not have come to birth without the preliminary comfort, as even afterwards the intermittent comfort is necessary to make suffering endurable and to prevent ruptures, their concealment of the secret hell that life can be when shared with the woman in question, carried to the pitch of an ostentatious display of an intimacy which, they pretend, is precious, expresses a genuine point of view, a universal process of cause and effect, one of the modes in which the production of grief is rendered possible.

It no longer surprised me that Albertine should be in the house, and would not be going out to-morrow save with myself or in the custody of Andrée. These habits of a life shared in common, this broad outline which defined my existence and within which nobody might penetrate but Albertine, also (in the future plan, of which I was still unaware, of my life to come, like the plan traced by an architect for monumental structures which will not be erected until long afterwards) the remoter lines, parallel to the others but vaster, that sketched in me, like a lonely hermitage, the somewhat rigid and monotonous formula of my future loves, had in reality been traced that night at Balbec when, in the little tram, after Albertine had revealed to me who it was that had brought her up, I had decided at any cost to remove her from certain influences and to prevent her from straying out of my sight for some days to come. Day after day had gone by, these habits had become mechanical, but, like those primitive rites the meaning of which historians seek to discover, I might (but would not) have said to anybody who asked me what I meant by this life of seclusion which I carried so far as not to go any more to the theatre, that its origin was the anxiety of a certain evening, and my need to prove to myself, during the days that followed, that the girl whose unfortunate childhood I had learned should not find it possible, if she wished, to expose herself to similar temptations. I no longer thought, save very rarely, of these possibilities, but they were nevertheless to remain vaguely present in my consciousness. The fact that I was destroying — or trying to destroy — them day by day was doubtless the reason why it comforted me to kiss those cheeks which were no more beautiful than many

others; beneath any carnal attraction which is at all profound, there is the permanent possibility of danger.

I had promised Albertine that, if I did not go out with her, I would settle down to work, but in the morning, just as if, taking advantage of our being asleep, the house had miraculously flown, I awoke in different weather beneath another clime. We do not begin to work at the moment of landing in a strange country to the conditions of which we have to adapt ourself. But each day was for me a different country. Even my laziness itself, beneath the novel forms that it had assumed, how was I to recognise it?

Sometimes, on days when the weather was, according to everyone, past praying for, the mere act of staying in the house, situated in the midst of a steady and continuous rain, had all the gliding charm, the soothing silence, the interest of a sea voyage; at another time, on a bright day, to lie still in bed was to let the lights and shadows play around me as round a tree-trunk.

Or yet again, in the first strokes of the bell of a neighbouring convent, rare as the early morning worshippers, barely whitening the dark sky with their fluttering snowfall, melted and scattered by the warm breeze, I had discerned one of those tempestuous, disordered, delightful days, when the roofs soaked by an occasional shower and dried by a breath of wind or a ray of sunshine let fall a cooing eavesdrop, and, as they wait for the wind to resume its turn, preen in the momentary sunlight that has burnished them their pigeon’s-breast of slates, one of those days filled with so many changes of weather, atmospheric incidents, storms, that the idle man does not feel that he has wasted them, because he has been taking an interest in the activity which, in default of himself, the atmosphere, acting in a sense in his stead, has displayed; days similar to those times of revolution or war which do not seem empty to the schoolboy who has played truant from his classroom, because by loitering outside the Law Courts or by reading the newspapers, he has the illusion of finding, in the events that have occurred, failing the lesson which he has not learned, an intellectual profit and an excuse for his idleness; days to which we may compare those on which there occurs in our life some exceptional crisis from which the man who has never done anything imagines that he is going to acquire, if it comes to a happy issue, laborious habits; for instance, the morning on which he sets out for a duel which is to be fought under particularly dangerous conditions; then he is suddenly made aware, at the moment when it is perhaps about to be taken from him, of the value of a life of which he might have made use to begin some important work, or merely to enjoy pleasures, and of which he has failed to make any use at all.

“If I can only not be killed,” he says to himself, “how I shall settle down to work this very minute, and how I shall enjoy myself too.”

Life has in fact suddenly acquired, in his eyes, a higher value, because he puts into life everything that it seems to him capable of giving, instead of the little that he normally makes it give. He sees it in the light of his desire, not as his experience has taught him that he was apt to make it, that is to say so tawdry! It has, at that moment, become filled with work, travel, mountain-climbing, all the pleasant things which, he tells himself, the fatal issue of the duel may render impossible, whereas they were already impossible before there was any question of a duel, owing to the bad habits which, even had there been no duel, would have persisted. He returns home without even a scratch, but he continues to find the same obstacles to pleasures, excursions, travel, to everything of which he had feared for a moment to be for ever deprived by death; to deprive him of them life has been sufficient. As for work — exceptional circumstances having the effect of intensifying what previously existed in the man, labour in the laborious, laziness in the lazy — he takes a holiday.

I followed his example, and did as I had always done since my first resolution to become a writer, which I had made long ago, but which seemed to me to date from yesterday, because I had regarded each intervening day as non-existent. I treated this day in a similar fashion, allowing its showers of rain and bursts of sunshine to pass without doing anything, and vowing that I would begin to work on the morrow. But then I was no longer the same man beneath a cloudless sky; the golden note of the bells did not contain merely (as honey contains) light, but the sensation of light and also the sickly savour of preserved fruits (because at Combray it had often loitered like a wasp over our cleared dinner-table). On this day of dazzling sunshine, to remain until nightfall with my eyes shut was a thing permitted, customary, healthgiving, pleasant, seasonable, like keeping the outside shutters closed against the heat.

It was in such weather as this that at the beginning of my second visit to Balbec I used to hear the violins of the orchestra amid the bluish flow of the rising tide. How much more fully did I possess Albertine to-day. There were days when the sound of a bell striking the hour bore upon the sphere of its resonance a plate so cool, so richly loaded with moisture or with light that it was like a transcription for the blind, or if you prefer a musical interpretation of the charm of rain or of the charm of the sun. So much so that, at that moment, as I lay in bed, with my eyes shut, I said to myself that everything is capable of transposition and that a universe which was merely audible might be as full of

variety as the other. Travelling lazily upstream from day to day, as in a boat, and seeing appear before my eyes an endlessly changing succession of enchanted memories, which I did not select, which a moment earlier had been invisible, and which my mind presented to me one after another, without my being free to choose them, I pursued idly over that continuous expanse my stroll in the sunshine.

Those morning concerts at Balbec were not remote in time. And yet, at that comparatively recent moment, I had given but little thought to Albertine. Indeed, on the very first mornings after my arrival, I had not known that she was at Balbec. From whom then had I learned it? Oh, yes, from Aimé. It was a fine sunny day like this. He was glad to see me again. But he does not like Albertine. Not everybody can be in love with her. Yes, it was he who told me that she was at Balbec. But how did he know? Ah! he had met her, had thought that she had a bad style. At that moment, as I regarded Aimé's story from another aspect than that in which he had told me it, my thoughts, which hitherto had been sailing blissfully over these untroubled waters, exploded suddenly, as though they had struck an invisible and perilous mine, treacherously moored at this point in my memory. He had told me that he had met her, that he had thought her style bad. What had he meant by a bad style? I had understood him to mean a vulgar manner, because, to contradict him in advance, I had declared that she was most refined. But no, perhaps he had meant the style of Gomorrah. She was with another girl, perhaps their arms were round one another's waist, they were staring at other women, they were indeed displaying a 'style' which I had never seen Albertine adopt in my presence. Who was the other girl, where had Aimé met her, this odious Albertine?

I tried to recall exactly what Aimé had said to me, in order to see whether it could be made to refer to what I imagined, or he had meant nothing more than common manners. But in vain might I ask the question, the person who put it and the person who might supply the recollection were, alas, one and the same person, myself, who was momentarily duplicated but without adding anything to my stature. Question as I might, it was myself who answered, I learned nothing fresh. I no longer gave a thought to Mlle. Vinteuil. Born of a novel suspicion, the fit of jealousy from which I was suffering was novel also, or rather it was only the prolongation, the extension of that suspicion, it had the same theatre, which was no longer Montjouvain, but the road upon which Aimé had met Albertine, and for its object the various friends one or other of whom might be she who had been with Albertine that day. It was perhaps a certain Elisabeth, or else perhaps

those two girls whom Albertine had watched in the mirror at the Casino, while appearing not to notice them. She had doubtless been having relations with them, and also with Esther, Bloch's cousin. Such relations, had they been revealed to me by a third person, would have been enough almost to kill me, but as it was myself that was imagining them, I took care to add sufficient uncertainty to deaden the pain.

We succeed in absorbing daily, under the guise of suspicions, in enormous doses, this same idea that we are being betrayed, a quite minute quantity of which might prove fatal, if injected by the needle of a stabbing word. It is no doubt for that reason, and by a survival of the instinct of self-preservation, that the same jealous man does not hesitate to form the most terrible suspicions upon a basis of innocuous details, provided that, whenever any proof is brought to him, he may decline to accept its evidence. Anyhow, love is an incurable malady, like those diathetic states in which rheumatism affords the sufferer a brief respite only to be replaced by epileptiform headaches. Was my jealous suspicion calmed, I then felt a grudge against Albertine for not having been gentle with me, perhaps for having made fun of me to Andrée. I thought with alarm of the idea that she must have formed if Andrée had repeated all our conversations; the future loomed black and menacing. This mood of depression left me only if a fresh jealous suspicion drove me upon another quest or if, on the other hand, Albertine's display of affection made the actual state of my fortunes seem to me immaterial. Whoever this girl might be, I should have to write to Aimé, to try to see him, and then I should check his statement by talking to Albertine, hearing her confession. In the meantime, convinced that it must be Bloch's cousin, I asked Bloch himself, who had not the remotest idea of my purpose, simply to let me see her photograph, or, better still, to arrange if possible for me to meet her.

How many persons, cities, roads does not jealousy make us eager thus to know? It is a thirst for knowledge thanks to which, with regard to various isolated points, we end by acquiring every possible notion in turn except those that we require. We can never tell whether a suspicion will not arise, for, all of a sudden, we recall a sentence that was not clear, an alibi that cannot have been given us without a purpose. And yet, we have not seen the person again, but there is such a thing as a posthumous jealousy, that is born only after we have left her, a jealousy of the doorstep. Perhaps the habit that I had formed of nursing in my bosom several simultaneous desires, a desire for a young girl of good family such as I used to see pass beneath my window escorted by her governess, and especially of the girl whom Saint-Loup had mentioned to me, the one who

frequented houses of ill fame, a desire for handsome lady's-maids, and especially for the maid of Mme. Putbus, a desire to go to the country in early spring, to see once again hawthorns, apple trees in blossom, storms at sea, a desire for Venice, a desire to settle down to work, a desire to live like other people — perhaps the habit of storing up, without assuaging any of them, all these desires, contenting myself with the promise, made to myself, that I would not forget to satisfy them one day, perhaps this habit, so many years old already, of perpetual postponement, of what M. de Charlus used to castigate under the name of procrastination, had become so prevalent in me that it assumed control of my jealous suspicions also and, while it made me take a mental note that I would not fail, some day, to have an explanation from Albertine with regard to the girl, possibly the girls (this part of the story was confused, rubbed out, that is to say obliterated, in my memory) with whom Aimé had met her, made me also postpone this explanation. In any case, I would not mention it this evening to my mistress for fear of making her think me jealous and so offending her.

And yet when, on the following day, Bloch had sent me the photograph of his cousin Esther, I made haste to forward it to Aimé. And at the same moment I remembered that Albertine had that morning refused me a pleasure which might indeed have tired her. Was that in order to reserve it for some one else? This afternoon, perhaps? For whom?

Thus it is that jealousy is endless, for even if the beloved object, by dying for instance, can no longer provoke it by her actions, it so happens that posthumous memories, of later origin than any event, take shape suddenly in our minds as though they were events also, memories which hitherto we have never properly explored, which had seemed to us unimportant, and to which our own meditation upon them has been sufficient, without any external action, to give a new and terrible meaning. We have no need of her company, it is enough to be alone in our room, thinking, for fresh betrayals of us by our mistress to come to light, even though she be dead. And so we ought not to fear in love, as in everyday life, the future alone, but even the past which often we do not succeed in realising until the future has come and gone; and we are not speaking only of the past which we discover long afterwards, but of the past which we have long kept stored up in ourselves and learn suddenly how to interpret.

No matter, I was very glad, now that afternoon was turning to evening, that the hour was not far off when I should be able to appeal to Albertine's company for the consolation of which I stood in need. Unfortunately, the evening that followed was one of those on which this consolation was not afforded me, on

which the kiss that Albertine would give me when she left me for the night, very different from her ordinary kiss, would no more soothe me than my mother's kiss had soothed me long ago, on days when she was vexed with me and I dared not send for her, but at the same time knew that I should not be able to sleep. Such evenings were now those on which Albertine had formed for the morrow some plan of which she did not wish me to know. Had she confided in me, I would have employed, to assure its successful execution, an ardour which none but Albertine could have inspired in me. But she told me nothing, nor had she any need to tell me anything; as soon as she came in, before she had even crossed the threshold of my room, as she was still wearing her hat or toque, I had already detected the unknown, restive, desperate, indomitable desire. Now, these were often the evenings when I had awaited her return with the most loving thoughts, and looked forward to throwing my arms round her neck with the warmest affection.

Alas, those misunderstandings that I had often had with my parents, whom I found cold or cross at the moment when I was running to embrace them, overflowing with love, are nothing in comparison with these that occur between lovers! The anguish then is far less superficial, far harder to endure, it has its abode in a deeper stratum of the heart. This evening, however, Albertine was obliged to mention the plan that she had in her mind; I gathered at once that she wished to go next day to pay a call on Mme. Verdurin, a call to which in itself I would have had no objection. But evidently her object was to meet some one there, to prepare some future pleasure. Otherwise she would not have attached so much importance to this call. That is to say, she would not have kept on assuring me that it was of no importance. I had in the course of my life developed in the opposite direction to those races which make use of phonetic writing only after regarding the letters of the alphabet as a set of symbols; I, who for so many years had sought for the real life and thought of other people only in the direct statements with which they furnished me of their own free will, failing these had come to attach importance, on the contrary, only to the evidence that is not a rational and analytical expression of the truth; the words themselves did not enlighten me unless they could be interpreted in the same way as a sudden rush of blood to the cheeks of a person who is embarrassed, or, what is even more telling, a sudden silence.

Some subsidiary word (such as that used by M. de Cambremer when he understood that I was 'literary,' and, not having spoken to me before, as he was describing a visit that he had paid to the Verdurins, turned to me with: "*Why*,

Boreli was there!") bursting into flames at the unintended, sometimes perilous contact of two ideas which the speaker has not expressed, but which, by applying the appropriate methods of analysis or electrolysis I was able to extract from it, told me more than a long speech.

Albertine sometimes allowed to appear in her conversation one or other of these precious amalgams which I made haste to 'treat' so as to transform them into lucid ideas. It is by the way one of the most terrible calamities for the lover that if particular details — which only experiment, espionage, of all the possible realisations, would ever make him know — are so difficult to discover, the truth on the other hand is easy to penetrate or merely to feel by instinct.

Often I had seen her, at Balbec, fasten upon some girls who came past us a sharp and lingering stare, like a physical contact, after which, if I knew the girls, she would say to me: "Suppose we asked them to join us? I should so love to be rude to them." And now, for some time past, doubtless since she had succeeded in reading my character, no request to me to invite anyone, not a word, never even a sidelong glance from her eyes, which had become objectless and mute, and as revealing, with the vague and vacant expression of the rest of her face, as had been their magnetic swerve before. Now it was impossible for me to reproach her, or to ply her with questions about things which she would have declared to be so petty, so trivial, things that I had stored up in my mind simply for the pleasure of making mountains out of molehills. It is hard enough to say: "Why did you stare at that girl who went past?" but a great deal harder to say: "Why did you not stare at her?" And yet I knew quite well, or at least I should have known, if I had not chosen to believe Albertine's assertions rather than all the trivialities contained in a glance, proved by it and by some contradiction or other in her speech, a contradiction which often I did not perceive until long after I had left her, which kept me on tenterhooks all the night long, which I never dared mention to her again, but which nevertheless continued to honour my memory from time to time with its periodical visits.

Often, in the case of these furtive or sidelong glances on the beach at Balbec or in the streets of Paris, I might ask myself whether the person who provoked them was not merely at the moment when she passed an object of desire but was an old acquaintance, or else some girl who had simply been mentioned to her, and of whom, when I heard about it, I was astonished that anybody could have spoken to her, so utterly unlike was she to anyone that Albertine could possibly wish to know. But the Gomorrah of to-day is a dissected puzzle made up of fragments which are picked up in the places where we least expected to find

them. Thus I once saw at Rivebelle a big dinner-party of ten women, all of whom I happened to know — at least by name — women as unlike one another as possible, perfectly united nevertheless, so much so that I never saw a party so homogeneous, albeit so composite.

To return to the girls whom we passed in the street, never did Albertine gaze at an old person, man or woman, with such fixity, or on the other hand with such reserve, and as though she saw nothing. The cuckolded husbands who know nothing know everything all the same. But it requires more accurate and abundant evidence to create a scene of jealousy. Besides, if jealousy helps us to discover a certain tendency to falsehood in the woman whom we love, it multiplies this tendency an hundredfold when the woman has discovered that we are jealous. She lies (to an extent to which she has never lied to us before), whether from pity, or from fear, or because she instinctively withdraws by a methodical flight from our investigations. Certainly there are love affairs in which from the start a light woman has posed as virtue incarnate in the eyes of the man who is in love with her. But how many others consist of two diametrically opposite periods? In the first, the woman speaks almost spontaneously, with slight modifications, of her zest for sensual pleasure, of the gay life which it has made her lead, things all of which she will deny later on, with the last breath in her body, to the same man — when she has felt that he is jealous of and spying upon her. He begins to think with regret of the days of those first confidences, the memory of which torments him nevertheless. If the woman continued to make them, she would furnish him almost unaided with the secret of her conduct which he has been vainly pursuing day after day. And besides, what a surrender that would mean, what trust, what friendship. If she cannot live without betraying him, at least she would be betraying him as a friend, telling him of her pleasures, associating him with them. And he thinks with regret of the sort of life which the early stages of their love seemed to promise, which the sequel has rendered impossible, making of that love a thing exquisitely painful, which will render a final parting, according to circumstances, either inevitable or impossible.

Sometimes the script from which I deciphered Albertine’s falsehoods, without being ideographic needed simply to be read backwards; so this evening she had flung at me in a careless tone the message, intended to pass almost unheeded: “It is possible that I may go to-morrow to the Verdurins’, I don’t in the least know whether I shall go, I don’t really want to.” A childish anagram of the admission: “I shall go to-morrow to the Verdurins’, it is absolutely certain,

for I attach the utmost importance to the visit." This apparent hesitation indicated a resolute decision and was intended to diminish the importance of the visit while warning me of it. Albertine always adopted a tone of uncertainty in speaking of her irrevocable decisions. Mine was no less irrevocable. I took steps to arrange that this visit to Mme. Verdurin should not take place. Jealousy is often only an uneasy need to be tyrannical, applied to matters of love. I had doubtless inherited from my father this abrupt, arbitrary desire to threaten the people whom I loved best in the hopes with which they were lulling themselves with a security that I determined to expose to them as false; when I saw that Albertine had planned without my knowledge, behind my back, an expedition which I would have done everything in the world to make easier and more pleasant for her, had she taken me into her confidence, I said carelessly, so as to make her tremble, that I intended to go out the next day myself.

I set to work to suggest to Albertine other expeditions in directions which would have made this visit to the Verdurins impossible, in words stamped with a feigned indifference beneath which I strove to conceal my excitement. But she had detected it. It encountered in her the electric shock of a contrary will which violently repulsed it; I could see the sparks flash from her eyes. Of what use, though, was it to pay attention to what her eyes were saying at that moment? How had I failed to observe long ago that Albertine's eyes belonged to the class which even in a quite ordinary person seem to be composed of a number of fragments, because of all the places which the person wishes to visit — and to conceal her desire to visit — that day. Those eyes which their falsehood keeps ever immobile and passive, but dynamic, measurable in the yards or miles to be traversed before they reach the determined, the implacably determined meeting-place, eyes that are not so much smiling at the pleasure which tempts them as they are shadowed with melancholy and discouragement because there may be a difficulty in their getting to the meeting-place. Even when you hold them in your hands, these people are fugitives. To understand the emotions which they arouse, and which other people, even better looking, do not arouse, we must take into account that they are not immobile but in motion, and add to their person a sign corresponding to what in physics is the sign that indicates velocity. If you upset their plans for the day, they confess to you the pleasure that they had hidden from you: "I did so want to go to tea at five o'clock with So-and-So, my dearest friend." Very well, if, six months later, you come to know the person in question, you will learn that the girl whose plans you upset, who, caught in the trap, in order that you might set her free, confessed to you that she was in the habit of

taking tea like this with a dear friend, every day at the hour at which you did not see her — has never once been inside this person's house, that they have never taken tea together, and that the girl used to explain that her whole time was take up by none other than yourself. And so the person with whom she confessed that she had gone to tea, with whom she begged you to allow her to go to tea, that person, the excuse that necessity made her plead, was not the real person, there was somebody, something else! Something else, what? Some one, who?

Alas, the kaleidoscopic eyes starting off into the distance and shadowed with melancholy might enable us perhaps to measure distance, but do not indicate direction. The boundless field of possibilities extends before us, and if by any chance the reality presented itself to our gaze, it would be so far beyond the bounds of possibility that, dashing suddenly against the boundary wall, we should fall over backwards. It is not even essential that we should have proof of her movement and flight, it is enough that we should guess them. She had promised us a letter, we were calm, we were no longer in love. The letter has not come; no messenger appears with it; what can have happened? anxiety is born afresh, and love. It is such people more than any others who inspire love in us, for our destruction. For every fresh anxiety that we feel on their account strips them in our eyes of some of their personality. We were resigned to suffering, thinking that we loved outside ourselves, and we perceive that our love is a function of our sorrow, that our love perhaps is our sorrow, and that its object is, to a very small extent only, the girl with the raven tresses. But, when all is said, it is these people more than any others who inspire love.

Generally speaking, love has not as its object a human body, except when an emotion, the fear of losing it, the uncertainty of finding it again have been infused into it. This sort of anxiety has a great affinity for bodies. It adds to them a quality which surpasses beauty even; which is one of the reasons why we see men who are indifferent to the most beautiful women fall passionately in love with others who appear to us ugly. To these people, these fugitives, their own nature, our anxiety fastens wings. And even when they are in our company the look in their eyes seems to warn us that they are about to take flight. The proof of this beauty, surpassing the beauty added by the wings, is that very often the same person is, in our eyes, alternately wingless and winged. Afraid of losing her, we forget all the others. Sure of keeping her, we compare her with those others whom at once we prefer to her. And as these emotions and these certainties may vary from week to week, a person may one week see sacrificed to her everything that gave us pleasure, in the following week be sacrificed

herself, and so for weeks and months on end. All of which would be incomprehensible did we not know from the experience, which every man shares, of having at least once in a lifetime ceased to love, forgotten a woman, for how very little a person counts in herself when she is no longer — or is not yet — permeable by our emotions. And, be it understood, what we say of fugitives is equally true of those in prison, the captive women, we suppose that we are never to possess them. And so men detest procuresses, for these facilitate the flight, enhance the temptation, but if on the other hand they are in love with a cloistered woman, they willingly have recourse to a procuress to make her emerge from her prison and bring her to them. In so far as relations with women whom we abduct are less permanent than others, the reason is that the fear of not succeeding in procuring them or the dread of seeing them escape is the whole of our love for them and that once they have been carried off from their husbands, torn from their footlights, cured of the temptation to leave us, dissociated in short from our emotion whatever it may be, they are only themselves, that is to say almost nothing, and, so long desired, are soon forsaken by the very man who was so afraid of their forsaking him.

How, I have asked, did I not guess this? But had I not guessed it from the first day at Balbec? Had I not detected in Albertine one of those girls beneath whose envelope of flesh more hidden persons are stirring, than in... I do not say a pack of cards still in its box, a cathedral or a theatre before we enter it, but the whole, vast, ever changing crowd? Not only all these persons, but the desire, the voluptuous memory, the desperate quest of all these persons. At Balbec I had not been troubled because I had never even supposed that one day I should be following a trail, even a false trail. No matter! This had given Albertine, in my eyes, the plenitude of a person filled to the brim by the superimposition of all these persons, and desires and voluptuous memories of persons. And now that she had one day let fall the words ‘Mlle. Vinteuil,’ I would have wished not to tear off her garments so as to see her body but through her body to see and read that memorandum block of her memories and her future, passionate engagements.

How suddenly do the things that are probably the most insignificant assume an extraordinary value when a person whom we love (or who has lacked only this duplicity to make us love her) conceals them from us! In itself, suffering does not of necessity inspire in us sentiments of love or hatred towards the person who causes it: a surgeon can hurt our body without arousing any personal emotion. But a woman who has continued for some time to assure us that we are

everything in the world to her, without being herself everything in the world to us, a woman whom we enjoy seeing, kissing, taking upon our knee, we are astonished if we merely feel from a sudden resistance that we are not free to dispose of her life. Disappointment may then revive in us the forgotten memory of an old anguish, which we know, all the same, to have been provoked not by this woman but by others whose betrayals are milestones in our past life; if it comes to that, how have we the courage to wish to live, how can we move a finger to preserve ourselves from death, in a world in which love is provoked only by falsehood, and consists merely in our need to see our sufferings appeased by the person who has made us suffer? To restore us from the collapse which follows our discovery of her falsehood and her resistance, there is the drastic remedy of endeavouring to act against her will, with the help of people whom we feel to be more closely involved than we are in her life, upon her who is resisting us and lying to us, to play the cheat in turn, to make ourselves loathed. But the suffering caused by such a love is of the sort which must inevitably lead the sufferer to seek in a change of posture an illusory comfort.

These means of action are not wanting, alas! And the horror of the kind of love which uneasiness alone has engendered lies in the fact that we turn over and over incessantly in our cage the most trivial utterances; not to mention that rarely do the people for whom we feel this love appeal to us physically in a complex fashion, since it is not our deliberate preference, but the chance of a minute of anguish, a minute indefinitely prolonged by our weakness of character, which repeats its experiments every evening until it yields to sedatives, that chooses for us.

No doubt my love for Albertine was not the most barren of those to which, through feebleness of will, a man may descend, for it was not entirely platonic; she did give me carnal satisfaction and, besides, she was intelligent. But all this was a superfluity. What occupied my mind was not the intelligent remark that she might have made, but some chance utterance that had aroused in me a doubt as to her actions; I tried to remember whether she had said this or that, in what tone, at what moment, in response to what speech of mine, to reconstruct the whole scene of her dialogue with me, to recall at what moment she had expressed a desire to call upon the Verdurins, what words of mine had brought that look of vexation to her face. The most important matter might have been in question, without my giving myself so much trouble to establish the truth, to restore the proper atmosphere and colour. No doubt, after these anxieties have intensified to a degree which we find insupportable, we do sometimes manage to

soothe them altogether for an evening. The party to which the mistress whom we love is engaged to go, the true nature of which our mind has been toiling for days to discover, we are invited to it also, our mistress has neither looks nor words for anyone but ourselves, we take her home and then we enjoy, all our anxieties dispelled, a repose as complete, as healing, as that which we enjoy at times in the profound sleep that comes after a long walk. And no doubt such repose deserves that we should pay a high price for it. But would it not have been more simple not to purchase for ourselves, deliberately, the preceding anxiety, and at a higher price still? Besides, we know all too well that however profound these momentary relaxations may be, anxiety will still be the stronger. Sometimes indeed it is revived by the words that were intended to bring us repose. But as a rule, all that we do is to change our anxiety. One of the words of the sentence that was meant to calm us sets our suspicions running upon another trail. The demands of our jealousy and the blindness of our credulity are greater than the woman whom we love could ever suppose.

When, of her own accord, she swears to us that some man is nothing more to her than a friend, she appalls us by informing us — a thing we never suspected — that he has been her friend. While she is telling us, in proof of her sincerity, how they took tea together, that very afternoon, at each word that she utters the invisible, the unsuspected takes shape before our eyes. She admits that he has asked her to be his mistress, and we suffer agonies at the thought that she can have listened to his overtures. She refused them, she says. But presently, when we recall what she told us, we shall ask ourselves whether her story is really true, for there is wanting, between the different things that she said to us, that logical and necessary connexion which, more than the facts related, is a sign of the truth. Besides, there was that terrible note of scorn in her: “I said to him no, absolutely,” which is to be found in every class of society, when a woman is lying. We must nevertheless thank her for having refused, encourage her by our kindness to repeat these cruel confidences in the future. At the most, we may remark: “But if he had already made advances to you, why did you accept his invitation to tea?” “So that he should not be angry with me and say that I hadn’t been nice to him.” And we dare not reply that by refusing she would perhaps have been nicer to us.

Albertine alarmed me further when she said that I was quite right to say, out of regard for her reputation, that I was not her lover, since “for that matter,” she went on, “it’s perfectly true that you aren’t.” I was not her lover perhaps in the full sense of the word, but then, was I to suppose that all the things that we did

together she did also with all the other men whose mistress she swore to me that she had never been? The desire to know at all costs what Albertine was thinking, whom she was seeing, with whom she was in love, how strange it was that I should be sacrificing everything to this need, since I had felt the same need to know, in the case of Gilberte, names, facts, which now left me quite indifferent. I was perfectly well aware that in themselves Albertine's actions were of no greater interest. It is curious that a first love, if by the frail state in which it leaves our heart it opens the way to our subsequent loves, does not at least provide us, in view of the identity of symptoms and sufferings, with the means of curing them.

After all, is there any need to know a fact? Are we not aware beforehand, in a general fashion, of the mendacity and even the discretion of those women who have something to conceal? Is there any possibility of error? They make a virtue of their silence, when we would give anything to make them speak. And we feel certain that they have assured their accomplice: "I never tell anything. It won't be through me that anybody will hear about it, I never tell anything." A man may give his fortune, his life for a person, and yet know quite well that in ten years' time, more or less, he would refuse her the fortune, prefer to keep his life. For then the person would be detached from him, alone, that is to say null and void. What attaches us to people are those thousand roots, those innumerable threads which are our memories of last night, our hopes for to-morrow morning, those continuous trammels of habit from which we can never free ourselves. Just as there are misers who hoard money from generosity, so we are spendthrifts who spend from avarice, and it is not so much to a person that we sacrifice our life as to all that the person has been able to attach to herself of our hours, our days, of the things compared with which the life not yet lived, the relatively future life, seems to us more remote, more detached, less practical, less our own. What we require is to disentangle ourselves from those trammels which are so much more important than the person, but they have the effect of creating in us temporary obligations towards her, obligations which mean that we dare not leave her for fear of being misjudged by her, whereas later on we would so dare for, detached from us, she would no longer be ourselves, and because in reality we create for ourselves obligations (even if, by an apparent contradiction, they should lead to suicide) towards ourselves alone.

If I was not in love with Albertine (and of this I could not be sure) then there was nothing extraordinary in the place that she occupied in my life: we live only with what we do not love, with what we have brought to live with us only to kill

the intolerable love, whether it be of a woman, of a place, or again of a woman embodying a place. Indeed we should be sorely afraid to begin to love again if a further separation were to occur. I had not yet reached this stage with Albertine. Her falsehoods, her admissions, left me to complete the task of elucidating the truth: her innumerable falsehoods because she was not content with merely lying, like everyone who imagines that he or she is loved, but was by nature, quite apart from this, a liar, and so inconsistent moreover that, even if she told me the truth every time, told me what, for instance, she thought of other people, she would say each time something different; her admissions, because, being so rare, so quickly cut short, they left between them, in so far as they concerned the past, huge intervals quite blank over the whole expanse of which I was obliged to retrace — and for that first of all to learn — her life.

As for the present, so far as I could interpret the sibylline utterances of Françoise, it was not only in particular details, it was as a whole that Albertine was lying to me, and ‘one fine day’ I would see what Françoise made a pretence of knowing, what she refused to tell me, what I dared not ask her. It was no doubt with the same jealousy that she had felt in the past with regard to Eulalie that Françoise would speak of the most improbable things, so vague that one could at the most suppose them to convey the highly improbable insinuation that the poor captive (who was a lover of women) preferred marriage with somebody who did not appear altogether to be myself. If this were so, how, notwithstanding her power of radiotelepathy, could Françoise have come to hear of it? Certainly, Albertine’s statements could give me no definite enlightenment, for they were as different day by day as the colours of a spinning-top that has almost come to a standstill. However, it seemed that it was hatred, more than anything else, that impelled Françoise to speak. Not a day went by but she said to me, and I in my mother’s absence endured such speeches as:

“To be sure, you yourself are kind, and I shall never forget the debt of gratitude that I owe to you” (this probably so that I might establish fresh claims upon her gratitude) “but the house has become a plague-spot now that kindness has set up knavery in it, now that cleverness is protecting the stupidest person that ever was seen, now that refinement, good manners, wit, dignity in everything allow to lay down the law and rule the roost and put me to shame, who have been forty years in the family — vice, everything that is most vulgar and abject.”

What Françoise resented most about Albertine was having to take orders from somebody who was not one of ourselves, and also the strain of the

additional housework which was affecting the health of our old servant, who would not, for all that, accept any help in the house, not being a ‘good for nothing.’ This in itself would have accounted for her nervous exhaustion, for her furious hatred. Certainly, she would have liked to see Albertine-Esther banished from the house. This was Françoise’s dearest wish. And, by consoling her, its fulfilment alone would have given our old servant some repose. But to my mind there was more in it than this. So violent a hatred could have originated only in an overstrained body. And, more even than of consideration, Françoise was in need of sleep.

Albertine went to take off her things and, so as to lose no time in finding out what I wanted to know, I attempted to telephone to Andrée; I took hold of the receiver, invoked the implacable deities, but succeeded only in arousing their fury which expressed itself in the single word ‘Engaged!’ Andrée was indeed engaged in talking to some one else. As I waited for her to finish her conversation, I asked myself how it was — now that so many of our painters are seeking to revive the feminine portraits of the eighteenth century, in which the cleverly devised setting is a pretext for portraying expressions of expectation, spleen, interest, distraction — how it was that none of our modern Bouchers or Fragonards had yet painted, instead of ‘The Letter’ or ‘The Harpsichord,’ this scene which might be entitled ‘At the Telephone,’ in which there would come spontaneously to the lips of the listener a smile all the more genuine in that it is conscious of being unobserved. At length, Andrée was at the other end: “You are coming to call for Albertine to-morrow?” I asked, and as I uttered Albertine’s name, thought of the envy I had felt for Swann when he said to me on the day of the Princesse de Guermantes’s party: “Come and see Odette,” and I had thought how, when all was said, there must be something in a Christian name which, in the eyes of the whole world including Odette herself, had on Swann’s lips alone this entirely possessive sense.

Must not such an act of possession — summed up in a single word — over the whole existence of another person (I had felt whenever I was in love) be pleasant indeed! But, as a matter of fact, when we are in a position to utter it, either we no longer care, or else habit has not dulled the force of affection, but has changed its pleasure into pain. Falsehood is a very small matter, we live in the midst of it without doing anything but smile at it, we practise it without meaning to do any harm to anyone, but our jealousy is wounded by it, and sees more than the falsehood conceals (often our mistress refuses to spend the evening with us and goes to the theatre simply so that we shall not notice that

she is not looking well). How blind it often remains to what the truth is concealing! But it can extract nothing, for those women who swear that they are not lying would refuse, on the scaffold, to confess their true character. I knew that I alone was in a position to say ‘Albertine’ in that tone to Andrée. And yet, to Albertine, to Andrée, and to myself, I felt that I was nothing. And I realised the impossibility against which love is powerless.

We imagine that love has as its object a person whom we can see lying down before our eyes, enclosed in a human body. Alas, it is the extension of that person to all the points in space and time which the person has occupied and will occupy. If we do not possess its contact with this or that place, this or that hour, we do not possess it. But we cannot touch all these points. If only they were indicated to us, we might perhaps contrive to reach out to them. But we grope for them without finding them. Hence mistrust, jealousy, persecutions. We waste precious time upon absurd clues and pass by the truth without suspecting it.

But already one of the irascible deities, whose servants speed with the agility of lightning, was annoyed, not because I was speaking, but because I was saying nothing. “Come along, I’ve been holding the line for you all this time; I shall cut you off.” However, she did nothing of the sort but, as she evoked Andrée’s presence, enveloped it, like the great poet that a telephone girl always is, in the atmosphere peculiar to the home, the district, the very life itself of Albertine’s friend. “Is that you?” asked Andrée, whose voice was projected towards me with an instantaneous speed by the goddess whose privilege it is to make sound more swift than light. “Listen,” I replied; “go wherever you like, anywhere, except to Mme. Verdurin’s. Whatever happens, you simply must keep Albertine away from there to-morrow.” “Why, that’s where she promised to go to-morrow.” “Ah!”

But I was obliged to break off the conversation for a moment and to make menacing gestures, for if Françoise continued — as though it had been something as unpleasant as vaccination or as dangerous as the aeroplane — to refuse to learn to telephone, whereby she would have spared us the trouble of conversations which she might intercept without any harm, on the other hand she would at once come into the room whenever I was engaged in a conversation so private that I was particularly anxious to keep it from her ears. When she had left the room, not without lingering to take away various things that had been lying there since the previous day and might perfectly well have been left there for an hour longer, and to place in the grate a log that was quite unnecessary in view of my burning fever at the intruder’s presence and my fear of finding myself ‘cut

off' by the operator: "I beg your pardon," I said to Andrée, "I was interrupted. Is it absolutely certain that she has to go to the Verdurins' tomorrow?" "Absolutely, but I can tell her that you don't like it." "No, not at all, but it is possible that I may come with you." "Ah!" said Andrée, in a tone of extreme annoyance and as though alarmed by my audacity, which was all the more encouraged by her opposition. "Then I shall say good night, and please forgive me for disturbing you for nothing." "Not at all," said Andrée, and (since nowadays, the telephone having come into general use, a decorative ritual of polite speeches has grown up round it, as round the tea-tables of the past) added: "It has been a great pleasure to hear your voice."

I might have said the same, and with greater truth than Andrée, for I had been deeply touched by the sound of her voice, having never before noticed that it was so different from the voices of other people. Then I recalled other voices still, women's voices especially, some of them rendered slow by the precision of a question and by mental concentration, others made breathless, even silenced at moments, by the lyrical flow of what the speakers were relating; I recalled one by one the voices of all the girls whom I had known at Balbec, then Gilberte's voice, then my grandmother's, then that of Mme. de Guermantes, I found them all unlike, moulded in a language peculiar to each of the speakers, each playing upon a different instrument, and I said to myself how meagre must be the concert performed in paradise by the three or four angel musicians of the old painters, when I saw mount to the Throne of God, by tens, by hundreds, by thousands, the harmonious and multisonant salutation of all the Voices. I did not leave the telephone without thanking, in a few propitiatory words, her who reigns over the swiftness of sounds for having kindly employed on behalf of my humble words a power which made them a hundred times more rapid than thunder, by my thanksgiving received no other response than that of being cut off.

When Albertine returned to my room, she was wearing a garment of black satin which had the effect of making her seem paler, of turning her into the pallid, ardent Parisian, etiolated by want of fresh air, by the atmosphere of crowds and perhaps by vicious habits, whose eyes seemed more restless because they were not brightened by any colour in her cheeks.

"Guess," I said to her, "to whom I've just been talking on the telephone. Andrée!" "Andrée?" exclaimed Albertine in a harsh tone of astonishment and emotion, which so simple a piece of intelligence seemed hardly to require. "I hope she remembered to tell you that we met Mme. Verdurin the other day." "Mme. Verdurin? I don't remember," I replied, as though I were thinking of

something else, so as to appear indifferent to this meeting and not to betray Andrée who had told me where Albertine was going on the morrow.

But how could I tell that Andrée was not herself betraying me, and would not tell Albertine to-morrow that I had asked her to prevent her at all costs from going to the Verdurins', and had not already revealed to her that I had many times made similar appeals. She had assured me that she had never repeated anything, but the value of this assertion was counterbalanced in my mind by the impression that for some time past Albertine's face had ceased to shew that confidence which she had for so long reposed in me.

What is remarkable is that, a few days before this dispute with Albertine, I had already had a dispute with her, but in Andrée's presence. Now Andrée, while she gave Albertine good advice, had always appeared to be insinuating bad. "Come, don't talk like that, hold your tongue," she said, as though she were at the acme of happiness. Her face assumed the dry raspberry hue of those pious housekeepers who made us dismiss each of our servants in turn. While I was heaping reproaches upon Albertine which I ought never to have uttered, Andrée looked as though she were sucking a lump of barley sugar with keen enjoyment. At length she was unable to restrain an affectionate laugh. "Come, Titine, with me. You know, I'm your dear little sister." I was not merely exasperated by this rather sickly exhibition, I asked myself whether Andrée really felt the affection for Albertine that she pretended to feel. Seeing that Albertine, who knew Andrée far better than I did, had always shrugged her shoulders when I asked her whether she was quite certain of Andrée's affection, and had always answered that nobody in the world cared for her more, I was still convinced that Andrée's affection was sincere. Possibly, in her wealthy but provincial family, one might find an equivalent of some of the shops in the Cathedral square, where certain sweetmeats are declared to be 'the best quality.' But I do know that, for my own part, even if I had invariably come to the opposite conclusion, I had so strong an impression that Andrée was trying to rap Albertine's knuckles that my mistress at once regained my affection and my anger subsided.

Suffering, when we are in love, ceases now and then for a moment, but only to recur in a different form. We weep to see her whom we love no longer respond to us with those outbursts of sympathy, the amorous advances of former days, we suffer more keenly still when, having lost them with us, she recovers them for the benefit of others; then, from this suffering, we are distracted by a new and still more piercing grief, the suspicion that she was lying to us about how she spent the previous evening, when she doubtless played us false; this

suspicion in turn is dispelled, the kindness that our mistress is shewing us soothes us, but then a word that we had forgotten comes back to our mind; some one has told us that she was ardent in moments of pleasure, whereas we have always found her calm; we try to picture to ourselves what can have been these frenzies with other people, we feel how very little we are to her, we observe an air of boredom, longing, melancholy, while we are talking, we observe like a black sky the unpretentious clothes which she puts on when she is with us, keeping for other people the garments with which she used to flatter us at first. If on the contrary she is affectionate, what joy for a moment; but when we see that little tongue outstretched as though in invitation, we think of those people to whom that invitation has so often been addressed, and that perhaps even here at home, even although Albertine was not thinking of them, it has remained, by force of long habit, an automatic signal. Then the feeling that we are bored with each other returns. But suddenly this pain is reduced to nothing when we think of the unknown evil element in her life, of the places impossible to identify where she has been, where she still goes perhaps at the hours when we are not with her, if indeed she is not planning to live there altogether, those places in which she is parted from us, does not belong to us, is happier than when she is with us. Such are the revolving searchlights of jealousy.

Jealousy is moreover a demon that cannot be exorcised, but always returns to assume a fresh incarnation. Even if we could succeed in exterminating them all, in keeping for ever her whom we love, the Spirit of Evil would then adopt another form, more pathetic still, despair at having obtained fidelity only by force, despair at not being loved.

Between Albertine and myself there was often the obstacle of a silence based no doubt upon grievances which she kept to herself, because she supposed them to be irremediable. Charming as Albertine was on some evenings, she no longer shewed those spontaneous impulses which I remembered at Balbec when she used to say: “How good you are to me all the same!” and her whole heart seemed to spring towards me without the reservation of any of those grievances which she now felt and kept to herself because she supposed them no doubt to be irremediable, impossible to forget, unconfessed, but which set up nevertheless between her and myself the significant prudence of her speech or the interval of an impassable silence.

“And may one be allowed to know why you telephoned to Andrée?” “To ask whether she had any objection to my joining you to-morrow, so that I may pay the Verdurins the call I promised them at la Raspelière.” “Just as you like. But I

warn you, there is an appalling mist this evening, and it's sure to last over to-morrow. I mention it, because I shouldn't like you to make yourself ill. Personally, you can imagine I would far rather you came with us. However," she added with a thoughtful air: "I'm not at all sure that I shall go to the Verdurins'. They've been so kind to me that I ought, really.... Next to yourself, they have been nicer to me than anybody, but there are some things about them that I don't quite like. I simply must go to the Bon Marché and the Trois-Quartiers and get a white scarf to wear with this dress which is really too black."

Allow Albertine to go by herself into a big shop crowded with people perpetually rubbing against one, furnished with so many doors that a woman can always say that when she came out she could not find the carriage which was waiting farther along the street; I was quite determined never to consent to such a thing, but the thought of it made me extremely unhappy. And yet I did not take into account that I ought long ago to have ceased to see Albertine, for she had entered, in my life, upon that lamentable period in which a person disseminated over space and time is no longer a woman, but a series of events upon which we can throw no light, a series of insoluble problems, a sea which we absurdly attempt, Xerxes-like, to scourge, in order to punish it for what it has engulfed. Once this period has begun, we are perforce vanquished. Happy are they who understand this in time not to prolong unduly a futile, exhausting struggle, hemmed in on every side by the limits of the imagination, a struggle in which jealousy plays so sorry a part that the same man who once upon a time, if the eyes of the woman who was always by his side rested for an instant upon another man, imagined an intrigue, suffered endless torments, resigns himself in time to allowing her to go out by herself, sometimes with the man whom he knows to be her lover, preferring to the unknown this torture which at least he does know! It is a question of the rhythm to be adopted, which afterwards one follows from force of habit. Neurotics who could never stay away from a dinner-party will afterwards take rest cures which never seem to them to last long enough; women who recently were still of easy virtue live for and by acts of penitence. Jealous lovers who, in order to keep a watch upon her whom they loved, cut short their own hours of sleep, deprived themselves of rest, feeling that her own personal desires, the world, so vast and so secret, time, are stronger than they, allow her to go out without them, then to travel, and finally separate from her. Jealousy thus perishes for want of nourishment and has survived so long only by clamouring incessantly for fresh food. I was still a long way from this state.

I was now at liberty to go out with Albertine as often as I chose. As there had recently sprung up all round Paris a number of aerodromes, which are to aeroplanes what harbours are to ships, and as ever since the day when, on the way to la Raspelière, that almost mythological encounter with an airman, at whose passage overhead my horse had shied, had been to me like a symbol of liberty, I often chose to end our day's excursion — with the ready approval of Albertine, a passionate lover of every form of sport — at one of these aerodromes. We went there, she and I, attracted by that incessant stir of departure and arrival which gives so much charm to a stroll along the pier, or merely upon the beach, to those who love the sea, and to loitering about an 'aviation centre' to those who love the sky. At any moment, amid the repose of the machines that lay inert and as though at anchor, we would see one, laboriously pushed by a number of mechanics, as a boat is pushed down over the sand at the bidding of a tourist who wishes to go for an hour upon the sea. Then the engine was started, the machine ran along the ground, gathered speed, until finally, all of a sudden, at right angles, it rose slowly, in the awkward, as it were paralysed ecstasy of a horizontal speed suddenly transformed into a majestic, vertical ascent. Albertine could not contain her joy, and demanded explanations of the mechanics who, now that the machine was in the air, were strolling back to the sheds. The passenger, meanwhile, was covering mile after mile; the huge skiff, upon which our eyes remained fixed, was nothing more now in the azure than a barely visible spot, which, however, would gradually recover its solidity, size, volume, when, as the time allowed for the excursion drew to an end, the moment came for landing. And we watched with envy, Albertine and I, as he sprang to earth, the passenger who had gone up like that to enjoy at large in those solitary expanses the calm and limpidity of evening. Then, whether from the aerodrome or from some museum, some church that we had been visiting, we would return home together for dinner. And yet, I did not return home calmed, as I used to be at Balbec by less frequent excursions which I rejoiced to see extend over a whole afternoon, used afterwards to contemplate standing out like clustering flowers from the rest of Albertine's life, as against an empty sky, before which we muse pleasantly, without thinking. Albertine's time did not belong to me then in such ample quantities as to-day. And yet, it had seemed to me then to be much more my own, because I took into account only — my love rejoicing in them as in the bestowal of a favour — the hours that she spent with me; now — my jealousy searching anxiously among them for the possibility of a betrayal — only those hours that she spent apart from me.

Well, on the morrow she was looking forward to some such hours. I must choose, either to cease from suffering, or to cease from loving. For, just as in the beginning it is formed by desire, so afterwards love is kept in existence only by painful anxiety. I felt that part of Albertine's life was escaping me. Love, in the painful anxiety as in the blissful desire, is the insistence upon a whole. It is born, it survives only if some part remains for it to conquer. We love only what we do not wholly possess. Albertine was lying when she told me that she probably would not go to the Verdurins', as I was lying when I said that I wished to go there. She was seeking merely to dissuade me from accompanying her, and I, by my abrupt announcement of this plan, which I had no intention of putting into practice, to touch what I felt to be her most sensitive spot, to track down the desire that she was concealing and to force her to admit that my company on the morrow would prevent her from gratifying it. She had virtually made this admission by ceasing at once to wish to go to see the Verdurins.

"If you don't want to go to the Verdurins'," I told her, "there is a splendid charity show at the Trocadéro." She listened to my urging her to attend it with a sorrowful air. I began to be harsh with her as at Balbec, at the time of my first jealousy. Her face reflected a disappointment, and I employed, to reproach my mistress, the same arguments that had been so often advanced against myself by my parents when I was little, and had appeared unintelligent and cruel to my misunderstood childhood. "No, for all your melancholy air," I said to Albertine, "I cannot feel any pity for you; I should feel sorry for you if you were ill, if you were in trouble, if you had suffered some bereavement; not that you would mind that in the least, I dare say, since you pour out false sentiment over every trifle. Anyhow, I have no opinion of the feelings of people who pretend to be so fond of us and are quite incapable of doing us the slightest service, and whose minds wander so that they forget to deliver the letter we have entrusted to them, on which our whole future depends."

These words — a great part of what we say being no more than a recitation from memory — I had heard spoken, all of them, by my mother, who was ever ready to explain to me that we ought not to confuse true feeling, what (she said) the Germans, whose language she greatly admired notwithstanding my father's horror of their nation, called *Empfindung*, and affectation or *Empfindelei*. She had gone so far, once when I was in tears, as to tell me that Nero probably suffered from his nerves and was none the better for that. Indeed, like those plants which bifurcate as they grow, side by side with the sensitive boy which was all that I had been, there was now a man of the opposite sort, full of

common sense, of severity towards the morbid sensibility of others, a man resembling what my parents had been to me. No doubt, as each of us is obliged to continue in himself the life of his forebears, the balanced, cynical man who did not exist in me at the start had joined forces with the sensitive one, and it was natural that I should become in my turn what my parents had been to me.

What is more, at the moment when this new personality took shape in me, he found his language ready made in the memory of the speeches, ironical and scolding, that had been addressed to me, that I must now address to other people, and which came so naturally to my lips, whether I evoked them by mimicry and association of memories, or because the delicate and mysterious enchantments of the reproductive power had traced in me unawares, as upon the leaf of a plant, the same intonations, the same gestures, the same attitudes as had been adopted by the people from whom I sprang. For sometimes, as I was playing the wise counsellor in conversation with Albertine, I seemed to be listening to my grandmother; had it not, moreover, occurred to my mother (so many obscure unconscious currents inflected everything in me down to the tiniest movements of my fingers even, to follow the same cycles as those of my parents) to imagine that it was my father at the door, so similar was my knock to his.

On the other hand the coupling of contrary elements is the law of life, the principle of fertilisation, and, as we shall see, the cause of many disasters. As a general rule, we detest what resembles ourself, and our own faults when observed in another person infuriate us. How much the more does a man who has passed the age at which we instinctively display them, a man who, for instance, has gone through the most burning moments with an icy countenance, execrate those same faults, if it is another man, younger or simpler or stupider, that is displaying them. There are sensitive people to whom merely to see in other people’s eyes the tears which they themselves have repressed is infuriating. It is because the similarity is too great that, in spite of family affection, and sometimes all the more the greater the affection is, families are divided.

Possibly in myself, and in many others, the second man that I had become was simply another aspect of the former man, excitable and sensitive in his own affairs, a sage mentor to other people. Perhaps it was so also with my parents according to whether they were regarded in relation to myself or in themselves. In the case of my grandmother and mother it was as clear as daylight that their severity towards myself was deliberate on their part and indeed cost them a serious effort, but perhaps in my father himself his coldness was but an external aspect of his sensibility. For it was perhaps the human truth of this twofold

aspect: the side of private life, the side of social relations, that was expressed in a sentence which seemed to me at the time as false in its matter as it was commonplace in form, when some one remarked, speaking of my father: “Beneath his icy chill, he conceals an extraordinary sensibility; what is really wrong with him is that he is ashamed of his own feelings.”

Did it not, after all, conceal incessant secret storms, that calm (interspersed if need be with sententious reflexions, irony at the maladroit exhibitions of sensibility) which was his, but which now I too was affecting in my relations with everybody and never laid aside in certain circumstances of my relations with Albertine?

I really believe that I came near that day to making up my mind to break with her and to start for Venice. What bound me afresh in my chains had to do with Normandy, not that she shewed any inclination to go to that region where I had been jealous of her (for it was my good fortune that her plans never impinged upon the painful spots in my memory), but because when I had said to her: “It is just as though I were to speak to you of your aunt’s friend who lived at Infreville,” she replied angrily, delighted — like everyone in a discussion, who is anxious to muster as many arguments as possible on his side — to shew me that I was in the wrong and herself in the right: “But my aunt never knew anybody at Infreville, and I have never been near the place.”

She had forgotten the lie that she had told me one afternoon about the susceptible lady with whom she simply must take tea, even if by going to visit this lady she were to forfeit my friendship and shorten her own life. I did not remind her of her lie. But it appalled me. And once again I postponed our rupture to another day. A person has no need of sincerity, nor even of skill in lying, in order to be loved. I here give the name of love to a mutual torment. I saw nothing reprehensible this evening in speaking to her as my grandmother — that mirror of perfection — used to speak to me, nor, when I told her that I would escort her to the Verdurins’, in having adopted my father’s abrupt manner, who would never inform us of any decision except in the manner calculated to cause us the maximum of agitation, out of all proportion to the decision itself. So that it was easy for him to call us absurd for appearing so distressed by so small a matter, our distress corresponding in reality to the emotion that he had aroused in us. Since — like the inflexible wisdom of my grandmother — these arbitrary moods of my father had been passed on to myself to complete the sensitive nature to which they had so long remained alien, and, throughout my whole childhood, had caused so much suffering, that sensitive nature informed them

very exactly as to the points at which they must take careful aim: there is no better informer than a reformed thief, or a subject of the nation we are fighting. In certain untruthful families, a brother who has come to call upon his brother without any apparent reason and asks him, quite casually, on the doorstep, as he is going away, for some information to which he does not even appear to listen, indicates thereby to his brother that this information was the main object of his visit, for the brother is quite familiar with that air of detachment, those words uttered as though in parentheses and at the last moment, having frequently had recourse to them himself. Well, there are also pathological families, kindred sensibilities, fraternal temperaments, initiated into that mute language which enables people in the family circle to make themselves understood without speaking. And who can be more nerve-wracking than a neurotic? Besides, my conduct, in these cases, may have had a more general, a more profound cause. I mean that in those brief but inevitable moments, when we detest some one whom we love — moments which last sometimes for a whole lifetime in the case of people whom we do not love — we do not wish to appear good, so as not to be pitied, but at once as wicked and as happy as possible so that our happiness may be truly hateful and may ulcerate the soul of the occasional or permanent enemy. To how many people have I not untruthfully slandered myself, simply in order that my ‘successes’ might seem to them immoral and make them all the more angry! The proper thing to do would be to take the opposite course, to shew without arrogance that we have generous feelings, instead of taking such pains to hide them. And it would be easy if we were able never to hate, to love all the time. For then we should be so glad to say only the things that can make other people happy, melt their hearts, make them love us.

To be sure, I felt some remorse at being so irritating to Albertine, and said to myself: “If I did not love her, she would be more grateful to me, for I should not be nasty to her; but no, it would be the same in the end, for I should also be less nice.” And I might, in order to justify myself, have told her that I loved her. But the confession of that love, apart from the fact that it could not have told Albertine anything new, would perhaps have made her colder to myself than the harshness and deceit for which love was the sole excuse. To be harsh and deceitful to the person whom we love is so natural! If the interest that we shew in other people does not prevent us from being kind to them and complying with their wishes, then our interest is not sincere. A stranger leaves us indifferent, and indifference does not prompt us to unkind actions.

The evening passed. Before Albertine went to bed, there was no time to lose

if we wished to make peace, to renew our embraces. Neither of us had yet taken the initiative. Feeling that, anyhow, she was angry with me already, I took advantage of her anger to mention Esther Levy. “Bloch tells me” (this was untrue) “that you are a great friend of his cousin Esther.” “I shouldn’t know her if I saw her,” said Albertine with a vague air. “I have seen her photograph,” I continued angrily. I did not look at Albertine as I said this, so that I did not see her expression, which would have been her sole reply, for she said nothing.

It was no longer the peace of my mother’s kiss at Combray that I felt when I was with Albertine on these evenings, but, on the contrary, the anguish of those on which my mother scarcely bade me good night, or even did not come up at all to my room, whether because she was vexed with me or was kept downstairs by guests. This anguish — not merely its transposition in terms of love — no, this anguish itself which had at one time been specialised in love, which had been allocated to love alone when the division, the distribution of the passions took effect, seemed now to be extending again to them all, become indivisible again as in my childhood, as though all my sentiments which trembled at the thought of my not being able to keep Albertine by my bedside, at once as a mistress, a sister, a daughter; as a mother too, of whose regular good-night kiss I was beginning again to feel the childish need, had begun to coalesce, to unify in the premature evening of my life which seemed fated to be as short as a day in winter. But if I felt the anguish of my childhood, the change of person that made me feel it, the difference of the sentiment that it inspired in me, the very transformation in my character, made it impossible for me to demand the soothing of that anguish from Albertine as in the old days from my mother.

I could no longer say: “I am unhappy.” I confined myself, with death at my heart, to speaking of unimportant things which afforded me no progress towards a happy solution. I waded knee-deep in painful platitudes. And with that intellectual egoism which, if only some insignificant fact has a bearing upon our love, makes us pay great respect to the person who has discovered it, as fortuitously perhaps as the fortune-teller who has foretold some trivial event which has afterwards come to pass, I came near to regarding Françoise as more inspired than Bergotte and Elstir because she had said to me at Balbec: “That girl will only land you in trouble.”

Every minute brought me nearer to Albertine’s good night, which at length she said. But this evening her kiss, from which she herself was absent, and which did not encounter myself, left me so anxious that, with a throbbing heart, I watched her make her way to the door, thinking: “If I am to find a pretext for

calling her back, keeping her here, making peace with her, I must make haste; only a few steps and she will be out of the room, only two, now one, she is turning the handle; she is opening the door, it is too late, she has shut it behind her!" Perhaps it was not too late, all the same. As in the old days at Combray when my mother had left me without soothing me with her kiss, I wanted to dart in pursuit of Albertine, I felt that there would be no peace for me until I had seen her again, that this next meeting was to be something immense which no such meeting had ever yet been, and that — if I did not succeed by my own efforts in ridding myself of this melancholy — I might perhaps acquire the shameful habit of going to beg from Albertine. I sprang out of bed when she was already in her room, I paced up and down the corridor, hoping that she would come out of her room and call me; I stood without breathing outside her door for fear of failing to hear some faint summons, I returned for a moment to my own room to see whether my mistress had not by some lucky chance forgotten her handkerchief, her bag, something which I might have appeared to be afraid of her wanting during the night, and which would have given me an excuse for going to her room. No, there was nothing. I returned to my station outside her door, but the crack beneath it no longer shewed any light. Albertine had put out the light, she was in bed, I remained there motionless, hoping for some lucky accident but none occurred; and long afterwards, frozen, I returned to bestow myself between my own sheets and cried all night long.

But there were certain evenings also when I had recourse to a ruse which won me Albertine's kiss. Knowing how quickly sleep came to her as soon as she lay down (she knew it also, for, instinctively, before lying down, she would take off her slippers, which I had given her, and her ring which she placed by the bedside, as she did in her own room when she went to bed), knowing how heavy her sleep was, how affectionate her awakening, I would plead the excuse of going to look for something and make her lie down upon my bed. When I returned to the room she was asleep and I saw before me the other woman that she became whenever one saw her full face. But she very soon changed her identity, for I lay down by her side and recaptured her profile. I could place my hand in her hand, on her shoulder, on her cheek. Albertine continued to sleep.

I might take her head, turn it round, press it to my lips, encircle my neck in her arms, she continued to sleep like a watch that does not stop, like an animal that goes on living whatever position you assign to it, like a climbing plant, a convulvulus which continues to thrust out its tendrils whatever support you give it. Only her breathing was altered by every touch of my fingers, as though she

had been an instrument on which I was playing and from which I extracted modulations by drawing from first one, then another of its strings different notes. My jealousy grew calm, for I felt that Albertine had become a creature that breathes, that is nothing else besides, as was indicated by that regular breathing in which is expressed that pure physiological function which, wholly fluid, has not the solidity either of speech or of silence; and, in its ignorance of all evil, her breath, drawn (it seemed) rather from a hollowed reed than from a human being, was truly paradisal, was the pure song of the angels to me who, at these moments, felt Albertine to be withdrawn from everything, not only materially but morally. And yet in that breathing, I said to myself of a sudden that perhaps many names of people borne on the stream of memory must be playing. Sometimes indeed to that music the human voice was added. Albertine uttered a few words. How I longed to catch their meaning! It happened that the name of a person of whom we had been speaking and who had aroused my jealousy came to her lips, but without making me unhappy, for the memory that it brought with it seemed to be only that of the conversations that she had had with me upon the subject. This evening, however, when with her eyes still shut she was half awake, she said, addressing myself: “Andrée.” I concealed my emotion. “You are dreaming, I am not Andrée,” I said to her, smiling. She smiled also. “Of course not, I wanted to ask you what Andrée was saying to you.” “I should have supposed that you were used to lying like this by her side.” “Oh no, never,” she said. Only, before making this reply, she had hidden her face for a moment in her hands. So her silences were merely screens, her surface affection merely kept beneath the surface a thousand memories which would have rent my heart, her life was full of those incidents the derisive account, the comic history of which form our daily gossip at the expense of other people, people who do not matter, but which, so long as a person remains lost in the dark forest of our heart, seem to us so precious a revelation of her life that, for the privilege of exploring that subterranean world, we would gladly sacrifice our own. Then her sleep appeared to me a marvellous and magic world in which at certain moments there rises from the depths of the barely translucent element the confession of a secret which we shall not understand. But as a rule, when Albertine was asleep, she seemed to have recovered her innocence. In the attitude which I had imposed upon her, but which in her sleep she had speedily made her own, she looked as though she were trusting herself to me! Her face had lost any expression of cunning or vulgarity, and between herself and me, towards whom she was raising her arm, upon whom her hand was resting, there seemed to be an

absolute surrender, an indissoluble attachment. Her sleep moreover did not separate her from me and allowed her to rétain her consciousness of our affection; its effect was rather to abolish everything else; I embraced her, told her that I was going to take a turn outside, she half-opened her eyes, said to me with an air of astonishment — indeed the hour was late: “But where are you off to, my darling ——” calling me by my Christian name, and at once fell asleep again. Her sleep was only a sort of obliteration of the rest of her life, a continuous silence over which from time to time would pass in their flight words of intimate affection. By putting these words together, you would have arrived at the unalloyed conversation, the secret intimacy of a pure love. This calm slumber delighted me, as a mother is delighted, reckoning it among his virtues, by the sound sleep of her child. And her sleep was indeed that of a child. Her waking also, and so natural, so loving, before she even knew where she was, that I sometimes asked myself with terror whether she had been in the habit, before coming to live with me, of not sleeping by herself but of finding, when she opened her eyes, some one lying by her side. But her childish charm was more striking. Like a mother again, I marvelled that she should always awake in so good a humour. After a few moments she recovered consciousness, uttered charming words, unconnected with one another, mere bird-pipings. By a sort of ‘general post’ her throat, which as a rule passed unnoticed, now almost startlingly beautiful, had acquired the immense importance which her eyes, by being closed in sleep, had forfeited, her eyes, my regular informants to which I could no longer address myself after the lids had closed over them. Just as the closed lids impart an innocent, grave beauty to the face by suppressing all that the eyes express only too plainly, there was in the words, not devoid of meaning, but interrupted by moments of silence, which Albertine uttered as she awoke, a pure beauty that is not at every moment polluted, as is conversation, by habits of speech, commonplaces, traces of blemish. Anyhow, when I had decided to wake Albertine, I had been able to do so without fear, I knew that her awakening would bear no relation to the evening that we had passed together, but would emerge from her sleep as morning emerges from night. As soon as she had begun to open her eyes with a smile, she had offered me her lips, and before she had even uttered a word, I had tasted their fresh savour, as soothing as that of a garden still silent before the break of day.

On the morrow of that evening when Albertine had told me that she would perhaps be going, then that she would not be going to see the Verdurins, I awoke early, and, while I was still half asleep, my joy informed me that there was, interpolated in the winter, a day of spring. Outside, popular themes skilfully transposed for various instruments, from the horn of the mender of porcelain, or the trumpet of the chair weaver, to the flute of the goat driver who seemed, on a fine morning, to be a Sicilian goatherd, were lightly orchestrating the matutinal air, with an 'Overture for a Public Holiday.' Our hearing, that delicious sense, brings us the company of the street, every line of which it traces for us, sketches all the figures that pass along it, shewing us their colours. The iron shutters of the baker's shop, of the dairy, which had been lowered last night over every possibility of feminine bliss, were rising now like the canvas of a ship which is setting sail and about to proceed, crossing the transparent sea, over a vision of young female assistants. This sound of the iron curtain being raised would perhaps have been my sole pleasure in a different part of the town. In this quarter a hundred other sounds contributed to my joy, of which I would not have lost a single one by remaining too long asleep. It is the magic charm of the old aristocratic quarters that they are at the same time plebeian. Just as, sometimes, cathedrals used to have them within a stone's throw of their porches (which have even preserved the name, like the porch of Rouen styled the Booksellers', because these latter used to expose their merchandise in the open air against its walls), so various minor trades, but peripatetic, used to pass in front of the noble Hôtel de Guermantes, and made one think at times of the ecclesiastical France of long ago. For the appeal which they launched at the little houses on either side had, with rare exceptions, nothing of a song. It differed from song as much as the declamation — barely coloured by imperceptible modulations — of *Boris Godounov* and *Pelléas*; but on the other hand recalled the psalmody of a priest chanting his office of which these street scenes are but the good-humoured, secular, and yet half liturgical counterpart. Never had I so delighted in them as since Albertine had come to live with me; they seemed to me a joyous signal of her awakening, and by interesting me in the life of the world outside made me all the more conscious of the soothing virtue of a beloved presence, as constant as I could wish. Several of the foodstuffs cried in the street, which personally I detested, were greatly to Albertine's liking, so much so that Françoise used to send her young footman out to buy them, slightly humiliated perhaps at finding himself mingled with the plebeian crowd. Very distinct in this peaceful quarter

(where the noise was no longer a cause of lamentation to Françoise and had become a source of pleasure to myself), there came to me, each with its different modulation, recitatives declaimed by those humble folk as they would be in the music — so entirely popular — of *Boris*, where an initial intonation is barely altered by the inflexion of one note which rests upon another, the music of the crowd which is more a language than a music. It was "*ah! le bigorneau, deux sous le bigorneau*," which brought people running to the cornets in which were sold those horrid little shellfish, which, if Albertine had not been there, would have disgusted me, just as the snails disgusted me which I heard cried for sale at the same hour. Here again it was of the barely lyrical declamation of Moussorgsky that the vendor reminded me, but not of it alone. For after having almost 'spoken': "*Les escargots, ils sont frais, ils sont beaux*," it was with the vague melancholy of Maeterlinck, transposed into music by Debussy, that the snail vendor, in one of those pathetic finales in which the composer of Pelléas shews his kinship with Rameau: "If vanquished I must be, is it for thee to be my vanquisher?" added with a singsong melancholy: "*On les vend six sous la douzaine*..."

I have always found it difficult to understand why these perfectly simple words were sighed in a tone so far from appropriate, mysterious, like the secret which makes everyone look sad in the old palace to which Mélisande has not succeeded in bringing joy, and profound as one of the thoughts of the aged Arkel who seeks to utter, in the simplest words, the whole lore of wisdom and destiny. The very notes upon which rises with an increasing sweetness the voice of the old King of Allemonde or that of Goland, to say: "We know not what is happening here, it may seem strange, maybe nought that happens is in vain," or else: "No cause here for alarm, 'twas a poor little mysterious creature, like all the world," were those which served the snail vendor to resume, in an endless cadenza: "*On les vend six sous la douzaine*..." But this metaphysical lamentation had not time to expire upon the shore of the infinite, it was interrupted by a shrill trumpet. This time, it was no question of victuals, the words of the libretto were: "*Tond les chiens, coupe les chats, les queues et les oreilles*."

It was true that the fantasy, the spirit of each vendor or vendress frequently introduced variations into the words of all these chants that I used to hear from my bed. And yet a ritual suspension interposing a silence in the middle of a word, especially when it was repeated a second time, constantly reminded me of some old church. In his little cart drawn by a she-ass which he stopped in front of each house before entering the courtyard, the old-clothes man, brandishing a

whip, intoned: "*Habits, marchand d'habits, ha... bits*" with the same pause between the final syllables as if he had been intoning in plain chant: "*Per omnia saecula saeculo... rum*" or "*requiescat in pa... ce*" albeit he had no reason to believe in the immortality of his clothes, nor did he offer them as cerements for the supreme repose in peace. And similarly, as the motives were beginning, even at this early hour, to become confused, a vegetable woman, pushing her little hand-cart, was using for her litany the Gregorian division:

A la tendresse, à la verduresse,
Artichauts tendres et beaux,
Arti... chauts.

although she had probably never heard of the antiphonal, or of the seven tones that symbolise four the sciences of the quadrivium and three those of the trivium.

Drawing from a penny whistle, from a bagpipe, airs of his own southern country whose sunlight harmonised well with these fine days, a man in a blouse, wielding a bull's pizzle in his hand and wearing a basque béret on his head, stopped before each house in turn. It was the goatherd with two dogs driving before him his string of goats. As he came from a distance, he arrived fairly late in our quarter; and the women came running out with bowls to receive the milk that was to give strength to their little ones. But with the Pyrenean airs of this good shepherd was now blended the bell of the grinder, who cried: "*Couteaux, ciseaux, rasoirs*." With him the saw-setter was unable to compete, for, lacking an instrument, he had to be content with calling: "*Avez-vous des scies à repasser, v'ià le repasseur*," while in a gayer mood the tinker, after enumerating the pots, pans and everything else that he repaired, intoned the refrain:

Tam, tam, tam,
C'est moi qui rétame
Même le macadam,
C'est moi qui mets des fonds partout,
Qui bouche tous les trous, trou, trou;

and young Italians carrying big iron boxes painted red, upon which the numbers — winning and losing — were marked, and springing their rattles, gave the invitation: "*Amusez-vous, mesdames, v'là le plaisir*."

Françoise brought in the *Figaro*. A glance was sufficient to shew me that my article had not yet appeared. She told me that Albertine had asked whether she might come to my room and sent word that she had quite given up the idea of calling upon the Verdurins, and had decided to go, as I had advised her, to the

‘special’ matinée at the Trocadéro — what nowadays would be called, though with considerably less significance, a ‘gala’ matinée — after a short ride which she had promised to take with Andrée. Now that I knew that she had renounced her desire, possibly evil, to go and see Mme. Verdurin, I said with a laugh: “Tell her to come in,” and told myself that she might go where she chose and that it was all the same to me. I knew that by the end of the afternoon, when dusk began to fall, I should probably be a different man, moping, attaching to every one of Albertine’s movements an importance that they did not possess at this morning hour when the weather was so fine. For my indifference was accompanied by a clear notion of its cause, but was in no way modified by it. “Françoise assured me that you were awake and that I should not be disturbing you,” said Albertine as she entered the room. And since next to making me catch cold by opening the window at the wrong moment, what Albertine most dreaded was to come into my room when I was asleep: “I hope I have not done anything wrong,” she went on. “I was afraid you would say to me: What insolent mortal comes here to meet his doom?” and she laughed that laugh which I always found so disturbing. I replied in the same vein of pleasantry: “Was it for you this stern decree was made?”— and, lest she should ever venture to break it, added: “Although I should be furious if you did wake me.” “I know, I know, don’t be frightened,” said Albertine. And, to relieve the situation, I went on, still enacting the scene from Esther with her, while in the street below the cries continued, drowned by our conversation: “I find in you alone a certain grace That charms me and of which I never tire” (and to myself I thought: “yes, she does tire me very often”). And remembering what she had said to me overnight, as I thanked her extravagantly for having given up the Verdurins, so that another time she would obey me similarly with regard to something else, I said: “Albertine, you distrust me who love you and you place your trust in other people who do not love you” (as though it were not natural to distrust the people who love us and who alone have an interest in lying to us in order to find out things, to hinder us), and added these lying words: “You don’t really believe that I love you, which is amusing. As a matter of fact, I don’t adore you.” She lied in her turn when she told me that she trusted nobody but myself and then became sincere when she assured me that she knew very well that I loved her. But this affirmation did not seem to imply that she did not believe me to be a liar and a spy. And she seemed to pardon me as though she had seen these defects to be the agonising consequence of a strong passion or as though she herself had felt herself to be less good. “I beg of you, my dearest girl, no more of that haute voltige you were

practising the other day. Just think, Albertine, if you were to meet with an accident!" Of course I did not wish her any harm. But what a pleasure it would be if, with her horses, she should take it into her head to ride off somewhere, wherever she chose, and never to return again to my house. How it would simplify everything, that she should go and live happily somewhere else, I did not even wish to know where. "Ohl I know you wouldn't survive me for more than a day; you would commit suicide."

So we exchanged lying speeches. But a truth more profound than that which we would utter were we sincere may sometimes be expressed and announced by another channel than that of sincerity. "You don't mind all that noise outside," she asked me; "I love it. But you're such a light sleeper anyhow." I was on the contrary an extremely heavy sleeper (as I have already said, but I am obliged to repeat it in view of what follows), especially when I did not begin to sleep until the morning. As this kind of sleep is — on an average — four times as refreshing, it seems to the awakened sleeper to have lasted four times as long, when it has really been four times as short. A splendid, sixteenfold error in multiplication which gives so much beauty to our awakening and makes life begin again on a different scale, like those great changes of rhythm which, in music, mean that in an andante a quaver has the same duration as a minim in a prestissimo, and which are unknown in our waking state. There life is almost always the same, whence the disappointments of travel. It may seem indeed that our dreams are composed of the coarsest stuff of life, but that stuff is treated, kneaded so thoroughly, with a protraction due to the fact that none of the temporal limitations of the waking state is there to prevent it from spinning itself out to heights so vast that we fail to recognise it. On the mornings after this good fortune had befallen me, after the sponge of sleep had obliterated from my brain the signs of everyday occupations that are traced upon it as upon a blackboard, I was obliged to bring my memory back to life; by the exercise of our will we can recapture what the amnesia of sleep or of a stroke has made us forget, what gradually returns to us as our eyes open or our paralysis disappears. I had lived through so many hours in a few minutes that, wishing to address Françoise, for whom I had rung, in language that corresponded to the facts of real life and was regulated by the clock, I was obliged to exert all my power of internal repression in order not to say: "Well, Françoise, here we are at five o'clock in the evening and I haven't set eyes on you since yesterday afternoon." And seeking to dispel my dreams, giving them the lie and lying to myself as well, I said boldly, compelling myself with all my might to silence, the direct opposite: "Françoise,

it must be at least ten!” I did not even say ten o’clock in the morning, but simply ten, so that this incredible hour might appear to be uttered in a more natural tone. And yet to say these words, instead of those that continued to run in the mind of the half-awakened sleeper that I still was, demanded the same effort of equilibrium that a man requires when he jumps out of a moving train and runs for some yards along the platform, if he is to avoid falling. He runs for a moment because the environment that he has just left was one animated by great velocity, and utterly unlike the inert soil upon which his feet find it difficult to keep their balance.

Because the dream world is not the waking world, it does not follow that the waking world is less genuine, far from it. In the world of sleep, our perceptions are so overcharged, each of them increased by a counterpart which doubles its bulk and blinds it to no purpose, that we are not able even to distinguish what is happening in the bewilderment of awakening; was it Françoise that had come to me, or I that, tired of waiting, went to her? Silence at that moment was the only way not to reveal anything, as at the moment when we are brought before a magistrate cognisant of all the charges against us, when we have not been informed of them ourselves. Was it Françoise that had come, was it I that had summoned her? Was it not, indeed, Françoise that had been asleep and I that had just awoken her; nay more, was not Françoise enclosed in my breast, for the distinction between persons and their reaction upon one another barely exists in that murky obscurity in which reality is as little translucent as in the body of a porcupine, and our all but non-existent perception may perhaps furnish an idea of the perception of certain animals. Besides, in the limpid state of unreason that precedes these heavy slumbers, if fragments of wisdom float there luminously, if the names of Taine and George Eliot are not unknown, the waking life does still retain the superiority, inasmuch as it is possible to continue it every morning, whereas it is not possible to continue the dream life every night. But are there perhaps other worlds more real than the waking world? Even if we have seen transformed by every revolution in the arts, and still more, at the same time, by the degree of proficiency and culture that distinguishes an artist from an ignorant fool.

And often an extra hour of sleep is a paralytic stroke after which we must recover the use of our limbs, learn to speak. Our will would not be adequate for this task. We have slept too long, we no longer exist. Our waking is barely felt, mechanically and without consciousness, as a water pipe might feel the turning off of a tap. A life more inanimate than that of the jellyfish follows, in which we

could equally well believe that we had been drawn up from the depths of the sea or released from prison, were we but capable of thinking anything at all. But then from the highest heaven the goddess Mnemotechnia bends down and holds out to us in the formula ‘the habit of ringing for our coffee’ the hope of resurrection. However, the instantaneous gift of memory is not always so simple. Often we have before us, in those first minutes in which we allow ourself to slip into the waking state, a truth composed of different realities among which we imagine that we can choose, as among a pack of cards.

It is Friday morning and we have just returned from our walk, or else it is teatime by the sea. The idea of sleep and that we are lying in bed and in our nightshirt is often the last that occurs to us.

Our resurrection is not effected at once; we think that we have rung the bell, we have not done so, we utter senseless remarks. Movement alone restores our thought, and when we have actually pressed the electric button we are able to say slowly but distinctly: “It must be at least ten o’clock, Françoise, bring me my coffee.” Oh, the miracle! Françoise could have had no suspicion of the sea of unreality in which I was still wholly immersed and through which I had had the energy to make my strange question pass. Her answer was: “It is ten past ten.” Which made my remark appear quite reasonable, and enabled me not to let her perceive the fantastic conversations by which I had been interminably beguiled, on days when it was not a mountain of non-existence that had crushed all life out of me. By strength of will, I had reinstated myself in life. I was still enjoying the last shreds of sleep, that is to say of the only inventiveness, the only novelty that exists in story-telling, since none of our narrations in the waking state, even though they be adorned with literary graces, admit those mysterious differences from which beauty derives. It is easy to speak of the beauty created by opium. But to a man who is accustomed to sleeping only with the aid of drugs, an unexpected hour of natural sleep will reveal the vast, matutinal expanse of a country as mysterious and more refreshing. By varying the hour, the place at which we go to sleep, by wooing sleep in an artificial manner, or on the contrary by returning for once to natural sleep — the strangest kind of all to whoever is in the habit of putting himself to sleep with soporifics — we succeed in producing a thousand times as many varieties of sleep as a gardener could produce of carnations or roses. Gardeners produce flowers that are delicious dreams, and others too that are like nightmares. When I fell asleep in a certain way I used to wake up shivering, thinking that I had caught the measles, or, what was far more painful, that my grandmother (to whom I never gave a thought now) was hurt

because I had laughed at her that day when, at Balbec, in the belief that she was about to die, she had wished me to have a photograph of herself. At once, albeit I was awake, I felt that I must go and explain to her that she had misunderstood me. But, already, my bodily warmth was returning. The diagnosis of measles was set aside, and my grandmother became so remote that she no longer made my heart throb. Sometimes over these different kinds of sleep there fell a sudden darkness. Ï was afraid to continue my walk along an entirely unlighted avenue, where I could hear prowling footsteps. Suddenly a dispute broke out between a policeman and one of those women whom one often saw driving hackney carriages, and mistook at a distance for young men. Upon her box among the shadows I could not see her, but she spoke, and in her voice I could read the perfections of her face and the youthfulness of her body. I strode towards her, in the darkness, to get into her carriage before she drove off. It was a long way. Fortunately, her dispute with the policeman continued. I overtook the carriage which was still drawn up. This part of the avenue was lighted by street lamps. The driver became visible. She was indeed a woman, but old and corpulent, with white hair tumbling beneath her hat, and a red birthmark on her face. I walked past her, thinking: Is this what happens to the youth of women? Those whom we have met in the past, if suddenly we desire to see them again, have they become old? Is the young woman whom we desire like a character on the stage, when, unable to secure the actress who created the part, the management is obliged to entrust it to a new star? But then it is no longer the same.

With this a feeling of melancholy invaded me. We have thus in our sleep a number of Pities, like the ‘Pietà’ of the Renaissance, but not, like them, wrought in marble, being, rather, unsubstantial. They have their purpose, however, which is to make us remember a certain outlook upon things, more tender, more human, which we are too apt to forget in the common sense, frigid, sometimes full of hostility, of the waking state. Thus I was reminded of the vow that I had made at Balbec that I would always treat Françoise with compassion. And for the whole of that morning at least I would manage to compel myself not to be irritated by Fran-çoise’s quarrels with the butler, to be gentle with Françoise to whom the others shewed so little kindness. For that morning only, and I would have to try to frame a code that was a little more permanent; for, just as nations are not governed for any length of time by a policy of pure sentiment, so men are not governed by the memory of their dreams. Already this dream was beginning to fade away. In attempting to recall it in order to portray it I made it fade all the faster. My eyelids were no longer so firmly sealed over my eyes. If I tried to

reconstruct my dream, they opened completely. At every moment we must choose between health and sanity on the one hand, and spiritual pleasures on the other. I have always taken the cowardly part of choosing the former. Moreover, the perilous power that I was renouncing was even more perilous than we suppose. Pities, dreams, do not fly away unaccompanied. When we alter thus the conditions in which we go to sleep, it is not our dreams alone that fade, but, for days on end, for years it may be, the faculty not merely of dreaming but of going to sleep. Sleep is divine but by no means stable; the slightest shock makes it volatile. A lover of habits, they retain it every night, being more fixed than itself, in the place set apart for it, they preserve it from all injury, but if we displace it, if it is no longer subordinated, it melts away like a vapour. It is like youth and love, never to be recaptured.

In these various forms of sleep, as likewise in music, it was the lengthening or shortening of the interval that created beauty. I enjoyed this beauty, but, on the other hand, I had lost in my sleep, however brief, a good number of the cries which render perceptible to us the peripatetic life of the tradesmen, the victuallers of Paris. And so, as a habit (without, alas, foreseeing the drama in which these late awakenings and the Draconian, Medo-Persian laws of a Racinian Assuérus were presently to involve me) I made an effort to awaken early so as to lose none of these cries.

And, more than the pleasure of knowing how fond Albertine was of them and of being out of doors myself without leaving my bed, I heard in them as it were the symbol of the atmosphere of the world outside, of the dangerous stirring life through the veins of which I did not allow her to move save under my tutelage, from which I withdrew her at the hour of my choosing to make her return home to my side. And so it was with the most perfect sincerity that I was able to say in answer to Albertine: “On the contrary, they give me pleasure because I know that you like them.” “*A la barque, les huîtres, à la barque*.” “Oh, oysters! I’ve been simply longing for some!” Fortunately Albertine, partly from inconsistency, partly from docility, quickly forgot the things for which she had been longing, and before I had time to tell her that she would find better oysters at Prunier’s, she wanted in succession all the things that she heard cried by the fish hawker: “*A la crevette, à la bonne crevette, j’ai de la raie toute en vie, toute en vie.” “Merlans à frire, à frire.” “Il arrive le maquereau, maquereau frais, maquereau nouveau.” “Voilà le maquereau, mesdames, il est beau le maquereau.” “A la moule fraîche et bonne, à la moule*!” In spite of myself, the warning: “*Il arrive le maquereau*” made me shudder. But as this warning could

not, I felt, apply to our chauffeur, I thought only of the fish of that name, which I detested, and my uneasiness did not last. “Ah! Mussels,” said Albertine, “I should so like some mussels.” “My darling! They were all very well at Balbec, here they’re not worth eating; besides, I implore you, remember what Cottard told you about mussels.” But my remark was all the more ill-chosen in that the vegetable woman who came next announced a thing that Cottard had forbidden even more strictly:

A la romaine, à la romaine!

On ne le vend pas, on la promène.

Albertine consented, however, to sacrifice her lettuces, on the condition that I would promise to buy for her in a few days’ time from the woman who cried: “*J’ai de la belle asperge d’Argenteuil, j’ai de la belle asperge*.” A mysterious voice, from which one would have expected some stranger utterance, insinuated: “Tonneaux, tonneaux!” We were obliged to remain under the disappointment that nothing more was being offered us than barrels, for the word was almost entirely drowned by the appeal: “*Vitri, vitri-er, carreaux cassés, voilà le vitrier, vitri-er*,” a Gregorian division which reminded me less, however, of the liturgy than did the appeal of the rag vendor, reproducing unconsciously one of those abrupt interruptions of sound, in the middle of a prayer, which are common enough in the ritual of the church: “*Praeceptis salutaribus moniti et divina institutione formait audemus dicere*,” says the priest, ending sharply upon ‘*dicere*.’ Without irreverence, as the populace of the middle ages used to perform plays and farces within the consecrated ground of the church, it is of that ‘*dicere*’ that this rag vendor makes one think when, after drawling the other words, he utters the final syllable with a sharpness befitting the accentuation laid down by the great Pope of the seventh century: “*Chiffons, ferrailles à vendre*” (all this chanted slowly, as are the two syllables that follow, whereas the last concludes more briskly than ‘*dicere*’) “*peaux d’la-pins*.” “*La Valence, la belle Valence, la fraîche orange*.” The humble leeks even: “*Voilà d’beaux poireaux*,” the onions: “*Huit sous mon oignon*,” sounded for me as if it were an echo of the rolling waves in which, left to herself, Albertine might have perished, and thus assumed the sweetness of a “*Suave mari magno.” “Voilà des carrottes à deux ronds la botte*.” “Oh!” exclaimed Albertine, “cabbages, carrots, oranges. All the things I want to eat. Do make Françoise go out and buy some. She shall cook us a dish of creamed carrots. Besides, it will be so nice to eat all these things together. It will be all the sounds that we hear, transformed into a good dinner.... Oh, please, ask Françoise to give us instead a ray with black butter. It is so good!” “My dear

child, of course I will, but don't wait; if you do, you'll be asking for all the things on the vegetable-barrows." "Very well, I'm off, but I never want anything again for our dinners except what we've heard cried in the street. It is such fun. And to think that we shall have to wait two whole months before we hear: '*Haricots verts et tendres, haricots, v'la l'haricot vert*.' How true that is: tender haricots; you know I like them as soft as soft, dripping with vinegar sauce, you wouldn't think you were eating, they melt in the mouth like drops of dew. Oh dear, it's the same with the little hearts of cream cheese, such a long time to wait: '*Bon fromage à la cré, à la cré, bon fromage*.' And the water-grapes from Fontainebleau: '*J'ai du bon chasselas*.'" And I thought with dismay of all the time that I should have to spend with her before the water-grapes were in season. "Listen, I said that I wanted only the things that we had heard cried, but of course I make exceptions. And so it's by no means impossible that I may look in at Rebattet's and order an ice for the two of us. You will tell me that it's not the season for them, but I do so want one!" I was disturbed by this plan of going to Rebattet's, rendered more certain and more suspicious in my eyes by the words 'it's by no means impossible.' It was the day on which the Verdurins were at home, and, ever since Swann had informed them that Rebattet's was the best place, it was there that they ordered their ices and pastry. "I have no objection to an ice, my darling Albertine, but let me order it for you, I don't know myself whether it will be from Poiré-Blanche's, or Rebattet's, or the Ritz, anyhow I shall see." "Then you're going out?" she said with an air of distrust. She always maintained that she would be delighted if I went out more often, but if anything that I said could make her suppose that I would not be staying indoors, her uneasy air made me think that the joy that she would feel in seeing me go out every day was perhaps not altogether sincere. "I may perhaps go out, perhaps not, you know quite well that I never make plans beforehand. In any case ices are not a thing that is cried, that people hawk in the streets, why do you want one?" And then she replied in words which shewed me what a fund of intelligence and latent taste had developed in her since Balbec, in words akin to those which, she pretended, were due entirely to my influence, to living continually in my company, words which, however, I should never have uttered, as though I had been in some way forbidden by some unknown authority ever to decorate my conversation with literary forms. Perhaps the future was not destined to be the same for Albertine as for myself. I had almost a presentiment of this when I saw her eagerness to employ in speech images so 'written,' which seemed to me to be reserved for another, more sacred use, of which I was still

ignorant. She said to me (and I was, in spite of everything, deeply touched, for I thought to myself: Certainly I would not speak as she does, and yet, all the same, but for me she would not be speaking like this, she has come profoundly under my influence, she cannot therefore help loving me, she is my handiwork): “What I like about these foodstuffs that are cried is that a thing which we hear like a rhapsody changes its nature when it comes to our table and addresses itself to my palate. As for ices (for I hope that you won’t order me one that isn’t cast in one of those old-fashioned moulds which have every architectural shape imaginable), whenever I take one, temples, churches, obelisks, rocks, it is like an illustrated geography-book which I look at first of all and then convert its raspberry or vanilla monuments into coolness in my throat.” I thought that this was a little too well expressed, but she felt that I thought that it was well expressed, and went on, pausing for a moment when she had brought off her comparison to laugh that beautiful laugh of hers which was so painful to me because it was so voluptuous. “Oh dear, at the Ritz I’m afraid you’ll find Vendôme Columns of ice, chocolate ice or raspberry, and then you will need a lot of them so that they may look like votive pillars or pylons erected along an avenue to the glory of Coolness. They make raspberry obelisks too, which will rise up here and there in the burning desert of my thirst, and I shall make their pink granite crumble and melt deep down in my throat which they will refresh better than any oasis” (and here the deep laugh broke out, whether from satisfaction at talking so well, or in derision of herself for using such hackneyed images, or, alas, from a physical pleasure at feeling inside herself something so good, so cool, which was tantamount to a sensual satisfaction). “Those mountains of ice at the Ritz sometimes suggest Monte Rosa, and indeed, if it is a lemon ice, I do not object to its not having a monumental shape, its being irregular, abrupt, like one of Elstir’s mountains. It ought not to be too white then, but slightly yellowish, with that look of dull, dirty snow that Elstir’s mountains have. The ice need not be at all big, only half an ice if you like, those lemon ices are still mountains, reduced to a tiny scale, but our imagination restores their dimensions, like those little Japanese dwarf trees which, one knows quite well, are still cedars, oaks, manchineels; so much so that if I arranged a few of them beside a little trickle of water in my room I should have a vast forest stretching down to a river, in which children would be lost. In the same way, at the foot of my yellowish lemon ice, I can see quite clearly postilions, travellers, post chaises over which my tongue sets to work to roll down freezing avalanches that will swallow them up” (the cruel delight with which she said this excited my jealousy); “just as,” she went on, “I set my lips to

work to destroy, pillar after pillar, those Venetian churches of a porphyry that is made with strawberries, and send what I spare of them crashing down upon the worshippers. Yes, all those monuments will pass from their stony state into my inside which throbs already with their melting coolness. But, you know, even without ices, nothing is so exciting or makes one so thirsty as the advertisements of mineral springs. At Montjouvain, at Mlle. Vinteuil's, there was no good confectioner who made ices in the neighbourhood, but we used to make our own tour of France in the garden by drinking a different sparkling water every day, like Vichy water which, as soon as you pour it out, sends up from the bottom of the glass a white cloud which fades and dissolves if you don't drink it at once." But to hear her speak of Montjouvain was too painful, I cut her short. "I am boring you, good-bye, my dear boy." What a change from Balbec, where I would defy Elstir himself to have been able to divine in Albertine this wealth of poetry, a poetry less strange, less personal than that of Céleste Albaret, for instance. Albertine would never have thought of the things that Céleste used to say to me, but love, even when it seems to be nearing its end, is partial. I preferred the illustrated geography-book of her ices, the somewhat facile charm of which seemed to me a reason for loving Albertine and a proof that I had an influence over her, that she was in love with me.

As soon as Albertine had gone out, I felt how tiring it was to me, this perpetual presence, insatiable of movement and life, which disturbed my sleep with its movements, made me live in a perpetual chill by that habit of leaving doors open, forced me — in order to find pretexts that would justify me in not accompanying her, without, however, appearing too unwell, and at the same time to see that she was not unaccompanied — to display every day greater ingenuity than Scheherezade. Unfortunately, if by a similar ingenuity the Persian story-teller postponed her own death, I was hastening mine. There are thus in life certain situations which are not all created, as was this, by amorous jealousy and a precarious state of health which does not permit us to share the life of a young and active person, situations in which nevertheless the problem of whether to continue a life shared with that person or to return to the separate existence of the past sets itself almost in medical terms; to which of the two sorts of repose ought we to sacrifice ourselves (by continuing the daily strain, or by returning to the agonies of separation) to that of the head or of the heart?

In any event, I was very glad that Andrée was to accompany Albertine to the Trocadéro, for certain recent and for that matter entirely trivial incidents had brought it about that while I had still, of course, the same confidence in the

chauffeur's honesty, his vigilance, or at least the perspicacity of his vigilance did not seem to be quite what it had once been. It so happened that, only a short while since, I had sent Albertine alone in his charge to Versailles, and she told me that she had taken her luncheon at the Réservoirs; as the chauffeur had mentioned the restaurant Vatel, the day on which I noticed this contradiction, I found an excuse to go downstairs and speak to him (it was still the same man, whose acquaintance we had made at Balbec) while Albertine was dressing. "You told me that you had had your luncheon at the Vatel. Mlle. Albertine mentions the Réservoirs. What is the meaning of that?" The driver replied: "Oh, I said that I had had my luncheon at the Vatel, but I cannot tell where Mademoiselle took hers. She left me as soon as we reached Versailles to take a horse cab, which she prefers when it is not a question of time." Already I was furious at the thought that she had been alone; still, it was only during the time that she spent at her luncheon. "You might surely," I suggested mildly (for I did not wish to appear to be keeping Albertine actually under surveillance, which would have been humiliating to myself, and doubly so, for it would have shewn that she concealed her activities from me), "have had your luncheon, I do not say at her table, but in the same restaurant?" "But all she told me was to meet her at six o'clock at the Place d'Armes. I had no orders to call for her after luncheon." "Ah!" I said, making an effort to conceal my dismay. And I returned upstairs. And so it was for more than seven hours on end that Albertine had been alone, left to her own devices. I might assure myself, it is true, that the cab had not been merely an expedient whereby to escape from the chauffeur's supervision. In town, Albertine preferred driving in a cab, saying that one had a better view, that the air was more pleasant. Nevertheless, she had spent seven hours, as to which I should never know anything. And I dared not think of the manner in which she must have employed them. I felt that the driver had been extremely clumsy, but my confidence in him was now absolute. For if he had been to the slightest extent in league with Albertine, he would never have acknowledged that he had left her unguarded from eleven o'clock in the morning to six in the afternoon. There could be but one other explanation, and it was absurd, of the chauffeur's admission. This was that some quarrel between Albertine and himself had prompted him, by making a minor disclosure to me, to shew my mistress that he was not the sort of man who could be hushed, and that if, after this first gentle warning, she did not do exactly as he told her, he would take the law into his own hands. But this explanation was absurd; I should have had first of all to assume a non-existent quarrel between him and Albertine, and then to label as a

consummate blackmailer this good-looking motorist who had always shewn himself so affable and obliging. Only two days later, as it happened, I saw that he was more capable than I had for a moment supposed in my frenzy of suspicion of exercising over Albertine a discreet and far-seeing vigilance. For, having managed to take him aside and talk to him of what he had told me about Versailles, I said to him in a careless, friendly tone: “That drive to Versailles that you told me about the other day was everything that it should be, you behaved perfectly as you always do. But, if I may give you just a little hint, I have so much responsibility now that Mme. Bontemps has placed her niece under my charge, I am so afraid of accidents, I reproach myself so for not going with her, that I prefer that it should be yourself, you who are so safe, so wonderfully skilful, to whom no accident can ever happen, that shall take Mlle. Albertine everywhere. Then I need fear nothing.” The charming apostolic motorist smiled a subtle smile, his hand resting upon the consecration-cross of his wheel. Then he uttered these words which (banishing all the anxiety from my heart where its place was at once filled by joy) made me want to fling my arms round his neck: “Don’t be afraid,” he said to me. “Nothing can happen to her, for, when my wheel is not guiding her, my eye follows her everywhere. At Versailles, I went quietly along and visited the town with her, as you might say. From the Réservoirs she went to the Château, from the Château to the Trianons, and I following her all the time without appearing to see her, and the astonishing thing is that she never saw me. Oh, if she had seen me, the fat would have been in the fire. It was only natural, as I had the whole day before me with nothing to do that I should visit the castle too. All the more as Mademoiselle certainly hasn’t failed to notice that I’ve read a bit myself and take an interest in all those old curiosities” (this was true, indeed I should have been surprised if I had learned that he was a friend of Morel, so far more refined was his taste than the violinist’s). “Anyhow, she didn’t see me.” “She must have met some of her own friends, of course, for she knows a great many ladies at Versailles.” “No, she was alone all the time.” “Then people must have stared at her, a girl of such striking appearance, all by herself.” “Why, of course they stared at her, but she knew nothing about it; she went all the time with her eyes glued to her guide-book, or gazing up at the pictures.” The chauffeur’s story seemed to me all the more accurate in that it was indeed a ‘card’ with a picture of the Château, and another of the Trianons, that Albertine had sent me on the day of her visit. The care with which the obliging chauffeur had followed every step of her course touched me deeply. How was I to suppose that this correction — in the form of a generous

amplification — of his account given two days earlier was due to the fact that in those two days Albertine, alarmed that the chauffeur should have spoken to me, had surrendered, and made her peace with him. This suspicion never even occurred to me. It is beyond question that this version of the driver's story, as it rid me of all fear that Albertine might have deceived me, quite naturally cooled me towards my mistress and made me take less interest in the day that she had spent at Versailles. I think, however, that the chauffeur's explanations, which, by absolving Albertine, made her even more tedious than before, would not perhaps have been sufficient to calm me so quickly. Two little pimples which for some days past my mistress had had upon her brow were perhaps even more effective in modifying the sentiments of my heart. Finally these were diverted farther still from her (so far that I was conscious of her existence only when I set eyes upon her) by the strange confidence volunteered me by Gilberte's maid, whom I happened to meet. I learned that, when I used to go every day to see Gilberte, she was in love with a young man of whom she saw a great deal more than of myself. I had had an inkling of this for a moment at the time, indeed I had questioned this very maid. But, as she knew that I was in love with Gilberte, she had denied, sworn that never had Mlle. Swann set eyes on the young man. Now, however, knowing that my love had long since died, that for years past I had left all her letters unanswered — and also perhaps because she was no longer in Gilberte's service — of her own accord she gave me a full account of the amorous episode of which I had known nothing. This seemed to her quite natural. I supposed, remembering her oaths at the time, that she had not been aware of what was going on. Far from it, it was she herself who used to go, at Mme. Swann's orders, to inform the young man whenever the object of my love was alone. The object then of my love.... But I asked myself whether my love of those days was as dead as I thought, for this story pained me. As I do not believe that jealousy can revive a dead love, I supposed that my painful impression was due, in part at least, to the injury to my self-esteem, for a number of people whom I did not like and who at that time and even a little later — their attitude has since altered — affected a contemptuous attitude towards myself, knew perfectly well, while I was in love with Gilberte, that I was her dupe. And this made me ask myself retrospectively whether in my love for Gilberte there had not been an element of self-love, since it so pained me now to discover that all the hours of affectionate intercourse, which had made me so happy, were known to be nothing more than a deliberate hoodwinking of me by my mistress, by people whom I did not like. In any case, love or self-love, Gilberte was almost

dead in me but not entirely, and the result of this annoyance was to prevent me from worrying myself beyond measure about Albertine, who occupied so small a place in my heart. Nevertheless, to return to her (after so long a parenthesis) and to her expedition to Versailles, the postcards of Versailles (is it possible, then, to have one's heart caught in a noose like this by two simultaneous and interwoven jealousies, each inspired by a different person?) gave me a slightly disagreeable impression whenever, as I tidied my papers, my eye fell upon them. And I thought that if the driver had not been such a worthy fellow, the harmony of his second narrative with Albertine's 'cards' would not have amounted to much, for what are the first things that people send you from Versailles but the Château and the Trianons, unless that is to say the card has been chosen by some person of refined taste who adores a certain statue, or by some idiot who selects as a 'view' of Versailles the station of the horse tramway or the goods depot. Even then I am wrong in saying an idiot, such postcards not having always been bought by a person of that sort at random, for their interest as coming from Versailles. For two whole years men of intelligence, artists, used to find Siena, Venice, Granada a 'bore,' and would say of the humblest omnibus, of every railway-carriage: "There you have true beauty." Then this fancy passed like the rest. Indeed, I cannot be certain that people did not revert to the 'sacrilege of destroying the noble relics of the past.' Anyhow, a first class railway carriage ceased to be regarded as *a priori* more beautiful than St. Mark's at Venice. People continued to say: "Here you have real life, the return to the past is artificial," but without drawing any definite conclusion. To make quite certain, without forfeiting any of my confidence in the chauffeur, in order that Albertine might not be able to send him away without his venturing to refuse for fear of her taking him for a spy, I never allowed her to go out after this without the reinforcement of Andrée, whereas for some time past I had found the chauffeur sufficient. I had even allowed her then (a thing I would never dare do now) to stay away for three whole days by herself with the chauffeur and to go almost as far as Balbec, so great was her longing to travel at high speed in an open car. Three days during which my mind had been quite at rest, although the rain of postcards that she had showered upon me did not reach me, owing to the appalling state of the Breton postal system (good in summer, but disorganised, no doubt, in winter), until a week after the return of Albertine and the chauffeur, in such health and vigour that on the very morning of their return they resumed, as though nothing had happened, their daily outings. I was delighted that Albertine should be going this afternoon to the Trocadéro, to this 'special' matinée, but still more reassured that

she would have a companion there in the shape of Andrée.

Dismissing these reflexions, now that Albertine had gone out, I went and took my stand for a moment at the window. There was at first a silence, amid which the whistle of the tripe vendor and the horn of the tramcar made the air ring in different octaves, like a blind piano-tuner. Thea gradually the interwoven motives became distinct, and others were combined with them. There was also a new whistle, the call of a vendor the nature of whose wares I have never discovered, a whistle that was itself exactly like the scream of the tramway, and, as it was not carried out of earshot by its own velocity, one thought of a single car, not endowed with motion, or broken down, immobilised, screaming at short intervals like a dying animal. And I felt that, should I ever have to leave this aristocratic quarter — unless it were to move to one that was entirely plebeian — the streets and boulevards of central Paris (where the fruit, fish and other trades, stabilised in huge stores, rendered superfluous the cries of the street hawkers, who for that matter would not have been able to make themselves heard) would seem to me very dreary, quite uninhabitable, stripped, drained of all these litanies of the small trades and peripatetic victuals, deprived of the orchestra that returned every morning to charm me. On the pavement a woman with no pretence to fashion (or else obedient to an ugly fashion) came past, too brightly dressed in a sack overcoat of goatskin; but no, it was not a woman, it was a chauffeur who, enveloped in his ponyskin, was proceeding on foot to his garage. Escaped from the big hotels, their winged messengers, of variegated hue, were speeding towards the termini, bent over their handlebars, to meet the arrivals by the morning trains. The throb of a violin was due at one time to the passing of a motor-car, at another to my not having put enough water in my electric kettle. In the middle of the symphony there rang out an old-fashioned ‘air’; replacing the sweet seller, who generally accompanied her song with a rattle, the toy seller, to whose pipe was attached a jumping jack which he sent flying in all directions, paraded similar puppets for sale, and without heeding the ritual declamation of Gregory the Great, the reformed declamation of Palestrina or the lyrical declamation of the modern composers, entoned at the top of his voice, a belated adherent of pure melody: *“Allons les papas, allons les mamans, contentez vos petits enfants, c’est moi qui les jais, c’est moi qui les vends, et c’est moi qui boulotte l’argent. Tra la la la. Tra la la la laire, tra la la la la la la. Allons les petits*!” Some Italian boys in felt bérets made no attempt to compete with this lively aria, and it was without a word that they offered their little statuettes. Soon, however, a young fifer compelled the toy merchant to move on and to

chant more inaudibly, though in brisk time: "*Allons les papas, allons les mamans*." This young fifer, was he one of the dragoons whom I used to hear in the mornings at Doncières? No, for what followed was: "*Voilà le réparateur de faïence et de porcelaine. Je répare le verre, le marbre, le cristal, l'os, l'ivoire et objets d'antiquité. Voilà le réparateur*." In a butcher's shop, between an aureole of sunshine on the left and a whole ox suspended from a hook on the right, an assistant, very tall and slender, with fair hair and a throat that escaped above his sky-blue collar, was displaying a lightning speed and a religious conscientiousness in putting on one side the most exquisite fillets of beef, on the other the coarsest parts of the rump, placed them upon glittering scales surmounted by a cross, from which hung down a number of beautiful chains, and — albeit he did nothing afterwards but arrange in the window a display of kidneys, steaks, ribs — was really far more suggestive of a handsome angel who, on the day of the Last Judgment, will prepare for God, according to their quality, the separation of the good and the evil and the weighing of souls. And once again the thin crawling music of the fife rose in the air, herald no longer of the destruction that Françoise used to dread whenever a regiment of cavalry filed past, but of 'repairs' promised by an 'antiquary,' simpleton or rogue, who, in either case highly eclectic, instead of specialising, applied his art to the most diverse materials. The young bread carriers hastened to stuff into their baskets the long rolls ordered for some luncheon party, while the milk girls attached the bottles of milk to their yokes. The sense of longing with which my eyes followed these young damsels, ought I to consider it quite justified? Would it not have been different if I had been able to detain for a few moments at close quarters one of those whom from the height of my window I saw only inside her shop or in motion. To estimate the loss that I suffered by my seclusion, that is to say the wealth that the day held in store for me, I should have had to intercept in the long unrolling of the animated frieze some girl carrying her linen or her milk, make her pass for a moment, like a silhouette from some mobile scheme of decoration, from the wings to the stage, within the proscenium of my bedroom door, and keep her there under my eye, not without eliciting some information about her which would enable me to find her again some day, like the inscribed ring which ornithologists or ichthyologists attach before setting them free to the legs or bellies of the birds or fishes whose migrations they are anxious to trace.

And so I asked Françoise, since I had a message that I wished taken, to be good enough to send up to my room, should any of them call, one or other of those girls who were always coming to take away the dirty or bring back the

clean linen, or with bread, or bottles of milk, and whom she herself used often to send on errands. In doing so I was like Elstir, who, obliged to remain closeted in his studio, on certain days in spring when the knowledge that the woods were full of violets gave him a hunger to gaze at them, used to send his porter's wife out to buy him a bunch; then it was not the table upon which he had posed the little vegetable model, but the whole carpet of the underwoods where he had seen in other years, in their thousands, the serpentine stems, bowed beneath the weight of their blue beaks, that Elstir would fancy that he had before his eyes, like an imaginary zone defined in his studio by the limpid odour of the sweet, familiar flower.

Of a laundry girl, on a Sunday, there was not the slightest prospect. As for the girl who brought the bread, as ill luck would have it, she had rung the bell when Françoise was not about, had left her rolls in their basket on the landing, and had made off. The fruit girl would not call until much later. Once I had gone to order a cheese at the dairy, and, among the various young assistants, had remarked one girl, extravagantly fair, tall in stature though still little more than a child, who, among the other errand girls, seemed to be dreaming, in a distinctly haughty attitude. I had seen her in the distance only, and for so brief an instant that I could not have described her appearance, except to say that she must have grown too fast and that her head supported a fleece that gave the impression far less of capillary details than of a sculptor's conventional rendering of the separate channels of parallel drifts of snow upon a glacier. This was all that I had been able to make out, apart from a nose sharply outlined (a rare thing in a child) upon a thin face which recalled the beaks of baby vultures. Besides, this clustering of her comrades round about her had not been the only thing that prevented me from seeing her distinctly, there was also my uncertainty whether the sentiments which I might, at first sight and subsequently, inspire in her would be those of injured pride, or of irony, or of a scorn which she would express later on to her friends. These alternative suppositions which I had formed, in an instant, with regard to her, had condensed round about her the troubled atmosphere in which she disappeared, like a goddess in the cloud that is shaken by thunder. For moral uncertainty is a greater obstacle to an exact visual perception than any defect of vision would be. In this too skinny young person, who moreover attracted undue attention, the excess of what another person would perhaps have called her charms was precisely what was calculated to repel me, but had nevertheless had the effect of preventing me from perceiving even, far more from remembering anything about the other young dairymaids,

whom the hooked nose of this one and her gaze — how unattractive it was! — pensive, personal, with an air of passing judgment, had plunged in perpetual night, as a white streak of lightning darkens the landscape on either side of it. And so, of my call to order a cheese, at the dairy, I had remembered (if we can say ‘remember’ in speaking of a face so carelessly observed that we adapt to the nullity of the face ten different noses in succession), I had remembered only this girl who had not attracted me. This is sufficient to engender love. And yet I should have forgotten the extravagantly fair girl and should never have wished to see her again, had not Françoise told me that, child as she was, she had all her wits about her and would shortly be leaving her employer, since she had been going too fast and owed money among the neighbours. It has been said that beauty is a promise of happiness. Inversely, the possibility of pleasure may be a beginning of beauty.

I began to read Mamma’s letter. Beneath her quotations from Madame de Sévigné: “If my thoughts are not entirely black at Combray, they are at least dark grey, I think of you at every moment; I long for you; your health, your affairs, your absence, what sort of cloud do you suppose they make in my sky?” I felt that my mother was vexed to find Albertine’s stay in the house prolonged, and my intention of marriage, although not yet announced to my mistress, confirmed. She did not express her annoyance more directly because she was afraid that I might leave her letters lying about. Even then, veiled as her letters were, she reproached me with not informing her immediately, after each of them, that I had received it: “You remember how Mme. de Sévigné said: ‘When we are far apart, we no longer laugh at letters which begin with *I have received yours*.’” Without referring to what distressed her most, she said that she was annoyed by my lavish expenditure: “Where on earth does all your money go? It is distressing enough that, like Charles de Sévigné, you do not know what you want and are ‘two or three people at once,’ but do try at least not to be like him in spending money so that I may never have to say of you: ‘he has discovered how to spend and have nothing to shew, how to lose without staking and how to pay without clearing himself of debt.’” I had just finished Mamma’s letter when Françoise returned to tell me that she had in the house that very same slightly overbold young dairymaid of whom she had spoken to me. “She can quite well take Monsieur’s note and bring back the answer, if it’s not too far. Monsieur shall see her, she’s just like a Little Red Ridinghood.” Françoise withdrew to fetch the girl, and I could hear her leading the way and saying: “Come along now, you’re frightened because there’s a passage, stuff and nonsense, I never thought you

would be such a goose. Have I got to lead you by the hand?" And Françoise, like a good and honest servant who means to see that her master is respected as she respects him herself, had draped herself in that majesty with ennobles the matchmaker in a picture by an old master where, in comparison with her, the lover and his mistress fade into insignificance. But Elstir when he gazed at them had no need to bother about what the violets were doing. The entry of the young dairymaid at once robbed me of my contemplative calm; I could think only of how to give plausibility to the fable of the letter that she was to deliver and I began to write quickly without venturing to cast more than a furtive glance at her, so that I might not seem to have brought her into my room to be scrutinised. She was invested for me with that charm of the unknown which I should not discover in a pretty girl whom I had found in one of those houses where they come to meet one. She was neither naked nor in disguise, but a genuine dairymaid, one of those whom we imagine to be so pretty, when we have not time to approach them; she possessed something of what constitutes the eternal desire, the eternal regret of life, the twofold current of which is at length diverted, directed towards us. Twofold, for if it is a question of the unknown, of a person who must, we guess, be divine, from her stature, her proportions, her indifferent glance, her haughty calm, on the other hand we wish this woman to be thoroughly specialised in her profession, allowing us to escape from ourselves into that world which a peculiar costume makes us romantically believe different. If for that matter we seek to comprise in a formula the law of our amorous curiosities, we should have to seek it in the maximum of difference between a woman of whom we have caught sight and one whom we have approached and caressed. If the women of what used at one time to be called the closed houses, if prostitutes themselves (provided that we know them to be prostitutes) attract us so little, it is not because they are less beautiful than other women, it is because they are ready and waiting; the very object that we are seeking to attain they offer us already; it is because they are not conquests. The difference there is at a minimum. A harlot smiles at us already in the street as she will smile when she is in our room. We are sculptors. We are anxious to obtain of a woman a statue entirely different from that which she has presented to us. We have seen a girl strolling, indifferent, insolent, along the seashore, we have seen a shop-assistant, serious and active, behind her counter, who will answer us stiffly, if only so as to escape the sarcasm of her comrades, a fruit seller who barely answers us at all. Well, we know no rest until we can discover by experiment whether the proud girl on the seashore, the shop-assistant on her high

horse of ‘What will people say?’, the preoccupied fruit seller cannot be made, by skilful handling on our part, to relax their rectangular attitude, to throw about our neck their fruit-laden arms, to direct towards our lips, with a smile of consent, eyes hitherto frozen or absent — oh, the beauty of stern eyes — in working hours when the worker was so afraid of the gossip of her companions, eyes that avoided our beleaguering stare and, now that we have seen her alone and face to face, make their pupils yield beneath the sunlit burden of laughter when we speak of making love. Between the shopgirl, the laundress busy with her iron, the fruit seller, the dairymaid on the one hand, and the same girl when she is about to become our mistress, the maximum of difference is attained, stretched indeed to its extreme limits, and varied by those habitual gestures of her profession which make a pair of arms, during the hours of toil, something as different as possible (regarded as an arabesque pattern) from those supple bonds that already every evening are fastened about our throat while the mouth shapes itself for a kiss. And so we pass our whole life in uneasy advances, incessantly renewed, to respectable girls whom their calling seems to separate from us. Once they are in our arms, they are no longer anything more than they originally were, the gulf that we dreamed of crossing has been bridged. But we begin afresh with other women, we devote to these enterprises all our time, all our money, all our strength, our blood boils at the too cautious driver who is perhaps going to make us miss our first assignation, we work ourself into a fever. That first meeting, we know all the same that it will mean the vanishing of an illusion. It does not so much matter that the illusion still persists; we wish to see whether we can convert it into reality, and then we think of the laundress whose coldness we remarked. Amorous curiosity is like that which is aroused in us by the names of places; perpetually disappointed, it revives and remains for ever insatiable.

Alas! As soon as she stood before me, the fair dairymaid with the ribbed tresses, stripped of all that I had imagined and of the desire that had been aroused in me, was reduced to her own proportions. The throbbing cloud of my suppositions no longer enveloped her in a shimmering haze. She acquired an almost beggarly air from having (in place of the ten, the score that I recalled in turn without being able to fix any of them in my memory) but a single nose, rounder than I had thought, which made her appear rather a fool and had in any case lost the faculty of multiplying itself. This flyaway caught on the wing, inert, crushed, incapable of adding anything to its own paltry appearance, had no longer my imagination to collaborate with it. Fallen into the inertia of reality, I sought to rebound; her cheeks, which I had not seen in the shop, appeared to me

so pretty that I became alarmed, and, to put myself in countenance, said to the young dairymaid: “Would you be so kind as to pass me the*Figaro* which is lying there, I must make sure of the address to which I am going to send you.” Thereupon, as she picked up the newspaper, she disclosed as far as her elbow the red sleeve of her jersey and handed me the conservative sheet with a neat and courteous gesture which pleased me by its intimate rapidity, its pliable contour and its scarlet hue. While I was opening the *Figaro*, in order to say something and without raising my eyes, I asked the girl: “What do you call that red knitted thing you’re wearing? It is very becoming.” She replied: “It’s my golf.” For, by a slight downward tendency common to all fashions, the garments and styles which, a few years earlier, seemed to belong to the relatively smart world of Albertine’s friends, were now the portion of working girls. “Are you quite sure it won’t be giving you too much trouble,” I said, while I pretended to be searching the columns of the *Figaro*, “if I send you rather a long way?” As soon as I myself appeared to find the service at all arduous that she would be performing by taking a message for me, she began to feel that it would be a trouble to her. “The only thing is, I have to be going out presently on my bike. Good lord, you know, Sunday’s the only day we’ve got.” “But won’t you catch cold, going bare-headed like that?” “Oh, I shan’t be bare-headed, I shall have my polo, and I could get on without it with all the hair I have.” I raised my eyes to the blaze of curling tresses and felt myself caught in their swirl and swept away, with a throbbing heart, amid the lightning and the blasts of a hurricane of beauty. I continued to study the newspaper, but albeit this was only to keep myself in countenance and to gain time, while I merely pretended to read, I took in nevertheless the meaning of the words that were before my eyes, and my attention was caught by the following: “To the programme already announced for this afternoon in the great hall of the Trocadéro must be added the name of Mlle. Lea who has consented to appear in *Les Fourberies de Nérine*. She will of course sustain the part of Nérine, in which she is astounding in her display of spirit and bewitching gaiety.” It was as though a hand had brutally torn from my heart the bandage beneath which its wound had begun since my return from Balbec to heal. The flood of my anguish escaped in torrents, Lea, that was the actress friend of the two girls at Balbec whom Albertine, without appearing to see them, had, one afternoon at the Casino, watched in the mirror. It was true that at Balbec Albertine, at the name of Lea, had adopted a special tone of compunction in order to say to me, almost shocked that anyone could suspect such a pattern of virtue: “Oh no, she is not in the least that sort of woman, she is

a very respectable person." Unfortunately for me, when Albertine made a statement of this sort, it was never anything but the first stage towards other, divergent statements. Shortly after the first, came this second: "I don't know her." In the third phase, after Albertine had spoken to me of somebody who was 'above suspicion' and whom (in the second place) she did not know, she first of all forgot that she had said that she did not know her and then, in a speech in which she contradicted herself unawares, informed me that she did know her. This first act of oblivion completed, and the fresh, statement made, a second oblivion began, to wit that the person was above suspicion. "Isn't So-and-So," I would ask, "one of those women?" "Why, of course, everybody knows that!" Immediately the note of compunction was sounded afresh to utter a statement which was a vague echo, greatly reduced, of the first statement of all. "I'm bound to say that she has always behaved perfectly properly with me. Of course, she knows that I would send her about her business if she tried it on. Still, that makes no difference. I am obliged to give her credit for the genuine respect she has always shewn for me. It is easy to see she knew the sort of person she had to deal with." We remember the truth because it has a name, is rooted in the past, but a makeshift lie is quickly forgotten. Albertine forgot this latest lie, her fourth, and, one day when she was anxious to gain my confidence by confiding in me, went so far as to tell me, with regard to the same person who at the outset had been so respectable and whom she did not know. "She took quite a fancy to me at one time. She asked me, three or four times, to go home with her and to come upstairs to her room. I saw no harm in going home with her, where everybody could see us, in broad daylight, in the open air. But when we reached her front door I always made some excuse and I never went upstairs." Shortly after this, Albertine made an allusion to the beautiful things that this lady had in her room. By proceeding from one approximation to another, I should no doubt have arrived at making her tell me the truth which was perhaps less serious than I had been led to believe, for, although perhaps easy going with women, she preferred a male lover, and now that she had myself would not have given a thought to Léa. In any case, with regard to this person, I was still at the first stage of revelation and was not aware whether Albertine knew her. Already, in the case of many women at any rate, it would have been enough for me to collect and present to my mistress, in a synthesis, her contradictory statements, in order to convict her of her misdeeds (misdeeds which, like astronomical laws, it is a great deal easier to deduce by a process of reasoning than to observe, to surprise in the act). But then she would have preferred to say that one of her statements had

been a lie, the withdrawal of which would thus bring about the collapse of my whole system of evidence, rather than admit that everything which she had told me from the start was simply a tissue of falsehood. There are similar tissues in the *Thousand and One Nights*, which we find charming. They pain us, coming from a person whom we love, and thereby enable us to penetrate a little deeper in our knowledge of human nature instead of being content to play upon the surface. Grief penetrates into us and forces us out of painful curiosity to penetrate other people. Whence emerge truths which we feel that we have no right to keep hidden, so much so that a dying atheist who has discovered them, certain of his own extinction, indifferent to fame, will nevertheless devote his last hours on earth to an attempt to make them known.

Of course, I was still at the first stage of enlightenment with regard to Léa. I was not even aware whether Albertine knew her. No matter, it all came to the same thing. I must at all costs prevent her from — at the Troca-déro — renewing this acquaintance or making the acquaintance of this stranger. I have said that I did not know whether she knew Léa; I ought, however, to have learned it at Balbec, from Albertine herself. For defective memory obliterated from my mind as well as from Albertine's a great many of the statements that she had made to me. Memory, instead of being a duplicate always present before our eyes of the various events of our life, is rather an abyss from which at odd moments a chance resemblance enables us to draw up, restored to life, dead impressions; but even then there are innumerable little details which have not fallen into that potential reservoir of memory, and which will remain for ever beyond our control. To anything that we do not know to be related to the real life of the person whom we love we pay but scant attention, we forget immediately what she has said to us about some incident or people that we do not know, and her expression while she was saying it. And so when, in due course, our jealousy is aroused by these same people, and seeks to make sure that it is not mistaken, that it is they who are responsible for the haste which our mistress shews in leaving the house, her annoyance when we have prevented her from going out by returning earlier than usual; our jealousy ransacking the past in search of a clue can find nothing; always retrospective, it is like a historian who has to write the history of a period for which he has no documents; always belated, it dashes like a mad bull to the spot where it will not find the proud and brilliant creature who is infuriating it with his darts and whom the crowd admire for his splendour and his cunning. Jealousy fights the empty air, uncertain as we are in those dreams in which we are distressed because we cannot find in his empty house a person

whom we have known well in life, but who here perhaps is really another person and has merely borrowed the features of our friend, uncertain as we are even more after we awake when we seek to identify this or that detail of our dream. What was our mistress's expression when she told us this; did she not look happy, was she not actually whistling, a thing that she never does unless there is some amorous thought in her mind? In the time of our love, if our presence teased her and irritated her a little, has she not told us something that is contradicted by what she now affirms, that she knows or does not know such and such a person? We do not know, we shall never find out; we strain after the unsubstantial fragments of a dream, and all the time our life with our mistress continues, our life indifferent to what we do not know to be important to us, attentive to what is perhaps of no importance, hagridden by people who have no real connexion with us, full of lapses of memory, gaps, vain anxieties, our life as fantastic as a dream.

I realised that the young dairymaid was still in the room. I told her that the place was certainly a long way off, that I did not need her. Whereupon she also decided that it would be too much trouble: "There's a fine match coming off, I don't want to miss it." I felt that she must already be devoted to sport and that in a few years' time she would be talking about 'living her own life.' I told her that I certainly did not need her any longer, and gave her five francs. Immediately, having little expected this largesse, and telling herself that if she earned five francs for doing nothing she would have a great deal more for taking my message, she began to find that her match was of no importance. "I could easily have taken your message. I can always find time." But I thrust her from the room, I needed to be alone, I must at all costs prevent Albertine from any risk of meeting Lea's girl friends at the Trocadéro. I must try, and I must succeed; to tell the truth I did not yet see how, and during these first moments I opened my hands, gazed at them, cracked my knuckles, whether because the mind which cannot find what it is seeking, in a fit of laziness allows itself to halt for an instant at a spot where the most unimportant things are distinctly visible to it, like the blades of grass on the embankment which we see from the carriage window trembling in the wind, when the train halts in the open country — an immobility that is not always more fertile than that of the captured animal which, paralysed by fear or fascinated, gazes without moving a muscle — or that I might hold my body in readiness — with my mind at work inside it and, in my mind, the means of action against this or that person — as though it were no more than a weapon from which would be fired the shot that was to separate

Albertine from Léa and her two friends. It is true that earlier in the morning, when Françoise had come in to tell me that Albertine was going to the Trocadéro, I had said to myself: “Albertine is at liberty to do as she pleases” and had supposed that until evening came, in this radiant weather, her actions would remain without any perceptible importance to myself; but it was not only the morning sun, as I had thought, that had made me so careless; it was because, having obliged Albertine to abandon the plans that she might perhaps have initiated or even completed at the Verdurins’, and having restricted her to attending a performance which I myself had chosen, so that she could not have made any preparations, I knew that whatever she did would of necessity be innocent. Just as, if Albertine had said a few moments later: “If I kill myself, it’s all the same to me,” it would have been because she was certain that she would not kill herself. Surrounding myself and Albertine there had been this morning (far more than the sunlight in the air) that atmosphere which we do not see, but by the translucent and changing medium of which we do see, I her actions, she the importance of her own life, that is to say those beliefs which we do not perceive but which are no more assimilable to a pure vacuum than is the air that surrounds us; composing round about us a variable atmosphere, sometimes excellent, often unbreathable, they deserve to be studied and recorded as carefully as the temperature, the barometric pressure, the weather, for our days have their own singularity, physical and moral. My belief, which I had failed to remark this morning, and yet in which I had been joyously enveloped until the moment when I had looked a second time at the*Figaro*, that Albertine would do nothing that was not harmless, this belief had vanished. I was living no longer in the fine sunny day, but in a day carved out of the other by my anxiety lest Albertine might renew her acquaintance with Léa and more easily still with the two girls, should they go, as seemed to me probable, to applaud the actress at the Trocadéro where it would not be difficult for them, in one of the intervals, to come upon Albertine. I no longer thought of Mlle. Vinteuil, the name of Léa had brought back to my mind, to make me jealous, the image of Albertine in the Casino watching the two girls. For I possessed in my memory only series of Albertines, separate from one another, incomplete, outlines, snapshots; and so my jealousy was restricted to an intermittent expression, at once fugitive and fixed, and to the people who had caused that expression to appear upon Albertine’s face. I remembered her when, at Balbec, she received undue attention from the two girls or from women of that sort; I remembered the distress that I used to feel when I saw her face subjected to an active scrutiny,

like that of a painter preparing to make a sketch, entirely covered by them, and, doubtless on account of my presence, submitting to this contact without appearing to notice it, with a passivity that was perhaps clandestinely voluptuous. And before she recovered herself and spoke to me there was an instant during which Albertine did not move, smiled into the empty air, with the same air of feigned spontaneity and concealed pleasure as if she were posing for somebody to take her photograph; or even seeking to assume before the camera a more dashing pose — that which she had adopted at Doncières when we were walking with Saint-Loup, and, laughing and passing her tongue over her lips, she pretended to be teasing a dog. Certainly at such moments she was not at all the same as when it was she that was interested in little girls who passed us. Then, on the contrary, her narrow velvety gaze fastened itself upon, glued itself to the passer-by, so adherent, so corrosive, that you felt that when she removed it it must tear away the skin. But at that moment this other expression, which did at least give her a serious air, almost as though she were in pain, had seemed to me a pleasant relief after the toneless blissful expression she had worn in the presence of the two girls, and I should have preferred the sombre expression of the desire that she did perhaps feel at times to the laughing expression caused by the desire which she aroused. However she might attempt to conceal her consciousness of it, it bathed her, enveloped her, vaporous, voluptuous, made her whole face appear rosy. But everything that Albertine held at such moments suspended in herself, that radiated round her and hurt me so acutely, how could I tell whether, once my back was turned, she would continue to keep it to herself, whether to the advances of the two girls, now that I was no longer with her, she would not make some audacious response. Indeed, these memories caused me intense grief, they were like a complete admission of Albertine’s failings, a general confession of her infidelity against which were powerless the various oaths that she swore to me and I wished to believe, the negative results of my incomplete researches, the assurances, made perhaps in connivance with her, of Andrée. Albertine might deny specified betrayals; by words that she let fall, more emphatic than her declarations to the contrary, by that searching gaze alone, she had made confession of what she would fain have concealed, far more than any specified incident, what she would have let herself be killed sooner than admit: her natural tendency. For there is no one who will willingly deliver up his soul. Notwithstanding the grief that these memories were causing me, could I have denied that it was the programme of the matinée at the Trocadéro that had revived my need of Albertine? She was one of those women in whom their

misdeeds may at a pinch take the place of absent charms, and no less than their misdeeds the kindness that follows them and restores to us that sense of comfort which in their company, like an invalid who is never well for two days in succession, we are incessantly obliged to recapture. And then, even more than their misdeeds while we are in love with them, there are their misdeeds before we made their acquaintance, and first and foremost: their nature. What makes this sort of love painful is, in fact, that there preexists a sort of original sin of Woman, a sin which makes us love them, so that, when we forget it, we feel less need of them, and to begin to love afresh we must begin to suffer afresh. At this moment, the thought that she must not meet the two girls again and the question whether or not she knew Léa were what was chiefly occupying my mind, in spite of the rule that we ought not to take an interest in particular facts except in relation to their general significance, and notwithstanding the childishness, as great as that of longing to travel or to make friends with women, of shattering our curiosity against such elements of the invisible torrent of painful realities which will always remain unknown to us as have happened to crystallise in our mind. But, even if we should succeed in destroying that crystallisation, it would at once be replaced by another. Yesterday I was afraid lest Albertine should go to see Mme. Verdurin. Now my only thought was of Léa. Jealousy, which wears a bandage over its eyes, is not merely powerless to discover anything in the darkness that enshrouds it, it is also one of those torments where the task must be incessantly repeated, like that of the Danaids, or of Ixion. Even if her friends were not there, what impression might she not form of Léa, beautified by her stage attire, haloed with success, what thoughts would she leave in Albertine's mind, what desires which, even if she repressed them, would in my house disgust her with a life in which she was unable to gratify them.

Besides, how could I tell that she was not acquainted with Léa, and would not pay her a visit in her dressing-room; and, even if Léa did not know her, who could assure me that, having certainly seen her at Balbec, she would not recognise her and make a signal to her from the stage that would entitle Albertine to seek admission behind the scenes? A danger seems easy to avoid after it has been conjured away. This one was not yet conjured, I was afraid that it might never be, and it seemed to me all the more terrible. And yet this love for Albertine which I felt almost vanish when I attempted to realise it, seemed in a measure to acquire a proof of its existence from the intensity of my grief at this moment. I no longer cared about anything else, I thought only of how I was to prevent her from remaining at the Trocadéro, I would have offered any sum in

the world to Léa to persuade her not to go there. If then we prove our choice by the action that we perform rather than by the idea that we form, I must have been in love with Albertine. But this renewal of my suffering gave no further consistency to the image that I beheld of Albertine. She caused my calamities, like a deity that remains invisible. Making endless conjectures, I sought to shield myself from suffering without thereby realising my love. First of all, I must make certain that Léa was really going to perform at the Trocadéro. After dismissing the dairymaid, I telephoned to Bloch, whom I knew to be on friendly terms with Léa, in order to ask him. He knew nothing about it and seemed surprised that the matter could be of any importance to me. I decided that I must set to work immediately, remembered that Françoise was ready to go out and that I was not, and as I rose and dressed made her take a motor-car; she was to go to the Trocadéro, engage a seat, look high and low for Albertine and give her a note from myself. In this note I told her that I was greatly upset by a letter which I had just received from that same lady on whose account she would remember that I had been so wretched one night at Balbec. I reminded her that, on the following day, she had reproached me for not having sent for her. And so I was taking the liberty, I informed her, of asking her to sacrifice her matinée and to join me at home so that we might take a little fresh air together, which might help me to recover from the shock. But as I should be a long time in getting ready, she would oblige me, seeing that she had Françoise as an escort, by calling at the Trois-Quartiers (this shop, being smaller, seemed to me less dangerous than the Bon Marché) to buy the scarf of white tulle that she required. My note was probably not superfluous. To tell the truth, I knew nothing that Albertine had done since I had come to know her, or even before. But in her conversation (she might, had I mentioned it to her, have replied that I had misunderstood her) there were certain contradictions, certain embellishments which seemed to me as decisive as catching her red-handed, but less serviceable against Albertine who, often caught out in wrongdoing like a child, had invariably, by dint of sudden, strategic changes of front, stultified my cruel onslaught and reestablished her own position. Cruel, most of all, to myself. She employed, not from any refinement of style, but in order to correct her imprudences, abrupt breaches of syntax not unlike that figure which the grammarians call anacoluthon or some such name. Having allowed herself, while discussing women, to say: “I remember, the other day, I...,” she would at once catch her breath, after which ‘I’ became ‘she’: it was something that she had witnessed as an innocent spectator, not a thing that she herself had done. It

was not herself that was the heroine of the anecdote. I should have liked to recall how, exactly, the sentence began, so as to conclude for myself, since she had broken off in the middle, how it would have ended. But as I had heard the end, I found it hard to remember the beginning, from which perhaps my air of interest had made her deviate, and was left still anxious to know what she was really thinking, what she really remembered. The first stages of falsehood on the part of our mistress are like the first stages of our own love, or of a religious vocation. They take shape, accumulate, pass, without our paying them any attention. When we wish to remember in what manner we began to love a woman, we are already in love with her; when we dreamed about her before falling in love, we did not say to ourself: This is the prelude to a love affair, we must pay attention! — and our dreams took us by surprise, and we barely noticed them. So also, except in cases that are comparatively rare, it is only for the convenience of my narrative that I have frequently in these pages confronted one of Albertine's false statements with her previous assertion upon the same subject. This previous assertion, as often as not, since I could not read the future and did not at the time guess what contradictory affirmation was to form a pendant to it, had slipped past unperceived, heard it is true by my ears, but without my isolating it from the continuous flow of Albertine's speech. Later on, faced with the self-evident lie, or seized by an anxious doubt, I would fain have recalled it; but in vain; my memory had not been warned in time, and had thought it unnecessary to preserve a copy.

I urged Françoise, when she had got Albertine out of the hall, to let me know by telephone, and to bring her home, whether she was willing or not. "That would be the last straw, that she should not be willing to come and see Monsieur," replied Françoise. "But I don't know that she's as fond as all that of seeing me." "Then she must be an ungrateful wretch," went on Françoise, in whom Albertine was renewing after all these years the same torment of envy that Eulalie used at one time to cause her in my aunt's sickroom. Unaware that Albertine's position in my household was not of her own seeking but had been decided by myself (a fact which, from motives of self-esteem and to make Françoise angry, I preferred to conceal from her), she admired and execrated the girl's dexterity, called her when she spoke of her to the other servants a 'play-actress,' a wheedler who could twist me round her little finger. She dared not yet declare open war against her, shewed her a smiling countenance and sought to acquire merit in my sight by the services which she performed for her in her relations with myself, deciding that it was useless to say anything to me and that

she would gain nothing by doing so; but if the opportunity ever arose, if ever she discovered a crack in Albertine's armour, she was fully determined to enlarge it, and to part us for good and all. "Ungrateful? No, Françoise, I think it is I that am ungrateful, you don't know how good she is to me." (It was so soothing to give the impression that I was loved.) "Be as quick as you can." "All right, I'll get a move on." Her daughter's influence was beginning to contaminate Françoise's vocabulary. So it is that all languages lose their purity by the admission of new words. For this decadence of Françoise's speech, which I had known in its golden period, I was myself indirectly responsible. Françoise's daughter would not have made her mother's classic language degenerate into the vilest slang, had she been content to converse with her in dialect. She had never given up the use of it, and when they were both in my room at once, if they had anything private to say, instead of shutting themselves up in the kitchen, they armed themselves, right in the middle of my room, with a screen more impenetrable than the most carefully shut door, by conversing in dialect. I supposed merely that the mother and daughter were not always on the best of terms, if I was to judge by the frequency with which they employed the only word that I could make out: *m'esasperate* (unless it was that the object of their exasperation was myself). Unfortunately the most unfamiliar tongue becomes intelligible in time when we are always hearing it spoken. I was sorry that this should be dialect, for I succeeded in picking it up, and should have been no less successful had Françoise been in the habit of expressing herself in Persian. In vain might Françoise, when she became aware of my progress, accelerate the speed of her utterance, and her daughter likewise, it was no good. The mother was greatly put out that I understood their dialect, then delighted to hear me speak it. I am bound to admit that her delight was a mocking delight, for albeit I came in time to pronounce the words more or less as she herself did, she found between our two ways of pronunciation an abyss of difference which gave her infinite joy, and she began to regret that she no longer saw people to whom she had not given a thought for years but who, it appeared, would have rocked with a laughter which it would have done her good to hear, if they could have heard me speaking their dialect so badly. In any case, no joy came to mitigate her sorrow that, however badly I might pronounce it, I understood well. Keys become useless when the person whom we seek to prevent from entering can avail himself of a skeleton key or a jemmy. Dialect having become useless as a means of defence, she took to conversing with her daughter in a French which rapidly became that of the most debased epochs.

I was now ready, but Françoise had not yet telephoned; I ought perhaps to go out without waiting for a message. But how could I tell that she would find Albertine, that the latter would not have gone behind the scenes, that even if Françoise did find her, she would allow herself to be taken away? Half an hour later the telephone bell began to tinkle and my heart throbbed tumultuously with hope and fear. There came, at the bidding of an operator, a flying squadron of sounds which with an instantaneous speed brought me the words of the telephonist, not those of Françoise whom an inherited timidity and melancholy, when she was brought face to face with any object unknown to her fathers, prevented from approaching a telephone receiver, although she would readily visit a person suffering from a contagious disease. She had found Albertine in the lobby by herself, and Albertine had simply gone to warn Andrée that she was not staying any longer and then had hurried back to Françoise. “She wasn’t angry? Oh, I beg your pardon; will you please ask the person whether the young lady was angry?” “The lady asks me to say that she wasn’t at all angry, quite the contrary, in fact; anyhow, if she wasn’t pleased, she didn’t shew it. They are starting now for the Trois-Quartiers, and will be home by two o’clock.” I gathered that two o’clock meant three, for it was past two o’clock already. But Françoise suffered from one of those peculiar, permanent, incurable defects, which we call maladies; she was never able either to read or to announce the time correctly. I have never been able to understand what went on in her head. When Françoise, after consulting her watch, if it was two o’clock, said: “It is one” or “it is three o’clock,” I have never been able to understand whether the phenomenon that occurred was situated in her vision or in her thought or in her speech; the one thing certain is that the phenomenon never failed to occur. Humanity is a very old institution. Heredity, cross-breeding have given an irresistible force to bad habits, to vicious reflexes. One person sneezes and gasps because he is passing a rosebush, another breaks out in an eruption at the smell of wet paint, has frequent attacks of colic if he has to start on a journey, and grandchildren of thieves who are themselves millionaires and generous cannot resist the temptation to rob you of fifty francs. As for knowing in what consisted Francoise’s incapacity to tell the time correctly, she herself never threw any light upon the problem. For, notwithstanding the anger that I generally displayed at her inaccurate replies, Françoise never attempted either to apologise for her mistake or to explain it. She remained silent, pretending not to hear, and thereby making me lose my temper altogether. I should have liked to hear a few words of justification, were it only that I might smite her hip and thigh; but not a word, an

indifferent silence. In any case, about the timetable for to-day there could be no doubt; Albertine was coming home with Françoise at three o'clock, Albertine would not be meeting Léa or her friends. Whereupon the danger of her renewing relations with them, having been averted, at once began to lose its importance in my eyes and I was amazed, seeing with what ease it had been averted, that I should have supposed that I would not succeed in averting it. I felt a keen impulse of gratitude to Albertine, who, I could see, had not gone to the Trocadéro to meet Léa's friends, and shewed me, by leaving the performance and coming home at a word from myself, that she belonged to me more than I had imagined. My gratitude was even greater when a bicyclist brought me a line from her bidding me be patient, and full of the charming expressions that she was in the habit of using. "My darling, dear Marcel, I return less quickly than this cyclist, whose machine I would like to borrow in order to be with you sooner. How could you imagine that I might be angry or that I could enjoy anything better than to be with you? It will be nice to go out, just the two of us together; it would be nicer still if we never went out except together. The ideas you get into your head! What a Marcel! What a Marcel! Always and ever your Albertine."

The frocks that I bought for her, the yacht of which I had spoken to her, the wrappers from Fortuny's, all these things having in this obedience on Albertine's part not their recompense but their complement, appeared to me now as so many privileges that I was enjoying; for the duties and expenditure of a master are part of his dominion, and define it, prove it, fully as much as his rights. And these rights which she recognised in me were precisely what gave my expenditure its true character: I had a woman of my own, who, at the first word that I sent to her unexpectedly, made my messenger telephone humbly that she was coming, that she was allowing herself to be brought home immediately. I was more of a master than I had supposed. More of a master, in other words more of a slave. I no longer felt the slightest impatience to see Albertine. The certainty that she was at this moment engaged in shopping with Françoise, or that she would return with her at an approaching moment which I would willingly have postponed, illuminated like a calm and radiant star a period of time which I would now have been far better pleased to spend alone. My love for Albertine had made me rise and get ready to go out, but it would prevent me from enjoying my outing. I reflected that on a Sunday afternoon like this little shopgirls, midinettes, prostitutes must be strolling in the Bois. And with the words *midinettes, little shopgirls* (as had often happened to me with a proper name, the name of a girl

read in the account of a ball), with the image of a white bodice, a short skirt, since beneath them I placed a stranger who might perhaps come to love me, I created out of nothing desirable women, and said to myself: “How charming they must be!” But of what use would it be to me that they were charming, seeing that I was not going out alone. Taking advantage of the fact that I still was alone, and drawing the curtains together so that the sun should not prevent me from reading the notes, I sat down at the piano, turned over the pages of Vinteuil’s sonata which happened to be lying there, and began to play; seeing that Albertine’s arrival was still a matter of some time but was on the other hand certain, I had at once time to spare and tranquillity of mind. Floating in the expectation, big with security, of her return escorted by Françoise and in my confidence in her docility as in the blessedness of an inward light as warming as the light of the sun, I might dispose of my thoughts, detach them for a moment from Albertine, apply them to the sonata. In the latter, indeed, I did not take pains to remark how the combinations of the voluptuous and anxious motives corresponded even more closely now to my love for Albertine, from which jealousy had been absent for so long that I had been able to confess to Swann my ignorance of that sentiment. No, taking the sonata from another point of view, regarding it in itself as the work of a great artist, I was carried back upon the tide of sound to the days at Combray — I do not mean at Montjouvain and along the Méséglise way, but to walks along the Guermantes way — when I had myself longed to become an artist. In definitely abandoning that ambition, had I forfeited something real? Could life console me for the loss of art, was there in art a more profound reality, in which our true personality finds an expression that is not afforded it by the activities of life? Every great artist seems indeed so different from all the rest, and gives us so strongly that sensation of individuality for which we seek in vain in our everyday existence. Just as I was thinking thus, I was struck by a passage in the sonata, a passage with which I was quite familiar, but sometimes our attention throws a different light upon things which we have long known, and we remark in them what we have never seen before. As I played the passage, and for all that in it Vinteuil had been trying to express a fancy which would have been wholly foreign to Wagner, I could not help murmuring ‘*Tristan*,’ with the smile of an old friend of the family discovering a trace of the grandfather in an intonation, a gesture of the grandson who never set eyes on him. And as the friend then examines a photograph which enables him to estimate the likeness, so, in front of Vinteuil’s sonata, I set up on the music-rest the score of *Tristan*, a selection from which was being given that afternoon,

as it happened, at the Lamoureux concert. I had not, in admiring the Bayreuth master, any of the scruples of those people whom, like Nietzsche, their sense of duty bids to shun in art as in life the beauty that tempts them, and who, tearing themselves from *Tristan* as they renounce *Parsifal*, and, in their spiritual asceticism, progressing from one mortification to another, arrive, by following the most bloody of *viae Cruets*, at exalting themselves to the pure cognition and perfect adoration of *Le Postillon de Longjumeau*. I began to perceive how much reality there is in the work of Wagner, when I saw in my mind's eye those insistent, fleeting themes which visit an act, withdraw only to return, and, sometimes distant, drowsy, almost detached, are at other moments, while remaining vague, so pressing and so near, so internal, so organic, so visceral, that one would call them the resumption not so much of a musical motive as of an attack of neuralgia.

Music, very different in this respect from Albertine's society, helped me to descend into myself, to make there a fresh discovery: that of the difference that I had sought in vain in life, in travel, a longing for which was given me, however, by this sonorous tide which sent its sunlit waves rolling to expire at my feet. A twofold difference. As the spectrum makes visible to us the composition of light, so the harmony of a Wagner, the colour of an Elstir enable us to know that essential quality of another person's sensations into which love for another person does not allow us to penetrate. Then there is diversity inside the work itself, by the sole means that it has of being effectively diverse, to wit combining diverse individualities. Where a minor composer would pretend that he was portraying a squire, or a knight, whereas he would make them both sing the same music, Wagner on the contrary allots to each denomination a different reality, and whenever a squire appears, it is an individual figure, at once complicated and simplified, that, with a joyous, feudal clash of warring sounds, inscribes itself in the vast, sonorous mass. Whence the completeness of a music that is indeed filled with so many different musics, each of which is a person. A person or the impression that is given us by a momentary aspect of nature. Even what is most independent of the sentiment that it makes us feel preserves its outward and entirely definite reality; the song of a bird, the ring of a hunter's horn, the air that a shepherd plays upon his pipe, cut out against the horizon their silhouette of sound. It is true that Wagner had still to bring these together, to make use of them, to introduce them into an orchestral whole, to make them subservient to the highest musical ideals, but always respecting their original nature, as a carpenter respects the grain, the peculiar essence of the wood that he is carving.

But notwithstanding the richness of these works in which the contemplation of nature has its place by the side of action, by the side of persons who are something more than proper names, I thought how markedly, all the same, these works participate in that quality of being — albeit marvellously — always incomplete, which is the peculiarity of all the great works of the nineteenth century, with which the greatest writers of that century have stamped their books, but, watching themselves at work as though they were at once author and critic, have derived from this self-contemplation a novel beauty, exterior and superior to the work itself, imposing upon it retrospectively a unity, a greatness which it does not possess. Without pausing to consider him who saw in his novels, after they had appeared, a *Human Comedy*, nor those who entitled heterogeneous poems or essays *The Legend of the Ages* or *The Bible of Humanity*, can we not say all the same of the last of these that he is so perfect an incarnation of the nineteenth century that the greatest beauties in Michelet are to be sought not so much in his work itself as in the attitudes that he adopts when he is considering his work, not in his *History of France* nor in his*History of the Revolution*, but in his prefaces to his books? *Prefaces*, that is to say pages written after the books themselves, in which he considers the books, and with which we must include here and there certain phrases beginning as a rule with a: “Shall I say?” which is not a scholar’s precaution but a musician’s cadence. The other musician, he who was delighting me at this moment, Wagner, retrieving some exquisite scrap from a drawer of his writing-table to make it appear as a theme, retrospectively necessary, in a work of which he had not been thinking at the moment when he composed it, then having composed a first mythological opera, and a second, and afterwards others still, and perceiving all of a sudden that he had written a tetralogy, must have felt something of the same exhilaration as Balzac, when, casting over his works the eye at once of a stranger and of a father, finding in one the purity of Raphael, in another the simplicity of the Gospel, he suddenly decided, as he shed a retrospective illumination upon them, that they would be better brought together in a cycle in which the same characters would reappear, and added to his work, in this act of joining it together, a stroke of the brush, the last and the most sublime. A unity that was ulterior, not artificial, otherwise it would have crumbled into dust like all the other systématisations of mediocre writers who with the elaborate assistance of titles and sub-titles give themselves the appearance of having pursued a single and transcendent design. Not fictitious, perhaps indeed all the more real for being ulterior, for being born of a moment of enthusiasm when it is discovered to

exist among fragments which need only to be joined together. A unity that has been unaware of itself, therefore vital and not logical, that has not banned variety, chilled execution. It emerges (only applying itself this time to the work as a whole) like a fragment composed separately, born of an inspiration, not required by the artificial development of a theme, which comes in to form an integral part of the rest. Before the great orchestral movement that precedes the return of Yseult, it is the work itself that has attracted to it the half-forgotten air of a shepherd's pipe. And, no doubt, just as the swelling of the orchestra at the approach of the ship, when it takes hold of these notes on the pipe, transforms them, infects them with its own intoxication, breaks their rhythm, clarifies their tone, accelerates their movement, multiplies their instrumentation, so no doubt Wagner himself was filled with joy when he discovered in his memory a shepherd's air, incorporated it in his work, gave it its full wealth of meaning. This joy moreover never forsakes him. In him, however great the melancholy of the poet, it is consoled, surpassed — that is to say destroyed, alas, too soon — by the delight of the craftsman. But then, no less than by the similarity I had remarked just now between Vinteuil's phrase and Wagner's, I was troubled by the thought of this Vulcan-like craftsmanship. Could it be this that gave to great artists the illusory appearance of a fundamental originality, incommensurable with any other, the reflexion of a more than human reality, actually the result of industrious toil? If art be no more than that, it is not more real than life and I had less cause for regret. I went on playing Tristan. Separated from Wagner by the wall of sound, I could hear him exult, invite me to share his joy, I could hear ring out all the louder the immortally youthful laugh and the hammer-blows of Siegfried, in which, moreover, more marvellously struck were those phrases, the technical skill of the craftsman serving merely to make it easier for them to leave the earth, birds akin not to Lohengrin's swan but to that aeroplane which I had seen at Balbec convert its energy into vertical motion, float over the sea and lose itself in the sky. Perhaps, as the birds that soar highest and fly most swiftly have a stronger wing, one required one of these frankly material vehicles to explore the infinite, one of these 120 horsepower machines, marked Mystery, in which nevertheless, however high one flies, one is prevented to some extent from enjoying the silence of space by the overpowering roar of the engine!

For some reason or other the course of my musings, which hitherto had wandered among musical memories, turned now to those men who have been the best performers of music in our day, among whom, slightly exaggerating his merit, I included Morel. At once my thoughts took a sharp turn, and it was

Morel's character, certain eccentricities of his nature that I began to consider. As it happened — and this might be connected though it should not be confused with the neurasthenia to which he was a prey — Morel was in the habit of talking about his life, but always presented so shadowy a picture of it that it was difficult to make anything out. For instance, he placed himself entirely at M. de Charlus's disposal on the understanding that he must keep his evenings free, as he wished to be able after dinner to attend a course of lectures on algebra. M. de Charlus conceded this, but insisted upon seeing him after the lectures. "Impossible, it's an old Italian painting" (this witticism means nothing when written down like this; but M. de Charlus having made Morel read *l'Éducation sentimentale*, in the penultimate chapter of which Frédéric Moreau uses this expression, it was Morel's idea of a joke never to say the word 'impossible' without following it up with "it's an old Italian painting") "the lectures go on very late, and I've already given a lot of trouble to the lecturer, who naturally would be annoyed if I came away in the middle." "But there's no need to attend lectures, algebra is not a thing like swimming, or even English, you can learn it equally well from a book," replied M. de Charlus, who had guessed from the first that these algebra lectures were one of those images of which it was impossible to make out anything. It was perhaps some affair with a woman, or, if Morel was seeking to earn money in shady ways and had attached himself to the secret police, a nocturnal expedition with detectives, or possibly, what was even worse, an engagement as one of the young men whose services may be required in a brothel. "A great deal easier, from a book," Morel assured M. de Charlus, "for it's impossible to make head or tail of the lectures." "Then why don't you study it in my house, where you would be far more comfortable?" M. de Charlus might have answered, but took care not to do so, knowing that at once, preserving only the same essential element that the evening hours must be set apart, the imaginary algebra course would change to a compulsory lesson in dancing or in drawing. In which M. de Charlus might have seen that he was mistaken, partially at least, for Morel did often spend his time at the Baron's in solving equations. M. de Charlus did raise the objection that algebra could be of little use to a violinist. Morel replied that it was a distraction which helped him to pass the time and to conquer his neurasthenia. No doubt M. de Charlus might have made inquiries, have tried to find out what actually were these mysterious and ineluctable lectures on algebra that were delivered only at night. But M. de Charlus was not qualified to unravel the tangled skein of Morel's occupations, being himself too much caught in the toils of social life. The visits he received or

paid, the time he spent at his club, dinner-parties, evenings at the theatre prevented him from thinking about the problem, or for that matter about the violent and vindictive animosity which Morel had (it was reported) indulged and at the same time sought to conceal in the various environments, the different towns in which his life had been spent, and where people still spoke of him with a shudder, with bated breath, never venturing to say anything definite about him.

It was unfortunately one of the outbursts of this neurotic irritability that I was privileged to hear that day when, rising from the piano, I went down to the courtyard to meet Albertine, who still did not appear. As I passed by Jupien's shop, in which Morel and the girl who, I supposed, was shortly to become his wife were by themselves, Morel was screaming at the top of his voice, thereby revealing an accent that I had never heard in his speech, a rustic tone, suppressed as a rule, and very strange indeed. His words were no less strange, faulty from the point of view of the French language, but his knowledge of everything was imperfect. "Will you get out of here, *grand pied de grue, grand pied de grue, grand pied de grue*," he repeated to the poor girl who at first had certainly not understood what he meant, and now, trembling and indignant, stood motionless before him. "Didn't I tell you to get out of here, *grand pied de grue, grand pied de grue*; go and fetch your uncle till I tell him what you are, you whore." Just at that moment the voice of Jupien who was coming home talking to one of his friends was heard in the courtyard, and as I knew that Morel was an utter coward, I decided that it was unnecessary to join my forces with those of Jupien and his friend, who in another moment would have entered the shop, and I retired upstairs again to escape Morel, who, for all his having pretended to be so anxious that Jupien should be fetched (probably in order to frighten and subjugate the girl, an act of blackmail which rested probably upon no foundation), made haste to depart as soon as he heard his voice in the courtyard. The words I have set down here are nothing, they would not explain why my heart throbbed so as I went upstairs. These scenes of which we are witnesses in real life find an incalculable element of strength in what soldiers call, in speaking of a military offensive, the advantage of surprise, and however agreeably I might be soothed by the knowledge that Albertine, instead of remaining at the Trocadéro, was coming home to me, I still heard ringing in my ears the accent of those words ten times repeated: "*Grand pied de grue, grand pied de grue*," which had so appalled me.

Gradually my agitation subsided. Albertine was on her way home. I should hear her ring the bell in a moment. I felt that my life was no longer what it might

have become, and that to have a woman in the house like this with whom quite naturally, when she returned home, I should have to go out, to the adornment of whose person the strength and activity of my nature were to be ever more and more diverted, made me as it were a bough that has blossomed, but is weighed down by the abundant fruit into which all its reserves of strength have passed. In contrast to the anxiety that I had been feeling only an hour earlier, the calm that I now felt at the prospect of Albertine's return was more ample than that which I had felt in the morning before she left the house. Anticipating the future, of which my mistress's docility made me practically master, more resistant, as though it were filled and stabilised by the imminent, importunate, inevitable, gentle presence, it was the calm (dispensing us from the obligation to seek our happiness in ourselves) that is born of family feeling and domestic bliss. Family and domestic: such was again, no less than the sentiment that had brought me such great peace while I was waiting for Albertine, that which I felt later on when I drove out with her. She took off her glove for a moment, whether to touch my hand, or to dazzle me by letting me see on her little finger, next to the ring that Mme. Bontemps had given her, another upon which was displayed the large and liquid surface of a clear sheet of ruby. "What! Another ring, Albertine. Your aunt is generous!" "No, I didn't get this from my aunt," she said with a laugh. "It was I who bought it, now that, thanks to you, I can save up ever so much money. I don't even know whose it was before. A visitor who was short of money left it with the landlord of an hotel where I stayed at Le Mans. He didn't know what to do with it, and would have let it go for much less than it was worth. But it was still far too dear for me. Now that, thanks to you, I'm becoming a smart lady, I wrote to ask him if he still had it. And here it is." "That makes a great many rings, Albertine. Where will you put the one that I am going to give you? Anyhow, it is a beautiful ring, I can't quite make out what that is carved round the ruby, it looks like a man's head grinning. But my eyes aren't strong enough." "They might be as strong as you like, you would be no better off. I can't make it out either." In the past it had often happened, as I read somebody's memoirs, or a novel, in which a man always goes out driving with a woman, takes tea with her, that I longed to be able to do likewise. I had thought sometimes that I was successful, as for instance when I took Saint-Loup's mistress out with me, or went to dinner with her. But in vain might I summon to my assistance the idea that I was at that moment actually impersonating the character that I had envied in the novel, that idea assured me that I ought to find pleasure in Rachel's society, and afforded me none. For, whenever we attempt to

imitate something that has really existed, we forget that this something was brought about not by the desire to imitate but by an unconscious force which itself also is real; but this particular impression which I had been unable to derive from all my desire to taste a delicate pleasure in going out with Rachel, behold I was now tasting it without having made the slightest effort to procure it, but for quite different reasons, sincere, profound; to take a single instance, for the reason that my jealousy prevented me from letting Albertine go out of my sight, and, the moment that I was able to leave the house, from letting her go anywhere without me. I tasted it only now, because our knowledge is not of the external objects which we try to observe, but of involuntary sensations, because in the past a woman might be sitting in the same carriage as myself, she was not *really* by my side, so long as she was not created afresh there at every moment by a need of her such as I felt of Albertine, so long as the constant caress of my gaze did not incessantly restore to her those tints that need to be perpetually refreshed, so long as my senses, appeased it might be but still endowed with memory, did not place beneath those colours savour and substance, so long as, combined with the senses and with the imagination that exalts them, jealousy was not maintaining the woman in equilibrium by my side by a compensated attraction as powerful as the law of gravity. Our motor-car passed swiftly along the boulevards, the avenues whose lines of houses, a rosy congelation of sunshine and cold, reminded me of calling upon Mme. Swann in the soft light of her chrysanthemums, before it was time to ring for the lamps.

I had barely time to make out, being divided from them by the glass of the motor-car as effectively as I should have been by that of my bedroom window, a young fruit seller, a dairymaid, standing in the doorway of her shop, illuminated by the sunshine like a heroine whom my desire was sufficient to launch upon exquisite adventures, on the threshold of a romance which I might never know. For I could not ask Albertine to let me stop, and already the young women were no longer visible whose features my eyes had barely distinguished, barely caressed their fresh complexions in the golden vapour in which they were bathed. The emotion that I felt grip me when I caught sight of a wine-merchant’s girl at her desk or a laundress chatting in the street was the emotion that we feel on recognising a goddess. Now that Olympus no longer exists, its inhabitants dwell upon the earth. And when, in composing a mythological scene, painters have engaged to pose as Venus or Ceres young women of humble birth, who follow the most sordid callings, so far from committing sacrilege, they have merely added, restored to them the quality, the various attributes which they had

forfeited. “What did you think of the Trocadéro, you little gadabout?” “I’m jolly glad I came away from it to go out with you. As architecture, it’s pretty measly, isn’t it? It’s by Davioud, I fancy.” “But how learned my little Albertine is becoming! Of course it was Davioud who built it, but I couldn’t have told you offhand.” “While you are asleep, I read your books, you old lazybones.” “Listen, child, you are changing so fast and becoming so intelligent” (this was true, but even had it not been true I was not sorry that she should have the satisfaction, failing any other, of saying to herself that at least the time which she spent in my house was not being entirely wasted) “that I don’t mind telling you things that would generally be regarded as false and which are all on the way to a truth that I am seeking. You know what is meant by impressionism?” “Of course!” “Very well then, this is what I mean: you remember the church at Marcouville l’Orgueilleuse which Elstir disliked because it was new. Isn’t it rather a denial of his own impressionism when he subtracts such buildings from the general impression in which they are contained to bring them out of the light in which they are dissolved and scrutinise like an archaeologist their intrinsic merit? When he begins to paint, have not a hospital, a school, a poster upon a hoarding the same value as a priceless cathedral which stands by their side in a single indivisible image? Remember how the façade was baked by the sun, how that carved frieze of saints swam upon the sea of light. What does it matter that a building is new, if it appears to be old, or even if it does not. All the poetry that the old quarters contain has been squeezed out to the last drop, but if you look at some of the houses that have been built lately for rich tradesmen, in the new districts, where the stone is all freshly cut and still quite white, don’t they seem to rend the torrid air of noon in July, at the hour when the shopkeepers go home to luncheon in the suburbs, with a cry as harsh as the odour of the cherries waiting for the meal to begin in the darkened dining-room, where the prismatic glass knife-rests project a multicoloured fire as beautiful as the windows of Chartres?” “How wonderful you are! If I ever do become clever, it will be entirely owing to you.” “Why on a fine day tear your eyes away from the Trocadéro, whose giraffe-neck towers remind one of the Charterhouse of Pavia?” “It reminded me also, standing up like that on its hill, of a Mantegna that you have, I think it’s of Saint Sebastian, where in the background there’s a city like an amphitheatre, and you would swear you saw the Trocadéro.” “There, you see! But how did you come across my Mantegna? You are amazing!” We had now reached a more plebeian quarter, and the installation of an ancillary Venus behind each counter made it as it were a suburban altar at the foot of which I

would gladly have spent the rest of my life.

As one does on the eve of a premature death, I drew up a mental list of the pleasures of which I was deprived by Albertine's setting a full stop to my freedom. At Passy it was in the open street, so crowded were the footways, that a group of girls, their arms encircling one another's waist, left me marvelling at their smile. I had not time to see it clearly, but it is hardly probable that I exaggerated it; in any crowd after all, in any crowd of young people, it is not unusual to come upon the effigy of a noble profile. So that these assembled masses on public holidays are to the voluptuary as precious as is to the archaeologist the congested state of a piece of ground in which digging will bring to light ancient medals. We arrived at the Bois. I reflected that, if Albertine had not come out with me, I might at this moment, in the enclosure of the Champs-Elysées, have been hearing the Wagnerian tempest set all the rigging of the orchestra ascream, draw to itself, like a light spindrift, the tune of the shepherd's pipe which I had just been playing to myself, set it flying, mould it, deform it, divide it, sweep it away in an ever-increasing whirlwind. I was determined, at any rate, that our drive should be short, and that we should return home early, for, without having mentioned it to Albertine, I had decided to go that evening to the Verdurins'. They had recently sent me an invitation which I had flung into the waste-paper basket with all the rest. But I changed my mind for this evening, for I meant to try to find out who the people were that Albertine might have been hoping to meet there in the afternoon. To tell the truth, I had reached that stage in my relations with Albertine when, if everything remains the same, if things go on normally, a woman ceases to serve us except as a starting point towards another woman. She still retains a corner in our heart, but a very small corner; we hasten out every evening in search of unknown women, especially unknown women who are known to her and can tell us about her life. Herself, after all, we have possessed, have exhausted everything that she has consented to yield to us of herself. Her life is still herself, but that part of herself which we do not know, the things as to which we have questioned her in vain and which we shall be able to gather from fresh lips.

If my life with Albertine was to prevent me from going to Venice, from travelling, at least I might in the meantime, had I been alone, have made the acquaintance of the young midinettes scattered about in the sunlight of this fine Sunday, in the sum total of whose beauty I gave a considerable place to the unknown life that animated them. The eyes that we see, are they not shot through by a gaze as to which we do not know what images, memories, expectations,

disdains it carries, a gaze from which we cannot separate them? The life that the person who passes by is living, will it not impart, according to what it is, a different value to the knitting of those brows, to the dilatation of those nostrils? Albertine's presence debarred me from going to join them and perhaps also from ceasing to desire them. The man who would maintain in himself the desire to go on living, and his belief in something more delicious than the things of daily life, must go out driving; for the streets, the avenues are full of goddesses. But the goddesses do not allow us to approach them. Here and there, among the trees, at the entrance to some café, a waitress was watching like a nymph on the edge of a sacred grove, while beyond her three girls were seated by the sweeping arc of their bicycles that were stacked beside them, like three immortals leaning against the clouds or the fabulous coursers upon which they perform their mythological journeys. I remarked that, whenever Albertine looked for a moment at these girls, with a profound attention, she at once turned to gaze at myself. But I was not unduly troubled, either by the intensity of this contemplation, or by its brevity for which its intensity compensated; as for the latter, it often happened that Albertine, whether from exhaustion, or because it was an intense person's way of looking at other people, used to gaze thus in a sort of brown study at my father, it might be, or at Françoise; and as for the rapidity with which she turned to look at myself, it might be due to the fact that Albertine, knowing my suspicions, might prefer, even if they were not justified, to avoid giving them any foothold. This attention, moreover, which would have seemed to me criminal on Albertine's part (and quite as much so if it had been directed at young men), I fastened, without thinking myself reprehensible for an instant, almost deciding indeed that Albertine was reprehensible for preventing me, by her presence, from stopping the car and going to join them, upon all the midinettes. We consider it innocent to desire a thing and atrocious that the other person should desire it. And this contrast between what concerns ourselves on the one hand, and on the other the person with whom we are in love, is not confined only to desire, but extends also to falsehood. What is more usual than a lie, whether it is a question of masking the daily weakness of a constitution which we wish to be thought strong, of concealing a vice, or of going off, without offending the other person, to the thing that we prefer? It is the most necessary instrument of conversation, and the one that is most widely used. But it is this which we actually propose to banish from the life of her whom we love; we watch for it, scent it, detest it everywhere. It appalls us, it is sufficient to bring about a rupture, it seems to us to be concealing the most serious faults,

except when it does so effectively conceal them that we do not suspect their existence. A strange state this in which we are so inordinately sensitive to a pathogenic agent which its universal swarming makes inoffensive to other people and so serious to the wretch who finds that he is no longer immune to it.

The life of these pretty girls (because of my long periods of seclusion, I so rarely met any) appeared to me as to everyone in whom facility of realisation has not destroyed the faculty of imagination, a thing as different from anything that I knew, as desirable as the most marvellous cities that travel holds in store for us.

The disappointment that I had felt with the women whom I had known, in the cities which I had visited, did not prevent me from letting myself be caught by the attraction of others or from believing in their reality; thus, just as seeing Venice — that Venice for which the spring weather too filled me with longing, and which marriage with Albertine would prevent me from knowing — seeing Venice in a panorama which Ski would perhaps have declared to be more beautiful in tone than the place itself, would to me have been no substitute for the journey to Venice the length of which, determined without any reference to myself, seemed to me an indispensable preliminary; similarly, however pretty she might be, the midinette whom a procuress had artificially provided for me could not possibly be a substitute for her who with her awkward figure was strolling at this moment under the trees, laughing with a friend. The girl that I might find in a house of assignation, were she even better-looking than this one, could not be the same thing, because we do not look at the eyes of a girl whom we do not know as we should look at a pair of little discs of opal or agate. We know that the little ray which colours them or the diamond dust that makes them sparkle is all that we can see of a mind, a will, a memory in which is contained the home life that we do not know, the intimate friends whom we envy. The enterprise of taking possession of all this, which is so difficult, so stubborn, is what gives its value to the gaze far more than its merely physical beauty (which may serve to explain why the same young man can awaken a whole romance in the imagination of a woman who has heard somebody say that he is the Prince of Wales, whereas she pays no more attention to him after learning that she is mistaken); to find the midinette in the house of assignation is to find her emptied of that unknown life which permeates her and which we aspire to possess with her, it is to approach a pair of eyes that have indeed become mere precious stones, a nose whose quivering is as devoid of meaning as that of a flower. No, that unknown midinette who was passing at that moment, it seemed to me as indispensable, if I wished to continue to believe in her reality, to test her

resistance by adapting my behaviour to it, challenging a rebuff, returning to the charge, obtaining an assignation, waiting for her as she came away from her work, getting to know, episode by episode, all that composed the girl's life, traversing the space that, for her, enveloped the pleasure which I was seeking, and the distance which her different habits, her special mode of life, set between me and the attention, the favour which I wished to attain and capture, as making a long journey in the train if I wished to believe in the reality of Venice which I should see and which would not be merely a panoramic show in a World Exhibition. But this very parallel between desire and travel made me vow to myself that one day I would grasp a little more closely the nature of this force, invisible but as powerful as any faith, or as, in the world of physics, atmospheric pressure, which exalted to such a height cities and women so long as I did not know them, and slipped away from beneath them as soon as I had approached them, made them at once collapse and fall flat upon the dead level of the most commonplace reality.

Farther along another girl was kneeling beside her bicycle, which she was putting to rights. The repair finished, the young racer mounted her machine, but without straddling it as a man would have done. For a moment the bicycle swerved, and the young body seemed to have added to itself a sail, a huge wing; and presently we saw dart away at full speed the young creature half-human, half-winged, angel or peri, pursuing her course.

This was what a life with Albertine prevented me from enjoying. Prevented me, did I say? Should I not have thought rather: what it provided for my enjoyment. If Albertine had not been living with me, had been free, I should have imagined, and with reason, every woman to be a possible, a probable object of her desire, of her pleasure. They would have appeared to me like those dancers who, in a diabolical ballet, representing the Temptations to one person, plunge their darts in the heart of another. Midinettes, schoolgirls, actresses, how I should have hated them all! Objects of horror, I should have excepted them from the beauty of the universe. My bondage to Albertine, by permitting me not to suffer any longer on their account, restored them to the beauty of the world. Inoffensive, having lost the needle that stabs the heart with jealousy, I was able to admire them, to caress them with my eyes, another day more intimately perhaps. By secluding Albertine, I had at the same time restored to the universe all those rainbow wings which sweep past us in public gardens, ballrooms, theatres, and which became tempting once more to me because she could no longer succumb to their temptation. They composed the beauty of the world.

They had at one time composed that of Albertine. It was because I had beheld her as a mysterious bird, then as a great actress of the beach, desired, perhaps won, that I had thought her wonderful. As soon as she was a captive in my house, the bird that I had seen one afternoon advancing with measured step along the front, surrounded by the congregation of the other girls like seagulls alighted from who knows whence, Albertine had lost all her colours, with all the chances that other people had of securing her for themselves. Gradually she had lost her beauty. It required excursions like this, in which I imagined her, but for my presence, accosted by some woman, or by some young man, to make me see her again amid the splendour of the beach, albeit my jealousy was on a different plane from the decline of the pleasures of my imagination. But notwithstanding these abrupt reversions in which, desired by other people, she once more became beautiful in my eyes, I might very well divide her visit to me in two periods, an earlier in which she was still, although less so every day, the glittering actress of the beach, and a later period in which, become the grey captive, reduced to her dreary self, I required those flashes in which I remembered the past to make me see her again in colour.

Sometimes, in the hours in which I felt most indifferent towards her, there came back to me the memory of a far-off moment when upon the beach, before I had made her acquaintance, a lady being near her with whom I was on bad terms and with whom I was almost certain now that she had had relations, she burst out laughing, staring me in the face in an insolent fashion. All round her hissed the blue and polished sea. In the sunshine of the beach, Albertine, in the midst of her friends, was the most beautiful of them all. She was a splendid girl, who in her familiar setting of boundless waters, had — precious in the eyes of the lady who admired her — inflicted upon me this unpardonable insult. It was unpardonable, for the lady would perhaps return to Balbec, would notice perhaps, on the luminous and echoing beach, that Albertine was absent. But she would not know that the girl was living with me, was wholly mine. The vast expanse of blue water, her forgetfulness of the fondness that she had felt for this particular girl and would divert to others, had closed over the outrage that Albertine had done me, enshrining it in a glittering and unbreakable casket. Then hatred of that woman gnawed my heart; of Albertine also, but a hatred mingled with admiration of the beautiful, courted girl, with her marvellous hair, whose laughter upon the beach had been an insult. Shame, jealousy, the memory of my earliest desires and of the brilliant setting had restored to Albertine the beauty, the intrinsic merit of other days. And thus there alternated with the somewhat

oppressive boredom that I felt in her company a throbbing desire, full of splendid storms and of regrets; according to whether she was by my side in my bedroom or I set her at liberty in my memory upon the front, in her gay seaside frocks, to the sound of the musical instruments of the sea — Albertine, now extracted from that environment, possessed and of no great value, now plunged back into it, escaping from me into a past which I should never be able to know, hurting me, in her friend's presence, as much as the splash of the wave or the heat of the sun — Albertine restored to the beach or brought back again to my room, in a sort of amphibious love.

Farther on, a numerous band were playing ball. All these girls had come out to make the most of the sunshine, for these days in February, even when they are brilliant, do not last long and the splendour of their light does not postpone the hour of its decline. Before that hour drew near, we passed some time in twilight, because after we had driven as far as the Seine, where Albertine admired, and by her presence prevented me from admiring the reflexions of red sails upon the wintry blue of the water, a solitary house in the distance like a single red poppy against the clear horizon, of which Saint-Cloud seemed, farther off again, to be the fragmentary, crumbling, rugged pétrification, we left our motor-car and walked a long way together; indeed for some moments I gave her my arm, and it seemed to me that the ring which her arm formed round it united our two persons in a single self and linked our separate destinies together.

At our feet, our parallel shadows, where they approached and joined, traced an exquisite pattern. No doubt it already seemed to me a marvellous thing at home that Albertine should be living with me, that it should be she that came and lay down on my bed. But it was so to speak the transportation of that marvel out of doors, into the heart of nature, that by the shore of that lake in the Bois, of which I was so fond, beneath the trees, it should be her and none but her shadow, the pure and simplified shadow of her leg, of her bust, that the sun had to depict in monochrome by the side of mine upon the gravel of the path. And I found a charm that was more immaterial doubtless, but no less intimate, than in the drawing together, the fusion of our bodies, in that of our shadows. Then we returned to our car. And it chose, for our homeward journey, a succession of little winding lanes along which the wintry trees, clothed, like ruins, in ivy and brambles, seemed to be pointing the way to the dwelling of some magician. No sooner had we emerged from their dusky cover than we found, upon leaving the Bois, the daylight still so bright that I imagined that I should still have time to do everything that I wanted to do before dinner, when, only a few minutes later, at

the moment when our car approached the Arc de Triomphe, it was with a sudden start of surprise and dismay that I perceived, over Paris, the moon prematurely full, like the face of a clock that has stopped and makes us think that we are late for an engagement. We had told the driver to take us home. To Albertine, this meant also coming to my home. The company of those women, however dear to us, who are obliged to leave us and return home, does not bestow that peace which I found in the company of Albertine seated in the car by my side, a company that was conveying us not to the void in which lovers have to part but to an even more stable and more sheltered union in my home, which was also hers, the material symbol of my possession of her. To be sure, in order to possess, one must first have desired. We do not possess a line, a surface, a mass unless it is occupied by our love. But Albertine had not been for me during our drive, as Rachel had been in the past, a futile dust of flesh and clothing. The imagination of my eyes, my lips, my hands had at Balbec so solidly built, so tenderly polished her body that now in this car, to touch that body, to contain it, I had no need to press my own body against Albertine, nor even to see her; it was enough to hear her, and if she was silent to know that she was by my side; my interwoven senses enveloped her altogether and when, as we arrived at the front door, she quite naturally alighted, I stopped for a moment to tell the chauffeur to call for me later on, but my gaze enveloped her still while she passed ahead of me under the arch, and it was still the same inert, domestic calm that I felt as I saw her thus, solid, flushed, opulent and captive, returning home quite naturally with myself, as a woman who was my own property, and, protected by its walls, disappearing into our house. Unfortunately, she seemed to feel herself a prisoner there, and to share the opinion of that Mme. de La Rochefoucauld who, when somebody asked her whether she was not glad to live in so beautiful a home as Liancourt, replied: “There is no such thing as a beautiful prison”; if I was to judge by her miserable, weary expression that evening as we dined together in my room. I did not notice it at first; and it was I that was made wretched by the thought that, if it had not been for Albertine (for with her I should have suffered too acutely from jealousy in an hotel where all day long she would have been exposed to contact with a crowd of strangers), I might at that moment be dining in Venice in one of those little restaurants, barrel-vaulted like the hold of a ship, from which one looks out on the Grand Canal through arched windows framed in Moorish mouldings.

I ought to add that Albertine greatly admired in my room a big bronze by Barbedienne which with ample justification Bloch considered extremely ugly.

He had perhaps less reason to be surprised at my having kept it. I had never sought, like him, to furnish for artistic effect, to compose my surroundings, I was too lazy, too indifferent to the things that I was in the habit of seeing every day. Since my taste was not involved, I had a right not to harmonise my interior. I might perhaps, even without that, have discarded the bronze. But ugly and expensive things are of great use, for they enjoy, among people who do not understand us, who have not our taste and with whom we cannot fall in love, a prestige that would not be shared by some proud object that does not reveal its beauty. Now the people who do not understand us are precisely the people with regard to whom alone it may be useful to us to employ a prestige which our intellect is enough, to assure us among superior people. Albertine might indeed be beginning to shew taste, she still felt a certain respect for the bronze, and this respect was reflected upon myself in a consideration which, coming from Albertine, mattered infinitely more to me than the question of keeping a bronze which was a trifle degrading, since I was in love with Albertine.

But the thought of my bondage ceased of a sudden to weigh upon me and I looked forward to prolonging it still further, because I seemed to perceive that Albertine was painfully conscious of her own. True that whenever I had asked her whether she was not bored in my house, she had always replied that she did not know where it would be possible to have a happier time. But often these words were contradicted by an air of nervous exhaustion, of longing to escape.

Certainly if she had the tastes with which I had credited her, this inhibition from ever satisfying them must have been as provoking to her as it was calming to myself, calming to such an extent that I should have decided that the hypothesis of my having accused her unjustly was the most probable, had it not been so difficult to fit into this hypothesis the extraordinary pains that Albertine was taking never to be alone, never to be disengaged, never to stop for a moment outside the front door when she came in, to insist upon being accompanied, whenever she went to the telephone, by some one who would be able to repeat to me what she had said, by Françoise or Andrée, always to leave me alone (without appearing to be doing so on purpose) with the latter, after they had been out together, so that I might obtain a detailed report of their outing. With this marvellous docility were contrasted certain quickly repressed starts of impatience, which made me ask myself whether Albertine was not planning to cast off her chain. Certain subordinate incidents seemed to corroborate my supposition. Thus, one day when I had gone out by myself, in the Passy direction, and had met Gisèle, we began to talk about one thing and another.

Presently, not without pride at being able to do so, I informed her that I was constantly seeing Albertine. Gisèle asked me where she could find her, since there was something that she simply *must*tell her. “Why, what is it?” “Something to do with some young friends of hers.” “What friends? I may perhaps be able to tell you, though that need not prevent you from seeing her.” “Oh, girls she knew years ago, I don’t remember their names,” Gisèle replied vaguely, and beat a retreat. She left me, supposing herself to have spoken with such prudence that the whole story must seem to me perfectly straightforward. But falsehood is so unexacting, needs so little help to make itself manifest! If it had been a question of friends of long ago, whose very names she no longer remembered, why *must* she speak about them to Albertine? This ‘*must*,’ akin to an expression dear to Mme. Cottard: ‘in the nick of time,’ could be applicable only to something particular, opportune, perhaps urgent, relating to definite persons. Besides, something about her way of opening her mouth, as though she were going to yawn, with a vague expression, as she said to me (almost drawing back her body, as though she began to reverse her engine at this point in our conversation): “Oh, I don’t know, I don’t remember their names,” made her face, and in harmony with it her voice, as clear a picture of falsehood as the wholly different air, tense, excited, of her previous ‘*must*’ was of truth. I did not question Gisèle. Of what use would it have been to me? Certainly, she was not lying in the same fashion as Albertine. And certainly Albertine’s lies pained me more. But they had obviously a point in common: the fact of the lie itself, which in certain cases is self-evident. Not evidence of the truth that the lie conceals. We know that each murderer in turn imagines that he has arranged everything so cleverly that he will not be caught, and so it is with liars, particularly the woman with whom we are in love. We do not know where she has been, what she has been doing. But at the very moment when she speaks, when she speaks of something else beneath which lies hidden the thing that she does not mention, the lie is immediately perceived, and our jealousy increased, since we are conscious of the lie, and cannot succeed in discovering the truth. With Albertine, the impression that she was lying was conveyed by many of the peculiarities which we have already observed in the course of this narrative, but especially by this, that, when she was lying, her story broke down either from inadequacy, omission, improbability, or on the contrary from a surfeit of petty details intended to make it seem probable. Probability, notwithstanding the idea that the liar has formed of it, is by no means the same as truth. Whenever, while listening to something that is true, we hear something that is only probable, which is perhaps more so than

the truth, which is perhaps too probable, the ear that is at all sensitive feels that it is not correct, as with a line that does not scan or a word read aloud in mistake for another. Our ear feels this, and if we are in love our heart takes alarm. Why do we not reflect at the time, when we change the whole course of our life because we do not know whether a woman went along the Rue de Berri or the Rue Washington, why do we not reflect that these few hundred yards of difference, and the woman herself, will be reduced to the hundred millionth part of themselves (that is to say to dimensions far beneath our perception), if we only have the wisdom to remain for a few years without seeing the woman, and that she who has out-Gullivered Gulliver in our eyes will shrink to a Lilliputian whom no microscope — of the heart, at least, for that of the disinterested memory is more powerful and less fragile — can ever again perceive! However it may be, if there was a point in common — the lie itself — between Albertine's lies and Gisèle's, still Gisèle did not lie in the same fashion as Albertine, nor indeed in the same fashion as Andrée, but their respective lies dovetailed so neatly into one another, while presenting a great variety, that the little band had the impenetrable solidity of certain commercial houses, booksellers' for example or printing presses, where the wretched author will never succeed, notwithstanding the diversity of the persons employed in them, in discovering whether he is being swindled or not. The editor of the newspaper or review lies with an attitude of sincerity all the more solemn in that he is frequently obliged to conceal the fact that he himself does exactly the same things and indulges in the same commercial practices that he denounced in other editors or theatrical managers, in other publishers, when he chose as his battle-cry, when he raised against them the standard of Sincerity. The fact of a man's having proclaimed (as leader of a political party, or in any other capacity) that it is wicked to lie, obliges him as a rule to lie more than other people, without on that account abandoning the solemn mask, doffing the august tiara of sincerity. The 'sincere' gentleman's partner lies in a different and more ingenuous fashion. He deceives his author as he deceives his wife, with tricks from the vaudeville stage. The secretary of the firm, a blunt and honest man, lies quite simply, like an architect who promises that your house will be ready at a date when it will not have been begun. The head reader, an angelic soul, flutters from one to another of the three, and without knowing what the matter is, gives them, by a brotherly scruple and out of affectionate solidarity, the precious support of a word that is above suspicion. These four persons live in a state of perpetual dissension to which the arrival of the author puts a stop. Over and above their private quarrels, each of

them remembers the paramount military duty of rallying to the support of the threatened ‘corps.’ Without realising it, I had long been playing the part of this author among the little band. If Gisèle had been thinking, when she used the word ‘must,’ of some one of Albertine’s friends who was proposing to go abroad with her as soon as my mistress should have found some pretext or other for leaving me, and had meant to warn Albertine that the hour had now come or would shortly strike, she, Gisèle, would have let herself be torn to pieces rather than tell me so; it was quite useless therefore to ply her with questions. Meetings such as this with Gisèle were not alone in accentuating my doubts. For instance, I admired Albertine’s sketches. Albertine’s sketches, the touching distractions of the captive, moved me so that I congratulated her upon them. “No, they’re dreadfully bad, but I’ve never had a drawing lesson in my life.” “But one evening at Balbec you sent word to me that you had stayed at home to have a drawing lesson.” I reminded her of the day and told her that I had realised at the time that people did not have drawing lessons at that hour in the evening. Albertine blushed. “It is true,” she said, “I was not having drawing lessons, I told you a great many lies at first, that I admit. But I never lie to you now.” I would so much have liked to know what were the many lies that she had told me at first, but I knew beforehand that her answers would be fresh lies. And so I contented myself with kissing her. I asked her to tell me one only of those lies. She replied: “Oh, well; for instance when I said that the sea air was bad for me.” I ceased to insist in the face of this unwillingness to reveal.

To make her chain appear lighter, the best thing was no doubt to make her believe that I was myself about to break it. In any case, I could not at that moment confide this mendacious plan to her, she had been too kind in returning from the Trocadéro that afternoon; what I could do, far from distressing her with the threat of a rupture, was at the most to keep to myself those dreams of a perpetual life together which my grateful heart kept forming. As I looked at her, I found it hard to restrain myself from pouring them out to her, and she may perhaps have noticed this. Unfortunately the expression of such dreams is not contagious. The case of an affected old woman like M. de Charlus who, by dint of never seeing in his imagination anything but a stalwart young man, thinks that he has himself become a stalwart young man, all the more so the more affected and ridiculous he becomes, this case is more general, and it is the tragedy of an impassioned lover that he does not take into account the fact that while he sees in front of him a beautiful face, his mistress is seeing his face which is not made any more beautiful, far from it, when it is distorted by the pleasure that is

aroused in it by the sight of beauty. Nor indeed does love exhaust the whole of this case; we do not see our own body, which other people see, and we ‘follow’ our own thought, the object invisible to other people which is before our eyes. This object the artist does sometimes enable us to see in his work. Whence it arises that the admirers of his work are disappointed in its author, upon whose face that internal beauty is imperfectly reflected.

Every person whom we love, indeed to a certain extent every person is to us like Janus, presenting to us the face that we like if that person leaves us, the repellent face if we know him or her to be perpetually at our disposal. In the case of Albertine, the prospect of her continued society was painful to me in another fashion which I cannot explain in this narrative. It is terrible to have the life of another person attached to our own like a bomb which we hold in our hands, unable to get rid of it without committing a crime. But let us take as a parallel the ups and downs, the dangers, the anxieties, the fear of seeing believed in time to come false and probable things which one will not be able then to explain, feelings that one experiences if one lives in the intimate society of a madman. For instance, I pitied M. de Charlus for living with Morel (immediately the memory of the scene that afternoon made me feel the left side of my breast heavier than the other); leaving out of account the relations that may or may not have existed between them, M. de Charlus must have been unaware at the outset that Morel was mad. Morel’s beauty, his stupidity, his pride must have deterred the Baron from exploring so deeply, until the days of melancholy when Morel accused M. de Charlus of responsibility for his sorrows, without being able to furnish any explanation, abused him for his want of confidence, by the aid of false but extremely subtle reasoning, threatened him with desperate resolutions, while throughout all this there persisted the most cunning regard for his own most immediate interests But all this is only a comparison. Albertine was not mad.

I learned that a death had occurred during the day which distressed me greatly, that of Bergotte. It was known that he had been ill for a long time past. Not, of course, with the illness from which he had suffered originally and which was natural. Nature hardly seems capable of giving us any but quite short illnesses. But medicine has annexed to itself the art of prolonging them. Remedies, the respite that they procure, the relapses that a temporary cessation of them provokes, compose a sham illness to which the patient grows so accustomed that he ends by making it permanent, just as children continue to give way to fits of coughing long after they have been cured of the whooping

cough. Then remedies begin to have less effect, the doses are increased, they cease to do any good, but they have begun to do harm thanks to that lasting indisposition. Nature would not have offered them so long a tenure. It is a great miracle that medicine can almost equal nature in forcing a man to remain in bed, to continue on pain of death the use of some drug. From that moment the illness artificially grafted has taken root, has become a secondary but a genuine illness, with this difference only that natural illnesses are cured, but never those which medicine creates, for it knows not the secret of their cure.

For years past Bergotte had ceased to go out of doors. Anyhow, he had never cared for society, or had cared for it for a day only, to despise it as he despised everything else and in the same fashion, which was his own, namely to despise a thing not because it was beyond his reach but as soon as he had reached it. He lived so simply that nobody suspected how rich he was, and anyone who had known would still have been mistaken, for he would have thought him a miser, whereas no one was ever more generous. He was generous above all towards women — girls, one ought rather to say — who were ashamed to receive so much in return for so little. He excused himself in his own eyes because he knew that he could never produce such good work as in an atmosphere of amorous feelings. Love is too strong a word, pleasure that is at all deeply rooted in the flesh is helpful to literary work because it cancels all other pleasures, for instance the pleasures of society, those which are the same for everyone. And even if this love leads to disillusionment, it does at least stir, even by so doing, the surface of the soul which otherwise would be in danger of becoming stagnant. Desire is therefore not without its value to the writer in detaching him first of all from his fellow men and from conforming to their standards, and afterwards in restoring some degree of movement to a spiritual machine which, after a certain age, tends to become paralysed. We do not succeed in being happy but we make observation of the reasons which prevent us from being happy and which would have remained invisible to us but for these loopholes opened by disappointment. Dreams are not to be converted into reality, that we know; we would not form any, perhaps, were it not for desire, and it is useful to us to form them in order to see them fail and to be instructed by their failure. And so Bergotte said to himself: “I am spending more than a multimillionaire would spend upon girls, but the pleasures or disappointments that they give me make me write a book which brings me money.” Economically, this argument was absurd, but no doubt he found some charm in thus transmuting gold into caresses and caresses into gold. We saw, at the time of my grandmother’s death, how a

weary old age loves repose. Now in society, there is nothing but conversation. It may be stupid, but it has the faculty of suppressing women who are nothing more than questions and answers. Removed from society, women become once more what is so reposeful to a weary old man, an object of contemplation. In any case, it was no longer a question of anything of this sort. I have said that Bergotte never went out of doors, and when he got out of bed for an hour in his room, he would be smothered in shawls, plaids, all the things with which a person covers himself before exposing himself to intense cold or getting into a railway train. He would apologise to the few friends whom he allowed to penetrate to his sanctuary, and, pointing to his tartan plaids, his travelling-rugs, would say merrily: “After all, my dear fellow, life, as Anaxagoras has said, is a journey.” Thus he went on growing steadily colder, a tiny planet that offered a prophetic image of the greater, when gradually heat will withdraw from the earth, then life itself. Then the resurrection will have come to an end, for if, among future generations, the works of men are to shine, there must first of all be men. If certain kinds of animals hold out longer against the invading chill, when there are no longer any men, and if we suppose Bergotte’s fame to have lasted so long, suddenly it will be extinguished for all time. It will not be the last animals that will read him, for it is scarcely probable that, like the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost, they will be able to understand the speech of the various races of mankind without having learned it.

In the months that preceded his death, Bergotte suffered from insomnia, and what was worse, whenever he did fall asleep, from nightmares which, if he awoke, made him reluctant to go to sleep again. He had long been a lover of dreams, even of bad dreams, because thanks to them and to the contradiction they present to the reality which we have before us in our waking state, they give us, at the moment of waking if not before, the profound sensation of having slept. But Bergotte’s nightmares were not like that. When he spoke of nightmares, he used in the past to mean unpleasant things that passed through his brain. Latterly, it was as though proceeding from somewhere outside himself that he would see a hand armed with a damp cloth which, passed over his face by an evil woman, kept scrubbing him awake, an intolerable itching in his thighs, the rage — because Bergotte had murmured in his sleep that he was driving badly — of a raving lunatic of a cabman who flung himself upon the writer, biting and gnawing his fingers. Finally, as soon as in his sleep it had grown sufficiently dark, nature arranged a sort of undress rehearsal of the apoplectic stroke that was to carry him off: Bergotte arrived in a carriage beneath the porch of Swann’s new

house, and tried to alight. A stunning giddiness glued him to his seat, the porter came forward to help him out of the carriage, he remained seated, unable to rise — to straighten his legs. He tried to pull himself up with the help of the stone pillar that was by his side, but did not find sufficient support in it to enable him to stand.

He consulted doctors who, flattered at being called in by him, saw in his virtue as an incessant worker (it was twenty years since he had written anything), in his overstrain, the cause of his ailments. They advised him not to read thrilling stories (he never read anything), to benefit more by the sunshine, which was 'indispensable to life' (he had owed a few years of comparative health only to his rigorous seclusion indoors), to take nourishment (which made him thinner, and nourished nothing but his nightmares). One of his doctors was blessed with the spirit of contradiction, and whenever Bergotte consulted him in the absence of the others, and, in order not to offend him, suggested to him as his own ideas what the others had advised, this doctor, thinking that Bergotte was seeking to have prescribed for him something that he himself liked, at once forbade it, and often for reasons invented so hurriedly to meet the case that in face of the material objections which Bergotte raised, this argumentative doctor was obliged in the same sentence to contradict himself, but, for fresh reasons, repeated the original prohibition. Bergotte returned to one of the first of these doctors, a man who prided himself on his cleverness, especially in the presence of one of the leading men of letters, and who, if Bergotte insinuated: "I seem to remember, though, that Dr. X — told me — long ago, of course — that that might congest my kidneys and brain..." would smile sardonically, raise his finger and enounce: "I said use, I did not say abuse. Naturally every remedy, if one takes it in excess, becomes a two-edged sword." There is in the human body a certain instinct for what is beneficial to us, as there is in the heart for what is our moral duty, an instinct which no authorisation by a Doctor of Medicine or Divinity can replace. We know that cold baths are bad for us, we like them, we can always find a doctor to recommend them, not to prevent them from doing us harm. From each of these doctors Bergotte took something which, in his own wisdom, he had forbidden himself for years past. After a few weeks, his old troubles had reappeared, the new had become worse. Maddened by an unintermittent pain, to which was added insomnia broken only by brief spells of nightmare, Bergotte called in no more doctors and tried with success, but to excess, different narcotics, hopefully reading the prospectus that accompanied each of them, a prospectus which proclaimed the necessity of sleep but hinted that all the

preparations which induce it (except that contained in the bottle round which the prospectus was wrapped, which never produced any toxic effect) were toxic, and therefore made the remedy worse than the disease. Bergotte tried them all. Some were of a different family from those to which we are accustomed, preparations for instance of amyl and ethyl. When we absorb a new drug, entirely different in composition, it is always with a delicious expectancy of the unknown. Our heart beats as at a first assignation. To what unknown forms of sleep, of dreams, is the newcomer going to lead us? He is inside us now, he has the control of our thoughts. In what fashion are we going to fall asleep? And, once we are asleep, by what strange paths, up to what peaks, into what unfathomed gulfs is he going to lead us? With what new grouping of sensations are we to become acquainted on this journey? Will it bring us in the end to illness? To blissful happiness? To death? Bergotte's death had come to him overnight, when he had thus entrusted himself to one of these friends (a friend? or an enemy, rather?) who proved too strong for him. The circumstances of his death were as follows. An attack of uraemia, by no means serious, had led to his being ordered to rest. But one of the critics having written somewhere that in Vermeer's *Street in Delft* (lent by the Gallery at The Hague for an Exhibition of Dutch painting), a picture which he adored and imagined that he knew by heart, a little patch of yellow wall (which he could not remember) was so well painted that it was, if one looked at it by itself, like some priceless specimen of Chinese art, of a beauty that was sufficient in itself, Bergotte ate a few potatoes, left the house, and went to the exhibition. At the first few steps that he had to climb he was overcome by giddiness. He passed in front of several pictures and was struck by the stiffness and futility of so artificial a school, nothing of which equalled the fresh air and sunshine of a Venetian palazzo, or of an ordinary house by the sea. At last he came to the Vermeer which he remembered as more striking, more different from anything else that he knew, but in which, thanks to the critic's article, he remarked for the first time some small figures in blue, that the ground was pink, and finally the precious substance of the tiny patch of yellow wall. His giddiness increased; he fixed his eyes, like a child upon a yellow butterfly which it is trying to catch, upon the precious little patch of wall. "That is how I ought to have written," he said. "My last books are too dry, I ought to have gone over them with several coats of paint, made my language exquisite in itself, like this little patch of yellow wall." Meanwhile he was not unconscious of the gravity of his condition. In a celestial balance there appeared to him, upon one of its scales, his own life, while the other contained the little patch of wall so beautifully painted in yellow.

He felt that he had rashly surrendered the former for the latter. “All the same,” he said to himself, “I have no wish to provide the ‘feature’ of this exhibition for the evening papers.”

He repeated to himself: “Little patch of yellow wall, with a sloping roof, little patch of yellow wall.” While doing so he sank down upon a circular divan; and then at once he ceased to think that his life was in jeopardy and, reverting to his natural optimism, told himself: “It is just an ordinary indigestion from those potatoes; they weren’t properly cooked; it is nothing.” A fresh attack beat him down; he rolled from the divan to the floor, as visitors and attendants came hurrying to his assistance. He was dead. Permanently dead? Who shall say? Certainly our experiments in spiritualism prove no more than the dogmas of religion that the soul survives death. All that we can say is that everything is arranged in this life as though we entered it carrying the burden of obligations contracted in a former life; there is no reason inherent in the conditions of life on this earth that can make us consider ourselves obliged to do good, to be fastidious, to be polite even, nor make the talented artist consider himself obliged to begin over again a score of times a piece of work the admiration aroused by which will matter little to his body devoured by worms, like the patch of yellow wall painted with so much knowledge and skill by an artist who must for ever remain unknown and is barely identified under the name Vermeer. All these obligations which have not their sanction in our present life seem to belong to a different world, founded upon kindness, scrupulosity, self-sacrifice, a world entirely different from this, which we leave in order to be born into this world, before perhaps returning to the other to live once again beneath the sway of those unknown laws which we have obeyed because we bore their precepts in our hearts, knowing not whose hand had traced them there — those laws to which every profound work of the intellect brings us nearer and which are invisible only — and still! — to fools. So that the idea that Bergotte was not wholly and permanently dead is by no means improbable.

They buried him, but all through the night of mourning, in the lighted windows, his books arranged three by three kept watch like angels with outspread wings and seemed, for him who was no more, the symbol of his resurrection.

I learned, I have said, that day that Bergotte was dead. And I marvelled at the carelessness of the newspapers which — each of them reproducing the same paragraph — stated that he had died the day before. For, the day before, Albertine had met him, as she informed me that very evening, and indeed she

had been a little late in coming home, for she had stopped for some time talking to him. She was doubtless the last person to whom he had spoken. She knew him through myself who had long ceased to see him, but, as she had been anxious to make his acquaintance, I had, a year earlier, written to ask the old master whether I might bring her to see him. He had granted my request, a trifle hurt, I fancy, that I should be visiting him only to give pleasure to another person, which was a proof of my indifference to himself. These cases are frequent: sometimes the man or woman whom we implore to receive us not for the pleasure of conversing with them again, but on behalf of a third person, refuses so obstinately that our protégée concludes that we have boasted of an influence which we do not possess; more often the man of genius or the famous beauty consents, but, humiliated in their glory, wounded in their affection, feel for us afterwards only a diminished, sorrowful, almost contemptuous attachment. I discovered long after this that I had falsely accused the newspapers of inaccuracy, since on the day in question Albertine had not met Bergotte, but at the time I had never suspected this for a single instant, so naturally had she told me of the incident, and it was not until much later that I discovered her charming skill in lying with simplicity. The things that she said, the things that she confessed were so stamped with the character of formal evidence — what we see, what we learn from an unquestionable source — that she sowed thus in the empty spaces of her life episodes of another life the falsity of which I did not then suspect and began to perceive only at a much later date. I have used the word ‘confessed,’ for the following reason. Sometimes a casual meeting gave me a jealous suspicion in which by her side there figured in the past, or alas in the future, another person. In order to appear certain of my facts, I mentioned the person’s name, and Albertine said: “Yes, I met her, a week ago, just outside the house. I had to be polite and answer her when she spoke to me. I walked a little way with her. But there never has been anything between us. There never will be.” Now Albertine had not even met this person, for the simple reason that the person had not been in Paris for the last ten months. But my mistress felt that a complete denial would sound hardly probable. Whence this imaginary brief encounter, related so simply that I could see the lady stop, bid her good day, walk a little way with her. The evidence of my senses, if I had been in the street at that moment, would perhaps have informed me that the lady had not been with Albertine. But if I had knowledge of the fact, it was by one of those chains of reasoning in which the words of people in whom we have confidence insert strong links, and not by the evidence of my senses. To invoke this evidence of

the senses I should have had to be in the street at that particular moment, and I had not been. We may imagine, however, that such an hypothesis is not improbable: I might have gone out, and have been passing along the street at the time at which Albertine was to tell me in the evening (not having seen me there) that she had gone a little way with the lady, and I should then have known that Albertine was lying. But is that quite certain even then? A religious obscurity would have clouded my mind, I should have begun to doubt whether I had seen her by herself, I should barely have sought to understand by what optical illusion I had failed to perceive the lady, and should not have been greatly surprised to find myself mistaken, for the stellar universe is not so difficult of comprehension as the real actions of other people, especially of the people with whom we are in love, strengthened as they are against our doubts by fables devised for their protection. For how many years on end can they not allow our apathetic love to believe that they have in some foreign country a sister, a brother, a sister-in-law who have never existed!

The evidence of the senses is also an operation of the mind in which conviction creates the evidence. We have often seen her sense of hearing convey to Françoise not the word that was uttered but what she thought to be its correct form, which was enough to prevent her from hearing the correction implied in a superior pronunciation. Our butler was cast in a similar mould. M. de Charlus was in the habit of wearing at this time — for he was constantly changing — very light trousers which were recognisable a mile off. Now our butler, who thought that the word *pissotière* (the word denoting what M. de Rambuteau had been so annoyed to hear the Duc de Guermantes call a Rambuteau stall) was really *pistière*, never once in the whole of his life heard a single person say *pissotière*, albeit the word was frequently pronounced thus in his hearing. But error is more obstinate than faith and does not examine the grounds of its belief. Constantly the butler would say: “I’m sure M. le Baron de Charlus must have caught a disease to stand about as long as he does in a *pistière*. That’s what comes of running after the girls at his age. You can tell what he is by his trousers. This morning, Madame sent me with a message to Neuilly. As I passed the*pistière* in the Rue de Bourgogne I saw M. le Baron de Charlus go in. When I came back from Neuilly, quite an hour later, I saw his yellow trousers in the same *pistière*, in the same place, in the middle stall where he always goes so that people shan’t see him.” I can think of no one more beautiful, more noble or more youthful than a certain niece of Mme. de Guermantes. But I have heard the porter of a restaurant where I used sometimes to dine say as she went by: “Just

look at that old trollop, what a style! And she must be eighty, if she's a day." As far as age went, I find it difficult to believe that he meant what he said. But the pages clustered round him, who tittered whenever she went past the hotel on her way to visit, at their house in the neighbourhood, her charming great-aunts, Mmes. de Fezensac and de Bellery, saw upon the face of the young beauty the four-score years with which, seriously or in jest, the porter had endowed the 'old trollop.' You would have made them shriek with laughter had you told them that she was more distinguished than one of the two cashiers of the hotel, who, devoured by eczema, ridiculously stout, seemed to them a fine-looking woman. Perhaps sexual desire alone would have been capable of preventing their error from taking form, if it had been brought to bear upon the passage of the alleged old trollop, and if the pages had suddenly begun to covet the young goddess. But for reasons unknown, which were most probably of a social nature, this desire had not come into play. There is moreover ample room for discussion. The universe is true for us all and dissimilar to each of us. If we were not obliged, to preserve the continuity of our story, to confine ourselves to frivolous reasons, how many more serious reasons would permit us to demonstrate the falsehood and flimsiness of the opening pages of this volume in which, from my bed, I hear the world awake, now to one sort of weather, now to another. Yes, I have been forced to whittle down the facts, and to be a liar, but it is not one universe, there are millions, almost as many as the number of human eyes and brains in existence, that awake every morning.

To return to Albertine, I have never known any woman more amply endowed than herself with the happy aptitude for a lie that is animated, coloured with the selfsame tints of life, unless it be one of her friends — one of my blossoming girls also, rose-pink as Albertine, but one whose irregular profile, concave in one place, then convex again, was exactly like certain clusters of pink flowers the name of which I have forgotten, but which have long and sinuous concavities. This girl was, from the point of view of story-telling, superior to Albertine, for she never introduced any of those painful moments, those furious innuendoes, which were frequent with my mistress. I have said, however, that she was charming when she invented a story which left no room for doubt, for one saw then in front of her the thing — albeit imaginary — which she was saying, using it as an illustration of her speech. Probability alone inspired Albertine, never the desire to make me jealous. For Albertine, without perhaps any material interest, liked people to be polite to her. And if in the course of this work I have had and shall have many occasions to shew how jealousy intensifies

love, it is the lover’s point of view that I have adopted. But if that lover be only the least bit proud, and though he were to die of a separation, he will not respond to a supposed betrayal with a courteous speech, he will turn away, or without going will order himself to assume a mask of coldness. And so it is entirely to her own disadvantage that his mistress makes him suffer so acutely. If, on the contrary, she dispels with a tactful word, with loving caresses, the suspicions that have been torturing him for all his show of indifference, no doubt the lover does not feel that despairing increase of love to which jealousy drives him, but ceasing in an instant to suffer, happy, affectionate, relieved from strain as one is after a storm when the rain has ceased and one barely hears still splash at long intervals from the tall horse-chestnut trees the clinging drops which already the reappearing sun has dyed with colour, he does not know how to express his gratitude to her who has cured him. Albertine knew that I liked to reward her for her kindnesses, and this perhaps explained why she used to invent, to exculpate herself, confessions as natural as these stories the truth of which I never doubted, one of them being that of her meeting with Bergotte when he was already dead. Previously I had never known any of Albertine’s lies save those that, at Balbec for instance, Françoise used to report to me, which I have omitted from these pages albeit they hurt me so sorely: “As she didn’t want to come, she said to me: ‘Couldn’t you say to Monsieur that you didn’t find me, that I had gone out?’” But our ‘inferiors,’ who love us as Françoise loved me, take pleasure in wounding us in our self-esteem.

Chapter 2 — The Verdurins Quarrel with M. De Charlus

After dinner, I told Albertine that, since I was out of bed, I might as well take the opportunity to go and see some of my friends, Mme. de Villeparisis, Mme. de Guermantes, the Cambremers, anyone in short whom I might find at home. I omitted to mention only the people whom I did intend to see, the Verdurins. I asked her if she would not come with me. She pleaded that she had no suitable clothes. “Besides, my hair is so awful. Do you really wish me to go on doing it like this?” And by way of farewell she held out her hand to me in that abrupt fashion, the arm outstretched, the shoulders thrust back, which she used to adopt on the beach at Balbec and had since then entirely abandoned. This forgotten gesture retransformed the body which it animated into that of the Albertine who as yet scarcely knew me. It restored to Albertine, ceremonious beneath an air of rudeness, her first novelty, her strangeness, even her setting. I saw the sea behind this girl whom I had never seen shake hands with me in this fashion since I was at the seaside. “My aunt thinks it makes me older,” she added with a sullen air. “Oh that her aunt may be right!” thought I. “That Albertine by looking like a child should make Mme. Bontemps appear younger than she is, is all that her aunt would ask, and also that Albertine shall cost her nothing between now and the day when, by marrying me, she will repay what has been spent on her.” But that Albertine should appear less young, less pretty, should turn fewer heads in the street, that is what I, on the contrary, hoped. For the age of a duenna is less reassuring to a jealous lover than the age of the woman’s face whom he loves. I regretted only that the style in which I had asked her to do her hair should appear to Albertine an additional bolt on the door of her prison. And it was henceforward this new domestic sentiment that never ceased, even when I was parted from Albertine, to form a bond attaching me to her.

I said to Albertine, who was not dressed, or so she told me, to accompany me to the Guermantes’ or the Cambremers’, that I could not be certain where I should go, and set off for the Verdurins’. At the moment when the thought of the concert that I was going to hear brought back to my mind the scene that afternoon: “*Grand pied de grue, grand pied de grue,*”— a scene of disappointed

love, of jealous love perhaps, but if so as bestial as the scene to which a woman might be subjected by, so to speak, an orang-outang that was, if one may use the expression, in love with her — at the moment when, having reached the street, I was just going to hail a cab, I heard the sound of sobs which a man who was sitting upon a curbstone was endeavouring to stifle. I came nearer; the man, who had buried his face in his hands, appeared to be quite young, and I was surprised to see, from the gleam of white in the opening of his cloak, that he was wearing evening clothes and a white tie. As he heard my step he uncovered a face bathed in tears, but at once, having recognised me, turned away. It was Morel. He guessed that I had recognised him and, checking his tears with an effort, told me that he had stopped to rest for a moment, he was in such pain. “I have grossly insulted, only to-day,” he said, “a person for whom I had the very highest regard. It was a cowardly thing to do, for she loves me.” “She will forget perhaps, as time goes on,” I replied, without realising that by speaking thus I made it apparent that I had overheard the scene that afternoon. But he was so much absorbed in his own grief that it never even occurred to him that I might know something about the affair. “She may forget, perhaps,” he said. “But I myself can never forget. I am too conscious of my degradation, I am disgusted with myself! However, what I have said I have said, and nothing can unsay it. When people make me lose my temper, I don’t know what I am doing. And it is so bad for me, my nerves are all on edge,” for, like all neurasthenics, he was keenly interested in his own health. If, during the afternoon, I had witnessed the amorous rage of an infuriated animal, this evening, within a few hours, centuries had elapsed and a fresh sentiment, a sentiment of shame, regret, grief, shewed that a great stage had been passed in the evolution of the beast destined to be transformed into a human being. Nevertheless, I still heard ringing in my ears his ‘*grand pied de grue*’ and dreaded an imminent return to the savage state. I had only a very vague impression, however, of what had been happening, and this was but natural, for M. de Charlus himself was totally unaware that for some days past, and especially that day, even before the shameful episode which was not a direct consequence of the violinist’s condition, Morel had been suffering from a recurrence of his neurasthenia. As a matter of fact, he had, in the previous month, proceeded as rapidly as he had been able, a great deal less rapidly than he would have liked, towards the seduction of Jupien’s niece with whom he was at liberty, now that they were engaged, to go out whenever he chose. But whenever he had gone a trifle far in his attempts at violation, and especially when he suggested to his betrothed that she might make friends with other girls whom she

would then procure for himself, he had met with a resistance that made him furious. All at once (whether she would have proved too chaste, or on the contrary would have surrendered herself) his desire had subsided. He had decided to break with her, but feeling that the Baron, vicious as he might be, was far more moral than himself, he was afraid lest, in the event of a rupture, M. de Charlus might turn him out of the house. And so he had decided, a fortnight ago, that he would not see the girl again, would leave M. de Charlus and Jupien to clean up the mess (he employed a more realistic term) by themselves, and, before announcing the rupture, to 'b —— off' to an unknown destination.

For all that his conduct towards Jupien's niece coincided exactly, in its minutest details, with the plan of conduct which he had outlined to the Baron as they were dining together at Saint-Mars le Vêtu, it is probable that his intention was entirely different, and that sentiments of a less atrocious nature, which he had not foreseen in his theory of conduct, had improved, had tinged it with sentiment in practice. The sole point in which, on the contrary, the practice was worse than the theory is this, that in theory it had not appeared to him possible that he could remain in Paris after such an act of betrayal. Now, on the contrary, actually to 'b ——— off' for so small a matter seemed to him quite unnecessary. It meant leaving the Baron who would probably be furious, and forfeiting his own position. He would lose all the money that the Baron was now giving him. The thought that this was inevitable made his nerves give away altogether, he cried for hours on end, and in order not to think about it any more dosed himself cautiously with morphine. Then suddenly he hit upon an idea which no doubt had gradually been taking shape in his mind and gaining strength there for some time, and this was that a rupture with the girl would not inevitably mean a complete break with M. de Charlus. To lose all the Baron's money was a serious thing in itself. Morel in his uncertainty remained for some days a prey to dark thoughts, such as came to him at the sight of Bloch. Then he decided that Jupien and his niece had been trying to set a trap for him, that they might consider themselves lucky to be rid of him so cheaply. He found in short that the girl had been in the wrong in being so clumsy, in not having managed to keep him attached to her by a sensual attraction. Not only did the sacrifice of his position with M. de Charlus seem to him absurd, he even regretted the expensive dinners he had given the girl since they became engaged, the exact cost of which he knew by heart, being a true son of the valet who used to bring his 'book' every month for my uncle's inspection. For the word book, in the singular, which means a printed volume to humanity in general, loses that meaning among Royal

Princes and servants. To the latter it means their housekeeping book, to the former the register in which we inscribe our names. (At Balbec one day when the Princesse de Luxembourg told me that she had not brought a book with her, I was about to offer her *Le Pêcheur d'Islande* and *Tartarîn de Tarascon,* when I realised that she had meant not that she would pass the time less agreeably, but that I should find it more difficult to pay a call upon her.)

Notwithstanding the change in Morel's point of view with regard to the consequences of his behaviour, albeit that behaviour would have seemed to him abominable two months earlier, when he was passionately in love with Jupien's niece, whereas during the last fortnight he had never ceased to assure himself that the same behaviour was natural, praiseworthy, it continued to intensify the state of nervous unrest in which, finally, he had announced the rupture that afternoon. And he was quite prepared to vent his anger, if not (save in a momentary outburst) upon the girl, for whom he still felt that lingering fear, the last trace of love, at any rate upon the Baron. He took care, however, not to say anything to him before dinner, for, valuing his own professional skill above everything, whenever he had any difficult music to play (as this evening at the Verdurins') he avoided (as far as possible, and the scene that afternoon was already more than ample) anything that might impair the flexibility of his wrists. Similarly a surgeon who is an enthusiastic motorist, does not drive when he has an operation to perform. This accounts to me for the fact that, while he was speaking to me, he kept bending his fingers gently one after another to see whether they had regained their suppleness. A slight frown seemed to indicate that there was still a trace of nervous stiffness. But, so as not to increase it, he relaxed his features, as we forbid ourself to grow irritated at not being able to sleep or to prevail upon a woman, for fear lest our rage itself may retard the moment of sleep or of satisfaction. And so, anxious to regain his serenity so that he might, as was his habit, absorb himself entirely in what he was going to play at the Verdurins', and anxious, so long as I was watching him, to let me see how unhappy he was, he decided that the simplest course was to beg me to leave him immediately. His request was superfluous, and it was a relief to me to get away from him. I had trembled lest, as we were due at the same house, within a few minutes, he might ask me to take him with me, my memory of the scene that afternoon being too vivid not to give me a certain distaste for the idea of having Morel by my side during the drive. It is quite possible that the love, and afterwards the indifference or hatred felt by Morel for Jupien's niece had been sincere. Unfortunately, it was not the first time that he had behaved thus, that he

had suddenly ‘dropped’ a girl to whom he had sworn undying love, going so far as to produce a loaded revolver, telling her that he would blow out his brains if ever he was mean enough to desert her. He did nevertheless desert her in time, and felt instead of remorse, a sort of rancour against her. It was not the first time that he had behaved thus, it was not to be the last, with the result that the heads of many girls — girls less forgetful of him than he was of them — suffered — as Jupien’s niece’s head continued long afterwards to suffer, still in love with Morel although she despised him — suffered, ready to burst with the shooting of an internal pain because in each of them — like a fragment of a Greek carving — an aspect of Morel’s face, hard as marble and beautiful as an antique sculpture, was embedded in her brain, with his blossoming hair, his fine eyes, his straight nose, forming a protuberance in a cranium not shaped to receive it, upon which no operation was possible. But in the fulness of time these stony fragments end by slipping into a place where they cause no undue discomfort, from which they never stir again; we are no longer conscious of their presence: I mean forgetfulness, or an indifferent memory.

Meanwhile I had gained two things in the course of the day. On the one hand, thanks to the calm that was produced in me by Albertine’s docility, I found it possible, and therefore made up my mind, to break with her. There was on the other hand, the fruit of my reflexions during the interval that I had spent waiting for her, at the piano, the idea that Art, to which I would try to devote my reconquered liberty, was not a thing that justified one in making a sacrifice, a thing above and beyond life, that did not share in its fatuity and futility; the appearance of real individuality obtained in works of art being due merely to the illusion created by the artist’s technical skill. If my afternoon had left behind it other deposits, possibly more profound, they were not to come to my knowledge until much later. As for the two which I was able thus to weigh, they were not to be permanent; for, from this very evening my ideas about art were to rise above the depression to which they had been subjected in the afternoon, while on the other hand my calm, and consequently the freedom that would enable me to devote myself to it, was once again to be withdrawn from me.

As my cab, following the line of the embankment, was coming near the Verdurins’ house, I made the driver pull up. I had just seen Brichot alighting from the tram at the foot of the Rue Bonaparte, after which he dusted his shoes with an old newspaper and put on a pair of pearl grey gloves. I went up to him on foot. For some time past, his sight having grown steadily weaker, he had been endowed — as richly as an observatory — with new spectacles of a powerful

and complicated kind, which, like astronomical instruments, seemed to be screwed into his eyes; he focussed their exaggerated blaze upon myself and recognised me. They — the spectacles — were in marvellous condition. But behind them I could see, minute, pallid, convulsive, expiring, a remote gaze placed under this powerful apparatus, as, in a laboratory equipped out of all proportion to the work that is done in it, you may watch the last throes of some insignificant animalcule through the latest and most perfect type of microscope. I offered him my arm to guide him on his way. “This time it is not by great Cherbourg that we meet,” he said to me, “but by little Dunkerque,” a remark which I found extremely tiresome, as I failed to understand what he meant; and yet I dared not ask Brichot, dreading not so much his scorn as his explanations. I replied that I was longing to see the room in which Swann used to meet Odette every evening. “What, so you know that old story, do you?” he said. “And yet from those days to the death of Swann is what the poet rightly calls: ‘*Grande spatium mortalis aevi*.’”

The death of Swann had been a crushing blow to me at the time. The death of Swann! Swann, in this phrase, is something more than a noun in the possessive case. I mean by it his own particular death, the death allotted by destiny to the service of Swann. For we talk of ‘death’ for convenience, but there are almost as many different deaths as there are people. We are not equipped with a sense that would enable us to see, moving at every speed in every direction, these deaths, the active deaths aimed by destiny at this person or that. Often there are deaths that will not be entirely relieved of their duties until two or even three years later. They come in haste to plant a tumour in the side of a Swann, then depart to attend to their other duties, returning only when, the surgeons having performed their operation, it is necessary to plant the tumour there afresh. Then comes the moment when we read in the *Gaulois* that Swann’s health has been causing anxiety but that he is now making an excellent recovery. Then, a few minutes before the breath leaves our body, death, like a sister of charity who has come to nurse, rather than to destroy us, enters to preside over our last moments, crowns with a supreme halo the cold and stiffening creature whose heart has ceased to beat. And it is this diversity among deaths, the mystery of their circuits, the colour of their fatal badge, that makes so impressive a paragraph in the newspapers such as this:

“We regret to learn that M. Charles Swann passed away yesterday at his residence in Paris, after a long and painful illness. A Parisian whose intellectual gifts were widely appreciated, a discriminating but steadfastly loyal friend, he

will be universally regretted, in those literary and artistic circles where the soundness and refinement of his taste made him a willing and a welcome guest, as well as at the Jockey Club of which he was one of the oldest and most respected members. He belonged also to the Union and Agricole. He had recently resigned his membership of the Rue Royale. His personal appearance and eminently distinguished bearing never failed to arouse public interest at all the great events of the musical and artistic seasons, especially at private views, at which he was a regular attendant until, during the last years of his life, he became almost entirely confined to the house. The funeral will take place, etc."

From this point of view, if one is not 'somebody,' the absence of a well known title makes the process of decomposition even more rapid. No doubt it is more or less anonymously, without any personal identity, that a man still remains Duc d'Uzès. But the ducal coronet does for some time hold the elements together, as their moulds keep together those artistically designed ices which Albertine admired, whereas the names of ultra-fashionable commoners, as soon as they are dead, dissolve and lose their shape. We have seen M. de Bréauté speak of Cartier as the most intimate friend of the Duc de La Trémoïlle, as a man greatly in demand in aristocratic circles. To a later generation, Cartier has become something so formless that it would almost be adding to his importance to make him out as related to the jeweller Cartier, with whom he would have smiled to think that anybody could be so ignorant as to confuse him! Swann on the contrary was a remarkable personality, in both the intellectual and the artistic worlds; and even although he had 'produced' nothing, still he had a chance of surviving a little longer. And yet, my dear Charles ——, whom I used to know when I was still so young and you were nearing your grave, it is because he whom you must have regarded as a little fool has made you the hero of one of his volumes that people are beginning to speak of you again and that your name will perhaps live. If in Tissot's picture representing the balcony of the Rue Royale club, where you figure with Galliffet, Edmond Polignac and Saint-Maurice, people are always drawing attention to yourself, it is because they know that there are some traces of you in the character of Swann.

To return to more general realities, it was of this foretold and yet unforeseen death of Swann that I had heard him speak himself to the Duchesse de Guermantes, on the evening of her cousin's party. It was the same death whose striking and specific strangeness had recurred to me one evening when, as I ran my eye over the newspaper, my attention was suddenly arrested by the announcement of it, as though traced in mysterious lines interpolated there out of

place. They had sufficed to make of a living man some one who can never again respond to what you say to him, to reduce him to a mere name, a written name, that has passed in a moment from the real world to the realm of silence. It was they that even now made me anxious to make myself familiar with the house in which the Verdurins had lived, and where Swann, who at that time was not merely a row of five letters printed in a newspaper, had dined so often with Odette. I must add also (and this is what for a long time made Swann's death more painful than any other, albeit these reasons bore no relation to the individual strangeness of his death) that I had never gone to see Gilberte, as I promised him at the Princesse de Guermantes's, that he had never told me what the 'other reason' was, to which he alluded that evening, for his selecting me as the recipient of his conversation with the Prince, that a thousand questions occurred to me (as bubbles rise from the bottom of a pond) which I longed to ask him about the most different subjects: Vermeer, M. de Mouchy, Swann himself, a Boucher tapestry, Combray, questions that doubtless were not very vital since I had put off asking them from day to day, but which seemed to me of capital importance now that, his lips being sealed, no answer would ever come.

"No," Brichot went on, "it was not here that Swann met his future wife, or rather it was here only in the very latest period, after the disaster that partially destroyed Mme. Verdurin's former home."

Unfortunately, in my fear of displaying before the eyes of Brichot an extravagance which seemed to me out of place, since the professor had no share in its enjoyment, I had alighted too hastily from the carriage and the driver had not understood the words I had flung at him over my shoulder in order that I might be well clear of the carriage before Brichot caught sight of me. The consequence was that the driver followed us and asked me whether he was to call for me later; I answered hurriedly in the affirmative, and was regarded with a vastly increased respect by the professor who had come by omnibus.

"Ah! So you were in a carriage," he said in solemn tones. "Only by the purest accident. I never take one as a rule. I always travel by omnibus or on foot. However, it may perhaps entitle me to the great honour of taking you home to-night if you will oblige me by consenting to enter that rattletrap; we shall be packed rather tight. But you are always so considerate to me." Alas, in making him this offer, I am depriving myself of nothing (I reflected) since in any case I shall be obliged to go home for Albertine's sake. Her presence in my house, at an hour when nobody could possibly call to see her, allowed me to dispose as freely of my time as I had that afternoon, when, seated at the piano, I knew that

she was on her way back from the Trocadéro and that I was in no hurry to see her again. But furthermore, as also in the afternoon, I felt that I had a woman in the house and that on returning home I should not taste the fortifying thrill of solitude. “I accept with great good will,” replied Brichot. “At the period to which you allude, our friends occupied in the Rue Montalivet a magnificent ground floor apartment with an upper landing, and a garden behind, less sumptuous of course, and yet to my mind preferable to the old Venetian Embassy.” Brichot informed me that this evening there was to be at ‘Quai Conti’ (thus it was that the faithful spoke of the Verdurin drawing-room since it had been transferred to that address) a great musical ‘tow-row-row’ got up by M. de Charlus. He went on to say that in the old days to which I had referred, the little nucleus had been different, and its tone not at all the same, not only because the faithful had then been younger. He told me of elaborate jokes played by Elstir (what he called ‘pure buffooneries’), as for instance one day when the painter, having pretended to fail at the last moment, had come disguised as an extra waiter and, as he handed round the dishes, whispered gallant speeches in the ear of the extremely proper Baroness Putbus, crimson with anger and alarm; then disappearing before the end of dinner he had had a hip-bath carried into the drawing-room, out of which, when the party left the table, he had emerged stark naked uttering fearful oaths; and also of supper parties to which the guests came in paper costumes, designed, cut out and coloured by Elstir, which were masterpieces in themselves, Brichot having worn on one occasion that of a great nobleman of the court of Charles VII, with long turned-up points to his shoes, and another time that of Napoleon I, for which Elstir had fashioned a Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour out of sealing-wax. In short Brichot, seeing again with the eyes of memory the drawing-room of those days with its high windows, its low sofas devoured by the midday sun which had had to be replaced, declared that he preferred it to the drawing-room of to-day. Of course, I quite understood that by ‘drawing-room’ Brichot meant — as the word church implies not merely the religious edifice but the congregation of worshippers — not merely the apartment, but the people who visited it, the special pleasures that they came to enjoy there, to which, in his memory, those sofas had imparted their form upon which, when you called to see Mme. Verdurin in the afternoon, you waited until she was ready, while the blossom on the horse chestnuts outside, and on the mantelpiece carnations in vases seemed, with a charming and kindly thought for the visitor expressed in the smiling welcome of their rosy hues, to be watching anxiously for the tardy appearance of the lady of the house. But if the drawing-

room seemed to him superior to what it was now, it was perhaps because our mind is the old Proteus who cannot remain the slave of any one shape and, even in the social world, suddenly abandons a house which has slowly and with difficulty risen to the pitch of perfection to prefer another which is less brilliant, just as the ‘touched-up’ photographs which Odette had had taken at Otto’s, in which she queened it in a ‘princess’ gown, her hair waved by Lenthéric, did not appeal to Swann so much as a little ‘cabinet picture’ taken at Nice, in which, in a cloth cape, her loosely dressed hair protruding beneath a straw hat trimmed with pansies and a bow of black ribbon, instead of being twenty years younger (for women as a rule look all the older in a photograph, the earlier it is), she looked like a little servant girl twenty years older than she now was. Perhaps too he derived some pleasure from praising to me what I myself had never known, from shewing me that he had tasted delights that I could never enjoy. If so, he was successful, for merely by mentioning the names of two or three people who were no longer alive and to each of whom he imparted something mysterious by his way of referring to them, to that delicious intimacy, he made me ask myself what it could have been like; I felt that everything that had been told me about the Verdurins was far too coarse; and indeed, in the case of Swann whom I had known, I reproached myself with not having paid him sufficient attention, with not having paid attention to him in a sufficiently disinterested spirit, with not having listened to him properly when he used to entertain me while we waited for his wife to come home for luncheon and he shewed me his treasures, now that I knew that he was to be classed with the most brilliant talkers of the past. Just as we were coming to Mme. Verdurin’s doorstep, I caught sight of M. de Charlus, steering towards us the bulk of his huge body, drawing unwillingly in his wake one of those blackmailers or mendicants who nowadays, whenever he appeared, sprang up without fail even in what were to all appearance the most deserted corners, by whom this powerful monster was, evidently against his will, invariably escorted, although at a certain distance, as is the shark by its pilot, in short contrasting so markedly with the haughty stranger of my first visit to Balbec, with his stern aspect, his affectation of virility, that I seemed to be discovering, accompanied by its satellite, a planet at a wholly different period of its revolution, when one begins to see it full, or a sick man now devoured by the malady which a few years ago was but a tiny spot which was easily concealed and the gravity of which was never suspected. Although the operation that Brichot had undergone had restored a tiny portion of the sight which he had thought to be lost for ever, I do not think he had observed the ruffian following

in the Baron's steps. Not that this mattered, for, ever since la Raspelière, and notwithstanding the professor's friendly regard for M. de Charlus, the sight of the latter always made him feel ill at ease. No doubt to every man the life of every other extends along shadowy paths which he does not suspect. Falsehood, however, so often treacherous, upon which all conversation is based, conceals less perfectly a feeling of hostility, or of sordid interest, or a visit which we wish to look as though we had not paid, or an escapade with the mistress of a day which we are anxious to keep from our wife, than a good reputation covers up — so as not to let their existence be guessed — evil habits. They may remain unknown to us for a lifetime; an accidental encounter upon a pier, at night, will disclose them; even then this accidental discovery is frequently misunderstood and we require a third person, who is in the secret, to supply the unimaginable clue of which everyone is unaware. But, once we know about them, they alarm us because we feel that that way madness lies, far more than by their immorality. Mme. de Surgis did not possess the slightest trace of any moral feeling, and would have admitted anything of her sons that could be degraded and explained by material interest, which is comprehensible to all mankind! But she forbade them to go on visiting M. de Charlus when she learned that, by a sort of internal clockwork, he was inevitably drawn upon each of their visits, to pinch their chins and to make each of them pinch his brother's. She felt that uneasy sense of a physical mystery which makes us ask ourself whether the neighbour with whom we have been on friendly terms is not tainted with cannibalism, and to the Baron's repeated inquiry: "When am I going to see your sons again?" she would reply, conscious of the thunderbolts that she was attracting to her defenceless head, that they were very busy working for examinations, preparing to go abroad, and so forth. Irresponsibility aggravates faults, and even crimes, whatever anyone may say. Landru (assuming that he really did kill his wives) if he did so from a financial motive, which it is possible to resist, may be pardoned, but not if his crime was due to an irresistible Sadism.

Brichot's coarse pleasantries, in the early days of his friendship with the Baron, had given place, as soon as it was a question, not of uttering commonplaces, but of understanding, to an awkward feeling which concealed a certain merriment. He reassured himself by recalling pages of Plato, lines of Virgil, because, being mentally as well as physically blind, he did not understand that in those days to fall in love with a young man was like, in our day (Socrates's jokes reveal this more clearly than Plato's theories), keeping a dancing girl before one marries and settles down. M. de Charlus himself would

not have understood, he who confused his mania with friendship, which does not resemble it in the least, and the athletes of Praxiteles with obliging boxers. He refused to see that for the last nineteen hundred years ("a pious courtier under a pious prince would have been an atheist under an atheist prince," as Labruyère reminds us) all conventional homosexuality — that of Plato's young friends as well as that of Virgil's shepherds — has disappeared, that what survives and increases is only the involuntary, the neurotic kind, which we conceal from other people and disguise to ourselves. And M. de Charlus would have been wrong in not denying frankly the pagan genealogy. In exchange for a little plastic beauty, how vast the moral superiority! The shepherd in Theocritus who sighs for love of a boy, later on will have no reason to be less hard of heart, less dull of wit than the other shepherd whose flute sounds for Amaryllis. For the former is not suffering from a malady, he is conforming to the customs of his time. It is the homosexuality that survives in spite of obstacles, a thing of scorn and loathing, that is the only true form, the only form that can be found conjoined in a person with an enhancement of his moral qualities. We are appalled at the apparently close relation between these and our bodily attributes, when we think of the slight dislocation of a purely physical taste, the slight blemish in one of the senses, which explain why the world of poets and musicians, so firmly barred against the Duc de Guermantes, opens its portals to M. de Charlus. That the latter should shew taste in the furnishing of his home, which is that of an eclectic housewife, need not surprise us; but the narrow loophole that opens upon Beethoven and Veronese! This does not exempt the sane from a feeling of alarm when a madman who has composed a sublime poem, after explaining to them in the most logical fashion that he has been shut up by mistake, through his wife's machinations, imploring them to intercede for him with the governor of the asylum, complaining of the promiscuous company that is forced upon him, concludes as follows: "You see that man who is waiting to speak to me on the lawn, whom I am obliged to put up with; he thinks that he is Jesus Christ. That alone will shew you the sort of lunatics that I have to live among; he cannot be Christ, for I am Christ myself!" A moment earlier, you were on the point of going to assure the governor that a mistake had been made. At this final speech, even if you bear in mind the admirable poem at which this same man is working every day, you shrink from him, as Mme. de Surgis's sons shrank from M. de Charlus, not that he would have done them any harm, but because of his ceaseless invitations, the ultimate purpose of which was to pinch their chins. The poet is to be pitied, who must, with no Virgil to guide him, pass through the

circles of an inferno of sulphur and brimstone, to cast himself into the fire that falls from heaven, in order to rescue a few of the inhabitants of Sodom! No charm in his work; the same severity in his life as in those of the unfrocked priests who follow the strictest rule of celibacy so that no one may be able to ascribe to anything but loss of faith their discarding of the cassock.

Making a pretence of not seeing the seedy individual who was following in his wake (whenever the Baron ventured into the Boulevards or crossed the waiting-room in Saint-Lazarre station, these followers might be counted by the dozen who, in the hope of 'touching him for a dollar,' never let him out of their sight), and afraid at the same time that the other might have the audacity to accost him, the Baron had devoutly lowered his darkened eyelids which, in contrast to his rice-powdered cheeks, gave him the appearance of a Grand Inquisitor painted by El Greco. But this priestly expression caused alarm, and he looked like an unfrocked priest, various compromises to which he had been driven by the need to apologise for his taste and to keep it secret having had the effect of bringing to the surface of his face precisely what the Baron sought to conceal, a debauched life indicated by moral decay. This last, indeed, whatever be its cause, is easily detected, for it is never slow in taking bodily form and proliferates upon a face, especially on the cheeks and round the eyes, as physically as the ochreous yellows accumulate there in a case of jaundice or repulsive reds in a case of skin disease. Nor was it merely in the cheeks, or rather the chaps of this painted face, in the mammiferous chest, the aggressive rump of this body allowed to deteriorate and invaded by obesity, upon which there now floated iridescent as a film of oil, the vice at one time so jealously confined by M. de Charlus in the most secret chamber of his heart. Now it overflowed in all his speech.

"So this is how you prowl the streets at night, Brichot, with a good-looking young man," he said as he joined us, while the disappointed ruffian made off. "A fine example. We must tell your young pupils at the Sorbonne that this is how you behave. But, I must say, the society of youth seems to be good for you, Monsieur le Professeur, you are as fresh as a rosebud. I have interrupted you, you looked as though you were enjoying yourselves like a pair of giddy girls, and had no need of an old Granny Killjoy like myself. I shan't take it to the confessional, since you are almost at your destination." The Baron's mood was all the more blithe since he knew nothing whatever about the scene that afternoon, Jupien having decided that it was better to protect his niece against a repetition of the onslaught than to inform M. de Charlus. And so the Baron was

still looking forward to the marriage, and delighting in the thought of it. One would suppose that it is a consolation to these great solitaries to give their tragic celibacy the relief of a fictitious fatherhood. “But, upon my word, Brichot,” he went on, turning with a laugh to gaze at us, “I feel quite awkward when I see you in such gallant company. You were like a pair of lovers. Going along arm in arm, I say, Brichot, you do go the pace!” Ought one to ascribe this speech to the senility of a particular state of mind, less capable than in the past of controlling its reflexes, which in moments of automatism lets out a secret that has been so carefully hidden for forty years? Or rather to that contempt for plebeian opinion which all the Guermantes felt in their hearts, and of which M. de Charlus’s brother, the Duke, was displaying a variant form when, regardless of the fact that my mother could see him, he used to shave standing by his bedroom window in his unbuttoned nightshirt. Had M. de Charlus contracted, during the roasting journeys between Doncières and Douville, the dangerous habit of making himself at ease, and, just as he would push back his straw hat in order to cool his huge forehead, of unfastening — at first, for a few moments only — the mask that for too long had been rigorously imposed upon his true face? His conjugal attitude towards Morel might well have astonished anyone who had observed it in its full extent. But M. de Charlus had reached the stage when the monotony of the pleasures that his vice has to offer became wearying. He had sought instinctively for novel displays, and, growing tired of the strangers whom he picked up, had passed to the opposite pole, to what he used to imagine that he would always loathe, the imitation of family life, or of fatherhood. Sometimes even this did not suffice him, he required novelty, and would go and spend the night with a woman, just as a normal man may, once in his life, have wished to go to bed with a boy, from a curiosity similar though inverse, and in either case equally unhealthy. The Baron’s existence as one of the ‘faithful,’ living, for Charlie’s sake, entirely among the little clan, had had, in stultifying the efforts that he had been making for years to keep up lying appearances, the same influence that a voyage of exploration or residence in the colonies has upon certain Europeans who discard the ruling principles by which they were guided at home. And yet, the internal revolution of a mind, ignorant at first of the anomaly contained in its body, then appalled at it after the discovery, and finally growing so used to it as to fail to perceive that it is not safe to confess to other people what the sinner has come in time to confess without shame to himself, had been even more effective in liberating M. de Charlus from the last vestiges of social constraint than the time that he spent at the Verdurins’. No banishment,

indeed, to the South Pole, or to the summit of Mont Blanc, can separate us so entirely from our fellow creatures as a prolonged residence in the seclusion of a secret vice, that is to say of a state of mind that is different from theirs. A vice (so M. de Charlus used at one time to style it) to which the Baron now gave the genial aspect of a mere failing, extremely common, attractive on the whole and almost amusing, like laziness, absent-mindedness or greed. Conscious of the curiosity that his own striking personality aroused, M. de Charlus derived a certain pleasure from satisfying, whetting, sustaining it. Just as a Jewish journalist will come forward day after day as the champion of Catholicism, not, probably, with any hope of being taken seriously, but simply in order not to disappoint the good-natured amusement of his readers, M. de Charlus would genially denounce evil habits among the little clan, as he would have mimicked a person speaking English or imitated Mounet-Sully, without waiting to be asked, so as to pay his scot with a good grace, by displaying an amateur talent in society; so that M. de Charlus now threatened Brichot that he would report to the Sorbonne that he was in the habit of walking about with young men, exactly as the circumcised scribe keeps referring in and out of season to the ‘Eldest Daughter of the Church’ and the ‘Sacred Heart of Jesus,’ that is to say without the least trace of hypocrisy, but with a distinctly histrionic effect. It was not only the change in the words themselves, so different from those that he allowed himself to use in the past, that seemed to require some explanation, there was also the change that had occurred in his intonations, his gestures, all of which now singularly resembled the type M. de Charlus used most fiercely to castigate; he would now utter unconsciously almost the same little cries (unconscious in him, and all the more deep-rooted) as are uttered consciously by the inverts who refer to one another as ‘she’; as though this deliberate ‘camping,’ against which M. de Charlus had for so long set his face, were after all merely a brilliant and faithful imitation of the manner that men of the Charlus type, whatever they may say, are compelled to adopt when they have reached a certain stage in their malady, just as sufferers from general paralysis or locomotor ataxia inevitably end by displaying certain symptoms. As a matter of fact — and this is what this purely unconscious ‘camping’ revealed — the difference between the stern Charlus, dressed all in black, with his stiffly brushed hair, whom I had known, and the painted young men, loaded with rings, was no more than the purely imaginary difference that exists between an excited person who talks fast, keeps moving all the time, and a neurotic who talks slowly, preserves a perpetual phlegm, but is tainted with the same neurasthenia in the eyes of the physician

who knows that each of the two is devoured by the same anguish and marred by the same defects. At the same time one could tell that M. de Charlus had aged from wholly different signs, such as the extraordinary frequency in his conversation of certain expressions that had taken root in it and used now to crop up at every moment (for instance: ‘the chain of circumstances’) upon which the Baron’s speech leaned in sentence after sentence as upon a necessary prop. “Is Charlie here yet?” Brichot asked M. de Charlus as we came in sight of the door. “Oh, I don’t know,” said the Baron, raising his arms and half-shutting his eyes with the air of a person who does not wish anyone to accuse him of being indiscreet, all the more so as he had probably been reproached by Morel for things which he had said and which the other, as timorous as he was vain, and as ready to deny M. de Charlus as he was to boast of his friendship, had considered serious albeit they were quite unimportant. “You know, he never tells me what he’s going to do.” If the conversations of two people bound by a tie of intimacy are full of falsehood, this occurs no less spontaneously in the conversations that a third person holds with a lover on the subject of the person with whom the latter is in love, whatever be the sex of that person.

“Have you seen him lately?” I asked M. de Charlus, with the object of seeming at once not to be afraid of mentioning Morel to him and not to believe that they were actually living together. “He came in, as it happened, for five minutes this morning while I was still half asleep, and sat down on the side of my bed, as though he wanted to ravish me.” I guessed at once that M. de Charlus had seen Charlie within the last hour, for if we ask a woman when she last saw the man whom we know to be — and whom she may perhaps suppose that we suspect of being — her lover, if she has just taken tea with him, she replies: “I saw him for an instant before luncheon.” Between these two incidents the only difference is that one is false and the other true, but both are equally innocent, or, if you prefer it, equally culpable. And so we should be unable to understand why the mistress (in this case, M. de Charlus) always chooses the false version, did we not know that such replies are determined, unknown to the person who utters them, by a number of factors which appear so out of proportion to the triviality of the incident that we do not take the trouble to consider them. But to a physicist the space occupied by the tiniest ball of pith is explained by the harmony of action, the conflict or equilibrium, of laws of attraction or repulsion which govern far greater worlds. Just as many different laws acting in opposite directions dictate the more general responses with regard to the innocence, the ‘platonism,’ or on the contrary the carnal reality of the relations that one has with

the person whom one says one saw in the morning when one has seen him or her in the evening. Here we need merely record, without pausing to consider them, the desire to appear natural and fearless, the instinctive impulse to conceal a secret assignation, a blend of modesty and ostentation, the need to confess what one finds so delightful and to shew that one is loved, a divination of what the other person knows or guesses — but does not say — a divination which, exceeding or falling short of the other person's, makes one now exaggerate, now under-estimate it, the spontaneous longing to play with fire and the determination to rescue something from the blaze. At the same time, speaking generally, let us say that M. de Charlus, notwithstanding the aggravation of his malady which perpetually urged him to reveal, to insinuate, sometimes boldly to invent compromising details, did intend, during this period in his life, to make it known that Charlie was not a man of the same sort as himself and that they were friends and nothing more. This did not prevent him (even though it may quite possibly have been true) from contradicting himself at times (as with regard to the hour at which they had last met), whether he forgot himself at such moments and told the truth, or invented a lie, boastingly or from a sentimental affectation or because he thought it amusing to baffle his questioner. "You know that he is to me," the Baron went on, "the best of comrades, for whom I have the greatest affection, as I am certain" (was he uncertain of it, then, that he felt the need to say that he was certain?) "he has for me, but there is nothing at all between us, nothing of that sort, you understand, nothing of that sort," said the Baron, as naturally as though he had been speaking of a woman. "Yes, he came in this morning to pull me out of bed. Though he knows that I hate anybody to see me in bed. You don't mind? Oh, it's horrible, it's so disturbing, one looks so perfectly hideous, of course I'm no longer five-and-twenty, they won't choose me to be Queen of the May, still one does like to feel that one is looking one's best."

It is possible that the Baron was in earnest when he spoke of Morel as a good comrade, and that he was being even more truthful than he supposed when he said: "I never know what he's doing; he tells me nothing about his life."

Indeed we may mention (interrupting for a few moments our narrative, which shall be resumed immediately after the closure of this parenthesis which opens at the moment when M. de Charlus, Brichot and myself are arriving at Mme. Verdurin's front door), we may mention that shortly before this evening the Baron had been plunged in grief and stupefaction by a letter which he had opened by mistake and which was addressed to Morel. This letter, which by a

repercussion was to cause intense misery to myself also, was written by the actress Léa, notorious for her exclusive interest in women. And yet her letter to Morel (whom M. de Charlus had never suspected of knowing her, even) was written in the most impassioned tone. Its indelicacy prevents us from reproducing it here, but we may mention that Léa addressed him throughout in the feminine gender, with such expressions as: “Go on, you bad woman!” or “Of course you are so, my pretty, you know you are.” And in this letter reference was made to various other women who seemed to be no less Morel’s friends than Léa’s. On the other hand, Morel’s sarcasm at the Baron’s expense and Léa’s at that of an officer who was keeping her, and of whom she said: “He keeps writing me letters begging me to be careful! What do you say to that, my little white puss,” revealed to M. de Charlus a state of things no less unsuspected by him than were Morel’s peculiar and intimate relations with Léa. What most disturbed the Baron was the word ‘so.’ Ignorant at first of its application, he had eventually, at a time already remote in the past, learned that he himself was ‘so.’ And now the notion that he had acquired of this word was again put to the challenge. When he had discovered that he was ‘so,’ he had supposed this to mean that his tastes, as Saint-Simon says, did not lie in the direction of women. And here was this word ‘so’ applied to Morel with an extension of meaning of which M. de Charlus was unaware, so much so that Morel gave proof, according to this letter, of his being ‘so’ by having the same taste as certain women for other women. From that moment the Baron’s jealousy had no longer any reason to confine itself to the men of Morel’s acquaintance, but began to extend to the women also. So that the people who were ‘so’ were not merely those that he had supposed to be ‘so,’ but a whole and vast section of the inhabitants of the planet, consisting of women as well as of men, loving not merely men but women also, and the Baron, in the face of this novel meaning of a word that was so familiar to him, felt himself tormented by an anxiety of the mind as well as of the heart, born of this twofold mystery which combined an extension of the field of his jealousy with the sudden inadequacy of a definition.

M. de Charlus had never in his life been anything but an amateur. That is to say, incidents of this sort could never be of any use to him. He worked off the painful impression that they might make upon him in violent scenes in which he was a past-master of eloquence, or in crafty intrigues. But to a person endowed with the qualities of a Bergotte, for instance, they might have been of inestimable value. This may indeed explain, to a certain extent (since we have to grope blindfold, but choose, like the lower animals, the herb that is good for us),

why men like Bergotte have generally lived in the company of persons who were ordinary, false and malicious. Their beauty is sufficient for the writer's imagination, enhances his generosity, but does not in any way alter the nature of his companion, whose life, situated thousands of feet below the level of his own, her incredible stories, her lies carried farther, and, what is more, in another direction than what might have been expected, appear in occasional flashes. The lie, the perfect lie, about people whom we know, about the relations that we have had with them, about our motive for some action, a motive which we express in totally different terms, the lie as to what we are, whom we love, what we feel with regard to the person who loves us and believes that she has fashioned us in her own image because she keeps on kissing us morning, noon and night, that lie is one of the only things in the world that can open a window for us upon what is novel, unknown, that can awaken in us sleeping senses to the contemplation of universes that otherwise we should never have known. We are bound to say, in so far as M. de Charlus is concerned, that, if he was stupefied to learn with regard to Morel a certain number of things which the latter had carefully concealed from him, he was not justified in concluding from this that it was a mistake to associate too closely with the lower orders. We shall indeed see, in the concluding section of this work, M. de Charlus himself engaged in doing things which would have stupefied the members of his family and his friends far more than he could possibly have been stupefied by the revelations of Léa. (The revelation that he had found most painful had been that of a tour which Morel had made with Léa, whereas at the time he had assured M. de Charlus that he was studying music in Germany. He had found support for this falsehood in obliging friends in Germany to whom he had sent his letters, to be forwarded from there to M. de Charlus, who, as it happened, was so positive that Morel was there that he had not even looked at the postmark.) But it is time to rejoin the Baron as he advances with Brichot and myself towards the Verdurins' door.

"And what," he went on, turning to myself, "has become of your young Hebrew friend, whom we met at Douville? It occurred to me that, if you liked, one might perhaps invite him to the house one evening." For M. de Charlus, who did not shrink from employing a private detective to spy upon every word and action of Morel, for all the world like a husband or a lover, had not ceased to pay attention to other young men. The vigilance which he made one of his old servants maintain, through an agency, upon Morel, was so indiscreet that his footmen thought they were being watched, and one of the housemaids could not endure the suspense, never ventured into the street, always expecting to find a

policeman at her heels. “She can do whatever she likes! It would be a waste of time and money to follow her! As if her goings on mattered to us!” the old servant ironically exclaimed, for he was so passionately devoted to his master that, albeit he in no way shared the Baron’s tastes, he had come in time, with such ardour did he employ himself in their service, to speak of them as though they were his own. “He is the very best of good fellows,” M. de Charlus would say of this old servant, for we never appreciate anyone so much as those who combine with other great virtues that of placing themselves unconditionally at the disposal of our vices. It was moreover of men alone that M. de Charlus was capable of feeling any jealousy so far as Morel was concerned. Women inspired in him no jealousy whatever. This is indeed an almost universal rule with the Charlus type. The love of the man with whom they are in love for women is something different, which occurs in another animal species (a lion does not interfere with tigers); does not distress them; if anything, reassures them. Sometimes, it is true, in the case of those who exalt their inversion to the level of a priesthood, this love creates disgust. These men resent their friends’ having succumbed to it, not as a betrayal but as a lapse from virtue. A Charlus, of a different variety from the Baron, would have been as indignant at the discovery of Morel’s relations with a woman as upon reading in a newspaper that he, the interpreter of Bach and Handel, was going to play Puccini. It is, by the way, for this reason that the young men who, with an eye to their own personal advantage, condescend to the love of men like Charlus, assure them that women inspire them only with disgust, just as they would tell a doctor that they never touch alcohol, and care only for spring water. But M. de Charlus, in this respect, departed to some extent from the general rule. Since he admired everything about Morel, the latter’s successes with women caused him no annoyance, gave him the same joy as his successes on the platform, or at écarté. “But do you know, my dear fellow, he has women,” he would say, with an air of disclosure, of scandal, possibly of envy, above all of admiration. “He is extraordinary,” he would continue. “Everywhere, the most famous whores can look at nobody but him. They stare at him everywhere, whether, it’s on the underground or in the theatre. It’s becoming a nuisance! I can’t go out with him to a restaurant without the waiter bringing him notes from at least three women. And always pretty women too. Not that there’s anything surprising in that. I was watching him yesterday, I can quite understand it, he has become so beautiful, he looks just like a Bronzino, he is really marvellous.” But M. de Charlus liked to shew that he was in love with Morel, to persuade other people, possibly to persuade

himself, that Morel was in love with him. He applied to the purpose of having Morel always with him (notwithstanding the harm that the young fellow might do to the Baron's social position) a sort of self-esteem. For (and this is frequent among men of good position, who are snobs, and, in their vanity, sever all their social ties in order to be seen everywhere with a mistress, a person of doubtful or a lady of tarnished reputation, whom nobody will invite, and with whom nevertheless it seems to them flattering to be associated) he had arrived at that stage at which self-esteem devotes all its energy to destroying the goals to which it has attained, whether because, under the influence of love, a man finds a prestige which he is alone in perceiving in ostentatious relations with the beloved object, or because, by the waning of social ambitions that have been gratified, and the rising of a tide of subsidiary curiosities all the more absorbing the more platonic they are, the latter have not only reached but have passed the level at which the former found it difficult to remain.

As for young men in general, M. de Charlus found that to his fondness for them Morel's existence was not an obstacle, and that indeed his brilliant reputation as a violinist or his growing fame as a composer and journalist might in certain instances prove an attraction. Did anyone introduce to the Baron a young composer of an agreeable type, it was in Morel's talents that he sought an opportunity of doing the stranger a favour. "You must," he would tell him, "bring me some of your work so that Morel can play it at a concert or on tour. There is hardly any decent music written, now, for the violin. It is a godsend to find anything new. And abroad they appreciate that sort of thing enormously. Even in the provinces there are little musical societies where they love music with a fervour and intelligence that are quite admirable." Without any greater sincerity (for all this could serve only as a bait and it was seldom that Morel condescended to fulfil these promises), Bloch having confessed that he was something of a poet (when he was 'in the mood,' he had added with the sarcastic laugh with which he would accompany a platitude, when he could think of nothing original), M. de Charlus said to me: "You must tell your young Israelite, since he writes verses, that he must really bring me some for Morel. For a composer, that is always the stumbling block, to find something decent to set to music. One might even consider a libretto. It would not be without interest, and would acquire a certain value from the distinction of the poet, from my patronage, from a whole chain of auxiliary circumstances, among which Morel's talent would take the chief place, for he is composing a lot just now, and writing too, and very pleasantly, I must talk to you about it. As for his talent as a

performer (there, as you know, he is already a past-master), you shall see this evening how well the lad plays Vinteuil's music; he overwhelms me; at his age, to have such an understanding while he is still such a boy, such a kid! Oh, this evening is only to be a little rehearsal. The big affair is to come off in two or three days. But it will be much more distinguished this evening. And so we are delighted that you have come," he went on, employing the plural pronoun doubtless because a King says: "It is our wish." "The programme is so magnificent that I have advised Mme. Verdurin to give two parties. One in a few days' time, at which she will have all her own friends, the other to-night at which the hostess is, to use a legal expression, 'disseized.' It is I who have issued the invitations, and I have collected a few people from another sphere, who may be useful to Charlie, and whom it will be nice for the Verdurins to meet. Don't you agree, it is all very well to have the finest music played by the greatest artists, the effect of the performance remains muffled in cotton-wool, if the audience is composed of the milliner from across the way and the grocer from round the corner. You know what I think of the intellectual level of people in society, still they can play certain quite important parts, among others that which in public events devolves upon the press, and which is that of being an organ of publicity. You know what I mean; I have for instance invited my sister-in-law Oriane; it is not certain that she will come, but it is on the other hand certain that, if she does come, she will understand absolutely nothing. But one does not ask her to understand, which is beyond her capacity, but to talk, a task which is admirably suited to her, and which she never fails to perform. What is the result? To-morrow as ever is, instead of the silence of the milliner and the grocer, an animated conversation at the Mortemarts' with Oriane telling everyone that she has heard the most marvellous music, that a certain Morel, and so forth; unspeakable rage of the people not invited, who will say: 'Palamède thought, no doubt, that we were unworthy; anyhow, who are these people who were giving the party?' a counterblast quite as useful as Oriane's praises, because Morel's name keeps cropping up all the time and is finally engraved in the memory like a lesson that one has read over a dozen times. All this forms a chain of circumstances which may be of value to the artist, to the hostess, may serve as a sort of megaphone for a performance which will thus be made audible to a remote public. Really, it is worth the trouble; you shall see what progress Charlie has made. And what is more, we have discovered a new talent in him, my dear fellow, he writes like an angel. Like an angel, I tell you." M. de Charlus omitted to say that for some time past he had been employing Morel, like those great

noblemen of the seventeenth century who scorned to sign and even to write their own slanderous attacks, to compose certain vilely calumnious little paragraphs at the expense of Comtesse Mole. Their insolence apparent even to those who merely glanced at them, how much more cruel were they to the young woman herself, who found in them, so skilfully introduced that nobody but herself saw the point, certain passages from her own correspondence, textually quoted, but interpreted in a sense which made them as deadly as the cruellest revenge. They killed the lady. But there is edited every day in Paris, Balzac would tell us, a sort of spoken newspaper, more terrible than its printed rivals. We shall see later on that this verbal press reduced to nothing the power of a Charlus who had fallen out of fashion, and exalted far above him a Morel who was not worth the millionth part of his former patron. Is this intellectual fashion really so simple, and does it sincerely believe in the nullity of a Charlus of genius, in the incontestable authority of a crass Morel? The Baron was not so innocent in his implacable vengeance. Whence, no doubt, that bitter venom on his tongue, the spreading of which seemed to dye his cheeks with jaundice when he was in a rage. “You who knew Bergotte,” M. de Charlus went on, “I thought at one time that you might, perhaps, by refreshing his memory with regard to the youngster’s writings, collaborate in short with myself, help me to assist a twofold talent, that of a musician and a writer, which may one day acquire the prestige of that of Berlioz. As you know, the Illustrious have often other things to think about, they are smothered in flattery, they take little interest except in themselves. But Bergotte, who was genuinely unpretentious and obliging, promised me that he would get into the *Gaulois*, or some such paper, those little articles, a blend of the humourist and the musician, which he really does quite charmingly now, and I am really very glad that Charlie should combine with his violin this little stroke of Ingres’s pen. I know that I am prone to exaggeration, when he is concerned, like all the old fairy godmothers of the Conservatoire. What, my dear fellow, didn’t you know that? You have never observed my little weakness. I pace up and down for hours on end outside the examination hall. I’m as happy as a queen. As for Charlie’s prose, Bergotte assured me that it was really very good indeed.”

M. de Charlus, who had long been acquainted with Bergotte through Swann, had indeed gone to see him a few days before his death, to ask him to find an opening for Morel in some newspaper for a sort of commentary, half humorous, upon the music of the day. In doing so, M. de Charlus had felt some remorse, for, himself a great admirer of Bergotte, he was conscious that he never went to see

him for his own sake, but in order, thanks to the respect, partly intellectual, partly social, that Bergotte felt for him, to be able to do a great service to Morel, or to some other of his friends. That he no longer made use of people in society for any other purpose did not shock M. de Charlus, but to treat Bergotte thus had appeared to him more offensive, for he felt that Bergotte had not the calculating nature of people in society, and deserved better treatment. Only, his was a busy life, and he could never find time for anything except when he was greatly interested in something, when, for instance, it affected Morel. What was more, as he was himself extremely intelligent, the conversation of an intelligent man left him comparatively cold, especially that of Bergotte who was too much the man of letters for his liking and belonged to another clan, did not share his point of view. As for Bergotte, he had observed the calculated motive of M. de Charlus's visits, but had felt no resentment, for he had been incapable, throughout his life, of any consecutive generosity, but anxious to give pleasure, broadminded, insensitive to the pleasure of administering a rebuke. As for M. de Charlus's vice, he had never partaken of it to the smallest extent, but had found in it rather an element of colour in the person affected, *fas et nefas*, for an artist, consisting not in moral examples but in memories of Plato or of Sodom. "But you, fair youth, we never see you at Quai Conti. You don't abuse their hospitality!" I explained that I went out as a rule with my cousin. "Do you hear that! He goes out with his cousin! What a most particularly pure young man!" said M. de Charlus to Brichot. Then, turning again to myself: "But we are not asking you to give an account of your life, my boy. You are free to do anything that amuses you. We merely regret that we have no share in it. Besides, you shew very good taste, your cousin is charming, ask Brichot, she quite turned his head at Douville. We shall regret her absence this evening. But you did just as well, perhaps, not to bring her with you. Vinteuil's music is delightful. But I have heard that we are to meet the composer's daughter and her friend, who have a terrible reputation. That sort of thing is always awkward for a girl. They are sure to be there, unless the ladies have been detained in the country, for they were to have been present without fail all afternoon at a rehearsal which Mme. Verdurin was giving to-day, to which she had invited only the bores, her family, the people whom she could not very well have this evening. But a moment ago, before dinner, Charlie told us that the sisters Vinteuil. as we call them, for whom they were all waiting, never came." Notwithstanding the intense pain that I had felt at the sudden association with its effect, of which alone I had been aware, of the cause, at length discovered, of Albertine's anxiety to be there that afternoon, the presence

publicly announced (but of which I had been ignorant) of Mlle. Vinteuil and her friend, my mind was still sufficiently detached to remark that M. de Charlus, who had told us, a few minutes earlier, that he had not seen Charlie since the morning, was now brazenly admitting that he had seen him before dinner. My pain became visible. “Why, what is the matter with you?” said the Baron. “You are quite green; come, let us go in, you will catch cold, you don’t look at all well.” It was not any doubt as to Albertine’s virtue that M. de Charlus’s words had awakened in me. Many other doubts had penetrated my mind already; at each fresh doubt we feel that the measure is heaped full, that we cannot cope with it, then we manage to find room for it all the same, and once it is introduced into our vital essence it enters into competition there with so many longings to believe, so many reasons to forget, that we speedily become accustomed to it, and end by ceasing to pay it any attention. There remains only, like a partly healed pain, the menace of possible suffering, which, the counterpart of desire, a feeling of the same order, and like it become the centre of our thoughts, radiates through them to an infinite circumference a wistful melancholy, as desire radiates pleasures whose origin we fail to perceive, wherever anything may suggest the idea of the person with whom we are in love. But pain revives as soon as a fresh doubt enters our mind complete; even if we assure ourself almost immediately: “I shall deal with this, there must be some method by which I need not suffer, it cannot be true,” nevertheless there has been a first moment in which we suffered as though we believed it. If we had merely members, such as legs and arms, life would be endurable; unfortunately we carry inside us that little organ which we call the heart, which is subject to certain maladies in the course of which it is infinitely impressionable by everything that concerns the life of a certain person, so that a lie — that most harmless of things, in the midst of which we live so unconcernedly, if the lie be told by ourselves or by strangers — coming from that person, causes the little heart, which surgeons ought really to be able to excise from us, intolerable anguish. Let us not speak of the brain, for our mind may go on reasoning interminably in the course of this ansuish, it does no more to mitigate it than by taking thought can we soothe an aching tooth. It is true that this person is to blame for having lied to us, for she had sworn to us that she would always tell us the truth. But we know from our own shortcomings, towards other people, how little an oath is worth. And we have deliberately believed them when they came from her, the very person to whose interest it has always been to lie to us, and whom, moreover, we did not select for her virtues. It is true that, later on, she would almost cease to have any need to lie to us — at

the moment when our heart will have grown indifferent to her falsehood — because then we shall not feel any interest in her life. We know this, and, notwithstanding, we deliberately sacrifice our own lives, either by killing ourselves for her sake, or by letting ourselves be sentenced to death for having murdered her, or simply by spending, in the course of a few evenings, our whole fortune upon her, which will oblige us presently to commit suicide because we have not a penny in the world. Besides, however calm we may imagine ourselves when we are in love, we always have love in our heart in a state of unstable equilibrium. A trifle is sufficient to exalt it to the position of happiness, we radiate happiness, we smother in our affection not her whom we love, but those who have given us merit in her eyes, who have protected her from every evil temptation; we think that our mind is at ease, and a word is sufficient: 'Gilberte is not coming,' 'Mademoiselle Vinteuil is expected,' to make all the preconceived happiness towards which we were rising collapse, to make the sun hide his face, to open the bag of the winds and let loose the internal tempest which one day we shall be incapable of resisting. That day, the day upon which the heart has become so frail, our friends who respect us are pained that such trifles, that certain persons, can so affect us, can bring us to death's door. But what are they to do? If a poet is dying of septic pneumonia, can one imagine his friends explaining to the pneumococcus that the poet is a man of talent and that it ought to let him recover? My doubt, in so far as it referred to Mlle. Vinteuil, was not entirely novel. But to a certain extent, my jealousy of the afternoon, inspired by Léa and her friends, had abolished it. Once that peril of the Trocadéro was removed, I had felt that I had recaptured for all time complete peace of mind. But what was entirely novel to me was a certain excursion as to which Andrée had told me: "We went to this place and that, we didn't meet anyone," and during which, on the contrary, Mlle. Vinteuil had evidently arranged to meet Albertine at Mme. Verdurin's. At this moment I would gladly have allowed Albertine to go out by herself, to go wherever she might choose, provided that I might lock up Mlle. Vinteuil and her friend somewhere and be certain that Albertine would not meet them. The fact is that jealousy is, as a rule, partial, of intermittent application, whether because it is the painful extension of an anxiety which is provoked now by one person, now by another with whom our mistress may be in love, or because of the exiguity of our thought which is able to realise only what it can represent to itself and leaves everything else in an obscurity which can cause us only a proportionately modified anguish.

Just as we were about to ring the bell we were overtaken by Saniette who

informed us that Princess Sherbatoff had died at six o'clock, and added that he had not at first recognised us. "I envisaged you, however, for some time," he told us in a breathless voice. "Is it aught but curious that I should have hesitated?" To say "Is it not curious" would have seemed to him wrong, and he had acquired a familiarity with obsolete forms of speech that was becoming exasperating. "Not but what you are people whom one may acknowledge as friends." His grey complexion seemed to be illuminated by the livid glow of a storm. His breathlessness, which had been noticeable, as recently as last summer, only when M. Verdurin 'jumped down his throat,' was now continuous. "I understand that an unknown work of Vinteuil is to be performed by excellent artists, and singularly by Morel." "Why singularly?" inquired the Baron who detected a criticism in the adverb. "Our friend Saniette," Brichot made haste to exclaim, acting as interpreter, "is prone to speak, like the excellent scholar that he is, the language of an age in which 'singularly' was equivalent to our 'especially.'"

As we entered the Verdurins' hall, M. de Charlus asked me whether I was engaged upon any work and as I told him that I was not, but that I was greatly interested at the moment in old dinner-services of plate and porcelain, he assured me that I could not see any finer than those that the Verdurins had; that moreover I might have seen them at la Raspelière, since, on the pretext that one's possessions are also one's friends, they were so silly as to cart everything down there with them; it would be less convenient to bring everything out for my benefit on the evening of a party; still, he would tell them to shew me anything that I wished to see. I begged him not to do anything of the sort. M. de Charlus unbuttoned his greatcoat, took off his hat, and I saw that the top of his head had now turned silver in patches. But like a precious shrub which is not only coloured with autumn tints but certain leaves of which are protected by bandages of wadding or incrustations of plaster, M. de Charlus received from these few white hairs at his crest only a further variegation added to those of his face. And yet, even beneath the layers of different expressions, paint and hypocrisy which formed such a bad 'make-up,' his face continued to hide from almost everyone the secret that it seemed to me to be crying aloud. I was almost put to shame by his eyes in which I was afraid of his surprising me in the act of reading it, as from an open book, by his voice which seemed to me to be repeating it in every tone, with an untiring indecency. But secrets are well kept by such people, for everyone who comes in contact with them is deaf and blind. The people who learned the truth from some one else, from the Verdurins for instance, believed it, but only for so long as they had not met M. de Charlus. His face, so far from

spreading, dissipated every scandalous rumour. For we form so extravagant an idea of certain characters that we would be incapable of identifying one of them with the familiar features of a person of our acquaintance. And we find it difficult to believe in such a person's vices, just as we can never believe in the genius of a person with whom we went to the Opera last night.

M. de Charlus was engaged in handing over his greatcoat with the instructions of a familiar guest. But the footman to whom he was handing it was a newcomer, and quite young. Now M. de Charlus had by this time begun, as people say, to 'lose his bearings' and did not always remember what might and what might not be done. The praiseworthy desire that he had felt at Balbec to shew that certain topics did not alarm him, that he was not afraid to declare with regard to some one or other: "He is a nice-looking boy," to utter, in short, the same words as might have been uttered by somebody who was not like himself, this desire he had now begun to express by saying on the contrary things which nobody could ever have said who was not like him, things upon which his mind was so constantly fixed that he forgot that they do not form part of the habitual preoccupation of people in general. And so, as he gazed at the new footman, he raised his forefinger in the air in a menacing fashion and, thinking that he was making an excellent joke: "You are not to make eyes at me like that, do you hear?" said the Baron, and, turning to Brichot: "He has a quaint little face, that boy, his nose is rather fun," and, completing his joke, or yielding to a desire, he lowered his forefinger horizontally, hesitated for an instant, then, unable to control himself any longer, thrust it irresistibly forwards at the footman and touched the tip of his nose, saying "Pif!" "That's a rum card," the footman said to himself, and inquired of his companions whether it was a joke or what it was. "It is just a way he has," said the butler (who regarded the Baron as slightly 'touched,' 'a bit balmy'), "but he is one of Madame's friends for whom I have always had the greatest respect, he has a good heart."

"Are you coming back this year to Incarville?" Brichot asked me. "I believe that our hostess has taken la Raspelière again, for all that she has had a crow to pick with her landlords. But that is nothing, it is a cloud that passes," he added in the optimistic tone of the newspapers that say: "Mistakes have been made, it is true, but who does not make mistakes at times?" But I remembered the state of anguish in which I had left Balbec, and felt no desire to return there. I kept putting off to the morrow my plans for Albertine. "Why, of course he is coming back, we need him, he is indispensable to us," declared M. de Charlus with the authoritative and uncomprehending egoism of friendliness.

At this moment M. Verdurin appeared to welcome us. When we expressed our sympathy over Princess Sherbatoff, he said: “Yes, I believe she is rather ill.” “No, no, she died at six o’clock,” exclaimed Saniette. “Oh, you exaggerate everything,” was M. Verdurin’s brutal retort, for, since he had not cancelled his party, he preferred the hypothesis of illness, imitating unconsciously the Duc de Guermantes. Saniette, not without fear of catching cold, for the outer door was continually being opened, stood waiting resignedly for some one to take his hat and coat. “What are you hanging about there for, like a whipped dog?” M. Verdurin asked him. “I am waiting until one of the persons who are charged with the cloakroom can take my coat and give me a number.” “What is that you say?” demanded M. Verdurin with a stern expression. “‘Charged with the cloakroom?’ Are you going off your head? ‘In charge of the cloakroom,’ is what we say, if we’ve got to teach you to speak your own language, like a man who has had a stroke.” “Charged with a thing is the correct form,” murmured Saniette in a stifled tone; “the abbé Le Batteux...” “You make me tired, you do,” cried M. Verdurin in a voice of thunder. “How you do wheezel Have you been running upstairs to an attic?” The effect of M. Verdurin’s rudeness was that the servants in the cloakroom allowed other guests to take precedence of Saniette and, when he tried to hand over his things, replied: “Wait for your turn, Sir, don’t be in such a hurry.” “There’s system for you, competent fellows, that’s right, my lads,” said M. Verdurin with an approving smile, in order to encourage them in their tendency to keep Saniette waiting till the end. “Come along,” he said to us, “the creature wants us all to catch our death hanging about in his beloved draught. Come and get warm in the drawing-room. ‘Charged with the cloakroom,’ indeed, what an idiot!” “He is inclined to be a little precious, but he’s not a bad fellow,” said Brichot. “I never said that he was a bad fellow, I said that he was an idiot,” was M. Verdurin’s harsh retort.

Meanwhile Mme. Verdurin was busily engaged with Cottard and Ski. Morel had just declined (because M. de Charlus could not be present) an invitation from some friends of hers to whom she had promised the services of the violinist. The reason for Morel’s refusal to perform at the party which the Verdurins’ friends were giving, a reason which we shall presently see reinforced by others of a far more serious kind, might have found its justification in a habit common to the leisured classes in general but specially distinctive of the little nucleus. To be sure, if Mme. Verdurin intercepted between a newcomer and one of the faithful a whispered speech which might let it be supposed that they were already acquainted, or wished to become more intimate (“On Friday, then, at So-

and-So's," or "Come to the studio any day you like; I am always there until five o'clock, I shall look forward to seeing you"), agitated, supposing the newcomer to occupy a 'position' which would make him a brilliant recruit to the little clan, the Mistress, while pretending not to have heard anything, and preserving in her fine eyes, shadowed by the habit of listening to Debussy more than they would have been by that of sniffing cocaine, the extenuated expression that they derived from musical intoxication alone, revolved nevertheless behind her splendid brow, inflated by all those quartets and the headaches that were their consequence, thoughts which were not exclusively polyphonic, and unable to contain herself any longer, unable to postpone the injection for another instant, flung herself upon the speakers, drew them apart, and said to the newcomer, pointing to the 'faithful' one: "You wouldn't care to come and dine to meet *him*, next Saturday, shall we say, or any day you like, with some really nice people! Don't speak too loud, as I don't want to invite all this mob" (a word used to denote for five minutes the little nucleus, disdained for the moment in favour of the newcomer in whom so many hqpes were placed).

But this infatuated impulse, this need to make friendly overtures, had its counterpart. Assiduous attendance at their Wednesdays aroused in the Verdurins an opposite tendency. This was the desire to quarrel, to hold aloof. It had been strengthened, had almost been wrought to a frenzy during the months spent at la Raspelière, where they were all together morning, noon and night. M. Verdurin went out of his way to prove one of his guests in the wrong, to spin webs in which he might hand over to his comrade spider some innocent fly. Failing a grievance, he would invent some absurdity. As soon as one of the faithful had been out of the house for half an hour, they would make fun of him in front of the others, would feign surprise that their guests had not noticed how his teeth were never clean, or how on the contrary he had a mania for brushing them twenty times a day. If any one took the liberty of opening a window, this want of breeding would cause a glance of disgust to pass between host and hostess. A moment later Mme. Verdurin would ask for a shawl, which gave M. Verdurin an excuse for saying in a tone of fury: "No, I shall close the window, I wonder who had the impertinence to open it," in the hearing of the guilty wretch who blushed to the roots of his hair. You were rebuked indirectly for the quantity of wine that you had drunk. "It won't do you any harm. Navvies thrive on it!" If two of the faithful went out together without first obtaining permission from the Mistress, their excursions led to endless comments, however innocent they might be. Those of M. de Charlus with Morel were not innocent. It was only the fact that

M. de Charlus was not staying at la Raspelière (because Morel was obliged to live near his barracks) that retarded the hour of satiety, disgust, retching. That hour was, however, about to strike.

Mme. Verdurin was furious and determined to 'enlighten' Morel as to the ridiculous and detestable part that M. de Charlus was making him play. "I must add," she went on (Mme. Verdurin, when she felt that she owed anyone a debt of gratitude which would be a burden to him, and was unable to rid herself of it by killing him, would discover a serious defect in him which would honourably dispense her from shewing her gratitude), "I must add that he gives himself airs in my house which I do not at all like." The truth was that Mme. Verdurin had another more serious reason than Morel's refusal to play at her friends' party for picking a quarrel with M. de Charlus. The latter, overcome by the honour he was doing the Mistress in bringing to Quai Conti people who after all would never have come there for her sake, had, on hearing the first names that Mme. Verdurin had suggested as those of people who ought to be invited, pronounced the most categorical ban upon them in a peremptory tone which blended the rancorous pride of a crotchety nobleman with the dogmatism of the expert artist in questions of entertainment who would cancel his programme and withhold his collaboration sooner than agree to concessions which, in his opinion, would endanger the success of the whole. M. de Charlus had given his approval, hedging it round with reservations, to Saintine alone, with whom, in order not to be bothered with his wife, Mme. de Guermantes had passed, from a daily intimacy, to a complete severance of relations, but whom M. de Charlus, finding him intelligent, continued to see. True, it was among a middle-class set, with a cross-breeding of the minor nobility, where people are merely very rich and connected with an aristocracy whom the true aristocracy does not know, that Saintine, at one time the flower of the Guermantes set, had gone to seek his fortune and, he imagined, a social foothold. But Mme. Verdurin, knowing the blue-blooded pretensions of the wife's circle, and failing to take into account the husband's position (for it is what is immediately over our head that gives us the impression of altitude and not what is almost invisible to us, so far is it lost in the clouds), felt that she ought to justify an invitation of Saintine by pointing out that he knew a great many people, "having married Mlle. ——." The ignorance which this assertion, the direct opposite of the truth, revealed in Mme. Verdurin caused the Baron's painted lips to part in a smile of indulgent scorn and wide comprehension. He disdained a direct answer, but as he was always ready to express in social examples theories which shewed the fertility of his mind and

the arrogance of his pride, with the inherited frivolity of his occupations: “Saintine ought to have come to me before marrying,” he said, “there is such a thing as social as well as physiological eugenics, and I am perhaps the only specialist in existence. Saintine’s case aroused no discussion, it was clear that, in making the marriage that he made, he was tying a stone to his neck, and hiding his light under a bushel. His social career was at an end. I should have explained this to him, and he would have understood me, for he is quite intelligent. On the other hand, there was a person who had everything that he required to make his position exalted, predominant, world-wide, only a terrible cable bound him to the earth. I helped him, partly by pressure, partly by force, to break his bonds and now he has won, with a triumphant joy, the freedom, the omnipotence that he owes to me; it required, perhaps, a little determination on his part, but what a reward! Thus a man can himself, when he has the sense to listen to me, become the midwife of his destiny.” It was only too clear that M. de Charlus had not been able to influence his own; action is a different thing from speech, even eloquent speech, and from thought, even the thoughts of genius. “But, so far as I am concerned, I live the life of a philosopher who looks on with interest at the social reactions which I have foretold, but who does not assist them. And so I have continued to visit Saintine, who has always received me with the whole-hearted deference which is my due. I have even dined with him in his new abode, where one is heavily bored, in the midst of the most sumptuous splendour, as one used to be amused in the old days when, living from hand to mouth, he used to assemble the best society in a wretched attic. Him, then, you may invite, I give you leave, but I rule out with my veto all the other names that you have mentioned. And you will thank me for it, for, if I am an expert in arranging marriages, I am no less an expert in arranging parties. I know the rising people who give tone to a gathering, make it go; and I know also the names that will bring it down to the ground, make it fall flat.” These exclusions were not always founded upon the Baron’s personal resentments nor upon his artistic refinements, but upon his skill as an actor. When he had perfected, at the expense of somebody or something, an entirely successful epigram, he was anxious to let it be heard by the largest possible audience, but took care not to admit to the second performance the audience of the first who could have borne witness that the novelty was not novel. He would then rearrange his drawing-room, simply because he did not alter his programme, and, when he had scored a success in conversation, would, if need be, have organised a tour, and given exhibitions in the provinces. Whatever may have been the various motives for

these exclusions, they did not merely annoy Mme. Verdurin, who felt her authority as a hostess impaired, they also did her great damage socially, and for two reasons. The first was that M. de Charlus, even more susceptible than Jupien, used to quarrel, without anyone's ever knowing why, with the people who were most suited to be his friends. Naturally, one of the first punishments that he could inflict upon them was that of not allowing them to be invited to a party which he was giving at the Verdurins'. Now these pariahs were often people who are in the habit of ruling the roost, as the saying is, but who in M. de Charlus's eyes had ceased to rule it from the day on which he had quarrelled with them. For his imagination, in addition to finding people in the wrong in order to quarrel with them, was no less ingenious in stripping them of all importance as soon as they ceased to be his friends. If, for instance, the guilty person came of an extremely old family, whose dukedom, however, dates only from the nineteenth century, such a family as the Montesquieu, from that moment all that counted for M. de Charlus was the precedence of the dukedom, the family becoming nothing. "They are not even Dukes," he would exclaim. "It is the title of the abbé de Montesquieu which passed most irregularly to a collateral, less than eighty years ago. The present Duke, if Duke he can be called, is the third. You may talk to me if you like of people like the Uzès, the La Trémoïlîe, the Luynes, who are tenth or fourteenth Dukes, or my brother who is twelfth Duc de Guermantes and seventeenth Prince of Cordova. The Montesquieu are descended from an old family, what would that prove, supposing that it were proved? They have descended so far that they have reached the fourteenth storey below stairs." Had he on the contrary quarrelled with a gentleman who possessed an ancient dukedom, who boasted the most magnificent connexions, was related to ruling princes, but to whose line this distinction had come quite suddenly without any length of pedigree, a Luynes for instance, the case was altered, pedigree alone counted. "I ask you — M. Alberti, who does not emerge from the mire until Louis XIII. What can it matter to us that favouritism at court allowed them to pick up dukedoms to which they have no right?" What was more, with M. de Charlus, the fall came immediately after the exaltation because of that tendency peculiar to the Guermantes to expect from conversation, from friendship, something that these are incapable of giving, as well as the symptomatic fear of becoming the objects of slander. And the fall was all the greater, the higher the exaltation had been. Now nobody had ever found such favour with the Baron as he had markedly shewn for Comtesse Mole. By what sign of indifference did she reveal, one fine day, that she had

been unworthy of it? The Comtesse always maintained that she had never been able to solve the problem. The fact remains that the mere sound of her name aroused in the Baron the most violent rage, provoked the most eloquent but the most terrible philippics. Mme. Verdurin, to whom Mme. Molé had been very kind, and who was founding, as we shall see, great hopes upon her and had rejoiced in anticipation at the thought that the Comtesse would meet in her house all the noblest names, as the Mistress said, “of France and Navarre,” at once proposed to invite “Madame de Molé.” “Oh, my God! Everyone has his own taste,” M. de Charlus had replied, “and if you, Madame, feel a desire to converse with Mme. Pipelet, Mme. Gibout and Mme. Joseph Prudhomme, I ask nothing better, but let it be on an evening when I am not present. I could see as soon as you opened your mouth that we do not speak the same language, since I was mentioning the names of the nobility, and you retort with the most obscure names of professional and tradespeople, dirty scandalmongering little bounders, little women who imagine themselves patronesses of the arts because they repeat, an octave lower, the manners of my Guermantes sister-in-law, like a jay that thinks it is imitating a peacock. I must add that it would be positively indecent to admit to a party which I am pleased to give at Mme. Verdurin’s a person whom I have with good reason excluded from my society, a sheep devoid of birth, loyalty, intelligence, who is so idiotic as to suppose that she is capable of playing the Duchesse de Guermantes and the Princesse de Guermantes, a combination which is in itself idiotic, since the Duchesse de Guermantes and the Princesse de Guermantes are poles apart. It is as though a person should pretend to be at once Reichenberg and Sarah Bernhardt. In any case, even if it were not impossible, it would be extremely ridiculous. Even though I may, myself, smile at times at the exaggeration of one and regret the limitations of the other, that is my right. But that upstart little frog trying to blow herself out to the magnitude of two great ladies who, at all events, always reveal the incomparable distinction of blood, it is enough, as the saying is, to make a cat laugh. The Molé! That is a name which must not be uttered in my hearing, or else I must simply withdraw,” he concluded with a smile, in the tone of a doctor, who, thinking of his patient’s interests in spite of that same patient’s opposition, lets it be understood that he will not tolerate the collaboration of a homoeopath. On the other hand, certain persons whom M. de Charlus regarded as negligible might indeed be so for him but not for Mme. Verdurin. M. de Charlus, with his exalted birth, could afford to dispense with people in the height of fashion, the assemblage of whom would have made Mme. Verdurin’s drawing-room one of the first in Paris. She, at the

same time, was beginning to feel that she had already on more than one occasion missed the coach, not to mention the enormous retardation that the social error of the Dreyfus case had inflicted upon her, not without doing her a service all the same. I forget whether I have mentioned the disapproval with which the Duchesse de Guermantes had observed certain persons of her world who, subordinating everything else to the Case, excluded fashionable women from their drawing-rooms and admitted others who were not fashionable, because they were for or against the fresh trial, and had then been criticised in her turn by those same ladies, as lukewarm, unsound in her views, and guilty of placing social distinctions above the national interests; may I appeal to the reader, as to a friend with regard to whom one completely forgets, at the end of a conversation, whether one has remembered, or had an opportunity to tell him something important? Whether I have done so or not, the attitude of the Duchesse de Guermantes can easily be imagined, and indeed if we look at it in the light of subsequent history may appear, from the social point of view, perfectly correct. M. de Cambremer regarded the Dreyfus case as a foreign machination intended to destroy the Intelligence Service, to undermine discipline, to weaken the army, to divide the French people, to pave the way for invasion. Literature being, apart from a few of La Fontaine's fables, a sealed book to the Marquis, he left it to his wife to prove that the cruelly introspective writers of the day had, by creating a spirit of irreverence, arrived by a parallel course at a similar result. "M. Reinach and M. Hervieu are in the plot," she would say. Nobody will accuse the Dreyfus case of having premeditated such dark designs upon society. But there it certainly has broken down the hedges. The social leaders who refuse to allow politics into society are as foreseeing as the soldiers who refuse to allow politics to permeate the army. Society is like the sexual appetite; one does not know at what forms of perversion it may not arrive, once we have allowed our choice to be dictated by aesthetic considerations. The reason that they were Nationalists gave the Faubourg Saint-Germain the habit of entertaining ladies from another class of society; the reason vanished with Nationalism, the habit remained. Mme. Verdurin, by the bond of Dreyfusism, had attracted to her house certain writers of distinction who for the moment were of no advantage to her socially, because they were Dreyfusards. But political passions are like all the rest, they do not last. Fresh generations arise which are incapable of understanding them. Even the generation that felt them changes, feels political passions which, not being modelled exactly upon their predecessors, make it rehabilitate some of the excluded, the reason for exclusion having altered. Monarchists no longer cared,

at the time of the Dreyfus case, whether a man had been a Republican, that is to say a Radical, that is to say Anticlerical, provided that he was an anti-Semite and a Nationalist. Should a war ever come, patriotism would assume another form and if a writer was chauvinistic nobody would stop to think whether he had or had not been a Dreyfusard. It was thus that, at each political crisis, at each artistic revival, Mme. Verdurin had collected one by one, like a bird building its nest, the several items, useless for the moment, of what would one day be her Salon. The Dreyfus case had passed, Anatole France remained. Mme. Verdurin's strength lay in her genuine love of art, the trouble that she used to take for her faithful, the marvellous dinners that she gave for them alone, without inviting anyone from the world of fashion. Each of the faithful was treated at her table as Bergotte had been treated at Mme. Swann's. When a boon companion of this sort had turned into an illustrious man whom everybody was longing to meet, his presence at Mme. Verdurin's had none of the artificial, composite effect of a dish at an official or farewell banquet, cooked by Potel or Chabot, but was merely a delicious 'ordinary' which you would have found there in the same perfection on a day when there was no party at all. At Mme. Verdurin's the cast was trained to perfection, the repertory most select, all that was lacking was an audience. And now that the public taste had begun to turn from the rational and French art of a Bergotte, and to go in, above all things, for exotic forms of music, Mme. Verdurin, a sort of official representative in Paris of all foreign artists, was not long in making her appearance, by the side of the exquisite Princess Yourbeletief, an aged Fairy Godmother, grim but all-powerful, to the Russian dancers. This charming invasion, against whose seductions only the stupidest of critics protested, infected Paris, as we know, with a fever of curiosity less burning, more purely aesthetic, but quite as intense perhaps as that aroused by the Dreyfus case. There again Mme. Verdurin, but with a very different result socially, was to take her place in the front row. Just as she had been seen by the side of Mme. Zola, immediately under the bench, during the trial in the Assize Court, so when the new generation of humanity, in their enthusiasm for the Russian ballet, thronged to the Opera, crowned with the latest novelty in aigrettes, they invariably saw in a stage box Mme. Verdurin by the side of Princess Yourbeletief. And just as, after the emotions of the law courts, people used to go in the evening to Mme. Verdurin's, to meet Picquart or Labori in the flesh and what was more to hear the latest news of the Case, to learn what hopes might be placed in Zurlinden, Loubet, Colonel Jouaust, the Regulations, so now, little inclined for sleep after the enthusiasm aroused by the *Scheherazade* or

Prince Igor, they repaired to Mme. Verdurin's, where under the auspices of Princess Yourbeletief and their hostess an exquisite supper brought together every night the dancers themselves, who had abstained from dinner so as to be more resilient, their director, their designers, the great composers Igor Stravinski and Richard Strauss, a permanent little nucleus, around which, as round the supper-table of M. and Mme. Helvétius, the greatest ladies in Paris and foreign royalties were not too proud to gather. Even those people in society who professed to be endowed with taste and drew unnecessary distinctions between the various Russian ballets, regarding the setting of the *Sylphides* as somehow 'purer' than that of*Scheherazade*, which they were almost prepared to attribute to Negro inspiration, were enchanted to meet face to face the great revivers of theatrical taste, who in an art that is perhaps a little more artificial than that of the easel had created a revolution as profound as Impressionism itself.

To revert to M. de Charlus, Mme. Verdurin would not have minded so much if he had placed on his Index only Comtesse Molé and Mme. Bontemps, whom she had picked out at Odette's on the strength of her love of the fine arts, and who during the Dreyfus case had come to dinner occasionally bringing her husband, whom Mme. Verdurin called 'lukewarm,' because he was not making any move for a fresh trial, but who, being extremely intelligent, and glad to form relations in every camp, was delighted to shew his independence by dining at the same table as Labori, to whom he listened without uttering a word that might compromise himself, but managed to slip in at the right moment a tribute to the loyalty, recognised by all parties, of Jaurès. But the Baron had similarly proscribed several ladies of the aristocracy whose acquaintance Mme. Verdurin, on the occasion of some musical festivity or a collection for charity, had recently formed and who, whatever M. de Charlus might think of them, would have been, far more than himself, essential to the formation of a fresh nucleus at Mme. Verdurin's, this time aristocratic. Mme. Verdurin had indeed been reckoning upon this party, to which M. de Charlus would be bringing her women of the same set, to mix her new friends with them, and had been relishing in anticipation the surprise that the latter would feel upon meeting at Quai Conti their own friends or relatives invited there by the Baron. She was disappointed and furious at his veto. It remained to be seen whether the evening, in these conditions, would result in profit or loss to herself. The loss would not be too serious if only M. de Charlus's guests came with so friendly a feeling for Mme. Verdurin that they would become her friends in the future. In this case the mischief would be only half done, these two sections of the fashionable world,

which the Baron had insisted upon keeping apart, would be united later on, he himself being excluded, of course, when the time came. And so Mme. Verdurin was awaiting the Baron's guests with a certain emotion. She would not be slow in discovering the state of mind in which they came, and the degree of intimacy to which she might hope to attain. While she waited, Mme. Verdurin took counsel with the faithful, but, upon seeing M. de Charlus enter the room with Brichot and myself, stopped short. Greatly to our astonishment, when Brichot told her how sorry he was to learn that her dear friend was so seriously ill, Mme. Verdurin replied: "Listen, I am obliged to confess that I am not at all sorry. It is useless to pretend to feel what one does not feel." No doubt she spoke thus from want of energy, because she shrank from the idea of wearing a long face throughout her party, from pride, in order not to appear to be seeking excuses for not having cancelled her invitations, from self-respect also and social aptitude, because the absence of grief which she displayed was more honourable if it could be attributed to a peculiar antipathy, suddenly revealed, to the Princess, rather than to a universal insensibility, and because her hearers could not fail to be disarmed by a sincerity as to which there could be no doubt. If Mme. Verdurin had not been genuinely unaffected by the death of the Princess, would she have gone on to excuse herself for giving the party, by accusing herself of a far more serious fault? Besides, one was apt to forget that Mme. Verdurin would thus have admitted, while confessing her grief, that she had not had the strength of mind to forego a pleasure; whereas the indifference of the friend was something more shocking, more immoral, but less humiliating, and consequently easier to confess than the frivolity of the hostess. In matters of crime, where the culprit is in danger, it is his material interest that prompts the confession. Where the fault incurs no penalty, it is self-esteem. Whether it was that, doubtless feeling the pretext to be too hackneyed of the people who, so as not to allow a bereavement to interrupt their life of pleasure, go about saying that it seems to them useless to display the outward signs of a grief which they feel in their hearts, Mme. Verdurin preferred to imitate those intelligent culprits who are revolted by the commonplaces of innocence and whose defence — a partial admission, though they do not know it — consists in saying that they would see no harm in doing what they are accused of doing, although, as it happens, they have had no occasion to do it; or that, having adopted, to explain her conduct, the theory of indifference, she found, once she had started upon the downward slope of her unnatural feeling, that it was distinctly original to have felt it, that she displayed a rare perspicacity in having managed to diagnose her own

symptoms, and a certain ‘nerve’ in proclaiming them; anyhow, Mme. Verdurin kept dwelling upon her want of grief, not without a certain proud satisfaction, as of a paradoxical psychologist and daring dramatist. “Yes, it is very funny,” she said, “I hardly felt it. Of course, I don’t mean to say that I wouldn’t rather she were still alive, she was not a bad person.” “Yes, she was,” put in M. Verdurin. “Ah! He doesn’t approve of her because he thought that I was doing myself harm by having her here, but he is quite pig-headed about that.” “Do me the justice to admit,” said M. Verdurin, “that I never approved of your having her. I always told you that she had a bad reputation.” “But I have never heard a thing against her,” protested Saniette. “What!” exclaimed Mme. Verdurin, “everybody knew; bad isn’t the word, it was scandalous, appalling. No, it has nothing to do with that. I couldn’t explain, myself, what I felt; I didn’t dislike her, but I took so little interest in her that, when we heard that she was seriously ill, my husband himself was quite surprised, and said: ‘Anyone would think that you didn’t mind.’ Why, this evening, he offered to put off the party, and I insisted upon having it, because I should have thought it a farce to shew a grief which I do not feel.” She said this because she felt that it had a curious smack of the ‘independent theatre,’ and was at the same time singularly convenient; for an admitted insensibility or immorality simplifies life as much as does easy virtue; it converts reproachable actions, for which one no longer need seek any excuse, into a duty imposed by sincerity. And the faithful listened to Mme. Verdurin’s speech with the blend of admiration and misgiving which certain cruelly realistic plays, that shewed a profound observation, used at one time to cause, and, while they marvelled to see their beloved Mistress display a novel aspect of her rectitude and independence, more than one of them, albeit he assured himself that after all it would not be the same thing, thought of his own death, and asked himself whether, on the day when death came to him, they would draw the blinds or give a party at Quai Conti. “I am very glad that the party has not been put off, for my guests’ sake,” said M. de Charlus, not realising that in expressing himself thus he was offending Mme. Verdurin. Meanwhile I was struck, as was everybody who approached Mme. Verdurin that evening, by a far from pleasant odour of rhinogomenol. The reason was as follows. We know that Mme. Verdurin never expressed her artistic feelings in a moral, but always in a physical fashion, so that they might appear more inevitable and more profound. So, if one spoke to her of Vinteuil’s music, her favourite, she remained unmoved, as though she expected to derive no emotion from it. But after a few minutes of a fixed, almost abstracted gaze, in a sharp, matter of fact, scarcely civil tone (as

though she had said to you: “I don’t in the least mind your smoking, it’s because of the carpet; it’s a very fine one [not that that matters either], but it’s highly inflammable, I’m dreadfully afraid of fire, and I shouldn’t like to see you all roasted because some one had carelessly dropped a cigarette end on it”), she replied: “I have no fault to find with Vinteuil; to my mind, he is the greatest composer of the age, only I can never listen to that sort of stuff without weeping all the time” (she did not apply any pathos to the word ‘weeping,’ she would have used precisely the same tone for ‘sleeping’; certain slandermongers used indeed to insist that the latter verb would have been more applicable, though no one could ever be certain, for she listened to the music with her face buried in her hands, and certain snoring sounds might after all have been sobs). “I don’t mind weeping, not in the least; only I get the most appalling colds afterwards. It stuffs up my mucous membrane, and the day after I look like nothing on earth. I have to inhale for days on end before I can utter. However, one of Cottard’s pupils, a charming person, has been treating me for it. He goes by quite an original rule: ‘Prevention is better than cure.’ And he greases my nose before the music begins. It is radical. I can weep like all the mothers who ever lost a child, not a trace of a cold. Sometimes a little conjunctivitis, that’s all. It is absolutely efficacious. Otherwise I could never have gone on listening to Vinteuil. I was just going from one bronchitis to another.” I could not refrain from alluding to Mlle. Vinteuil. “Isn’t the composer’s daughter to be here,” I asked Mme. Verdurin, “with one of her friends?” “No, I have just had a telegram,” Mme. Verdurin said evasively, “they have been obliged to remain in the country.” I felt a momentary hope that there might never have been any question of their leaving it and that Mme. Verdurin had announced the presence of these representatives of the composer only in order to make a favourable impression upon the performers and their audience. “What, didn’t they come, then, to the rehearsal this afternoon?” came with a feigned curiosity from the Baron who was anxious to let it appear that he had not seen Charlie. The latter came up to greet me. I whispered a question in his ear about Mlle. Vinteuil; he seemed to me to know little or nothing about her. I signalled to him not to let himself be heard and told him that we should discuss the question later on. He bowed, and assured me that he would be delighted to place himself entirely at my disposal. I observed that he was far more polite, more respectful, than he had been in the past. I spoke warmly of him — who might perhaps be able to help me to clear up my suspicions — to M. de Charlus who replied: “He only does what is natural, there would be no point in his living among respectable people if he didn’t learn good

manners.” These, according to M. de Charlus, were the old manners of France, untainted by any British bluntness. Thus when Charlie, returning from a tour in the provinces or abroad, arrived in his travelling suit at the Baron’s, the latter, if there were not too many people present, would kiss him without ceremony upon both cheeks, perhaps a little in order to banish by so ostentatious a display of his affection any idea of its being criminal, perhaps because he could not deny himself a pleasure, but still more, doubtless, from a literary sense, as upholding and illustrating the traditional manners of France, and, just as he would have countered the Munich or modern style of furniture by keeping in his rooms old armchairs that had come to him from a great-grandmother, countering the British phlegm with the affection of a warm-hearted father of the eighteenth century, unable to conceal his joy at beholding his son once more. Was there indeed a trace of incest in this paternal affection? It is more probable that the way in which M. de Charlus habitually appeased his vicious cravings, as to which we shall learn something in due course, was not sufficient for the need of affection, which had remained unsatisfied since the death of his wife; the fact remains that after having thought more than once of a second marriage, he was now devoured by a maniacal desire to adopt an heir. People said that he was going to adopt Morel, and there was nothing extraordinary in that. The invert who has been unable to feed his passion save on a literature written for women-loving men, who used to think of men when he read Mussel’s*Nuits*, feels the need to partake, nevertheless, in all the social activities of the man who is not an invert, to keep a lover, as the old frequenter of the Opera keeps ballet-girls, to settle down, to marry or form a permanent tie, to become a father.

M. de Charlus took Morel aside on the pretext of making him tell him what was going to be played, but above all finding a great consolation, while Charlie shewed him his music, in displaying thus publicly their secret intimacy. In the meantime I myself felt a certain charm. For albeit the little clan included few girls, on the other hand girls were abundantly invited on the big evenings. There were a number present, and very pretty girls too, whom I knew. They wafted smiles of greeting to me across the room. The air was thus decorated at every moment with the charming smile of some girl. That is the manifold, occasional ornament of evening parties, as it is of days. We remember an atmosphere because girls were smiling in it.

Many people might have been greatly surprised had they overheard the furtive remarks which M. de Charlus exchanged with a number of important gentlemen at this party. These were two Dukes, a distinguished General, a great writer, a great physician, a great barrister. And the remarks in question were: “By the way, did you notice the footman, I mean the little fellow they take on the carriage? At our cousin Guermantes’, you don’t know of anyone?” “At the moment, no.” “I say, though, outside the door, where the carriages stop, there used to be a fair little person, in breeches, who seemed to me most attractive. She called my carriage most charmingly, I would gladly have prolonged the conversation.” “Yes, but I believe she’s altogether against it, besides, she puts on airs, you like to get to business at once, you would loathe her. Anyhow, I know there’s nothing doing, a friend of mine tried.” “That is a pity, I thought the profile very fine, and the hair superb.” “Really, as much as that? I think, if you had seen a little more of her, you would have been disillusioned. No, in the supper-room, only two months ago you would have seen a real marvel, a great fellow six foot six, a perfect skin, and loves it, too. But he’s gone off to Poland.” “Ah, that is rather a long way.” “You never know, he may come back, perhaps. One always meets again somewhere.” There is no great social function that does not, if, in taking a section of it, we contrive to cut sufficiently deep, resemble those parties to which doctors invite their patients, who utter the most intelligent remarks, have perfect manners, and would never shew that they were mad did they not whisper in our ear, pointing to some old gentleman who goes past: “That’s Joan of Arc.”

“I feel that it is our duty to enlighten him,” Mme. Verdurin said to Brichot. “Not that I have anything against Charlus, far from it. He is a pleasant fellow and as for his reputation, I don’t mind saying that it is not of a sort that can do me any harm! As far as I’m concerned, in our little clan, in our table-talk, as I detest flirts, the men who talk nonsense to a woman in a corner instead of discussing interesting topics, I’ve never had any fear with Charlus of what happened to me with Swann, and Elstir, and lots of them. With him I was quite safe, he would come to my dinners, all the women in the world might be there, you could be certain that the general conversation would not be disturbed by flirtations and whisperings. Charlus is in a class of his own, one doesn’t worry, he might be a priest. Only, he must not be allowed to take it upon himself to order about the young men who come to the house and make a nuisance of himself in our little nucleus, or he’ll be worse than a man who runs after

women.” And Mme. Verdurin was sincere in thus proclaiming her indulgence towards Charlism. Like every ecclesiastical power she regarded human frailties as less dangerous than anything that might undermine the principle of authority, impair the orthodoxy, modify the ancient creed of her little Church. “If he does, then I shall bare my teeth. What do you say to a gentleman who tried to prevent Charlie from coming to a rehearsal because he himself was not invited? So he’s going to be taught a lesson, I hope he’ll profit by it, otherwise he can simply take his hat and go. He keeps the boy under lock and key, upon my word he does.” And, using exactly the same expressions that almost anyone else might have used, for there are certain not in common currency which some particular subject, some given circumstance recalls almost inevitably to the mind of the speaker, who imagines that he is giving free expression to his thought when he is merely repeating mechanically the universal lesson, she went on: “It’s impossible to see Morel nowadays without that great lout hanging round him, like an armed escort.” M. Verdurin offered to take Charlie out of the room for a minute to explain things to him, on the pretext of asking him a question. Mme. Verdurin was afraid that this might upset him, and that he would play badly in consequence. It would be better to postpone this performance until after the other. Perhaps even until a later occasion. For however Mme. Verdurin might look forward to the delicious emotion that she would feel when she knew that her husband was engaged in enlightening Charlie in the next room, she was afraid, if the shot missed fire, that he would lose his temper and would fail to reappear on the sixteenth.

What ruined M. de Charlus that evening was the ill-breeding — so common in their class — of the people whom he had invited and who were now beginning to arrive. Having come there partly out of friendship for M. de Charlus and also out of curiosity to explore these novel surroundings, each Duchess made straight for the Baron as though it were he who was giving the party and said, within a yard of the Verdurins, who could hear every word: “Shew me which is mother Verdurin; do you think I really need speak to her? I do hope at least, that she won’t put my name in the paper to-morrow, nobody would ever speak to me again. What! That woman with the white hair, but she looks quite presentable.” Hearing some mention of Mlle. Vinteuil, who, however, was not in the room, more than one of them said: “Ah! The sonata-man’s daughter? Shew me her” and, each finding a number of her friends, they formed a group by themselves, watched, sparkling with ironical curiosity, the arrival of the faithful, able at the most to point a finger at the odd way in which a

person had done her hair, who, a few years later, was to make this the fashion in the very best society, and, in short, regretted that they did not find this house as different from the houses that they knew, as they had hoped to find it, feeling the disappointment of people in society who, having gone to the Boîte à Bruant in the hope that the singer would make a butt of them, find themselves greeted on their arrival with a polite bow instead of the expected:

Ah! voyez c'te gueule, c'te binette.

Ah! voyez c'te gueule qu'elle a.

M. de Charlus had, at Balbec, given me a perspicacious criticism of Mme. de Vaugoubert who, notwithstanding her keen intellect, had brought about, after his unexpected prosperity, the irremediable disgrace of her husband. The rulers to whose Court M. de Vaugoubert was accredited, King Theodosius and Queen Eudoxia, having returned to Paris, but this time for a prolonged visit, daily festivities had been held in their honour, in the course of which the Queen, on the friendliest terms with Mme. de Vaugoubert, whom she had seen for the last ten years in her own capital, and knowing neither the wife of the President of the Republic nor those of his Ministers, had neglected these ladies and kept entirely aloof with the Ambassadress. This lady, believing her own position to be unassailable — M. de Vaugoubert having been responsible for the alliance between King Theodosius and France — had derived from the preference that the Queen shewed for her society a proud satisfaction but no anxiety at the peril that threatened her, which took shape a few months later in the fact, wrongly considered impossible by the too confident couple, of the brutal dismissal from the Service of M. de Vaugoubert. M. de Charlus, remarking in the 'crawler' upon the downfall of his lifelong friend, expressed his astonishment that an intelligent woman had not, in such circumstances, brought all her influence with the King and Queen to bear, so as to secure that she might not seem to possess any influence, and to make them transfer to the wives of the President and his Ministers a civility by which those ladies would have been all the more flattered, that is to say which would have made them more inclined, in their satisfaction, to be grateful to the Vaugouberts, inasmuch as they would have supposed that civility to be spontaneous, and not dictated by them. But the man who can see the mistakes of others need only be exhilarated by circumstances in order to succumb to them himself. And M, de Charlus, while his guests fought their way towards him, to come and congratulate him, thank him, as though he were the master of the house, never thought of asking them to say a few words to Mme. Verdurin. Only the Queen of Naples, in whom survived the same noble blood

that had flowed in the veins of her sisters the Empress Elisabeth and the Duchesse d'Alençon, made a point of talking to Mme. Verdurin as though she had come for the pleasure of meeting her rather than for the music and for M. de Charlus, made endless pretty speeches to her hostess, could not cease from telling her for how long she had been wishing to make her acquaintance, expressed her admiration for the house and spoke to her of all manner of subjects as though she were paying a call. She would so much have liked to bring her niece Elisabeth, she said (the niece who shortly afterwards was to marry Prince Albert of Belgium), who would be so sorry. She stopped talking when she saw the musicians mount the platform, asking which of them was Morel. She can scarcely have been under any illusion as to the motives that led M. de Charlus to desire that the young virtuoso should be surrounded with so much glory. But the venerable wisdom of a sovereign in whose veins flowed the blood of one of the noblest races in history, one of the richest in experience, scepticism and pride, made her merely regard the inevitable defects of the people whom she loved best, such as her cousin Charlus (whose mother had been, like herself, a 'Duchess in Bavaria'), as misfortunes that rendered more precious to them the support that they might find in herself and consequently made it even more pleasant to her to provide that support. She knew that M. de Charlus would be doubly touched by her having taken the trouble to come, in the circumstances. Only, being as good as she had long ago shewn herself brave, this heroic woman who, a soldier-queen, had herself fired her musket from the ramparts of Gaeta, always ready to take her place chivalrously by the weaker side, seeing Mme. Verdurin alone and abandoned, and unaware (for that matter) that she ought not to leave the Queen, had sought to pretend that for her, the Queen of Naples, the centre of this party, the lodestone that had made her come was Mme. Verdurin. She expressed her regret that she would not be able to remain until the end, as she had, although she never went anywhere, to go on to another party, and begged that on no account, when she had to go, should any fuss be made for her, thus discharging Mme. Verdurin of the honours which the latter did not even know that she ought to render.

One must, however, do M. de Charlus the justice of saying that, if he entirely forgot Mme. Verdurin and allowed her to be ignored, to a scandalous extent, by the people 'of his own world' whom he had invited, he did, on the other hand, realise that he must not allow these people to display, during the 'symphonic recital' itself, the bad manners which they were exhibiting towards the Mistress. Morel had already mounted the platform, the musicians were

assembling, and one could still hear conversations, not to say laughter, speeches such as “it appears, one has to be initiated to understand it.” Immediately M. de Charlus, drawing himself erect, as though he had entered a different body from that which I had seen, not an hour ago, crawling towards Mme. Verdurin’s door, assumed a prophetic expression and regarded the assembly with an earnestness which indicated that this was not the moment for laughter, whereupon one saw a rapid blush tinge the cheeks of more than one lady thus publicly rebuked, like a schoolgirl scolded by her teacher in front of the whole class. To my mind, M. de Charlus’s attitude, noble as it was, was somehow slightly comic; for at one moment he pulverised his guests with a flaming glare, at another, in order to indicate to them as with a *vade mecum* the religious silence that ought to be observed, the detachment from every worldly consideration, he furnished in himself, as he raised to his fine brow his white-gloved hands, a model (to which they must conform) of gravity, already almost of ecstasy, without acknowledging the greetings of late-comers so indelicate as not to understand that it was now the time for High Art. They were all hypnotised; no one dared utter a sound, move a chair; respect for music — by virtue of Palamède’s prestige — had been instantaneously inculcated in a crowd as ill-bred as it was exclusive.

When I saw appear on the little platform, not only Morel and a pianist, but performers upon other instruments as well, I supposed that the programme was to begin with works of composers other than Vinteuil. For I imagined that the only work of his in existence was his sonata for piano and violin.

Mme. Verdurin sat in a place apart, the twin hemispheres of her pale, slightly roseate brow magnificently curved, her hair drawn back, partly in imitation of an eighteenth century portrait, partly from the desire for coolness of a fever-stricken patient whom modesty forbids to reveal her condition, aloof, a deity presiding over musical rites, patron saint of Wagnerism and sick-headaches, a sort of almost tragic Norn, evoked by the spell of genius in the midst of all these bores, in whose presence she would more than ordinarily scorn to express her feelings upon hearing a piece of music which she knew better than they. The concert began, I did not know what they were playing, I found myself in a strange land. Where was I to locate it? Into what composer’s country had I come? I should have been glad to know, and, seeing nobody near me whom I might question, I should have liked to be a character in those *Arabian Nights* which I never tired of reading and in which, in moments of uncertainty, there arose a genie or a maiden of ravishing beauty, invisible to everyone else but not to the embarrassed hero to whom she reveals exactly what he wishes to learn.

Well, at this very moment I was favoured with precisely such a magical apparition. As, in a stretch of country which we suppose to be strange to us and which as a matter of fact we have approached from a new angle, when after turning out of one road we find ourself emerging suddenly upon another every inch of which is familiar only we have not been in the habit of entering it from that end, we say to ourself immediately: “Why, this is the lane that leads to the garden gate of my friends the X—— I shall be there in a minute,” and there, indeed, is their daughter at the gate, come out to greet us as we pass; so, all of a sudden, I found myself, in the midst of this music that was novel to me, right in the heart of Vinteuil’s sonata; and, more marvellous than any maiden, the little phrase, enveloped, harnessed in silver, glittering with brilliant effects of sound, as light and soft as silken scarves, came towards me, recognisable in this new guise. My joy at having found it again was enhanced by the accent, so friendlily familiar, which it adopted in addressing me, so persuasive, so simple, albeit without dimming the shimmering beauty with which it was resplendent. Its intention, however, was, this time, merely to shew me the way, which was not the way of the sonata, for this was an unpublished work of Vinteuil in which he had merely amused himself, by an allusion which was explained at this point by a sentence in the programme which one ought to have been reading simultaneously, in making the little phrase reappear for a moment. No sooner was it thus recalled than it vanished, and I found myself once more in an unknown world, but I knew now, and everything that followed only confirmed my knowledge, that this world was one of those which I had never even been capable of imagining that Vinteuil could have created, for when, weary of the sonata which was to me a universe thoroughly explored, I tried to imagine others equally beautiful but different, I was merely doing what those poets do who fill their artificial paradise with meadows, flowers and streams which duplicate those existing already upon Earth. What was now before me made me feel as keen a joy as the sonata would have given me if I had not already known it, and consequently, while no less beautiful, was different. Whereas the sonata opened upon a dawn of lilied meadows, parting its slender whiteness to suspend itself over the frail and yet consistent mingling of a rustic bower of honeysuckle with white geraniums, it was upon continuous, level surfaces like those of the sea that, in the midst of a stormy morning beneath an already lurid sky, there began, in an eery silence, in an infinite void, this hew masterpiece, and it was into a roseate dawn that, in order to construct itself progressively before me, this unknown universe was drawn from silence and from night. This so novel

redness, so absent from the tender, rustic, pale sonata, tinged all the sky, as dawn does, with a mysterious hope. And a song already thrilled the air, a song on seven notes, but the strangest, the most different from any that I had ever imagined, from any that I could ever have been able to imagine, at once ineffable and piercing, no longer the cooing of a dove as in the sonata, but rending the air, as vivid as the scarlet tinge in which the opening bars had been bathed, something like the mystical crow of a cock, an ineffable but over-shrill appeal of the eternal morning. The cold atmosphere, soaked in rain, electric — of a quality so different, feeling wholly other pressures, in a world so remote from that, virginal and endowed only with vegetable life, of the sonata — changed at every moment, obliterating the empurpled promise of the Dawn. At noon, however, beneath a scorching though transitory sun, it seemed to fulfil itself in a dull, almost rustic bliss in which the peal of clanging, racing bells (like those which kindled the blaze of the square outside the church of Combray, which Vinteuil, who must often have heard them, had perhaps discovered at that moment in his memory like a colour which the painter's hand has conveyed to his palette) seemed to materialise the coarsest joy. To be honest, from the aesthetic point of view, this joyous motive did not appeal to me, I found it almost ugly, its rhythm dragged so laboriously along the ground that one might have succeeded in imitating almost everything that was essential to it by merely making a noise, sounds, by the tapping of drumsticks upon a table. It seemed to me that Vinteuil had been lacking, here, in inspiration, and consequently I was a little lacking also in the power of attention.

I looked at the Mistress, whose sullen immobility seemed to be protesting against the noddings — in time with the music — of the empty heads of the ladies of the Faubourg. She did not say: "You understand that I know something about this music, and more than a little! If I had to express all that I feel, you would never hear the end of it!" She did not say this. But her upright, motionless body, her expressionless eyes, her straying locks said it for her. They spoke also of her courage, said that the musicians might go on, need not spare her nerves, that she would not flinch at the andante, would not cry out at the allegro. I looked at the musicians. The violoncellist dominated the instrument which he clutched between his knees, bowing his head to which its coarse features gave, in moments of mannerism, an involuntary expression of disgust; he leaned over it, fingered it with the same domestic patience with which he might have plucked a cabbage, while by his side the harpist (a mere girl) in a short skirt, bounded on either side by the lines of her golden quadrilateral like those which, in the magic

chamber of a Sibyl, would arbitrarily denote the ether, according to the consecrated rules, seemed to be going in quest, here and there, at the point required, of an exquisite sound, just as though, a little allegorical deity, placed in front of the golden trellis of the heavenly vault, she were gathering, one by one, its stars. As for Morel, a lock, hitherto invisible and lost in the rest of his hair, had fallen loose and formed a curl upon his brow. I turned my head slightly towards the audience to discover what M. de Charlus might be feeling at the sight of this curl. But my eyes encountered only the face, or rather the hands of Mme. Verdurin, for the former was entirely buried in the latter.

But very soon, the triumphant motive of the bells having been banished, dispersed by others, I succumbed once again to the music; and I began to realise that if, in the body of this septet, different elements presented themselves in turn, to combine at the close, so also Vinteuil's sonata, and, as I was to find later on, his other works as well, had been no more than timid essays, exquisite but very slight, towards the triumphant and complete masterpiece which was revealed to me at this moment. And so too, I could not help recalling how I had thought of the other worlds which Vinteuil might have created as of so many universes as hermetically sealed as each of my own love-affairs, whereas in reality I was obliged to admit that in the volume of my latest love — that is to say, my love for Albertine — my first inklings of love for her (at Balbec at the very beginning, then after the game of ferret, then on the night when she slept at the hotel, then in Paris on the foggy afternoon, then on the night of the Guermantes' party, then at Balbec again, and finally in Paris where my life was now closely linked to her own) had been nothing more than experiments; indeed, if I were to consider, not my love for Albertine, but my life as a whole, my earlier love-affairs had themselves been but slight and timid essays, experiments, which paved the way to this vaster love: my love for Albertine. And I ceased to follow the music, in order to ask myself once again whether Albertine had or had not seen Mlle. Vinteuil during the last few days, as we interrogate afresh an internal pain, from which we have been distracted for a moment. For it was in myself that Albertine's possible actions were performed. Of each of the people whom we know we possess a double, but it is generally situated on the horizon of our imagination, of our memory; it remains more or less external to ourselves, and what it has done or may have done has no greater capacity to cause us pain than an object situated at a certain distance, which provides us with only the painless sensations of vision. The things that affect these people we perceive in a contemplative fashion, we are able to deplore them in appropriate language

which gives other people a sense of our kindness of heart, we do not feel them; but since the wound inflicted on me at Balbec, it was in my heart, at a great depth, difficult to extract, that Albertine's double was lodged. What I saw of her hurt me, as a sick man would be hurt whose senses were so seriously deranged that the sight of a colour would be felt by him internally like a knife-thrust in his living flesh. It was fortunate that I had not already yielded to the temptation to break with Albertine; the boring thought that I should have to see her again presently, when I went home, was a trifling matter compared with the anxiety that I should have felt if the separation had been permanent at this moment when I felt a doubt about her before she had had time to become immaterial to me. At the moment when I pictured her thus to myself waiting for me at home, like a beloved wife who found the time of waiting long, and had perhaps fallen asleep for a moment in her room, I was caressed by the passage of a tender phrase, homely and domestic, of the septet. Perhaps — everything is so interwoven and superimposed in our inward life — it had been inspired in Vinteuil by his daughter's sleep — his daughter, the cause to-day of all my troubles — when it enveloped in its quiet, on peaceful evenings, the work of the composer, this phrase which calmed me so, by the same soft background of silence which pacifies certain of Schumann's reveries, during which, even when 'the Poet is speaking,' one can tell that 'the child is asleep.' Asleep, awake, I should find her again this evening, when I chose to return home, Albertine, my little child. And yet, I said to myself, something more mysterious than Albertine's love seemed to be promised at the outset of this work, in those first cries of dawn. I endeavoured to banish the thought of my mistress, so as to think only of the composer. Indeed, he seemed to be present. One would have said that, reincarnate, the composer lived for all time in his music; one could feel the joy with which he was choosing the colour of some sound, harmonising it with the rest. For with other and more profound gifts Vinteuil combined that which few composers, and indeed few painters have possessed, of using colours not merely so lasting but so personal that, just as time has been powerless to fade them, so the disciples who imitate him who discovered them, and even the masters who surpass him do not pale their originality. The revolution that their apparition has effected does not live to see its results merge unacknowledged in the work of subsequent generations; it is liberated, it breaks out again, and alone, whenever the innovator's works are performed in all time to come. Each note underlined itself in a colour which all the rules in the world could not have taught the most learned composers to imitate, with the result that Vinteuil, albeit he had appeared

at his hour and was fixed in his place in the evolution of music, would always leave that place to stand in the forefront, whenever any of his compositions was performed, which would owe its appearance of having blossomed after the works of other more recent composers to this quality, apparently paradoxical and actually deceiving, of permanent novelty. A page of symphonic music by Vinteuil, familiar already on the piano, when one heard it rendered by an orchestra, like a ray of summer sunlight which the prism of the window disintegrates before it enters a dark dining-room, revealed like an unsuspected, myriad-hued treasure all the jewels of the Arabian Nights. But how can one compare to that motionless brilliance of light what was life, perpetual and blissful motion? This Vinteuil, whom I had known so timid and sad, had been capable — when he had to select a tone, to blend another with it — of audacities, had enjoyed a good fortune, in the full sense of the word, as to which the hearing of any of his works left one in no doubt. The joy that such chords had aroused in him, the increase of strength that it had given him wherewith to discover others led the listener on also from one discovery to another, or rather it was the composer himself who guided him, deriving from the colours that he had invented a wild joy which gave him the strength to discover, to fling himself upon the others which they seemed to evoke, enraptured, quivering, as though from the shock of an electric spark, when the sublime came spontaneously to life at the clang of the brass, panting, drunken, maddened, dizzy, while he painted his great musical fresco, like Michelangelo strapped to his scaffold and dashing, from his supine position, tumultuous brush-strokes upon the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Vinteuil had been dead for many years; but in the sound of these instruments which he had animated, it had been given him to prolong, for an unlimited time, a part at least of his life. Of his life as a man merely? If art was indeed but a prolongation of life, was it worth while to sacrifice anything to it, was it not as unreal as life itself? If I was to listen properly to this septet, I could not pause to consider the question. No doubt the glowing septet differed singularly from the candid sonata; the timid question to which the little phrase replied, from the breathless supplication to find the fulfilment of the strange promise that had resounded, so harsh, so supernatural, so brief, setting athrob the still inert crimson of the morning sky, above the sea. And yet these so widely different phrases were composed of the same elements, for just as there was a certain universe, perceptible by us in those fragments scattered here and there, in private houses, in public galleries, which were Elstir’s universe, the universe which he saw, in which he lived, so to the music of Vinteuil extended, note by

note, key by key, the unknown colourings of an inestimable, unsuspected universe, made fragmentary by the gaps that occurred between the different occasions of hearing his work performed; those two so dissimilar questions which commanded the so different movements of the sonata and the septet, the former breaking into short appeals a line continuous and pure, the latter welding together into an indivisible structure a medley of scattered fragments, were nevertheless, one so calm and timid, almost detached and as though philosophic, the other so anxious, pressing, imploring, were nevertheless the same prayer, poured forth before different risings of the inward sun and merely refracted through the different mediums of other thoughts, of artistic researches carried on through the years in which he had tried to create something new. A prayer, a hope which was at heart the same, distinguishable beneath these disguises in the various works of Vinteuil, and on the other hand not to be found elsewhere than in his works. For these phrases historians of music might indeed find affinities, a pedigree in the works of other great composers, but merely for subordinate reasons, from external resemblances, from analogies which were ingeniously discovered by reasoning rather than felt by a direct impression. The impression that these phrases of Vinteuil imparted was different from any other, as though, notwithstanding the conclusions to which science seems to point, the individual did really exist. And it was precisely when he was seeking vigorously to be something new that one recognised beneath the apparent differences the profound similarities; and the deliberate resemblances that existed in the body of a work, when Vinteuil repeated once and again a single phrase, diversified it, amused himself by altering its rhythm, by making it reappear in its original form, these deliberate resemblances, the work of the intellect, inevitably superficial, never succeeded in being as striking as those resemblances, concealed, involuntary, which broke out in different colours, between the two separate masterpieces; for then Vinteuil, seeking to do something new, questioned himself, with all the force of his creative effort, reached his own essential nature at those depths, where, whatever be the question asked, it is in the same accent, that is to say its own, that it replies. Such an accent, the accent of Vinteuil, is separated from the accents of other composers by a difference far greater than that which we perceive between the voices of two people, even between the cries of two species of animal: by the difference that exists between the thoughts of those other composers and the eternal investigations of Vinteuil, the question that he put to himself in so many forms, his habitual speculation, but as free from analytical formulas of reasoning as if it were being carried out in the world

of the angels, so that we can measure its depth, but without being any more able to translate it into human speech than are disincarnate spirits when, evoked by a medium, he questions them as to the mysteries of death. And even when I bore in mind the acquired originality which had struck me that afternoon, that kinship which musical critics might discover among them, it is indeed a unique accent to which rise, and return in spite of themselves those great singers that original composers are, which is a proof of the irreducibly individual existence of the soul. Though Vinteuil might try to make more solemn, more grand, or to make more sprightly and gay what he saw reflected in the mind of his audience, yet, in spite of himself, he submerged it all beneath an undercurrent which makes his song eternal and at once recognisable. This song, different from those of other singers, similar to all his own, where had Vinteuil learned, where had he heard it? Each artist seems thus to be the native of an unknown country, which he himself has forgotten, different from that from which will emerge, making for the earth, another great artist. When all is said, Vinteuil, in his latest works, seemed to have drawn nearer to that unknown country. The atmosphere was no longer the same as in the sonata, the questioning phrases became more pressing, more uneasy, the answers more mysterious; the clean-washed air of morning and evening seemed to influence even the instruments. Morel might be playing marvellously, the sounds that came from his violin seemed to me singularly piercing, almost blatant. This harshness was pleasing, and, as in certain voices, one felt in it a sort of moral virtue and intellectual superiority. But this might give offence. When his vision of the universe is modified, purified, becomes more adapted to his memory of the country of his heart, it is only natural that this should be expressed by a general alteration of sounds in the musician, as of colours in the painter. Anyhow, the more intelligent section of the public is not misled, since people declared later on that Vinteuil's last compositions were the most profound. Now no programme, no subject supplied any intellectual basis for judgment. One guessed therefore that it was a question of transposition, an increasing profundity of sound.

This lost country composers do not actually remember, but each of them remains all his life somehow attuned to it; he is wild with joy when he is singing the airs of his native land, betrays it at times in his thirst for fame, but then, in seeking fame, turns his back upon it, and it is only when he despises it that he finds it when he utters, whatever the subject with which he is dealing, that peculiar strain the monotony of which — for whatever its subject it remains identical in itself — proves the permanence of the elements that compose his

soul. But is it not the fact then that from those elements, all the real residuum which we are obliged to keep to ourselves, which cannot be transmitted in talk, even by friend to friend, by master to disciple, by lover to mistress, that ineffable something which makes a difference in quality between what each of us has felt and what he is obliged to leave behind at the threshold of the phrases in which he can communicate with his fellows only by limiting himself to external points common to us all and of no interest, art, the art of a Vinteuil like that of an Elstir, makes the man himself apparent, rendering externally visible in the colours of the spectrum that intimate composition of those worlds which we call individual persons and which, without the aid of art, we should never know? A pair of wings, a different mode of breathing, which would enable us to traverse infinite space, would in no way help us, for, if we visited Mars or Venus keeping the same senses, they would clothe in the same aspect as the things of the earth everything that we should be capable of seeing. The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Eternal Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds, that each of them is; and this we can contrive with an Elstir, with a Vinteuil; with men like these we do really fly from star to star. The andante had just ended upon a phrase filled with a tenderness to which I had entirely abandoned myself; there followed, before the next movement, a short interval during which the performers laid down their instruments and the audience exchanged impressions. A Duke, in order to shew that he knew what he was talking about, declared: “It is a difficult thing to play well.” Other more entertaining people conversed for a moment with myself. But what were their words, which like every human and external word, left me so indifferent, compared with the heavenly phrase of music with which I had just been engaged? I was indeed like an angel who, fallen from the inebriating bliss of paradise, subsides into the most humdrum reality. And, just as certain creatures are the last surviving testimony to a form of life which nature has discarded, I asked myself if music were not the unique example of what might have been — if there had not come the invention of language, the formation of words, the analysis of ideas — the means of communication between one spirit and another. It is like a possibility which has ended in nothing; humanity has developed along other lines, those of spoken and written language. But this return to the unanalysed was so inebriating, that on emerging from that paradise, contact with people who were more or less intelligent seemed to me of an extraordinary insignificance. People — I had been

able during the music to remember them, to blend them with it; or rather I had blended with the music little more than the memory of one person only, which was Albertine. And the phrase that ended the andante seemed to me so sublime that I said to myself that it was a pity that Albertine did not know it, and, had she known it, would not have understood what an honour it was to be blended with anything so great as this phrase which brought us together, and the pathetic voice of which she seemed to have borrowed. But, once the music was interrupted, the people who were present seemed utterly lifeless. Refreshments were handed round. M. de Charlus accosted a footman now and then with: “How are you? Did you get my note? Can you come?” No doubt there was in these remarks the freedom of the great nobleman who thinks he is flattering his hearer and is himself more one of the people than a man of the middle classes; there was also the cunning of the criminal who imagines that anything which he volunteers is on that account regarded as innocent. And he added, in the Guermantes tone of Mme. de Villeparisis: “He’s a good young fellow, such a good sort, I often employ him at home.” But his adroitness turned against the Baron, for people thought his intimate conversation and correspondence with footmen extraordinary. The footmen themselves were not so much flattered as embarrassed, in the presence of their comrades. Meanwhile the septet had begun again and was moving towards its close; again and again one phrase or another from the sonata recurred, but always changed, its rhythm and harmony different, the same and yet something else, as things recur in life; and they were phrases of the sort which, without our being able to understand what affinity assigns to them as their sole and necessary home the past life of a certain composer, are to be found only in his work, and appear constantly in it, where they are the fairies, the dryads, the household gods; I had at the start distinguished in the septet two or three which reminded me of the sonata. Presently — bathed in the violet mist which rose particularly in Vinteuil’s later work, so much so that, even when he introduced a dance measure, it remained captive in the heart of an opal — I caught the sound of another phrase from the sonata, still hovering so remote that I barely recognised it; hesitating, it approached, vanished as though in alarm, then returned, joined hands with others, come, as I learned later on, from other works, summoned yet others which became in their turn attractive and persuasive, as soon as they were tamed, and took their places in the ring, a ring divine but permanently invisible to the bulk of the audience, who, having before their eyes only a thick veil through which they saw nothing, punctuated arbitrarily with admiring exclamations a continuous boredom which was

becoming deadly. Then they withdrew, save one which I saw reappear five times or six, without being able to distinguish its features, but so caressing, so different — as was no doubt the little phrase in Swann's sonata — from anything that any woman had ever made me desire, that this phrase which offered me in so sweet a voice a happiness which would really have been worth the struggle to obtain it, is perhaps — this invisible creature whose language I did not know and whom I understood so well — the only Stranger that it has ever been my good fortune to meet. Then this phrase broke up, was transformed, like the little phrase in the sonata, and became the mysterious appeal of the start. A phrase of a plaintive kind rose in opposition to it, but so profound, so vague, so internal, almost so organic and visceral that one could not tell at each of its repetitions whether they were those of a theme or of an attack of neuralgia. Presently these two motives were wrestling together in a close fight in which now one disappeared entirely, and now the listener could catch only a fragment of the other. A wrestling match of energies only, to tell the truth; for if these creatures attacked one another, it was rid of their physical bodies, of their appearance, of their names, and finding in me an inward spectator, himself indifferent also to their names and to all details, interested only in their immaterial and dynamic combat and following with passion its sonorous changes. In the end the joyous motive was left triumphant; it was no longer an almost anxious appeal addressed to an empty sky, it was an ineffable joy which seemed to come from paradise, a joy as different from that of the sonata as from a grave and gentle angel by Bellini, playing the theorbo, would be some archangel by Mantegna sounding a trump. I might be sure that this new tone of joy, this appeal to a super-terrestrial joy, was a thing that I would never forget. But should I be able, ever, to realise it? This question seemed to me all the more important, inasmuch as this phrase was what might have seemed most definitely to characterise — from its sharp contrast with all the rest of my life, with the visible world — those impressions which at remote intervals I recaptured in my life as starting-points, foundation-stones for the construction of a true life: the impression that I had felt at the sight of the steeples of Martinville, or of a line of trees near Balbec. In any case, to return to the particular accent of this phrase, how strange it was that the presentiment most different from what life assigns to us on earth, the boldest approximation to the bliss of the world beyond should have been materialised precisely in the melancholy, respectable little old man whom we used to meet in the Month of Mary at Combray; but, stranger still, how did it come about that this revelation, the strangest that I had yet received, of an unknown type of joy, should have

come to me from him, since, it was understood, when he died he left nothing behind him but his sonata, all the rest being non-existent in indecipherable scribbljngs. Indecipherable they may have been, but they had nevertheless been in the end deciphered, by dint of patience, intelligence and respect, by the only person who had lived sufficiently in Vinteuil's company to understand his method of working, to interpret his orchestral indications: Mlle. Vinteuil's friend. Even in the lifetime of the great composer, she had acquired from his daughter the reverence that the latter felt for her father. It was because of this reverence that, in those moments in which people run counter to their natural inclinations, the two girls had been able to find an insane pleasure in the profanations which have already been narrated. (Her adoration of her father was the primary condition of his daughter's sacrilege. And no doubt they ought to have foregone the delight of that sacrilege, but it did not express the whole of their natures.) And, what is more, the profanations had become rarefied until they disappeared altogether, in proportion as their morbid carnal relations, that troubled, smouldering fire, had given place to the flame of a pure and lofty friendship. Mlle. Vinteuil's friend was sometimes worried by the importunate thought that she had perhaps hastened the death of Vinteuil. At any rate, by spending years in poring over the cryptic scroll left by him, in establishing the correct reading of those illegible hieroglyphs, Mlle. Vinteuil's friend had the consolation of assuring the composer whose grey hairs she had sent in sorrow to the grave an immortal and compensating glory. Relations which are not consecrated by the laws establish bonds of kinship as manifold, as complex, even more solid than those which spring from marriage. Indeed, without pausing to consider relations of so special a nature, do we not find every day that adultery, when it is based upon genuine love, does not upset the family sentiment, the duties of kinship, but rather revivifies them. Adultery brings the spirit into what marriage would often have left a dead letter. A good-natured girl who merely from convention will wear mourning for her mother's second husband has not tears enough to shed for the man whom her mother has chosen out of all the world as her lover. Anyhow, Mlle. Vinteuil had acted only in a spirit of Sadism, which did not excuse her, but it gave me a certain consolation to think so later on. She must indeed have realised, I told myself, at the moment when she and her friend profaned her father's photograph, that what they were doing was merely morbidity, silliness, and not the true and joyous wickedness which she would have liked to feel. This idea that it was merely a pretence of wickedness spoiled her pleasure. But if this idea recurred to her mind later on, as

it had spoiled her pleasure, so it must then have diminished her grief. “It was not I,” she must have told herself, “I was out of my mind. I myself mean still to pray for my father’s soul, not to despair of his forgiveness.” Only it is possible that this idea, which had certainly presented itself to her in her pleasure, may not have presented itself in her grief. I would have liked to be able to put it into her mind. I am sure that I should have done her good and that I should have been able to reestablish between her and the memory of her father a pleasant channel of communication.

As in the illegible note-books in which a chemist of genius, who does not know that death is at hand, jots down discoveries which will perhaps remain forever unknown, Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend had disentangled, from papers more illegible than strips of papyrus, dotted with a cuneiform script, the formula eternally true, forever fertile, of this unknown joy, the mystic hope of the crimson Angel of the dawn. And I to whom, albeit not so much perhaps as to Vinteuil, she had been also, she had been once more this very evening, by reviving afresh my jealousy of Albertine, she was above all in the future to be the cause of so many sufferings, it was thanks to her, in compensation, that there had been able to come to my ears the strange appeal which I should never for a moment cease to hear, as the promise and proof that there existed something other, realisable no doubt by art, than the nullity that I had found in all my pleasures and in love itself, and that if my life seemed to me so empty, at least there were still regions unexplored.

What she had enabled us, thanks to her labour, to know of Vinteuil was, to tell the truth, the whole of Vinteuil’s work. Compared with this septet, certain phrases from the sonata which alone the public knew appeared so commonplace that one failed to understand how they could have aroused so much admiration. Similarly we are surprised that for years past, pieces as trivial as the *Evening Star* or *Elisabeth’s Prayer* can have aroused in the concert-hall fanatical worshippers who wore themselves out in applause and in crying encore at the end of what after all is poor and trite to us who know *Tristan,* the *Rheingold* and the*Meistersinger*. We are left to suppose that those featureless melodies contained already nevertheless in infinitesimal, and for that reason, perhaps, more easily assimilable quantities, something of the originality of the masterpieces which, in retrospect, are alone of importance to us, but which their very perfection may perhaps have prevented from being understood; they have been able to prepare the way for them in our hearts. Anyhow it is true that, if they gave a confused presentiment of the beauties to come, they left these in a

state of complete obscurity. It was the same with Vinteuil; if at his death he had left behind him — excepting certain parts of the sonata — only what he had been able to complete, what we should have known of him would have been, in relation to his true greatness, as little as, in the case of, say, Victor Hugo, if he had died after the *Pas d'Armes du Roi Jean*, the *Fiancée du Timbalier* and *Sarah la Baigneuse*, without having written a line of the Légende des Siècles or the Contemplations: what is to us his real work would have remained purely potential, as unknown as those universes to which our perception does not attain, of which we shall never form any idea.

Anyhow, the apparent contrast, that profound union between genius (talent too and even virtue) and the sheath of vices in which, as had happened in the case of Vinteuil, it is so frequently contained, preserved, was legible, as in a popular allegory, in the mere assembly of the guests among whom I found myself once again when the music had come to an end. This assembly, albeit limited this time to Mme. Verdurin's drawing-room, resembled many others, the ingredients of which are unknown to the general public, and which philosophical journalists, if they are at all well-informed, call Parisian, or Panamist, or Dreyfusard, never suspecting that they may equally well be found in Petersburg, Berlin, Madrid, and at every epoch; if as a matter of fact the Under Secretary of State for Fine Arts, an artist to his fingertips, well-bred and smart, several Duchesses and three Ambassadors with their wives were present this evening at Mme. Verdurin's, the proximate, immediate cause of their presence lay in the relations that existed between M. de Charlus and Morel, relations which made the Baron anxious to give as wide a celebrity as possible to the artistic triumphs of his young idol, and to obtain for him the Cross of the Legion of Honour; the remoter cause which had made this assembly possible was that a girl living with Mlle. Vinteuil in the same way as the Baron was living with Charlie had brought to light a whole series of works of genius which had been such a revelation that before long a subscription was to be opened under the patronage of the Minister of Education, with the object of erecting a statue of Vinteuil. Moreover, these works had been assisted, no less than by Mlle. Vinteuil's relations with her friend, by the Baron's relations with Charlie, a sort of cross-road, a short cut, thanks to which the world was enabled to overtake these works without the preliminary circuit, if not of a want of comprehension which would long persist, at least of a complete ignorance which might have lasted for years. Whenever an event occurs which is within the range of the vulgar mind of the moralising journalist, a political event as a rule, the moralising journalists are convinced that

there has been some great change in France, that we shall never see such evenings again, that no one will ever again admire Ibsen, Renan, Dostoïevski, D'Annunzio, Tolstoi, Wagner, Strauss. For moralising journalists take their text from the equivocal undercurrents of these official manifestations, in order to find something decadent in the art which is there celebrated and which as often as not is more austere than any other. But there is no name among those most revered by these moralising journalists which has not quite naturally given rise to some such strange gathering, although its strangeness may have been less flagrant and better concealed. In the case of this gathering, the impure elements that associated themselves with it struck me from another aspect; to be sure, I was as well able as anyone to dissociate them, having learned to know them separately, but anyhow it came to pass that some of them, those which concerned Mlle. Vinteuil and her friend, speaking to me of Combray, spoke to me also of Albertine, that is to say of Balbec, since it was because I had long ago seen Mlle. Vinteuil at Montjouvain and had learned of her friend's intimacy with Albertine, that I was presently, when I returned home, to find, instead of solitude, Albertine awaiting me, and that the others, those which concerned Morel and M. de Charlus, speaking to me of Balbec, where I had seen, on the platform at Doncières, their intimacy begin, spoke to me of Combray and of its two 'ways,' for M. de Charlus was one of those Guermantes, Counts of Combray, inhabiting Combray without having any dwelling there, between earth and heaven, like Gilbert the Bad in his window: while, after all, Morel was the son of that old valet who had enabled me to know the lady in pink, and had permitted me, years after, to identify her with Mme. Swann.

M. de Charlus repeated, when, the music at an end, his guests came, to say good-bye to him, the same error that he had made when they arrived. He did not ask them to shake hands with their hostess, to include her and her husband in the gratitude that was being showered on himself. There was a long queue waiting, but a queue that led to the Baron alone, a fact of which he must have been conscious, for as he said to me a little later: "The form of the artistic celebration ended in a 'few-words-in-the-vestry' touch that was quite amusing." The guests even prolonged their expressions of gratitude with indiscriminate remarks which enabled them to remain for a moment longer in the Baron's presence, while those who had not yet congratulated him on the success of his party hung wearily in the rear. A stray husband or two may have announced his intention of going; but his wife, a snob as well as a Duchess, protested: "No, no, even if we are kept waiting an hour, we cannot go away without thanking Palamède, who

has taken so much trouble. There is nobody else left now who can give entertainments like this." Nobody would have thought of asking to be introduced to Mme. Verdurin any more than to the attendant in a theatre to which some great lady has for one evening brought the whole aristocracy. "Were you at Eliane de Montmorency's yesterday, cousin?" asked Mme. de Mortemart, seeking an excuse to prolong their conversation. "Good gracious, no; I like Eliane, but I never can understand her invitations. I must be very stupid, I'm afraid," he went on, parting his lips in a broad smile, while Mme. de Mortemart realised that she was to be made the first recipient of 'one of Palamède's' as she had often been of 'one of Oriane's.'"I did indeed receive a card a fortnight ago from the charming Eliane. Above the questionably authentic name of 'Montmorency' was the following kind invitation: 'My dear cousin, will you please remember me next Friday at half-past nine.' Beneath were written two less gratifying words: 'Czech Quartet.' These seemed to me incomprehensible, and in any case to have no more connexion with the sentence above than the words 'My dear ——,' which you find on the back of a letter, with nothing else after them, when the writer has already begun again on the other side, and has not taken a fresh sheet, either from carelessness or in order to save paper. I am fond of Eliane: and so I felt no annoyance, I merely ignored the strange and inappropriate allusion to a Czech Quartet, and, as I am a methodical man, I placed on my chimney-piece the invitation to remember Madame de Montmorency on Friday at half-past nine. Although renowned for my obedient, punctual and meek nature, as Buffon says of the camel"— at this, laughter seemed to radiate from M. de Charlus who knew that on the contrary he was regarded as the most impossible person to live with —"I was a few minutes late (it took me a few minutes to change my clothes), and without any undue remorse, thinking that half-past nine meant ten, at the stroke of ten in a comfortable dressing-gown, with warm slippers on my feet, I sat down in my chimney corner to remember Eliane as she had asked me and with a concentration which began to relax only at half-past ten. Tell her please that I complied strictly with her audacious request. I am sure she will be gratified." Mme. de Mortemart was helpless with laughter, in which M. de Charlus joined. "And to-morrow," she went on, forgetting that she had already long exceeded the time that might be allotted to her, "are you going to our La Rochefoucauld cousins?" "Oh, that, now, is quite impossible, they have invited me, and you too, I see, to a thing it is utterly impossible to imagine, which is called, if I am to believe their card of invitation, a 'dancing tea.' I used to be considered pretty

nimble when I was young, but I doubt whether I could ever decently have drunk a cup of tea while I was dancing. No, I have never cared for eating or drinking in unnatural positions. You will remind me that my dancing days are done. But even sitting down comfortably to drink my tea — of the quality of which I am suspicious since it is called ‘dancing’— I should be afraid lest other guests younger than myself, and less nimble possibly than I was at their age, might spill their cups over my clothes which would interfere with my pleasure in draining my own.” Nor indeed was M. de Charlus content with leaving Mme. Verdurin out of the conversation while he spoke of all manner of subjects which he seemed to be taking pleasure in developing and varying, that cruel pleasure which he had always enjoyed of keeping indefinitely on their feet the friends who were waiting with an excruciating patience for their turn to come; he even criticised all that part of the entertainment for which Mme. Verdurin was responsible. “But, talking about cups, what in the world are those strange little bowls which remind me of the vessels in which, when I was a young man, people used to get sorbets from Poiré-Blanche. Somebody said to me just now that they were for ‘iced coffee.’ But if it comes to that, I have seen neither coffee nor ice. What curious little objects — so very ambiguous.” In saying this M. de Charlus had placed his white-gloved hands vertically over his lips and had modestly circumscribed his indicative stare as though he were afraid of being heard, or even seen by his host and hostess. But this was a mere feint, for in a few minutes he would be offering the same criticisms to the Mistress herself, and a little later would be insolently enjoining: “No more iced-coffee cups, remember! Give them to one of your friends whose house you wish to disfigure. But warn her not to have them in the drawing-room, or people might think that they had come into the wrong room, the things are so exactly like chamberpots.” “But, cousin,” said the guest, lowering her own voice also, and casting a questioning glance at M. de Charlus, for she was afraid of offending not Mme. Verdurin but him, “perhaps she doesn’t quite know yet...” “She shall be taught.” “Oh!” laughed the guest, “she couldn’t have a better teacher! She is lucky! If you are in charge, one can be sure there won’t be a false note.” “There wasn’t one, if it comes to that, in the music.” “Oh! It was sublime. One of those pleasures which can never be forgotten. Talking of that marvellous violinist,” she went on, imagining in her innocence that M. de Charlus was interested in the violin ‘pure and simple,’”do you happen to know one whom I heard the other day playing too wonderfully a sonata by Fauré, his name is Frank...” “Oh, he’s a horror,” replied M. de Charlus, overlooking the rudeness of a contradiction which

implied that his cousin was lacking in taste. “As far as violinists are concerned, I advise you to confine yourself to mine.” This paved the way to a fresh exchange of glances, at once furtive and scrutinous, between M. de Charlus and his cousin, for, blushing and seeking by her zeal to atone for her blunder, Mme. de Mortemart went on to suggest to M. de Charlus that she might give a party, to hear Morel play. Now, so far as she was concerned, this party had not the object of bringing an unknown talent into prominence, an object which she would, however, pretend to have in mind, and which was indeed that of M. de Charlus. She regarded it only as an opportunity for giving a particularly smart party and was calculating already whom she would invite and whom she would reject. This business of selection, the chief preoccupation of people who give parties (even the people whom ‘society’ journalists are so impudent or so foolish as to call ‘the élite’), alters at once the expression — and the handwriting — of a hostess more profoundly than any hypnotic suggestion. Before she had even thought of what Morel was to play (which she regarded, and rightly, as a secondary consideration, for even if everybody this evening, from fear of M. de Charlus, had observed a polite silence during the music, it would never have occurred to anyone to listen to it), Mme. de Mortemart, having decided that Mme. de Valcourt was not to be one of the elect, had automatically assumed that air of conspiracy, of a secret plotting which so degrades even those women in society who can most easily afford to ignore what ‘people will say.’”Wouldn’t it be possible for me to give a party, for people to hear your friend play?” murmured Mme. de Mortemart, who, while addressing herself exclusively to M. de Charlus, could not refrain, as though under a fascination, from casting a glance at Mme. de Valcourt (the rejected) in order to make certain that the other was too far away to hear her. “No she cannot possibly hear what I am saying,” Mme. de Mortemart concluded inwardly, reassured by her own glance which as a matter of fact had had a totally different effect upon Mme. de Valcourt from that intended: “Why,” Mme. de Valcourt had said to herself when she caught this glance, “Marie-Thérèse is planning something with Palamède which I am not to be told.” “You mean my protégé,” M. de Charlus corrected, as merciless to his cousin’s choice of words as he was to her musical endowments. Then without paying the slightest attention to her silent prayers, as she made a smiling apology: “Why, yes...” he said in a loud tone, audible throughout the room, “although there is always a risk in that sort of exportation of a fascinating personality into surroundings that must inevitably diminish his transcendent gifts and would in any case have to be adapted to them.” Madame de Mortemart told

herself that the aside, the pianissimo of her question had been a waste of trouble, after the megaphone through which the answer had issued. She was mistaken. Mme. de Valcourt heard nothing, for the simple reason that she did not understand a single word. Her anxiety diminished and would rapidly have been extinguished had not Mme. de Mortemart, afraid that she might have been given away and afraid of having to invite Mme. de Valcourt, with whom she was on too intimate terms to be able to leave her out if the other knew about her party beforehand, raised her eyelids once again in Edith's direction, as though not to lose sight of a threatening peril, lowering them again briskly so as not to commit herself. She intended, on the morning after the party, to write her one of those letters, the complement of the revealing glance, letters which people suppose to be subtle and which are tantamount to a full and signed confession. For instance: "Dear Edith, I am so sorry about you, I did not really expect you last night" ("How could she have expected me," Edith would ask herself, "since she never invited me?") "as I know that you are not very fond of parties of that sort, which rather bore you. We should have been greatly honoured, all the same, by your company" (never did Mme. de Mortemart employ the word 'honoured,' except in the letters in which she attempted to cloak a lie in the semblance of truth). "You know that you are always at home in our house, however, you were quite right, as it was a complete failure, like everything that is got up at a moment's notice." But already the second furtive glance darted at her had enabled Edith to grasp everything that was concealed by the complicated language of M. de Charlus. This glance was indeed so violent that, after it had struck Mme. de Valcourt, the obvious secrecy and mischievous intention that it embodied rebounded upon a young Peruvian whom Mme. de Mortemart intended, on the contrary, to invite. But being of a suspicious nature, seeing all too plainly the mystery that was being made without realising that it was not intended to mystify him, he at once conceived a violent hatred of Mme. de Mortemart and determined to play all sorts of tricks upon her, such as ordering fifty iced coffees to be sent to her house on a day when she was not giving a party, or, when she was, inserting a paragraph in the newspapers announcing that the party was postponed, and publishing false reports of her other parties, in which would figure the notorious names of all the people whom, for various reasons, a hostess does not invite or even allow to be introduced to her. Mme. de Mortemart need not have bothered herself about Mme. de Valcourt. M. de Charlus was about to spoil, far more effectively than the other's presence could spoil it, the projected party. "But, my dear cousin," she said in response to the expression 'adapting the

surroundings,' the meaning of which her momentary state of hyperaesthesia had enabled her to discern, "we shall save you all the trouble. I undertake to ask Gilbert to arrange everything." "Not on any account, all the more as he must not be invited to it. Nothing can be arranged except by myself. The first thing is to exclude all the people who have ears and hear not." M. de Charlus's cousin, who had been reckoning upon Morel as an attraction in order to give a party at which she could say that, unlike so many of her kinswomen, she had 'had Palamède,' carried her thoughts abruptly, from this prestige of M. de Charlus, to all sorts of people with whom he would get her into trouble if he began interfering with the list of her guests. The thought that the Prince de Guermantes (on whose account, partly, she was anxious to exclude Mme. de Valcourt, whom he declined to meet) was not to be invited, alarmed her. Her eyes assumed an uneasy expression. "Is the light, which is rather too strong, hurting you?" inquired M. de Charlus with an apparent seriousness the underlying irony of which she failed to perceive. "No, not at all, I was thinking of the difficulty, not for myself of course, but for my family, if Gilbert were to hear that I had given a party without inviting him, when he never has a cat on his housetop without..." "Why of course, we must begin by eliminating the cat on the housetop, which could only miaow; I suppose that the din of talk has prevented you from realising that it was a question not of doing the civilities of a hostess but of proceeding to the rites customary at every true celebration." Then, deciding, not that the next person had been kept waiting too long, but that it did not do to exaggerate the favours shewn to one who had in mind not so much Morel as her own visiting-list, M. de Charlus, like a physician who cuts short a consultation when he considers that it has lasted long enough, gave his cousin a signal to withdraw, not by bidding her good night but by turning to the person immediately behind her. "Good evening, Madame de Montesquieu, marvellous, wasn't it? I have not seen Hélène, tell her that every general abstention, even the most noble, that is to say her own, must include exceptions, if they are brilliant, as has been the case to-night. To shew that one is rare is all very well, but to subordinate one's rarity, which is only negative, to what is precious is better still. In your sister's case, and I value more than anyone her systematic *absence* from places where what is in store for her is not worthy of her, here to-night, on the contrary, her presence at so memorable an exhibition as this would have been a*présidence*, and would have given your sister, already so distinguished, an additional distinction." Then he turned to a third person, M. d'Argencourt. I was greatly astonished to see in this room, as friendly and flattering towards M. de Charlus as he was severe with him elsewhere, insisting

upon Morel's being introduced to him and telling him that he hoped he would come and see him, M. d'Argencourt, that terrible scourge of men such as M. de Charlus. At the moment he was living in the thick of them. It was certainly not because he had in any sense become one of them himself. But for some time past he had practically deserted his wife for a young woman in society whom he adored. Being intelligent herself, she made him share her taste for intelligent people, and was most anxious to have M. de Charlus in her house. But above all M. d'Argencourt, extremely jealous and not unduly potent, feeling that he was failing to satisfy his captive and anxious at once to introduce her to people and to keep her amused, could do so without risk to himself only by surrounding her with innocuous men, whom he thus cast for the part of guardians of his seraglio. These men found that he had become quite pleasant and declared that he was a great deal more intelligent than they had supposed, a discovery that delighted him and his mistress.

The remainder of M. de Charlus's guests drifted away fairly rapidly. Several of them said: "I don't want to call at the vestry" (the little room in which the Baron, with Charlie by his side, was receiving congratulations, and to which he himself had given the name), "but I must let Palamède see me so that he shall know that I stayed to the end." Nobody paid the slightest attention to Mme. Verdurin. Some pretended not to know which was she and said good night by mistake to Mme. Cottard, appealing to me for confirmation with a "That *is* Mme. Verdurin, ain't it?" Mme. d'Arpajon asked me, in the hearing of our hostess: "Tell me, has there ever been a Monsieur Verdurin?" The Duchesses, finding none of the oddities that they expected in this place which they had hoped to find more different from anything that they already knew, made the best of a bad job by going into fits of laughter in front of Elstir's paintings; for all the rest of the entertainment, which they found more in keeping than they had expected with the style with which they were familiar, they gave the credit to M. de Charlus, saying: "How clever Palamède is at arranging things; if he were to stage an opera in a stable or a bathroom, it would still be perfectly charming." The most noble ladies were those who shewed most fervour in congratulating M. de Charlus upon the success of a party, of the secret motive of which some of them were by no means unaware, without, however, being embarrassed by the knowledge, this class of society — remembering perhaps certain epochs in history when their own family had already arrived at an identical stage of brazenly conscious effrontery — carrying their contempt for scruples almost as far as their respect for etiquette. Several of them engaged Charlie on the spot for

different evenings on which he was to come and play them Vinteuil's septet, but it never occurred to any of them to invite Mme. Verdurin. This last was already blind with fury when M. de Charlus who, his head in the clouds, was incapable of perceiving her condition, decided that it would be only decent to invite the Mistress to share his joy. And it was perhaps yielding to his literary preciosity rather than to an overflow of pride that this specialist in artistic entertainments said to Mme. Verdurin: "Well, are you satisfied? I think you have reason to be; you see that when I set to work to give a party there are no half-measures. I do not know whether your heraldic knowledge enables you to gauge the precise importance of the display, the weight that I have lifted, the volume of air that I have displaced for you. You have had the Queen of Naples, the brother of the King of Bavaria, the three premier peers. If Vinteuil is Mahomet, we may say that we have brought to him some of the least movable of mountains. Bear in mind that to attend your party the Queen of Naples has come up from Neuilly, which is a great deal more difficult for her than evacuating the Two Sicilies," he went on, with a deliberate sneer, notwithstanding his admiration for the Queen. "It is an historic event. Just think that it is perhaps the first time she has gone anywhere since the fall of Gaeta. It is probable that the dictionaries of dates will record as culminating points the day of the fall of Gaeta and that of the Verdurins' party. The fan that she laid down, the better to applaud Vinteuil, deserves to become more famous than the fan that Mme. de Metternich broke because the audience hissed Wagner." "Why, she has left it here," said Mme. Verdurin, momentarily appeased by the memory of the Queen's kindness to herself, and she shewed M. de Charlus the fan which was lying upon a chair. "Oh! What a touching spectacle!" exclaimed M. de Charlus, approaching the relic with veneration. "It is all the more touching, it is so hideous; poor little Violette is incredible!" And spasms of emotion and irony coursed through him alternately. "Oh dear, I don't know whether you feel this sort of thing as I do. Swann would positively have died of convulsions if he had seen it. I am sure, whatever price it fetches, I shall buy the fan at the Queen's sale. For she is bound to be sold up, she hasn't a penny," he went on, for he never ceased to intersperse the cruellest slanders with the most sincere veneration, albeit these sprang from two opposing natures, which, however, were combined in himself. They might even be brought to bear alternately upon the same incident. For M. de Charlus who in his comfortable state as a wealthy man ridiculed the poverty of the Queen was himself often to be heard extolling that poverty and, when anyone spoke of Princesse Murât, Queen of the Two Sicilies, would reply: "I do not know to

whom you are alluding. There is only one Queen of Naples, who is a sublime person and does not keep a carriage. But from her omnibus she annihilates every vehicle on the street and one could kneel down in the dust on seeing her drive past." "I shall bequeath it to a museum. In the meantime, it must be sent back to her, so that she need not hire a cab to come and fetch it. The wisest thing, in view of the historical interest of such an object, would be to steal the fan. But that would be awkward for her — since it is probable that she does not possess another!" he added, with a shout of laughter. "Anyhow, you see that for my sake she came. And that is not the only miracle that I have performed. I do not believe that anyone at the present day has the power to move the people whom I have brought here. However, everyone must be given his due. Charlie and the rest of the musicians played divinely. And, my dear Mistress," he added condescendingly, "you yourself have played your part on this occasion. Your name will not be unrecorded. History has preserved that of the page who armed Joan of Arc when she set out for battle; indeed you have served as a connecting link, you have made possible the fusion between Vinteuil's music and its inspired interpreter, you have had the intelligence to appreciate the capital importance of the whole chain of circumstances which would enable the interpreter to benefit by the whole weight of a considerable — if I were not referring to myself, I would say providential — personage, whom you were clever enough to ask to ensure the success of the gathering, to bring before Morel's violin the ears directly attached to the tongues that have the widest hearing; no, no, it is not a small matter. There can be no small matter in so complete a realisation. Everything has its part. The Duras was marvellous. In fact, everything; that is why," he concluded, for he loved to administer a rebuke, "I set my face against your inviting those persons — divisors who, among the overwhelming people whom I brought you would have played the part of the decimal points in a sum, reducing the others to a merely fractional value. I have a very exact appreciation of that sort of thing. You understand, we must avoid blunders when we are giving a party which ought to be worthy of Vinteuil, of his inspired interpreter, of yourself, and, I venture to say, of me. You were prepared to invite the Molé, and everything would have been spoiled. It would have been the little contrary, neutralising drop which deprives a potion of its virtue. The electric lights would have fused, the pastry would not have come in time, the orangeade would have given everybody a stomachache. She was the one person not to invite. At the mere sound of her name, as in a fairy-tale, not a note would have issued from the brass; the flute and the hautboy would have been stricken

with a sudden silence. Morel himself, even if he had succeeded in playing a few bars, would not have been in tune, and instead of Vinteuil's septet you would have had a parody of it by Beckmesser, ending amid catcalls. I, who believe strongly in personal influence, could feel quite plainly in the expansion of a certain largo, which opened itself right out like a flower, in the supreme satisfaction of the finale, which was not merely allegro but incomparably allegro, that the absence of the Molé was inspiring the musicians and was diffusing joy among the very instruments themselves. In any case, when one is at home to Queens one does not invite one's hall-portress." In calling her 'the Molé' (as for that matter he said quite affectionately 'the Duras') M. de Charlus was doing the lady justice. For all these women were the actresses of society and it is true also that, even regarding her from this point of view, Comtesse Molé did not justify the extraordinary reputation for intelligence that she had acquired, which made one think of those mediocre actors or novelists who, at certain periods, are hailed as men of genius, either because of the mediocrity of their competitors, among whom there is no artist capable of revealing what is meant by true talent, or because of the mediocrity of the public, which, did there exist an extraordinary individuality, would be incapable of understanding it. In Mme. Molé's case it is preferable, if not absolutely fair, to stop at the former explanation. The social world being the realm of nullity, there exist between the merits of women in society only insignificant degrees, which are at best capable of rousing to madness the rancours or the imagination of M. de Charlus. And certainly, if he spoke as he had just been speaking in this language which was a precious alloy of artistic and social elements, it was because his old-womanly anger and his culture as a man of the world furnished the genuine eloquence that he possessed with none but insignificant themes. Since the world of differences does not exist on the surface of the earth, among all the countries which our perception renders uniform, all the more reason why it should not exist in the social 'world.' Does it exist anywhere else? Vinteuil's septet had seemed to tell me that it did. But where? As M. de Charlus also enjoyed repeating what one person had said of another, seeking to stir up quarrels, to divide and reign, he added: "You have, by not inviting her, deprived Mme. Molé of the opportunity of saying: 'I can't think why this Mme. Verdurin should invite me. I can't imagine who these people are, I don't know them.' She was saying a year ago that you were boring her with your advances. She's a fool, never invite her again. After all, she's nothing so very wonderful. She can come to your house without making a fuss about it, seeing that I come here. In short," he concluded,

“it seems to me that you have every reason to thank me, for, so far as it went, everything has been perfect. The Duchesse de Guermantes did not come, but one can’t tell, it was better perhaps that she didn’t. We shan’t bear her any grudge, and we shall remember her all the same another time, not that one can help remembering her, her very eyes say to us ‘Forget me not!’, for they are a pair of myosotes” (here I thought to myself how strong the Guermantes spirit — the decision to go to one house and not to another — must be, to have outweighed in the Duchess’s mind her fear of Palamède). “In the face of so complete a success, one is tempted like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre to see everywhere the hand of Providence. The Duchesse de Duras was enchanted. She even asked me to tell you so,” added M. de Charlus, dwelling upon the words as though Mme. Verdurin must regard this as a sufficient honour. Sufficient and indeed barely credible, for he found it necessary, if he was to be believed, to add, completely carried away by the madness of those whom Jupiter has decided to ruin: “She has engaged Morel to come to her house, where the same programme will be repeated, and I even think of asking her for an invitation for M. Verdurin.” This civility to the husband alone was, although no such idea even occurred to M. de Charlus, the most wounding outrage to the wife who, believing herself to possess, with regard to the violinist, by virtue of a sort of ukase which prevailed in the little clan, the right to forbid him to perform elsewhere without her express authorisation, was fully determined to forbid his appearance at Mme. de Duras’s party.

The Baron’s volubility was in itself an irritation to Mme. Verdurin who did not like people to form independent groups within their little clan. How often, even at la Raspelière, hearing M. de Charlus talking incessantly to Charlie instead of being content with taking his part in the so harmonious chorus of the clan, she had pointed to him and exclaimed: “What a rattle [Mme. Verdurin uses here the word *tapette*, being probably unaware of its popular meaning. C. K. S. M.] he is! What a rattle! Oh, if it comes to rattles, he’s a famous rattle!” But this time it was far worse. Inebriated with the sound of his own voice, M. de Charlus failed to realise that by cutting down the part assigned to Mme. Verdurin and confining it within narrow limits, he was calling forth that feeling of hatred which was in her only a special, social form of jealousy. Mme. Verdurin was genuinely fond of her regular visitors, the faithful of the little clan, but wished them to be entirely devoted to their Mistress. Willing to make some sacrifice, like those jealous lovers who will tolerate a betrayal, but only under their own roof and even before their eyes, that is to say when there is no betrayal, she

would allow the men to have mistresses, lovers, on condition that the affair had no social consequence outside her own house, that the tie was formed and perpetuated in the shelter of her Wednesdays. In the old days, every furtive peal of laughter that came from Odette when she conversed with Swann had gnawed her heartstrings, and so of late had every aside exchanged by Morel and the Baron; she found one consolation alone for her griefs which was to destroy the happiness of other people. She had not been able to endure for long that of the Baron. And here was this rash person precipitating the catastrophe by appearing to be restricting the Mistress's place in her little clan. Already she could see Morel going into society, without her, under the Baron's aegis. There was but a single remedy, to make Morel choose between the Baron and herself, and, relying upon the ascendancy that she had acquired over Morel by the display that she made of an extraordinary perspicacity, thanks to reports which she collected, to falsehoods which she invented, all of which served to corroborate what he himself was led to believe, and what would in time be made plain to him, thanks to the pitfalls which she was preparing, into which her unsuspecting victims would fall, relying upon this ascendancy, to make him choose herself in preference to the Baron. As for the society ladies who had been present and had not even asked to be introduced to her, as soon as she grasped their hesitations or indifference, she had said: "Ah! I see what they are, the sort of old good-for-nothings that are not our style, it's the last time they shall set foot in this house." For she would have died rather than admit that anyone had been less friendly to her than she had hoped. "Ah! My dear General," M. de Charlus suddenly exclaimed, abandoning Mme. Verdurin, as he caught sight of General Deltour, Secretary to the President of the Republic, who might be of great value in securing Charlie his Cross, and who, after asking some question of Cottard, was rapidly withdrawing: "Good evening, my dear, delightful friend. So this is how you slip away without saying good-bye to me," said the Baron with a genial, self-satisfied smile, for he knew quite well that people were always glad to stay behind for a moment to talk to himself. And as, in his present state of excitement, he would answer his own questions in a shrill tone: "Well, did you enjoy it? Wasn't it really fine? The andante, what? It's the most touching thing that was ever written. I defy anyone to listen to the end without tears in his eyes. Charming of you to have come. Listen, I had the most perfect telegram this morning from Froberville, who tells me that as far as the Grand Chancery goes the difficulties have been smoothed away, as the saying is." M. de Charlus's voice continued to soar at this piercing pitch, as different from his normal voice

as is that of a barrister making an emphatic plea from his ordinary utterance, a phenomenon of vocal amplification by over-excitement and nervous tension analogous to that which, at her own dinner-parties, raised to so high a diapason the voice and gaze alike of Mme. de Guermantes. “I intended to send you a note to-morrow by a messenger to tell you of my enthusiasm, until I could find an opportunity of speaking to you, but you have been so surrounded! Froberville’s support is not to be despised, but for my own part, I have the Minister’s promise,” said the General. “Ah! Excellent. Besides, you have seen for yourself that it is only what such talent deserves. Hoyos was delighted, I didn’t manage to see the Ambassadress, was she pleased? Who would not have been, except those that have ears and hear not, which does not matter so long as they have tongues and can speak.” Taking advantage of the Baron’s having withdrawn to speak to the General, Mme. Verdurin made a signal to Brichot. He, not knowing what Mme. Verdurin was going to say, sought to amuse her, and never suspecting the anguish that he was causing me, said to the Mistress: “The Baron is delighted that Mlle. Vinteuil and her friend did not come. They shock him terribly. He declares that their morals are appalling. You can’t imagine how prudish and severe the Baron is on moral questions.” Contrary to Brichot’s expectation, Mme. Verdurin was not amused: “He is obscene,” was her answer. “Take him out of the room to smoke a cigarette with you, so that my husband can get hold of his Dulcinea without his noticing it and warn him of the abyss that is yawning at his feet.” Brichot seemed to hesitate. “I don’t mind telling you,” Mme. Verdurin went on, to remove his final scruples, “that I do not feel at all safe with a man like that in the house. I know, there are all sorts of horrible stories about him, and the police have him under supervision.” And, as she possessed a certain talent of improvisation when inspired by malice, Mme. Verdurin did not stop at this: “It seems, he has been in prison. Yes, yes, I have been told by people who knew all about it. I know, too, from a person who lives in his street, that you can’t imagine the ruffians that go to his house.” And as Brichot, who often went to the Baron’s, began to protest, Mme. Verdurin, growing animated, exclaimed: “But I can assure you! It is I who am telling you,” an expression with which she habitually sought to give weight to an assertion flung out more or less at random. “He will be found murdered in his bed one of these days, as those people always are. He may not go quite as far as that perhaps, because he is in the clutches of that Jupien whom he had the impudence to send to me, and who is an ex-convict, I know it, you yourself know it, yes, for certain. He has a hold on him because of some letters which are perfectly appalling, it seems. I know it from somebody

who has seen them, and told me: ‘You would be sick on the spot if you saw them.’ That is how Jupien makes him toe the line and gets all the money he wants out of him. I would sooner die a thousand times over than live in a state of terror like Charlus. In any case, if Morel’s family decides to bring an action against him, I have no desire to be dragged in as an accomplice. If he goes on, it will be at his own risk, but I shall have done my duty. What is one to do? It’s no joke, I can tell you.” And, agreeably warmed already by the thought of her husband’s impending conversation with the violinist, Mme. Verdurin said to me: “Ask Brichot whether I am not a courageous friend, and whether I am not capable of sacrificing myself to save my comrades.” (She was alluding to the circumstances in which she had, just in time, made him quarrel, first of all with his laundress, and then with Mme. de Cambremer, quarrels as a result of which Brichot had become almost completely blind, and [people said] had taken to morphia.) “An incomparable friend, far-sighted and valiant,” replied the Professor with an innocent emotion. “Mme. Verdurin prevented me from doing something extremely foolish,” Brichot told me when she had left us. “She never hesitates to operate without anaesthetics. She is an interventionist, as our friend Cottard says. I admit, however, that the thought that the poor Baron is still unconscious of the blow that is going to fall upon him distresses me deeply. He is quite mad about that boy. If Mme. Verdurin should prove successful, there is a man who is going to be very miserable. However, it is not certain that she will not fail. I am afraid that she may only succeed in creating a misunderstanding between them, which, in the end, without parting them, will only make them quarrel with her.” It was often thus with Mme. Verdurin and her faithful. But it was evident that in her the need to preserve their friendship was more and more dominated by the requirement that this friendship should never be challenged by that which they might feel for one another. Homosexuality did not disgust her so long as it did not tamper with orthodoxy, but like the Church she preferred any sacrifice rather than a concession of orthodoxy. I was beginning to be afraid lest her irritation with myself might be due to her having heard that I had prevented Albertine from going to her that afternoon, and that she might presently set to work, if she had not already begun, upon the same task of separating her from me which her husband, in the case of Charlus, was now going to attempt with the musician. “Come along, get hold of Charlus, find some excuse, there’s no time to lose,” said Mme. Verdurin, “and whatever you do, don’t let him come back here until I send for you. Oh! What an evening,” Mme. Verdurin went on, revealing thus the true cause of her anger. “Performing a masterpiece in front of

those wooden images. I don't include the Queen of Naples, she is intelligent, she is a nice woman" (which meant: "She has been kind to me"). "But the others. Oh! It's enough to drive anyone mad. What can you expect, I'm no longer a girl. When I was young, people told me that one must put up with boredom, I made an effort, but now, oh no, it's too much for me, I am old enough to please myself, life is too short; bore myself, listen to idiots, smile, pretend to think them intelligent. No, I can't do it. Get along, Brichot, there's no time to lose." "I am going, Madame, I am going," said Brichot, as General Deltour moved away. But first of all the Professor took me aside for a moment: "Moral Duty," he said, "is less clearly imperative than our Ethics teach us. Whatever the Theosophical cafés and the Kantian beer-houses may say, we are deplorably ignorant of the nature of Good. I myself who, without wishing to boast, have lectured to my pupils, in all innocence, upon the philosophy of the said Immanuel Kant, I can see no precise ruling for the case of social casuistry with which I am now confronted in that Critique of Practical Reason in which the great renegade of Protestantism platonised in the German manner for a Germany prehistorically sentimental and aulic, ringing all the changes of a Pomeranian mysticism. It is still the Symposium, but held this time at Kônigsberg, in the local style, indigestible and reeking of sauerkraut, and without any good-looking boys. It is obvious on the one hand that I cannot refuse our excellent hostess the small service that she asks of me, in a fully orthodox conformity with traditional morals. One ought to avoid, above all things, for there are few that involve one in more foolish speeches, letting oneself be lured by words. But after all, let us not hesitate to admit that if the mothers of families were entitled to vote, the Baron would run the risk of being lamentably blackballed for the Chair of Virtue. It is unfortunately with the temperament of a rake that he pursues the vocation of a pedagogue; observe that I am not speaking evil of the Baron; that good man, who can carve a joint like nobody in the world, combines with a genius for anathema treasures of goodness. He can be most amusing as a superior sort of wag, whereas with a certain one of my colleagues, an Academician, if you please, I am bored, as Xenophon would say, at a hundred drachmae to the hour. But I am afraid that he is expending upon Morel rather more than a wholesome morality enjoins, and without knowing to what extent the young penitent shews himself docile or rebellious to the special exercises which his catechist imposes upon him by way of mortification, one need not be a learned clerk to be aware that we should be erring, as the other says, on the side of clemency with regard to this Rosicrucian who seems to have come down to us

from Petronius, by way of Saint-Simon, if we granted him with our eyes shut, duly signed and sealed, permission to satanise. And yet, in keeping the man occupied while Mme. Verdurin, for the sinner's good and indeed rightly tempted by such a cure of souls, proceeds — by speaking to the young fool without any concealment — to remove from him all that he loves, to deal him perhaps a fatal blow, it seems to me that I am leading him into what one might call a man-trap, and I recoil as though from a base action." This said, he did not hesitate to commit it, but, taking him by the arm, began: "Come, Baron, let us go and smoke a cigarette, this young man has not yet seen all the marvels of the house." I made the excuse that I was obliged to go home. "Just wait a moment," said Brichot. "You remember, you are giving me a lift, and I have not forgotten your promise." "Wouldn't you like me, really, to make them bring out their plate, nothing could be simpler," said M. de Charlus. "You promised me, remember, not a word about Morel's decoration. I mean to give him the surprise of announcing it presently when people have begun to leave, although he says that it is of no importance to an artist, but that his uncle would like him to have it" (I blushed, for, I thought to myself, the Verdurins would know through my grandfather what Morel's uncle was). "Then you wouldn't like me to make them bring out the best pieces," said M. de Charlus. "Of course, you know them already, you have seen them a dozen times at la Raspelière." I dared not tell him that what might have interested me was not the mediocrity of even the most splendid plate in a middle-class household, but some specimen, were it only reproduced in a fine engraving, of Mme. Du Barry's. I was far too gravely preoccupied — even if I had not been by this revelation as to Mlle. Vinteuil's expected presence — always, in society, far too much distracted and agitated to fasten my attention upon objects that were more or less beautiful. It could have been arrested only by the appeal of some reality that addressed itself to my imagination, as might have been, this evening, a picture of that Venice of which I had thought so much during the afternoon, or some general element, common to several forms and more genuine than they, which, of its own accord, never failed to arouse in me an inward appreciation, normally lulled in slumber, the rising of which to the surface of my consciousness filled me with great joy. Well, as I emerged from the room known as the concert-room, and crossed the other drawing-rooms with Brichot and M. de Charlus, on discovering, transposed among others, certain pieces of furniture which I had seen at la Raspelière and to which I had paid no attention, I perceived, between the arrangement of the town house and that of the country house, a certain common air of family life, a

permanent identity, and I understood what Brichot meant when he said to me with a smile: “There, look at this room, it may perhaps give you an idea of what things were like in Rue Montalivet, twenty-five years ago.” From his smile, a tribute to the defunct drawing-room which he saw with his mind’s eye, I understood that what Brichot, perhaps without realising it, preferred in the old room, more than the large windows, more than the gay youth of his hosts and their faithful, was that unreal part (which I myself could discern from some similarities between la Raspelière and Quai Conti) of which, in a drawing-room as in everything else, the external, actual part, liable to everyone’s control, is but the prolongation, was that part become purely imaginary, of a colour which no longer existed save for my elderly guide, which he was incapable of making me see, that part which has detached itself from the outer world, to take refuge in our soul, to which it gives a surplus value, in which it is assimilated to its normal substance, transforming itself — houses that have been pulled down, people long dead, bowls of fruit at the suppers which we recall — into that translucent alabaster of our memories, the colour of which we are incapable of displaying, since we alone see it, which enables us to say truthfully to other people, speaking of things past, that they cannot form any idea of them, that they do not resemble anything that they have seen, while we are unable to think of them ourselves without a certain emotion, remembering that it is upon the existence of our thoughts that there depends, for a little time still, their survival, the brilliance of the lamps that have been extinguished and the fragrance of the arbours that will never bloom again. And possibly, for this reason, the drawing-room in Rue Montalivet disparaged, for Brichot, the Verdurins’ present home. But on the other hand it added to this home, in the Professor’s eyes, a beauty which it could not have in those of a stranger. Those pieces of the original furniture that had been transported here, and sometimes arranged in the same groups, and which I myself remembered from la Raspelière, introduced into the new drawing-room fragments of the old which, at certain moments, recalled it so vividly as to create a hallucination and then seemed themselves scarcely real from having evoked in the midst of the surrounding reality fragments of a vanished world which seemed to extend round about them. A sofa that had risen up from dreamland between a pair of new and thoroughly substantial armchairs, smaller chairs upholstered in pink silk, the cloth surface of a card-table raised to the dignity of a person since, like a person, it had a past, a memory, retaining in the chill and gloom of Quai Conti the tan of its roasting by the sun through the windows of Rue Montalivet (where it could tell the time of day as accurately as Mme. Verdurin herself) and

through the glass doors at la Raspelière, where they had taken it and where it used to gaze out all day long over the flower-beds of the garden at the valley far below, until it was time for Cottard and the musician to sit down to their game; a posy of violets and pansies in pastel, the gift of a painter friend, now dead, the sole fragment that survived of a life that had vanished without leaving any trace, summarising a great talent and a long friendship, recalling his keen, gentle eyes, his shapely hand, plump and melancholy, while he was at work on it; the incoherent, charming disorder of the offerings of the faithful, which have followed the lady of the house on all her travels and have come in time to assume the fixity of a trait of character, of a line of destiny; a profusion of cut flowers, of chocolate-boxes which here as in the country systematised their growth in an identical mode of blossoming; the curious interpolation of those singular and superfluous objects which still appear to have been just taken from the box in which they were offered and remain for ever what they were at first, New Year's Day presents; all those things, in short, which one could not have isolated from the rest, but which for Brichot, an old frequenter of the Verdurin parties, had that patina, that velvety bloom of things to which, giving them a sort of profundity, an astral body has been added; all these things scattered before him, sounded in his ear like so many resonant keys which awakened cherished likenesses in his heart, confused reminiscences which, here in this drawing-room of the present day that was littered with them, cut out, defined, as on a fine day a shaft of sunlight cuts a section in the atmosphere, the furniture and carpets, and pursuing it from a cushion to a flower-stand, from a footstool to a lingering scent, from the lighting arrangements to the colour scheme, carved, evoked, spiritualised, called to life a form which might be called the ideal aspect, immanent in each of their successive homes, of the Verdurin drawing-room. "We must try," Brichot whispered in my ear, "to get the Baron upon his favourite topic. He is astounding." Now on the one hand I was glad of an opportunity to try to obtain from M. de Charlus information as to the coming of Mlle. Vinteuil and her friend. On the other hand, I did not wish to leave Albertine too long by herself, not that she could (being uncertain of the moment of my return, not to mention that, at so late an hour, she could not have received a visitor or left the house herself without arousing comment) make any evil use of my absence, but simply so that she might not find it too long. And so I told Brichot and M. de Charlus that I must shortly leave them. "Come with us all the same," said the Baron, whose social excitement was beginning to flag, but feeling that need to prolong, to spin out a conversation, which I had already observed in the

Duchesse de Guermantes as well as in himself, and which, while distinctive of their family, extends in a more general fashion to all those people who, offering their minds no other realisation than talk, that is to say an imperfect realisation, remain unassuaged even after hours spent in one's company, and attach themselves more and more hungrily to their exhausted companion, from whom they mistakenly expect a satiety which social pleasures are incapable of giving. "Come, won't you," he repeated, "this is the pleasant moment at a party, the moment when all the guests have gone, the hour of Dona Sol; let us hope that it will end less tragically. Unfortunately you are in a hurry, in a hurry probably to go and do things which you would much better leave undone. People are always in a hurry and leave at the time when they ought to be arriving. We are here like Couture's philosophers, this is the moment in which to go over the events of the evening, to make what is called in military language a criticism of the operations. We might ask Mme. Verdurin to send us in a little supper to which we should take care not to invite her, and we might request Charlie — still *Hernani* — to play for ourselves alone the sublime adagio. Isn't it fine, that adagio? But where is the young violinist, I would like to congratulate him, this is the moment for tender words and embraces. Admit, Brichot, that they played like gods, Morel especially. Did you notice the moment when that lock of hair came loose? Ah, then, my dear fellow, you saw nothing at all. There was an F sharp at which Enesco, Capet and Thibaut might have died of jealousy; I may have appeared calm enough, I can tell you that at such a sound my heart was so wrung that I could barely control my tears. The whole room sat breathless; Brichot, my dear fellow," cried the Baron, gripping the other's arm which he shook violently, "it was sublime. Only young Charlie preserved a stony immobility, you could not even see him breathe, he looked like one of those objects of the inanimate world of which Théodore Rousseau speaks, which make us think, but do not think themselves. And then, all of a sudden," cried M. de Charlus with enthusiasm, making a pantomime gesture, "then... the Lock! And all the time, the charming little country-dance of the allegro vivace. You know, that lock was the symbol of the revelation, even to the most obtuse. The Princess of Taormina, deaf until then, for there are none so deaf as those that have ears and hear not, the Princess of Taormina, confronted by the message of the miraculous lock, realised that it was music that they were playing and not poker. Oh, that was indeed a solemn moment." "Excuse me, Sir, for interrupting you," I said to M. de Charlus, hoping to bring him to the subject in which I was interested, "you told me that the composer's daughter was to be present. I should

have been most interested to meet her. Are you certain that she was expected?" "Oh, that I can't say." M. de Charlus thus complied, perhaps unconsciously, with that universal rule by which people withhold information from a jealous lover, whether in order to shew an absurd 'comradeship,' as a point of honour, and even if they detest her, with the woman who has excited his jealousy, or out of malice towards her, because they guess that jealousy can only intensify love, or from that need to be disagreeable to other people which consists in revealing the truth to the rest of the world but concealing it from the jealous, ignorance increasing their torment, or so at least the tormentors suppose, who, in their desire to hurt other people are guided by what they themselves believe, wrongly perhaps, to be most painful. "You know," he went on, "in this house they are a trifle prone to exaggerate, they are charming people, still they do like to catch celebrities of one sort or another. But you are not looking well, and you will catch cold in this damp room," he said, pushing a chair towards me. "Since you have not been well, you must take care of yourself, let me go and find you your coat. No, don't go for it yourself, you will lose your way and catch cold. How careless people are; you might be an infant in arms, you want an old nurse like me to look after you." "Don't trouble, Baron, let me go," said Brichot, and left us immediately; not being precisely aware perhaps of the very warm affection that M. de Charlus felt for me and of the charming lapses into simplicity and devotion that alternated with his delirious crises of grandeur and persecution, he was afraid that M. de Charlus, whom Mme. Verdurin had entrusted like a prisoner to his vigilance, might simply be seeking, under the pretext of asking for my greatcoat, to return to Morel and might thus upset the Mistress's plan.

Meanwhile Ski had sat down, uninvited, at the piano, and assuming — with a playful knitting of his brows, a remote gaze and a slight twist of his lips — what he imagined to be an artistic air, was insisting that Morel should play something by Bizet. "What, you don't like it, that boyish music of Bizet. Why, my dear fellow," he said, with that rolling of the letter r which was one of his peculiarities, "it's rravishing." Morel, who did not like Bizet, said so in exaggerated terms and (as he had the reputation in the little clan of being, though it seems incredible, a wit) Ski, pretending to take the violinist's diatribes as paradoxes, burst out laughing. His laugh was not, like M. Verdurin's, the stifled gasp of a smoker. Ski first of all assumed a subtle air, then allowed to escape, as though against his will, a single note of laughter, like the first clang from a belfry, followed by a silence in which the subtle gaze seemed to be making a competent examination of the absurdity of what had been said, then a second

peal of laughter shook the air, followed presently by a merry angelus.

I expressed to M. de Charlus my regret that M. Brichot should be taking so much trouble. “Not at all, he is delighted, he is very fond of you, everyone is fond of you. Somebody was saying only the other day: ‘We never see him now, he is isolating himself!’ Besides, he is such a good fellow, is Brichot,” M. de Charlus went on, never suspecting probably, in view of the affectionate, frank manner in which the Professor of Moral Philosophy conversed with him, that he had no hesitation is slandering him behind his back. “He is a man of great merit, immensely learned, and not a bit spoiled, his learning hasn’t turned him into a bookworm, like so many of them who smell of ink. He has retained a breadth of outlook, a tolerance, rare in his kind. Sometimes, when one sees how well he understands life, with what a natural grace he renders everyone his due, one asks oneself where a humble little Sorbonne professor, an ex-schoolmaster, can have picked up such breeding. I am astonished at it myself.” I was even more astonished when I saw the conversation of this Brichot, which the least refined of Mme. de Guermantes’s friends would have found so dull, so heavy, please the most critical of them all, M. de Charlus. But to achieve this result there had collaborated, among other influences, themselves distinct also, those by virtue of which Swann, on the one hand, had so long found favour with the little clan, when he was in love with Odette, and on the other hand, after he married, found an attraction in Mme. Bontemps who, pretending to adore the Swann couple, came incessantly to call upon the wife and revelled in all the stories about the husband. Just as a writer gives the palm for intelligence, not to the most intelligent man, but to the worldling who utters a bold and tolerant comment upon the passion of a man for a woman, a comment which makes the writer’s bluestocking mistress agree with him in deciding that of all the people who come to her house the least stupid is after all this old beau who shews experience in the things of love, so M. de Charlus found more intelligent than the rest of his friends Brichot, who was not merely kind to Morel, but would cull from the Greek philosophers, the Latin poets, the authors of Oriental tales, appropriate texts which decorated the Baron’s propensity with a strange and charming anthology. M. de Charlus had reached the age at which a Victor Hugo chooses to surround himself, above all, with Vacqueries and Meurices. He preferred to all others those men who tolerated his outlook upon life. “I see a great deal of him,” he went on, in a balanced, sing-song tone, allowing no movement of his lips to stir his grave, powdered mask over which were purposely lowered his prelatical eyelids. “I attend his lectures, that atmosphere of the Latin Quarter refreshes me,

there is a studious, thoughtful adolescence of young bourgeois, more intelligent, better read than were, in a different sphere, my own contemporaries. It is a different world, which you know probably better than I, they are young*bourgeois*," he said, detaching the last word to which he prefixed a string of*b_s, and emphasising it from a sort of habit of elocution, corresponding itself to a taste for fine distinctions in past history, which was peculiar to him, but perhaps also from inability to resist the pleasure of giving me a flick of his insolence. This did not in any way diminish the great and affectionate pity that was inspired in me by M. de Charlus (after Mme. Verdurin had revealed her plan in my hearing), it merely amused me, and indeed on any other occasion, when I should not have felt so kindly disposed towards him, would not have offended me. I derived from my grandmother such an absence of any self-importance that I might easily be found wanting in dignity. Doubtless, I was scarcely aware of this, and by dint of having seen and heard, from my schooldays onwards, my most esteemed companions take offence if anyone failed to keep an appointment, refuse to overlook any disloyal behaviour, I had come in time to exhibit in my speech and actions a second nature which was stamped with pride. I was indeed considered extremely proud, because, as I had never been timid, I had been easily led into duels, the moral prestige of which, however, I diminished by making little of them, which easily persuaded other people that they were absurd; but the true nature which we trample underfoot continues nevertheless to abide within us. Thus it is that at times, if we read the latest masterpiece of a man of genius, we are delighted to find in it all those of our own reflexions which we have always despised, joys and sorrows which we have repressed, a whole world of feelings scorned by us, the value of which the book in which we discover them afresh at once teaches us. I had come in time to learn from my experience of life that it was a mistake to smile a friendly smile when somebody made a fool of me, instead of feeling annoyed. But this want of self-importance and resentment, if I had so far ceased to express it as to have become almost entirely unaware that it existed in me, was nevertheless the primitive, vital element in which I was steeped. Anger and spite came to me only in a wholly different manner, in furious crises. What was more, the sense of justice was so far lacking in me as to amount to an entire want of moral sense. I was in my heart of hearts entirely won over to the side of the weaker party, and of anyone who was in trouble. I had no opinion as to the proportion in which good and evil might be blended in the relations between Morel and M. de Charlus, but the thought of the sufferings that were being prepared for M. de Charlus was*

intolerable to me. I would have liked to warn him, but did not know how to do it. "The spectacle of all that laborious little world is very pleasant to an old stick like myself. I do not know them," he went on, raising his hand with an air of reserve — so as not to appear to be boasting of his own conquests, to testify to his own purity and not to allow any suspicion to rest upon that of the students —"but they are most civil, they often go so far as to keep a place for me, since I am a very old gentleman. Yes indeed, my dear boy, do not protest, I am past forty," said the Baron, who was past sixty. "It is a trifle stuffy in the hall in which Brichot lectures, but it is always interesting." Albeit the Baron preferred to mingle with the youth of the schools, in other words to be jostled by them, sometimes, to save him a long wait in the lecture-room, Brichot took him in by his own door. Brichot might well be at home in the Sorbonne, at the moment when the janitor, loaded with chains of office, stepped out before him, and the master admired by his young pupils followed, he could not repress a certain timidity, and much as he desired to profit by that moment in which he felt himself so important to shew consideration for Charlus, he was nevertheless slightly embarrassed; so that the janitor should allow him to pass, he said to him, in an artificial tone and with a preoccupied air: "Follow me, Baron, they'll find a place for you," then, without paying any more attention to him, to make his own entry, he advanced by himself briskly along the corridor. On either side, a double hedge of young lecturers greeted him; Brichot, anxious not to appear to be posing in the eyes of these young men to whom he knew that he was a great pontiff, bestowed on them a thousand glances, a thousand little nods of connivance, to which his desire to remain martial, thoroughly French, gave the effect of a sort of cordial encouragement by an old soldier saying: "Damn it all, we can face the foe." Then the applause of his pupils broke out. Brichot sometimes extracted from this attendance by M. de Charlus at his lectures an opportunity for giving pleasure, almost for returning hospitality. He would say to some parent, or to one of his middle-class friends: "If it would interest your wife or daughter, I may tell you that the Baron de Charlus, Prince de Carency, a scion of the House of Condé, attends my lectures. It is something to remember, having seen one of the last descendants of our aristocracy who preserves the type. If they care to come, they will know him because he will be sitting next to my chair. Besides he will be alone there, a stout man, with white hair and black moustaches, wearing the military medal." "Oh, thank you," said the father. And, albeit his wife had other engagements, so as not to disoblige Brichot, he made her attend the lecture, while the daughter, troubled by the heat and the crowd,

nevertheless devoured eagerly with her eyes the descendant of Condé, marvelling all the same that he was not crowned with strawberry-leaves and looked just like anybody else of the present day. He meanwhile had no eyes for her, but more than one student, who did not know who he was, was amazed at his friendly glances, became self-conscious and stiff, and the Baron left the room full of dreams and melancholy. "Forgive me if I return to the subject," I said quickly to M. de Charlus, for I could hear Brichot returning, "but could you let me know by wire if you should hear that Mlle. Vinteuil or her friend is expected in Paris, letting me know exactly how long they will be staying and without telling anybody that I asked you." I had almost ceased to believe that she had been expected, but I wished to guard myself thus for the future. "Yes, I will do that for you, first of all because I owe you a great debt of gratitude. By not accepting what, long ago, I had offered you, you rendered me, to your own loss, an immense service, you left me my liberty. It is true that I have abdicated it in another fashion," he added in a melancholy tone beneath which was visible a desire to take me into his confidence; "that is what I continue to regard as the important fact, a whole combination of circumstances which you failed to turn to your own account, possibly because fate warned you at that precise minute not to cross my Path. For always man proposes and God disposes. Who knows whether if, on the day when we came away together from Mme. de Villeparisis's, you had accepted, perhaps many things that have since happened would never have occurred?" In some embarrassment, I turned the conversation, seizing hold of the name of Mme. de Villeparisis, and sought to find out from him, so admirably qualified in every respect, for what reasons Mme. de Villeparisis seemed to be held aloof by the aristocratic world. Not only did he not give me the solution of this little social problem, he did not even appear to me to be aware of its existence. I then realised that the position of Mme. de Villeparisis, if it was in later years to appear great to posterity, and even in the Marquise's lifetime to the ignorant rich, had appeared no less great at the opposite extremity of society, that which touched Mme. de Villeparisis, that of the Guermantes. She was their aunt; they saw first and foremost birth, connexions by marriage, the opportunity of impressing some sister-in-law with the importance of their own family. They regarded this less from the social than from the family point of view. Now this was more brilliant in the case of Mme. de Villeparisis than I had supposed. I had been impressed when I heard that the title Villeparisis was falsely assumed. But there are other examples of great ladies who have made degrading marriages and preserved a predominant position. M. de Charlus

began by informing me that Mme. de Villeparisis was a niece of the famous Duchesse de ——, the most celebrated member of the great aristocracy during the July Monarchy, albeit she had refused to associate with the Citizen King and his family. I had so longed to hear stories about this Duchess! And Mme. de Villeparisis, the kind Mme. de Villeparisis, with those cheeks that to me had been the cheeks of an ordinary woman, Mme. de Villeparisis who sent me so many presents and whom I could so easily have seen every day, Mme. de Villeparisis was her niece brought up by her, in her home, at the Hôtel de ——. "She asked the Duc de Doudeauville," M. de Charlus told me, "speaking of the three sisters, 'Which of the sisters do you prefer?' And when Doudeauville said: 'Madame de Villeparisis,' the Duchesse de ——— replied 'Pig!' For the Duchess was extremely witty," said M. de Charlus, giving the word the importance and the special pronunciation in use among the Guermantes. That he should have thought the expression so 'witty' did not, however, surprise me, for I had on many other occasions remarked the centrifugal, objective tendency which leads men to abdicate, when they are relishing the wit of others, the severity with which they would criticise their own, and to observe, to record faithfully, what they would have scorned to create. "But what on earth is he doing, that is my greatcoat he is bringing," he said, on seeing that Brichot had made so long a search to no better result. "I would have done better to go for it myself. However, you can put it on now. Are you aware that it is highly compromising, my dear boy, it is like drinking out of the same glass, I shall be able to read your thoughts. No, not like that, come, let me do it," and as he put me into his greatcoat, he pressed it down on my shoulders, fastened it round my throat, and brushed my chin with his hand, making the apology: "At his age, he doesn't know how to put on a coat, one has to titivate him, I have missed my vocation, Brichot, I was born to be a nursery-maid." I wanted to go home, but as M. de Charlus had expressed his intention of going in search of Morel, Brichot detained us both. Moreover, the certainty that when I went home I should find Albertine there, a certainty as absolute as that which I had felt in the afternoon that Albertine would return home from the Trocadéro, made me at this moment as little impatient to see her as I had been then when I was sitting at the piano, after Françoise had sent me her telephone message. And it was this calm that enabled me, whenever, in the course of this conversation, I attempted to rise, to obey Brichot's injunctions who was afraid that my departure might prevent Charlus from remaining with him until the moment when Mme. Verdurin was to come and fetch us. "Come," he said to the Baron, "stay a little here with us, you

shall give him the accolade presently," Brichot added, fastening upon myself his almost sightless eyes to which the many operations that he had undergone had restored some degree of life, but which had not all the same the mobility necessary to the sidelong expression of malice. "The accolade, how absurd!" cried the Baron, in a shrill and rapturous tone. "My boy, I tell you, he imagines he is at a prize-giving, he is dreaming of his young pupils. I ask myself whether he don't sleep with them." "You wish to meet Mlle. Vinteuil," said Brichot, who had overheard the last words of our conversation. "I promise to let you know if she comes, I shall hear of it from Mme. Verdurin," for he doubtless foresaw that the Baron was in peril of an immediate exclusion from the little clan. "I see, so you think that I have less claim than yourself upon Mme. Verdurin," said M. de Charlus, "to be informed of the coming of these terribly disreputable persons. You know that they are quite notorious. Mme. Verdurin is wrong to allow them to come here, they are all very well for the fast set. They are friends with a terrible band of women. They meet in the most appalling places." At each of these words, my suffering was increased by the addition of a fresh suffering, changing in form. "Certainly not, I don't suppose that I have any better claim than yourself upon Mme. Verdurin," Brichot protested, punctuating his words, for he was afraid that he might have aroused the Baron's suspicions. And as he saw that I was determined to go, seeking to detain me with the bait of the promised entertainment: "There is one thing which the Baron seems to me not to have taken into account when he speaks of the reputation of these two ladies, namely that a person's reputation may be at the same time appalling and undeserved. Thus for instance, in the more notorious group which I shall call parallel, it is certain that the errors of justice are many and that history has registered convictions for sodomy against illustrious men who were wholly innocent of the charge. The recent discovery of Michelangelo's passionate love for a woman is a fresh fact which should entitle the friend of Leo X to the benefit of a posthumous retrial. The Michelangelo case seems to me clearly indicated to excite the snobs and mobilise the Villette, when another case in which anarchism reared its head and became the fashionable sin of our worthy dilettantes, but which must not even be mentioned now for fear of stirring up quarrels, shall have run its course." From the moment when Brichot began to speak of masculine reputations, M. de Charlus betrayed on every one of his features that special sort of impatience which one sees on the face of a medical or military expert when society people who know nothing about the subject begin to talk nonsense about points of therapeutics or strategy. "You know

absolutely nothing about the matter," he said at length to Brichot. "Quote me a single reputation that is undeserved. Mention names. Oh yes, I know the whole story," was his brutal retort to a timid interruption by Brichot, "the people who tried it once long ago out of curiosity, or out of affection for a dead friend, and the man who, afraid he has gone too far, if you speak to him of the beauty of a man, replies that that is Chinese to him, that he can no more distinguish between a beautiful man and an ugly one than between the engines of two motorcars, mechanics not being in his line. That's all stuff and nonsense. Mind you, I don't mean to say that a bad (or what is conventionally so called) and yet undeserved reputation is absolutely impossible. It is so exceptional, so rare, that for practical purposes it does not exist. At the same time I, who have a certain curiosity in ferreting things out, have known cases which were not mythical. Yes, in the course of my life, I have established (scientifically speaking, of course, you mustn't take me too literally) two unjustified reputations. They generally arise from a similarity of names, or from certain outward signs, a profusion of rings, for instance, which persons who are not qualified to judge imagine to be characteristic of what you were mentioning, just as they think that a peasant never utters a sentence without adding: 'Jarnignié,' or an Englishman: 'Goddam.' Dialogue for the boulevard theatres. What will surprise you is that the unjustified are those most firmly established in the eyes of the public. You yourself, Brichot, who would thrust your hand in the flames to answer for the virtue of some man or other who comes to this house and whom the enlightened know to be a wolf in sheep's clothing, you feel obliged to believe like every Tom, Dick and Harry in what is said about some man in the public eye who is the incarnation of those propensities to the common herd, when as a matter of fact, he doesn't care twopence for that sort of thing. I say twopence, because if we were to offer five-and-twenty louis, we should see the number of plaster saints dwindle down to nothing. As things are, the average rate of sanctity, if you see any sanctity in that sort of thing, is somewhere between thirty and forty per cent." If Brichot had transferred to the male sex the question of evil reputations, with me it was, inversely, to the female sex that, thinking of Albertine, I applied the Baron's words. I was appalled at his statistics, even when I bore in mind that he was probably enlarging his figures to reach the total that he would like to believe true, and had based them moreover upon the reports of persons who were scandalmongers and possibly liars, and had in any case been led astray by their own desire, which, coming in addition to that of M. de Charlus, doubtless falsified the Baron's calculations. "Thirty per cent!" exclaimed Brichot. "Why,

even if the proportions were reversed I should still have to multiply the guilty a hundredfold. If it is as you say, Baron, and you are not mistaken, then we must confess that you are one of those rare visionaries who discern a truth which nobody round them has ever suspected. Just as Barrés made discoveries as to parliamentary corruption, the truth of which was afterwards established, like the existence of Leverrier's planet. Mme. Verdurin would prefer to cite men whom I would rather not name who detected in the Intelligence Bureau, in the General Staff, activities inspired, I am sure, by patriotic zeal, which I had never imagined. Upon free-masonry, German espionage, morphinomania, Léon Daudet builds up, day by day, a fantastic fairy-tale which turns out to be the barest truth. Thirty per cent!" Brichot repeated in stupefaction. It is only fair to say that M. de Charlus taxed the great majority of his contemporaries with inversion, always excepting those men with whom he himself had had relations, their case, provided that they had introduced the least trace of romance into those relations, appearing to him more complex. So it is that we see men of the world, who refuse to believe in women's honour, allow some remnants of honour only to the woman who has been their mistress, as to whom they protest sincerely and with an air of mystery: "No, you are mistaken, she is not that sort of girl." This unlooked-for tribute is dictated partly by their own self-respect which is flattered by the supposition that such favours have been reserved for them alone, partly by their simplicity which has easily swallowed everything that their mistress has given them to believe, partly from that sense of the complexity of life which brings it about that, as soon as we approach other people, other lives, ready-made labels and classifications appear unduly crude. "Thirty per cent! But have a care; less fortunate than the historians whose conclusions the future will justify, Baron, if you were to present to posterity the statistics that you offer us, it might find them erroneous. Posterity judges only from documentary evidence, and will insist on being assured of your facts. But as no document would be forthcoming to authenticate this sort of collective phenomena which the few persons who are enlightened are only too ready to leave in obscurity, the best minds would be moved to indignation, and you would be regarded as nothing more than a slanderer or a lunatic. After having, in the social examination, obtained top marks and the primacy upon this earth, you would taste the sorrows of a blackball beyond the grave. That is not worth powder and shot, to quote — may God forgive me — our friend Bossuet." "I am not interested in history," replied M. de Charlus, "this life is sufficient for me, it is quite interesting enough, as poor Swann used to say." "What, you knew Swann, Baron, I was not aware of

that. Tell me, was he that way inclined?" Brichot inquired with an air of misgiving!"What a mind the man has! So you suppose that I only know men like that. No, I don't think so," said Charlus, looking to the ground and trying to weigh the pros and cons. And deciding that, since he was dealing with Swann whose hostility to that sort of thing had always been notorious, a half-admission could only be harmless to him who was its object and flattering to him who allowed it to escape in an insinuation: "I don't deny that long ago in our schooldays, once by accident," said the Baron, as though unwillingly and as though he were thinking aloud, then recovering himself: "But that was centuries ago, how do you expect me to remember, you are making a fool of me," he concluded with a laugh. "In any case, he was never what you'd call a beauty!" said Brichot who, himself hideous, thought himself good-looking and was always ready to believe that other men were ugly. "Hold your tongue," said the Baron, "you don't know what you're talking about, in those days he had a peach-like complexion, and," he added, finding a fresh note for each syllable, "he was as beautiful as Cupid himself. Besides he was always charming. The women were madly in love with him." "But did you ever know his wife?" "Why, it was through me that he came to know her. I thought her charming in her disguise one evening when she played Miss Sacripant; I was with some fellows from the club, each of us took a woman home with him, and, although all that I wanted was to go to sleep, slanderous tongues alleged, for it is terrible how malicious people are, that I went to bed with Odette. Only she took advantage of the slanders to come and worry me, and I thought I might get rid of her by introducing her to Swann. From that moment she never let me go, she couldn't spell the simplest word, it was I who wrote all her letters for her. And it was I who, afterwards, had to take her out. That, my boy, is what comes of having a good reputation, you see. Though I only half deserved it. She forced me to help her to betray him, with five, with six other men." And the lovers whom Odette had had in succession (she had been with this man, then with that, those men not one of whose names had ever been guessed by poor Swann, blinded in turn by jealousy and by love, reckoning the chances and believing in oaths more affirmative than a contradiction which escapes from the culprit, a contradiction far more unseizable, and at the same time far more significant, of which the jealous lover might take advantage more logically than of the information which he falsely pretends to have received, in the hope of confusing his mistress), these lovers M. de Charlus began to enumerate with as absolute a certainty as if he had been repeating the list of the Kings of France. And indeed the jealous lover is, like the

contemporaries of an historical event, too close, he knows nothing, and it is in the eyes of strangers that the comic aspect of adultery assumes the precision of history, and prolongs itself in lists of names which are, for that matter, unimportant and become painful only to another jealous lover, such as myself, who cannot help comparing his own case with that which he hears mentioned and asks himself whether the woman of whom he is suspicious cannot boast an equally illustrious list. But he can never know anything more, it is a sort of universal conspiracy, a 'blindman's buff' in which everyone cruelly participates, and which consists, while his mistress flits from one to another, in holding over his eyes a bandage which he is perpetually attempting to tear off without success, for everyone keeps him blindfold, poor wretch, the kind out of kindness, the wicked out of malice, the coarse-minded out of their love of coarse jokes, the well-bred out of politeness and good-breeding, and all alike respecting one of those conventions which are called principles. "But did Swann never know that you had enjoyed her favours?" "What an idea! If you had suggested such a thing to Charles! It's enough to make one's hair stand up on end. Why, my dear fellow, he would have killed me on the spot, he was as jealous as a tiger. Any more than I ever confessed to Odette, not that she would have minded in the least, that... but you must not make my tongue run away with me. And the joke of it is that it was she who fired a revolver at him, and nearly hit me. Oh! I used to have a fine time with that couple; and naturally it was I who was obliged to act as his second against d'Osmond, who never forgave me. D'Osmond had carried off Odette and Swann, to console himself, had taken as his mistress, or make-believe mistress, Odette's sister. But really you must not begin to make me tell you Swann's story, we should be here for ten years, don't you know, nobody knows more about him than I do. It was I who used to take Odette out when she did not wish to see Charles. It was all the more awkward for me as I have a quite near relative who bears the name Crécy, without of course having any manner of right to it, but still he was none too well pleased. For she went by the name of Odette de Crécy, as she very well might, being merely separated from a Crécy whose wife she still was, and quite an authentic person, a highly respectable gentleman out of whom she had drained his last farthing. But why should I have to tell you about this Crécy, I have seen you with him on the crawler, you used to have him to dinner at Balbec. He must have needed those dinners, poor fellow, he lived upon a tiny allowance that Swann made him; I am greatly afraid that, since my friend's death, that income must have stopped altogether. What I do not understand," M. de Charlus said to me, "is that, since you used often to go to Charles's, you did

not ask me this evening to present you to the Queen of Naples. In fact I can see that you are less interested in people than in curiosities, and that continues to surprise me in a person who knew Swann, in whom that sort of interest was so far developed that it is impossible to say whether it was I who initiated him in these matters or he myself. It surprises me as much as if I met a person who had known Whistler and remained ignorant of what is meant by taste. By Jove, it is Morel that ought really to have been presented to her, he was passionately keen on it too, for he is the most intelligent fellow you could imagine. It is a nuisance that she has left. However, I shall effect the conjunction one of these days. It is indispensable that he should know her. The only possible obstacle would be if she were to die in the night. Well, we may hope that it will not happen." All of a sudden Brichot, who was still suffering from the shock of the proportion 'thirty per cent' which M. de Charlus had revealed to him, Brichot who had continued all this time in the pursuit of his idea, with an abruptness which suggested that of an examining magistrate seeking to make a prisoner confess, but which was in reality the result of the Professor's desire to appear perspicacious and of the misgivings that he felt about launching so grave an accusation, spoke. "Isn't Ski like that?" he inquired of M. de Charlus with a sombre air. To make us admire his alleged power of intuition, he had chosen Ski, telling himself that since there were only three innocent men in every ten, he ran little risk of being mistaken if he named Ski who seemed to him a trifle odd, suffered from insomnia, scented himself, in short was not entirely normal. "*Nothing of the sort*!" exclaimed the Baron with a bitter, dogmatic, exasperated irony. "What you say is utterly false, absurd, fantastic. Ski is like that precisely to the people who know nothing about it; if he was, he would not look so like it, be it said without any intention to criticise, for he has a certain charm, indeed I find something very attractive about him." "But give us a few names, then," Brichot pursued with insistence. M. de Charlus drew himself up with a forbidding air. "Ah! my dear Sir, I, as you know, live in a world of abstraction, all that sort of thing interests me only from a transcendental point of view," he replied with the touchy susceptibility peculiar to men of his kind, and the affectation of grandiloquence that characterised his conversation. "To me, you understand, it is only general principles that are of any interest, I speak to you of this as I might of the law of gravitation." But these moments of irritable reaction in which the Baron sought to conceal his true life lasted but a short time compared with the hours of continual progression in which he allowed it to be guessed, displayed it with an irritating complacency, the need to confide being stronger in him than the fear of divulging his secret.

“What I was trying to say,” he went on, “is that for one evil reputation that is unjustified there are hundreds of good ones which are no less so. Obviously, the number of those who do not merit their reputations varies according to whether you rely upon what is said by men of their sort or by the others. And it is true that if the malevolence of the latter is limited by the extreme difficulty which they would find in believing that a vice as horrible to them as robbery or murder is being practised by men whom they know to be sensitive and sincere, the malevolence of the former is stimulated to excess by the desire to regard as — what shall I say? — accessible, men who appeal to them, upon the strength of information given them by people who have been led astray by a similar desire, in fact by the very aloofness with which they are generally regarded. I have heard a man, viewed with considerable disfavour on account of these tastes, say that he supposed that a certain man in society shared them. And his sole reason for believing it was that this other man had been polite to him! So many reasons for *optimism*,” said the Baron artlessly, “in the computation of the number. But the true reason of the enormous difference that exists between the number calculated by the profane, and that calculated by the initiated, arises from the mystery with which the latter surround their actions, in order to conceal them from the rest, who, lacking any source of information, would be literally stupefied if they were to learn merely a quarter of the truth.” “Then in our days, things are as they were among the Greeks,” said Brichot. “What do you mean, among the Greeks? Do you suppose that it has not been going on ever since? Take the reign of Louis XIV, you have young Vermandois, Molière, Prince Louis of Baden, Brunswick, Charolais, Boufflers, the Great Condé, the Duc de Brissac.” “Stop a moment, I knew about Monsieur, I knew about Brissac from Saint-Simon, Vendôme of course, and many, others as well. But that old pest Saint-Simon often refers to the Great Condé and Prince Louis of Baden and never mentions it.” “It seems a pity, I must say, that it should fall to me to teach a Professor of the Sorbonne his history. But, my dear Master, you are as ignorant as a carp.” “You are harsh, Baron, but just. And, wait a moment, now this will please you, I remember now a song of the period composed in macaronic verse about a certain storm which surprised the Great Condé as he was going down the Rhône in the company of his friend, the Marquis de La Moussaye. Condé says:

Carus Amicus Mussaeus,
Ah! Quod tempus, bonus Deus,
Landerirette
Imbre sumus perituri.

And La Moussaye reassures him with:
Securae sunt nostrae vitae
Sumus enim Sodomitae
Igne tantum perituri
Landeriri."

"I take back what I said," said Charlus in a shrill and mannered tone, "you are a well of learning, you will write it down for me, won't you, I must preserve it in my family archives, since my great-great-great-grandmother was a sister of M. le Prince." "Yes, but, Baron, with regard to Prince Louis of Baden I can think of nothing. However, at that period, I suppose that generally speaking the art of war..." "What nonsense, Vendôme, Villars, Prince Eugène, the Prince de Conti, and if I were to tell you of all the heroes of Tonkin, Morocco, and I am thinking of men who are truly sublime, and pious, and 'new generation,' I should astonish you greatly. Ah! I should have something to teach the people who are making inquiries about the new generation which has rejected the futile complications of its elders, M. Bourget tells us! I have a young friend out there, who is highly spoken of, who has done great things, however, I am not going to tell tales out of school, let us return to the seventeenth century, you know that Saint-Simon says of the Maréchal d'Huxelles — one among many: 'Voluptuous in Grecian debaucheries which he made no attempt to conceal, he used to get hold of young officers whom he trained to his purpose, not to mention stalwart young valets, and this openly, in the army and at Strasbourg.' You have probably read Madame's *Letters*, all his men called him 'Putain.' She is quite outspoken about it." "And she was in a good position to know, with her husband." "Such an interesting character, Madame," said M. de Charlus. "One might base upon her the lyrical synthesis of 'Wives of Aunties.' First of all, the masculine type; generally the wife of an Auntie is a man, that is what makes it so easy for her to bear him children. Then Madame does not mention Monsieur's vices, but she does mention incessantly the same vice in other men, writing as a well-informed woman, from that tendency which makes us enjoy finding in other people's families the same defects as afflict us in our own, in order to prove to ourselves that there is nothing exceptional or degrading in them. I was saying that things have been much the same in every age. Nevertheless, our own is quite remarkable in that respect. And notwithstanding the instances that I have borrowed from the seventeenth century, if my great ancestor François C. de La Rochefoucauld were alive in these days, he might say of them with even more justification than of his own — come, Brichot, help me out: 'Vices are common

to every age; but if certain persons whom everyone knows had appeared in the first centuries of our era, would anyone speak to-day of the prostitutions of Heliogabalus?' '*Whom everyone knows*' appeals to me immensely. I see that my sagacious kinsman understood the tricks of his most illustrious contemporaries as I understand those of my own. But men of that sort are not only far more frequent to-day. They have also special characteristics." I could see that M. de Charlus was about to tell us in what fashion these habits had evolved. The insistence with which M. de Charlus kept on reverting to this topic — into which, moreover, his intellect, constantly trained in the same direction, had acquired a certain penetration — was, in a complicated way, distinctly trying. He was as boring as a specialist who can see nothing outside his own subject, as irritating as a well-informed man whose vanity is flattered by the secrets which he possesses and is burning to divulge, as repellent as those people who, whenever their own defects are mentioned, spread themselves without noticing that they are giving offence, as obsessed as a maniac and as uncontrollably imprudent as a criminal. These characteristics which, at certain moments, became as obvious as those that stamp a madman or a criminal, brought me, as it happened, a certain consolation. For, making them undergo the necessary transposition in order to be able to draw from them deductions with regard to Albertine, and remembering her attitude towards Saint-Loup, and towards myself, I said to myself, painful as one of these memories and melancholy as the other was to me, I said to myself that they seemed to exclude the kind of deformity so plainly denounced, the kind of specialisation inevitably exclusive, it appeared, which was so vehemently apparent in the conversation as in the person of M. de Charlus. But he, as ill luck would have it, made haste to destroy these grounds for hope in the same way as he had furnished me with them, that is to say unconsciously. "Yes," he said, "I am no longer in my teens, and I have already seen many things change round about me, I no longer recognise either society, in which the barriers are broken down, in which a mob, devoid of elegance and decency, dance the tango even in my own family, or fashions, or politics, or the arts, or religion, or anything. But I must admit that the thing which has changed most of all is what the Germans call homosexuality. Good God, in my day, apart from the men who loathed women, and those who, caring only for women, did the other thing merely with an eye to profit, the homosexuals were sound family men and never kept mistresses except to screen themselves. If I had had a daughter to give away, it is among them that I should have looked for my son-in-law if I had wished to be certain that she would not

be unhappy. Alas! Things have changed entirely. Nowadays they are recruited also from the men who are the most insatiable with women. I thought I possessed a certain instinct, and that when I said to myself: ‘Certainly not,’ I could not have been mistaken. Well, I give it up. One of my friends, who is well-known for that sort of thing, bad a coachman whom my sister-in-law Oriane found for him, a lad from Combray who was something of a jack of all trades, but particularly in trading with women, and who, I would have sworn, was as hostile as possible to anything of that sort. He broke his mistress’s heart by betraying her with two women whom he adored, not to mention the others, an actress and a girl from a bar. My cousin the Prince de Guermantes, who has that irritating intelligence of people who are too ready to believe anything, said to me one day: ‘But why in the world does not X—— have his coachman? It might be a pleasure to Théodore’ (which is the coachman’s name) ‘and he may be annoyed at finding that his master does not make advances to him.’ I could not help telling Gilbert to hold his tongue; I was overwrought both by that boasted perspicacity which, when it is exercised indiscriminately, is a want of perspicacity, and also by the sîlver-lined malice of my cousin who would have liked X—— to risk taking the first steps so that, if the going was good, he might follow.” “Then the Prince de Guermantes is like that, too?” asked Brichot with a blend of astonishment and dismay. “Good God,” replied M. de Charlus, highly delighted, “it is so notorious that I don’t think I am guilty of an indiscretion if I tell you that he is. Very well, the year after this, I went to Balbec, where I heard from a sailor who used to take me out fishing occasionally, that my Théodore, whose sister, I may mention, is the maid of a friend of Mme. Verdurin, Baroness Putbus, used to come down to the harbour to pick up now one sailor, now another, with the most infernal cheek, to go for a trip on the sea ‘with extras.’” It was now my turn to inquire whether his employer, whom I had identified as the gentleman who at Balbec used to play cards all day long with his mistress, and who was the leader of the little group of four boon companions, was like the Prince of Guermantes. “Why, of course, everyone knows about him, he makes no attempt to conceal it.” “But he had his mistress there with him.” “Well, and what difference does that make? How innocent these children are,” he said to me in a fatherly tone, little suspecting the grief that I extracted from his words when I thought of Albertine. “She is charming, his mistress.” “But then his three friends are like himself.” “Not at all,” he cried, stopping his ears as though, in playing some instrument, I had struck a wrong note. “Now he has gone to the other extreme. So a man has no longer the right to have friends? Ah! Youth,

youth; it gets everything wrong. We shall have to begin your education over again, my boy. Well," he went on, "I admit that this case, and I know of many others, however open a mind I may try to keep for every form of audacity, does embarrass me. I may be very old-fashioned, but I fail to understand," he said in the tone of an old Gallican speaking of some development of Ultramontanism, of a Liberal Royalist speaking of the *Action Française* or of a disciple of Claude Monet speaking of the Cubists. "I do not reproach these innovators, I envy them if anything, I try to understand them, but I do not succeed. If they are so passionately fond of woman, why, and especially in this workaday world where that sort of thing is so frowned upon, where they conceal themselves from a sense of shame, have they any need of what they call 'a bit of brown'? It is because it represents to them something else. What?" "What else can a woman represent to Albertine," I thought, and there indeed lay the cause of my anguish. "Decidedly, Baron," said Brichot, "should the Board of Studies ever think of founding a Chair of Homosexuality, I shall see that your name is the first to be submitted. Or rather, no; an Institute of Psycho-physiology would suit you better. And I can see you, best of all, provided with a Chair in the Collège de France, which would enable you to devote yourself to personal researches the results of which you would deliver, like the Professor of Tamil or Sanskrit, to the handful of people who are interested in them. You would have an audience of two, with your assistant, not that I mean to cast the slightest suspicion upon our corps of janitors, whom I believe to be above suspicion." "You know nothing about them," the Baron retorted in a harsh and cutting tone. "Besides you are wrong in thinking that so few people are interested in the subject. It is just the opposite." And without stopping to consider the incompatibility between the invariable trend of his own conversation and the reproach which he was about to heap upon other people: "It is, on the contrary, most alarming," said the Baron, with a scandalised and contrite air, "people are talking about nothing else. It is a scandal, but I am not exaggerating, my dear fellow! It appears that, the day before yesterday, at the Duchesse d'Agen's, they talked about nothing else for two hours on end; you can imagine, if women have taken to discussing that sort of thing, it is a positive scandal! What is vilest of all is that they get their information," he went on with an extraordinary fire and emphasis, "from pests, regular harlots like young Châtellerault, who has the worst reputation in the world, who tell them stories about other men. I have been told that he said more than enough to hang me, but I don't care, I am convinced that the mud and filth flung by an individual who barely escaped being turned out of the Jockey for

cheating at cards can only fall back upon himself. I am sure that if I were Jane d'Agen, I should have sufficient respect for my drawing-room not to allow such subjects to be discussed in it, nor to allow my own flesh and blood to be dragged through the mire in my house. But there is no longer any society, any rules, any conventions, in conversation any more than in dress. Ah, my dear fellow, it is the end of the world. Everyone has become so malicious. The prize goes to the man who can speak most evil of his fellows. It is appalling."

As cowardly still as I had been long ago in my boyhood at Combray when I used to run away in order not to see my grandfather tempted with brandy and the vain efforts of my grandmother imploring him not to drink it, I had but one thought in my mind, which was to leave the Verdurins' house before the execution of M. de Charlus occurred. "I simply must go," I said to Brichot. "I am coming with you," he replied, "but we cannot slip away, English fashion. Come and say good-bye to Mme. Verdurin," the Professor concluded, as he made his way to the drawing-room with the air of a man who, in a guessing game, goes to find out whether he may 'come back.'

While we conversed, M. Verdurin, at a signal from his wife, had taken Morel aside. Indeed, had Mme. Verdurin decided, after considering the matter in all its aspects, that it was wiser to postpone Morel's enlightenment, she was powerless now to prevent it. There are certain desires, some of them confined to the mouth, which, as soon as we have allowed them to grow, insist upon being gratified, whatever the consequences may be; we are unable to resist the temptation to kiss a bare shoulder at which we have been gazing for too long and at which our lips strike like a serpent at a bird, to bury our sweet tooth in a cake that has fascinated and famished it, nor can we forego the delight of the amazement, anxiety, grief or mirth to which we can move another person by some unexpected communication. So, in a frenzy of melodrama, Mme. Verdurin had ordered her husband to take Morel out of the room and, at all costs, to explain matters to him. The violinist had begun by deploring the departure of the Queen of Naples before he had had a chance of being presented to her. M. de Charlus had told him so often that she was the sister of the Empress Elisabeth and of the Duchesse d'Alençon that Her Majesty had assumed an extraordinary importance in his eyes. But the Master explained to him that it was not to talk about the Queen of Naples that they had withdrawn from the rest, and then went straight to the root of the matter. "Listen," he had concluded after a long explanation; "listen; if you like, we can go and ask my wife what she thinks. I give you my word of honour, I've said nothing to her about it. We shall see how

she looks at it. My advice is perhaps not the best, but you know how sound her judgment is; besides, she is extremely attached to yourself, let us go and submit the case to her." And while Mme. Verdurin, awaiting with impatience the emotions that she would presently be relishing as she talked to the musician, and again, after he had gone, when she made her husband give her a full report of their conversation, continued to repeat: "But what in the world can they be doing? I do hope that my husband, in keeping him all this time, has managed to give him his cue," M. Verdurin reappeared with Morel who seemed greatly moved. "He would like to ask your advice," M. Verdurin said to his wife, in the tone of a man who does not know whether his prayer will be heard. Instead of replying to M. Verdurin, it was to Morel that, in the heat of her passion, Mme. Verdurin addressed herself. "I agree entirely with my husband, I consider that you cannot tolerate this sort of thing for another instant," she exclaimed with violence, discarding as a useless fiction her agreement with her husband that she was supposed to know nothing of what he had been saying to the violinist. "How do you mean? Tolerate what?" stammered M. Verdurin, endeavouring to feign astonishment and seeking, with an awkwardness that was explained by his dismay, to defend his falsehood. "I guessed what you were saying to him," replied Mme. Verdurin, undisturbed by the improbability of this explanation, and caring little what, when he recalled this scene, the violinist might think of the Mistress's veracity. "No," Mme. Verdurin continued, "I feel that you ought not to endure any longer this degrading promiscuity with a tainted person whom nobody will have in her house," she went on, regardless of the fact that this was untrue and forgetting that she herself entertained him almost daily. "You are the talk of the Conservatoire," she added, feeling that this was the argument that carried most weight; "another month of this life and your artistic future is shattered, whereas, without Charlus, you ought to be making at least a hundred thousand francs a year." "But I have never heard anyone utter a word, I am astounded, I am very grateful to you," Morel murmured, the tears starting to his eyes. But, being obliged at once to feign astonishment and to conceal his shame, he had turned redder and was perspiring more abundantly than if he had played all Beethoven's sonatas in succession, and tears welled from his eyes which the Bonn Master would certainly not have drawn from him. "If you have never heard anything, you are unique in that respect. He is a gentleman with a vile reputation and the most shocking stories are told about him. I know that the police are watching him and that is perhaps the best thing for him if he is not to end like all those men, murdered by hooligans," she went on, for as she thought

of Charlus the memory of Mme. de Duras recurred to her, and in her frenzy of rage she sought to aggravate still further the wounds that she was inflicting on the unfortunate Charlie, and to avenge herself for those that she had received in the course of the evening. “Anyhow, even financially, he can be of no use to you, he is completely ruined since he has become the prey of people who are blackmailing him, and who can’t even make him fork out the price of the tune they call, still less can he pay you for your playing, for it is all heavily mortgaged, town house, country house, everything.” Morel was all the more ready to believe this lie since M. de Charlus liked to confide in him his relations with hooligans, a race for which the son of a valet, however debauched he may be, professes a feeling of horror as strong as his attachment to Bonapartist principles.

Already, in the cunning mind of Morel, a plan was beginning to take shape similar to what was called in the eighteenth century the reversal of alliances. Determined never to speak to M. de Charlus again, he would return on the following evening to Jupien’s niece, and see that everything was made straight with her. Unfortunately for him this plan was doomed to failure, M. de Charlus having made an appointment for that very evening with Jupien, which the ex-tailor dared not fail to keep, in spite of recent events. Other events, as we shall see, having followed upon Morel’s action, when Jupien in tears told his tale of woe to the Baron, the latter, no less wretched, assured him that he would adopt the forsaken girl, that she should assume one of the titles that were at his disposal, probably that of Mlle. d’Oloron, that he would see that she received a thorough education, and furnish her with a rich husband. Promises which filled Jupien with joy and left his niece unmoved, for she was still in love with Morel, who, from stupidity or cynicism, used to come into the shop and tease her in Jupien’s absence. “What is the matter with you,” he would say with a laugh, “with those black marks under your eyes? A broken heart? Gad, the years pass and people change. After all, a man is free to try on a shoe, all the more a woman, and if she doesn’t fit him...” He lost his temper once only, because she cried, which he considered cowardly, unworthy of her. People are not always very tolerant of the tears which they themselves have provoked.

But we have looked too far ahead, for all this did not happen until after the Verdurins’ party which we have interrupted, and we must go back to the point at which we left off. “I should never have suspected it,” Morel groaned, in answer to Mme. Verdurin. “Naturally people do not say it to your face, that does not prevent your being the talk of the Conservatoire,” Mme. Verdurin went on

wickedly, seeking to make it plain to Morel that it was not only M. de Charlus that was being criticised, but himself also. “I can well believe that you know nothing about it; all the same, people are quite outspoken. Ask Ski what they were saying the other day at Chevillard’s within a foot of us when you came into my box. I mean to say, people point you out. As far as I’m concerned, I don’t pay the slightest attention, but what I do feel is that it makes a man supremely ridiculous and that he becomes a public laughing-stock for the rest of his life.” “I don’t know how to thank you,” said Charlie in the tone we use to a dentist who has just caused us terrible pain while we tried not to let him see it, or to a too bloodthirsty second who has forced us into a duel on account of some casual remark of which he has said: “You can’t swallow that.” “I believe that you have plenty of character, that you are a man,” replied Mme. Verdurin, “and that you will be capable of speaking out boldly, although he tells everybody that you would never dare, that he holds you fast.” Charlie, seeking a borrowed dignity in which to cloak the tatters of his own, found in his memory something that he had read or, more probably, heard quoted, and at once proclaimed: “I was not brought up to eat that sort of bread. This very evening I will break with M. de Charlus. The Queen of Naples has gone, hasn’t she? Otherwise, before breaking with him, I should like to ask him...” “It is not necessary to break with him altogether,” said Mme. Verdurin, anxious to avoid a disruption of the little nucleus. “There is no harm in your seeing him here, among our little group, where you are appreciated, where no one speaks any evil of you. But insist upon your freedom, and do not let him drag you about among all those sheep who are friendly to your face; I wish you could have heard what they were saying behind your back. Anyhow, you need feel no regret, not only are you wiping off a stain which would have marked you for the rest of your life, from the artistic point of view, even if there had not been this scandalous presentation by Charlus, I don’t mind telling you that wasting yourself like this in this sham society will make people suppose that you aren’t serious, give you an amateur reputation, as a little drawing-room performer, which is a terrible thing at your age. I can understand that to all those fine ladies it is highly convenient to be able to return their friends’ hospitality by making you come and play for nothing, but it is your future as an artist that would foot the bill. I don’t say that you shouldn’t go to one or two of them. You were speaking of the Queen of Naples — who has left, for she had to go on to another party — now she is a splendid woman, and I don’t mind saying that I think she has a poor opinion of Charlus and came here chiefly to please me. Yes, yes, I know she was longing to meet us, M. Verdurin

and myself. That is a house in which you might play. And then I may tell you that if I take you — because the artists all know me, you understand, they have always been most obliging to me, and regard me almost as one of themselves, as their Mistress — that is a very different matter. But whatever you do, you must never go near Mme. de Duras! Don't go and make a stupid blunder like that! I know several artists who have come here and told me all about her. They know they can trust me," she said, in the sweet and simple tone which she knew how to adopt in an instant, imparting an appropriate air of modesty to her features, an appropriate charm to her eyes, "they come here, just like that, to tell me all their little troubles; the ones who are said to be most silent, go on chatting to me sometimes for hours on end and I can't tell you how interesting they are. Poor Chabrier used always to say: 'There's nobody like Mme. Verdurin for getting them to talk.' Very well, don't you know, all of them, without one exception, I have seen them in tears because they had gone to play for Mme. de Duras. It is not only the way she enjoys making her servants humiliate them, they could never get an engagement anywhere else again. The agents would say: 'Oh yes, the fellow who plays at Mme. de Duras's.' That settled it. There is nothing like that for ruining a man's future. You know what society people are like, it's not taken seriously, you may have all the talent in the world, it's a dreadful thing to have to say, but one Mme. de Duras is enough to give you the reputation of an amateur. And among artists, don't you know, well I, you can ask yourself whether I know them, when I have been moving among them for forty years, launching them, taking an interest in them; very well, when they say that somebody is an amateur, that finishes it. And people were beginning to say it of you. Indeed, at times I have been obliged to take up the cudgels, to assure them that you would not play in some absurd drawing-room! Do you know what the answer was: 'But he will be forced to go, Charlus won't even consult him, he never asks him for his opinion.' Somebody thought he would pay him a compliment and said: 'We greatly admire your friend Morel.' Can you guess what answer he made, with that insolent air which you know? 'But what do you mean by calling him my friend, we are not of the same class, say rather that he is my creature, my protégé.'" At this moment there stirred beneath the convex brows of the musical deity the one thing that certain people cannot keep to themselves, a saying which it is not merely abject but imprudent to repeat. But the need to repeat it is stronger than honour, than prudence. It was to this need that, after a few convulsive movements of her spherical and sorrowful brows, the Mistress succumbed: "Some one actually told my husband that he had said 'my

servant,' but for that I cannot vouch," she added. It was a similar need that had compelled M. de Charlus, shortly after he had sworn to Morel that nobody should ever know the story of his birth, to say to Mme. Verdurin: "His father was a flunkey." A similar need again, now that the story had been started, would make it circulate from one person to another, each of whom would confide it under the seal of a secrecy which would be promised and not kept by the hearer, as by the informant himself. These stories would end, as in the game called hunt-the-thimble, by being traced back to Mme. Verdurin, bringing down upon her the wrath of the person concerned, who would at last have learned the truth. She knew this, but could not repress the words that were burning her tongue. Anyhow, the word 'servant' was bound to annoy Morel. She said 'servant' nevertheless, and if she added that she could not vouch for the word, this was so as at once to appear certain of the rest, thanks to this hint of uncertainty, and to shew her impartiality. This impartiality that she shewed, she herself found so touching that she began to speak affectionately to Charlie: "For, don't you see," she went on, "I am not blaming him, he is dragging you down into his abyss, it is true, but it is not his fault, since he wallows in it himself, since he wallows in it," she repeated in a louder tone, having been struck by the aptness of the image which had taken shape so quickly that her attention only now overtook it and was trying to give it prominence. "No, the fault that I do find with him," she said in a melting tone — like a woman drunken with her own success —"is a want of delicacy towards yourself. There are certain things which one does not say in public. Well, this evening, he was betting that he would make you blush with joy, by telling you (stuff and nonsense, of course, for his recommendation would be enough to prevent your getting it) that you were to have the Cross of the Legion of Honour. Even that I could overlook, although I have never quite liked," she went on with a delicate, dignified air, "hearing a person make a fool of his friends, but, don't you know, there are certain little things that one does resent. Such as when he told us, with screams of laughter, that if you want the Cross it's to please your uncle and that your uncle was a footman." "He told you that!" cried Charlie, believing, on the strength of this adroitly interpolated quotation, in the truth of everything that Mme. Verdurin had said! Mme. Verdurin was overwhelmed with the joy of an old mistress who, just as her young lover was on the point of deserting her, has succeeded in breaking off his marriage, and it is possible that she had not calculated her lie, that she was not even consciously lying. A sort of sentimental logic, something perhaps more elementary still, a sort of nervous reflex urging her, in order to brighten her life

and preserve her happiness, to stir up trouble in the little clan, may have brought impulsively to her lips, without giving her time to check their veracity, these assertions diabolically effective if not rigorously exact. “If he had only repeated it to us, it wouldn’t matter,” the Mistress went on, “we know better than to listen to what he says, besides, what does a man’s origin matter, you have your own value, you are what you make yourself, but that he should use it to make Mme. de Portefin laugh” (Mme. Verdurin named this lady on purpose because she knew that Charlie admired her) “that is what vexes us: my husband said to me when he heard him: ‘I would sooner he had struck me in the face.’ For he is as fond of you as I am, don’t you know, is Gustave” (from this we learn that M. Verdurin’s name was Gustave). “He is really very sensitive.” “But I never told you I was fond of him,” muttered M. Verdurin, acting the kind-hearted curmudgeon. “It is Charlus that is fond of him.” “Oh, no! Now I realise the difference, I was betrayed by a scoundrel and you, you are good,” Charlie exclaimed in all sincerity. “No, no,” murmured Mme. Verdurin, seeking to retain her victory, for she felt that her Wednesdays were safe, but not to abuse it: “scoundrel is too strong; he does harm, a great deal of harm, unconsciously; you know that tale about the Legion of Honour was the affair of a moment. And it would be painful to me to repeat all that he said about your family,” said Mme. Verdurin, who would have been greatly embarrassed had she been asked to do so. “Oh, even if it only took a moment, it proves that he is a traitor,” cried Morel. It was at this moment that we returned to the drawing-room. “Ah!” exclaimed M. de Charlus when he saw that Morel was in the room, advancing upon him with the alacrity of the man who has skillfully organised a whole evening’s entertainment with a view to an assignation with a woman, and in his excitement never imagines that he has with his own hands set the snare in which he will presently be caught and publicly thrashed by bravoes stationed in readiness by her husband. “Well, after all it is none too soon; are you satisfied, young glory, and presently young knight of the Legion of Honour? For very soon you will be able to sport your Cross,” M. de Charlus said to Morel with a tender and triumphant air, but by the very mention of the decoration endorsed Mme. Verdurin’s lies, which appeared to Morel to be indisputable truth. “Leave me alone, I forbid you to come near me,” Morel shouted at the Baron. “You know what I mean, all right, I’m not the first young man you’ve tried to corrupt!” My sole consolation lay in the thought that I was about to see Morel and the Verdurins pulverised by M. de Charlus. For a thousand times less an offence I had been visited with his furious rage, no one was safe from it, a king would not

have intimidated him. Instead of which, an extraordinary thing happened. One saw M. de Charlus dumb, stupefied, measuring the depths of his misery without understanding its cause, finding not a word to utter, raising his eyes to stare at each of the company in turn, with a questioning, outraged, suppliant air, which seemed to be asking them not so much what had happened as what answer he ought to make. And yet M. de Charlus possessed all the resources, not merely of eloquence but of audacity, when, seized by a rage which had long been simmering against some one, he reduced him to desperation, with the most outrageous speeches, in front of a scandalised society which had never imagined that anyone could go so far. M. de Charlus, on these occasions, burned, convulsed with a sort of epilepsy, which left everyone trembling. But in these instances he had the initiative, he launched the attack, he said whatever came into his mind (just as Bloch was able to make fun of Jews and blushed if the word Jew was uttered in his hearing). Perhaps what struck him speechless was — when he saw that M. and Mme. Verdurin turned their eyes from him and that no one was coming to his rescue — his anguish at the moment and, still more, his dread of greater anguish to come; or else that, not having lost his temper in advance, in imagination, and forged his thunderbolt, not having his rage ready as a weapon in his hand, he had been seized and dealt a mortal blow at the moment when he was unarmed (for, sensitive, neurotic, hysterical, his impulses were genuine, but his courage was a sham; indeed, as I had always thought, and this was what made me like him, his malice was a sham also: the people whom he hated, he hated because he thought that they looked down upon him; had they been civil to him, instead of flying into a furious rage with them, he would have taken them to his bosom, and he did not shew the normal reactions of a man of honour who has been insulted); or else that, in a sphere which was not his own, he felt himself less at his ease and less courageous than he would have been in the Faubourg. The fact remains that, in this drawing-room which he despised, this great nobleman (in whom his sense of superiority to the middle classes was no less essentially inherent than it had been in any of his ancestors who had stood in the dock before the Revolutionary Tribunal) could do nothing, in a paralysis of all his members, including his tongue, but cast in every direction glances of terror, outraged by the violence that had been done to him, no less suppliant than questioning. In a situation so cruelly unforeseen, this great talker could do no more than stammer: “What does it all mean, what has happened?” His question was not even heard. And the eternal pantomime of panic terror has so little altered, that this elderly gentleman, to whom a disagreeable incident had

just occurred in a Parisian drawing-room, unconsciously repeated the various formal attitudes in which the Greek sculptors of the earliest times symbolised the terror of nymphs pursued by the Great Pan.

The ambassador who has been recalled, the undersecretary placed suddenly on the retired list, the man about town whom people began to cut, the lover who has been shewn the door examine sometimes for months on end the event that has shattered their hopes; they turn it over and over like a projectile fired at them they know not whence or by whom, almost as though it were a meteorite. They would fain know the elements that compose this strange engine which has burst upon them, learn what hostilities may be detected in them. Chemists have at least the power of analysis; sick men suffering from a malady the origin of which they do not know can send for the doctor; criminal mysteries are more or less solved by the examining magistrate. But when it comes to the disconcerting actions of our fellow-men, we rarely discover their motives. Thus M. de Charlus, to anticipate the days that followed this party to which we shall presently return, could see in Charlie's attitude one thing alone that was self-evident. Charlie, who had often threatened the Baron that he would tell people of the passion that he inspired in him, must have seized the opportunity to do so when he considered that he had now sufficiently 'arrived' to be able to fly unaided. And he must, out of sheer ingratitude, have told Mme. Verdurin everything. But how had she allowed herself to be taken in (for the Baron, having made up his mind to deny the story, had already persuaded himself that the sentiments for which he was blamed were imaginary)? Some friends of Mme. Verdurin, who themselves perhaps felt a passion for Charlie, must have prepared the ground. Accordingly, M. de Charlus during the next few days wrote terrible letters to a number of the faithful, who were entirely innocent and concluded that he must be mad; then he went to Mme. Verdurin with a long and moving tale, which had not at all the effect that he desired. For in the first place Mme. Verdurin repeated to the Baron: "All you need do is not to bother about him, treat him with scorn, he is a mere boy." Now the Baron longed only for a reconciliation. In the second place, to bring this about, by depriving Charlie of everything of which he had felt himself assured, he asked Mme. Verdurin not to invite him again; a request which she met with a refusal that brought upon her angry and sarcastic letters from M. de Charlus. Flitting from one supposition to another, the Baron never arrived at the truth, which was that the blow had not come from Morel. It is true that he might have learned this by asking him for a few minutes' conversation. But he felt that this would injure his dignity and would be against the interests of his love. He

had been insulted, he awaited an explanation. There is, for that matter, almost invariably, attached to the idea of a conversation which might clear up a misunderstanding, another idea which, whatever the reason, prevents us from agreeing to that conversation. The man who is abased and has shewn his weakness on a score of occasions, will furnish proofs of pride on the twenty-first, the only occasion on which it would serve him not to adopt a headstrong and arrogant attitude but to dispel an error which will take root in his adversary failing a contradiction. As for the social side of the incident, the rumour spread abroad that M. de Charlus had been turned out of the Verdurins' house at the moment when he was attempting to rape a young musician. The effect of this rumour was that nobody was surprised when M. de Charlus did not appear again at the Verdurins', and whenever he happened by chance to meet, anywhere else, one of the faithful whom he had suspected and insulted, as this person had a grudge against the Baron who himself abstained from greeting him, people were not surprised, realising that no member of the little clan would ever wish to speak to the Baron again.

While M. de Charlus, rendered speechless by Morel's words and by the attitude of the Mistress, stood there in the pose of the nymph a prey to Panic terror, M. and Mme. Verdurin had retired to the outer drawing-room, as a sign of diplomatic rupture, leaving M. de Charlus by himself, while on the platform Morel was putting his violin in its case. "Now you must tell us exactly what happened," Mme. Verdurin appealed avidly to her husband. "I don't know what you can have said to him, he looked quite upset," said Ski, "there are tears in his eyes." Pretending not to have understood: "I'm sure, nothing that I said could make any difference to him," said Mme. Verdurin, employing one of those stratagems which do not deceive everybody, so as to force the sculptor to repeat that Charlie was in tears, tears which filled the Mistress with too much pride for her to be willing to run the risk that one or other of the faithful, who might not have heard what was said, remained in ignorance of them. "No, it has made a difference, for I saw big tears glistening in his eyes," said the sculptor in a low tone with a smile of malicious connivance, and a sidelong glance to make sure that Morel was still on the platform and could not overhear the conversation. But there was somebody who did overhear, and whose presence, as soon as it was observed, was to restore to Morel one of the hopes that he had forfeited. This was the Queen of Naples, who, having left her fan behind, had thought it more polite, on coming away from another party to which she had gone on, to call for it in person. She had entered the room quite quietly, as though she were ashamed

of herself, prepared to make apologies for her presence, and to pay a little call upon her hostess now that all the other guests had gone. But no one had heard her come in, in the heat of the incident the meaning of which she had at once gathered, and which set her ablaze with indignation. “Ski says that he had tears in his eyes, did you notice that? I did not see any tears. Ah, yes, I remember now,” she corrected herself, in the fear that her denial might not be believed. “As for Charlus, he’s not far off them, he ought to take a chair, he’s tottering on his feet, he’ll be on the floor in another minute,” she said with a pitiless laugh. At that moment Morel hastened towards her: “Isn’t that lady the Queen of Naples?” he asked (albeit he knew quite well that she was), pointing to Her Majesty who was making her way towards Charlus. “After what has just happened, I can no longer, I’m afraid, ask the Baron to present me.” “Wait, I shall take you to her myself,” said Mme. Verdurin, and, followed by a few of the faithful, but not by myself and Brichot who made haste to go and call for our hats and coats, she advanced upon the Queen who was talking to M. de Charlus. He had imagined that the realisation of his great desire that Morel should be presented to the Queen of Naples could be prevented only by the improbable demise of that lady. But we picture the future as a reflexion of the present projected into empty space, whereas it is the result, often almost immediate, of causes which for the most part escape our notice. Not an hour had passed, and now M. de Charlus would have given everything he possessed in order that Morel should not be presented to the Queen. Mme. Verdurin made the Queen a curtsey. Seeing that the other appeared not to recognise her: “I am Mme. Verdurin. Your Majesty does not remember me.” “Quite well,” said the Queen as she continued so naturally to converse with M. de Charlus and with an air of such complete indifference that Mme. Verdurin doubted whether it was to herself that this ‘Quite well’ had been addressed, uttered with a marvellously detached intonation, which wrung from M. de Charlus, despite his broken heart, a smile of expert and delighted appreciation of the art of impertinence. Morel, who had watched from the distance the preparations for his presentation, now approached. The Queen offered her arm to M. de Charlus. With him, too, she was vexed, but only because he did not make a more energetic stand against vile detractors. She was crimson with shame for him whom the Verdurins dared to treat in this fashion. The entirely simple civility which she had shewn them a few hours earlier, and the arrogant pride with which she now stood up to face them, had their source in the same region of her heart. The Queen, as a woman full of good nature, regarded good nature first and foremost in the form of an unshakable

attachment to the people whom she liked, to her own family, to all the Princes of her race, among whom was M. de Charlus, and, after them, to all the people of the middle classes or of the humblest populace who knew how to respect those whom she liked and felt well-disposed towards them. It was as to a woman endowed with these sound instincts that she had shewn kindness to Mme. Verdurin. And, no doubt, this is a narrow conception, somewhat Tory, and increasingly obsolete, of good nature. But this does not mean that her good nature was any less genuine or ardent. The ancients were no less strongly attached to the group of humanity to which they devoted themselves because it did not exceed the limits of their city, nor are the men of to-day to their country than will be those who in the future love the United States of the World. In my own immediate surroundings, I have had an example of this in my mother whom Mme. de Cambremer and Mme. de Guermantes could never persuade to take part in any philanthropic undertaking, to join any patriotic workroom, to sell or to be a patroness at any bazaar. I do not go so far as to say that she was right in doing good only when her heart had first spoken, and in reserving for her own family, for her servants, for the unfortunate whom chance brought in her way, her treasures of love and generosity, but I do know that these, like those of my grandmother, were unbounded and exceeded by far anything that Mme. de Guermantes or Mme. de Cambremer ever could have done or did. The case of the Queen of Naples was altogether different, but even here it must be admitted that her conception of deserving people was not at all that set forth in those novels of Dostoievski which Albertine had taken from my shelves and devoured, that is to say in the guise of wheedling parasites, thieves, drunkards, at one moment stupid, at another insolent, debauchees, at a pinch murderers. Extremes, however, meet, since the noble man, the brother, the outraged kinsman whom the Queen sought to defend, was M. de Charlus, that is to say, notwithstanding his birth and all the family ties that bound him to the Queen, a man whose virtue was hedged round by many vices. “You do not look at all well, my dear cousin,” she said to M. de Charlus. “Léan upon my arm. Be sure that it will still support you. It is firm enough for that.” Then, raising her eyes proudly to face her adversaries (at that moment, Ski told me, there were in front of her Mme. Verdurin and Morel), “You know that, in the past, at Gaeta, it held the mob in defiance. It will be able to serve you as a rampart.” And it was thus, taking the Baron on her arm and without having allowed Morel to be presented to her, that the splendid sister of the Empress Elisabeth left the house. It might be supposed, in view of M. de Charlus’s terrible nature, the persecutions with which he

terrorised even his own family, that he would, after the events of this evening, let loose his fury and practise reprisals upon the Verdurins. We have seen why nothing of this sort occurred at first. Then the Baron, having caught cold shortly afterwards, and contracted the septic pneumonia which was very rife that winter, was for long regarded by his doctors, and regarded himself, as being at the point of death, and lay for many months suspended between it and life. Was there simply a physical change, and the substitution of a different malady for the neurosis that had previously made him lose all control of himself in his outbursts of rage? For it is too obvious to suppose that, having never taken the Verdurins seriously, from the social point of view, but having come at last to understand the part that they had played, he was unable to feel the resentment that he would have felt for any of his equals; too obvious also to remember that neurotics, irritated on the slightest provocation by imaginary and inoffensive enemies, become on the contrary inoffensive as soon as anyone takes the offensive against them, and that we can calm them more easily by flinging cold water in their faces than by attempting to prove to them the inanity of their grievances. It is probably not in a physical change that we ought to seek the explanation of this absence of rancour, but far more in the malady itself. It exhausted the Baron so completely that he had little leisure left in which to think about the Verdurins. He was almost dead. We mentioned offensives; even those which have only a posthumous effect require, if we are to ‘stage’ them properly, the sacrifice of a part of our strength. M. de Charlus had too little strength left for the activity of a preparation. We hear often of mortal enemies who open their eyes to gaze upon one another in the hour of death and close them again, made happy. This must be a rare occurrence, except when death surprises us in the midst of life. It is, on the contrary, at the moment when we have nothing left to lose, that we are not bothered by the risks which, when full of life, we would lightly have undertaken. The spirit of vengeance forms part of life, it abandons us as a rule — notwithstanding certain exceptions which, occurring in the heart of the same person, are, as we shall see, human contradictions — on the threshold of death. After having thought for a moment about the Verdurins, M. de Charlus felt that he was too weak, turned his face to the wall, and ceased to think about anything. If he often lay silent like this, it was not that he had lost his eloquence. It still flowed from its source, but it had changed. Detached from the violence which it had so often adorned, it was no more now than an almost mystic eloquence decorated with words of meekness, words from the Gospel, an apparent resignation to death. He talked especially on the days when he thought that he

would live. A relapse made him silent. This Christian meekness into which his splendid violence was transposed (as is in *Esther* the so different genius of *Andromaque*) provoked the admiration of those who came to his bedside. It would have provoked that of the Verdurins themselves, who could not have helped adoring a man whom his weakness had made them hate. It is true that thoughts which were Christian only in appearance rose to the surface. He implored the Archangel Gabriel to appear and announce to him, as to the Prophet, at what time the Messiah would come to him. And, breaking off with a sweet and sorrowful smile, he would add: "But the Archangel must not ask me, as he asked Daniel, to have patience for 'seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks,' for I should be dead before then." The person whom he awaited thus was Morel. And so he asked the Archangel Raphael to bring him to him, as he had brought the young Tobias. And, introducing more human methods (like sick Popes who, while ordering masses to be said, do not neglect to send for their doctors), he insinuated to his visitors that if Brichot were to bring him without delay his young Tobias, perhaps the Archangel Raphael would consent to restore Brichot's sight, as he had done to the father of Tobias, or as had happened in the sheep-pool of Bethesda. But, notwithstanding these human lapses, the moral purity of M. de Charlus's conversation had none the less become alarming. Vanity, slander, the insanity of malice and pride, had alike disappeared. Morally M. de Charlus had been raised far above the level at which he had lived in the past. But this moral perfection, as to the reality of which his oratorical art was for that matter capable of deceiving more than one of his compassionate audience, this perfection vanished with the malady which had laboured on its behalf. M. de Charlus returned along the downward slope with a rapidity which, as we shall see, continued steadily to increase. But the Verdurins' attitude towards him was by that time no more than a somewhat distant memory which more immediate outbursts prevented from reviving.

To turn back to the Verdurins' party, when the host and hostess were by themselves, M. Verdurin said to his wife: "You know where Cottard has gone? He is with Saniette: he has been speculating to put himself straight and has gone smash. When he got home just now after leaving us, and learned that he hadn't a penny in the world and nearly a million francs of debts, Saniette had a stroke." "But then, why did he gamble, it's idiotic, he was the last person in the world to succeed at that game. Cleverer men than he get plucked at it, and he was born to let himself be swindled by every Tom, Dick and Harry." "Why, of course, we have always known that he was an idiot," said M. Verdurin. "Anyhow, this is the

result. Here you have a man who will be turned out of house and home to-morrow by his landlord, who is going to find himself utterly penniless; his family don't like him, Forcheville is the last man in the world to do anything for him. And so it occurred to me, I don't wish to do anything that doesn't meet with your approval, but we might perhaps be able to scrape up a small income for him so that he shan't be too conscious of his ruin, so that he can keep a roof over his head." "I entirely agree with you, it is very good of you to have thought of it. But you say 'a roof; the imbecile has kept on an apartment beyond his means, he can't remain in it, we shall have to find him a couple of rooms somewhere. I understand that at the present moment he is still paying six or seven thousand francs for his apartment." "Six thousand, five hundred. But he is greatly attached to his home. In short, he has had his first stroke, he can scarcely live more than two or three years. Suppose we were to allow him ten thousand francs for three years. It seems to me that we should be able to afford that. We might for instance this year, instead of taking la Raspelière again, get hold of something on a simpler scale. With our income, it seems to me that to sacrifice ten thousand francs a year for three years is not out of the question." "Very well, there's only the nuisance that people will get to know about it, we shall be expected to do it again for others." "Believe me, I have thought about that. I shall do it only upon the express condition that nobody knows anything about it. Thank you, I have no desire that we should become the benefactors of the human race. No philanthropy! What we might do is to tell him that the money has been left to him by Princess Sherbatoff." "But will he believe it? She consulted Cottard about her will." "If the worse comes to the worst, we might take Cottard into our confidence, he is used to professional secrecy, he makes an enormous amount of money, he won't be like one of those busybodies one is obliged to hush up. He may even be willing to say, perhaps, that it was himself that the Princess appointed as her agent. In that way we shouldn't even appear. That would avoid all the nuisance of scenes, and gratitude, and speeches." M. Verdurin added an expression which made quite plain the kind of touching scenes and speeches which they were anxious to avoid. But it cannot have been reported to me correctly, for it was not a French expression, but one of those terms that are to be found in certain families to denote certain things, annoying things especially, probably because people wish to indicate them in the hearing of the persons concerned without being understood! An expression of this sort is generally a survival from an earlier condition of the family. In a Jewish family, for instance, it will be a ritual term diverted from its true meaning, and perhaps the only

Hebrew word with which the family, now thoroughly French, is still acquainted. In a family that is strongly provincial, it will be a term in the local dialect, albeit the family no longer speaks or even understands that dialect. In a family that has come from South America and no longer speaks anything but French, it will be a Spanish word. And, in the next generation, the word will no longer exist save as a childish memory. They may remember quite well that their parents at table used to allude to the servants who were waiting, without being understood by them, by employing some such word, but the children cannot tell exactly what the word meant, whether it was Spanish, Hebrew, German, dialect, if indeed it ever belonged to any language and was not a proper name or a word entirely forged. The uncertainty can be cleared up only if they have a great-uncle, a cousin still surviving who must have used the same expression. As I never knew any relative of the Verdurins, I have never been able to reconstruct the word. All I know is that it certainly drew a smile from Mme. Verdurin, for the use of this language less general, more personal, more secret, than their everyday speech inspires in those who use it among themselves a sense of self-importance which is always accompanied by a certain satisfaction. After this moment of mirth: “But if Cottard talks,” Mme. Verdurin objected. “He will not talk.” He did mention it, to myself at least, for it was from him that I learned of this incident a few years later, actually at the funeral of Saniette. I was sorry that I had not known of it earlier. For one thing the knowledge would have brought me more rapidly to the idea that we ought never to feel resentment towards other people, ought never to judge them by some memory of an unkind action, for we do not know all the good that, at other moments, their hearts may have sincerely desired and realised; no doubt the evil form which we have established once and for all will recur, but the heart is far more rich than that, has many other forms that will recur, also, to these people, whose kindness we refuse to admit because of the occasion on which they behaved badly. Furthermore, this revelation by Cottard must inevitably have had an effect upon me, because by altering my opinion of the Verdurins, this revelation, had it been made to me earlier, would have dispelled the suspicions that I had formed as to the part that the Verdurins might be playing between Albertine and myself, would have dispelled them, wrongly perhaps as it happened, for if M. Verdurin — whom I supposed, with increasing certainty, to be the most malicious man alive — had certain virtues, he was nevertheless tormenting to the point of the most savage persecution, and so jealous of his domination over the little clan as not to shrink from the basest falsehoods, from the fomentation of the most unjustified hatreds, in order to

sever any ties between the faithful which had not as their sole object the strengthening of the little group. He was a man capable of disinterested action, of unostentatious generosity, that does not necessarily mean a man of feeling, nor a pleasant man, nor a scrupulous, nor a truthful, nor always a good man. A partial goodness, in which there persisted, perhaps, a trace of the family whom my great-aunt had known, existed probably in him in view of this action before I discovered it, as America or the North Pole existed before Columbus or Peary. Nevertheless, at the moment of my discovery, M. Verdurin's nature offered me a new and unimagined aspect; and so I am brought up against the difficulty of presenting a permanent image as well of a character as of societies and passions. For it changes no less than they, and if we seek to portray what is relatively unchanging in it, we see it present in succession different aspects (implying that it cannot remain still but keeps moving) to the disconcerted artist.

Chapter 3 — Flight of Albertine

Seeing how late it was, and fearing that Albertine might be growing impatient, I asked Brichot, as we left the Verdurins' party, to be so kind as to drop me at my door. My carriage would then take him home. He congratulated me upon going straight home like this (unaware that a girl was waiting for me in the house), and upon ending so early, and so wisely, an evening of which, on the contrary, all that I had done was to postpone the actual beginning. Then he spoke to me about M. de Charlus. The latter would doubtless have been stupefied had he heard the Professor, who was so kind to him, the Professor who always assured him: "I never repeat anything," speaking of him and of his life without the slightest reserve. And Brichot's indignant amazement would perhaps have been no less sincere if M. de Charlus had said to him: "I am told that you have been speaking evil of me." Brichot did indeed feel an affection for M. de Charlus and, if he had had to call to mind some conversation that had turned upon him, would have been far more likely to remember the friendly feeling that he had shewn for the Baron, while he said the same things about him that everyone was saying, than to remember the things that he had said. He would not have thought that he was lying if he had said: "I who speak of you in so friendly a spirit," since he did feel a friendly spirit while he was speaking of M. de Charlus. The Baron had above all for Brichot the charm which the Professor demanded before everything else in his social existence, and which was that of furnishing real examples of what he had long supposed to be an invention of the poets. Brichot, who had often expounded the second Eclogue of Virgil without really knowing whether its fiction had any basis in reality, found later on in conversing with Charlus some of the pleasure which he knew that his masters, M. Mérimée and M. Renan, his colleague M. Maspéro had felt, when travelling in Spain, Palestine, and Egypt, upon recognising in the scenery and the contemporary peoples of Spain, Palestine and Egypt, the setting and the invariable actors of the ancient scenes which they themselves had expounded in their books. "Be it said without offence to that knight of noble lineage," Brichot declared to me in the carriage that was taking us home, "he is simply prodigious when he illustrates

his satanic catechism with a distinctly Bedlamite vigour and the persistence, I was going to say the candour, of Spanish whitewash and of a returned émigré. I can assure you, if I dare express myself like Mgr. d'Hulst, I am by no means bored upon the days when I receive a visit from that feudal lord who, seeking to defend Adonis against our age of miscreants, has followed the instincts of his race, and, in all sodomist innocence, has gone crusading." I listened to Brichot, and I was not alone with him. As, for that matter, I had never ceased to feel since I left home that evening, I felt myself, in however obscure a fashion, tied fast to the girl who was at that moment in her room. Even when I was talking to some one or other at the Verdurins', I had felt, confusedly, that she was by my side, I had that vague impression of her that we have of our own limbs, and if I happened to think of her it was as we think, with disgust at being bound to it in complete subjection, of our own body. "And what a fund of scandal," Brichot went on, "sufficient to supply all the appendices of the *Causeries du Lundi*, is the conversation of that apostle. Imagine that I have learned from him that the ethical treatise which I had always admired as the most splendid moral composition of our age was inspired in our venerable colleague X by a young telegraph messenger. Let us not hesitate to admit that my eminent friend omitted to give us the name of this ephebe in the course of his demonstrations. He has shewn in so doing more human respect, or, if you prefer, less gratitude than Phidias who inscribed the name of the athlete whom he loved upon the ring of his Olympian Zeus. The Baron had not heard that story. Needless to say, it appealed to his orthodox mind. You can readily imagine that whenever I have to discuss with my colleague a candidate's thesis, I shall find in his dialectic, which for that matter is extremely subtle, the additional savour which spicy revelations added, for Sainte-Beuve, to the insufficiently confidential writings of Chateaubriand. From our colleague, who is a goldmine of wisdom but whose gold is not legal tender, the telegraph-boy passed into the hands of the Baron, 'all perfectly proper, of course,' (you ought to hear his voice when he says it). And as this Satan is the most obliging of men, he has found his protégé a post in the Colonies, from which the young man, who has a sense of gratitude, sends him from time to time the most excellent fruit. The Baron offers these to his distinguished friends; some of the young man's pineapples appeared quite recently on the table at Quai Conti, drawing from Mme. Verdurin, who at that moment put no malice into her words: 'You must have an uncle or a nephew in America, M. de Charlus, to get pineapples like these!' I admit that if I had known the truth then I should have eaten them with a certain gaiety, repeating to

myself *in petto* the opening lines of an Ode of Horace which Diderot loved to recall. In fact, like my colleague Boissier, strolling from the Palatine to Tibur, I derive from the Baron's conversation a singularly more vivid and more savoury idea of the writers of the Augustan age. Let us not even speak of those of the Decadence, nor let us hark back to the Greeks, although I have said to that excellent Baron that in his company I felt like Plato in the house of Aspasia. To tell the truth, I had considerably enlarged the scale of the two characters and, as La Fontaine says, my example was taken 'from lesser animals.' However it be, you do not, I imagine, suppose that the Baron took offence. Never have I seen him so ingenuously delighted. A childish excitement made him depart from his aristocratic phlegm. 'What flatterers all these Sorbonnards are!' he exclaimed with rapture. 'To think that I should have had to wait until my age before being compared to Aspasia! An old image like me! Oh, my youth!' I should like you to have seen him as he said that, outrageously powdered as he always is, and, at his age, scented like a young coxcomb. All the same, beneath his genealogical obsessions, the best fellow in the world. For all these reasons, I should be distressed were this evening's rupture to prove final. What did surprise me was the way in which the young man turned upon him. His manner towards the Baron has been, for some time past, that of a violent partisan, of a feudal vassal, which scarcely betokened such an insurrection. I hope that, in any event, even if (*Dii omen avertant*) the Baron were never to return to Quai Conti, this schism is not going to involve myself. Each of us derives too much advantage from the exchange that we make of my feeble stock of learning with his experience." (We shall see that if M. de Charlus, after having hoped in vain that Brichot would bring Morel back to him, shewed no violent rancour against him, at any rate his affection for the Professor vanished so completely as to allow him to judge him without any indulgence.) "And I swear to you that the exchange is so much in my favour that when the Baron yields up to me what his life has taught him, I am unable to endorse the opinion of Sylvestre Bonnard that a library is still the best place in which to ponder the dream of life."

We had now reached my door. I got out of the carriage to give the driver Brichot's address. From the pavement, I could see the window of Albertine's room, that window, formerly quite black, at night, when she was not staying in the house, which the electric light inside, dissected by the slats of the shutters, striped from top to bottom with parallel bars of gold. This magic scroll, clear as it was to myself, tracing before my tranquil mind precise images, near at hand, of which I should presently be taking possession, was completely invisible to

Brichot who had remained in the carriage, almost blind, and would moreover have been completely incomprehensible to him could he have seen it, since, like the friends who called upon me before dinner, when Albertine had returned from her drive, the Professor was unaware that a girl who was all my own was waiting for me in a bedroom adjoining mine. The carriage drove on. I remained for a moment alone upon the pavement. To be sure, these luminous rays which I could see from below and which to anyone else would have seemed merely superficial, I endowed with the utmost consistency, plenitude, solidity, in view of all the significance that I placed behind them, in a treasure unsuspected by the rest of the world which I had concealed there and from which those horizontal rays emanated, a treasure if you like, but a treasure in exchange for which I had forfeited my freedom, my solitude, my thought. If Albertine had not been there, and indeed if I had merely been in search of pleasure, I would have gone to demand it of unknown women, into whose life I should have attempted to penetrate, at Venice perhaps, or at least in some corner of nocturnal Paris. But now all that I had to do when the time came for me to receive caresses, was not to set forth upon a journey, was not even to leave my own house, but to return there. And to return there not to find myself alone, and, after taking leave of the friends who furnished me from outside with food for thought, to find myself at any rate compelled to seek it in myself, but to be on the contrary less alone than when I was at the Verdurins', welcomed as I should be by the person to whom I abdicated, to whom I handed over most completely my own person, without having for an instant the leisure to think of myself nor even requiring the effort, since she would be by my side, to think of her. So that as I raised my eyes to look for the last time from outside at the window of the room in which I should presently find myself, I seemed to behold the luminous gates which were about to close behind me and of which I myself had forged, for an eternal slavery, the unyielding bars of gold.

Our engagement had assumed the form of a criminal trial and gave Albertine the timidity of a guilty party. Now she changed the conversation whenever it turned upon people, men or women, who were not of mature years. It was when she had not yet suspected that I was jealous of her that I could have asked her to tell me what I wanted to know. We ought always to take advantage of that period. It is then that our mistress tells us of her pleasures and even of the means by which she conceals them from other people. She would no longer have admitted to me now as she had admitted at Balbec (partly because it was true, partly in order to excuse herself for not making her affection for myself more

evident, for I had already begun to weary her even then, and she had gathered from my kindness to her that she need not shew it to me as much as to other men in order to obtain more from me than from them), she would no longer have admitted to me now as she had admitted then: “I think it stupid to let people see that one is in love; I’m just the opposite, as soon as a person appeals to me, I pretend not to take any notice of him. In that way, nobody knows anything about it.”

What, it was the same Albertine of to-day, with her pretensions to frankness and indifference to all the world who had told me this! She would never have informed me of such a rule of conduct now! She contented herself when she was talking to me with applying it, by saying of somebody or other who might cause me anxiety: “Oh, I don’t know, I never noticed them, they don’t count.” And from time to time, to anticipate discoveries which I might make, she would proffer those confessions which their accent, before one knows the reality which they are intended to alter, to render innocent, denounces already as being falsehoods.

Albertine had never told me that she suspected me of being jealous of her, preoccupied with everything that she did. The only words — and that, I must add, was long ago — which we had exchanged with regard to jealousy seemed to prove the opposite. I remembered that, on a fine moonlight evening, towards the beginning of our intimacy, on one of the first occasions when I had accompanied her home, and when I would have been just as glad not to do so and to leave her in order to run after other girls, I had said to her: “You know, if I am offering to take you home, it is not from jealousy; if you have anything else to do, I shall slip discreetly away.” And she had replied: “Oh, I know quite well that you aren’t jealous and that it’s all the same to you, but I’ve nothing else to do except to stay with you.” Another occasion was at la Raspelière, when M. de Charlus, not without casting a covert glance at Morel, had made a display of friendly gallantry toward Albertine; I had said to her: “Well, he gave you a good hug, I hope.” And as I had added half ironically: “I suffered all the torments of jealousy,” Albertine, employing the language proper either to the vulgar class from which she sprang or to that other, more vulgar still, which she frequented, replied: “What a fusspot you are! I know quite well you’re not jealous. For one thing, you told me so, and besides, it’s perfectly obvious, get along with you!” She had never told me since then that she had changed her mind; but there must all the same have developed in her, upon that subject, a number of fresh ideas, which she concealed from me but which an accident might, in spite of her,

betray, for this evening when, having gone indoors, after going to fetch her from her own room and taking her to mine, I had said to her (with a certain awkwardness which I did not myself understand, for I had indeed told Albertine that I was going to pay a call, and had said that I did not know where, perhaps upon Mme. de Villeparisis, perhaps upon Mme. de Guermantes, perhaps upon Mme. de Cambremer; it is true that I had not actually mentioned the Verdurins): "Guess where I have been, at the Verdurins'," I had barely had time to utter the words before Albertine, a look of utter consternation upon her face, had answered me in words which seemed to explode of their own accord with a force which she was unable to contain: "I thought as much." "I didn't know that you would be annoyed by my going to see the Verdurins." It is true that she did not tell me that she was annoyed, but that was obvious; it is true also that I had not said to myself that she would be annoyed. And yet in the face of the explosion of her wrath, as in the face of those events which a sort of retrospective second sight makes us imagine that we have already known in the past, it seemed to me that I could never have expected anything else. "Annoyed? What do you suppose I care, where you've been. It's all the same to me. Wasn't Mlle. Vinteuil there?" Losing all control of myself at these words: "You never told me that you had met her the other day," I said to her, to shew her that I was better informed than she knew. Believing that the person whom I reproached her for having met without telling me was Mme. Verdurin, and not, as I meant to imply, Mlle. Vinteuil: "Did I meet her?" she inquired with a pensive air, addressing at once herself as though she were seeking to collect her fugitive memories and myself as though it were I that ought to have told her of the meeting; and no doubt in order that I might say what I knew, perhaps also in order to gain time before making a difficult response. But I was preoccupied with the thought of Mlle. Vinteuil, and still more with a dread which had already entered my mind but which now gripped me in a violent clutch, the dread that Albertine might be longing for freedom. When I came home I had supposed that Mme. Verdurin had purely and simply invented, to enhance her own renown, the story of her having expected Mlle. Vinteuil and her friend, so that I was quite calm. Albertine, merely by saying: "Wasn't Mlle. Vinteuil there?" had shewn me that I had not been mistaken in my original suspicion; but anyhow my mind was set at rest in that quarter for the future, since by giving up her plan of visiting the Verdurins' and going instead to the Trocadéro, Albertine had sacrificed Mlle. Vinteuil. But, at the Trocadéro, from which, for that matter, she had come away in order to go for a drive with myself, there had been as a reason to make her leave it the presence of Léa. As I

thought of this I mentioned Léa by name, and Albertine, distrustful, supposing that I had perhaps heard something more, took the initiative and exclaimed volubly, not without partly concealing her face: “I know her quite well; we went last year, some of my friends and I, to see her act: after the performance we went behind to her dressing-room, she changed in front of us. It was most interesting.” Then my mind was compelled to relinquish Mlle. Vinteuil and, in a desperate effort, racing through the abysses of possible reconstructions, attached itself to the actress, to that evening when Albertine had gone behind to her dressing-room. On the other hand, after all the oaths that she had sworn to me, and in so truthful a tone, after the so complete sacrifice of her freedom, how was I to suppose that there was any evil in all this affair? And yet, were not my suspicions feelers pointing in the direction of the truth, since if she had made me a sacrifice of the Verdurins in order to go to the Trocadéro, nevertheless at the Verdurins’ Mlle. Vinteuil was expected, and, at the Trocadéro, there had been Léa, who seemed to me to be disturbing me without cause and whom all the same, in that speech which I had not demanded of her, she admitted that she had known upon a larger scale than that of my fears, in circumstances that were indeed shady? For what could have induced her to go behind like that to that dressing-room? If I ceased to suffer because of Mlle. Vinteuil when I suffered because of Léa, those two tormentors of my day, it was either on account of the inability of my mind to picture too many scenes at one time, or on account of the interference of my nervous emotions of which my jealousy was but the echo. I could induce from them only that she had belonged no more to Léa than to Mlle. Vinteuil and that I was thinking of Léa only because the thought of her still caused me pain. But the fact that my twin jealousies were dying down — to revive now and then, alternately — does not, in any way, mean that they did not on the contrary correspond each to some truth of which I had had a foreboding, that of these women I must not say to myself none, but all. I say a foreboding, for I could not project myself to all the points of time and space which I should have had to visit, and besides, what instinct would have given me the coordinate of one with another necessary to enable me to surprise Albertine, here, at one moment, with Léa, or with the Balbec girls, or with that friend of Mme. Bontemps whom she had jostled, or with the girl on the tennis-court who had nudged her with her elbow, or with Mlle. Vinteuil?

I must add that what had appeared to me most serious, and had struck me as most symptomatic, was that she had forestalled my accusation, that she had said to me: “Wasn’t Mlle. Vinteuil there?” to which I had replied in the most brutal

fashion imaginable: “You never told me that you had met her.” Thus as soon as I found Albertine no longer obliging, instead of telling her that I was sorry, I became malicious. There was then a moment in which I felt a sort of hatred of her which only intensified my need to keep her in captivity.

“Besides,” I said to her angrily, “there are plenty of other things which you hide from me, even the most trivial things, such as for instance when you went for three days to Balbec, I mention it in passing.” I had added the words “I mention it in passing” as a complement to “even the most trivial things” so that if Albertine said to me “What was there wrong about my trip to Balbec?” I might be able to answer: “Why, I’ve quite forgotten. I get so confused about the things people tell me, I attach so little importance to them.” And indeed if I referred to those three days which she had spent in an excursion with the chauffeur to Balbec, from where her postcards had reached me after so long an interval, I referred to them purely at random and regretted that I had chosen so bad an example, for in fact, as they had barely had time to go there and return, it was certainly the one excursion in which there had not even been time for the interpolation of a meeting at all protracted with anybody. But Albertine supposed, from what I had just said, that I was fully aware of the real facts, and had merely concealed my knowledge from her; so she had been convinced, for some time past, that, in one way or another, I was having her followed, or in short was somehow or other, as she had said the week before to Andrée, better informed than herself about her own life. And so she interrupted me with a wholly futile admission, for certainly I suspected nothing of what she now told me, and I was on the other hand appalled, so vast can the disparity be between the truth which a liar has disguised and the idea which, from her lies, the man who is in love with the said liar has formed of the truth. Scarcely had I uttered the words: “When you went for three days to Balbec, I mention it in passing,” before Albertine, cutting me short, declared as a thing that was perfectly natural: “You mean to say that I never went to Balbec at all? Of course I didn’t! And I have always wondered why you pretended to believe that I had. All the same, there was no harm in it. The driver had some business of his own for three days. He didn’t like to mention it to you. And so, out of kindness to him (it was my doing! Besides it is always I that have to bear the brunt), I invented a trip to Balbec. He simply put me down at Auteuil, with my friend in the Rue de l’Assomption, where I spent the three days bored to tears. You see it is not a serious matter, there’s nothing broken. I did indeed begin to suppose that you perhaps knew all about it, when I saw how you laughed when the postcards

began to arrive, a week late. I quite see that it was absurd, and that it would have been better not to send any cards. But that wasn't my fault. I had bought the cards beforehand and given them to the driver before he dropped me at Auteuil, and then the fathead put them in his pocket and forgot about them instead of sending them on in an envelope to a friend of his near Balbec who was to forward them to you. I kept on supposing that they would turn up. He forgot all about them for five days, and instead of telling me the idiot sent them on at once to Balbec. When he did tell me, I fairly broke it over him, I can tell you! And you go and make a stupid fuss, when it's all the fault of that great fool, as a reward for my shutting myself up for three whole days, so that he might go and look after his family affairs. I didn't even venture to go out into Auteuil for fear of being seen. The only time that I did go out, I was dressed as a man, and that was a funny business. And it was just my luck, which follows me wherever I go, that the first person I came across was your Yid friend Bloch. But I don't believe it was from him that you learned that my trip to Balbec never existed except in my imagination, for he seemed not to recognise me."

I did not know what to say, not wishing to appear astonished, while I was appalled by all these lies. With a sense of horror, which gave me no desire to turn Albertine out of the house, far from it, was combined a strong inclination to burst into tears. This last was caused not by the lie itself and by the annihilation of everything that I had so stoutly believed to be true that I felt as though I were in a town that had been razed to the ground, where not a house remained standing, where the bare soil was merely heaped with rubble — but by the melancholy thought that, during those three days when she had been bored to tears in her friend's house at Auteuil, Albertine had never once felt any desire, the idea had perhaps never occurred to her to come and pay me a visit one day on the quiet, or to send a message asking me to go and see her at Auteuil. But I had not time to give myself up to these reflexions. Whatever happened, I did not wish to appear surprised. I smiled with the air of a man who knows far more than he is going to say: "But that is only one thing out of a thousand. For instance, you knew that Mlle. Vinteuil was expected at Mme. Verdurin's, this afternoon when you went to the Trocadéro." She blushed: "Yes, I knew that." "Can you swear to me that it was not in order to renew your relations with her that you wanted to go to the Verdurins'." "Why, of course I can swear. Why do you say renew, I never had any relations with her, I swear it." I was appalled to hear Albertine lie to me like this, deny the facts which her blush had made all too evident. Her mendacity appalled me. And yet, as it contained a protestation

of innocence which, almost unconsciously, I was prepared to accept, it hurt me less than her sincerity when, after I had asked her: “Can you at least swear to me that the pleasure of seeing Mlle. Vinteuil again had nothing to do with your anxiety to go this afternoon to the Verdurins’ party?” she replied: “No, that I cannot swear. It would have been a great pleasure to see Mlle. Vinteuil again.” A moment earlier, I had been angry with her because she concealed her relations with Mlle. Vinteuil, and now her admission of the pleasure that she would have felt in seeing her again turned my bones to water. For that matter, the mystery in which she had cloaked her intention of going to see the Verdurins ought to have been a sufficient proof. But I had not given the matter enough thought. Although she was now telling me the truth, why did she admit only half, it was even more stupid than it was wicked and wretched. I was so crushed that I had not the courage to insist upon this question, as to which I was not in a strong position, having no damning evidence to produce, and to recover my ascendancy, I hurriedly turned to a subject which would enable me to put Albertine to rout: “Listen, only this evening, at the Verdurins’, I learned that what you had told me about Mlle. Vinteuil...” Albertine gazed at me fixedly with a tormented air, seeking to read in my eyes how much I knew. Now, what I knew and what I was about to tell her as to Mlle. Vinteuil’s true nature, it was true that it was not at the Verdurins’ that I had learned it, but at Montjouvain long ago. Only, as I had always refrained, deliberately, from mentioning it to Albertine, I could now appear to have learned it only this evening. And I could almost feel a joy — after having felt, on the little tram, so keen an anguish — at possessing this memory of Montjouvain, which I postdated, but which would nevertheless be the unanswerable proof, a crushing blow to Albertine. This time at least, I had no need to “seem to know” and to “make Albertine speak”; I did know, I had seen through the lighted window at Montjouvain. It had been all very well for Albertine to tell me that her relations with Mlle. Vinteuil and her friend had been perfectly pure, how could she when I swore to her (and swore without lying) that I knew the habits of these two women, how could she maintain any longer that, having lived in a daily intimacy with them, calling them “my big sisters,” she had not been approached by them with suggestions which would have made her break with them, if on the contrary she had not complied? But I had no time to tell her what I knew. Albertine, imagining, as in the case of the pretended excursion to Balbec, that I had learned the truth, either from Mlle. Vinteuil, if she had been at the Verdurins’, or simply from Mme. Verdurin herself who might have mentioned her to Mlle. Vinteuil, did not allow me to speak but made a

confession, the exact opposite of what I had supposed, which nevertheless, by shewing me that she had never ceased to lie to me, caused me perhaps just as much grief (especially since I was no longer, as I said a moment ago, jealous of Mlle. Vinteuil); in short, taking the words out of my mouth, Albertine proceeded to say: “You mean to tell me that you found out this evening that I lied to you when I pretended that I had been more or less brought up by Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend. It is true that I did lie to you a little. But I felt that you despised me so, I saw too that you were so keen upon that man Vinteuil’s music that as one of my school friends — this is true, I swear to you — had been a friend of Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend, I stupidly thought that I might make myself seem interesting to you by inventing the story that I had known the girls quite well. I felt that I was boring you, that you thought me a goose, I thought that if I told you that those people used to see a lot of me, that I could easily tell you all sorts of things about Vinteuil’s work, I should acquire a little importance in your eyes, that it would draw us together. When I lie to you, it is always out of affection for you. And it needed this fatal Verdurin party to open your eyes to the truth, which has been a bit exaggerated besides. I bet, Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend told you that she did not know me. She met me at least twice at my friend’s house. But of course, I am not smart enough for people like that who have become celebrities. They prefer to say that they have never met me.” Poor Albertine, when she imagined that to tell me that she had been so intimate with Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend would postpone her own dismissal, would draw her nearer to me, she had, as so often happens, attained the truth by a different road from that which she had intended to take. Her shewing herself better informed about music than I had supposed would never have prevented me from breaking with her that evening, on the little tram; and yet it was indeed that speech, which she had made with that object, which had immediately brought about far more than the impossibility of a rupture. Only she made an error in her interpretation, not of the effect which that speech was to have, but of the cause by virtue of which it was to produce that effect, a cause which was my discovery not of her musical culture, but of her evil associations. What had abruptly drawn me to her, what was more, merged me in her was not the expectation of a pleasure — and pleasure is too strong a word, a slight interest — it was a wringing grief.

Once again I had to be careful not to keep too long a silence which might have led her to suppose that I was surprised. And so, touched by the discovery that she was so modest and had thought herself despised in the Verdurin circle, I said to her tenderly: “But, my darling, I would gladly give you several hundred

francs to let you go and play the fashionable lady wherever you please and invite M. and Mme. Verdurin to a grand dinner." Alas! Albertine was several persons in one. The most mysterious, most simple, most atrocious revealed herself in the answer which she made me with an air of disgust and the exact words to tell the truth I could not quite make out (even the opening words, for she did not finish her sentence). I succeeded in establishing them only a little later when I had guessed what was in her mind. We hear things retrospectively when we have understood them. "Thank you for nothing! Fancy spending a cent upon those old frumps, I'd a great deal rather you left me alone for once in a way so that I can go and get some one decent to break my..." As she uttered the words, her face flushed crimson, a look of terror came to her eyes, she put her hand over her mouth as though she could have thrust back the words which she had just uttered and which I had completely failed to understand. "What did you say, Albertine?" "No, nothing, I was half asleep and talking to myself." "Not a bit of it, you were wide awake." "I was thinking about asking the Verdurins to dinner, it is very good of you." "No, I mean what you said just now." She gave me endless versions, none of which agreed in the least, I do not say with her words which, being interrupted, remained vague, but with the interruption itself and the sudden flush that had accompanied it. "Come, my darling, that is not what you were going to say, otherwise why did you stop short." "Because I felt that my request was indiscreet." "What request?" "To be allowed to give a dinner-party." "No, it is not that, there is no need of discretion between you and me." "Indeed there is, we ought never to take advantage of the people we love. In any case, I swear to you that that was all." On the one hand it was still impossible for me to doubt her sworn word, on the other hand her explanations did not satisfy my critical spirit. I continued to press her. "Anyhow, you might at least have the courage to finish what you were saying, you stopped short at *break*." "No, leave me alone!" "But why?" "Because it is dreadfully vulgar, I should be ashamed to say such a thing in front of you. I don't know what I was thinking of, the words — I don't even know what they mean, I heard them used in the street one day by some very low people — just came to my lips without rhyme or reason. It had nothing to do with me or anybody else, I was simply dreaming aloud." I felt that I should extract nothing more from Albertine. She had lied to me when she had sworn, a moment ago, that what had cut her short had been a social fear of being indiscreet, since it had now become the shame of letting me hear her use a vulgar expression. Now this was certainly another lie. For when we were alone together there was no speech too perverse, no word too coarse for us to utter among our

embraces. Anyhow, it was useless to insist at that moment. But my memory remained obsessed by the word “break.” Albertine frequently spoke of ‘breaking sticks’ or ‘breaking sugar’ over some one, or would simply say: “Ah! I fairly broke it over him!” meaning “I fairly gave it to him!” But she would say this quite freely in my presence, and if it was this that she had meant to say, why had she suddenly stopped short, why had she blushed so deeply, placed her hands over her mouth, given a fresh turn to her speech, and, when she saw that I had heard the word ‘break,’ offered a false explanation. But as soon as I had abandoned the pursuit of an interrogation from which I received no response, the only thing to do was to appear to have lost interest in the matter, and, retracing my thoughts to Albertine’s reproaches of me for having gone to the Mistress’s, I said to her, very awkwardly, making indeed a sort of stupid excuse for my conduct: “Why, I had been meaning to ask you to come to the Verdurins’ party this evening,” a speech that was doubly maladroit, for if I meant it, since I had been with her all the day, why should I not have made the suggestion? Furious at my lie and emboldened by my timidity: “You might have gone on asking me for a thousand years,” she said, “I would never have consented. They are people who have always been against me, they have done everything they could to upset me. There was nothing I didn’t do for Mme. Verdurin at Balbec, and I’ve been finely rewarded. If she summoned me to her deathbed, I wouldn’t go. There are some things which it is impossible to forgive. As for you, it’s the first time you’ve treated me badly. When Françoise told me that you had gone out (she enjoyed telling me that, I don’t think), you might have knocked me down with a feather. I tried not to shew any sign, but never in my life have I been so insulted.” While she was speaking, there continued in myself, in the thoroughly alive and creative sleep of the unconscious (a sleep in which the things that barely touch us succeed in carving an impression, in which our hands take hold of the key that turns the lock, the key for which we have sought in vain), the quest of what it was that she had meant by that interrupted speech the end of which I was so anxious to know. And all of a sudden an appalling word, of which I had never dreamed, burst upon me: ‘pot.’ I cannot say that it came to me in a single flash, as when, in a long passive submission to an incomplete memory, while we try gently, cautiously, to draw it out, we remain fastened, glued to it. No, in contrast to the ordinary process of my memory, there were, I think, two parallel quests; the first took into account not merely Albertine’s words, but her look of extreme annoyance when I had offered her a sum of money with which to give a grand dinner, a look which seemed to say: “Thank

you, the idea of spending money upon things that bore me, when without money I could do things that I enjoy doing!" And it was perhaps the memory of this look that she had given me which made me alter my method in discovering the end of her unfinished sentence. Until then I had been hypnotised by her last word: 'break,' she had meant to say break what? Break wood? No. Sugar? No. Break, break, break. And all at once the look that she had given me at the moment of my suggestion that she should give a dinner-party, turned me back to the words that had preceded. And immediately I saw that she had not said 'break' but 'get some one to break.' Horror! It was this that she would have preferred. Twofold horror! For even the vilest of prostitutes, who consents to that sort of thing, or desires it, does not employ to the man who yields to her desires that appalling expression. She would feel the degradation too great. To a woman alone, if she loves women, she says this, as an excuse for giving herself presently to a man. Albertine had not been lying when she told me that she was speaking in a dream. Distracted, impulsive, not realising that she was with me, she had, with a shrug of her shoulders, begun to speak as she would have spoken to one of those women, to one, perhaps, of my young budding girls. And abruptly recalled to reality, crimson with shame, thrusting back between her lips what she was going to say, plunged in despair, she had refused to utter another word. I had not a moment to lose if I was not to let her see how desperate I was. But already, after my sudden burst of rage, the tears came to my eyes. As at Balbec, on the night that followed her revelation of her friendship with the Vinteuil pair, I must immediately invent a plausible excuse for my grief, and one that was at the same time capable of creating so profound an effect upon Albertine as to give me a few days' respite before I came to a decision. And so, at the moment when she told me that she had never received such an insult as that which I had inflicted upon her by going out, that she would rather have died than hear Françoise tell her of my departure, when, as though irritated by her absurd susceptibility, I was on the point of telling her that what I had done was nothing, that there was nothing that could offend her in my going out — as, during these moments, moving on a parallel course, my unconscious quest for what she had meant to say after the word 'break' had proved successful, and the despair into which my discovery flung me could not be completely hidden, instead of defending, I accused myself. "My little Albertine," I said to her in a gentle voice which was drowned in my first tears, "I might tell you that you are mistaken, that what I did this evening is nothing, but I should be lying; it is you that are right, you have realised the truth, my poor child, which is that six

months ago, three months ago, when I was still so fond of you, never would I have done such a thing. It is a mere nothing, and it is enormous, because of the immense change in my heart of which it is the sign. And since you have detected this change which I hoped to conceal from you, that leads me on to tell you this: My little Albertine" (and here I addressed her with a profound gentleness and melancholy), "don't you see, the life that you are leading here is boring to you, it is better that we should part, and as the best partings are those that are ended at once, I ask you, to cut short the great sorrow that I am bound to feel, to bid me good-bye to-night and to leave in the morning without my seeing you again, while I am asleep." She appeared stupefied, still incredulous and already disconsolate: "To-morrow? You really mean it?" And notwithstanding the anguish that I felt in speaking of our parting as though it were already in the past — partly perhaps because of that very anguish — I began to give Albertine the most precise instructions as to certain things which she would have to do after she left the house. And passing from one request to another, I soon found myself entering into the minutest details. "Be so kind," I said, with infinite melancholy, "as to send me back that book of Bergotte's which is at your aunt's. There is no hurry about it, in three days, in a week, whenever you like, but remember that I don't want to have to write and ask you for it, that would be too painful. We have been happy together, we feel now that we should be unhappy." "Don't say that we feel that we should be unhappy," Albertine interrupted me, "don't say 'we,' it is only you who feel that." "Yes, very well, you or I, as you like, for one reason or another. But it is absurdly late, you must go to bed — we have decided to part to-night." "Pardon me, you have decided, and I obey you because I do not wish to cause you any trouble." "Very well, it is I who have decided, but that makes it none the less painful for me. I do not say that it will be painful for long, you know that I have not the faculty of remembering things for long, but for the first few days I shall be so miserable without you. And so I feel that it will be useless to revive the memory with letters, we must end everything at once." "Yes, you are right," she said to me with a crushed air, which was enhanced by the strain of fatigue upon her features due to the lateness of the hour; "rather than have one finger chopped off, then another, I prefer to lay my head on the block at once." "Heavens, I am appalled when I think how late I am keeping you out of bed, it is madness. However, it's the last night! You will have plenty of time to sleep for the rest of your life." And as I suggested to her thus that it was time to say good night I sought to postpone the moment when she would have said it. "Would you like me, as a distraction during the first few days, to tell

Bloch to send his cousin Esther to the place where you will be staying, he will do that for me." "I don't know why you say that" (I had said it in an endeavour to wrest a confession from Albertine); "there is only one person for whom I care, which is yourself," Albertine said to me, and her words filled me with comfort. But, the next moment, what a blow she dealt me!"I remember, of course, that I did give Esther my photograph because she kept on asking me for it and I saw that she would like to have it, but as for feeling any liking for her or wishing ever to see her again..." And yet Albertine was of so frivolous a nature that she went on: "If she wants to see me, it is all the same to me, she is very nice, but I don't care in the least either way." And so when I had spoken to her of the photograph of Esther which Bloch had sent me (and which I had not even received when I mentioned it to Albertine) my mistress had gathered that Bloch had shewn me a photograph of herself, given by her to Esther. In my worst suppositions, I had never imagined that any such intimacy could have existed between Albertine and Esther. Albertine had found no words in which to answer me when I spoke of the photograph. And now, supposing me, wrongly, to be in the know, she thought it better to confess. I was appalled. "And, Albertine, let me ask you to do me one more favour, never attempt to see me again. If at any time, as may happen in a year, in two years, in three years, we should find ourselves in the same town, keep away from me." Then, seeing that she did not reply in the affirmative to my prayer: "My Albertine, never see me again in this world. It would hurt me too much. For I was really fond of you, you know. Of course, when I told you the other day that I wanted to see the friend again whom I mentioned to you at Balbec, you thought that it was all settled. Not at all, I assure you, it was quite immaterial to me. You were convinced that I had long made up my mind to leave you, that my affection was all make-believe." "No indeed, you are mad, I never thought so," she said sadly. "You are right, you must never think so, I did genuinely feel for you, not love perhaps, but a great, a very great affection, more than you can imagine." "I can, indeed. And do you suppose that I don't love you!" "It hurts me terribly to have to give you up." "It hurts me a thousand times more," replied Albertine. A moment earlier I had felt that I could no longer restrain the tears that came welling up in my eyes. And these tears did not spring from at all the same sort of misery which I had felt long ago when I said to Gilberte: "It is better that we should not see one another again, life is dividing us." No doubt when I wrote this to Gilberte, I said to myself that when I should be in love not with her but with another, the excess of my love would diminish that which I might perhaps have been able to inspire, as

though two people must inevitably have only a certain quantity of love at their disposal; of which the surplus taken by one is subtracted from the other, and that from her too, as from Gilberte, I should be doomed to part. But the situation was entirely different for several reasons, the first of which (and it had, in its turn, given rise to the others) was that the lack of will-power which my grandmother and mother had observed in me with alarm, at Combray, and before which each of them, so great is the energy with which a sick man imposes his weakness upon others, had capitulated in turn, this lack of will-power had gone on increasing at an ever accelerated pace. When I felt that my company was boring Gilberte, I had still enough strength left to give her up; I had no longer the same strength when I had made a similar discovery with regard to Albertine, and could think only of keeping her at any cost to myself. With the result that, whereas I wrote to Gilberte that I would not see her again, meaning quite sincerely not to see her, I said this to Albertine as a pure falsehood, and in the hope of bringing about a reconciliation. Thus we presented each to the other an appearance which was widely different from the reality. And no doubt it is always so when two people stand face to face, since each of them is ignorant of a part of what exists in the other (even what he knows, he can understand only in part) and since both of them display what is the least personal thing about them, whether because they have not explored themselves and regard as negligible what is most important, or because insignificant advantages which have no place in themselves seem to them more important and more flattering. But in love this misunderstanding is carried to its supreme pitch because, except perhaps when we are children, we endeavour to make the appearance that we assume, rather than reflect exactly what is in our mind, be what our mind considers best adapted to enable us to obtain what we desire, which in my case, since my return to the house, was to be able to keep Albertine as docile as she had been in the past, was that she should not in her irritation ask me for a greater freedom, which I intended to give her one day, but which at this moment, when I was afraid of her cravings for independence, would have made me too jealous. After a certain age, from self-esteem and from sagacity, it is to the things which we most desire that we pretend to attach no importance. But in love, our mere sagacity — which for that matter is probably not the true wisdom — forces us speedily enough to this genius for duplicity. All that I had dreamed, as a boy, to be the sweetest thing in love, what had seemed to me to be the very essence of love, was to pour out freely, before the feet of her whom I loved, my affection, my gratitude for her kindness, my longing for a perpetual life together. But I had become only too

well aware, from my own experience and from that of my friends, that the expression of such sentiments is far from being contagious. Once we have observed this, we no longer ‘let ourself go’; I had taken good care in the afternoon not to tell Albertine how grateful I was to her that she had not remained at the Trocadéro. And to-night, having been afraid that she might leave me, I had feigned a desire to part from her, a feint which for that matter was not suggested to me merely by the enlightenment which I supposed myself to have received from my former loves and was seeking to bring to the service of this.

The fear that Albertine was perhaps going to say to me: “I wish to be allowed to go out by myself at certain hours, I wish to be able to stay away for a night,” in fact any request of that sort, which I did not attempt to define, but which alarmed me, this fear had entered my mind for a moment before and during the Verdurins’ party. But it had been dispelled, contradicted moreover by the memory of how Albertine assured me incessantly how happy she was with me. The intention to leave me, if it existed in Albertine, was made manifest only in an obscure fashion, in certain sorrowful glances, certain gestures of impatience, speeches which meant nothing of the sort, but which, if one analysed them (and there was not even any need of analysis, for we can immediately detect the language of passion, the lower orders themselves understand these speeches which can be explained only by vanity, rancour, jealousy, unexpressed as it happens, but revealing itself at once to the listener by an intuitive faculty which, like the ‘good sense’ of which Descartes speaks, is the most widespread thing in the world), revealed the presence in her of a sentiment which she concealed and which might lead her to form plans for another life apart from myself. Just as this intention was not expressed in her speech in a logical fashion, so the presentiment of this intention, which I had felt tonight, remained just as vague in myself. I continued to live by the hypothesis which admitted as true everything that Albertine told me. But it may be that in myself, during this time, a wholly contrary hypothesis, of which I refused to think, never left me; this is all the more probable since, otherwise, I should have felt no hesitation in telling Albertine that I had been to the Verdurins’, and, indeed, my want of astonishment at her anger would not have been comprehensible. So that what probably existed in me was the idea of an Albertine entirely opposite to that which my reason formed of her, to that also which her own speech portrayed, an Albertine that all the same was not wholly invented, since she was like a prophetic mirror of certain impulses that occurred in her, such as her ill humour at my having gone to the Verdurins’. Besides, for a long time past, my frequent

anguish, my fear of telling Albertine that I loved her, all this corresponded to another hypothesis which explained many things besides, and had also this to be said for it, that, if one adopted the first hypothesis, the second became more probable, for by allowing myself to give way to effusive tenderness for Albertine, I obtained from her nothing but irritation (to which moreover she assigned a different cause).

If I analyse my feelings by this hypothesis, by the invariable system of retorts expressing the exact opposite of what I was feeling, I can be quite certain that if, to-night, I told her that I was going to send her away, it was — at first, quite unconsciously — because I was afraid that she might desire her freedom (I should have been put to it to say what this freedom was that made me tremble, but anyhow some state of freedom in which she would have been able to deceive me, or, at least, I should no longer have been able to be certain that she was not) and wished to shew her, from pride, from cunning, that I was very far from fearing anything of the sort, as I had done already, at Balbec, when I was anxious that she should have a good opinion of me, and later on, when I was anxious that she should not have time to feel bored with me. In short, the objection that might be offered to this second hypothesis — which I did not formulate — that everything that Albertine said to me indicated on the contrary that the life which she preferred was the life in my house, resting, reading, solitude, a loathing of Sapphic loves, and so forth, need not be considered seriously. For if on her part Albertine had chosen to interpret my feelings from what I said to her, she would have learned the exact opposite of the truth, since I never expressed a desire to part from her except when I was unable to do without her, and at Balbec I had confessed to her that I was in love with another woman, first Andrée, then a mysterious stranger, on the two occasions on which jealousy had revived my love for Albertine. My words, therefore, did not in the least reflect my sentiments. If the reader has no more than a faint impression of these, that is because, as narrator, I reveal my sentiments to him at the same time as I repeat my words. But if I concealed the former and he were acquainted only with the latter, my actions, so little in keeping with my speech, would so often give him the impression of strange revulsions of feeling that he would think me almost mad. A procedure which would not, for that matter, be much more false than that which I have adopted, for the images which prompted me to action, so opposite to those which were portrayed in my speech, were at that moment extremely obscure; I was but imperfectly aware of the nature which guided my actions; at present, I have a clear conception of its subjective truth. As for its objective

truth, that is to say whether the inclinations of that nature grasped more exactly than my reason Albertine's true intentions, whether I was right to trust to that nature or on the contrary it did not corrupt Albertine's intentions instead of making them plain, that I find difficult to say. That vague fear which I had felt at the Verdurins' that Albertine might leave me had been at once dispelled. When I returned home, it had been with the feeling that I myself was a captive, not with that of finding a captive in the house. But the dispelled fear had gripped me all the more violently when, at the moment of my informing Albertine that I had been to the Verdurins', I saw her face veiled with a look of enigmatic irritation which moreover was not making itself visible for the first time. I knew quite well that it was only the crystallisation in the flesh of reasoned complaints, of ideas clear to the person who forms and does not express them, a synthesis rendered visible but not therefore rational, which the man who gathers its precious residue from the face of his beloved, endeavours in his turn, so that he may understand what is occurring in her, to reduce by analysis to its intellectual elements. The approximate equation of that unknown quantity which Albertine's thoughts were to me, had given me, more or less: "I knew his suspicions, I was sure that he would attempt to verify them, and so that I might not hinder him, he has worked out his little plan in secret." But if this was the state of mind (and she had never expressed it to me) in which Albertine was living, must she not regard with horror, find the strength fail her to carry on, might she not at any moment decide to terminate an existence in which, if she was, in desire at any rate, guilty, she must feel herself exposed, tracked down, prevented from ever yielding to her instincts, without thereby disarming my jealousy, and if innocent in intention and fact, she had had every right, for some time past, to feel discouraged, seeing that never once, from Balbec, where she had shewn so much perseverance in avoiding the risk of her ever being left alone with Andrée, until this very day when she had agreed not to go to the Verdurins' and not to stay at the Trocadéro, had she succeeded in regaining my confidence. All the more so as I could not say that her behaviour was not exemplary. If at Balbec, when anyone mentioned girls who had a bad style, she used often to copy their laughter, their wrigglings, their general manner, which was a torture to me because of what I supposed that it must mean to her girl friends, now that she knew my opinion on the subject, as soon as anyone made an allusion to things of that sort, she ceased to take part in the conversation, not only in speech but with the expression on her face. Whether it was in order not to contribute her share to the slanders that were being uttered about some woman or other, or for a quite different reason, the

only thing that was noticeable then, upon those so mobile features, was that from the moment in which the topic was broached they had made their inattention evident, while preserving exactly the same expression that they had worn a moment earlier. And this immobility of even a light expression was as heavy as a silence; it would have been impossible to say that she blamed, that she approved, that she knew or did not know about these things. None of her features bore any relation to anything save another feature. Her nose, her mouth, her eyes formed a perfect harmony, isolated from everything else; she looked like a pastel, and seemed to have no more heard what had just been said than if it had been uttered in front of a portrait by Latour.

My serfdom, of which I had already been conscious when, as I gave the driver Brichot's address, I caught sight of the light in her window, had ceased to weigh upon me shortly afterwards, when I saw that Albertine appeared so cruelly conscious of her own. And in order that it might seem to her less burdensome, that she might not decide to break her bonds of her own accord, I had felt that the most effective plan was to give her the impression that it would not be permanent and that I myself was looking forward to its termination. Seeing that my feint had proved successful, I might well have thought myself fortunate, in the first place because what I had so greatly dreaded, Albertine's determination (as I supposed) to leave me, was shewn to be non-existent, and secondly, because, quite apart from the object that I had had in mind, the very success of my feint, by proving that I was something more to Albertine than a scorned lover, whose jealousy is flouted, all of his ruses detected in advance, endowed our love afresh with a sort of virginity, revived for it the days in which she could still, at Balbec, so readily believe that I was in love with another woman. For she would probably not have believed that any longer, but she was taking seriously my feigned determination to part from her now and for ever. She appeared to suspect that the cause of our parting might be something that had happened at the Verdurins'. Feeling a need to soothe the anxiety into which I was worked by my pretence of a rupture, I said to her: "Albertine, can you swear that you have never lied to me?" She gazed fixedly into the air before replying: "Yes, that is to say no. I ought not to have told you that Andrée was greatly taken with Bloch, we never met him." "Then why did you say so?" "Because I was afraid that you had believed other stories about her, that's all." I told her that I had met a dramatist who was a great friend of Léa, and to whom Léa had told some strange things. I hoped by telling her this to make her suppose that I knew a great deal more than I cared to say about Bloch's cousin's friend. She stared

once again into vacancy and then said: “I ought not, when I spoke to you just now about Léa, to have kept from you a three weeks’ trip that I took with her once. But I knew you so slightly in those days!” “It was before Balbec?” “Before the second time, yes.” And that very morning, she had told me that she did not know Léa, and, only a moment ago, that she had met her once only in her dressing-room! I watched a tongue of flame seize and devour in an instant a romance which I had spent millions of minutes in writing. To what end? To what end? Of course I understood that Albertine had revealed these facts to me because she thought that I had learned them indirectly from Léa; and that there was no reason why a hundred similar facts should not exist. I realised thus that Albertine’s utterances, when one interrogated her, did not ever contain an atom of truth, that the truth she allowed to escape only in spite of herself, as though by a sudden combination in her mind of the facts which she had previously been determined to conceal with the belief that I had been informed of them. “But two things are nothing,” I said to Albertine, “let us have as many as four, so that you may leave me some memories of you. What other revelations have you got for me?” Once again she stared into vacancy. To what belief in a future life was she adapting her falsehood, with what Gods less unstable than she had supposed was she seeking to ally herself? This cannot have been an easy matter, for her silence and the fixity of her gaze continued for some time. “No, nothing else,” she said at length. And, notwithstanding my persistence, she adhered, easily now, to “nothing else.” And what a lie! For, from the moment when she had acquired those tastes until the day when she had been shut up in my house, how many times, in how many places, on how many excursions must she have gratified them! The daughters of Gomorrah are at once so rare and so frequent that, in any crowd of people, one does not pass unperceived by the other. From that moment a meeting becomes easy.

I remembered with horror an evening which at the time had struck me as merely absurd. One of my friends had invited me to dine at a restaurant with his mistress and another of his friends who had also brought his own. The two women were not long in coming to an understanding, but were so impatient to enjoy one another that, with the soup, their feet were searching for one another, often finding mine. Presently their legs were interlaced. My two friends noticed nothing; I was on tenterhooks. One of the women, who could contain herself no longer, stooped under the table, saying that she had dropped something. Then one of them complained of a headache and asked to go upstairs to the lavatory. The other discovered that it was time for her to go and meet a woman friend at

the theatre. Finally I was left alone with my two friends who suspected nothing. The lady with the headache reappeared, but begged to be allowed to go home by herself to wait for her lover at his house, so that she might take a dose of antipyrin. They became great friends, used to go about together, one of them, dressed as a man, picking up little girls and taking them to the other, initiating them. One of them had a little boy who, she pretended, was troublesome, and handed him over for punishment to her friend, who set to work with a strong arm. One may say that there was no place, however public, in which they did not do what is most secret.

"But Léa behaved perfectly properly with me all the time," Albertine told me. "She was indeed a great deal more reserved than plenty of society women." "Are there any society women who have shewn a want of reserve with you, Albertine?" "Never." "Then what do you mean?" "O, well, she was less free in her speech." "For instance?" "She would never, like many of the women you meet, have used the expression 'rotten,' or say: 'I don't care a damn for anybody.'" It seemed to me that a part of the romance which the flames had so far spared was crumbling at length in ashes.

My discouragement might have persisted. Albertine's words, when I thought of them, made it give place to a furious rage. This succumbed to a sort of tender emotion. I also, when I came home and declared that I wished to break with her, had been lying. And this desire for a parting, which I had feigned with perseverance, gradually affected me with some of the misery which I should have felt if I had really wished to part from Albertine.

Besides, even when I thought in fits and starts, in twinges, as we say of other bodily pains, of that orgiastic life which Albertine had led before she met me, I admired all the more the docility of my captive and ceased to feel any resentment.

No doubt, never, during our life together, had I failed to let Albertine know that such a life would in all probability be merely temporary, so that Albertine might continue to find some charm in it. But to-night I had gone further, having feared that vague threats of separation were no longer sufficient, contradicted as they would doubtless be, in Albertine's mind, by her idea of a strong and jealous love of her, which must have made me, she seemed to imply, go in quest of information to the Verdurins'.

To-night I thought that, among the other reasons which might have made me decide of a sudden, without even realising except as I went on what I was doing, to enact this scene of rupture, there was above all the fact that, when, in one of

those impulses to which my father was liable, I threatened another person in his security, as I had not, like him, the courage to carry a threat into practice, in order not to let it be supposed that it had been but empty words, I would go to a considerable length in pretending to carry out my threat and would recoil only when my adversary, having had a genuine illusion of my sincerity, had begun seriously to tremble. Besides, in these lies, we feel that there is indeed a grain of truth, that, if life does not bring any alteration of our loves, it is ourselves who will seek to bring or to feign one, so strongly do we feel that all love, and everything else evolves rapidly towards a farewell. We would like to shed the tears that it will bring long before it comes. No doubt there had been, on this occasion, in the scene that I had enacted, a practical value. I had suddenly determined to keep Albertine because I felt that she was distributed among other people whom I could not prevent her from joining. But had she renounced them all finally for myself, I should have been all the more firmly determined never to let her go, for a parting is, by jealousy, rendered cruel, but, by gratitude, impossible. I felt that in any case I was fighting the decisive battle in which I must conquer or fall. I would have offered Albertine in an hour all that I possessed, because I said to myself: “Everything depends upon this battle, but such battles are less like those of old days which lasted for a few hours than a battle of to-day which does not end on the morrow, nor on the day after, nor in the following week. We give all our strength, because we steadfastly believe that we shall never need any strength again. And more than a year passes without bringing a ‘decisive’ victory. Perhaps an unconscious reminiscence of lying scenes enacted by M. de Charlus, in whose company I was when the fear of Albertine’s leaving me had seized hold of me, was added to the rest. But, later on, I heard my mother say something of which I was then unaware and which leads me to believe that I found all the elements of this scene in myself, in those obscure reserves of heredity which certain emotions, acting in this respect as, upon the residue of our stored-up strength, drugs such as alcohol and coffee act, place at our disposal. When my aunt Léonie learned from Eulalie that Françoise, convinced that her mistress would never again leave the house, had secretly planned some outing of which my aunt was to know nothing, she, the day before, would pretend to have made up her mind that she would attempt an excursion on the morrow. The incredulous Françoise was ordered not only to prepare my aunt’s clothes beforehand, to give an airing to those that had been put away for too long, but to order a carriage, to arrange, to within a quarter of an hour, all the details of the day. It was only when Françoise, convinced or at

any rate shaken, had been forced to confess to my aunt the plan that she herself had formed, that my aunt would publicly abandon her own, so as not, she said, to interfere with Françoise's arrangements. Similarly, so that Albertine might not believe that I was exaggerating and to make her proceed as far as possible in the idea that we were to part, drawing myself the obvious deductions from the proposal that I had advanced, I had begun to anticipate the time which was to begin on the morrow and was to last for ever, the time in which we should be parted, addressing to Albertine the same requests as if we were not to be reconciled almost immediately. Like a general who considers that if a feint is to succeed in deceiving the enemy it must be pushed to extremes, I had employed in this feint almost as much of my store of sensibility as if it had been genuine. This fictitious parting scene ended by causing me almost as much grief as if it had been real, possibly because one of the actors, Albertine, by believing it to be real, had enhanced the other's illusion. While we were living, from day to day, in a day which, even if painful, was still endurable, held down to earth by the ballast of habit and by that certainty that the morrow, should it prove a day of torment, would contain the presence of the person who is all in all, here was I stupidly destroying all that oppressive life. I was destroying it, it is true, only in a fictitious fashion, but this was enough to make me wretched; perhaps because the sad words which we utter, even when we are lying, carry in themselves their sorrow and inject it deeply into us; perhaps because we do not realise that, by feigning farewells, we evoke by anticipation an hour which must inevitably come later on; then we cannot be certain that we have not released the mechanism which will make it strike. In every bluff there is an element, however small, of uncertainty as to what the person whom we are deceiving is going to do. If this make-believe of parting should lead to a parting! We cannot consider the possibility, however unlikely it may seem, without a clutching of the heart. We are doubly anxious, because the parting would then occur at the moment when it would be intolerable, when we had been made to suffer by the woman who would be leaving us before she had healed, or at least appeased us. In short, we have no longer the solid ground of habit upon which we rest, even in our sorrow. We have deliberately deprived ourselves of it, we have given the present day an exceptional importance, have detached it from the days before and after it; it floats without roots like a day of departure; our imagination ceasing to be paralysed by habit has awakened, we have suddenly added to our everyday love sentimental dreams which enormously enhance it, make indispensable to us a presence upon which, as a matter of fact, we are no longer certain that we can

rely. No doubt it is precisely in order to assure ourselves of that presence for the future that we have indulged in the make-believe of being able to dispense with it. But this make-believe, we have ourselves been taken in by it, we have begun to suffer afresh because we have created something new, unfamiliar which thus resembles those cures that are destined in time to heal the malady from which we are suffering, but the first effects of which are to aggravate it.

I had tears in my eyes, like the people who, alone in their bedrooms, imagining, in the wayward course of their meditations, the death of some one whom they love, form so detailed a picture of the grief that they would feel that they end by feeling it. And so as I multiplied my advice to Albertine as to the way in which she would have to behave in relation to myself after we had parted, I seemed to be feeling almost as keen a distress as though we had not been on the verge of a reconciliation. Besides, was I so certain that I could bring about this reconciliation, bring Albertine back to the idea of a life shared with myself, and, if I succeeded for the time being, that in her, the state of mind which this scene had dispelled would not revive? I felt myself, but did not believe myself to be master of the future, because I realised that this sensation was due merely to the fact that the future did not yet exist, and that thus I was not crushed by its inevitability. In short, while I lied, I was perhaps putting into my words more truth than I supposed. I had just had an example of this, when I told Albertine that I should quickly forget her; this was what had indeed happened to me in the case of Gilberte, whom I now refrained from going to see in order to escape not a grief but an irksome duty. And certainly I had been grieved when I wrote to Gilberte that I would not come any more, and I had gone to see her only occasionally. Whereas the whole of Albertine's time belonged to me, and in love it is easier to relinquish a sentiment than to lose a habit. But all these painful words about our parting, if the strength to utter them had been given me because I knew them to be untrue, were on the other hand sincere upon Albertine's lips when I heard her exclaim: "Ah! I promise, I will never see you again. Anything sooner than see you cry like that, my darling. I do not wish to cause you any grief. Since it must be, we will never meet again." They were sincere, as they could not have been coming from me, because, for one thing, as Albertine felt nothing stronger for me than friendship, the renunciation that they promised cost her less; because, moreover, in a scene of parting, it is the person who is not genuinely in love that makes the tender speeches, since love does not express itself directly; because, lastly, my tears, which would have been so small a matter in a great love, seemed to her almost extraordinary and overwhelmed her,

transposed into the region of that state of friendship in which she dwelt, a friendship greater than mine for her, to judge by what she had just said, which was perhaps not altogether inexact, for the thousand kindnesses of love may end by arousing, in the person who inspires without feeling it, an affection, a gratitude less selfish than the sentiment that provoked them, which, perhaps, after years of separation, when nothing of that sentiment remains in the former lover, will still persist in the beloved.

"My little Albertine," I replied, "it is very good of you to make me this promise. Anyhow, for the first few years at least, I shall avoid the places where I might meet you. You don't know whether you will be going to Balbec this year? Because in that case I should arrange not to go there myself." But now, if I continued to progress thus, anticipating time to come in my lying inventions, it was with a view no less to inspiring fear in Albertine than to making myself wretched. As a man who at first had no serious reason for losing his temper, becomes completely intoxicated by the sound of his own voice, and lets himself be carried away by a fury engendered not by his grievance but by his anger which itself is steadily growing, so I was falling ever faster and faster down the slope of my wretchedness, towards an ever more profound despair, and with the inertia of a man who feels the cold grip him, makes no effort to resist it and even finds a sort of pleasure in shivering. And if I had now at length, as I fully supposed, the strength to control myself, to react and to reverse my engines, far more than from the grief which Albertine had caused me by so unfriendly a greeting on my return, it was from that which I had felt in imagining, so as to pretend to be outlining them, the formalities of an imaginary separation, in foreseeing its consequences, that Albertine's kiss, when the time came for her to bid me good night, would have to console me now. In any case, it must not be she that said this good night of her own accord, for that would have made more difficult the revulsion by which I would propose to her to abandon the idea of our parting. And so I continued to remind her that the time to say good night had long since come and gone, a method which, by leaving the initiative to me, enabled me to put it off for a moment longer. And thus I scattered with allusions to the lateness of the hour, to our exhaustion, the questions with which I was plying Albertine. "I don't know where I shall be going," she replied to the last of these, in a worried tone. "Perhaps I shall go to Touraine, to my aunt's." And this first plan that she suggested froze me as though it were beginning to make definitely effective our final separation. She looked round the room, at the pianola, the blue satin armchairs. "I still cannot make myself realise that I shall

not see all this again, to-morrow, or the next day, or ever. Poor little room. It seems to me quite impossible; I cannot get it into my head." "It had to be; you were unhappy here." "No, indeed, I was not unhappy, it is now that I shall be unhappy." "No, I assure you, it is better for you." "For you, perhaps!" I began to stare fixedly into vacancy, as though, worried by an extreme hesitation, I was debating an idea which had occurred to my mind. Then, all of a sudden: "Listen, Albertine, you say that you are happier here, that you are going to be unhappy." "Why, of course." "That appalls me; would you like us to try to carry on for a few weeks? Who knows, week by week, we may perhaps go on for a long time; you know that there are temporary arrangements which end by becoming permanent." "Oh, how kind you are!" "Only in that case it is ridiculous of us to have made ourselves wretched like this over nothing for hours on end, it is like making all the preparations for a long journey and then staying at home. I am shattered with grief." I made her sit on my knee, I took Bergotte's manuscript which she so longed to have and wrote on the cover: "To my little Albertine, in memory of a new lease of life." "Now," I said to her, "go and sleep until to-morrow, my darling, for you must be worn out." "I am very glad, all the same." "Do you love me a little bit?" "A hundred times more than ever."

I should have been wrong in being delighted with this little piece of playacting, had it not been that I had carried it to the pitch of a real scene on the stage. Had we done no more than quite simply discuss a separation, even that would have been a serious matter. In conversations of this sort, we suppose that we are speaking not merely without sincerity, which is true, but freely. Whereas they are generally, though we know it not, murmured in spite of us; the first murmur of a storm which we do not suspect. In reality, what we express at such times is the opposite of our desire (which is to live for ever with her whom we love), but there is also that impossibility of living together which is the cause of our daily suffering, a suffering preferred by us to that of a parting, which will, however, end, in spite of ourselves, in parting us. Generally speaking, not, however, at once. As a rule, it happens — this was not, as we shall see, my case with Albertine — that, some time after the words in which we did not believe, we put into action a vague attempt at a deliberate separation, not painful, temporary. We ask the woman, so that afterwards she may be happier in our company, so that we on the other hand may momentarily escape from continual worries and fatigues, to go without us, or to let us go without her, for a few days elsewhere, the first days that we have — for a long time past — spent, as would have seemed to us impossible, away from her. Very soon she returns to take her

place by our fireside. Only this separation, short, but made real, is not so arbitrarily decided upon, not so certainly the only one that we have in mind. The same sorrows begin afresh, the same difficulty in living together becomes accentuated, only a parting is no longer so difficult as before; we have begun mentioning it, and have then put it into practice in a friendly fashion. But these are only preliminary ventures whose nature we have not recognised. Presently, to the momentary and smiling separation will succeed the terrible and final separation for which we have, without knowing it, paved the way.

"Come to my room in five minutes and let me see something of you, my dearest boy. You are full of kindness. But afterwards I shall fall asleep at once, for I am almost dead." It was indeed a dead woman that I beheld when, presently, I entered her room. She had gone to sleep immediately she lay down, the sheets wrapped like a shroud about her body had assumed, with their stately folds, a stony rigidity. One would have said that, as in certain Last Judgments of the Middle Ages, her head alone was emerging from the tomb, awaiting in its sleep the Archangel's trumpet. This head had been surprised by sleep almost flung back, its hair bristling. And as I saw the expressionless body extended there, I asked myself what logarithmic table it constituted so that all the actions in which it might have been involved, from the nudge of an elbow to the brushing of a skirt, were able to cause me, stretched out to the infinity of all the points that it had occupied in space and time, and from time to time sharply reawakened in my memory, so intense an anguish, albeit I knew those actions to have been determined in her by impulses, desires, which in another person, in herself five years earlier, or five years later, would have left me quite indifferent. All this was a lie, but a lie for which I had not the courage to seek any solution other than my own death. And so I remained, in the fur coat which I had not taken off since my return from the Verdurins', before that bent body, that figure allegorical of what? Of my death? Of my love? Presently I began to hear her regular breathing. I went and sat down on the edge of her bed to take that soothing cure of fresh air and contemplation. Then I withdrew very gently so as not to awaken her.

It was so late that, in the morning, I warned Françoise to tread very softly when she had to pass by the door of Albertine's room. And so Françoise, convinced that we had spent the night in what she used to call orgies, ironically warned the other servants not to 'wake the Princess.' And this was one of the things that I dreaded, that Françoise might one day be unable to contain herself any longer, might treat Albertine with insolence, and that this might introduce

complications into our life. Françoise was now no longer, as at the time when it distressed her to see Eulalie treated generously by my aunt, of an age to endure her jealousy with courage. It distorted, paralysed our old servant's face to such an extent that at times I asked myself whether she had not, after some outburst of rage, had a slight stroke. Having thus asked that Albertine's sleep should be respected, I was unable to sleep myself. I endeavoured to understand the true state of Albertine's mind. By that wretched farce which I had played, was it a real peril that I had averted, and, notwithstanding her assurance that she was so happy living with me, had she really felt at certain moments a longing for freedom, or on the contrary was I to believe what she said? Which of these two hypotheses was the truth? If it often befell me, if it was in a special case to befall me that I must extend an incident in my past life to the dimensions of history, when I made an attempt to understand some political event; inversely, this morning, I did not cease to identify, in spite of all the differences and in an attempt to understand its bearing, our scene overnight with a diplomatic incident that had just occurred. I had perhaps the right to reason thus. For it was highly probable that, without my knowledge, the example of M. de Charlus had guided me in that lying scene which I had so often seen him enact with such authority; on the other hand, was it in him anything else than an unconscious importation into the domain of his private life of the innate tendency of his Germanic stock, provocative from guile and, from pride, belligerent at need. Certain persons, among them the Prince of Monaco, having suggested the idea to the French Government that, if it did not dispense with M. Delcassé, a menacing Germany would indeed declare war, the Minister for Foreign Affairs had been asked to resign. So that the French Government had admitted the hypothesis of an intention to make war upon us if we did not yield. But others thought that it was all a mere 'bluff' and that if France had stood firm Germany would not have drawn the sword. No doubt the scenario was not merely different but almost opposite, since the threat of a rupture had not been put forward by Albertine; but a series of impressions had led me to believe that she was thinking of it, as France had been led to believe about Germany. On the other hand, if Germany desired peace, to have provoked in the French Government the idea that she was anxious for war was a disputable and dangerous trick. Certainly, my conduct had been skilful enough, if it was the thought that I would never make up my mind to break with her that provoked in Albertine sudden longings for independence. And was it not difficult to believe that she did not feel them, to shut one's eyes to a whole secret existence, directed towards the satisfaction of her vice, simply on

remarking the anger with which she had learned that I had gone to see the Verdurins', when she exclaimed: "I thought as much," and went on to reveal everything by saying: "Wasn't Mlle. Vinteuil there?" All this was corroborated by Albertine's meeting with Mme. Verdurin of which Andrée had informed me. But perhaps all the same these sudden longings for independence (I told myself, when I tried to go against my own instinct) were caused — supposing them to exist — or would eventually be caused by the opposite theory, to wit that I had never had any intention of marrying her, that it was when I made, as though involuntarily, an allusion to our approaching separation that I was telling the truth, that I would whatever happened part from her one day or another, a belief which the scene that I had made overnight could then only have confirmed and which might end by engendering in her the resolution: "If this is bound to happen one day or another, better to end everything at once." The preparations for war which the most misleading of proverbs lays down as the best way to secure the triumph of peace, create first of all the belief in each of the adversaries that the other desires a rupture, a belief which brings the rupture about, and, when it has occurred, this further belief in each of them that it is the other that has sought it. Even if the threat was not sincere, its success encourages a repetition. But the exact point to which a bluff may succeed is difficult to determine; if one party goes too far, the other which has previously yielded, advances in its turn; the first party, no longer able to change its method, accustomed to the idea that to seem not to fear a rupture is the best way of avoiding one (which is what I had done overnight with Albertine), and moreover driven to prefer, in its pride, to fall rather than yield, perseveres in its threat until the moment when neither can draw back any longer. The bluff may also be blended with sincerity, may alternate with it, and it is possible that what was a game yesterday may become a reality tomorrow. Finally it may also happen that one of the adversaries is really determined upon war, it might be that Albertine, for instance, had the intention of, sooner or later, not continuing this life any longer, or on the contrary that the idea had never even entered her mind and that my imagination had invented the whole thing from start to finish. Such were the different hypotheses which I considered while she lay asleep that morning. And yet as to the last I can say that I never, in the period that followed, threatened Albertine with a rupture unless in response to an idea of an evil freedom on her part, an idea which she did not express to me, but which seemed to me to be implied by certain mysterious dissatisfactions, certain words, certain gestures, of which that idea was the only possible explanation and of which she refused to

give me any other. Even then, quite often, I remarked them without making any allusion to a possible separation, hoping that they were due to a fit of ill temper which would end that same day. But it continued at times without intermission for weeks on end, during which Albertine seemed anxious to provoke a conflict, as though there had been at the time, in some region more or less remote, pleasures of which she knew, of which her seclusion in my house was depriving her, and which would continue to influence her until they came to an end, like those atmospheric changes which, even by our own fireside, affect our nerves, even when they are occurring as far away as the Balearic islands.

This morning, while Albertine lay asleep and I was trying to guess what was concealed in her, I received a letter from my mother in which she expressed her anxiety at having heard nothing of what we had decided in this phrase of Mme. de Sévigné: “In my own mind I am convinced that he will not marry; but then, why trouble this girl whom he will never marry? Why risk making her refuse suitors at whom she will never look again save with scorn? Why disturb the mind of a person whom it would be so easy to avoid?” This letter from my mother brought me back to earth. “What am I doing, seeking a mysterious soul, interpreting a face and feeling myself overawed by presentiments which I dare not explore?” I asked myself. “I have been dreaming, the matter is quite simple. I am an undecided young man, and it is a question of one of those marriages as to which it takes time to find out whether they will happen or not. There is nothing in this peculiar to Albertine.” This thought gave me an immense but a short relief. Very soon I said to myself: “One can after all reduce everything, if one regards it in its social aspect, to the most commonplace item of newspaper gossip. From outside, it is perhaps thus that I should look at it. But I know well that what is true, what at least is also true, is everything that I have thought, is what I have read in Albertine’s eyes, is the fears that torment me, is the problem that I incessantly set myself with regard to Albertine. The story of the hesitating bridegroom and the broken engagement may correspond to this, as the report of a theatrical performance made by an intelligent reporter may give us the subject of one of Ibsen’s plays. But there is something beyond those facts which are reported. It is true that this other thing exists perhaps, were we able to discern it, in all hesitating bridegrooms and in all the engagements that drag on, because there is perhaps an element of mystery in our everyday life.” It was possible for me to neglect it in the lives of other people, but Albertine’s life and my own I was living from within.

Albertine no more said to me after this midnight scene than she had said

before it: “I know that you do not trust me, I am going to try to dispel your suspicions.” But this idea, which she never expressed in words, might have served as an explanation of even her most trivial actions. Not only did she take care never to be alone for a moment, so that I might not lack information as to what she had been doing, if I did not believe her own statements, but even when she had to telephone to Andrée, or to the garage, or to the livery stable or elsewhere, she pretended that it was such a bore to stand about by herself waiting to telephone, what with the time the girls took to give you your number, and took care that I should be with her at such times, or, failing myself, Françoise, as though she were afraid that I might imagine reprehensible conversations by telephone in which she would make mysterious assignations. Alas, all this did not set my mind at rest. I had a day of discouragement. Aimé had sent me back Esther’s photograph, with a message that she was not the person. And so Albertine had other intimate friends as well as this girl to whom, through her misunderstanding of what I said, I had, when I meant to refer to something quite different, discovered that she had given her photograph. I sent this photograph back to Bloch. What I should have liked to see was the photograph that Albertine had given to Esther. How was she dressed in it? Perhaps with a bare bosom, for all I knew. But I dared not mention it to Albertine (for it would then have appeared that I had not seen the photograph), or to Bloch, since I did not wish him to think that I was interested in Albertine. And this life, which anyone who knew of my suspicions and her bondage would have seen to be agonising to myself and to Albertine, was regarded from without, by Françoise, as a life of unmerited pleasures of which full advantage was cunningly taken by that ‘trickstress’ and (as Françoise said, using the feminine form far more often than the masculine, for she was more envious of women) ‘charlatante.’ Indeed, as Françoise, by contact with myself, had enriched her vocabulary with fresh terms, but had adapted them to her own style, she said of Albertine that she had never known a person of such ‘perfidity,’ who was so skilful at ‘drawing my money’ by play-acting (which Françoise, who was as prone to mistake the particular for the general as the general for the particular and who had but a very vague idea of the various kinds of dramatic art, called ‘acting a pantomime’). Perhaps for this error as to the true nature of the life led by Albertine and myself, I was myself to some extent responsible owing to the vague confirmations of it which, when I was talking to Françoise, I skilfully let fall, from a desire either to tease her or to appear, if not loved, at any rate happy. And yet my jealousy, the watch that I kept over Albertine, which I would have

given anything for Françoise not to suspect, she was not long in discovering, guided, like the thought-reader who, groping blindfold, finds the hidden object, by that intuition which she possessed for anything that might be painful to me, which would not allow itself to be turned aside by the lies that I might tell in the hope of distracting her, and also by that clairvoyant hatred which urged her — even more than it urged her to believe her enemies more prosperous, more skilful hypocrites than they really were — to discover the secret that might prove their undoing and to precipitate their downfall. Françoise certainly never made any scenes with Albertine. But I was acquainted with Françoise's art of insinuation, the advantage that she knew how to derive from a significant setting, and I cannot believe that she resisted the temptation to let Albertine know, day by day, what a degraded part she was playing in the household, to madden her by a description, cunningly exaggerated, of the confinement to which my mistress was subjected. On one occasion I found Françoise, armed with a huge pair of spectacles, rummaging through my papers and replacing among them a sheet on which I had jotted down a story about Swann and his utter inability to do without Odette. Had she maliciously left it lying in Albertine's room? Besides, above all Françoise's innuendoes which had merely been, in the bass, the muttering and perfidious orchestration, it is probable that there must have risen, higher, clearer, more pressing, the accusing and calumnious voice of the Verdurins, annoyed to see that Albertine was involuntarily keeping me and that I was voluntarily keeping her away from the little clan. As for the money that I was spending upon Albertine, it was almost impossible for me to conceal it from Françoise, since I was unable to conceal any of my expenditure from her. Françoise had few faults, but those faults had created in her, for their service, positive talents which she often lacked apart from the exercise of those faults. Her chief fault was her curiosity as to all money spent by us upon people other than herself. If I had a bill to pay, a gratuity to give, it was useless my going into a corner, she would find a plate to be put in the right place, a napkin to be picked up, which would give her an excuse for approaching. And however short a time I allowed her, before dismissing her with fury, this woman who had almost lost her sight, who could barely add up a column of figures, guided by the same expert sense which makes a tailor, on catching sight of you, instinctively calculate the price of the stuff of which your coat is made, while he cannot resist fingering it, or makes a painter responsive to a colour effect, Françoise saw by stealth, calculated instantaneously the amount that I was giving. And when, so that she might not tell Albertine that I was corrupting her chauffeur, I took the initiative and,

apologising for the tip, said: “I wanted to be generous to the chauffeur, I gave him ten francs”; Françoise, pitiless, to whom a glance, that of an old and almost blind eagle, had been sufficient, replied: “No indeed, Monsieur gave him a tip of 43 francs. He told Monsieur that the charge was 45 francs, Monsieur gave him 100 francs, and he handed back only 12 francs.” She had had time to see and to reckon the amount of the gratuity which I myself did not know. I asked myself whether Albertine, feeling herself watched, would not herself put into effect that separation with which I had threatened her, for life in its changing course makes realities of our fables. Whenever I heard a door open, I felt myself shudder as my grandmother used to shudder in her last moments whenever I rang my bell. I did not believe that she would leave the house without telling me, but it was my unconscious self that thought so, as it was my grandmother’s unconscious self that throbbed at the sound of the bell, when she was no longer conscious. One morning indeed, I felt a sudden misgiving that she not only had left the house but had gone for good: I had just heard the sound of a door which seemed to me to be that of her room. On tiptoe I crept towards the room, opened the door, stood upon the threshold. In the dim light the bedclothes bulged in a semi-circle, that must be Albertine who, with her body bent, was sleeping with her feet and face to the wall. Only, overflowing the bed, the hair upon that head, abundant and dark, made me realise that it was she, that she had not opened her door, had not stirred, and I felt that this motionless and living semi-circle, in which a whole human life was contained and which was the only thing to which I attached any value, I felt that it was there, in my despotic possession.

If Albertine’s object was to restore my peace of mind, she was partly successful; my reason moreover asked nothing better than to prove to me that I had been mistaken as to her crafty plans, as I had perhaps been mistaken as to her vicious instincts. No doubt I added to the value of the arguments with which my reason furnished me my own desire to find them sound. But, if I was to be fair and to have a chance of perceiving the truth, unless we admit that it is never known save by presentiment, by a telepathic emanation, must I not say to myself that if my reason, in seeking to bring about my recovery, let itself be guided by my desire, on the other hand, so far as concerned Mlle. Vinteuil, Albertine’s vices, her intention to lead a different life, her plan of separation, which were the corollaries of her vices, my instinct had been capable, in the attempt to make me ill, of being led astray by my jealousy. Besides, her seclusion, which Albertine herself contrived so ingeniously to render absolute, by removing my suffering, removed by degrees my suspicion and I could begin again, when the night

brought back my uneasiness, to find in Albertine's presence the consolation of earlier days. Seated beside my bed, she spoke to me of one of those dresses or one of those presents which I never ceased to give her in the effort to enhance the comfort of her life and the beauty of her prison. Albertine had at first thought only of dresses and furniture. Now silver had begun to interest her. And so I had questioned M. de Charlus about old French silver, and had done so because, when we had been planning to have a yacht — a plan which Albertine decided was impracticable, as I did also whenever I had begun to believe in her virtue, with the result that my jealousy, as it declined, no longer held in check other desires in which she had no place and which also needed money for their satisfaction — we had, to be on the safe side, not that she supposed that we should ever have a yacht, asked Elstir for his advice. Now, just as in matters of women's dress, the painter was a refined and sensitive critic of the furnishing of yachts. He would allow only English furniture and old silver. This had led Albertine, since our return from Balbec, to read books upon the silversmith's art, upon the handiwork of the old chasers. But as our old silver was melted twice over, at the time of the Treaty of Utrecht when the King himself, setting the example to his great nobles, sacrificed his plate, and again in 1789, it is now extremely rare. On the other hand, it is true that modern silversmiths have managed to copy all this old plate from the drawings of Le Pont-aux-Choux, Elstir considered this modern antique unworthy to enter the home of a woman of taste, even a floating home. I knew that Albertine had read the description of the marvels that Roelliers had made for Mme. du Barry. If any of these pieces remained, she was dying to see them, and I to give them to her. She had even begun to form a neat collection which she installed with charming taste in a glass case and at which I could not look without emotion and alarm, for the art with which she arranged them was that born of patience, ingenuity, home-sickness, the need to forget, in which prisoners excel. In the matter of dress, what appealed to her most at this time was everything that was made by Fortuny. These Fortuny gowns, one of which I had seen Mme. de Guermantes wearing, were those of which Elstir, when he told us about the magnificent garments of the women of Carpaccio's and Titian's day, had prophesied the speedy return, rising from their ashes, sumptuous, for everything must return in time, as it is written beneath the vaults of Saint Mark's, and proclaimed, where they drink from the urns of marble and jasper of the byzantine capitals, by the birds which symbolise at once death and resurrection. As soon as women had begun to wear them, Albertine had remembered Elstir's prophecy, she had desired to have one and we were to

go and choose it. Now these gowns, even if they were not those genuine antiques in which women to-day seem a little too much ‘in fancy dress’ and which it is preferable to keep as pieces in a collection (I was in search of these also, as it happens, for Albertine), could not be said to have the chilling effect of the artificial, the sham antique. Like the theatrical designs of Sert, Bakst and Benoist who at that moment were recreating in the Russian ballet the most cherished periods of art — with the aid of works of art impregnated with their spirit and yet original — these Fortuny gowns, faithfully antique but markedly original, brought before the eye like a stage setting, with an even greater suggestiveness than a setting, since the setting was left to the imagination, that Venice loaded with the gorgeous East from which they had been taken, of which they were, even more than a relic in the shrine of Saint Mark suggesting the sun and a group of turbaned heads, the fragmentary, mysterious and complementary colour. Everything of those days had perished, but everything was born again, evoked to fill the space between them with the splendour of the scene and the hum of life, by the reappearance, detailed and surviving, of the fabrics worn by the Doges’ ladies. I had tried once or twice to obtain advice upon this subject from Mme. de Guermantes. But the Duchess cared little for garments which form a ‘costume.’ She herself, though she possessed several, never looked so well as in black velvet with diamonds. And with regard to gowns like Fortuny’s, her advice was not of any great value. Besides, I felt a scruple, if I asked for it, lest she might think that I called upon her only when I happened to need her help, whereas for a long time past I had been declining several invitations from her weekly. It was not only from her, moreover, that I received them in such profusion. Certainly, she and many other women had always been extremely kind to me. But my seclusion had undoubtedly multiplied their hospitality tenfold. It seems that in our social life, a minor echo of what occurs in love, the best way for a man to make himself sought-after is to withhold himself. A man calculates everything that he can possibly cite to his credit, in order to find favour with a woman, changes his clothes all day long, pays attention to his appearance, she does not pay him a single one of the attentions which he receives from the other woman to whom, while he betrays her, and in spite of his appearing before her ill-dressed and without any artifice to attract, he has endeared himself for ever. Similarly, if a man were to regret that he was not sufficiently courted in society, I should not advise him to pay more calls, to keep an even finer carriage, I should tell him not to accept any invitation, to live shut up in his room, to admit nobody, and that then there would be a queue outside his door. Or rather I should not tell

him so. For it is a certain road to success which succeeds only like the road to love, that is to say if one has not adopted it with that object in view, if, for instance, you confine yourself to your room because you are seriously ill, or are supposed to be, or are keeping a mistress shut up with you whom you prefer to society (or for all these reasons at once), this will justify another person, who is not aware of the woman's existence, and simply because you decline to see him, in preferring you to all the people who offer themselves, and attaching himself to you.

"We shall have to begin to think soon about your Fortuny gowns," I said to Albertine one evening. Surely, to her who had long desired them, who chose them deliberately with me, who had a place reserved for them beforehand not only in her wardrobe but in her imagination, the possession of these gowns, every detail of which, before deciding among so many, she carefully examined, was something more than it would have been to an overwealthy woman who has more dresses than she knows what to do with and never even looks at them. And yet, notwithstanding the smile with which Albertine thanked me, saying: "You are too kind," I noticed how weary, and even wretched, she was looking.

While we waited for these gowns to be ready, I used to borrow others of the kind, sometimes indeed merely the stuffs, and would dress Albertine in them, drape them over her; she walked about my room with the majesty of a Doge's wife and the grace of a mannequin. Only my captivity in Paris was made more burdensome by the sight of these garments which suggested Venice. True, Albertine was far more of a prisoner than I. And it was curious to remark how, through the walls of her prison, destiny, which transforms people, had contrived to pass, to change her in her very essence, and turn the girl I had known at Balbec into a tedious and docile captive. Yes, the walls of her prison had not prevented that influence from reaching her; perhaps indeed it was they that had produced it. It was no longer the same Albertine, because she was not, as at Balbec, incessantly in flight upon her bicycle, never to be found owing to the number of little watering-places where she would go to spend the night with her girl friends and where moreover her untruths made it more difficult to lay hands upon her; because confined to my house, docile and alone, she was no longer even what at Balbec, when I had succeeded in finding her, she used to be upon the beach, that fugitive, cautious, cunning creature, whose presence was enlarged by the thought of all those assignations which she was skilled in concealing, which made one love her because they made one suffer, in whom, beneath her coldness to other people and her casual answers, one could feel yesterday's

assignation and to-morrow's, and for myself a contemptuous, deceitful thought; because the sea breeze no longer buffeted her skirts, because, above all, I had clipped her wings, she had ceased to be a Victory, was a burdensome slave of whom I would fain have been rid.

Then, to change the course of my thoughts, rather than begin a game of cards or draughts with Albertine, I asked her to give me a little music. I remained in bed, and she went and sat down at the end of the room before the pianola, between the two bookcases. She chose pieces which were quite new or which she had played to me only once or twice, for, as she began to know me better, she had learned that I liked to fix my thoughts only upon what was still obscure to me, glad to be able, in the course of these successive renderings, to join together, thanks to the increasing but, alas, distorting and alien light of my intellect, the fragmentary and interrupted lines of the structure which at first had been almost hidden in the mist. She knew and, I think, understood, the joy that my mind derived, at these first hearings, from this task of modelling a still shapeless nebula. She guessed that at the third or fourth repetition my intellect, having reached, having consequently placed at the same distance, all the parts, and having no longer any activity to spare for them, had reciprocally extended and arrested them upon a uniform plane. She did not, however, proceed at once to a fresh piece, for, without perhaps having any clear idea of the process that was going on in my mind, she knew that at the moment when the effort of my intellect had succeeded in dispelling the mystery of a work, it was very rarely that, in compensation, it did not, in the course of its task of destruction, pick up some profitable reflexion. And when in time Albertine said: "We might give this roll to Françoise and get her to change it for something else," often there was for me a piece of music less in the world, perhaps, but a truth the more. While she was playing, of all Albertine's multiple tresses I could see but a single loop of black hair in the shape of a heart trained at the side of her ear like the riband of a Velasquez Infanta. Just as the substance of that Angel musician was constituted by the multiple journeys between the different points in past time which the memory of her occupied in myself, and its different abodes, from my vision to the most inward sensations of my being, which helped me to descend into the intimacy of hers, so the music that she played had also a volume, produced by the inconstant visibility of the different phrases, accordingly as I had more or less succeeded in throwing a light upon them and in joining together the lines of a structure which at first had seemed to me to be almost completely hidden in the fog.

I was so far convinced that it was absurd to be jealous of Mlle. Vinteuil and her friend, inasmuch as Albertine since her confession had made no attempt to see them and among all the plans for a holiday in the country which we had formed had herself rejected Combray, so near to Montjouvain, that, often, what I would ask Albertine to play to me, without its causing me any pain, would be some music by Vinteuil. Once only this music had been an indirect cause of my jealousy. This was when Albertine, who knew that I had heard it performed at Mme. Verdurin's by Morel, spoke to me one evening about him, expressing a keen desire to go and hear him play and to make his acquaintance. This, as it happened, was shortly after I had learned of the letter, unintentionally intercepted by M. de Charlus, from Léa to Morel. I asked myself whether Léa might not have mentioned him to Albertine. The words: 'You bad woman, you naughty old girl' came to my horrified mind. But precisely because Vinteuil's music was in this way painfully associated with Léa — and no longer with Mlle. Vinteuil and her friend — when the grief that Léa caused me was soothed, I could then listen to this music without pain; one malady had made me immune to any possibility of the others. In this music of Vinteuil, phrases that I had not noticed at Mme. Verdurin's, obscure phantoms that were then indistinct, turned into dazzling architectural structures; and some of them became friends, whom I had barely made out at first, who at best had appeared to me to be ugly, so that I could never have supposed that they were like those people, unattractive at first sight, whom we discover to be what they really are only after we have come to know them well. From one state to the other was a positive transmutation. On the other hand, phrases that I had distinguished at once in the music that I had heard at Mme. Verdurin's, but had not then recognised, I identified now with phrases from other works, such as that phrase from the Sacred Variation for the Organ which, at Mme. Verdurin's, had passed unperceived by me in the septet, where nevertheless, a saint that had stepped down from the sanctuary, it found itself consorting with the composer's familiar fays. Finally, the phrase that had seemed to me too little melodious, too mechanical in its rhythm, of the swinging joy of bells at noon, had now become my favourite, whether because I had grown accustomed to its ugliness or because I had discovered its beauty. This reaction from the disappointment which great works of art cause at first may in fact be attributed to a weakening of the initial impression or to the effort necessary to lay bare the truth. Two hypotheses which suggest themselves in all important questions, questions of the truth of Art, of the truth of the Immortality of the Soul; we must choose between them; and, in the case of Vinteuil's music,

this choice presented itself at every moment under a variety of forms. For instance, this music seemed to me to be something truer than all the books that I knew. Sometimes I thought that this was due to the fact that what we feel in life, not being felt in the form of ideas, its literary (that is to say an intellectual) translation in giving an account of it, explains it, analyses it, but does not recompose it as does music, in which the sounds seem to assume the inflexion of the thing itself, to reproduce that interior and extreme point of our sensation which is the part that gives us that peculiar exhilaration which we recapture from time to time and which when we say: “What a fine day! What glorious sunshine!” we do not in the least communicate to our neighbour, in whom the same sun and the same weather arouse wholly different vibrations. In Vinteuil’s music, there were thus some of those visions which it is impossible to express and almost forbidden to record, since, when at the moment of falling asleep we receive the caress of their unreal enchantment, at that very moment in which reason has already deserted us, our eyes are already sealed, and before we have had time to know not merely the ineffable but the invisible, we are asleep. It seemed to me indeed when I abandoned myself to this hypothesis that art might be real, that it was something even more than the simply nervous joy of a fine day or an opiate night that music can give; a more real, more fruitful exhilaration, to judge at least by what I felt. It is not possible that a piece of sculpture, a piece of music which gives us an emotion which we feel to be more exalted, more pure, more true, does not correspond to some definite spiritual reality. It is surely symbolical of one, since it gives that impression of profundity and truth. Thus nothing resembled more closely than some such phrase of Vinteuil the peculiar pleasure which I had felt at certain moments in my life, when gazing, for instance, at the steeples of Martinville, or at certain trees along a road near Balbec, or, more simply, in the first part of this book, when I tasted a certain cup of tea.

Without pressing this comparison farther, I felt that the clear sounds, the blazing colours which Vinteuil sent to us from the world in which he composed, paraded before my imagination with insistence but too rapidly for me to be able to apprehend it, something which I might compare to the perfumed silkiness of a geranium. Only, whereas, in memory, this vagueness may be, if not explored, at any rate fixed precisely, thanks to a guiding line of circumstances which explain why a certain savour has been able to recall to us luminous sensations, the vague sensations given by Vinteuil coming not from a memory but from an impression (like that of the steeples of Martinville), one would have had to find, for the

geranium scent of his music, not a material explanation, but the profound equivalent, the unknown and highly coloured festival (of which his works seemed to be the scattered fragments, the scarlet-flashing rifts), the mode in which he 'heard' the universe and projected it far beyond himself. This unknown quality of a unique world which no other composer had ever made us see, perhaps it is in this, I said to Albertine, that the most authentic proof of genius consists, even more than in the content of the work itself. "Even in literature?" Albertine inquired. "Even in literature." And thinking again of the monotony of Vinteuil's works, I explained to Albertine that the great men of letters have never created more than a single work, or rather have never done more than refract through various mediums an identical beauty which they bring into the world. "If it were not so late, my child," I said to her, "I would shew you this quality in all the writers whose works you read while I am asleep, I would shew you the same identity as in Vinteuil. These typical phrases, which you are beginning to recognise as I do, my little Albertine, the same in the sonata, in the septet, in the other works, would be for instance, if you like, in Barbey d'Aurevilly, a hidden reality revealed by a material trace, the physiological blush of *l'Ensorcelée*, of *Aimée de Spens*, of *la Clotte*, the hand of the *Rideau Cramoisi*, the old manners and customs, the old words, the ancient and peculiar trades behind which there is the Past, the oral history compiled by the rustics of the manor, the noble Norman cities redolent of England and charming as a Scots village, the cause of curses against which one can do nothing, the Vellini, the Shepherd, a similar sensation of anxiety in a passage, whether it be the wife seeking her husband in *Une Vieille Maîtresse*, or the husband in *l'Ensorcelée* scouring the plain and the 'Ensorcelée' herself coming out from Mass. There are other typical phrases in Vinteuil like that stonemason's geometry in the novels of Thomas Hardy."

Vinteuil's phrases made me think of the 'little phrase' and I told Albertine that it had been so to speak the national anthem of the love of Swann and Odette, "the parents of Gilberte whom you know. You told me that she was not a bad girl. But didn't she attempt to have relations with you? She has mentioned you to me." "Yes, you see, her parents used to send a carriage to fetch her from our lessons when the weather was bad, I believe she took me home once and kissed me," she said, after a momentary pause, with a laugh, and as though it were an amusing confession. "She asked me all of a sudden whether I was fond of women." (But if she only believed that she remembered that Gilberte had taken her home, how could she say with such precision that Gilberte had asked her this odd question?) "In fact, I don't know what absurd idea came into my head to

make a fool of her, I told her that I was." (One would have said that Albertine was afraid that Gilberte had told me this and did not wish me to come to the conclusion that she was lying.) "But we did nothing at all." (It was strange, if they had exchanged confidences, that they should have done nothing, especially as, before this, they had kissed, according to Albertine.) "She took me home like that four or five times, perhaps more, and that is all." It cost me a great effort not to ply her with further questions, but, mastering myself so as to appear not to be attaching any importance to all this, I returned to Thomas Hardy. "Do you remember the stonemasons in *Jude the Obscure*, in *The Well-Beloved*, the blocks of stone which the father hews out of the island coming in boats to be piled up in the son's studio where they are turned into statues; in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* the parallelism of the tombs, and also the parallel line of the vessel, and the railway coaches containing the lovers and the dead woman; the parallelism between *The Well-Beloved*, where the man is in love with three women, and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* where the woman is in love with three men, and in short all those novels which can be laid one upon another like the vertically piled houses upon the rocky soil of the island. I cannot summarise the greatest writers like this in a moment's talk, but you would see in Stendhal a certain sense of altitude combining with the life of the spirit: the lofty place in which Julien Sorel is imprisoned, the tower on the summit of which Fabrice is confined, the belfry in which the Abbé Blanès pores over his astrology and from which Fabrice has such a magnificent bird's-eye view. You told me that you had seen some of Vermeer's pictures, you must have realised that they are fragments of an identical world, that it is always, however great the genius with which they have been recreated, the same table, the same carpet, the same woman, the same novel and unique beauty, an enigma, at that epoch in which nothing resembles or explains it, if we seek to find similarities in subjects but to isolate the peculiar impression that is produced by the colour. Well, then, this novel beauty remains identical in all Dostoievski's works, the Dostoïevski woman (as distinctive as a Rembrandt woman) with her mysterious face, whose engaging beauty changes abruptly, as though her apparent good nature had been but make-believe, to a terrible insolence (although at heart it seems that she is more good than bad), is she not always the same, whether it be Nastasia Philipovna writing love letters to Aglaé and telling her that she hates her, or in a visit which is wholly identical with this — as also with that in which Nastasia Philipovna insults Vania's family — Grouchenka, as charming in Katherina Ivanovna's house as the other had supposed her to be terrible, then suddenly revealing her malevolence by insulting

Katherina Ivanovna (although Grouchenka is good at heart); Grouchenka, Nastasia, figures as original, as mysterious not merely as Carpaccio's courtesans but as Rembrandt's Bathsheba. As, in Vermeer, there is the creation of a certain soul, of a certain colour of fabrics and places, so there is in Dostoievski creation not only of people but of their homes, and the house of the Murder in *Crime and Punishment* with its dvornik, is it not almost as marvellous as the masterpiece of the House of Murder in Dostoievski, that sombre house, so long, and so high, and so huge, of Rogojin in which he kills Nastasia Philipovna. That novel and terrible beauty of a house, that novel beauty blended with a woman's face, that is the unique thing which Dostoievski has given to the world, and the comparisons that literary critics may make, between him and Gogol, or between him and Paul de Kock, are of no interest, being external to this secret beauty. Besides, if I have said to you that it is, from one novel to another, the same scene, it is in the compass of a single novel that the same scenes, the same characters reappear if the novel is at all long. I could illustrate this to you easily in *War and Peace*, and a certain scene in a carriage..." "I didn't want to interrupt you, but now that I see that you are leaving Dostoïevski, I am afraid of forgetting. My dear boy, what was it you meant the other day when you said: 'It is, so to speak, the Dostoïevski side of Mme. de Sévigné.' I must confess that I did not understand. It seems to me so different." "Come, little girl, let me give you a kiss to thank you for remembering so well what I say, you shall go back to the pianola afterwards. And I must admit that what I said was rather stupid. But I said it for two reasons. The first is a special reason. What I meant was that Mme. de Sévigné, like Elstir, like Dostoïevski, instead of presenting things in their logical sequence, that is to say beginning with the cause, shews us first of all the effect, the illusion that strikes us. That is how Dostoïevski presents his characters. Their actions seem to us as misleading as those effects in Elstir's pictures where the sea appears to be in the sky. We are quite surprised to find that some sullen person is really the best of men, or vice versa." "Yes, but give me an example in Mme. de Sévigné." "I admit," I answered her with a laugh, "that I am splitting hairs very fine, but still I could find examples.." "But did he ever murder anyone, Dostoïevski? The novels of his that I know might all be called *The Story of a Crime*. It is an obsession with him, it is not natural that he should always be talking about it." "I don't think so, dear Albertine, I know little about his life. It is certain that, like everyone else, he was acquainted with sin, in one form or another, and probably in a form which the laws condemn. In that sense he must have been more or less criminal, like his heroes (not that they are altogether heroes, for that matter),

who are found guilty with attenuating circumstances. And it is not perhaps necessary that he himself should have been a criminal. I am not a novelist; it is possible that creative writers are tempted by certain forms of life of which they have no personal experience. If I come with you to Versailles as we arranged, I shall shew you the portrait of the ultra-respectable man, the best of husbands, Choderlos de Laclos, who wrote the most appallingly corrupt book, and facing it that of Mme. de Genlis who wrote moral tales and was not content with betraying the Duchesse d'Orléans but tormented her by turning her children against her. I admit all the same that in Dostoïevski this preoccupation with murder is something extraordinary which makes him very alien to me. I am stupefied enough when I hear Baudelaire say:

Si le viol, le poison, le poignard, l'incendie
N'ont pas encor brodé de leurs plaisants dessins
Le canevas banal de nos piteux destins,
C'est que notre âme, hélas! n'est pas assez hardie.

But I can at least assume that Baudelaire is not sincere. Whereas*Dostoïevski*.... All that sort of thing seems to me as remote from myself as possible, unless there are parts of myself of which I know nothing, for we realise our own nature only in course of time. In Dostoïevski I find the deepest penetration but only into certain isolated regions of the human soul. But he is a great creator. For one thing, the world which he describes does really appear to have been created by him. All those buffoons who keep on reappearing, like Lebedeff, Karamazoff, Ivolghin, Segreff, that incredible procession, are a humanity more fantastic than that which peoples Rembrandt's *Night Watch*. And perhaps it is fantastic only in the same way, by the effect of lighting and costume, and is quite normal really. In any case it is at the same time full of profound and unique truths, which belong only to Dostoïevski. They almost suggest, those buffoons, some trade or calling that no longer exists, like certain characters in the old drama, and yet how they reveal true aspects of the human soul! What astonishes me is the solemn manner in which people talk and write about Dostoïevski. Have you ever noticed the part that self-respect and pride play in his characters? One would say that, to him, love and the most passionate hatred, goodness and treachery, timidity and insolence are merely two states of a single nature, their self-respect, their pride preventing Aglaé, Nastasia, the Captain whose beard Mitia pulls, Krassotkin, Aliosha's enemy-friend, from shewing themselves in their true colours. But there are many other great passages as well. I know very few of his books. But is it not a sculpturesque and

simple theme, worthy of the most classical art, a frieze interrupted and resumed on which the tale of vengeance and expiation is unfolded, the crime of old Karamazoff getting the poor idiot with child, the mysterious, animal, unexplained impulse by which the mother, herself unconsciously the instrument of an avenging destiny, obeying also obscurely her maternal instinct, feeling perhaps a combination of physical resentment and gratitude towards her seducer, comes to bear her child on old Karamazoffs ground. This is the first episode, mysterious, grand, august as a Creation of Woman among the sculptures at Orvieto. And as counterpart, the second episode more than twenty years later, the murder of old Karamazoff, the disgrace brought upon the Karamazoff family by this son of the idiot, Smerdiakoff, followed shortly afterwards by another action, as mysteriously sculpturesque and unexplained, of a beauty as obscure and natural as that of the childbirth in old Karamazoff's garden, Smerdiakoff hanging himself, his crime accomplished. As for Dostoïevski, I was not straying so far from him as you thought when I mentioned Tolstoi who has imitated him closely. In Dostoïevski there is, concentrated and fretful, a great deal of what was to blossom later on in Tolstoi. There is, in Dostoïevski, that proleptic gloom of the primitives which their disciples will brighten and dispel." "My dear boy, what a terrible thing it is that you are so lazy. Just look at your view of literature, so far more interesting than the way we were made to study it; the essays that they used to make us write upon *Esther*: 'Monsieur,'— you remember," she said with a laugh, less from a desire to make fun of her masters and herself than from the pleasure of finding in her memory, in our common memory, a relic that was already almost venerable. But while she was speaking, and I continued to think of Vinteuil, it was the other, the materialist hypothesis, that of there being nothing, that in turn presented itself to my mind. I began to doubt, I said to myself that after all it might be the case that, if Vinteuil's phrases seemed to be the expression of certain states of the soul analogous to that which I had experienced when I tasted the madeleine that had been dipped in a cup of tea, there was nothing to assure me that the vagueness of such states was a sign of their profundity rather than of our not having learned yet to analyse them, so that there need be nothing more real in them than in other states. And yet that happiness, that sense of certainty in happiness while I was drinking the cup of tea, or when I smelt in the Champs-Elysées a smell of mouldering wood, was not an illusion. In any case, whispered the spirit of doubt, even if these states are more profound than others that occur in life, and defy analysis for the very reason that they bring into play too many forces which we have not yet taken

into consideration, the charm of certain phrases of Vinteuil's music makes us think of them because it too defies analysis, but this does not prove that it has the same depth; the beauty of a phrase of pure music can easily appear to be the image of or at least akin to an intellectual impression which we have received, but simply because it is unintellectual. And why then do we suppose to be specially profound those mysterious phrases which haunt certain works, including this septet by Vinteuil?

It was not, however, his music alone that Albertine played me; the pianola was to us at times like a scientific magic lantern (historical and geographical) and on the walls of this room in Paris, supplied with inventions more modern than that of Combray days, I would see, accordingly as Albertine played me Rameau or Borodin, extend before me now an eighteenth century tapestry sprinkled with cupids and roses, now the Eastern steppe in which sounds are muffled by boundless distances and the soft carpet of snow. And these fleeting decorations were as it happened the only ones in my room, for if, at the time of inheriting my aunt Léonie's fortune, I had vowed that I would become a collector like Swann, would buy pictures, statues, all my money went upon securing horses, a motorcar, dresses for Albertine. But did not my room contain a work of art more precious than all these — Albertine herself? I looked at her. It was strange to me to think that it was she, she whom I had for so long thought it impossible even to know, who now, a wild beast tamed, a rosebush to which I had acted as trainer, as the framework, the trellis of its life, was seated thus, day by day, at home, by my side, before the pianola, with her back to my bookcase. Her shoulders, which I had seen bowed and resentful when she was carrying her golf-clubs, were leaning against my books. Her shapely legs, which at first I had quite reasonably imagined as having trodden throughout her girlhood the pedals of a bicycle, now rose and fell alternately upon those of the pianola, upon which Albertine who had acquired a distinction which made me feel her more my own, because it was from myself that it came, pressed her shoes of cloth of gold. Her fingers, at one time trained to the handle-bars, now rested upon the keys like those of a Saint Cecilia. Her throat the curve of which, seen from my bed, was strong and full, at that distance and in the lamplight appeared more rosy, less rosy, however, than her face presented in profile, to which my gaze, issuing from the innermost depths of myself, charged with memories and burning with desire, added such a brilliancy, such an intensity of life that its relief seemed to stand out and turn with almost the same magic power as on the day, in the hotel at Balbec, when my vision was clouded by my overpowering desire to kiss her; I

prolonged each of its surfaces beyond what I was able to see and beneath what concealed it from me and made me feel all the more strongly — eyelids which half hid her eyes, hair that covered the upper part of her cheeks — the relief of those superimposed planes. Her eyes shone like, in a matrix in which the opal is still embedded, the two facets which alone have as yet been polished, which, become more brilliant than metal, reveal, in the midst of the blind matter that encumbers them, as it were the mauve, silken wings of a butterfly placed under glass. Her dark, curling hair, presenting a different appearance whenever she turned to ask me what she was to play next, now a splendid wing, sharp at the tip, broad at the base, feathered and triangular, now weaving the relief of its curls in a strong and varied chain, a mass of crests, of watersheds, of precipices, with its incisions so rich and so multiple, seemed to exceed the variety that nature normally realises and to correspond rather to the desire of a sculptor who accumulates difficulties in order to bring into greater prominence the suppleness, the fire, the moulding, the life of his execution, and brought out more strongly, by interrupting in order to resume them, the animated curve, and, as it were, the rotation of the smooth and rosy face, of the polished dulness of a piece of painted wood. And, in contrast with all this relief, by the harmony also which united them with her, which had adapted her attitude to their form and purpose, the pianola which half concealed her like the keyboard of an organ, the bookcase, the whole of that corner of the room seemed to be reduced to nothing more than the lighted sanctuary, the shrine of this angel musician, a work of art which, presently, by a charming magic, was to detach itself from its niche and offer to my kisses its precious, rosy substance. But no, Albertine was in no way to me a work of art. I knew what it meant to admire a woman in an artistic fashion, I had known Swann. For my own part, moreover, I was, no matter who the woman might be, incapable of doing so, having no sort of power of detached observation, never knowing what it was that I beheld, and I had been amazed when Swann added retrospectively for me an artistic dignity — by comparing her, as he liked to do with gallantry to her face, to some portrait by Luini, by finding in her attire the gown or the jewels of a picture by Giorgione — to a woman who had seemed to me to be devoid of interest. Nothing of that sort with me. The pleasure and the pain that I derived from Albertine never took, in order to reach me, the line of taste and intellect; indeed, to tell the truth, when I began to regard Albertine as an angel musician glazed with a marvellous patina whom I congratulated myself upon possessing, it was not long before I found her uninteresting; I soon became bored in her company, but these moments were of

brief duration; we love only that in which we pursue something inaccessible, we love only what we do not possess, and very soon I returned to the conclusion that I did not possess Albertine. In her eyes I saw pass now the hope, now the memory, perhaps the regret of joys which I could not guess, which in that case she preferred to renounce rather than tell me of them, and which, gathering no more of them than certain flashes in her pupils, I no more perceived than does the spectator who has been refused admission to the theatre, and who, his face glued to the glass panes of the door, can take in nothing of what is happening upon the stage. I do not know whether this was the case with her, but it is a strange thing, and so to speak a testimony by the most incredulous to their belief in good, this perseverance in falsehood shewn by all those who deceive us. It is no good our telling them that their lie hurts us more than a confession, it is no good their realising this for themselves, they will start lying again a moment later, to remain consistent with their original statement of how much we meant to them. Similarly an atheist who values his life will let himself be burned alive rather than allow any contradiction of the popular idea of his courage. During these hours, I used sometimes to see hover over her face, in her gaze, in her pout, in her smile, the reflexion of those inward visions the contemplation of which made her on these evenings unlike her usual self, remote from me to whom they were denied. “What are you thinking about, my darling?” “Why, nothing.” Sometimes, in answer to this reproach that she told me nothing, she would at one moment tell me things which she was not unaware that I knew as well as anyone (like those statesmen who will never give you the least bit of news, but speak to you instead of what you could read for yourself in the papers the day before), at another would describe without the least precision, in a sort of false confidence, bicycle rides that she had taken at Balbec, the year before our first meeting. And as though I had guessed aright long ago, when I inferred from it that she must be a girl who was allowed a great deal of freedom, who went upon long jaunts, the mention of those rides insinuated between Albertine’s lips the same mysterious smile that had captivated me in those first days on the front at Balbec. She spoke to me also of the excursions that she had made with some girl-friends through the Dutch countryside, of returning to Amsterdam in the evening, at a late hour, when a dense and happy crowd of people almost all of whom she knew, thronged the streets, the canal towpaths, of which I felt that I could see reflected in Albertine’s brilliant eyes as in the glancing windows of a fast-moving carriage, the innumerable, flickering fires. Since what is called aesthetic curiosity would deserve rather the name of indifference in comparison with the

painful, unwearying curiosity that I felt as to the places in which Albertine had stayed, as to what she might have been doing on a particular evening, her smiles, the expressions in her eyes, the words that she had uttered, the kisses that she had received. No, never would the jealousy that I had felt one day of Saint-Loup, if it had persisted, have caused me this immense uneasiness. This love of woman for woman was something too unfamiliar; nothing enabled me to form a certain, an accurate idea of its pleasures, its quality. How many people, how many places (even places which did not concern her directly, vague pleasure resorts where she might have enjoyed some pleasure), how many scenes (wherever there was a crowd, where people could brush against her) Albertine — like a person who, shepherding all her escort, a whole company, past the barrier in front of her, secures their admission to the theatre — from the threshold of my imagination or of my memory, where I paid no attention to them, had introduced into my heart! Now the knowledge that I had of them was internal, immediate, spasmodic, painful. Love, what is it but space and time rendered perceptible by the heart.

And yet perhaps, had I myself been entirely faithful, I should have suffered because of infidelities which I would have been incapable of conceiving, whereas what it tortured me to imagine in Albertine was my own perpetual desire to find favour with fresh ladies, to plan fresh romances, was to suppose her guilty of the glance which I had been unable to resist casting, the other day, even when I was by her side, at the young bicyclists seated at tables in the Bois de Boulogne. As we have no personal knowledge, one might almost say that we can feel no jealousy save of ourselves. Observation counts for little. It is only from the pleasure that we ourselves have felt that we can derive knowledge and grief.

At moments, in Albertine's eyes, in the sudden inflammation of her cheeks, I felt as it were a gust of warmth pass furtively into regions more inaccessible to me than the sky, in which Albertine's memories, unknown to me, lived and moved. Then this beauty which, when I thought of the various years in which I had known Albertine whether upon the beach at Balbec or in Paris, I found that I had but recently discovered in her, and which consisted in the fact that my mistress was developing upon so many planes and embodied so many past days, this beauty became almost heartrending. Then beneath that blushing face I felt that there yawned like a gulf the inexhaustible expanse of the evenings when I had not known Albertine. I might, if I chose, take Albertine upon my knee, take her head in my hands; I might caress her, pass my hands slowly over her, but, just as if I had been handling a stone which encloses the salt of immemorial

oceans or the light of a star, I felt that I was touching no more than the sealed envelope of a person who inwardly reached to infinity. How I suffered from that position to which we are reduced by the carelessness of nature which, when instituting the division of bodies, never thought of making possible the interpénétration of souls (for if her body was in the power of mine, her mind escaped from the grasp of mine). And I became aware that Albertine was not even for me the marvellous captive with whom I had thought to enrich my home, while I concealed her presence there as completely, even from the friends who came to see me and never suspected that she was at the end of the corridor, in the room next to my own, as did that man of whom nobody knew that he kept sealed in a bottle the Princess of China; urging me with a cruel and fruitless pressure to the remembrance of the past, she resembled, if anything, a mighty goddess of Time. And if it was necessary that I should lose for her sake years, my fortune — and provided that I can say to myself, which is by no means certain, alas, that she herself lost nothing — I have nothing to regret. No doubt solitude would have been better, more fruitful, less painful. But if I had led the life of a collector which Swann counselled (the joys of which M. de Charlus reproached me with not knowing, when, with a blend of wit, insolence and good taste, he said to me: “How ugly your rooms are!”) what statues, what pictures long pursued, at length possessed, or even, to put it in the best light, contemplated with detachment, would, like the little wound which healed quickly enough, but which the unconscious clumsiness of Albertine, of people generally, or of my own thoughts was never long in reopening, have given me access beyond my own boundaries, upon that avenue which, private though it be, debouches upon the high road along which passes what we learn to know only from the day on which it has made us suffer, the life of other people?

Sometimes the moon was so bright that, an hour after Albertine had gone to bed, I would go to her bedside to tell her to look at it through the window. I am certain that it was for this reason that I went to her room and not to assure myself that she was really there. What likelihood was there of her being able, had she wished, to escape? That would have required an improbable collusion with Françoise. In the dim room, I could see nothing save on the whiteness of the pillow a slender diadem of dark hair. But I could hear Albertine’s breath. Her slumber was so profound that I hesitated at first to go as far as the bed. Then I sat down on the edge of it. Her sleep continued to flow with the same murmur. What I find it impossible to express is how gay her awakenings were. I embraced her, shook her. At once she ceased to sleep, but, without even a

moment's interval, broke out in a laugh, saying as she twined her arms about my neck: "I was just beginning to wonder whether you were coming," and she laughed a tender, beautiful laugh. You would have said that her charming head, when she slept, was filled with nothing but gaiety, affection and laughter. And in waking her I had merely, as when we cut a fruit, released the gushing juice which quenches our thirst.

Meanwhile winter was at an end; the fine weather returned, and often when Albertine had just bidden me good night, my room, my curtains, the wall above the curtains being still quite dark, in the nuns' garden next door I could hear, rich and precious in the silence like a harmonium in church, the modulation of an unknown bird which, in the Lydian mode, was already chanting matins, and into the midst of my darkness flung the rich dazzling note of the sun that it could see. Once indeed, we heard all of a sudden the regular cadence of a plaintive appeal. It was the pigeons beginning to coo. "That proves that day has come already," said Albertine; and, her brows almost knitted, as though she missed, by living with me, the joys of the fine weather, "Spring has begun, if the pigeons have returned." The resemblance between their cooing and the crow of the cock was as profound and as obscure as, in Vinteuil's septet, the resemblance between the theme of the adagio and that of the closing piece, which is based upon the same key-theme as the other but so transformed by differences of tonality, of measure, that the profane outsider if he opens a book upon Vinteuil is astonished to find that they are all three based upon the same four notes, four notes which for that matter he may pick out with one finger upon the piano without recapturing anything of the three fragments. So this melancholy fragment performed by the pigeons was a sort of cock-crow in the minor, which did not soar up into the sky, did not rise vertically, but, regular as the braying of a donkey, enveloped in sweetness, went from one pigeon to another along a single horizontal line, and never raised itself, never changed its lateral plaint into that joyous appeal which had been uttered so often in the allegro of the introduction and in the finale.

Presently the nights grew shorter still and before what had been the hour of daybreak, I could see already stealing above my window-curtains the daily increasing whiteness of the dawn. If I resigned myself to allowing Albertine to continue to lead this life, in which, notwithstanding her denials, I felt that she had the impression of being a prisoner, it was only because I was sure that on the morrow I should be able to set myself, at the same time to work and to leave my bed, to go out of doors, to prepare our departure for some property which we should buy and where Albertine would be able to lead more freely and without

anxiety on my account, the life of country or seaside, of boating or hunting, which appealed to her. Only, on the morrow, that past which I loved and detested by turns in Albertine, it would so happen that (as, when it is the present, between himself and us, everyone, from calculation, or courtesy, or pity, sets to work to weave a curtain of falsehood which we mistake for the truth), retrospectively, one of the hours which composed it, and even those which I had supposed myself to know, offered me all of a sudden an aspect which some one no longer made any attempt to conceal from me and which was then quite different from that in which it had previously appeared to me. Behind some look in her eyes, in place of the honest thought which I had formerly supposed that I could read in it, was a desire, unsuspected hitherto, which revealed itself, alienating from me a fresh region of Albertine's heart which I had believed to be assimilated to my own. For instance, when Andrée left Balbec in the month of July, Albertine had never told me that she was to see her again shortly, and I supposed that she had seen her even sooner than she expected, since, in view of the great unhappiness that I had felt at Balbec, on that night of the fourteenth of September, she had made me the sacrifice of not remaining there and of returning at once to Paris. When she had arrived there on the fifteenth, I had asked her to go and see Andrée and had said to her: "Was she pleased to see you again?" Now one day Mme. Bontemps had called, bringing something for Albertine; I saw her for a moment and told her that Albertine had gone out with Andrée: "They have gone for a drive in the country." "Yes," replied Mme. Bontemps, "Albertine is always ready to go to the country. Three years ago, for instance, she simply had to go, every day, to the Buttes-Chaumont." At the name Buttes-Chaumont, a place where Albertine had told me that she had never been, my breath stopped for a moment. The truth is the most cunning of enemies. It launches its attacks upon the points of our heart at which we were not expecting them, and have prepared no defence. Had Albertine been lying to her aunt, then, when she said that she went every day to the Buttes-Chaumont, or to myself, more recently, when she told me that she did not know the place? "Fortunately," Mme. Bontemps went on, "that poor Andrée will soon be leaving for a more bracing country, for the real country, she needs it badly, she is not looking at all well. It is true that she did not have an opportunity this summer of getting the fresh air she requires. Just think, she left Balbec at the end of July, expecting to go back there in September, and then her brother put his knee out, and she was unable to go back." So Albertine was expecting her at Balbec and had concealed this from me. It is true that it was all the more kind of her to have offered to return to Paris with me.

Unless.... “Yes, I remember Albertine’s mentioning it to me” (this was untrue). “When did the accident occur, again? I am not very clear about it.” “Why, to my mind, it occurred in the very nick of time, for a day later the lease of the villa began, and Andrée’s grandmother would have had to pay a month’s rent for nothing. He hurt his leg on the fourteenth of September, she was in time to telegraph to Albertine on the morning of the fifteenth that she was not coming and Albertine was in time to warn the agent. A day later, the lease would have run on to the middle of October.” And so, no doubt, when Albertine, changing her mind, had said to me: “Let us go this evening,” what she saw with her mind’s eye was an apartment, that of Andrée’s grandmother, where, as soon as we returned, she would be able to see the friend whom, without my suspecting it, she had supposed that she would be seeing in a few days at Balbec. Those kind words which she had used, in offering to return to Paris with me, in contrast to her headstrong refusal a little earlier, I had sought to attribute them to a reawakening of her good nature. They were simply and solely the effect of a change that had occurred in a situation which we do not know, and which is the whole secret of the variation of the conduct of the women who are not in love with us. They obstinately refuse to give us an assignation for the morrow, because they are tired, because their grandfather insists upon their dining with him: “But come later,” we insist. “He keeps me very late. He may want to see me home.” The whole truth is that they have made an appointment with some man whom they like. Suddenly it happens that he is no longer free. And they come to tell us how sorry they are to have disappointed us, that the grandfather can go and hang himself, that there is nothing in the world to keep them from remaining with us. I ought to have recognised these phrases in Albertine’s language to me on the day of my departure from Balbec, but to interpret that language I should have needed to remember at the time two special features in Albertine’s character which now recurred to my mind, one to console me, the other to make me wretched, for we find a little of everything in our memory; it is a sort of pharmacy, of chemical laboratory, in which our groping hand comes to rest now upon a sedative drug, now upon a dangerous poison. The first, the consoling feature was that habit of making a single action serve the pleasure of several persons, that multiple utilisation of whatever she did, which was typical of Albertine. It was quite in keeping with her character, when she returned to Paris (the fact that Andrée was not coming back might make it inconvenient for her to remain at Balbec, without any implication that she could not exist apart from Andrée), to derive from that single journey an opportunity of touching two

people each of whom she genuinely loved, myself, by making me believe that she was coming in order not to let me be alone, so that I should not be unhappy, out of devotion to me, Andrée by persuading her that, as soon as there was no longer any question of her coming to Balbec, she herself did not wish to remain there a moment longer, that she had prolonged her stay there only in the hope of seeing Andrée and was now hurrying back to join her. Now, Albertine's departure with myself was such an immediate sequel, on the one hand to my grief, my desire to return to Paris, on the other hand to Andrée's' telegram, that it was quite natural that Andrée and I, unaware, respectively, she of my grief, I of her telegram, should have supposed that Albertine's departure from Balbec was the effect of the one cause that each of us knew, which indeed it followed at so short an interval and so unexpectedly. And in this case, I might still believe that the thought of keeping me company had been Albertine's real object, while she had not chosen to overlook an opportunity of thereby establishing a claim to Andrée's gratitude. But unfortunately I remembered almost at once another of Albertine's characteristics, which was the vivacity with which she was gripped by the irresistible temptation of a pleasure. And so I recalled how, when she had decided to leave, she had been so impatient to get to the tram, how she had pushed past the Manager who, as he tried to detain us, might have made us miss the omnibus, the shrug of connivance that she had given me, by which I had been so touched, when, on the crawler, M. de Cambremer had asked us whether we could not 'postpone it by a week.' Yes, what she saw before her eyes at that moment, what made her so feverishly anxious to leave, what she was so impatient to see again was that emptied apartment which I had once visited, the home of Andrée's grandmother, left in charge of an old footman, a luxurious apartment, facing south, but so empty, so silent, that the sun appeared to have spread dust-sheets over the sofa, the armchairs of the room in which Albertine and Andrée would ask the respectful caretaker, perhaps unsuspecting, perhaps an accomplice, to allow them to rest for a while. I could always see it now, empty, with a bed or a sofa, that room, to which, whenever Albertine seemed pressed for time and serious, she set off to meet her friend, who had doubtless arrived there before her since her time was more her own. I had never before given a thought to that apartment which now possessed for me a horrible beauty. The unknown element in the lives of other people is like that in nature, which each fresh scientific discovery merely reduces, but does not abolish. A jealous lover exasperates the woman with whom he is in love by depriving her of a thousand unimportant pleasures, but those pleasures which are the keystone of her life she

conceals in a place where, in the moments in which he thinks that he is shewing the most intelligent perspicacity and third parties are keeping him most closely informed, he never dreams of looking. Anyhow, Andrée was at least going to leave Paris. But I did not wish that Albertine should be in a position to despise me as having been the dupe of herself and Andrée. One of these days, I would tell her. And thus I should force her perhaps to speak to me more frankly, by shewing her that I was informed, all the same, of the things that she concealed from me. But I did not wish to mention it to her for the moment, first of all because, so soon after her aunt's visit, she would guess from where my information came, would block that source and would not dread other, unknown sources. Also because I did not wish to risk, so long as I was not absolutely certain of keeping Albertine for as long as I chose, arousing in her too frequent irritations which might have the effect of making her decide to leave me. It is true that if I reasoned, sought the truth, prognosticated the future on the basis of her speech, which always approved of all my plans, assuring me how much she loved this life, of how little her seclusion deprived her, I had no doubt that she would remain with me always. I was indeed greatly annoyed by the thought, I felt that I was missing life, the universe, which I had never enjoyed, bartered for a woman in whom I could no longer find anything novel. I could not even go to Venice, where, while I lay in bed, I should be too keenly tormented by the fear of the advances that might be made to her by the gondolier, the people in the hotel, the Venetian women. But if I reasoned, on the other hand, upon the other hypothesis, that which rested not upon Albertine's speech, but upon silences, looks, blushes, sulks, and indeed bursts of anger, which I could quite easily have shewn her to be unfounded and which I preferred to appear not to notice, then I said to myself that she was finding this life insupportable, that all the time she found herself deprived of what she loved, and that inevitably she must one day leave me. All that I wished, if she did so, was that I might choose the moment in which it would not be too painful to me, and also that it might be in a season when she could not go to any of the places in which I imagined her debaucheries, either at Amsterdam, or with Andrée whom she would see again, it was true, a few months later. But in the interval I should have grown calm and their meeting would leave me unmoved. In any case, I must wait before I could think of it until I was cured of the slight relapse that had been caused by my discovery of the reasons by which Albertine, at an interval of a few hours, had been determined not to leave, and then to leave Balbec immediately. I must allow time for the symptoms to disappear which could only go on diminishing if

I learned nothing new, but which were still too acute not to render more painful, more difficult, an operation of rupture recognised now as inevitable, but in no sense urgent, and one that would be better performed in ‘cold blood.’ Of this choice of the right moment I was the master, for if she decided to leave me before I had made up my mind, at the moment when she informed me that she had had enough of this life, there would always be time for me to think of resisting her arguments, to offer her a larger freedom, to promise her some great pleasure in the near future which she herself would be anxious to await, at worst, if I could find no recourse save to her heart, to assure her of my grief. I was therefore quite at my ease from this point of view, without, however, being very logical with myself. For, in the hypotheses in which I left out of account the things which she said and announced, I supposed that, when it was a question of her leaving me, she would give me her reasons beforehand, would allow me to fight and to conquer them. I felt that my life with Albertine was, on the one hand, when I was not jealous, mere boredom, and on the other hand, when I was jealous, constant suffering. Supposing that there was any happiness in it, it could not last. I possessed the same spirit of wisdom which had inspired me at Balbec, when, on the evening when we had been happy together after Mme. de Cambremer’s call, I determined to give her up, because I knew that by prolonging our intimacy I should gain nothing. Only, even now, I imagined that the memory which I should preserve of her would be like a sort of vibration prolonged by a pedal from the last moment of our parting. And so I intended to choose a pleasant moment, so that it might be it which continued to vibrate in me. It must not be too difficult, I must not wait too long, I must be prudent. And yet, having waited so long, it would be madness not to wait a few days longer, until an acceptable moment should offer itself, rather than risk seeing her depart with that same sense of revolt which I had felt in the past when Mamma left my bedside without bidding me good night, or when she said good-bye to me at the station. At all costs I multiplied the favours that I was able to bestow upon her. As for the Fortuny gowns, we had at length decided upon one in blue and gold lined with pink which was just ready. And I had ordered, at the same time, the other five which she had relinquished with regret, out of preference for this last. Yet with the coming of spring, two months after her aunt’s conversation with me, I allowed myself to be carried away by anger one evening. It was the very evening on which Albertine had put on for the first time the indoor gown in gold and blue by Fortuny which, by reminding me of Venice, made me feel all the more strongly what I was sacrificing for her, who felt no corresponding gratitude

towards me. If I had never seen Venice, I had dreamed of it incessantly since those Easter holidays which, when still a boy, I had been going to spend there, and earlier still, since the Titian prints and Giotto photographs which Swann had given me long ago at Combray. The Fortuny gown which Albertine was wearing that evening seemed to me the tempting phantom of that invisible Venice. It swarmed with Arabic ornaments, like the Venetian palaces hidden like sultanas behind a screen of pierced stone, like the bindings in the Ambrosian library, like the columns from which the Oriental birds that symbolised alternatively life and death were repeated in the mirror of the fabric, of an intense blue which, as my gaze extended over it, was changed into a malleable gold, by those same transmutations which, before the advancing gondolas, change into flaming metal the azure of the Grand Canal. And the sleeves were lined with a cherry pink which is so peculiarly Venetian that it is called Tiepolo pink.

In the course of the day, Françoise had let fall in my hearing that Albertine was satisfied with nothing, that when I sent word to her that I would be going out with her, or that I would not be going out, that the motor-car would come to fetch her, or would not come, she almost shrugged her shoulders and would barely give a polite answer. This evening, when I felt that she was in a bad temper, and when the first heat of summer had wrought upon my nerves, I could not restrain my anger and reproached her with her ingratitude. “Yes, you can ask anybody,” I shouted at the top of my voice, quite beyond myself, “you can ask Françoise, it is common knowledge.” But immediately I remembered how Albertine had once told me how terrifying she found me when I was angry, and had applied to myself the speech of Esther:

Jugez combien ce front irrité contre moi
Dans mon âme troublée a dû jeter d’émoi.
Hélas sans frissonner quel coeur audacieux
Soutiendrait les éclairs qui partent de ses yeux.

I felt ashamed of my violence. And, to make reparation for what I had done, without, however, acknowledging a defeat, so that my peace might be an armed and awe-inspiring peace, while at the same time I thought it as well to shew her once again that I was not afraid of a rupture so that she might not feel any temptation to break with me: “Forgive me, my little Albertine, I am ashamed of my violence, I don’t know how to apologise. If we are not able to get on together, if we are to be obliged to part, it must not be in this fashion, it would not be worthy of us. We will part, if part we must, but first of all I wish to beg your pardon most humbly and from the bottom of my heart.” I decided that, to

atone for my rudeness and also to make certain of her intention to remain with me for some time to come, at any rate until Andrée should have left Paris, which would be in three weeks, it would be as well, next day, to think of some pleasure greater than any that she had yet had and fairly slow in its fulfilment; also, since I was going to wipe out the offence that I had given her, perhaps I should do well to take advantage of this moment to shew her that I knew more about her life than she supposed. The resentment that she would feel would be removed on the morrow by my kindness, but the warning would remain in her mind. “Yes, my little Albertine, forgive me if I was violent. I am not quite as much to blame as you think. There are wicked people in the world who are trying to make us quarrel; I have always refrained from mentioning this, as I did not wish to torment you. But sometimes I am driven out of my mind by certain accusations. For instance,” I went on, “they are tormenting me at present, they are persecuting me with reports of your relations, but with Andrée.” “With Andrée?” she cried, her face ablaze with anger. And astonishment or the desire to appear astonished made her open her eyes wide. “How charming! And may one know who has been telling you these pretty tales, may I be allowed to speak to these persons, to learn from them upon what they are basing their scandals?” “My little Albertine, I do not know, the letters are anonymous, but from people whom you would perhaps have no difficulty in finding” (this to shew her that I did not believe that she would try) “for they must know you quite well. The last one, I must admit (and I mention it because it deals with a trifle, and there is nothing at all unpleasant in it), made me furious all the same. It informed me that if, on the day when we left Balbec, you first of all wished to remain there and then decided to go, that was because in the interval you had received a letter from Andrée telling you that she was not coming.” “I know quite well that Andrée wrote to tell me that she wasn’t coming, in fact she telegraphed; I can’t shew you the telegram because I didn’t keep it, but it wasn’t that day; what difference do you suppose it could make to me whether Andrée came or not?” The words “what difference do you suppose it could make to me” were a proof of anger and that ‘it did make’ some difference, but were not necessarily a proof that Albertine had returned to Paris solely from a desire to see Andrée. Whenever Albertine saw one of the real or alleged motives of one of her actions discovered by a person to whom she had pleaded a different motive, she became angry, even if the person were he for whose sake she had really performed the action. That Albertine believed that this information as to what she had been doing was not furnished me in anonymous letters against my will but was eagerly demanded by myself,

could never have been deduced from the words which she next uttered, in which she appeared to accept my story of the anonymous letters, but rather from her air of anger with myself, an anger which appeared to be merely the explosion of her previous ill humour, just as the espionage in which, by this hypothesis, she must suppose that I had been indulging would have been only the culmination of a supervision of all her actions as to which she had felt no doubt for a long time past. Her anger extended even to Andrée herself, and deciding no doubt that from now onwards I should never be calm again even when she went out with Andrée: “Besides, Andrée makes me wild. She is a deadly bore. I never want to go anywhere with her again. You can tell that to the people who informed you that I came back to Paris for her sake. Suppose I were to tell you that after all the years I’ve known Andrée, I couldn’t even describe her face to you, I’ve hardly ever looked at it!” Now at Balbec, in that first year, she had said to me: “Andrée is lovely.” It is true that this did not mean that she had had amorous relations with her, and indeed I had never heard her speak at that time save with indignation of any relations of that sort. But could she not have changed even without being aware that she had changed, never supposing that her amusements with a girl friend were the same thing as the immoral relations, not clearly defined in her own mind, which she condemned in other women? Was it not possible also that this same change, and this same unconsciousness of change, might have occurred in her relations with myself, whose kisses she had repulsed at Balbec with such indignation, kisses which afterwards she was to give me of her own accord every day, which (so, at least, I hoped) she would give me for a long time to come, and which she was going to give me in a moment? “But, my darling, how do you expect me to tell them when I do not know who they are?” This answer was so forceful that it ought to have melted the objections and doubts which I saw crystallised in Albertine’s pupils. But it left them intact. I was now silent, and yet she continued to gaze at me with that persistent attention which we give to some one who has not finished speaking. I begged her pardon once more. She replied that she had nothing to forgive me. She had grown very gentle again. But, beneath her sad and troubled features, it seemed to me that a secret had taken shape. I knew quite well that she could not leave me without warning me, besides she could not either wish to leave me (it was in a week’s time that she was to try on the new Fortuny gowns), nor decently do so, as my mother was returning to Paris at the end of the week and her aunt also. Why, since it was impossible for her to depart, did I repeat to her several times that we should be going out together next day to look at some Venetian glass which I

wished to give her, and why was I comforted when I heard her say that that was settled? When it was time for her to bid me good night and I kissed her, she did not behave as usual, but turned aside — it was barely a minute or two since I had been thinking how pleasant it was that she now gave me every evening what she had refused me at Balbec — she did not return my kiss. One would have said that, having quarrelled with me, she was not prepared to give me a token of affection which might later on have appeared to me a treacherous denial of that quarrel. One would have said that she was attuning her actions to that quarrel, and yet with moderation, whether so as not to announce it, or because, while breaking off her carnal relations with me, she wished still to remain my friend. I embraced her then a second time, pressing to my heart the mirroring and gilded azure of the Grand Canal and the mating birds, symbols of death and resurrection. But for the second time she drew away and, instead of returning my kiss, withdrew with the sort of instinctive and fatal obstinacy of animals that feel the hand of death. This presentiment which she seemed to be expressing overpowered me also, and filled me with so anxious an alarm that when she had reached the door I had not the courage to let her go, and called her back, “Albertine,” I said to her, “I am not at all sleepy. If you don’t want to go to sleep yourself, you might stay here a little longer, if you like, but I don’t really mind, and I don’t on any account want to tire you.” I felt that if I had been able to make her undress, and to have her there in her white nightgown, in which she seemed more rosy, warmer, in which she excited my senses more keenly, the reconciliation would have been more complete. But I hesitated for an instant, for the blue border of her gown added to her face a beauty, an illumination, a sky without which she would have seemed to me more harsh. She came back slowly and said to me very sweetly, and still with the same downcast, sorrowful expression: “I can stay as long as you like, I am not sleepy.” Her reply calmed me, for, so long as she was in the room, I felt that I could take thought for the future and that moreover it implied friendship, obedience, but of a certain sort, which seemed to me to be bounded by that secret which I felt to exist behind her sorrowful gaze, her altered manner, partly in spite of herself, partly no doubt to attune them beforehand to something which I did not know. I felt that, all the same, I needed only to have her all in white, with her throat bare, in front of me, as I had seen her at Balbec in bed, to find the courage which would make her obliged to yield. “Since you are so kind as to stay here a moment to console me, you ought to take off your gown, it is too hot, too stiff, I dare not approach you for fear of crumpling that fine stuff and we have those symbolic birds between

us. Undress, my darling." "No, I couldn't possibly take off this dress here. I shall undress in my own room presently." "Then you won't even come and sit down on my bed?" "Why, of course." She remained, however, a little way from me, by my feet. We talked. I know that I then uttered the word death, as though Albertine were about to die. It seems that events are larger than the moment in which they occur and cannot confine themselves in it. Certainly they overflow into the future through the memory that we retain of them, but they demand a place also in the time that precedes them. One may say that we do not then see them as they are to be, but in memory are they not modified also?

When I saw that she deliberately refrained from kissing me, realising that I was merely wasting my time, that it was only after the kiss that the soothing, the genuine minutes would begin, I said to her: "Good night, it is too late," because that would make her kiss me and we could then continue. But after saying: "Good night, see you sleep well," exactly as she had done twice already, she contented herself with letting me kiss her on the cheek. This time I dared not call her back, but my heart beat so violently that I could not lie down again. Like a bird that flies from one end of its cage to the other, without stopping I passed from the anxiety lest Albertine should leave the house to a state of comparative calm. This calm was produced by the argument which I kept on repeating several times every minute: "She cannot go without warning me, she never said anything about going," and I was more or less calmed. But at once I reminded myself: "And yet if to-morrow I find that she has gone. My very anxiety must be founded upon something; why did she not kiss me?" At this my heart ached horribly. Then it was slightly soothed by the argument which I advanced once more, but I ended with a headache, so incessant and monotonous was this movement of my thoughts. There are thus certain mental states, and especially anxiety, which, as they offer us only two alternatives, are in a way as atrociously circumscribed as a merely physical pain. I perpetually repeated the argument which justified my anxiety and that which proved it false and reassured me, within as narrow a space as the sick man who explores without ceasing, by an internal movement, the organ that is causing his suffering, and withdraws for an instant from the painful spot to return to it a moment later. Suddenly, in the silence of the night, I was startled by a sound apparently insignificant which, however, filled me with terror, the sound of Albertine's window being violently opened. When I heard no further sound, I asked myself why this had caused me such alarm. In itself there was nothing so extraordinary; but I probably gave it two interpretations which appalled me equally. In the first place it was one of the

conventions of our life in common, since I was afraid of draughts, that nobody must ever open a window at night. This had been explained to Albertine when she came to stay in the house, and albeit she was convinced that this was a mania on my part and thoroughly unhealthy, she had promised me that she would never break the rule. And she was so timorous about everything that she knew to be my wish, even if she blamed me for it, that she would have gone to sleep with the stench of a chimney on fire rather than open her window, just as, however important the circumstances, she would not have had me called in the morning. It was only one of the minor conventions of our life, but from the moment when she violated it without having said anything to me, did not that mean that she no longer needed to take precautions, that she would violate them all just as easily? Besides, the sound had been violent, almost ill-bred, as though she had flung the window open crimson with rage, and saying: “This life is stifling me, so that’s that, I must have air!” I did not exactly say all this to myself, but I continued to think, as of a presage more mysterious and more funereal than the hoot of an owl, of that sound of the window which Albertine had opened. Filled with an agitation such as I had not felt perhaps since the evening at Combray when Swann had been dining downstairs, I paced the corridor for a long time, hoping, by the noise that I made, to attract Albertine’s attention, hoping that she would take pity upon me and would call me to her, but I heard no sound come from her room. Gradually I began to feel that it was too late. She must long have been asleep. I went back to bed. In the morning, as soon as I awoke, since no one ever came to my room, whatever might have happened, without a summons, I rang for Françoise. And at the same time I thought: “I must speak to Albertine about a yacht which I mean to have built for her.” As I took my letters I said to Françoise without looking at her: “Presently I shall have something to say to Mlle. Albertine; is she out of bed yet?” “Yes, she got up early.” I felt arise in me, as in a sudden gust of wind, a thousand anxieties, which I was unable to keep in suspense in my bosom. The tumult there was so great that I was quite out of breath as though caught in a tempest. “Ah! But where is she just now?” “I expect she’s in her room.” “Ah! Good! Very well, I shall see her presently.” I breathed again, she was still in the house, my agitation subsided. Albertine was there, it was almost immaterial to me whether she was or not. Besides, had it not been absurd to suppose that she could possibly not be there? I fell asleep, but, in spite of my certainty that she would not leave me, into a light sleep and of a lightness relative to her alone. For by the sounds that could be connected only with work in the courtyard, while I heard them vaguely in my sleep, I remained unmoved,

whereas the slightest rustle that came from her room, when she left it, or noiselessly returned, pressing the bell so gently, made me start, ran through my whole body, left me with a throbbing heart, albeit I had heard it in a profound slumber, just as my grandmother in the last days before her death, when she was plunged in an immobility which nothing could disturb and which the doctors called coma, would begin, I was told, to tremble for a moment like a leaf when she heard the three rings with which I was in the habit of summoning Françoise, and which, even when I made them softer, during that week, so as not to disturb the silence of the death-chamber, nobody, Françoise assured me, could mistake, because of a way that I had, and was quite unconscious of having, of pressing the bell, for the ring of anyone else. Had I then entered myself into my last agony, was this the approach of death?

That day and the next we went out together, since Albertine refused to go out again with Andrée. I never even mentioned the yacht to her. These excursions had completely restored my peace of mind. But she had continued at night to embrace me in the same novel fashion, which left me furious. I could interpret it now in no other way than as a method of shewing me that she was cross with me, which seemed to me perfectly absurd after my incessant kindness to her. And so, no longer deriving from her even those carnal satisfactions on which I depended, finding her positively ugly in her ill humour, I felt all the more keenly my deprivation of all the women and of the travels for which these first warm days re-awakened my desire. Thanks no doubt to the scattered memory of the forgotten assignations that I had had, while still a schoolboy, with women, beneath trees already in full leaf, this springtime region in which the endless round of our dwelling-place travelling through the seasons had halted for the last three days, beneath a clement sky, and from which all the roads pointed towards picnics in the country, boating parties, pleasure trips, seemed to me to be the land of women just as much as it was the land of trees, and the land in which a pleasure that was everywhere offered became permissible to my convalescent strength. Resigning myself to idleness, resigning myself to chastity, to tasting pleasure only with a woman whom I did not love, resigning myself to remaining shut up in my room, to not travelling, all this was possible in the Old World in which we had been only the day before, in the empty world of winter, but was no longer possible in this new universe bursting with green leaves, in which I had awaked like a young Adam faced for the first time with the problem of existence, of happiness, who is not bowed down beneath the weight of the accumulation of previous negative solutions. Albertine’s presence weighed upon

me, and so I regarded her sullenly, feeling that it was a pity that we had not had a rupture. I wanted to go to Venice, I wanted in the meantime to go to the Louvre to look at Venetian pictures and to the Luxembourg to see the two Elstirs which, as I had just heard, the Duchesse de Guermantes had recently sold to that gallery, those that I had so greatly admired, the*Pleasures oj the Dance* and the *Portrait of the X Family*. But I was afraid that, in the former, certain lascivious poses might give Albertine a desire, a regretful longing for popular rejoicings, making her say to herself that perhaps a certain life which she had never led, a life of fireworks and country taverns, was not so bad. Already, in anticipation, I was afraid lest, on the Fourteenth of July, she would ask me to take her to a popular ball and I dreamed of some impossible event which would cancel the national holiday. And besides, there were also present, in Elstir's pictures, certain nude female figures in the leafy landscapes of the South which might make Albertine think of certain pleasures, albeit Elstir himself (but would she not lower the standard of his work?) had seen in them nothing more than plastic beauty, or rather the beauty of snowy monuments which is assumed by the bodies of women seated among verdure. And so I resigned myself to abandoning that pleasure and made up my mind to go to Versailles. Albertine had remained in her room, reading, in her Fortuny gown. I asked her if she would like to go with me to Versailles. She had the charming quality of being always ready for anything, perhaps because she had been accustomed in the past to spend half her time as the guest of other people, and, just as she had made up her mind to come to Paris, in two minutes, she said to me: "I can come as I am, we shan't be getting out of the car." She hesitated for a moment between two cloaks in which to conceal her indoor dress — as she might have hesitated between two friends in the choice of an escort — chose one of dark blue, an admirable choice, thrust a pin into a hat. In a minute, she was ready, before I had put on my greatcoat, and we went to Versailles. This very promptitude, this absolute docility left me more reassured, as though indeed, without having any special reason for uneasiness, I had been in need of reassurance. "After all I have nothing to fear, she does everything that I ask, in spite of the noise she made with her window the other night. The moment I spoke of going out, she flung that blue cloak over her gown and out she came, that is not what a rebel would have done, a person who was no longer on friendly terms with me," I said to myself as we went to Versailles. We stayed there a long time. The whole sky was formed of that radiant and almost pale blue which the wayfarer lying down in a field sees at times above his head, but so consistent, so intense, that he feels that the blue of which it is composed

has been utilised without any alloy and with such an inexhaustible richness that one might delve more and more deeply into its substance without encountering an atom of anything but that same blue. I thought of my grandmother who — in human art as in nature — loved grandeur, and who used to enjoy watching the steeple of Saint-Hilaire soar into the same blue. Suddenly I felt once again a longing for my lost freedom as I heard a sound which I did not at first identify, a sound which my grandmother would have loved as well. It was like the buzz of a wasp. “Why,” said Albertine, “there is an aeroplane, it is high up in the sky, so high.” I looked in every direction but could see only, unmarred by any black spot, the unbroken pallor of the serene azure. I continued nevertheless to hear the humming of the wings which suddenly eame into my field of vision. Up there a pair of tiny wings, dark and flashing, punctured the continuous blue of the unalterable sky. I had at length been able to attach the buzzing to its cause, to that little insect throbbing up there in the sky, probably quite five thousand feet above me; I could see it hum. Perhaps at a time when distances by land had not yet been habitually shortened by speed as they are to-day, the whistle of a passing train a mile off was endowed with that beauty which now and for some time to come will stir our emotions in the hum of an aeroplane five thousand feet up, with the thought that the distances traversed in this vertical journey are the same as those on the ground, and that in this other direction, where the measurements appeared to us different because it had seemed impossible to make the attempt, an aeroplane at five thousand feet is no farther away than a train a mile off, is indeed nearer, the identical trajectory occurring in a purer medium, with no separation of the traveller from his starting point, just as on the sea or across the plains, in calm weather, the wake of a ship that is already far away or the breath of a single zephyr will furrow the ocean of water or of grain.

“After all neither of us is really hungry, we might have looked in at the Verdurins’,” Albertine said to me, “this is their day and their hour.” “But I thought you were angry with them?” “Oh! There are all sorts of stories about them, but really they’re not so bad as all that. Madame Verdurin has always been very nice to me. Besides, one can’t keep on quarrelling all the time with everybody. They have their faults, but who hasn’t?” “You are not dressed, you would have to go home and dress, that would make us very late.” I added that I was hungry. “Yes, you are right, let us eat by ourselves,” replied Albertine with that marvellous docility which continued to stupefy me. We stopped at a big pastrycook’s, situated almost outside the town, which at that time enjoyed a certain reputation. A lady was leaving the place, and asked the girl in charge for

her things. And after the lady had gone, Albertine cast repeated glances at the girl as though she wished to attract her attention while the other was putting away cups, plates, cakes, for it was getting late. She came near me only if I asked for something. And what happened then was that as the girl, who moreover was extremely tall, was standing up while she waited upon us and Albertine was seated beside me, each time, Albertine, in an attempt to attract her attention, raised vertically towards her a sunny gaze which compelled her to elevate her pupils to an even higher angle since, the girl being directly in front of us, Albertine had not the remedy of tempering the angle with the obliquity of her gaze. She was obliged, without raising her head unduly, to make her eyes ascend to that disproportionate height at which the girl's eyes were situated. Out of consideration for myself, Albertine lowered her own at once, and, as the girl had paid her no attention, began again. This led to a series of vain imploring elevations before an inaccessible deity. Then the girl had nothing left to do but to put straight a big table, next to ours. Now Albertine's gaze need only be natural. But never once did the girl's eyes rest upon my mistress. This did not surprise me, for I knew that the woman, with whom I was slightly acquainted, had lovers, although she was married, but managed to conceal her intrigues completely, which astonished me vastly in view of her prodigious stupidity. I studied the woman while we finished eating. Concentrated upon her task, she was almost impolite to Albertine, in the sense that she had not a glance to spare for her, not that Albertine's attitude was not perfectly correct. The other arranged things, went on arranging things, without letting anything distract her. The counting and putting away of the coffee-spoons, the fruit-knives, might have been entrusted not to this large and handsome woman, but, by a 'labour-saving' device, to a mere machine, and you would not have seen so complete an isolation from Albertine's attention, and yet she did not lower her eyes, did not let herself become absorbed, allowed her eyes, her charms to shine in an undivided attention to her work. It is true that if this woman had not been a particularly foolish person (not only was this her reputation, but I knew it by experience), this detachment might have been a supreme proof of her cunning. And I know very well that the stupidest person, if his desire or his pocket is involved, can, in that sole instance, emerging from the nullity of his stupid life, adapt himself immediately to the workings of the most complicated machinery; all the same, this would have been too subtle a supposition in the case of a woman as idiotic as this. Her idiocy even assumed the improbable form of impoliteness! Never once did she look at Albertine whom, after all, she could not help seeing. It was

not very flattering for my mistress, but, when all was said, I was delighted that Albertine should receive this little lesson and should see that frequently women paid no attention to her. We left the pastrycook's, got into our carriage and were already on our way home when I was seized by a sudden regret that I had not taken the waitress aside and begged her on no account to tell the lady who had come out of the shop as we were going in my name and address, which she must know because of the orders I had constantly left with her. It was indeed undesirable that the lady should be enabled thus to learn, indirectly, Albertine's address. But I felt that it would be a waste of time to turn back for so small a matter, and that I should appear to be attaching too great an importance to it in the eyes of the idiotic and untruthful waitress. I decided, finally, that I should have to return there, in a week's time, to make this request, and that it was a great bore, since one always forgot half the things that one had to say, to have to do even the simplest things in instalments. In this connexion, I cannot tell you how densely, now that I come to think of it, Albertine's life was covered in a network of alternate, fugitive, often contradictory desires. No doubt falsehood complicated this still further, for, as she retained no accurate memory of our conversations, when she had said to me: "Ah! That's a pretty girl, if you like, and a good golfer," and I had asked the girl's name, she had answered with that detached, universal, superior air of which no doubt there is always enough and to spare, for every liar of this category borrows it for a moment when he does not wish to answer a question, and it never fails him: "Ah! That I don't know" (with regret at her inability to enlighten me). "I never knew her name, I used to see her on the golf course, but I didn't know what she was called" — if, a month later, I said to her: "Albertine, you remember that pretty girl you mentioned to me, who plays golf so well." "Ah, yes," she would answer without thinking: "Emilie Daltier, I don't know what has become of her." And the lie, like a line of earthworks, was carried back from the defence of the name, now captured, to the possibilities of meeting her again. "Oh, I can't tell you, I never knew her address. I never see anybody who could tell you. Oh, no! Andrée never knew her. She wasn't one of our little band, now so scattered." At other times the lie took the form of a base admission: "Ah! If I had three hundred thousand francs a year..." She bit her lip. "Well? What would you do then?" "I should ask you," she said, kissing me as she spoke, "to allow me to remain with you always. Where else could I be so happy?" But, even when one took her lies into account, it was incredible how spasmodic her life was, how fugitive her strongest desires. She would be mad about a person whom, three days later, she would refuse to

see. She could not wait for an hour while I sent out for canvas and colours, for she wished to start painting again. For two whole days she was impatient, almost shed the tears, quickly dried, of an infant that has just been weaned from its nurse. And this instability of her feelings with regard to people, things, occupations, arts, places, was in fact so universal that, if she did love money, which I do not believe, she cannot have loved it for longer than anything else. When she said: “Ah! If I had three hundred thousand francs a year!” or even if she expressed a bad but very transient thought, she could not have attached herself to it any longer than to the idea of going to Les Rochers, of which she had seen an engraving in my grandmother’s edition of Mme. de Sévigné, of meeting an old friend from the golf course, of going up in an aeroplane, of going to spend Christmas with her aunt, or of taking up painting again.

We returned home very late one evening while, here and there, by the roadside, a pair of red breeches pressed against a skirt revealed an amorous couple. Our carriage passed in through the Porte Maillot. For the monuments of Paris had been substituted, pure, linear, without depth, a drawing of the monuments of Paris, as though in an attempt to recall the appearance of a city that had been destroyed. But, round about this picture, there stood out so delicately the pale-blue mounting in which it was framed that one’s greedy eyes sought everywhere for a further trace of that delicious shade which was too sparingly measured out to them: the moon was shining. Albertine admired the moonlight. I dared not tell her that I would have admired it more if I had been alone, or in quest of a strange woman. I repeated to her poetry or passages of prose about moonlight, pointing out to her how from ‘silvery’ which it had been at one time, it had turned ‘blue’ in Chateaubriand, in the Victor Hugo of*Eviradnus* and *La Fête chez Thérèse*, to become in turn yellow and metallic in Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle. Then, reminding her of the image that is used for the crescent moon at the end of *Booz endormi*, I repeated the whole of that poem to her. And so we came to the house. The fine weather that night made a leap forwards as the mercury in the thermometer darts upward. In the early-rising mornings of spring that followed, I could hear the tram-cars moving, through a cloud of perfumes, in an air with which the prevailing warmth became more and more blended until it reached the solidification and density of noon. When the unctuous air had succeeded in varnishing with it and isolating in it the scent of the wash-stand, the scent of the wardrobe, the scent of the sofa, simply by the sharpness with which, vertical and erect, they stood out in adjacent but distinct slices, in a pearly chiaroscuro which added a softer glaze to the shimmer

of the curtains and the blue satin armchairs, I saw myself, not by a mere caprice of my imagination, but because it was physically possible, following in some new quarter of the suburbs, like that in which Bloch's house at Balbec was situated, the streets blinded by the sun, and finding in them not the dull butchers' shops and the white freestone facings, but the country dining-room which I could reach in no time, and the scents that I would find there on my arrival, that of the bowl of cherries and apricots, the scent of cider, that of gruyère cheese, held in suspense in the luminous congelation of shadow which they delicately vein like the heart of an agate, while the knife-rests of prismatic glass scatter rainbows athwart the room or paint the waxcloth here and there with peacock-eyes. Like a wind that swells in a regular progression, I heard with joy a motor-car beneath the window. I smelt its odour of petrol. It may seem regrettable to the over-sensitive (who are always materialists) for whom it spoils the country, and to certain thinkers (materialists after their own fashion also) who, believing in the importance of facts, imagine that man would be happier, capable of higher flights of poetry, if his eyes were able to perceive more colours, his nostrils to distinguish more scents, a philosophical adaptation of the simple thought of those who believe that life was finer when men wore, instead of the black coats of to-day, sumptuous costumes. But to me (just as an aroma, unpleasant perhaps in itself, of naphthaline and flowering grasses would have thrilled me by giving me back the blue purity of the sea on the day of my arrival at Balbec), this smell of petrol which, with the smoke from the exhaust of the car, had so often melted into the pale azure, on those scorching days when I used to drive from Saint-Jean de la Haise to Gourville, as it had accompanied me on my excursions during those summer afternoons when I had left Albertine painting, called into blossom now on either side of me, for all that I was lying in my darkened bedroom, cornflowers, poppies and red clover, intoxicated me like a country scent, not circumscribed and fixed, like that which is spread before the hawthorns and, retained in its unctuous and dense elements, floats with a certain stability before the hedge, but like a scent before which the roads took flight, the sun's face changed, castles came hurrying to meet me, the sky turned pale, force was increased tenfold, a scent which was like a symbol of elastic motion and power, and which revived the desire that I had felt at Balbec, to enter the cage of steel and crystal, but this time not to go any longer on visits to familiar houses with a woman whom I knew too well, but to make love in new places with a woman unknown. A scent that was accompanied at every moment by the horns of passing motors, which I set to words like a military call: "Parisian, get up, get

up, come out and picnic in the country, and take a boat on the river, under the trees, with a pretty girl; get up, get up!" And all these musings were so agreeable that I congratulated myself upon the 'stern decree' which prescribed that until I should have rung my bell, no 'timid mortal,' whether Françoise or Albertine, should dream of coming in to disturb me 'within this palace' where

"... a terrible Majesty makes me all invisible To my subjects."

But all of a sudden the scene changed; it was the memory, no longer of old impressions, but of an old desire, quite recently reawakened by the Fortuny gown in blue and gold, that spread itself before me, another spring, a spring not leafy at all but suddenly stripped, on the contrary, of its trees and flowers by the name that I had just uttered to myself: 'Venice,' a decanted spring, which is reduced to its essential qualities, and expresses the lengthening, the warming, the gradual maturing of its days by the progressive fermentation, not (this time) of an impure soil, but of a blue and virgin water, springlike without bud or blossom, which could answer the call of May only by gleaming facets, carved by that month, harmonising exactly with it in the radiant, unaltering nakedness of its dusky sapphire. And so, no more than the seasons to its unflowering inlets of the sea, do modern years bring any change to the gothic city; I knew it, I could not imagine it, but this was what I longed to contemplate with the same desire which long ago, when I was a boy, in the very ardour of my departure had shattered the strength necessary for the journey; I wished to find myself face to face with my Venetian imaginings, to behold how that divided sea enclosed in its meanderings, like the streams of Ocean, an urbane and refined civilisation, but one that, isolated by their azure belt, had developed by itself, had had its own schools of painting and architecture, to admire that fabulous garden of fruits and birds in coloured stone, flowering in the midst of the sea which kept it refreshed, splashed with its tide against the base of the columns and, on the bold relief of the capitals, like a dark blue eye watching in the shadows, laid patches, which it kept perpetually moving, of light. Yes, I must go, the time had come. Now that Albertine no longer appeared to be cross with me, the possession of her no longer seemed to me a treasure in exchange for which we are prepared to sacrifice every other. For we should have done so only to rid ourselves of a grief, an anxiety which were now appeased. We have succeeded in jumping through the calico hoop through which we thought for a moment that we should never be able to pass. We have lightened the storm, brought back the serenity of the smile. The agonising mystery of a hatred without any known cause, and perhaps without end, is dispelled. Henceforward we find ourselves once more face to

face with the problem, momentarily thrust aside, of a happiness which we know to be impossible. Now that life with Albertine had become possible once again, I felt that I could derive nothing from it but misery, since she did not love me; better to part from her in the pleasant moment of her consent which I should prolong in memory. Yes, this was the moment; I must make quite certain of the date on which Andrée was leaving Paris, use all my influence with Mme. Bon temps to make sure that at that moment Albertine should not be able to go either to Holland or to Montjouvain. It would fall to our lot, were we better able to analyse our loves, to see that often women rise in our estimation only because of the dead weight of men with whom we have to compete for them, although we can hardly bear the thought of that competition; the counterpoise removed, the charm of the woman declines. We have a painful and salutary example of this in the predilection that men feel for the women who, before coming to know them, have gone astray, for those women whom they feel to be sinking in perilous quicksands and whom they must spend the whole period of their love in rescuing; a posthumous example, on the other hand, and one that is not at all dramatic, in the man who, conscious of a decline in his affection for the woman whom he loves, spontaneously applies the ruies that he has deduced, and, to make sure of his not ceasing to love the woman, places her in a dangerous environment from which he is obliged to protect her daily. (The opposite of the men who insist upon a woman’s retiring from the stage even when it was because of her being upon the stage that they fell in love with her.)

When in this way there could be no objection to Albertine’s departure, I should have to choose a fine day like this — and there would be plenty of them before long — one on which she would have ceased to matter to me, on which I should be tempted by countless desires, I should have to let her leave the house without my seeing her, then, rising from my bed, making all my preparations in haste, leave a note for her, taking advantage of the fact that as she could not for the time being go to any place the thought of which would upset me, I might be spared, during my travels, from imagining the wicked things that she was perhaps doing — which for that matter seemed to me at the moment to be quite unimportant — and, without seeing her again, might leave for Venice.

I rang for Françoise to ask her to buy me a guide-book and a timetable, as I had done as a boy, when I wished to prepare in advance a journey to Venice, the realisation of a desire as violent as that which I felt at this moment; I forgot that, in the interval, there was a desire which I had attained, without any satisfaction, the desire for Balbec, and that Venice, being also a visible phenomenon, was

probably no more able than Balbec to realise an ineffable dream, that of the gothic age, made actual by a springtime sea, and coming at moments to stir my soul with an enchanted, caressing, unseizable, mysterious, confused image. Françoise having heard my ring came into the room, in considerable uneasiness as to how I would receive what she had to say and what she had done. “It has been most awkward,” she said to me, “that Monsieur is so late in ringing this morning. I didn’t know what I ought to do. This morning at eight o’clock Mademoiselle Albertine asked me for her trunks, I dared not refuse her, I was afraid of Monsieur’s scolding me if I came and waked him. It was no use my putting her through her catechism, telling her to wait an hour because I expected all the time that Monsieur would ring; she wouldn’t have it, she left this letter with me for Monsieur, and at nine o’clock off she went.” Then — so ignorant may we be of what we have within us, since I was convinced of my own indifference to Albertine — my breath was cut short, I gripped my heart in my hands suddenly moistened by a perspiration which I had not known since the revelation that my mistress had made on the little tram with regard to Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend, without my being able to say anything else than: “Ah! Very good, you did quite right not to wake me, leave me now for a little, I shall ring for you presently.”

The Sweet Cheat Gone [Volume 6]

Albertine Disparue (1930)
Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (1889-1930)

Chapter 1 — Grief and Oblivion

“Mademoiselle Albertine has gone!” How much farther does anguish penetrate in psychology than psychology itself! A moment ago, as I lay analysing my feelings, I had supposed that this separation without a final meeting was precisely what I wished, and, as I compared the mediocrity of the pleasures that Albertine afforded me with the richness of the desires which she prevented me from realising, had felt that I was being subtle, had concluded that I did not wish to see her again, that I no longer loved her. But now these words: “Mademoiselle Albertine has gone!” had expressed themselves in my heart in the form of an anguish so keen that I would not be able to endure it for any length of time. And so what I had supposed to mean nothing to me was the only thing in my whole life. How ignorant we are of ourselves. The first thing to be done was to make my anguish cease at once. Tender towards myself as my mother had been towards my dying grandmother, I said to myself with that anxiety which we feel to prevent a person whom we love from suffering: “Be patient for just a moment, we shall find something to take the pain away, don’t fret, we are not going to allow you to suffer like this.” It was among ideas of this sort that my instinct of self-preservation sought for the first sedatives to lay upon my open wound: “All this is not of the slightest importance, for I am going to make her return here at once. I must think first how I am to do it, but in any case she will be here this evening. Therefore, it is useless to worry myself.” “All this is not of the slightest importance,” I had not been content with giving myself this assurance, I had tried to convey the same impression to Françoise by not allowing her to see what I was suffering, because, even at the moment when I was feeling so keen an anguish, my love did not forget how important it was that it should appear a happy love, a mutual love, especially in the eyes of Françoise, who, as she disliked Albertine, had always doubted her sincerity. Yes, a moment ago, before Françoise came into the room, I had supposed that I was no longer in love with Albertine, I had supposed that I was leaving nothing out of account; a careful analyst, I had supposed that I knew the state of my own heart. But our intelligence, however great it may be, cannot perceive the elements that compose

it and remain unsuspected so long as, from the volatile state in which they generally exist, a phenomenon capable of isolating them has not subjected them to the first stages of solidification. I had been mistaken in thinking that I could see clearly into my own heart. But this knowledge which had not been given me by the finest mental perceptions had now been brought to me, hard, glittering, strange, like a crystallised salt, by the abrupt reaction of grief. I was so much in the habit of seeing Albertine in the room, and I saw, all of a sudden, a fresh aspect of Habit. Hitherto I had regarded it chiefly as an annihilating force which suppresses the originality and even our consciousness of our perceptions; now I beheld it as a dread deity, so riveted to ourselves, its meaningless aspect so incrusted in our heart, that if it detaches itself, if it turns away from us, this deity which we can barely distinguish inflicts upon us sufferings more terrible than any other and is then as cruel as death itself.

The first thing to be done was to read Albertine's letter, since I was anxious to think of some way of making her return. I felt that this lay in my power, because, as the future is what exists only in our mind, it seems to us to be still alterable by the intervention, *in extremis*, of our will. But, at the same time, I remembered that I had seen act upon it forces other than my own, against which, however long an interval had been allowed me, I could never have prevailed. Of what use is it that the hour has not yet struck if we can do nothing to influence what is bound to happen. When Albertine was living in the house I had been quite determined to retain the initiative in our parting. And now she had gone. I opened her letter. It ran as follows:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"Forgive me for not having dared to say to you in so many words what I am now writing, but I am such a coward, I have always been so afraid in your presence that I have never been able to force myself to speak. This is what I should have said to you. Our life together has become impossible; you must, for that matter, have seen, when you turned upon me the other evening, that there had been a change in our relations. What we were able to straighten out that night would become irreparable in a few days' time. It is better for us, therefore, since we have had the good fortune to be reconciled, to part as friends. That is why, my darling, I am sending you this line, and beg you to be so kind as to forgive me if I am causing you a little grief when you think of the immensity of mine. My dear old boy, I do not wish to become your enemy, it will be bad enough to become by degrees, and very soon, a stranger to you; and so, as I have absolutely made up my mind, before sending you this letter by Françoise, I shall

have asked her to let me have my boxes. Good-bye: I leave with you the best part of myself.

"ALBERTINE."

"All this means nothing," I told myself, "It is even better than I thought, for as she doesn't mean a word of what she says she has obviously written her letter only to give me a severe shock, so that I shall take fright, and not be horrid to her again. I must make some arrangement at once: Albertine must be brought back this evening. It is sad to think that the Bontemps are no better than blackmailers who make use of their niece to extort money from me. But what does that matter? Even if, to bring Albertine back here this evening, I have to give half my fortune to Mme. Bontemps, we shall still have enough left, Albertine and I, to live in comfort." And, at the same time, I calculated whether I had time to go out that morning and order the yacht and the Rolls-Royce which she coveted, quite forgetting, now that all my hesitation had vanished, that I had decided that it would be unwise to give her them. "Even if Mme. Bontemps' support is not sufficient, if Albertine refuses to obey her aunt and makes it a condition of her returning to me that she shall enjoy complete independence, well, however much it may distress me, I shall leave her to herself; she shall go out by herself, whenever she chooses. One must be prepared to make sacrifices, however painful they may be, for the thing to which one attaches most importance, which is, in spite of everything that I decided this morning, on the strength of my scrupulous and absurd arguments, that Albertine shall continue to live here." Can I say for that matter that to leave her free to go where she chose would have been altogether painful to me? I should be lying. Often already I had felt that the anguish of leaving her free to behave improperly out of my sight was perhaps even less than that sort of misery which I used to feel when I guessed that she was bored in my company, under my roof. No doubt at the actual moment of her asking me to let her go somewhere, the act of allowing her to go, with the idea of an organised orgy, would have been an appalling torment. But to say to her: "Take our yacht, or the train, go away for a month, to some place which I have never seen, where I shall know nothing of what you are doing,"— this had often appealed to me, owing to the thought that, by force of contrast, when she was away from me, she would prefer my society, and would be glad to return. "This return is certainly what she herself desires; she does not in the least insist upon that freedom upon which, moreover, by offering her every day some fresh pleasure, I should easily succeed in imposing, day by day, a further restriction. No, what Albertine has wanted is that I shall no longer make myself unpleasant

to her, and most of all — like Odette with Swann — that I shall make up my mind to marry her. Once she is married, her independence will cease to matter; we shall stay here together, in perfect happiness." No doubt this meant giving up any thought of Venice. But the places for which we have most longed, such as Venice (all the more so, the most agreeable hostesses, such as the Duchesse de Guermantes, amusements such as the theatre), how pale, insignificant, dead they become when we are tied to the heart of another person by a bond so painful that it prevents us from tearing ourselves away. "Albertine is perfectly right, for that matter, about our marriage. Mamma herself was saying that all these postponements were ridiculous. Marrying her is what I ought to have done long ago, it is what I shall have to do, it is what has made her write her letter without meaning a word of it; it is only to bring about our marriage that she has postponed for a few hours what she must desire as keenly as I desire it: her return to this house. Yes, that is what she meant, that is the purpose of her action," my compassionate judgment assured me; but I felt that, in telling me this, my judgment was still maintaining the same hypothesis which it had adopted from the start. Whereas I felt that it was the other hypothesis which had invariably proved correct. No doubt this second hypothesis would never have been so bold as to formulate in so many words that Albertine could have had intimate relations with Mile. Vinteuil and her friend. And yet, when I was overwhelmed by the invasion of those terrible tidings, as the train slowed down before stopping at Parville station, it was the second hypothesis that had already been proved correct. This hypothesis had never, in the interval, conceived the idea that Albertine might leave me of her own accord, in this fashion, and without warning me and giving me time to prevent her departure. But all the same if, after the immense leap forwards which life had just made me take, the reality that confronted me was as novel as that which is presented by the discovery of a scientist, the inquiries of an examining magistrate or the researches of a historian into the mystery of a crime or a revolution, this reality while exceeding the meagre previsions of my second hypothesis nevertheless fulfilled them. This second hypothesis was not an intellectual feat, and the panic fear that I had felt on the evening when Albertine had refused to kiss me, the night when I had heard the sound of her window being opened, that fear was not based upon reason. But — and the sequel will shew this more clearly, as several episodes must have indicated it already — the fact that our intellect is not the most subtle, the most powerful, the most appropriate instrument for grasping the truth, is only a reason the more for beginning with the intellect, and not with a

subconscious intuition, a ready-made faith in presentiments. It is life that, little by little, case by case, enables us to observe that what is most important to our heart, or to our mind, is learned not by reasoning but by other powers. And then it is the intellect itself which, taking note of their superiority, abdicates its sway to them upon reasoned grounds and consents to become their collaborator and their servant. It is faith confirmed by experiment. The unforeseen calamity with which I found myself engaged, it seemed to me that I had already known it also (as I had known of Albertine's friendship with a pair of Lesbians), from having read it in so many signs in which (notwithstanding the contrary affirmations of my reason, based upon Albertine's own statements) I had discerned the weariness, the horror that she felt at having to live in that state of slavery, signs traced as though in invisible ink behind her sad, submissive eyes, upon her cheeks suddenly inflamed with an unaccountable blush, in the sound of the window that had suddenly been flung open. No doubt I had not ventured to interpret them in their full significance or to form a definite idea of her immediate departure. I had thought, with a mind kept in equilibrium by Albertine's presence, only of a departure arranged by myself at an undetermined date, that is to say a date situated in a non-existent time; consequently I had had merely the illusion of thinking of a departure, just as people imagine that they are not afraid of death when they think of it while they are in good health and actually do no more than introduce a purely negative idea into a healthy state which the approach of death would automatically destroy. Besides, the idea of Albertine's departure on her own initiative might have occurred to my mind a thousand times over, in the clearest, the most sharply defined form, and I should no more have suspected what, in relation to myself, that is to say in reality, that departure would be, what an unprecedented, appalling, unknown thing, how entirely novel a calamity. Of her departure, had I foreseen it, I might have gone on thinking incessantly for years on end, and yet all my thoughts of it, placed end to end, would not have been comparable for an instant, not merely in intensity but in kind, with the unimaginable hell the curtain of which Françoise had raised for me when she said: "Mademoiselle Albertine has gone." In order to form an idea of an unknown situation our imagination borrows elements that are already familiar and for that reason does not form any idea of it. But our sensibility, even in its most physical form, receives, as it were the brand of the lightning, the original and for long indelible imprint of the novel event. And I scarcely ventured to say to myself that, if I had foreseen this departure, I would perhaps have been incapable of picturing it to myself in all its horror, or indeed,

with Albertine informing me of it, and myself threatening, imploring her, of preventing it! How far was any longing for Venice removed from me now! As far as, in the old days at Combray, was the longing to know Mme. de Guermantes when the time came at which I longed for one thing only, to have Mamma in my room. And it was indeed all these anxieties that I had felt ever since my childhood, which, at the bidding of this new anguish, had come hastening to reinforce it, to amalgamate themselves with it in a homogeneous mass that was stifling me. To be sure, the physical blow which such a parting strikes at the heart, and which, because of that terrible capacity for registering things with which the body is endowed, makes our suffering somehow contemporaneous with all the epochs in our life in which we have suffered; to be sure, this blow at the heart upon which the woman speculates a little perhaps — so little compunction do we shew for the sufferings of other people — who is anxious to give the maximum intensity to regret, whether it be that, merely hinting at an imaginary departure, she is seeking only to demand better terms, or that, leaving us for ever — for ever!— she desires to wound us, or, in order to avenge herself, or to continue to be loved, or to enhance the memory that she will leave behind her, to rend asunder the net of weariness, of indifference which she has felt being woven about her — to be sure, this blow at our heart, we had vowed that we would avoid it, had assured ourselves that we would make a good finish. But it is rarely indeed that we do finish well, for, if all was well, we would never finish! And besides, the woman to whom we shew the utmost indifference feels nevertheless in an obscure fashion that while we have been growing tired of her, by virtue of an identical force of habit, we have grown more and more attached to her, and she reflects that one of the essential elements in a good finish is to warn the other person before one goes. But she is afraid, if she warns us, of preventing her own departure. Every woman feels that, if her power over a man is great, the only way to leave him is sudden flight. A fugitive because a queen, precisely. To be sure, there is an unspeakable interval between the boredom which she inspired a moment ago and, because she has gone, this furious desire to have her back again. But for this, apart from those which have been furnished in the course of this work and others which will be furnished later on, there are reasons. For one thing, her departure occurs as often as not at the moment when our indifference — real or imagined — is greatest, at the extreme point of the oscillation of the pendulum. The woman says to herself: “No, this sort of thing cannot go on any longer,” simply because the man speaks of nothing but leaving her, or thinks of nothing else; and it is she who leaves him.

Then, the pendulum swinging back to its other extreme, the interval is all the greater. In an instant it returns to this point; once more, apart from all the reasons that have been given, it is so natural. Our heart still beats; and besides, the woman who has gone is no longer the same as the woman who was with us. Her life under our roof, all too well known, is suddenly enlarged by the addition of the lives with which she is inevitably to be associated, and it is perhaps to associate herself with them that she has left us. So that this novel richness of the life of the woman who has gone reacts upon the woman who was with us and was perhaps planning her departure. To the series of psychological facts which we are able to deduce and which form part of her life with us, our too evident boredom in her company, our jealousy also (the effect of which is that the men who have been left by a number of women have been left almost always in the same manner because of their character and of certain always identical reactions which can be calculated: each man has his own way of being betrayed, as he has his own way of catching cold), to this series not too mysterious for us, there corresponds doubtless a series of facts of which we were unaware. She must for some tune past have been keeping up relations, written, or verbal or through messengers, with some man, or some woman, have been awaiting some signal which we may perhaps have given her ourselves, unconsciously, when we said: "X. called yesterday to see me," if she had arranged with X. that on the eve of the day when she was to join him he was to call upon me. How many possible hypotheses! Possible only. I constructed the truth so well, but in the realm of possibility only, that, having one day opened, and then by mistake, a letter addressed to my mistress, from this letter which was written in a code, and said: "Go on waiting for a signal to go to the Marquis de Saint-Loup; let me know to-morrow by telephone," I reconstructed a sort of projected flight; the name of the Marquis de Saint-Loup was there only as a substitute for some other name, for my mistress did not know Saint-Loup well enough, but had heard me speak of him, and moreover the signature was some sort of nickname, without any intelligible form. As it happened, the letter was addressed not to my mistress but to another person in the building who bore a different name which had been misread. The letter was written not in code, but in bad French, because it was written by an American woman, who was indeed a friend of Saint-Loup as he himself told me. And the odd way in which this American woman wrote certain letters had given the appearance of a nickname to a name which was quite genuine, only foreign. And so I had on that occasion been entirely at fault in my suspicions. But the intellectual structure which had in my mind combined these

facts, all of them false, was itself so accurate, so inflexible form of the truth that when three months later my mistress, who had at that time been meaning to spend the rest of her life with me, left me, it was in a fashion absolutely identical with that which I had imagined on the former occasion. A letter arrived, containing the same peculiarities which I had wrongly attributed to the former letter, but this time it was indeed meant as a signal.

This calamity was the greatest that I had experienced in my life. And, when all was said, the suffering that it caused me was perhaps even exceeded by my curiosity to learn the causes of this calamity which Albertine had deliberately brought about. But the sources of great events are like those of rivers, in vain do we explore the earth's surface, we can never find them. So Albertine had for a long time past been planning lier flight; I have said (and at the time it had seemed to me simply a sign of affectation and ill humour, what Françoise called 'lifting her head') that, from the day upon which she had ceased to kiss me, she had gone about as though tormented by a devil, stiffly erect, unbending, saying the simplest things in a sorrowful tone, slow in her movements, never once smiling. I cannot say that there was any concrete proof of conspiracy with the outer world. Françoise told me long afterwards that, having gone into Albertine's room two days before her departure, she had found it empty, the curtains drawn, but had detected from the atmosphere of the room and the sounds that came in that the window was open. And indeed she had found Albertine on the balcony. But it is hard to say with whom she could have been communicating from there, and moreover the drawn curtains screening the open window could doubtless be explained by her knowing that I was afraid of draughts, and by the fact that, even if the curtains afforded me little protection, they would prevent Françoise from seeing from the passage that the shutters had been opened so early. No, I can see nothing save one trifling incident which proves merely that on the day before her departure she knew that she was going. For during the day she took from my room without my noticing it a large quantity of wrapping paper and cloth which I kept there, and in which she spent the whole night packing her innumerable wrappers and dressing-gowns so that she might leave the house in the morning; this was the only incident, it was more than enough. I cannot attach any importance to her having almost forced upon me that evening a thousand francs which she owed me, there is nothing peculiar in that, for she was extremely scrupulous about money. Yes, she took the wrapping paper overnight, but it was not only then that she knew that she was going to leave me! For it was not resentment that made her leave me, but her determination, already formed, to

leave me, to abandon the life of which she had dreamed, that gave her that air of resentment. A resentful air, almost solemnly cold toward myself, except on the last evening when, after staying in my room longer than she had intended, she said — a remark which surprised me, coming from her who had always sought to postpone the moment of parting — she said to me from the door: “Good-bye, my dear; good-bye, my dear.” But I did not take any notice of this, at the moment. Françoise told me that next morning when Albertine informed her that she was going (but this, for that matter, may be explained also by exhaustion for she had spent the whole night in packing all her clothes, except the things for which she had to ask Françoise as they were not in her bedroom or her dressing-room), she was still so sad, so much more erect, so much stiffer than during the previous days that Françoise, when Albertine said to her: “Good-bye, Françoise,” almost expected to see her fall to the ground. When we are told anything like this, we realise that the woman who appealed to us so much less than any of the women whom we meet so easily in the course of the briefest outing, the woman who makes us resent our having to sacrifice them to herself, is on the contrary she whom now we would a thousand times rather possess. For the choice lies no longer between a certain pleasure — which has become by force of habit, and perhaps by the insignificance of its object, almost nothing — and other pleasures, which tempt and thrill us, but between these latter pleasures and something that is far stronger than they, compassion for suffering.

When I vowed to myself that Albertine would be back in the house before night, I had proceeded in hot haste to cover with a fresh belief the open wound from which I had torn the belief that had been my mainstay until then. But however rapidly my instinct of self-preservation might have acted, I had, when Françoise spoke to me, been left for an instant without relief, and it was useless my knowing now that Albertine would return that same evening, the pain that I had felt in the instant in which I had not yet assured myself of her return (the instant that had followed the words: “Mademoiselle Albertine has asked for her boxes, Mademoiselle Albertine has gone”), this revived in me of its own accord as keen as it had been before, that is to say as if I had still been unaware of Albertine’s immediate return. However, it was essential that she should return, but of her own accord. Upon every hypothesis, to appear to be taking the first step, to be begging her to return would be to defeat my own object. To be sure, I had not the strength to give her up as I had given up Gilberte. Even more than to see Albertine again, what I wished was to put an end to the physical anguish which my heart, less stout than of old, could endure no longer. Then, by dint of

accustoming myself to not wishing anything, whether it was a question of work or of anything else, I had become more cowardly. But above all, this anguish was incomparably keener for several reasons, the most important of which was perhaps not that I had never tasted any sensual pleasure with Mme. de Guermantes or with Gilberte, but that, not seeing them every day, and at every hour of the day, having no opportunity and consequently no need to see them, there had been less prominent, in my love for them, the immense force of Habit. Perhaps, now that my heart, incapable of wishing and of enduring of its own free will what I was suffering, found only one possible solution, that Albertine should return at all costs, perhaps the opposite solution (a deliberate renunciation, gradual resignation) would have seemed to me a novelist's solution, improbable in real life, had I not myself decided upon it in the past when Gilberte was concerned. I knew therefore that this other solution might be accepted also and by the same man, for I had remained more or less the same. Only time had played its part, time which had made me older, time which moreover had kept Albertine perpetually in my company while we were living together. But I must add that, without my giving up the idea of that life, there survived in me of all that I had felt about Gilberte the pride which made me refuse to be to Albertine a repellent plaything by insisting upon her return; I wished her to come back without my appearing to attach any importance to her return. I got out of bed, so as to lose no more time, but was arrested by my anguish; this was the first time that I had got out of bed since Albertine had left me. Yet I must dress myself at once in order to go and make inquiries of her porter.

Suffering, the prolongation of a spiritual shock that has come from without, keeps on endeavouring to change its form; we hope to be able to dispel it by making plans, by seeking information; we wish it to pass through its countless metamorphoses, this requires less courage than retaining our suffering intact; the bed appears so narrow, hard and cold on which we lie down with our grief. I put my feet to the ground; I stepped across the room with endless precautions, took up a position from which I could not see Albertine's chair, the pianola upon the pedals of which she used to press her golden slippers, nor a single one of the things which she had used and all of which, in the secret language that my memory had imparted to them, seemed to be seeking to give me a fresh translation, a different version, to announce to me for the second time the news of her departure. But even without looking at them I could see them, my strength left me, I sank down upon one of those blue satin armchairs, the glossy surface of which an hour earlier, in the dimness of my bedroom anaesthetised by a ray of

morning light, had made me dream dreams which then I had passionately caressed, which were so far from me now. Alas, I had never sat down upon any of them until this minute save when Albertine was still with me. And so I could not remain sitting there, I rose; and thus, at every moment there was one more of those innumerable and humble ‘selves’ that compose our personality which was still unaware of Albertine’s departure and must be informed of it; I was obliged — and this was more cruel than if they had been strangers and had not borrowed my sensibility to pain — to describe to all these ‘selves’ who did not yet know of it, the calamity that had just occurred, it was necessary that each of them in turn should hear for the first time the words: “Albertine has asked for her boxes”— those coffin-shaped boxes which I had seen put on the train at Balbec with my mother’s —”Albertine has gone.” To each of them I had to relate my grief, the grief which is in no way a pessimistic conclusion freely drawn from a number of lamentable circumstances, but is the intermittent and involuntary revival of a specific impression, come to us from without and not chosen by us. There were some of these ‘selves’ which I had not encountered for a long time past. For instance (I had not remembered that it was the day on which the barber called) the ‘self that I was when I was having my hair cut. I had forgotten this ‘self,’ the barber’s arrival made me burst into tears, as, at a funeral, does the appearance of an old pensioned servant who has not forgotten the deceased. Then all of a sudden I recalled that, during the last week, I had from time to time been seized by panic fears which I had not confessed to myself. At such moments, however, I had debated the question, saying to myself: “Useless, of course, to consider the hypothesis of her suddenly leaving me. It is absurd. If I were to confess it to a sober, intelligent man” (and I should have done so to secure peace of mind, had not jealousy prevented me from making confidences) “he would be sure to say to me: ‘Why, you are mad. It is impossible.’ And, as a matter of fact, during these jjast days we have not quarrelled once. People separate for a reason. They tell you their reason. They give you a chance to reply. They do not run away like that. No, it is perfectly childish. It is the only hypothesis that is absurd.” And yet, every day, when I found that she was still there in the morning when I fang my bell, I had heaved a vast sigh of relief. And when Françoise handed me Albertine’s letter, I had at once been certain that it referred to the one thing that could not happen, to this departure which I had in a sense perceived many days in advance, in spite of the logical reasons for my feeling reassured. I had said this to myself almost with satisfaction at my own perspicacity in my despair, like a murderer who knows that his guilt cannot be detected, but is nevertheless

afraid and all of a sudden sees his victim's name written at the head of a document on the table of the police official who has sent for him. My only hope was that Albertine had gone to Touraine, to her aunt's house where, after all, she would be fairly well guarded and could not do anything very serious in the interval before I brought her back. My worst fear was that she might be remaining in Paris, or have gone to Amsterdam or to Montjouvain, in other words that she had escaped in order to involve herself in some intrigue the preliminaries of which I had failed to observe. But in reality when I said to myself Paris, Amsterdam, Montjouvain, that is to say various names of places, I was thinking of places which were merely potential. And so, when Albertine's hall porter informed me that she had gone to Touraine, this place of residence which I supposed myself to desire seemed to me the most terrible of them all, because it was real, and because, tormented for the first time by the certainty of the present and the uncertainty of the future, I pictured to myself Albertine starting upon a life which she had deliberately chosen to lead apart from myself, perhaps for a long time, perhaps for ever, and in which she would realise that unknown element which in the past had so often distressed me when, nevertheless, I had enjoyed the happiness of possessing, of caressing what was its outer shell, that charming face impenetrable and captive. It was this unknown element that formed the core of my love. Outside the door of Albertine's house I found a poor little girl who gazed at me open-eyed and looked so honest that I asked her whether she would care to come home with me, as I might have taken home a dog with faithful eyes. She seemed pleased by my suggestion. When I got home, I held her for some time on my knee, but very soon her presence, by making me feel too keenly Albertine's absence, became intolerable. And I asked her to go away, giving her first a five-hundred franc note. And yet, a moment later, the thought of having some other little girl in the house with me, of never being alone, without the comfort of an innocent presence, was the only thing that enabled me to endure the idea that Albertine might perhaps remain away for some time before returning. As for Albertine herself, she barely existed in me save under the form of her name, which, but for certain rare moments of respite when I awoke, came and engraved itself upon my brain and continued incessantly to do so. If I had thought aloud, I should have kept on repeating it, and my speech would have been as monotonous, as limited as if I had been transformed into a bird, a bird like that in the fable whose song repeated incessantly the name of her whom, when a man, it had loved. We say the name to ourselves, and as we remain silent it seems as though we inscribed it on

ourselves, as though it left its trace on our brain which must end by being, like a wall upon which somebody has amused himself by scribbling, entirely covered with the name, written a thousand times over, of her whom we love. We repeat it all the time in our mind, even when we are happy, all the more when we are unhappy. And to repeat this name, which gives us nothing in addition to what we already know, we feel an incessantly renewed desire, but, in the course of time, it wearies us. To carnal pleasure I did not even give a thought at this moment; I did not even see, with my mind's eye, the image of that Albertine, albeit she had been the cause of such an upheaval of my existence, I did not perceive her body and if I had wished to isolate the idea that was bound up — for there is always some idea bound up — with my suffering, it would have been alternately, on the one hand my doubt as to the intention with which she had left me, with or without any thought of returning, and on the other hand the means of bringing her back. Perhaps there is something symbolical and true in the minute place occupied in our anxiety by the person who is its cause. The fact is that the person counts for little or nothing; what is almost everything is the series of emotions, of agonies which similar mishaps have made us feel in the past in connexion with her and which habit has attached to her. What proves this clearly is, even more than the boredom which we feel in moments of happiness, that the fact of seeing or not seeing the person in question, of being or not being admired by her, of having or not having her at our disposal will seem to us utterly trivial when we shall no longer have to set ourselves the problem (so superfluous that we shall no longer take the trouble to consider it) save in relation to the person herself — the series of emotions and agonies being forgotten, at least in so far as she is concerned, for it may have developed afresh but in connexion with another person. Before this, when it was still attached to her, we supposed that our happiness was dependent upon her presence; it depended merely upon the cessation of our anxiety. Our subconscious was therefore more clairvoyant than ourselves at that moment, when it made the form of the beloved woman so minute, a form which we had indeed perhaps forgotten, which we might have failed to remember clearly and thought unattractive, in the terrible drama in which finding her again in order to cease from expecting her becomes an absolutely vital matter. Minute proportions of the woman's form, a logical and necessary effect of the fashion in which love develops, a clear allegory of the subjective nature of that love.

The spirit in which Albertine had left me was similar no doubt to that of the nations who pave the way by a demonstration of their armed force for the

exercise of their diplomacy. She could not have left me save in the hope of obtaining from me better terms, greater freedom, more comfort. In that case the one of us who would have conquered would have been myself, had I had the strength to await the moment when, seeing that she could gam nothing, she would return of her own accord. But if at cards, or in war, where victory alone matters, we can hold out against bluff, the conditions are not the same that are created by love and jealousy, not to mention suffering. If, in order to wait, to 'hold out,' I allowed Albertine to remain away from me for several days, for several weeks perhaps, I was ruining what had been my sole purpose for more than a year, never to leave her by herself for a single hour. All my precautions were rendered fruitless, if I allowed her the time, the opportunity to betray me as often as she might choose, and if in the end she did return to me, I should never again be able to forget the time when she had been alone, and even if I won in the end, nevertheless in the past, that is to say irreparably, I should be the vanquished party.

As for the means of bringing Albertine back, they had all the more chance of success the more plausible the hypothesis appeared that she had left me only in the hope of being summoned back upon more favourable terms. And no doubt to the people who did not believe in Albertine's sincerity, certainly to Françoise for instance, this was the more plausible hypothesis. But my reason, to which the only explanation of certain bouts of ill humour, of certain attitudes had appeared, before I knew anything, to be that she had planned a final departure, found it difficult to believe that, now that her departure had occurred, it was a mere feint. I say my reason, not myself. The hypothesis of a feint became all the more necessary to me the more improbable it was, and gained in strength what it lost in probability. When we find ourselves on the brink of the abyss, and it seems as though God has forsaken us, we no longer hesitate to expect a miracle of Him.

I realise that in all this I was the most apathetic, albeit the most anxious of detectives. But Albertine's flight had not restored to myself the faculties of which the habit of having her watched by other people had deprived me. I could think of one thing only: how to employ some one else upon the search for her. This other person was Saint-Loup, who agreed. The transference of the anxiety of so many days to another person filled me with joy and I quivered with the certainty of success, my hands becoming suddenly dry again as in the past, and no longer moist with that sweat in which Françoise had bathed me when she said: "Mademoiselle Albertine has gone."

The reader may remember that when I decided to live with Albertine, and

even to marry her, it was in order to guard her, to know what she was doing, to prevent her from returning to her old habits with Mlle. Vinteuil. It had been in the appalling anguish caused by her revelation at Balbec when she had told me, as a thing that was quite natural, and I succeeded, albeit it was the greatest grief that I had ever yet felt in my life, in seeming to find quite natural the thing which in my worst suppositions I had never had the audacity to imagine. (It is astonishing what a want of imagination jealousy, which spends its time in weaving little suppositions of what is untrue, shews when it is a question of discovering the truth.) Now this love, born first and foremost of a need to prevent Albertine from doing wrong, this love had preserved in the sequel the marks of its origin. Being with her mattered little to me so long as I could prevent her from "being on the run," from going to this place or to that. In order to prevent her, I had had recourse to the vigilance, to the company of the people who went about with her, and they had only to give me at the end of the day a report that was fairly reassuring for my anxieties to vanish in good humour.

Having given myself the assurance that, whatever steps I might have to take, Albertine would be back in the house that same evening, I had granted a respite to the grief which Françoise had caused me when she told me that Albertine had gone (because at that moment my mind taken by surprise had believed for an instant that her departure was final). But after an interruption, when with an impulse of its own independent life the initial suffering revived spontaneously in me, it was just as keen as before, because it was anterior to the consoling promise that I had given myself to bring Albertine back that evening. This utterance, which would have calmed it, my suffering had not heard. To set in motion the means of bringing about her return, once again, not that such an attitude on my part would ever have proved very successful, but because I had always adopted it since I had been in love with Albertine, I was condemned to behave as though I did not love her, was not pained by her departure, I was condemned to continue to lie to her. I might be all the more energetic in my efforts to bring her back in that personally I should appear to have given her up for good. I decided to write Albertine a farewell letter in which I would regard her departure as final, while I would send Saint-Loup down to put upon Mme. Bontemps, as though without my knowledge, the most brutal pressure to make Albertine return as soon as possible. No doubt I had had experience with Gilberte of the danger of letters expressing an indifference which, feigned at first, ends by becoming genuine. And this experience ought to have restrained me from writing to Albertine letters of the same sort as those that I had written to

Gilberte. But what we call experience is merely the revelation to our own eyes of a trait in our character which naturally reappears, and reappears all the more markedly because we have already brought it into prominence once of our own accord, so that the spontaneous impulse which guided us on the first occasion finds itself reinforced by all the suggestions of memory. The human plagiarism which it is most difficult to avoid, for individuals (and even for nations which persevere in their faults and continue to aggravate them) is the plagiarism of ourselves.

Knowing that Saint-Loup was in Paris I had sent for him immediately; he came in haste to my rescue, swift and efficient as he had been long ago at Doncières, and agreed to set off at once for Touraine. I suggested to him the following arrangement. He was to take the train to Chatellerault, find out where Mme. Bontemps lived, and wait until Albertine should have left the house, since there was a risk of her recognising him. “But does the girl you are speaking of know me, then?” he asked. I told him that I did not think so. This plan of action filled me with indescribable joy. It was nevertheless diametrically opposed to my original intention: to arrange things so that I should not appear to be seeking Albertine’s return; whereas by so acting I must inevitably appear to be seeking it, but this plan had inestimable advantage over ‘the proper thing to do’ that it enabled me to say to myself that some one sent by me was going to see Albertine, and would doubtless bring her back with him. And if I had been able to read my own heart clearly at the start, I might have foreseen that it was this solution, hidden in the darkness, which I felt to be deplorable, that would ultimately prevail over the alternative course of patience which I had decided to choose, from want of will-power. As Saint-Loup already appeared slightly surprised to learn that a girl had been living with me through the whole winter without my having said a word to him about her, as moreover he had often spoken to me of the girl who had been at Balbec and I had never said in reply: “But she is living here,” he might be annoyed by my want of confidence. There was always the risk of Mme. Bontemps’s mentioning Balbec to him. But I was too impatient for his departure, for his arrival at the other end, to wish, to be able to think of the possible consequences of his journey. As for the risk of his recognising Albertine (at whom he had resolutely refrained from looking when he had met her at Doncières), she had, as everyone admitted, so altered and had grown so much stouter that it was hardly likely. He asked me whether I had not a picture of Albertine. I replied at first that I had not, so that he might not have a chance, from her photograph, taken about the time of our stay at Balbec, of

recognising Albertine, though he had had no more than a glimpse of her in the railway carriage. But then I remembered that in the photograph she would be already as different from the Albertine of Balbec as the living Albertine now was, and that he would recognise her no better from her photograph than in the flesh. While I was looking for it, he laid his hand gently upon my brow, by way of consoling me. I was touched by the distress which the grief that he guessed me to be feeling was causing him. For one thing, however final his rupture with Rachel, what he had felt at that time was not yet so remote that he had not a special sympathy, a special pity for this sort of suffering, as we feel ourselves more closely akin to a person who is afflicted with the same malady as ourselves. Besides, he had so strong an affection for myself that the thought of my suffering was intolerable to him. And so he conceived, towards her who was the cause of my suffering, a rancour mingled with admiration. He regarded me as so superior a being that he supposed that if I were to subject myself to another person she must be indeed extraordinary. I quite expected that he would think Albertine, in her photograph, pretty, but as at the same time I did not imagine that it would produce upon him the impression that Helen made upon the Trojan elders, as I continued to look for it, I said modestly: “Oh! you know, you mustn’t imagine things, for one thing it is a bad photograph, and besides there’s nothing startling about her, she is not a beauty, she is merely very nice.” “Oh, yes, she must be wonderful,” he said with a simple, sincere enthusiasm as he sought to form a mental picture of the person who was capable of plunging me in such despair and agitation. “I am angry with her because she has hurt you, but at the same time one can’t help seeing that a man who is an artist to his fingertips like you, that you, who love beauty in everything and with so passionate a love, were predestined to suffer more than the ordinary person when you found it in a woman.” At last I managed to find her photograph. “She is bound to be wonderful,” still came from Robert, who had not seen that I was holding out the protograph to him. All at once he caught sight of it, he held it for a moment between his hands. His face expressed a stupefaction which amounted to stupidity. “Is this the girl you are in love with?” he said at length in a tone from which astonishment was banished by his fear of making me angry. He made no remark upon it, he had assumed the reasonable, prudent, inevitably somewhat disdainful air which we assume before a sick person — even if he has been in the past a man of outstanding gifts, and our friend — who is now nothing of the sort, for, raving mad, he speaks to us of a celestial being who has appeared to him, and continues to behold this being where we, the sane man, can see nothing

but a quilt on the bed. I at once understood Robert's astonishment and that it was the same in which the sight of his mistress had plunged me, with this difference only that I had recognised in her a woman whom I already knew, whereas he supposed that he had never seen Albertine. But no doubt the difference between our respective impressions of the same person was equally great. The time was past when I had timidly begun at Balbec by adding to my visual sensations when I gazed at Albertine sensations of taste, of smell, of touch. Since then, other more profound, more pleasant, more indefinable sensations had been added to them, and afterwards painful sensations. In short, Albertine was merely, like a stone round which snow has gathered, the generating centre of an immense structure which rose above the plane of my heart. Robert, to whom all this stratification of sensations was invisible, grasped only a residue of it which it prevented me, on the contrary, from perceiving. What had disconcerted Robert when his eyes fell upon Albertine's photograph was not the consternation of the Trojan elders when they saw Helen go by and said: "All our misfortunes are not worth a single glance from her eyes," but the exactly opposite impression which may be expressed by: "What, it is for this that he has worked himself into such a state, has grieved himself so, has done so many idiotic things!" It must indeed be admitted that this sort of reaction at the sight of the person who has caused the suffering, upset the life, sometimes brought about the death of some one whom we love, is infinitely more frequent than that felt by the Trojan elders, and is in short habitual. This is not merely because love is individual, nor because, when we do not feel it, finding it avoidable and philosophising upon the folly of other people come naturally to us. No, it is because, when it has reached the stage at which it causes such misery, the structure composed of the sensations interposed between the face of the woman and the eyes of her lover — the huge egg of pain which encases it and conceals it as a mantle of snow conceals a fountain — is already raised so high that the point at which the lover's gaze comes to rest, the point at which he finds his pleasure and his sufferings, is as far from the point which other people see as is the real sun from the place in which its condensed light enables us to see it in the sky. And what is more, during this time, beneath the chrysalis of griefs and affections which render invisible to the lover the worst metamorphoses of the beloved object, her face has had time to grow old and to change. With the result that if the face which the lover saw on the first occasion is very far removed from that which he has seen since he has been in love and has been made to suffer, it is, in the opposite direction, equally far from the face which may now be seen by the indifferent onlooker. (What would have happened

if, instead of the photograph of one who was still a girl, Robert had seen the photograph of an elderly mistress?) And indeed we have no need to see for the first time the woman who has caused such an upheaval, in order to feel this astonishment. Often we know her already, as my great-uncle knew Odette. Then the optical difference extends not merely to the bodily aspect, but to the character, to the individual importance. It is more likely than not that the woman who is causing the man who is in love with her to suffer has already behaved perfectly towards some one who was not interested in her, just as Odette who was so cruel to Swann had been the sedulous 'lady in pink' to my great-uncle, or indeed that the person whose every decision is calculated in advance with as much dread as that of a deity by the man who is in love with her, appears as a person of no importance, only too glad to do anything that he may require of her, in the eyes of the man who is not in love with her, as Saint-Loup's mistress appeared to me who saw in her nothing more than that 'Rachel, when from the Lord' who had so repeatedly been offered me. I recalled my own stupefaction, that first time that I met her with Saint-Loup, at the thought that anybody could be tormented by not knowing what such a woman had been doing, by the itch to know what she might have said in a whisper to some other man, why she had desired a rupture. And I felt that all this past existence — but, in this case, Albertine's — toward which every fibre of my heart, of my life was directed with a throbbing, clumsy pain, must appear just as insignificant to Saint-Loup as it would one day, perhaps, appear to myself. I felt that I would pass perhaps gradually, so far as the insignificance or gravity of Albertine's past was concerned, from the state of mind in which I was at the moment to that of Saint-Loup, for I was under no illusion as to what Saint-Loup might be thinking, as to what anyone else than the lover himself might think. And I was not unduly distressed. Let us leave pretty women to men devoid of imagination. I recalled that tragic explanation of so many of us which is furnished by an inspired but not lifelike portrait, such as Elstir's portrait of Odette, which is a portrait not so much of a mistress as of our degrading love for her. There was lacking only what we find in so many portraits — that the painter should have been at once a great artist and a lover (and even then it was said that Elstir had been in love with Odette). This disparity, the whole life of a lover — of a lover whose acts of folly nobody understands — the whole life of a Swann goes to prove. But let the lover be embodied in a painter like Elstir and then we have the clue to the enigma, we have at length before our eyes those lips which the common herd have never perceived, that nose which nobody has ever seen, that unsuspected carriage. The

portrait says: “What I have loved, what has made me suffer, what I have never ceased to behold is this.” By an inverse gymnastic, I who had made a mental effort to add to Rachel all that Saint-Loup had added to her of himself, I attempted to subtract the support of my heart and mind from the composition of Albertine and to picture her to myself as she must appear to Saint-Loup, as Rachel had appeared to me. Those differences, even though we were to observe them ourselves, what importance would we attach to them? When, in the summer at Balbec, Albertine used to wait for me beneath the arcades of Incarville and spring into my carriage, not only had she not yet put on weight, she had, as a result of too much exercise, begun to waste; thin, made plainer by an ugly hat which left visible only the tip of an ugly nose, and a side-view, pale cheeks like white slugs, I recognised very little of her, enough however to know, when she sprang into the carriage, that it was she, that she had been punctual in keeping our appointment and had not gone somewhere else; and this was enough; what we love is too much in the past, consists too much in the time that we have spent together for us to require the whole woman; we wish only to be sure that it is she, not to be mistaken as to her identity, a thing far more important than beauty to those who are in love; her cheeks may grow hollow, her body thin, even to those who were originally most proud, in the eyes of the world, of their domination over beauty, that little tip of a nose, that sign in which is summed up the permanent personality of a woman, that algebraical formula, that constant, is sufficient to prevent a man who is courted in the highest society and is in love with her from being free upon a single evening because he is spending his evenings in brushing and entangling, until it is time to go to bed, the hair of the woman whom he loves, or simply in staying by her side, so that he may be with her or she with him, or merely that she may not be with other people.

“You are sure,” Robert asked me, “that I can begin straight away by offering this woman thirty thousand francs for her husband’s constituency? She is as dishonest as all that? You’re sure you aren’t exaggerating and that three thousand francs wouldn’t be enough?” “No, I beg of you, don’t try to be economical about a thing that matters so much to me. This is what you are to say to her (and it is to some extent true): ‘My friend borrowed these thirty thousand francs from a relative for the election expenses of the uncle of the girl he was engaged to marry. It was because of this engagement that the money was given him. And he asked me to bring it to you so that Albertine should know nothing about it. And now Albertine goes and leaves him. He doesn’t know what to do. He is obliged to pay back the thirty thousand francs if he does not marry Albertine. And if he

is going to marry her, then if only to keep up appearances she ought to return immediately, because it will look so bad if she stays away for long.' You think I've made all this up?" "Not at all," Saint-Loup assured me out of consideration for myself, out of discretion, and also because he knew that truth is often stranger than fiction. After all, it was by no means impossible that in this tale of the thirty thousand francs there might be, as I had told him, a large element of truth. It was possible, but it was not true and this element of truth was in fact a lie. But we lied to each other, Robert and I, as in every conversation when one friend is genuinely anxious to help another who is desperately in love. The friend who is being counsellor, prop, comforter, may pity the other's distress but cannot share it, and the kinder he is to him the more he has to lie. And the other confesses to him as much as is necessary in order to secure his help, but, simply perhaps in order to secure that help, conceals many things from him. And the happy one of the two is, when all is said, he who takes trouble, goes on a journey, executes a mission, but feels no anguish in his heart. I was at this moment the person that Robert had been at Doncières when he thought that Rachel had abandoned him. "Very well, just as you like; if I get my head bitten off, I accept the snub in advance for your sake. And even if it does seem a bit queer to make such an open bargain, I know that in our own set there are plenty of duchesses, even the most stuffy of them, who if you offered them thirty thousand francs Would do things far more difficult than telling their nieces not to stay in Touraine. Anyhow I am doubly glad to be doing you a service, since that is the only reason that will make you consent to see me. If I marry," he went on, "don't you think we might see more of one another, won't you look upon my house as your own..." He stopped short, the thought having suddenly occurred to him (as I supposed at the time) that, if I too were to marry, his wife would not be able to make an intimate friend of Albertine. And I remembered what the Cambremers had said to me as to the probability of his marrying a niece of the Prince de Guermantes. He consulted the time-table, and found that he could not leave Paris until the evening. Françoise inquired: "Am I to take Mlle. Albertine's bed out of the study?" "Not at all," I said, "you must leave everything ready for her." I hoped that she would return any day and did not wish Françoise to suppose that there could be any doubt of her return. Albertine's departure must appear to have been arranged between ourselves, and not in any way to imply that she loved me less than before. But Françoise looked at me with an air, if not of incredulity, at any rate of doubt. She too had her alternative hypotheses. Her nostrils expanded, she could scent the quarrel, she must have felt it in the air for

a long time past. And if she was not absolutely sure of it, this was perhaps because, like myself, she would hesitate to believe unconditionally what would have given her too much pleasure. Now the burden of the affair rested no longer upon my overwrought mind, but upon Saint-Loup. I became quite light-hearted because I had made a decision, because I could say to myself: “I haven’t lost any time, I have acted.” Saint-Loup can barely have been in the train when in the hall I ran into Bloch, whose ring I had not heard, and so was obliged to let him stay with me for a minute. He had met me recently with Albertine (whom he had known at Balbec) on a day when she was in bad humour. “I met M. Bontemps at dinner,” he told me, “and as I have a certain influence over him, I told him that I was grieved that his niece was not nicer to you, that he must make entreaties to her in that connexion.” I boiled with rage; these entreaties, this compassion destroyed the whole effect of Saint-Loup’s intervention and brought me into direct contact with Albertine herself whom I now seemed to be imploring to return. To make matters worse, Françoise, who was lingering in the hall, could hear every word. I heaped every imaginable reproach upon Bloch, telling him that I had never authorised him to do anything of the sort and that, besides, the whole thing was nonsense. Bloch, from that moment, continued to smile, less, I imagine, from joy than from self-consciousness at having made me angry. He laughingly expressed his surprise at having provoked such anger. Perhaps he said this hoping to minimise in my mind the importance of his indiscreet intervention, perhaps it Was because he was of a cowardly nature, and lived gaily and idly in an atmosphere of falsehood, as jelly-fish float upon the surface of the sea, perhaps because, even if he had not been of a different race, as other people can never place themselves at our point of view, they do not realise the magnitude of the injury that words uttered at random can do us. I had barely shewn him out, unable to think of any remedy for the mischief that he had done, when the bell rang again and Françoise brought me a summons from the head of the Sûreté. The parents of the little girl whom I had brought into the house for an hour had decided to lodge a complaint against me for corruption of a child under the age of consent. There are moments in life when a sort of beauty is created by the multiplicity of the troubles that assail us, intertwined like Wagnerian *leitmotiv*, from the idea also, which then emerges, that events are not situated in the content of the reflexions portrayed in the wretched little mirror which the mind holds in front of it and which is called the future, that they are somewhere outside, and spring up as suddenly as a person who comes to accuse us of a crime. Even when left to itself, an event becomes modified, whether frustration

amplifies it for us or satisfaction reduces it. But it is rarely unaccompanied. The feelings aroused by each event contradict one another, and there comes to a certain extent, as I felt when on my way to the head of the Sûreté, an at least momentary revulsion which is as provocative of sentimental misery as fear. I found at the Sûreté the girl's parents who insulted me by saying: "We don't eat this sort of bread," and handed me back the five hundred francs which I declined to take, and the head of the Sûreté who, setting himself the inimitable example of the judicial facility in repartee, took hold of a word from each sentence that I uttered, a word which enabled him to make a witty and crushing retort. My innocence of the alleged crime was never taken into consideration, for that was the sole hypothesis which nobody was willing to accept for an instant. Nevertheless the difficulty of a conviction enabled me to escape with an extremely violent reprimand, while the parents were in the room. But as soon as they had gone, the head of the Sûreté, who had a weakness for little girls, changed his tone and admonished me as one man to another: "Next time, you must be more careful. Gad, you can't pick them up as easily as that, or you'll get into trouble. Anyhow, you can find dozens of girls better than that one, and far cheaper. It was a perfectly ridiculous amount to pay." I felt him to be so incapable of understanding me if I attempted to tell him the truth that without saying a word I took advantage of his permission to withdraw. Every passer-by, until I was safely at home, seemed to me an inspector appointed to spy upon my behaviour. But this *leitmotiv*, like that of my anger with Bloch, died away, leaving the field clear for that of Albertine's departure. And this took its place once more, but in an almost joyous tone now that Saint-Loup had started. Now that he had undertaken to go and see Mme. Bontemps, my sufferings had been dispelled. I believed that this was because I had taken action, I believed it sincerely, for we never know what we conceal in our heart of hearts. What really made me happy was not, as I supposed, that I had transferred my load of indecisions to Saint-Loup. I was not, for that matter, entirely wrong; the specific remedy for an unfortunate event (and three events out of four are unfortunate) is a decision; for its effect is that, by a sudden reversal of our thoughts, it interrupts the flow of those that come from the past event and prolong its vibration, and breaks that flow with a contrary flow of contrary thoughts, come from without, from the future. But these new thoughts are most of all beneficial to us when (and this was the case with the thoughts that assailed me at this moment), from the heart of that future, it is a hope that they bring us. What really made me so happy was the secret certainty that Saint-Loup's mission could not fail, Albertine

was bound to return, I realised this; for not having received, on the following day, any answer from Saint-Loup, I began to suffer afresh. My decision, my transference to him of full power of action, were not therefore the cause of my joy, which, in that case, would have persisted; but rather the 'Success is certain' which had been in my mind when I said: "Come what may." And the thought aroused by his delay, that, after all, his mission might not prove successful, was so hateful to me that I had lost my gaiety. It is in reality our anticipation, our hope of happy events that fills us with a joy which we ascribe to other causes and which ceases, letting us relapse into misery, if we are no longer so assured that what we desire will come to pass. It is always this invisible belief that sustains the edifice of our world of sensation, deprived of which it rocks from its foundations. We have seen that it created for us the merit or unimportance of other people, our excitement or boredom at seeing them. It creates similarly the possibility of enduring a grief which seems to us trivial, simply because we are convinced that it will presently be brought to an end, or its sudden enlargement until the presence of a certain person matters as much as, possibly more than our life itself. One thing however succeeded in making my heartache as keen as it had been at the first moment and (I am bound to admit) no longer was. This was when I read over again a passage in Albertine's letter. It is all very well our loving people, the pain of losing them, when in our isolation we are confronted with it alone, to which our mind gives, to a certain extent, whatever form it chooses, this pain is endurable and different from that other pain less human, less our own, as unforeseen and unusual as an accident in the moral world and in the region of our heart, which is caused not so much by the people themselves as by the manner in which we have learned that we are not to see them again. Albertine, I might think of her with gentle tears, accepting the fact that I should not be able to see her again this evening as I had seen her last night, but when I read over again: "my decision is irrevocable," that was another matter, it was like taking a dangerous drug which might give me a heart attack which I could not survive. There is in inanimate objects, in events, in farewell letters a special danger which amplifies and even alters the nature of the grief that people are capable of causing us. But this pain did not last long. I was, when all was said, so sure of Saint-Loup's skill, of his eventual success, Albertine's return seemed to me so certain that I asked myself whether I had had any reason to hope for it. Nevertheless, I rejoiced at the thought. Unfortunately for myself, who supposed the business with the Sûreté to be over and done with, Françoise came in to tell me that an inspector had called to inquire whether I was in the habit of having

girls in the house, that the porter, supposing him to refer to Albertine, had replied in the affirmative, and that from that moment it had seemed that the house was being watched. In future it would be impossible for me ever to bring a little girl into the house to console me in my grief, without the risk of being put to shame in her eyes by the sudden intrusion of an inspector, and of her regarding me as a criminal. And at the same instant I realised how far more we live for certain ideas than we suppose, for this impossibility of my ever taking a little girl on my knee again seemed to me to destroy all the value of my life, but what was more I understood how comprehensible it is that people will readily refuse wealth and risk their lives, whereas we imagine that pecuniary interest and the fear of death rule the world. For if I had thought that even a little girl who was a complete stranger might by the arrival of a policeman, be given a bad impression of myself, how much more readily would I have committed suicide. And yet there was no possible comparison between the two degrees of suffering. Now in everyday life we never bear in mind that the people to whom we offer money, whom we threaten to kill, may have mistresses or merely friends, to whose esteem they attach importance, not to mention their own self-respect. But, all of a sudden, by a confusion of which I was not aware (I did not in fact remember that Albertine, being of full age, was free to live under my roof and even to be my mistress), it seemed to me that the charge of corrupting minors might include Albertine also. Thereupon my life appeared to me to be hedged in on every side. And when I thought that I had not lived chastely with her, I found in the punishment that had been inflicted upon me for having forced an unknown little girl to accept money, that relation which almost always exists in human sanctions, the effect of which is that there is hardly ever either a fair sentence or a judicial error, but a sort of compromise between the false idea that the judge forms of an innocent action and the culpable deeds of which he is unaware. But then when I thought that Albertine’s return might involve me in the scandal of a sentence which would degrade me in her eyes and would perhaps do her, too, an injury which she would not forgive me, I ceased to look forward to her return, it terrified me. I would have liked to telegraph to her not to come back. And immediately, drowning everything else, the passionate desire for her return overwhelmed me. The fact was that having for an instant considered the possibility of telling her not to return and of living without her, all of a sudden, I felt myself on the contrary ready to abandon all travel, all pleasure, all work, if only Albertine might return! Ah, how my love for Albertine, the course of which I had supposed that I could foretell, on the analogy of my previous love for

Gilberte, had developed in an entirely opposite direction! How impossible it was for me to live without seeing her! And with each of my actions, even the most trivial, since they had all been steeped before in the blissful atmosphere which was Albertine's presence, I was obliged in turn, with a fresh expenditure of energy, with the same grief, to begin again the apprenticeship of separation. Then the competition of other forms of life thrust this latest grief into the background, and, during those days which were the first days of spring, I even found, as I waited until Saint-Loup should have seen Mme. Bontemps, in imagining Venice and beautiful, unknown women, a few moments of pleasing calm. As soon as I was conscious of this, I felt in myself a panic terror. This calm which I had just enjoyed was the first apparition of that great occasional force which was to wage war in me against grief, against love, and would in the end prove victorious. This state of which I had just had a foretaste and had received the warning, was, for a moment only, what would in time to come be my permanent state, a life in which I should no longer be able to suffer on account of Albertine, in which I should no longer be in love with her. And my love, which had just seen and recognised the one enemy by whom it could be conquered, forgetfulness, began to tremble, like a lion which in the cage in which it has been confined has suddenly caught sight of the python that is about to devour it.

I thought of Albertine all the time and never was Françoise, when she came into my room, quick enough in saying: "There are no letters," to curtail my anguish. From time to time I succeeded, by letting some current or other of ideas flow through my grief, in refreshing, in aerating to some slight extent the vitiated atmosphere of my heart, but at night, if I succeeded in going to sleep, then it was as though the memory of Albertine had been the drug that had procured my sleep, whereas the cessation of its influence would awaken me. I thought all the time of Albertine while I was asleep. It was a special sleep of her own that she gave me, and one in which, moreover, I should no longer have been at liberty, as when awake, to think of other things. Sleep and the memory of her were the two substances which I must mix together and take at one draught in order to put myself to sleep. When I was awake, moreover, my suffering went on increasing day by day instead of diminishing, not that oblivion was not performing its task, but because by the very fact of its doing so it favoured the idealisation of the regretted image and thereby the assimilation of my initial suffering to other analogous sufferings which intensified it. Still this image was endurable. But if all of a sudden I thought of her room, of her room in which the bed stood empty,

of her piano, her motor-car, I lost all my strength, I shut my eyes, let my head droop upon my shoulder like a person who is about to faint. The sound of doors being opened hurt me almost as much because it was not she that was opening them.

When it was possible that a telegram might have come from Saint-Loup, Idared not ask: “Is there a telegram?” At length one did come, but brought with it only a postponement of any result, with the message: “The ladies have gone away for three days.” No doubt, if I had endured the four days that had already elapsed since her departure, it was because I said to myself: “It is only a matter of time, by the end of the week she will be here.” But this argument did not alter the fact that for my heart, for my body, the action to be performed was the same: living without her, returning home and not finding her in the house, passing the door of her room — as for opening it, I had not yet the courage to do that — knowing that she was not inside, going to bed without having said good night to her, such were the tasks that my heart had been obliged to accomplish in their terrible entirety, and for all the world as though I had not been going to see Albertine. But the fact that my heart had already performed this daily task four times proved that it was now capable of continuing to perform it. And soon, perhaps, the consideration which helped me to go on living in this fashion — the prospect of Albertine’s return — I should cease to feel any need of it (I should be able to say to myself: “She is never coming back,” and remain alive all the same as I had already been living for the last four days), like a cripple who has recovered the use of his feet and can dispense with his crutches. No doubt when I came home at night I still found, taking my breath away, stifling me in the vacuum of solitude, the memories placed end to end in an interminable series of all the evenings upon which Albertine had been waiting for me; but already I found in this series my memory of last night, of the night before and of the two previous evenings, that is to say the memory of the four nights that had passed since Albertine’s departure, during which I had remained without her, alone, through which nevertheless I had lived, four nights already, forming a string of memories that was very slender compared with the other, but to which every new day would perhaps add substance. I shall say nothing of the letter conveying a declaration of affection which I received at this time from a niece of Mme. de Guermantes, considered the prettiest girl in Paris, nor of the overtures made to me by the Duc de Guermantes on behalf of her parents, resigned, in their anxiety to secure their daughter’s happiness, to the inequality of the match, to an apparent misalliance. Such incidents which might prove gratifying to our self-

esteem are too painful when we are in love. We feel a desire, but shrink from the indelicacy of communicating them to her who has a less flattering opinion of us, nor would that opinion be altered by the knowledge that we are able to inspire one that is very different. What the Duke's niece wrote to me could only have made Albertine angry. From the moment of waking, when I picked my grief up again at the point which I had reached when I fell asleep, like a book which had been shut for a while but which I would keep before my eyes until night, it could be only with some thought relating to Albertine that all my sensation would be brought into harmony, whether it came to me from without or from within. The bell rang: it is a letter from her, it is she herself perhaps! If I felt myself in better health, not too miserable, I was no longer jealous, I no longer had any grievance against her, I would have liked to see her at once, to kiss her, to live happily with her ever after. The act of telegraphing to her: "Come at once" seemed to me to have become a perfectly simple thing, as though my fresh mood had changed not merely my inclinations but things external to myself, had made them more easy. If I was in a sombre mood, all my anger with her revived, I no longer felt any desire to kiss her, I felt how impossible it was that she could ever make me happy, I sought only to do her harm and to prevent her from belonging to other people. But these two opposite moods had an identical result: it was essential that she should return as soon as possible. And yet, however keen my joy at the moment of her return, I felt that very soon the same difficulties would crop up again and that to seek happiness in the satisfaction of a moral desire was as fatuous as to attempt to reach the horizon by walking straight ahead. The farther the desire advances, the farther does true possession withdraw. So that if happiness or at least freedom from suffering can be found it is not the satisfaction, but the gradual reduction, the eventual extinction of our desire that we must seek. We attempt to see the person whom we love, we ought to attempt not to see her, oblivion alone brings about an ultimate extinction of desire. And I imagine that if an author were to publish truths of this sort he would dedicate the book that contained them to a woman to whom he would thus take pleasure in returning, saying to her: "This book is yours." And thus, while telling the truth in his book, he would be lying in his dedication, for he will attach to the book's being hers only the importance that he attaches to the stone that came to him from her which will remain precious to him only so long as he is in love with her. The bonds that unite another person to ourselves exist only in our mind. Memory as it grows fainter relaxes them, and notwithstanding the illusion by which we would fain be cheated and with which, out of love, friendship,

politeness, deference, duty, we cheat other people, we exist alone. Man is the creature that cannot emerge from himself, that knows his fellows only in himself; when he asserts the contrary, he is lying. And I should have been in such terror (had there been anyone capable of taking it) of somebody's robbing me of this need of her, this love for her, that I convinced myself that it had a value in my life. To be able to hear uttered, without being either fascinated or pained by them, the names of the stations through which the train passed on its way to Touraine, would have seemed to me a diminution of myself (for no other reason really than that it would have proved that Albertine was ceasing to interest me); it was just as well, I told myself, that by incessantly asking myself what she could be doing, thinking, longing, at every moment, whether she intended, whether she was going to return, I should be keeping open that communicating door which love had installed in me, and feeling another person's mind flood through open sluices the reservoir which must not again become stagnant. Presently, as Saint-Loup remained silent, a subordinate anxiety — my expectation of a further telegram, of a telephone call from him — masked the other, my uncertainty as to the result, whether Albertine was going to return. Listening for every sound in expectation of the telegram became so intolerable that I felt that, whatever might be its contents, the arrival of the telegram, which was the only thing of which I could think at the moment, would put an end to my sufferings. But when at length I had received a telegram from Robert in which he informed me that he had seen Mme. Bontemps, but that, notwithstanding all his precautions, Albertine had seen him, and that this had upset everything, I burst out in a torrent of fury and despair, for this was what I would have done anything in the world to prevent. Once it came to Albertine's knowledge, Saint-Loup's mission gave me an appearance of being dependent upon her which could only dissuade her from returning, my horror of which was, as it happened, all that I had retained of the pride that my love had boasted in Gilberte's day and had since lost. I cursed Robert. Then I told myself that, if this attempt had failed, I would try another. Since man is able to influence the outer world, how, if I brought into play cunning, intelligence, pecuniary advantage, affection, should I fail to succeed in destroying this appalling fact: Albertine's absence. We believe that according to our desire we are able to change the things around about us, we believe this because otherwise we can see no favourable solution. We forget the solution that generally comes to pass and is also favourable: we do not succeed in changing things according to our desire, but gradually our desire changes. The situation that we hoped to change because it was intolerable becomes

unimportant. We have not managed to surmount the obstacle, as we were absolutely determined to do, but life has taken us round it, led us past it, and then if we turn round to gaze at the remote past, we can barely catch sight of it, so imperceptible has it become. In the flat above ours, one of the neighbours was strumming songs. I applied their words, which I knew, to Albertine and myself, and was stirred by so profound a sentiment that I began to cry. The words were:

"*Hélas, l'oiseau qui fuit ce qu'il croit l'esclavage,*
d'un vol désespéré revient battre au vitrage"

and the death of Manon:

"*Manon, réponds-moi donc,*
Seul amour de mon âme, je n'ai su qu'aujourd'hui
la bonté de ton coeur."

Since Manon returned to Des Grieux, it seemed to me that I was to Albertine the one and only love of her life. Alas, it is probable that, if she had been listening at that moment to the same air, it would not have been myself that she would have cherished under the name of Des Grieux, and, even if the idea had occurred to her, the memory of myself would have checked her emotion on hearing this music, albeit it was, although better and more distinguished, just the sort of music that she admired. As for myself, I had not the courage to abandon myself to so pleasant a train of thought, to imagine Albertine calling me her 'heart's only love' and realising that she had been mistaken over what she 'had thought to be bondage.' I knew that we can never read a novel without giving its heroine the form and features of the woman with whom we are in love. But be the ending as happy as it may, our love has not advanced an inch and, when we have shut the book, she whom we love and who has come to us at last in its pages, loves us no better in real life. In a fit of fury, I telegraphed to Saint-Loup to return as quickly as possible to Paris, so as to avoid at least the appearance of an aggravating insistence upon a mission which I had been so anxious to keep secret. But even before he had returned in obedience to my instructions it was from Albertine herself that I received the following letter:

"My dear, you have sent your friend Saint-Loup to my aunt, which was foolish. My dear boy, if you needed me why did you not write to me myself, I should have been only too delighted to come back, do not let us have any more of these absurd complications." "I should have been only too delighted to come back!" If she said this, it must mean that she regretted her departure, and was only seeking an excuse to return. So that I had merely to do what she said, to write to her that I needed her, and she would return.

I was going, then, to see her again, her, the Albertine of Balbec (for since her departure this was what she had once more become to me; like a sea-shell to which we cease to pay any attention while we have it on the chest of drawers in our room, once we have parted with it, either by giving it away or by losing it, and begin to think about it, a thing which we had ceased to do, she recalled to me all the joyous beauty of the blue mountains of the sea). And it was not only she that had become a creature of the imagination, that is to say desirable, life with her had become an imaginary life, that is to a life set free from all difficulties, so that I said to myself: “How happy we are going to be!” But, now that I was assured of her return, I must not appear to be seeking to hasten it, but must on the contrary efface the bad impression left by Saint-Loup’s intervention, which I could always disavow later on by saying that he had acted upon his own initiative, because he had always been in favour of our marriage. Meanwhile, I read her letter again, and was nevertheless disappointed when I saw how little there is of a person in a letter. Doubtless the characters traced on the paper express our thoughts, as do also our features: it is still a thought of some kind that we see before us. But all the same, in the person, the thought is not apparent to us until it has been diffused through the expanded water-lily of her face. This modifies it considerably. And it is perhaps one of the causes of our perpetual disappointments in love, this perpetual deviation which brings it about that, in response to our expectation of the ideal person with whom we are in love, each meeting provides us with a person in flesh and blood in whom there is already so little trace of our dream. And then when we demand something of this person, we receive from her a letter in which even of the person very little remains, as in the letters of an algebraical formula there no longer remains the precise value of the arithmetical ciphers, which themselves do not contain the qualities of the fruit or flowers that they enumerate. And yet love, the beloved object, her letters, are perhaps nevertheless translations (unsatisfying as it may be to pass from one to the other) of the same reality, since the letter seems to us inadequate only while we are reading it, but we have been sweating blood until its arrival, and it is sufficient to calm our anguish, if not to appease, with its tiny black symbols, our desire which knows that it contains after all only the equivalent of a word, a smile, a kiss, not the things themselves.

I wrote to Albertine:

“My dear, I was just about to write to you, and I thank you for telling me that if I had been in need of you you would have come at once; it is like you to have so exalted a sense of devotion to an old friend, which can only increase my

regard for you. But no, I did not ask and I shall not ask you to return; our meeting — for a long time to come — might not be painful, perhaps, to you, a heartless girl. To me whom at times you have thought so cold, it would be most painful. Life has driven us apart. You have made a decision which I consider very wise, and which you have made at the right moment, with a marvellous presentiment, for you left me on the day on which I had just received my mother's consent to my asking you to marry me. I would have told you this when I awoke, when I received her letter (at the same moment as yours). Perhaps you would have been afraid of distressing me by leaving immediately after that. And we should perhaps have united our lives in what would have been for us (who knows?) misery. If this is what was in store for us, then I bless you for your wisdom. We should lose all the fruit of it were we to meet again. This is not to say that I should not find it a temptation. But I claim no great credit for resisting it. You know what an inconstant person I am and how quickly I forget. You have told me often, I am first and foremost a man of habit. The habits which I am beginning to form in your absence are not as yet very strong. Naturally, at this moment, the habits that I had when you were with me, habits which your departure has upset, are still the stronger. They will not remain so for very long. For that reason, indeed, I had thought of taking advantage of these last few days in which our meeting would not yet be for me what it will be in a fortnight's time, perhaps even sooner (forgive my frankness): a disturbance,— I had thought of taking advantage of them, before the final oblivion, in order to settle certain little material questions with you, in which you might, as a good and charming friend, have rendered a service to him who for five minutes imagined himself your future husband. As I never expected that my mother would approve, as on the other hand I desired that we should each of us enjoy all that liberty of which you had too generously and abundantly made a sacrifice which might be admissible had we been living together for a few weeks, but would have become as hateful to you as to myself now that we were to spend the rest of our lives together (it almost hurts me to think as I write to you that this nearly happened, that the news came only a moment too late), I had thought of organising our existence in the most independent manner possible, and, to begin with, I wished you to have that yacht in which you could go cruising while I, not being well enough to accompany you, would wait for you at the port (I had written to Elstir to ask for his advice, since you admire his taste), and on land I wished you to have a motor-car to yourself, for your very own, in which you could go out, could travel wherever you chose. The yacht was almost ready; it is named, after

a wish that you expressed at Balbec, *le Cygne*. And remembering that your favourite make of car was the Rolls, I had ordered one. But now that we are never to meet again, as I have no hope of persuading you to accept either the vessel or the car (to me they would be quite useless), I had thought — as I had ordered them through an agent, but in your name — that you might perhaps by countermanding them, yourself, save me the expense of the yacht and the car which are no longer required. But this, and many other matters, would need to be discussed. Well, I find that so long as I am capable of falling in love with you again, which will not be for long, it would be madness, for the sake of a sailing-vessel and a Rolls-Royce, to meet again and to risk the happiness of your life since you have decided that it lies in your living apart from myself. No, I prefer to keep the Rolls and even the yacht. And as I shall make no use of them and they are likely to remain for ever, one in its dock, dismantled, the other in its garage, I shall have engraved upon the yacht (Heavens, I am afraid of misquoting the title and committing a heresy which would shock you) those lines of Mallarmé which you used to like:

Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.

You remember — it is the poem that begins:

Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui...

Alas, to-day is no longer either virginal or fair. But the men who know, as I know, that they will very soon make of it an endurable 'to-morrow' are seldom *endurable* themselves. As for the Rolls, it would deserve rather those other lines of the same poet which you said you could not understand:

Dis si je ne suis pas joyeux
Tonnerre et rubis aux moyeux
De voir en l'air que ce feu troue
Avec des royaumes épars
Comme mourir pourpre la roue
Du seul vespéral de mes chars.

“Farewell for ever, my little Albertine, and thanks once again for the charming drive which we took on the eve of our parting. I retain a very pleasant memory of it.

“P.S. I make no reference to what you tell me of the alleged suggestions which Saint-Loup (whom I do not for a moment believe to be in Touraine) may have made to your aunt. It is just like a Sherlock Holmes story. For what do you take me?”

No doubt, just as I had said in the past to Albertine: “I am not in love with you,” in order that she might love me; “I forget people when I do not see them,” in order that she might come often to see me; “I have decided to leave you,” in order to forestall any idea of a parting, now it was because I was absolutely determined that she must return within a week that’I said to her: “Farewell for ever”; it was because I wished to see her again that I said to her: “I think it would be dangerous to see you”; it was because living apart from her seemed to me worse than death that I wrote to her: “You were right, we should be wretched together.” Alas, this false letter, when I wrote it in order to appear not to be dependent upon her and also to enjoy the pleasure of saying certain things which could arouse emotion only in myself and not in her, I ought to have foreseen from the start that it was possible that it would result in a negative response, that is to say one which confirmed what I had said; that this was indeed probable, for even had Albertine been less intelligent than she was, she would never have doubted for an instant that what I said to her was untrue. Indeed without pausing to consider the intentions that I expressed in this letter, the mere fact of my writing it, even if it had not been preceded by Saint-Loup’s intervention, was enough to prove to her that I desired her return and to prompt her to let me become more and more inextricably ensnared. Then, having foreseen the possibility of a reply in the negative, I ought also to have foreseen that this reply would at once revive in its fullest intensity my love for Albertine. And I ought, still before posting my letter, to have asked myself whether, in the event of Albertine’s replying in the same tone and refusing to return, I should have sufficient control over my grief to force myself to remain silent, not to telegraph to her: “Come back,” not to send her some other messenger, which, after I had written to her that we would not meet again, would make it perfectly obvious that I could not get on without her, and would lead to her refusing more emphatically than ever, whereupon I, unable to endure my anguish for another moment, would go down to visit her and might, for all I knew, be refused

admission. And, no doubt, this would have been, after three enormous blunders, the worst of all, after which there would be nothing left but to take my life in front of her house. But the disastrous manner in which the psychopathic universe is constructed has decreed that the clumsy action, the action which we ought most carefully to have avoided, should be precisely the action that will calm us, the action that, opening before us, until we learn its result, fresh avenues of hope, relieves us for the moment of the intolerable pain which a refusal has aroused in us. With the result that, when the pain is too keen, we dash headlong into the blunder that consists in writing, sending somebody to intercede, going in person, proving that we cannot get on without the woman we love. But I foresaw nothing of all this. The probable result of my letter seemed to me on the contrary to be that of making Albertine return to me at once. And so, as I thought of this result, I greatly enjoyed writing the letter. But at the same time I had not ceased, while writing it, from shedding tears; partly, at first, in the same way as upon the day when I had acted a pretence of separation, because, as the words represented for me the idea which they expressed to me, albeit they were aimed in the opposite direction (uttered mendaciously because my pride forbade me to admit that I was in love), they carried their own load of sorrow. But also because I felt that the idea contained a grain of truth.

As this letter seemed to me to be certain of its effect, I began to regret that I had sent it. For as I pictured to myself the return (so natural, after all), of Albertine, immediately all the reasons which made our marriage a thing disastrous to myself returned in their fullest force. I hoped that she would refuse to come back. I was engaged in calculating that my liberty, my whole future depended upon her refusal, that I had been mad to write to her, that I ought to have retrieved my letter which, alas, had gone, when Françoise, with the newspaper which she had just brought upstairs, handed it back to me. She was not certain how many stamps it required. But immediately I changed my mind; I hoped that Albertine would not return, but I wished the decision to come from her, so as to put an end to my anxiety, and I handed the letter back to Françoise. I opened the newspaper; it announced a performance by Berma. Then I remembered the two different attitudes in which I had listened to Phèdre, and it was now in a third attitude that I thought of the declaration scene. It seemed to me that what I had so often repeated to myself, and had heard recited in the theatre, was the statement of the laws of which I must make experience in my life. There are in our soul things to which we do not realise how strongly we are attached. Or else, if we live without them, it is because we put off from day to

day, from fear of failure, or of being made to suffer, entering into possession of them. This was what had happened to me in the case of Gilberte when I thought that I had given her up. If before the moment in which we are entirely detached from these things — a moment long subsequent to that in which we suppose ourselves to have been detached from them — the girl with whom we are in love becomes, for instance, engaged to some one else, we are mad, we can no longer endure the life which appeared to us to be so sorrowfully calm. Or else, if we are in control of the situation, we feel that she is a burden, we would gladly be rid of her. Which was what had happened to me in the case of Albertine. But let a sudden departure remove the unloved creature from us, we are unable to survive. But did not the plot of Phèdre combine these two cases? Hippolyte is about to leave. Phèdre, who until then has taken care to court his hostility, from a scruple of conscience, she says, or rather the poet makes her say, because she is unable to foresee the consequences and feels that she is not loved, Phèdre can endure the situation no longer. She comes to him to confess her love, and this was the scene which I had so often repeated to myself:

On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous....

Doubtless this reason for the departure of Hippolyte is less decisive, we may suppose, than the death of Thésée. And similarly when, a few lines farther on, Phèdre pretends for a moment that she has been misunderstood:

Aurais-je perdu tout le soin de ma gloire?

we may suppose that it is because Hippolyte has repulsed her declaration.

Madame, oubliez-vous
Que Thésée est mon père, et qu'il est votre époux?

But there would not have been this indignation unless, in the moment of a consummated bliss, Phèdre could have had the same feeling that it amounted to little or nothing. Whereas, as soon as she sees that it is not to be consummated, that Hippolyte thinks that he has misunderstood her and makes apologies, then, like myself when I decided to give my letter back to Françoise, she decides that the refusal must come from him, decides to stake everything upon his answer:

Ah! cruel, tu m'as trop entendue.

And there is nothing, not even the harshness with which, as I had been told, Swann had treated Odette, or I myself had treated Albertine, a harshness which substituted for the original love a new love composed of pity, emotion, of the need of effusion, which is only a variant of the former love, that is not to be found also in this scene:

Tu me haïssais plus, je ne t'aimais pas moins.

Tes malheurs te prêtaient encor de nouveaux charmes.

What proves that it is not to the 'thought of her own fame' that Phèdre attaches most importance is that she would forgive Hippolyte and turn a deaf ear to the advice of Oenone had she not learned at the same instant that Hippolyte was in love with Aricie. So it is that jealousy, which in love is equivalent to the loss of all happiness, outweighs any loss of reputation. It is then that she allows Oenone (which is merely a name for the baser part of herself) to slander Hippolyte without taking upon herself the 'burden of his defence' and thus sends the man who will have none of her to a fate the calamities of which are no consolation, however, to herself, since her own suicide follows immediately upon the death of Hippolyte. Thus at least it was, with a diminution of the part played by all the 'Jansenist scruples,' as Bergotte would have said, which Racine ascribed to Phèdre to make her less guilty, that this scene appeared to me, a sort of prophecy of the amorous episodes in my own life. These reflexions had, however, altered nothing of my determination, and I handed my letter to Françoise so that she might post it after all, in order to carry into effect that appeal to Albertine which seemed to me to be indispensable, now that I had learned that my former attempt had failed. And no doubt we are wrong when we suppose that the accomplishment of our desire is a small matter, since as soon as we believe that it cannot be realised we become intent upon it once again, and decide that it was not worth our while to pursue it only when we are quite certain that our attempt will not fail. And yet we are right also. For if this accomplishment, if our happiness appear of small account only in the light of certainty, nevertheless they are an unstable element from which only trouble can arise. And our trouble will be all the greater the more completely our desire will have been accomplished, all the more impossible to endure when our happiness has been, in defiance of the law of nature, prolonged for a certain period, when it has received the consecration of habit. In another sense as well, these two tendencies, by which I mean that which made me anxious that my letter should be posted, and, when I thought that it had gone, my regret that I had written it, have each of them a certain element of truth. In the case of the first, it is easily comprehensible that we should go in pursuit of our happiness — or misery — and that at the same time we should hope to keep before us, by this latest action which is about to involve us in its consequences, a state of expectancy which does not leave us in absolute despair, in a word that we should seek to convert into other forms, which, we imagine, must be less painful to us, the malady from which we are suffering. But the other tendency is no less important, for, born of

our belief in the success of our enterprise, it is simply an anticipation of the disappointment which we should very soon feel in the presence of a satisfied desire, our regret at having fixed for ourselves, at the expense of other forms which are necessarily excluded, this form of happiness. I had given my letter to Françoise and had asked her to go out at once and post it. As soon as the letter had gone, I began once more to think of Albertine's return as imminent. It did not fail to introduce into my mind certain pleasing images which neutralised somewhat by their attractions the dangers that I foresaw in her return. The pleasure, so long lost, of having her with me was intoxicating.

Time passes, and gradually everything that we have said in falsehood becomes true; I had learned this only too well with Gilberte; the indifference that I had feigned when I could never restrain my tears had ended by becoming real; gradually life, as I told Gilberte in a lying formula which retrospectively had become true, life had driven us apart. I recalled this, I said to myself: "If Albertine allows an interval to elapse, my lies will become the truth. And now that the worst moments are over, ought I not to hope that she will allow this month to pass without returning? If she returns, I shall have to renounce the true life which certainly I am not in a fit state to enjoy as yet, but which as time goes on may begin to offer me attractions while my memory of Albertine grows fainter."

I have said that oblivion was beginning to perform its task. But one of the effects of oblivion was precisely — since it meant that many of Albertine's less pleasing aspects, of the boring hours that I had spent with her, no longer figured in my memory, ceased therefore to be reasons for my desiring that she should not be with me as I used to wish when she was still in the house — that it gave me a curtailed impression of her, enhanced by all the love that I had ever felt for other women. In this novel aspect of her, oblivion which nevertheless was engaged upon making me accustomed to our separation, made me, by shewing me a more attractive Albertine, long all the more for her return.

Since her departure, very often, when I was confident that I shewed no trace of tears, I would ring for Françoise and say to her: "We must make sure that Mademoiselle Albertine hasn't left anything behind her. Don't forget to do her room, it must be ready for her when she comes." Or merely: "Only the other day Mademoiselle Albertine said to me, let me think now, it was the day before she left..." I was anxious to diminish Françoise's abominable pleasure at Albertine's departure by letting her see that it was not to be prolonged. I was anxious also to let Françoise see that I was not afraid to speak of this departure, to proclaim it —

like certain generals who describe a forced retreat as a strategic withdrawal in conformity with a prearranged plan — as intended by myself, as constituting an episode the true meaning of which I concealed for the moment, but in no way implying the end of my friendship with Albertine. By repeating her name incessantly I sought in short to introduce, like a breath of air, something of herself into that room in which her departure had left a vacuum, in which I could no longer breathe. Then, moreover, we seek to reduce the dimensions of our grief by making it enter into our everyday speech between ordering a suit of clothes and ordering dinner.

While she was doing Albertine's room, Françoise, out of curiosity, opened the drawer of a little rosewood table in which my mistress used to put away the ornaments which she discarded when she went to bed. "Oh! Monsieur, Mademoiselle Albertine has forgotten to take her rings, she has left them in the drawer." My first impulse was to say: "We must send them after her." But this would make me appear uncertain of her return. "Very well," I replied after a moment of silence, "it is hardly worth while sending them to her as she is coming back so soon. Give them to me, I shall think about it." Françoise handed me the rings with a distinct misgiving. She loathed Albertine, but, regarding me in her own image, supposed that one could not hand me a letter in the handwriting of my mistress without the risk of my opening it. I took the rings. "Monsieur must take care not to lose them," said Françoise, "such beauties as they are! I don't know who gave them to her, if it was Monsieur or some one else, but I can see that it was some one rich, who had good taste!" "It was not I," I assured her, "besides, they don't both come from the same person, one was given her by her aunt and the other she bought for herself." "Not from the same person!" Françoise exclaimed, "Monsieur must be joking, they are just alike, except that one of them has had a ruby added to it, there's the same eagle on both, the same initials inside..." I do not know whether Françoise was conscious of the pain that she was causing me, but she began at this point to curve her lips in a smile which never left them. "What, the same eagle? You are talking nonsense. It is true that the one without the ruby has an eagle upon it, but on the other it is a sort of man's head." "A man's head, where did Monsieur discover that? I had only to put on my spectacles to see at once that it was one of the eagle's wings; if Monsieur will take his magnifying glass, he will see the other wing on the other side, the head and the beak in the middle. You can count the feathers. Oh, it's a fine piece of work." My intense anxiety to know whether Albertine had lied to me made me forget that I ought to maintain a certain

dignity in Françoise's presence and deny her the wicked pleasure that she felt, if not in torturing me, at least in disparaging my mistress. I remained breathless while Françoise went to fetch my magnifying glass, I took it from her, asked her to shew me the eagle upon the ring with the ruby, she had no difficulty in making me see the wings, conventionalised in the same way as upon the other ring, the feathers, cut separately in relief, the head. She pointed out to me also the similar inscriptions, to which, it is true, others were added upon the ring with the ruby. And on the inside of both was Albertine's monogram. "But I'm surprised that it should need all this to make Monsieur see that the rings are the same," said Françoise. "Even without examining them, you can see that it is the same style, the same way of turning the gold, the same form. As soon as I looked at them I could have sworn that they came from the same place. You can tell it as you can tell the dishes of a good cook." And indeed, to the curiosity of a servant, whetted by hatred and trained to observe details with a startling precision, there had been added, to assist her in this expert criticism, the taste that she had, that same taste in fact which she shewed in her cookery and which was intensified perhaps, as I had noticed when we left Paris for Balbec, in her attire, by the coquetry of a woman who was once good-looking, who has studied the jewels and dresses of other women. I might have taken the wrong box of medicine and, instead of swallowing a few capsules of veronal on a day when I felt that I had drunk too many cups of tea, might have swallowed as many capsules of caffeine; my heart would not have throbbed more violently. I asked Françoise to leave the room. I would have liked to see Albertine immediately. To my horror at her falsehood, to my jealousy of the unknown donor, was added grief that she should have allowed herself to accept such presents. I made her even more presents, it is true, but a woman whom we are keeping does not seem to us to be a kept woman so long as we do not know that she is being kept by other men. And yet since I had continued to spend so much money upon her, I had taken her notwithstanding this moral baseness; this baseness I had maintained in her, I had perhaps increased, perhaps created it. Then, just as we have the faculty of inventing fairy tales to soothe our grief, just as we manage, when we are dying of hunger, to persuade ourselves that a stranger is going to leave us a fortune of a hundred millions, I imagined Albertine in my arms, explaining to me in a few words that it was because of the similarity of its workmanship that she had bought the second ring, that it was she who had had her initials engraved on it. But this explanation was still feeble, it had not yet had time to thrust into my mind its beneficent roots, and my grief could not be so quickly soothed. And I reflected

that many men who tell their friends that their mistresses are very kind to them must suffer similar torments. Thus it is that they lie to others and to themselves. They do not altogether lie; they do spend in the woman's company hours that are really pleasant; but think of all that the kindness which their mistresses shew them before their friends and which enables them to boast, and of all that the kindness which their mistresses shew when they are alone with them, and which enables their lovers to bless them, conceal of unrecorded hours in which the lover has suffered, doubted, sought everywhere in vain to discover the truth! It is to such sufferings that we attach the pleasure of loving, of delighting in the most insignificant remarks of a woman, which we know to be insignificant, but which we perfume with her scent. At this moment I could no longer find any delight in inhaling, by an act of memory, the scent of Albertine. Thunderstruck, holding the two rings in my hand, I stared at that pitiless eagle whose beak was rending my heart, whose wings, chiselled in high relief, had borne away the confidence that I retained in my mistress, in whose claws my tortured mind was unable to escape for an instant from the incessantly recurring questions as to the stranger whose name the eagle doubtless symbolised, without however allowing me to decipher it, whom she had doubtless loved in the past, and whom she had doubtless seen again not so long ago, since it was upon that day so pleasant, so intimate, of our drive together through the Bois that I had seen, for the first time, the second ring, that upon which the eagle appeared to be dipping his beak in the bright blood of the ruby.

If, however, morning, noon and night, I never ceased to grieve over Albertine's departure, this did not mean that I was thinking only of her. For one thing, her charm having acquired a gradual ascendancy over things which, in course of time, were entirely detached from her, but were nevertheless electrified by the same emotion that she used to give me, if something made me think of Incarville or of the Verdurins, or of some new part that Léa was playing, a flood of suffering would overwhelm me. For another thing, what I myself called thinking of Albertine, was thinking of how I might bring her back, of how I might join her, might know what she was doing. With the result that if, during those hours of incessant martyrdom, there had been an illustrator present to represent the images which accompanied my sufferings, you would have seen pictures of the Gare d'Orsay, of the bank notes offered to Mme. Bontemps, of Saint-Loup stooping over the sloping desk of a telegraph office at which he was writing out a telegram for myself, never the picture of Albertine. Just as, throughout the whole course of our life, our egoism sees before it all the time the objects that are of interest to ourselves, but never takes in that Ego itself which is incessantly observing them, so the desire which directs our actions descends towards them, but does not reascend to itself, whether because, being unduly utilitarian, it plunges into the action and disdains all knowledge of it, or because we have been looking to the future to compensate for the disappointments of the past, or because the inertia of our mind urges it down the easy slope of imagination, rather than make it reascend the steep slope of introspection. As a matter of fact, in those hours of crisis in which we would stake our whole life, in proportion as the person upon whom it depends reveals more clearly the immensity of the place that she occupies in our life, leaving nothing in the world which is not overthrown by her, so the image of that person diminishes until it is not longer perceptible. In everything we find the effect of her presence in the emotion that we feel; herself, the cause, we do not find anywhere. I was during these days so incapable of forming any picture of Albertine that I could almost have believed that I was not in love with her, just as my mother, in the moments of desperation in which she was incapable of ever forming any picture of my grandmother (save once in the chance encounter of a dream the importance of which she felt so intensely that she employed all the strength that remained to her in her sleep to make it last), might have accused and did in fact accuse herself of not regretting her mother, whose death had been a mortal blow to her but whose features escaped her memory.

Why should I have supposed that Albertine did not care for women? Because she had said, especially of late, that she did not care for them: but did not our life rest upon a perpetual lie? Never once had she said to me: “Why is it that I cannot go out when and where I choose, why do you always ask other people what I have been doing?” And yet, after all, the conditions of her life were so unusual that she must have asked me this had she not herself guessed the reason. And to my silence as to the causes of her claustration, was it not comprehensible that she should correspond with a similar and constant silence as to her perpetual desires, her innumerable memories and hopes? Françoise looked as though she knew that I was lying when I made an allusion to the imminence of Albertine’s return. And her belief seemed to be founded upon something more than that truth which generally guided our old housekeeper, that masters do not like to be humiliated in front of their servants, and allow them to know only so much of the truth as does not depart too far from a flattering fiction, calculated to maintain respect for themselves. This time, Fran-çoise’s belief seemed to be founded upon something else, as though she had herself aroused, kept alive the distrust in Albertine’s mind, stimulated her anger, driven her in short to the point at which she could predict her departure as inevitable. If this was true, my version of a temporary absence, of which I had known and approved, could be received with nothing but incredulity by Françoise. But the idea that she had formed of Albertine’s venal nature, the exasperation with which, in her hatred, she multiplied the ‘profit’ that Albertine was supposed to be making out of myself, might to some extent give a check to that certainty. And so when in her hearing I made an allusion, as if to something that was altogether natural, to Albertine’s immediate return, Françoise would look me in the face, to see whether I was not inventing, in the same way in which, when the butler, to make her angry, read out to her, changing the words, some political news which she hesitated to believe, as for instance the report of the closing of the churches and expulsion of the clergy, even from the other end of the kitchen, and without being able to read it, she would fix her gaze instinctively and greedily upon the paper, as though she had been able to see whether the report was really there.

When Françoise saw that after writing a long letter I put on the envelope the address of Mme. Bontemps, this alarm, hitherto quite vague, that Albertine might return, increased in her. It grew to a regular consternation when one morning she had to bring me with the rest of my mail a letter upon the envelope of which she had recognised Albertine’s handwriting. She asked herself whether Albertine’s departure had not been a mere make-believe, a supposition which

distressed her twice over as making definitely certain for the future Albertine's presence in the house, and as bringing upon myself, and thereby, in so far as I was Fran-çoise's master, upon herself, the humiliation of having been tricked by Albertine. However great my impatience to read her letter, I could not refrain from studying for a moment Françoise's eyes from which all hope had fled, inducing from this presage the imminence of Albertine's return, as a lover of winter sports concludes with joy that the cold weather is at hand when he sees the swallows fly south. At length Françoise left me, and when I had made sure that she had shut the door behind her, I opened, noiselessly so as not to appear anxious, the letter which ran as follows:

"My dear, thank you for all the nice things that you say to me, I am at your orders to countermand the Rolls, if you think that I can help in any way, as I am sure I can. You have only to let me know the name of your agent. You would let yourself be taken in by these people whose only thought is of selling things, and what would you do with a motorcar, you who never stir out of the house? I am deeply touched that you have kept a happy memory of our last drive together. You may be sure that for my part I shall never forget that drive in a twofold twilight (since night was falling and we were about to part) and that it will be effaced from my memory only when the darkness is complete."

I felt that this final phrase was merely a phrase and that Albertine could not possibly retain until her death any such pleasant memory of this drive from which she had certainly derived no pleasure since she had been impatient to leave me. But I was impressed also, when I thought of the bicyclist, the golfer of Balbec, who had read nothing but Esther before she made my acquaintance, to find how richly endowed she was and how right I had been in thinking that she had in my house enriched herself with fresh qualities which made her different and more complete. And thus, the words that I had said to her at Balbec: "I feel that my friendship would be of value to you, that I am just the person who could give you what you lack"— I had written this upon a photograph which I gave her —"with the certainty that I was being providential"— these words, which I uttered without believing them and simply that she might find some advantage in my society which would outweigh any possible boredom, these words turned out to have been true as well. Similarly, for that matter, when I said to her that I did not wish to see her for fear of falling in love with her, I had said this because on the contrary I knew that in frequent intercourse my love grew cold and that separation kindled it, but in reality our frequent intercourse had given rise to a need of her that was infinitely stronger than my love in the first weeks at Balbec.

Albertine's letter did not help matters in any way. She spoke to me only of writing to my agent. It was necessary to escape from this situation, to cut matters short, and I had the following idea. I sent a letter at once to Andrée in which I told her that Albertine was at her aunt's, that I felt very lonely, that she would be giving me an immense pleasure if she came and stayed with me for a few days and that, as I did not wish to make any mystery, I begged her to inform Albertine of this. And at the same time I wrote to Albertine as though I had not yet received her letter: "My dear, forgive me for doing something which you will understand so well, I have such a hatred of secrecy that I have chosen that you should be informed by her and by myself. I have acquired, from having you staying so charmingly in the house with me, the bad habit of not being able to live alone. Since we have decided that you are not to come back, it has occurred to me that the person who would best fill your place, because she would make least change in my life, would remind me most strongly of yourself, is Andrée, and I have invited her here. So that all this may not appear too sudden, I have spoken to her only of a short visit, but between ourselves I am pretty certain that this time it will be permanent. Don't you agree that I am right? You know that your little group of girls at Balbec has always been the social unit that has exerted the greatest influence upon me, in which I have been most happy to be eventually included. No doubt it is this influence which still makes itself felt. Since the fatal incompatibility of our natures and the mischances of life have decreed that my little Albertine can never be my wife, I believe that I shall nevertheless find a wife — less charming than herself, but one whom greater conformities of nature will enable perhaps to be happier with me — in Andrée." But after I had sent this letter to the post, the suspicion occurred to me suddenly that, when Albertine wrote to me: "I should have been only too delighted to come back if you had written to me myself," she had said this only because I had not written to her, and that, had I done so, it would not have made any difference; that she would be glad to know that Andrée was staying with me, to think of her as my wife, provided that she herself remained free, because she could now, as for a week past, stultifying the hourly precautions which I had adopted during more than six months in Paris, abandon herself to her vices and do what, minute by minute, I had prevented her from doing. I told myself that probably she was making an improper use, down there, of her freedom, and no doubt this idea which I formed seemed to me sad but remained general, shewing me no special details, and, by the indefinite number of possible mistresses which it allowed me to imagine, prevented me from stopping to consider any one of

them, drew my mind on in a sort of perpetual motion not free from pain but tinged with a pain which the absence of any concrete image rendered endurable. It ceased however to be endurable and became atrocious when Saint-Loup arrived. Before I explain why the information that he gave me made me so unhappy, I ought to relate an incident which I place immediately before his visit and the memory of which so distressed me afterwards that it weakened, if not the painful impression that was made on me by my conversation with Saint-Loup, at any rate the practical effect of this conversation. This incident was as follows. Burning with impatience to see Saint-Loup, I was waiting for him upon the staircase (a thing which I could not have done had my mother been at home, for it was what she most abominated, next to 'talking from the window') when I heard the following speech: "Do you mean to say you don't know how to get a fellow sacked whom you don't like? It's not difficult. You need only hide the things that he has to take in. Then, when they're in a hurry and ring for him, he can't find anything, he loses his head. My aunt will be furious with him, and will say to you: 'Why, what is the man doing?' When he does shew his face, everybody will be raging, and he won't have what is wanted. After this has happened four or five times, you may be sure that they'll sack him, especially if you take care to dirty the things that he has to bring in clean, and all that sort of thing." I remained speechless with astonishment, for these cruel, Machiavellian words were uttered by the voice of Saint-Loup. Now I had always regarded him as so good, so tender-hearted a person that this speech had the same effect upon me as if he had been acting the part of Satan in a play: it could not be in his own name that he was speaking. "But after all a man has got to earn his living," said the other person, of whom I then caught sight and who was one of the Duchesse de Guermantes's footmen. "What the hell does that matter to you so long as you're all right?" Saint-Loup replied callously. "It will be all the more fun for you, having a scape-goat. You can easily spill ink over his livery just when he has to go and wait at a big dinner-party, and never leave him in peace for a moment until he's only too glad to give notice. Anyhow, I can put a spoke in his wheel, I shall tell my aunt that I admire your patience in working with a great lout like that, and so dirty too." I shewed myself, Saint-Loup came to greet me, but my confidence in him was shaken since I had heard him speak in a manner so different from anything that I knew. And I asked myself whether a person who was capable of acting so cruelly towards a poor and defenceless man had not played the part of a traitor towards myself, on his mission to Mme. Bontemps. This reflexion was of most service in helping me not to regard his

failure as a proof that I myself might not succeed, after he had left me. But so long as he was with me, it was nevertheless of the Saint-Loup of long ago and especially of the friend who had just come from Mme. Bontemps that I thought. He began by saying: “You feel that I ought to have telephoned to you more often, but I was always told that you were engaged.” But the point at which my pain became unendurable was when he said: “To begin where my last telegram left you, after passing by a sort of shed, I entered the house and at the end of a long passage was shewn into a drawing-room.” At these words, shed, passage, drawing-room, and before he had even finished uttering them, my heart was shattered more swiftly than by an electric current, for the force which girdles the earth many times in a second is not electricity, but pain. How I repeated them to myself, renewing the shock as I chose, these words, shed, passage, drawing-room, after Saint-Loup had left me! In a shed one girl can lie down with another. And in that drawing-room who could tell what Albertine used to do when her aunt was not there? What was this? Had I then imagined the house in which she was living as incapable of possessing either a shed or a drawing-room? No, I had not imagined it at all, except as a vague place. I had suffered originally at the geographical identification of the place in which Albertine was. When I had learned that, instead of being in two or three possible places, she was in Touraine, those words uttered by her porter had marked in my heart as upon a map the place in which I must at length suffer. But once I had grown accustomed to the idea that she was in a house in Touraine, I had not seen the house. Never had there occurred to my imagination this appalling idea of a drawing-room, a shed, a passage, which seemed to be facing me in the retina of Saint-Loup’s eyes, who had seen them, these rooms in which Albertine came and went, was living her life, these rooms in particular and not an infinity of possible rooms which had cancelled one another. With the words shed, passage, drawing-room, I became aware of my folly in having left Albertine for a week in this cursed place, the existence (instead of the mere possibility) of which had just been revealed to me. Alas! when Saint-Loup told me also that in this drawing-room he had heard some one singing at the top of her voice in an adjoining room and that it was Albertine who was singing, I realised with despair that, rid of me at last, she was happy! She had regained her freedom. And I who had been thinking that she would come to take the place of Andrée! My grief turned to anger with Saint-Loup. “That is the one thing in the world that I asked you to avoid, that she should know of your coming.” “If you imagine it was easy! They had assured me that she was not in the house. Oh, I know very well that you aren’t pleased

with me, I could tell that from your telegrams. But you are not being fair to me, I did all that I could." Set free once more, having left the cage from which, here at home, I used to remain for days on end without making her come to my room, Albertine had regained all her value in my eyes, she had become once more the person whom everyone pursued, the marvellous bird of the earliest days. "However, let us get back to business. As for the question of the money, I don't know what to say to you, I found myself addressing a woman who seemed to me to be so scrupulous that I was afraid of shocking her. However, she didn't say no when I mentioned the money to her. In fact, a little later she told me that she was touched to find that we understood one another so well. And yet everything that she said after that was so delicate, so refined, that it seemed to me impossible that she could have been referring to my offer of money when she said: 'We understand one another so well,' for after all I was behaving like a cad." "But perhaps she did not realise what you meant, she cannot have heard you, you ought to have repeated the offer, for then you would certainly have won the battle." "But what do you mean by saying that she cannot have heard me, I spoke to her as I am speaking to you, she is neither deaf nor mad." "And she made no comment?" "None." "You ought to have repeated the offer." "How do you mean, repeat it? As soon as we met I saw what sort of person she was, I said to myself that you had made a mistake, that you were letting me in for the most awful blunder, and that it would be terribly difficult to offer her the money like that. I did it, however, to oblige you, feeling certain that she would turn me out of the house." "But she did not. Therefore, either she had not heard you and you should have started afresh, or you could have developed the topic." "You say: 'She had not heard,' because you were here in Paris, but, I repeat, if you had been present at our conversation, there was not a sound to interrupt us, I said it quite bluntly, it is not possible that she failed to understand." "But anyhow is she quite convinced that I have always wished to marry her niece?" "No, as to that, if you want my opinion, she did not believe that you had any Intention of marrying the girl. She told me that you yourself had informed her niece that you wished to leave her. I don't really know whether now she is convinced that you wish to marry." This reassured me slightly by shewing me that I was less humiliated, and therefore more capable of being still loved, more free to take some decisive action. Nevertheless I was in torments. "I am sorry, because I can see that you are not pleased." "Yes, I am touched by your kindness, I am grateful to you, but it seems to me that you might..." "I did my best. No one else could have done more or even as much. Try sending some one else." "No, as a matter

of fact, if I had known, I should not have sent you, but the failure of your attempt prevents me from making another." I heaped reproaches upon him: he had tried to do me a service and had not succeeded. Saint-Loup as he left the house had met some girls coming in. I had already and often supposed that Albertine knew other girls in the country; but this was the first time that I felt the torture of that supposition. We are really led to believe that nature has allowed our mind to secrete a natural antidote which destroys the suppositions that we form, at once without intermission and without danger. But there was nothing to render me immune from these girls whom Saint-Loup had met. All these details, were they not precisely what I had sought to learn from everyone with regard to Albertine, was it not I who, in order to learn them more fully, had begged Saint-Loup, summoned back to Paris by his colonel, to come and see me at all costs, was it not therefore I who had desired them, or rather my famished grief, longing to feed and to wax fat upon them? Finally Saint-Loup told me that he had had the pleasant surprise of meeting, quite near the house, the only familiar face that had reminded him of the past, a former friend of Rachel, a pretty actress who was taking a holiday in the neighbourhood. And the name of this actress was enough to make me say to myself: "Perhaps it is with her"; was enough to make me behold, in the arms even of a woman whom I did not know, Albertine smiling and flushed with pleasure. And after all why should not this have been true? Had I found fault with myself for thinking of other women since I had known Albertine? On the evening of my first visit to the Princesse de Guermantes, when I returned home, had I not been thinking far less of her than of the girl of whom Saint-Loup had told me who frequented disorderly houses and of Mme. Putbus's maid? Was it not in the hope of meeting the latter of these that I had returned to Balbec, and, more recently, had been planning to go to Venice? Why should not Albertine have been planning to go to Touraine? Only, when it came to the point, as I now realised, I would not have left her, I would not have gone to Venice. Even in my own heart of hearts, when I said to myself: "I shall leave her presently," I knew that I would never leave her, just as I knew that I would never settle down again to work, or make myself live upon hygienic principles, or do any of the things which, day by day, I vowed that I would do upon the morrow. Only, whatever I might feel in my heart, I had thought it more adroit to let her live under the perpetual menace of a separation. And no doubt, thanks to my detestable adroitness, I had convinced her only too well. In any case, now, things could not go on like this. I could not leave her in Touraine with those girls, with that actress, I could not endure the thought of that life which was escaping my

control. I would await her reply to my letter: if she was doing wrong, alas! a day more or less made no difference (and perhaps I said this to myself because, being no longer in the habit of taking note of every minute of her life, whereas a single minute in which she was unobserved would formerly have driven me out of my mind, my jealousy no longer observed the same division of time). But as soon as I should have received her answer, if she was not coming back, I would go to fetch her; willy-nilly, I would tear her away from her women friends. Besides, was it not better for me to go down in person, now that I had discovered the duplicity, hitherto unsuspected by me, of Saint-Loup; he might, for all I knew, have organised a plot to separate me from Albertine.

And at the same time, how I should have been lying now had I written to her, as I used to say to her in Paris, that I hoped that no accident might befall her. Ah! if some accident had occurred, my life, instead of being poisoned for ever by this incessant jealousy, would at once regain, if not happiness, at least a state of calm through the suppression of suffering.

The suppression of suffering? Can I really have believed it, have believed that death merely eliminates what exists, and leaves everything else in its place, that it removes the grief from the heart of him for whom the other person's existence has ceased to be anything but a source of grief, that it removes the grief and substitutes nothing in its place. The suppression of grief! As I glanced at the paragraphs in the newspapers, I regretted that I had not had the courage to form the same wish as Swann. If Albertine could have been the victim of an accident, were she alive I should have had a pretext for hastening to her bedside, were she dead I should have recovered, as Swann said, my freedom to live as I chose. Did I believe this? He had believed it, that subtlest of men who thought that he knew himself well. How little do we know what we have in our heart. How clearly, a little later, had he been still alive, I could have proved to him that his wish was not only criminal but absurd, that the death of her whom he loved would have set him free from nothing.

I forsook all pride with regard to Albertine, I sent her a despairing telegram begging her to return upon any conditions, telling her that she might do anything she liked, that I asked only to be allowed to take her in my arms for a minute three times a week, before she went to bed. And had she confined me to once a week, I would have accepted the restriction. She did not, ever, return. My telegram had just gone to her when I myself received one. It was from Mme. Bontemps. The world is not created once and for all time for each of us individually. There are added to it in the course of our life things of which we

have never had any suspicion. Alas! it was not a suppression of suffering that was wrought in me by the first two lines of the telegram: “My poor friend, our little Albertine is no more; forgive me for breaking this terrible news to you who were so fond of her. She was thrown by her horse against a tree while she was out riding. All our efforts to restore her to life were unavailing. If only I were dead in her place!” No, not the suppression of suffering, but a suffering until then unimagined, that of learning that she would not come back. And yet, had I not told myself, many times, that, quite possibly, she would not come back? I had indeed told myself so, but now I saw that never for a moment had I believed it. As I needed her presence, her kisses, to enable me to endure the pain that my suspicions wrought in me, I had formed, since our Balbec days, the habit of being always with her. Even when she had gone out, when I was left alone, I was kissing her still. I had continued to do so since her departure for Touraine. I had less need of her fidelity than of her return. And if my reason might with impunity cast a doubt upon her now and again, my imagination never ceased for an instant to bring her before me. Instinctively I passed my hand over my throat, over my lips which felt themselves kissed by her lips still after she had gone away, and would never be kissed by them again; I passed my hands over them, as Mamma had caressed me at the time of grandmother’s death, when she said: “My poor boy, your grandmother, who was so fond of you, will never kiss you again.” All my life to come seemed to have been wrenched from my heart. My life to come? I had not then thought at times of living it without Albertine? Why, no! All this time had I, then, been vowing to her service every minute of my life until my death? Why, of course! This future indissolubly blended with hers I had never had the vision to perceive, but now that it had just been shattered, I could feel the place that it occupied in my gaping heart. Françoise, who still knew nothing, came into my room; in a sudden fury I shouted at her: “What do you want?” Then (there are sometimes words which set a different reality in the same place as that which confronts us; they stun us as does a sudden fit of giddiness) she said to me: “Monsieur has no need to look cross. I’ve got something here that will make him very happy. Here are two letters from Mademoiselle Albertine.” I felt, afterwards, that I must have stared at her with the eyes of a man whose mind has become unbalanced. I was not even glad, nor was I incredulous. I was like a person who sees the same place in his room occupied by a sofa and by a grotto: nothing seeming to him more real, he collapses on the floor. Albertine’s two letters must have been written at an interval of a few hours, possibly at the same moment, and, anyhow, only a short while before the

fatal ride. The first said: “My dear, I must thank you for the proof of your confidence which you give me when you tell me of your plan to get Andrée to stay with you. I am sure that she will be delighted to accept, and I think that it will be a very good thing for her. With her talents, she will know how to make the most of the companionship of a man like yourself, and of the admirable influence which you manage to secure over other people. I feel that you have had an idea from which as much good may spring for her as for yourself. And so, if she should make the least shadow of difficulty (which I don’t suppose), telegraph to me, I undertake to bring pressure to bear upon her.” The second was dated on the following day. (As a matter of fact, she must have written her two letters at an interval of a few minutes, possibly without any interval, and must have antedated the first. For, all the time, I had been forming an absurd idea of her intentions, which had been only this: to return to me, and which anyone with no direct interest in the matter, a man lacking in imagination, the plenipotentiary in a peace treaty, the merchant who has to examine a deal, would have judged more accurately than myself.) It contained only these words: “Is it too late for me to return to you? If you have not yet written to Andrée, would you be prepared to take me back? I shall abide by your decision, but I beg you not to be long in letting me know it, you can imagine how impatiently I shall be waiting. If it is telling me to return, I shall take the train at once. With my whole heart, yours, Albertine.”

For the death of Albertine to be able to suppress my suffering, the shock of the fall would have had to kill her not only in Touraine but in myself. There, never had she been more alive. In order to enter into us, another person must first have assumed the form, have entered into the surroundings of the moment; appearing to us only in a succession of momentary flashes, he has never been able to furnish us with more than one aspect of himself at a time, to present us with more than a single photograph of himself. A great weakness, no doubt, for a person to consist merely in a collection of moments; a great strength also: it is dependent upon memory, and our memory of a moment is not informed of everything that has happened since; this moment which it has registered endures still, lives still, and with it the person whose form is outlined in it. And moreover, this disintegration does not only make the dead man live, it multiplies him. To find consolation, it was not one, it was innumerable Albertines that I must first forget. When I had reached the stage of enduring the grief of losing this Albertine, I must begin afresh with another, with a hundred others.

So, then, my life was entirely altered. What had made it — and not owing to

Albertine, concurrently with her, when I was alone — attractive, was precisely the perpetual resurgence, at the bidding of identical moments, of moments from the past. From the sound of the rain I recaptured the scent of the lilacs at Combray, from the shifting of the sun's rays on the balcony the pigeons in the Champs-Elysées, from the muffling of all noise in the heat of the morning hours, the cool taste of cherries, the longing for Brittany or Venice from the sound of the wind and the return of Easter. Summer was at hand, the days were long, the weather warm. It was the season when, early in the morning, pupils and teachers resort to the public gardens to prepare for the final examinations under the trees, seeking to extract the sole drop of coolness that is let fall by a sky less ardent than in the midday heat but already as sterilely pure. From my darkened room, with a power of evocation equal to that of former days but capable now of evoking only pain, I felt that outside, in the heaviness of the atmosphere, the setting sun was plastering the vertical fronts of houses and churches with a tawny distemper. And if Françoise, when she came in, parted, by accident, the inner curtains, I stifled a cry of pain at the gash that was cut in my heart by that ray of long-ago sunlight which had made beautiful in my eyes the modern front of Marcouville l'Orgueilleuse, when Albertine said to me: "It is restored." Not knowing how to account to Françoise for my groan, I said to her: "Oh, I am so thirsty." She left the room, returned, but I turned sharply away, smarting under the painful discharge of one of the thousand invisible memories which at every moment burst into view in the surrounding darkness: I had noticed that she had brought in a jug of cider and a dish of cherries, things which a farm-lad had brought out to us in the carriage, at Balbec, 'kinds' in which I should have made the most perfect communion, in those days, with the prismatic gleam in shuttered dining-rooms on days of scorching heat. Then I thought for the first time of the farm called Les Ecorres, and said to myself that on certain days when Albertine had told me, at Balbec, that she would not be free, that she was obliged to go somewhere with her aunt, she had perhaps been with one or another of her girl friends at some farm to which she knew that I was not in the habit of going, and, while I waited desperately for her at Marie-Antoinette, where they told me: "No, we have not seen her to-day," had been using, to her friend, the same words that she used to say to myself when we went out together: "He will never think of looking for us here, so that there's no fear of our being disturbed." I told Françoise to draw the curtains together, so that I should not see that ray of sunlight. But it continued to filter through, just as corrosive, into my memory. "It doesn't appeal to me, it has been restored, but we shall go to-morrow to Saint-

Mars le Vêtu, and the day after to...” To-morrow, the day after, it was a prospect of life shared in common, perhaps for all time, that was opening; my heart leaped towards it, but it was no longer there, Albertine was dead.

I asked Françoise the time. Six o’clock. At last, thank God, that oppressive heat would be lifted of which in the past I used to complain to Albertine, and which we so enjoyed. The day was drawing to its close. But what did that profit me? The cool evening air came in; it was the sun setting in my memory, at the end of a road which we had taken, she and I, on our way home, that I saw now, more remote than the farthest village, like some distant town not to be reached that evening, which we would spend at Balbec, still together. Together then; now I must stop short on the brink of that same abyss; she was dead. It was not enough now to draw the curtains, I tried to stop the eyes and ears of my memory so as not to see that band of orange in the western sky, so as not to hear those invisible birds responding from one tree to the next on either side of me who was then so tenderly embraced by her that now was dead. I tried to avoid those sensations that are given us by the dampness of leaves in the evening air, the steep rise and fall of mule-tracks. But already those sensations had gripped me afresh, carried far enough back from the present moment so that it should have gathered all the recoil, all the resilience necessary to strike me afresh, this idea that Albertine was dead. Ah! never again would I enter a forest, I would stroll no more beneath the spreading trees. But would the broad plains be less cruel to me? How many times had I crossed, going in search of Albertine, how many times had I entered, on my return with her, the great plain of Cricqueville, now in foggy weather when the flooding mist gave us the illusion of being surrounded by a vast lake, now on limpid evenings when the moonlight, de-materialising the earth, making it appear, a yard away, celestial, as it is, in the daytime, on far horizons only, enshrined the fields, the woods, with the firmament to which it had assimilated them, in the moss-agate of a universal blue.

Françoise was bound to rejoice at Albertine’s death, and it should, in justice to her, be said that by a sort of tactful convention she made no pretence of sorrow. But the unwritten laws of her immemorial code and the tradition of the mediaeval peasant woman who weeps as in the romances of chivalry were older than her hatred of Albertine and even of Eulalie. And so, on one of these late afternoons, as I was not quick enough in concealing my distress, she caught sight of my tears, served by the instinct of a little old peasant woman which at one time had led her to catch and torture animals, to feel only amusement in

wringing the necks of chickens and in boiling lobsters alive, and, when I was ill, in observing, as it might be the wounds that she had inflicted upon an owl, my suffering expression which she afterwards proclaimed in a sepulchral tone and as a presage of coming disaster. But her Combray ‘Customary’ did not permit her to treat lightly tears, grief, things which in her judgment were as fatal as shedding one’s flannels in spring or eating when one had no ‘stomach.’ “Oh, no. Monsieur, it doesn’t do to cry like that, it isn’t good for you.” And in her attempt to stem my tears she shewed as much uneasiness as though they had been torrents of blood. Unfortunately I adopted a chilly air that cut short the effusions in which she was hoping to indulge and which might quite well, for that matter, have been sincere. Her attitude towards Albertine had been, perhaps, akin to her attitude towards Eulalie, and, now that my mistress could no longer derive any profit from me, Françoise had ceased to hate her. She felt bound, however, to let me see that she was perfectly well aware that I was crying, and that, following the deplorable example set by my family, I did not wish to ‘let it be seen.’ “You mustn’t cry, Monsieur,” she adjured me, in a calmer tone, this time, and intending to prove her own perspicacity rather than to shew me any compassion. And she went on: “It was bound to happen; she was too happy, poor creature, she never knew how happy she was.”

How slow the day is in dying on these interminable summer evenings. A pallid ghost of the house opposite continued indefinitely to sketch upon the sky its persistent whiteness. At last it was dark indoors; I stumbled against the furniture in the hall, but in the door that opened upon the staircase, in the midst of the darkness which I had supposed to be complete, the glazed panel was translucent and blue, with the blue of a flower, the blue of an insect’s wing, a blue that would have seemed to me beautiful if I had not felt it to be a last reflexion, trenchant as a blade of steel, a supreme blow which in its indefatigable cruelty the day was still dealing me. In the end, however, the darkness became complete, but then a glimpse of a star behind one of the trees in the courtyard was enough to remind me of how we used to set out in a carriage, after dinner, for the woods of Chantepie, carpeted with moonlight. And even in the streets it would so happen that I could isolate upon the back of a seat, could gather there the natural purity of a moonbeam in the midst of the artificial lights of Paris, of that Paris over which it enthroned, by making the town return for a moment, in my imagination, to a state of nature, with the infinite silence of the suggested fields, the heartrending memory of the walks that I had taken in them with Albertine. Ah! when would the night end? But at the first cool breath of dawn I

shuddered, for it had revived in me the delight of that summer when, from Balbec to Incarville, from Incarville to Balbec, we had so many times escorted each other home until the break of day. I had now only one hope left for the future — a hope far more heartrending than any dread — which was that I might forget Albertine. I knew that I should one day forget her; I had quite forgotten Gilberte, Mme. de Guermantes; I had quite forgotten my grandmother. And it is our most fitting and most cruel punishment, for that so complete oblivion, as tranquil as the oblivion of the graveyard, by which we have detached ourself from those whom we no longer love, that we can see this same oblivion to be inevitable in the case of those whom we love still. To tell the truth, we know it to be a state not painful, a state of indifference. But not being able to think at the same time of what I was and of what I should one day be, I thought with despair of all that covering mantle of caresses, of kisses, of friendly slumber, of which I must presently let myself be divested for all time. The rush of these tender memories sweeping on to break against the knowledge that Albertine was dead oppressed me by the incessant conflict of their baffled waves so that I could not keep still; I rose, but all of a sudden I stopped in consternation; the same faint daybreak that I used to see at the moment when I had just left Albertine, still radiant and warm with her kisses, had come into the room and bared, above the curtains, its blade now a sinister portent, whose whiteness, cold, implacable and compact, entered the room like a dagger thrust into my heart.

Presently the sounds from the streets would begin, enabling me to tell from the qualitative scale of their resonance the degree of the steadily increasing heat in which they were sounding. But in this heat which, a few hours later, would have saturated itself in the fragrance of cherries, what I found (as in a medicine which the substitution of one ingredient for another is sufficient to transform from the stimulant and tonic that it was into a debilitating drug) was no longer the desire for women but the anguish of Albertine’s departure. Besides, the memory of all my desires was as much impregnated with her, and with suffering, as the memory of my pleasures. That Venice where I had thought that her company would be a nuisance (doubtless because I had felt in a confused way that it would be necessary to me), now that Albertine was no more, I preferred not to go there. Albertine had seemed to me to be an obstacle interposed between me and everything else, because she was for me what contained everything, and it was from her as from an urn that I might receive things. Now that this urn was shattered, I no longer felt that I had the courage to grasp things; there was nothing now from which I did not turn away, spiritless, preferring not to taste it.

So that my separation from her did not in the least throw open to me the field of possible pleasures which I had imagined to be closed to me by her presence. Besides, the obstacle which her Presence had perhaps indeed been in the way of my traveling, of my enjoying life, had only (as always happens) been a mask for other obstacles which reappeared intact now that this first obstacle had been removed. It had been in the same way that, in the past, when some friend had called to see me and had prevented me from working, if on the following day I was left undisturbed, I did not work any better. Let an illness, a duel, a runaway horse make us see death face to face, how richly we should have enjoyed the life of pleasure, the travels in unknown lands which are about to be snatched from us. And no sooner is the danger past than what we find once again before us is the same dull life in which none of those delights had any existence for us.

No doubt these nights that are so short continue for but a brief season. Winter would at length return, when I should no longer have to dread the memory of drives with her, protracted until the too early dawn. But would not the first frosts bring back to me, preserved in their cold storage, the germ of my first desires, when at midnight I used to send for her, when the time seemed so long until I heard her ring the bell: a sound for which I might now wait everlastingly in vain? Would they not bring back to me the germ of my first uneasiness, when, upon two occasions, I thought that she was not coming? At that time I saw her but rarely, but even those intervals that there were between her visits which made her emerge, after many weeks, from the heart of an unknown life which I made no effort to possess, ensured my peace of mind by preventing the first inklings, constantly interrupted, of my jealousy from coagulating, from forming a solid mass in my heart. So far as they had contrived to be soothing, at that earlier time, so far, in retrospect, were they stamped with the mark of suffering, since all the unaccountable things that she might, while those intervals lasted, have been doing had ceased to be immaterial to me, and especially now that no visit from her would ever fall to my lot again; so that those January evenings on which she used to come, and which, for that reason, had been so dear to me, would blow into me now with their biting winds an uneasiness which then I did not know, and would bring back to me (but now grown pernicious) the first germ of my love. And when I considered that I would see again presently that cold season, which since the time of Gilberte and my play-hours in the Champs-Elysées, had always seemed to me so depressing; when I thought that there would be returning again evenings like that evening of snow when I had vainly, far into the night, waited for Albertine to come; then as

a consumptive chooses the best place, from the physical point of view, for his lungs, but in my case making a moral choice, what at such moments I still dreaded most for my grief, for my heart, was the return of the intense cold, and I said to myself that what it would be hardest to live through was perhaps the winter. Bound up as it was with each of the seasons, in order for me to discard the memory of Albertine I should have had first to forget them all, prepared to begin again to learn to know them, as an old man after a stroke of paralysis learns again to read; I should have had first to forego the entire universe. Nothing, I told myself, but an actual extinction of myself would be capable (but that was impossible) of consoling me for hers. I did not realise that the death of oneself is neither impossible nor extraordinary; it is effected without our knowledge, it may be against our will, every day of our life, and I should have to suffer from the recurrence of all sorts of days which not only nature but adventitious circumstances, a purely conventional order introduce into a season. Presently would return the day on which I had gone to Balbec in that earlier summer when my love, which was not yet inseparable from jealousy and did not perplex itself with the problem of what Albertine would be doing all day, had still to pass through so many evolutions before becoming that so specialised love of the latest period, that this final year, in which Albertine's destiny had begun to change and had received its quietus, appeared to me full, multiform, vast, like a whole century. Then it would be the memory of days more slow in reviving but dating from still earlier years; on the rainy Sundays on which nevertheless everyone else had gone out, in the void of the afternoon, when the sound of wind and rain would in the past have bidden me stay at home, to 'philosophise in my garret,' with what anxiety would I see the hour approach at which Albertine, so little expected, had come to visit me, had fondled me for the first time, breaking off because Françoise had brought in the lamp, in that time now doubly dead when it had been Albertine who was interested in me, when my affection for her might legitimately nourish so strong a hope. Even later in the season, those glorious evenings when the windows of kitchens, of girls' schools, standing open to the view like wayside shrines, allow the street to crown itself with a diadem of those demi-goddesses who, conversing, ever so close to us, with their peers, fill us with a feverish longing to penetrate into their mythological existence, recalled to me nothing now but the affection of Albertine whose company was an obstacle in the way of my approaching them.

Moreover, to the memory even of hours that were purely natural would inevitably be added the moral background that makes each of them a thing apart.

When, later on, I should hear the goatherd's horn, on a first fine, almost Italian morning, the day that followed would blend successively with its sunshine the anxiety of knowing that Albertine was at the Trocadéro, possibly with Léa and the two girls, then her kindly, domestic gentleness, almost that of a wife who seemed to me then an embarrassment and whom Françoise was bringing home to me. That telephone message from Françoise which had conveyed to me the dutiful homage of an Albertine who was returning with her, I had thought at the time that it made me swell with pride. I was mistaken. If it had exhilarated me, that was because it had made me feel that she whom I loved was really mine, lived only for me, and even at a distance, without my needing to occupy my mind with her, regarded me as her lord and master, returning home upon a sign from myself. And so that telephone message had been a particle of sweetness, coming to me from afar, sent out from that region of the Trocadéro where there were proved to be for me sources of happiness directing towards me molecules of comfort, healing balms, restoring to me at length so precious a liberty of spirit that I need do no more, surrendering myself without the restriction of a single care to Wagner's music, than await the certain arrival of Albertine, without fever, with an entire absence of impatience in which I had not had the perspicacity to recognise true happiness. And this happiness that she should return, that she should obey me and be mine, the cause of it lay in love and not in pride. It would have been quite immaterial to me now to have at my behest fifty women returning, at a sign from myself, not from the Trocadéro but from the Indies. But that day, conscious of Albertine who, while I sat alone in my room playing music, was coming dutifully to join me, I had breathed in, where it lay scattered like motes in a sunbeam, one of those substances which, just as others are salutary to the body, do good to the soul. Then there had been, half an hour later, Albertine's return, then the drive with Albertine returned, a drive which I had thought tedious because it was accompanied for me by certainty, but which, on account of that very certainty, had, from the moment of Francoise's telephoning to me that she was bringing Albertine home, let flow a golden calm over the hours that followed, had made of them as it were a second day, wholly unlike the first, because it had a completely different moral basis, a moral basis which made it an original day, which came and added itself to the variety of the days that I had previously known, a day which I should never have been able to imagine — any more than we could imagine the delicious idleness of a day in summer if such days did not exist in the calendar of those through which we had lived — a day of which I could not say absolutely that I recalled it, for to this

calm I added now an anguish which I had not felt at the time. But at a much later date, when I went over gradually, in a reversed order, the times through which I had passed before I was so much in love with Albertine, when my scarred heart could detach itself without suffering from Albertine dead, then I was able to recall at length without suffering that day on which Albertine had gone shopping with Françoise instead of remaining at the Trocadéro; I recalled it with pleasure, as belonging to a moral season which I had not known until then; I recalled it at length exactly, without adding to it now any suffering, rather, on the contrary, as we recall certain days in summer which we found too hot while they lasted, and from which only after they have passed do we extract their unalloyed standard of fine gold and imperishable azure.

With the result that these several years imposed upon my memory of Albertine, which made them so painful, the successive colouring, the different modulations not only of their seasons or of their hours, from late afternoons in June to winter evenings, from seas by moonlight to dawn that broke as I was on my way home, from snow in Paris to fallen leaves at Saint-Cloud, but also of each of the particular ideas of Albertine that I successively formed, of the physical aspect in which I pictured her at each of those moments, the degree of frequency with which I had seen her during that season, which itself appeared consequently more or less dispersed or compact, the anxieties which she might have caused me by keeping me waiting, the desire which I had felt at a given moment for her, the hopes formed and then blasted; all of these modified the character of my retrospective sorrow fully as much as the impressions of light or of scents which were associated with it, and completed each of the solar years through which I had lived — years which, simply with their springs, their trees, their breezes, were already so sad because of the indissociable memory of her — complementing each of them with a sort of sentimental year in which the hours were defined not by the sun’s position, but by the strain of waiting for a tryst, in which the length of the days, in which the changes of temperature were determined not by the seasons but by the soaring flight of my hopes, the progress of our intimacy, the gradual transformation of her face, the expeditions on which she had gone, the frequency and style of the letters that she had written me during her absence, her more or less eager anxiety to see me on her return. And lastly if these changes of season, if these different days furnished me each with a fresh Albertine, it was not only by recalling to me similar moments. The reader will remember that always, even before I began to be in love, each day had made me a different person, swayed by other desires because he had other perceptions,

a person who, whereas he had dreamed only of cliffs and tempests overnight, if the indiscreet spring dawn had distilled a scent of roses through the gaping portals of his house of sleep, would awake alert to set off for Italy. Even in my love, had not the changing state of my moral atmosphere, the varying pressure of my beliefs, had they not one day diminished the visibility of the love that I was feeling, had they not another day extended it beyond all bounds, one day softened it to a smile, another day condensed it to a storm? We exist only by virtue of what we possess, we possess only what is really present to us, and so many of our memories, our humours, our ideas set out to voyage far away from us, until they are lost to sight! Then we can no longer make them enter into our reckoning of the total which is our personality. But they know of secret paths by which to return to us. And on certain nights, having gone to sleep almost without regretting Albertine any more — we can regret only what we remember — on awakening I found a whole fleet of memories which had come to cruise upon the surface of my clearest consciousness, and seemed marvellously distinct. Then I wept over what I could see so plainly, what overnight had been to me non-existent. In an instant, Albertine's name, her death, had changed their meaning; her betrayals had suddenly resumed their old importance.

How could she have seemed dead to me when now, in order to think of her, I had at my disposal only those same images one or other of which I used to recall when she was alive, each one being associated with a particular moment? Rapid and bowed above the mystic wheel of her bicycle, tightly strapped upon rainy days in the amazonian corslet of her waterproof which made her breasts protrude, while serpents writhed in her turbaned hair, she scattered terror in the streets of Balbec; on the evenings on which we had taken champagne with us to the woods of Chantepie, her voice provoking, altered, she shewed on her face that pallid warmth colouring only over her cheekbones so that, barely able to make her out in the darkness of the carriage, I drew her face into the moonlight in order to see her better, and which I tried now in vain to recapture, to see again in a darkness that would never end. A little statuette as we drove to the island, a large, calm, coarsely grained face above the pianola, she was thus by turns rain-soaked and swift, provoking and diaphanous, motionless and smiling, an angel of music. So that what would have to be obliterated in me was not one only, but countless Albertines. Each of these was thus attached to a moment, to the date of which I found myself carried back when I saw again that particular Albertine. And the moments of the past do not remain still; they retain in our memory the motion which drew them towards the future, towards a future which has itself

become the past, and draw us on in their train. Never had I caressed the waterproofed Albertine of the rainy days, I wanted to ask her to divest herself of that armour, that would be to know with her the love of the tented field, the brotherhood of travel. But this was no longer possible, she was dead. Never either, for fear of corrupting her, had I shewn any sign of comprehension on the evenings when she seemed to be offering me pleasures which, but for my self-restraint, she would not perhaps have sought from others, and which aroused in me now a frantic desire. I should not have found them the same in any other woman, but she who would fain have offered me them I might scour the whole world now without encountering, for Albertine was dead. It seemed that I had to choose between two sets of facts, to decide which was the truth, so far was the fact of Albertine's death — arising for me from a reality which I had not known; her life in Touraine — a contradiction of all my thoughts of her, my desires, my regrets, my tenderness, my rage, my jealousy. So great a wealth of memories, borrowed from the treasury of her life, such a profusion of sentiments evoking, implicating her life, seemed to make it incredible that Albertine should be dead. Such a profusion of sentiments, for my memory, while preserving my affection, left to it all its variety. It was not Albertine alone that was simply a series of moments, it was also myself. My love for her had not been simple: to a curious interest in the unknown had been added a sensual desire and to a sentiment of an almost conjugal mildness, at one moment indifference, at another a jealous fury. I was not one man only, but the steady advance hour after hour of an army in close formation, in which there appeared, according to the moment, impassioned men, indifferent men, jealous men — jealous men no two of whom were jealous of the same woman. And no doubt it would be from this that one day would come the healing which I should not expect. In a composite mass, these elements may, one by one, without our noticing it, be replaced by others, which others again eliminate or reinforce, until in the end a change has been brought about which it would be impossible to conceive if we were a single person. The complexity of my love, of my person, multiplied, diversified my sufferings. And yet they could always be ranged in the two categories, the option between which had made up the whole life of my love for Albertine, swayed alternately by trust and by a jealous suspicion.

If I had found it difficult to imagine that Albertine, so vitally alive in me (wearing as I did the double harness of the present and the past), was dead, perhaps it was equally paradoxical in me that Albertine, whom I knew to be dead, could still excite my jealousy, and that this suspicion of the misdeeds of

which Albertine, stripped now of the flesh that had rejoiced in them, of the heart that had been able to desire them, was no longer capable, nor responsible for them, should excite in me so keen a suffering that I should only have blessed them could I have seen in those misdeeds the pledge of the moral reality of a person materially non-existent, in place of the reflexion, destined itself too to fade, of impressions that she had made on me in the past. A woman who could no longer taste any pleasure with other people ought not any longer to have excited my jealousy, if only my affection had been able to come to the surface. But this was just what was impossible, since it could not find its object, Albertine, save among memories in which she was still alive. Since, merely by thinking of her, I brought her back to life, her infidelities could never be those of a dead woman; the moments at which she had been guilty of them became the present moment, not only for Albertine, but for that one of my various selves who was thinking of her. So that no anachronism could ever separate the indissoluble couple, in which, to each fresh culprit, was immediately mated a jealous lover, pitiable and always contemporaneous. I had, during the last months, kept her shut up in my own house. But in my imagination now, Albertine was free, she was abusing her freedom, was prostituting herself to this friend or to that. Formerly, I used constantly to dream of the uncertain future that was unfolding itself before us, I endeavoured to read its message. And now, what lay before me, like a counterpart of the future — as absorbing as the future because it was equally uncertain, as difficult to decipher, as mysterious, more cruel still because I had not, as with the future, the possibility or the illusion of influencing it, and also because it unrolled itself to the full extent of my own life without my companion's being present to soothe the anguish that it caused me — was no longer Albertine's Future, it was her Past. Her Past? That is the wrong word, since for jealousy there can be neither past nor future, and what it imagines is invariably the present.

Atmospheric changes, provoking other changes in the inner man, awaken forgotten variants of himself, upset the somnolent course of habit, restore their old force to certain memories, to certain sufferings. How much the more so with me if this change of weather recalled to me the weather in which Albertine, at Balbec, under the threat of rain, it might be, used to set out, heaven knows why, upon long rides, in the clinging mail-armour of her waterproof. If she had lived, no doubt to-day, in this so similar weather, she would be setting out, in Touraine, upon a corresponding expedition. Since she could do so no longer, I ought not to have been pained by the thought; but, as with amputated cripples, the slightest

change in the weather revived my pains in the member that had ceased, now, to belong to me.

All of a sudden it was an impression which I had not felt for a long time — for it had remained dissolved in the fluid and invisible expanse of my memory — that became crystallised. Many years ago, when somebody mentioned her bath-wrap, Albertine had blushed. At that time I was not jealous of her. But since then I had intended to ask her if she could remember that conversation, and why she had blushed. This had worried me all the more because I had been told that the two girls, Léa's friends, frequented the bathing establishment of the hotel, and, it was said, not merely for the purpose of taking baths. But, for fear of annoying Albertine, or else deciding to await some more opportune moment, I had always refrained from mentioning it to her and in time had ceased to think about it. And all of a sudden, some time after Albertine's death, I recalled this memory, stamped with the mark, at once irritating and solemn, of riddles left for ever insoluble by the death of the one person who could have interpreted them. Might I not at least try to make certain that Albertine had never done anything wrong in that bathing establishment? By sending some one to Balbec I might perhaps succeed. While she was alive, I should doubtless have been unable to learn anything. But people's tongues become strangely loosened and they are ready to report a misdeed when they need no longer fear the culprit's resentment. As the constitution of our imagination, which has remained rudimentary, simplified (not having passed through the countless transformations which improve upon the primitive models of human inventions, barely recognisable, whether it be the barometer, the balloon, the telephone, or anything else, in their ultimate perfection), allows us to see only a very few things at one time, the memory of the bathing establishment occupied the whole field of my inward vision.

Sometimes I came in collision in the dark lanes of sleep with one of those bad dreams, which are not very serious for several reasons, one of these being that the sadness which they engender lasts for barely an hour after we awake, like the weakness that is caused by an artificial soporific. For another reason also, namely that we encounter them but very rarely, no more than once in two or three years. And moreover it remains uncertain whether we have encountered them before, whether they have not rather that aspect of not being seen for the first time which is projected over them by an illusion, a subdivision (for duplication would not be a strong enough term).

Of course, since I entertained doubts as to the life, the death of Albertine, I

ought long since to have begun to make inquiries, but the same weariness, the same cowardice which had made me give way to Albertine when she was with me prevented me from undertaking anything since I had ceased to see her. And yet from a weakness that had dragged on for years on end, a flash of energy sometimes emerged. I decided to make this investigation which, after all, was perfectly natural. One would have said that nothing else had occurred in Albertine's whole life. I asked myself whom I could best send down to make inquiries on the spot, at Balbec. Aimé seemed to me to be a suitable person. Apart from his thorough knowledge of the place, he belonged to that category of plebeian folk who have a keen eye to their own advantage, are loyal to those whom they serve, indifferent to any thought of morality, and of whom — because, if we pay them well, in their obedience to our will, they suppress everything that might in one way or another go against it, shewing themselves as incapable of indiscretion, weakness or dishonesty as they are devoid of scruples — we say: "They are good fellows." In such we can repose an absolute confidence. When Aimé had gone, I thought how much more to the point it would have been if, instead of sending him down to try to discover something there, I had now been able to question Albertine herself. And at once the thought of this question which I would have liked, which it seemed to me that I was about to put to her, having brought Albertine into my presence — not thanks to an effort of resurrection but as though by one of those chance encounters which, as is the case with photographs that are not posed, with snapshots, always make the person appear more alive — at the same time in which I imagined our conversation, I felt how impossible it was; I had just approached a fresh aspect of the idea that Albertine was dead, Albertine who inspired in me that affection which we have for the absent the sight of whom does not come to correct the embellished image, inspiring also sorrow that this absence must be eternal and that the poor child should be deprived for ever of the joys of life. And immediately, by an abrupt change of mood, from the torments of jealousy I passed to the despair of separation.

What filled my heart now was, in the place of odious suspicions, the affectionate memory of hours of confiding tenderness spent with the sister whom death had really made me lose, since my grief was related not to what Albertine had been to me, but to what my heart, anxious to participate in the most general emotions of love, had gradually persuaded me that she was; then I became aware that the life which had bored me so — so, at least, I thought — had been on the contrary delicious, to the briefest moments spent in talking to her of things that

were quite insignificant, I felt now that there was added, amalgamated a pleasure which at the time had not — it is true — been perceived by me, but which was already responsible for making me turn so perseveringly to those moments to the exclusion of any others; the most trivial incidents which I recalled, a movement that she had made in the carriage by my side, or to sit down facing me in my room, dispersed through my spirit an eddy of sweetness and sorrow which little by little overwhelmed it altogether.

This room in which we used to dine had never seemed to me attractive, I had told Albertine that it was attractive merely in order that my mistress might be content to live in it. Now the curtains, the chairs, the books, had ceased to be unimportant. Art is not alone in imparting charm and mystery to the most insignificant things; the same power of bringing them into intimate relation with ourselves is committed also to grief. At the moment I had paid no attention to the dinner which we had eaten together after our return from the Bois, before I went to the Verdurins', and towards the beauty, the solemn sweetness of which I now turned, my eyes filled with tears. An impression of love is out of proportion to the other impressions of life, but it is not when it is lost in their midst that we can take account of it. It is not from its foot, in the tumult of the street and amid the thronging houses, it is when we are far away, that from the slope of a neighbouring hill, at a distance from which the whole town has disappeared, or appears only as a confused mass upon the ground, we can, in the calm detachment of solitude and dusk, appreciate, unique, persistent and pure, the height of a cathedral. I tried to embrace the image of Albertine through my tears as I thought of all the serious and sensible things that she had said that evening.

One morning I thought that I could see the oblong shape of a hill swathed in mist, that I could taste the warmth of a cup of chocolate, while my heart was horribly wrung by the memory of that afternoon on which Albertine had come to see me and I had kissed her for the first time: the fact was that I had just heard the hiccough of the hot-water pipes, the furnace having just been started. And I flung angrily away an invitation which Françoise brought me from Mme. Verdurin; how the impression that I had felt when I went to dine for the first time at la Raspelière, that death does not strike us all at the same age, overcame me with increased force now that Albertine was dead, so young, while Brichot continued to dine with Mme. Verdurin who was still entertaining and would perhaps continue to entertain for many years to come. At once the name of Brichot recalled to me the end of that evening party when he had accompanied me home, when I had seen from the street the light of Albertine's lamp. I had

already thought of it upon many occasions, but I had not approached this memory from the same angle. Then when I thought of the void which I should now find upon returning home, that I should never again see from the street Albertine's room, the light in which was extinguished for ever, I realised how, that evening, in parting from Brichot, I had thought that I was bored, that I regretted my inability to stroll about the streets and make love elsewhere, I realised how greatly I had been mistaken, that it was only because the treasure whose reflexions came down to me in the street had seemed to be entirely in my possession that I had failed to calculate its value, which meant that it seemed to me of necessity inferior to pleasures, however slight, of which however, in seeking to imagine them, I enhanced the value. I realised how much that light which had seemed to me to issue from a prison contained for me of fulness, of life and sweetness, all of which was but the realisation of what had for a moment intoxicated me and had then seemed for ever impossible: I began to understand that this life which I had led in Paris in a home which was also her home, was precisely the realisation of that profound peace of which I had dreamed on the night when Albertine had slept under the same roof as myself, at Balbec. The conversation which I had had with Albertine after our return from the Bois before that party at the Verdurins', I should not have been consoled had it never occurred, that conversation which had to some extent introduced Albertine into my intellectual life and in certain respects had made us one. For no doubt if I returned with melting affection to her intelligence, to her kindness to myself, it was not because they were any greater than those of other persons whom I had known. Had not Mme. de Cambremer said to me at Balbec: "What! You might be spending your days with Elstir, who is a genius, and you spend them with your cousin!" Albertine's intelligence pleased me because, by association, it revived in me what I called its sweetness as we call the sweetness of a fruit a certain sensation which exists only in our palate. And in fact, when I thought of Albertine's intelligence, my lips instinctively protruded and tasted a memory of which I preferred that the reality should remain external to me and should consist in the objective superiority of another person. There could be no denying that I had known people whose intelligence was greater. But the infinitude of love, or its egoism, has the result that the people whom we love are those whose intellectual and moral physiognomy is least defined objectively in our eyes, we alter them incessantly to suit our desires and fears, we do not separate them from ourselves: they are only a vast and vague place in which our affections take root. We have not of our own body, into which flow perpetually so many discomforts

and pleasures, as clear an outline as we have of a tree or house, or of a passer-by. And where I had gone wrong was perhaps in not making more effort to know Albertine in herself. Just as, from the point of view of her charm, I had long considered only the different positions that she occupied in my memory in the procession of years, and had been surprised to see that she had been spontaneously enriched with modifications which were due merely to the difference of perspective, so I ought to have sought to understand her character as that of an ordinary person, and thus perhaps, finding an explanation of her persistence in keeping her secret from me, might have averted the continuance between us, with that strange desperation, of the conflict which had led to the death of Albertine. And I then felt, with an intense pity for her, shame at having survived her. It seemed to me indeed, in the hours when I suffered least, that I had derived a certain benefit from her death, for a woman is of greater service to our life if she is in it, instead of being an element of happiness, an instrument of sorrow, and there is not a woman in the world the possession of whom is as precious as that of the truths which she reveals to us by causing us to suffer. In these moments, thinking at once of my grandmother's death and of Albertine's, it seemed to me that my life was stained with a double murder from which only the cowardice of the world could absolve me. I had dreamed of being understood by Albertine, of not being scorned by her, thinking that it was for the great happiness of being understood, of not being scorned, when so many other people might have served me better. We wish to be understood, because we wish to be loved, and we wish to be loved because we are in love. The understanding of other people is immaterial and their love importunate. My joy at having possessed a little of Albertine's intelligence and of her heart arose not from their intrinsic worth, but from the fact that this possession was a stage farther towards the complete possession of Albertine, a possession which had been my goal and my chimera, since the day on which I first set eyes on her. When we speak of the 'kindness' of a woman, we do no more perhaps than project outside ourselves the pleasure that we feel in seeing her, like children when they say: "My dear little bed, my dear little pillow, my dear little hawthorns." Which explains incidentally why men never say of a woman who is not unfaithful to them: "She is so kind," and say it so often of a woman by whom they are betrayed. Mme. de Cambremer was right in thinking that Elstir's intellectual charm was greater. But we cannot judge in the same way the charm of a person who is, like everyone else, exterior to ourselves, painted upon the horizon of our mind, and that of a person who, in consequence of an error in localisation which has been due to

certain accidents but is irreparable, has lodged herself in our own body so effectively that the act of asking ourselves in retrospect whether she did not look at a woman on a particular day in the corridor of a little seaside railway-tram makes us feel the same anguish as would a surgeon probing for a bullet in our heart. A simple crescent of bread, but one which we are eating, gives us more pleasure than all the ortolans, young rabbits and barbavelles that were set before Louis XV and the blade of grass which, a few inches away, quivers before our eye, while we are lying upon the mountain-side, may conceal from us the sheer summit of another peak, if it is several miles away.

Furthermore, our mistake is our failure to value the intelligence, the kindness of a woman whom we love, however slight they may be. Our mistake is our remaining indifferent to the kindness, the intelligence of others. Falsehood begins to cause us the indignation, and kindness the gratitude which they ought always to arouse in us, only if they proceed from a woman with whom we are in love, and bodily desire has the marvellous faculty of restoring its value to intelligence and a solid base to the moral life. Never should I find again that divine thing, a person with whom I might talk freely of everything, in whom I might confide. Confide? But did not other people offer me greater confidence than Albertine? Had I not had with others more unrestricted conversations? The fact is that confidence, conversation, trivial things in themselves, what does it matter whether they are more or less imperfect, if only there enters into them love, which alone is divine. I could see Albertine now, seated at her pianola, rosy beneath her dark hair, I could feel, against my lips which she was trying to part, her tongue, her motherly, inedible, nourishing and holy tongue whose secret flame and dew meant that even when Albertine let it glide over the surface of my throat or stomach, those caresses, superficial but in a sense offered by her inmost flesh, turned outward like a cloth that is turned to shew its lining, assumed even in the most external touches as it were the mysterious delight of a penetration.

All these so pleasant moments which nothing would ever restore to me again, I cannot indeed say that what made me feel the loss of them was despair. To feel despair, we must still be attached to that life which could end only in disaster. I had been in despair at Balbec when I saw the day break and realised that none of the days to come could ever be a happy day for me, I had remained fairly selfish since then, but the self to which I was now attached, the self which constituted those vital reserves that were set in action by the instinct of self-preservation, this self was no longer alive; when I thought of my strength, of my vital force, of the best elements in myself, I thought of a certain treasure which I

had possessed (which I had been alone in possessing since other people could not know exactly the sentiment, concealed in myself, which it had inspired in me) and which no one could ever again take from me since I possessed it no longer.

And, to tell the truth, when I had ever possessed it, it had been only because I had liked to think of myself as possessing it. I had not merely committed the imprudence, when I cast my eyes upon Albertine and lodged her in my heart, of making her live within me, nor that other imprudence of combining a domestic affection with sensual pleasure. I had sought also to persuade myself that our relations were love, that we were mutually practising the relations that are called love, because she obediently returned the kisses that I gave her, and, having come in time to believe this, I had lost not merely a woman whom I loved but a woman who loved me, my sister, my child, my tender mistress. And in short, I had received a blessing and a curse which Swann had not known, for after all during the whole of the time in which he had been in love with Odette and had been so jealous of her, he had barely seen her, having found it so difficult, on certain days when she put him off at the last moment, to gain admission to her. But afterwards he had had her to himself, as his wife, and until the day of his death. I, on the contrary, while I was so jealous of Albertine, more fortunate than Swann, had had her with me in my own house. I had realised as a fact the state of which Swann had so often dreamed and which he did not realise materially until it had ceased to interest him. But after all I had not managed to keep Albertine as he had kept Odette. She had fled from me, she was dead. For nothing is ever repeated exactly, and the most analogous lives which, thanks to the kinship of the persons and the similarity of the circumstances, we may select in order to represent them as symmetrical, remain in many respects opposite.

By losing my life I should not have lost very much; I should have lost now only an empty form, the empty frame of a work of art. Indifferent as to what I might in the future put in it, but glad and proud to think of what it had contained, I dwelt upon the memory of those so pleasant hours, and this moral support gave me a feeling of comfort which the approach of death itself would not have disturbed.

How she used to hasten to see me at Balbec when I sent for her, lingering only to sprinkle scent on her hair to please me. These images of Balbec and Paris which I loved to see again were the pages still so recent, and so quickly turned, of her short life. All this which for me was only memory had been for her action, action as precipitate as that of a tragedy towards a sudden death. People develop

in one way inside us, but in another way outside us (I had indeed felt this on those evenings when I remarked in Albertine an enrichment of qualities which was due not only to my memory), and these two ways do not fail to react upon each other. Albeit I had, in seeking to know Albertine, then to possess her altogether, obeyed merely the need to reduce by experiment to elements meanly similar to those of our own self the mystery of every other person, I had been unable to do so without exercising an influence in my turn over Albertine's life. Perhaps my wealth, the prospect of a brilliant marriage had attracted her, my jealousy had kept her, her goodness or her intelligence, or her sense of guilt, or her cunning had made her accept, and had led me on to make harsher and harsher a captivity in chains forged simply by the internal process of my mental toil, which had nevertheless had, upon Albertine's life, reactions, destined themselves to set, by the natural swing of the pendulum, fresh and ever more painful problems to my psychology, since from my prison she had escaped, to go and kill herself upon a horse which but for me she would not have owned, leaving me, even after she was dead, with suspicions the verification of which, if it was to come, would perhaps be more painful to me than the discovery at Balbec that Albertine had known Mlle. Vinteuil, since Albertine would no longer be present to soothe me. So that the long plaint of the soul which thinks that it is living shut up within itself is a monologue in appearance only, since the echoes of reality alter its course and such a life is like an essay in subjective psychology spontaneously pursued, but furnishing from a distance its 'action' to the purely realistic novel of another reality, another existence, the vicissitudes of which come in their turn to inflect the curve and change the direction of the psychological essay. How highly geared had been the mechanism, how rapid had been the evolution of our love, and, notwithstanding the sundry delays, interruptions and hesitations of the start, as in certain of Balzac's tales or Schumann's ballads, how sudden the catastrophe! It was in the course of this last year, long as a century to me, so many times had Albertine changed her appearance in my mind between Balbec and her departure from Paris, and also, independently of me and often without my knowledge, changed in herself, that I must place the whole of that happy life of affection which had lasted so short a while, which yet appeared to me with an amplitude, almost an immensity, which now was for ever impossible and yet was indispensable to me. Indispensable without perhaps having been in itself and at the outset a thing that was necessary since I should not have known Albertine had I not read in an archaeological treatise a description of the church at Balbec, had not Swann, by telling me that

this church was almost Persian, directed my taste to the Byzantine Norman, had not a financial syndicate, by erecting at Balbec a hygienic and comfortable hotel, made my parents decide to hear my supplication and send me to Balbec. To be sure, in that Balbec so long desired I had not found the Persian church of my dreams, nor the eternal mists. Even the famous train at one twenty-two had not corresponded to my mental picture of it. But in compensation for what our imagination leaves us wanting and we give ourselves so much unnecessary trouble in trying to find, life does give us something which we were very far from imagining. Who would have told me at Combray, when I lay waiting for my mother's good-night with so heavy a heart, that those anxieties would be healed, and would then break out again one day, not for my mother, but for a girl who would at first be no more, against the horizon of the sea, than a flower upon which my eyes would daily be invited to gaze, but a flower that could think, and in whose mind I should be so childishly anxious to occupy a prominent place, that I should be distressed by her not being aware that I knew Mme. de Villeparisis? Yes, it was the good-night, the kiss of a stranger like this, that, in years to come, was to make me suffer as keenly as I had suffered as a child when my mother was not coming up to my room. Well, this Albertine so necessary, of love for whom my soul was now almost entirely composed, if Swann had not spoken to me of Balbec, I should never have known her. Her life would perhaps have been longer, mine would have been unprovided with what was now making it a martyrdom. And also it seemed to me that, by my entirely selfish affection, I had allowed Albertine to die just as I had murdered my grandmother. Even later on, even after I had already known her at Balbec, I should have been able not to love her as I was to love her in the sequel. When I gave up Gilberte and knew that I would be able one day to love another woman, I scarcely ventured to entertain a doubt whether, considering simply the past, Gilberte was the only woman whom I had been capable of loving. Well, in the case of Albertine I had no longer any doubt at all, I was sure that it need not have been herself that I loved, that it might have been some one else. To prove this, it would have been sufficient that Mlle. de Stermaria, on the evening when I was going to take her to dine on the island in the Bois, should not have put me off. It was still not too late, and it would have been upon Mlle. de Stermaria that I would have trained that activity of the imagination which makes us extract from a woman so special a notion of the individual that she appears to us unique in herself and predestined and necessary for us. At the most, adopting an almost physiological point of view, I could say that I might have been able to feel this same exclusive love for

another woman but not for any other woman. For Albertine, plump and dark, did not resemble Gilberte, tall and ruddy, and yet they were fashioned of the same healthy stuff, and over the same sensual cheeks shone a look in the eyes of both which it was difficult to interpret. They were women of a sort that would never attract the attention of men who, for their part, would do the most extravagant things for other women who made no appeal to me. A man has almost always the same way of catching cold, and so forth; that is to say, he requires to bring about the event a certain combination of circumstances; it is natural that when he falls in love he should love a certain class of woman, a class which for that matter is very numerous. The two first glances from Albertine which had set me dreaming were not absolutely different from Gilberte's first glances. I could almost believe that the obscure personality, the sensuality, the forward, cunning nature of Gilberte had returned to tempt me, incarnate this time in Albertine's body, a body quite different and yet not without analogies. In Albertine's case, thanks to a wholly different life shared with me into which had been unable to penetrate — in a block of thoughts among which a painful preoccupation maintained a permanent cohesion — any fissure of distraction and oblivion, her living body had indeed not, like Gilberte's, ceased one day to be the body in which I found what I subsequently recognised as being to me (what they would not have been to other men) feminine charms. But she was dead. I should, in time, forget her. Who could tell whether then, the same qualities of rich blood, of uneasy brooding would return one day to spread havoc in my life, but incarnate this time in what feminine form I could not foresee. The example of Gilberte would as little have enabled me to form an idea of Albertine and guess that I should fall in love with her, as the memory of Vinteuil's sonata would have enabled me to imagine his septet. Indeed, what was more, on the first occasions of my meeting Albertine, I might have supposed that it was with other girls that I should fall in love. Besides, she might indeed quite well have appeared to me, had I met her a year earlier, as dull as a grey sky in which dawn has not yet broken. If I had changed in relation to her, she herself had changed also, and the girl who had come and sat Upon my bed on the day of my letter to Mlle. de Stermaria was no longer the same girl that I had known at Balbec, whether by a mere explosion of the woman which occurs at the age of puberty, or because of some incident which I have never been able to discover. In any case if she whom I was one day to love must to a certain extent resemble this other, that is to say if my choice of a woman was not entirely free, this meant nevertheless that, trained in a manner that was perhaps inevitable, it was trained upon something more considerable

than a person, upon a type of womankind, and this removed all inevitability from my love for Albertine. The woman whose face we have before our eyes more constantly than light itself, since, even when our eyes are shut, we never cease for an instant to adore her beautiful eyes, her beautiful nose, to arrange opportunities of seeing them again, this unique woman — we know quite well that it would have been another woman that would now be unique to us if we had been in another town than that in which we made her acquaintance, if we had explored other quarters of the town, if we had frequented the house of a different hostess. Unique, we suppose; she is innumerable. And yet she is compact, indestructible in our loving eyes, irreplaceable for a long time to come by any other. The truth is that the woman has only raised to life by a sort of magic spell a thousand elements of affection existing in us already in a fragmentary state, which she has assembled, joined together, bridging every gap between them, it is ourselves who by giving her her features have supplied all the solid matter of the beloved object. Whence it comes about that even if we are only one man among a thousand to her and perhaps the last man of them all, to us she is the only woman, the woman towards whom our whole life tends. It was indeed true that I had been quite well aware that this love was not inevitable since it might have occurred with Mlle. de Stermaria, but even without that from my knowledge of the love itself, when I found it to be too similar to what I had known with other women, and also when I felt it to be vaster than Albertine, enveloping her, unconscious of her, like a tide swirling round a tiny rock. But gradually, by dint of living with Albertine, the chains which I myself had forged I was unable to fling off, the habit of associating Albertine’s person with the sentiment which she had not inspired made me nevertheless believe that ft was peculiar to her, as habit gives to the mere association of ideas between two phenomena, according to a certain school of philosophy, an illusion of the force, the necessity of a law of causation. I had thought that my social relations, my wealth, would dispense me from suffering, and too effectively perhaps since this seemed to dispense me from feeling, loving, imagining; I envied a poor country girl whom her absence of social relations, even by telegraph, allows to ponder for months on end upon a grief which she cannot artificially put to sleep. And now I began to realise that if, in the case of Mme. de Guermantes, endowed with everything that could make the gulf infinite between her and myself, I had seen that gulf suddenly bridged by the opinion that social advantages are nothing more than inert and transmutable matter, so, in a similar albeit converse fashion, my social relations, my wealth, all the material means by which not only my

own position but the civilisation of my age enabled me to profit, had done no more than postpone the conclusion of my struggle against the contrary inflexible will of Albertine upon which no pressure had had any effect. True, I had been able to exchange telegrams, telephone messages with Saint-Loup, to remain in constant communication with the office at Tours, but had not the delay in waiting for them proved useless, the result nil? And country girls, without social advantages or relations, or human beings enjoying the perfections of civilisation, do they not suffer less, because all of us desire less, because we regret less what we have always known to be inaccessible, what for that reason has continued to seem unreal? We desire more keenly the person who is about to give herself to us; hope anticipates possession; but regret also is an amplifier of desire. Mme. de Stermaria's refusal to come and dine with me on the island in the Bois was what had prevented her from becoming the object of my love. This might have sufficed also to make me fall in love with her if afterwards I had seen her again before it was too late. As soon as I had known that she was not coming, entertaining the improbable hypothesis — which had been proved correct — that perhaps she had a jealous lover who prevented her from seeing other men, that I should never see her again, I had suffered so intensely that I would have given anything in the world to see her, and it was one of the keenest anguishes that I had ever felt that Saint-Loup's arrival had soothed. After we have reached a certain age our loves, our mistresses, are begotten of our anguish; our past, and the physical lesions in which it is recorded, determine our future. In Albertine's case, the fact that it would not necessarily be she that I must love was, even without the example of those previous loves, inscribed in the history of my love for her, that is to say for herself and her friends. For it was not a single love like my love for Gilberte, but was created by division among a number of girls. That it was on her account and because they appeared to me more or less similar to her that I had amused myself with her friends was quite possible. The fact remains that for a long time hesitation among them all was possible, my choice strayed from one to another, and when I thought that I preferred one, it was enough that another should keep me waiting, should refuse to see me, to make me feel the first premonitions of love for her. Often at that time when Andrée was coming to see me at Balbec, if, shortly before Andrée was expected, Albertine failed to keep an appointment, my heart throbbed without ceasing, I felt that I would never see her again and that it was she whom I loved. And when Andrée came it was in all seriousness that I said to her (as I said it to her in Paris after I had learned that Albertine had known Mlle. Vinteuil) what she supposed

me to be saying with a purpose, without sincerity, what I would indeed have said and in the same words had I been enjoying myself the day before with Albertine: “Alas! If you had only come sooner, now I am in love with some one else.” Again, in this case of Andrée, replaced by Albertine after I learned that the latter had known Mlle. Vinteuil, my love had alternated between them, so that after all there had been only one love at a time. But a case had occurred earlier in which I had more or less quarrelled with two of the girls. The one who took the first step towards a reconciliation would restore my peace of mind, it was the other that I would love, if she remained cross with me, which does not mean that it was not with the former that I would form a definite tie, for she would console me — albeit ineffectively — for the harshness of the other, whom I would end by forgetting if she did not return to me again. Now, it so happened that, while I was convinced that one or the other at least would come back to me, for some time neither of them did so. My anguish was therefore twofold, and twofold my love, while I reserved to myself the right to cease to love the one who came back, but until that happened continued to suffer on account of them both. It is the lot of a certain period in life which may come to us quite early that we are made less amorous by a person than by a desertion, in which we end by knowing one thing and one thing only about that person, her face having grown dim, her heart having ceased to exist, our preference of her being quite recent and inexplicable; namely that what we need to make our suffering cease is a message from her: “May I come and see you?” My separation from Albertine on the day when Françoise informed me: “Mademoiselle Albertine has gone” was like an allegory of countless other separations. For very often in order that we may discover that we are in love, perhaps indeed in order that we may fall in love, the day of separation must first have come. In the case when it is an unkept appointment, a written refusal that dictates our choice, our imagination lashed by suffering sets about its work so swiftly, fashions with so frenzied a rapidity a love that had scarcely begun, and had been quite featureless, destined, for months past, to remain a rough sketch, that now and again our intelligence which has not been able to keep pace with our heart, cries out in astonishment: “But you must be mad, what are these strange thoughts that are making you so miserable? That is not real life.” And indeed at that moment, had we not been roused to action by the betrayer, a few healthy distractions that would calm our heart physically would be sufficient to bring our love to an end. In any case if this life with Albertine was not in its essence necessary, it had become indispensable to me. I had trembled when I was in love with Mme. de Guermantes because I used to

say to myself that, with her too abundant means of attraction, not only beauty but position, wealth, she would be too much at liberty to give herself to all and sundry, that I should have too little hold over her. Albertine had been penniless, obscure, she must have been anxious to marry me. And yet I had not been able to possess her exclusively. Whatever be our social position, however wise our precautions, when the truth is confessed we have no hold over the life of another person. Why had she not said to me: “I have those tastes,” I would have yielded, would have allowed her to gratify them. In a novel that I had been reading there was a woman whom no objurgation from the man who was in love with her could induce to speak. When I read the book, I had thought this situation absurd; had I been the hero, I assured myself, I would first of all have forced the woman to speak, then we could have come to an understanding; what was the good of all this unnecessary misery? But I saw now that we are not free to abstain from forging the chains of our own misery, and that however well we may know our own will, other people do not obey it.

And yet those painful, those ineluctable truths which dominated us and to which we were blind, the truth of our sentiments, the truth of our destiny, how often without knowing it, without meaning it, we have expressed them in words in which we ourselves doubtless thought that we were lying, but the prophetic value of which has been established by subsequent events. I could recall many words that each of us had uttered without knowing at the time the truth that they contained, which indeed we had said thinking that each was deceiving the other, words the falsehood of which was very slight, quite uninteresting, wholly confined within our pitiable insincerity, compared with what they contained that was unknown to us. Lies, mistakes, falling short of the reality which neither of us perceived, truth extending beyond it, the truth of our natures the essential laws of which escape us and require time before they reveal themselves, the truth of our destinies also. I had supposed that I was lying when I said to her at Balbec: “The more I see you, the more I shall love you” (and yet it was that intimacy at every moment that had, through the channel of jealousy, attached me so strongly to her), “I know that I could be of use to you intellectually”; and in Paris: “Do be careful. Remember that if you met with an accident, it would break my heart.” And she: “But I may meet with an accident”; and I in Paris on the evening when I pretended that I wished to part from her: “Let me look at you once again since presently I shall not be seeing you again, and it will be for ever!” and when, that same evening, she looked round the room: “To think that I shall never see this room again, those books, that pianola, the whole house, I

cannot believe it and yet it is true." In her last letters again, when she wrote — probably saying to herself: "This is the stuff to tell him"—"I leave with you the best part of myself" (and was it not now indeed to the fidelity, to the strength, which too was, alas, frail, of my memory that were entrusted her intelligence, her goodness, her beauty?) and "that twofold twilight (since night was falling and we were about to part) will be effaced from my thoughts only when the darkness is complete," that phrase written on the eve of the day when her mind had indeed been plunged in complete darkness, and when, it may well have been, in the last glimmer, so brief but stretched out to infinity by the anxiety of the moment, she had indeed perhaps seen again our last drive together and in that instant when everything forsakes us and we create a faith for ourselves, as atheists turn Christian upon the battlefield, she had perhaps summoned to her aid the friend whom she had so often cursed but had so deeply respected, who himself — for all religions are alike — was so cruel as to hope that she had also had time to see herself as she was, to give her last thought to him, to confess her sins at length to him, to die in him. But to what purpose, since even if, at that moment, she had had time to see herself as she was, we had neither of us understood where our happiness lay, what we ought to do, until that happiness, because that happiness was no longer possible, until and because we could no longer realise it. So long as things are possible we postpone them, and they cannot assume that force of attraction, that apparent ease of realisation save when, projected upon the ideal void of the imagination, they are removed from their burdensome, degrading submersion in the vital medium. The thought that we must die is more painful than the act of dying, but less painful than the thought that another person is dead, which, becoming once more a plane surface after having engulfed a person, extends without even an eddy at the point of disappearance, a reality from which that person is excluded, in which there exists no longer any will, any knowledge, and from which it is as difficult to reascend to the thought that the person has lived, as it is difficult, with the still recent memory of her life, to think that she is now comparable with the unsubstantial images, with the memories left us by the characters in a novel which we have been reading.

At any rate I was glad that, before she died, she had written me that letter, and above all had sent me that final message which proved to me that she would have returned had she lived. It seemed to me that it was not merely more soothing, but more beautiful also, that the event would have been incomplete without this note, would not have had so markedly the form of art and destiny. In

reality it would have been just as markedly so had it been different; for every event is like a mould of a particular shape, and, whatever it be, it imposes, upon the series of incidents which it has interrupted and seems to have concluded, a pattern which we believe to be the only one possible, because we do not know the other which might have been substituted for it. I repeated to myself: “Why had she not said to me: ‘I have those tastes,’ I would have yielded, would have allowed her to gratify them, at this moment I should be kissing her still.” What a sorrow to have to remind myself that she had lied to me thus when she swore to me, three days before she left me, that she had never had with Mlle. Vinteuil’s friend those relations which at the moment when Albertine swore it her blush had confessed. Poor child, she had at least had the honesty to refuse to swear that the pleasure of seeing Mlle. Vinteuil again had no part in her desire to go that day to the Verdurins’. Why had she not made her admission complete, why had she then invented that inconceivable tale? Perhaps however it was partly my fault that she had never, despite all my entreaties which were powerless against her denial, been willing to say to me: “I have those tastes.” It was perhaps partly my fault because at Balbec, on the day when, after Mme. de Cambremer’s call, I had had my first explanation with Albertine, and when I was so far from imagining that she could have had, in any case, anything more than an unduly passionate friendship with Andrée, I had expressed with undue violence my disgust at that kind of moral lapse, had condemned it in too categorical a fashion. I could not recall whether Albertine had blushed when I had innocently expressed my horror of that sort of thing, I could not recall it, for it is often only long afterwards that we would give anything to know what attitude a person adopted at a moment when we were paying no attention to it, an attitude which, later on, when we think again of our conversation, would elucidate a poignant difficulty. But in our memory there is a blank, there is no trace of it. And very often we have not paid sufficient attention, at the actual moment, to the things which might even then have seemed to us important, we have not properly heard a sentence, have not noticed a gesture, or else we have forgotten them. And when later on, eager to discover a truth, we reascend from deduction to deduction, turning over our memory like a sheaf of written evidence, when we arrive at that sentence, at that gesture, which it is impossible to recall, we begin again a score of times the same process, but in vain: the road goes no farther. Had she blushed? I did not know whether she had blushed, but she could not have failed to hear, and the memory of my speech had brought her to a halt later on when perhaps she had been on the point of making her confession to me. And

now she no longer existed anywhere, I might scour the earth from pole to pole without finding Albertine. The reality which had closed over her was once more unbroken, had obliterated every trace of the creature who had sunk into its depths. She was no more now than a name, like that Mme. de Charlus of whom the people who had known her said with indifference: “She was charming.” But I was unable to conceive for more than an instant the existence of this reality of which Albertine had no knowledge, for in myself my mistress existed too vividly, in myself in whom every sentiment, every thought bore some reference to her life. Perhaps if she had known, she would have been touched to see that her lover had not forgotten her, now that her own life was finished, and would have been moved by things which in the past had left her indifferent. But as we would choose to refrain from infidelities, however secret they might be, so fearful are we that she whom we love is not refraining from them, I was alarmed by the thought that if the dead do exist anywhere, my grandmother was as well aware of my oblivion as Albertine of my remembrance. And when all is said, even in the case of a single dead person, can we be sure that the joy which we should feel in learning that she knows certain things would compensate for our alarm at the thought that she knows *all*; and, however agonising the sacrifice, would we not sometimes abstain from keeping after their death as friends those whom we have loved, from the fear of having them also as judges?

My jealous curiosity as to what Albertine might have done was unbounded. I suborned any number of women from whom I learned nothing. If this curiosity was so keen, it was because people do not die at once for us, they remain bathed in a sort of *aura* of life in which there is no true immortality but which means that they continue to occupy our thoughts in the same way as when they were alive. It is as though they were travelling abroad. This is a thoroughly pagan survival. Conversely, when we have ceased to love her, the curiosity which the person arouses dies before she herself is dead. Thus I would no longer have taken any step to find out with whom Gilberte had been strolling on a certain evening in the Champs-Elysées. Now I felt that these curiosities were absolutely alike, had no value in themselves, were incapable of lasting, but I continued to sacrifice everything to the cruel satisfaction of this transient curiosity, albeit I knew in advance that my enforced separation from Albertine, by the fact of her death, would lead me to the same indifference as had resulted from my deliberate separation from Gilberte.

If she could have known what was about to happen, she would have stayed with me. But this meant no more than that, once she saw herself dead, she would

have preferred, in my company, to remain alive. Simply in view of the contradiction that it implied, such a supposition was absurd. But it was not innocuous, for in imagining how glad Albertine would be, if she could know, if she could retrospectively understand, to come back to me, I saw her before me, I wanted to kiss her; and alas, it was impossible, she would never come back, she was dead. My imagination sought for her in the sky, through the nights on which we had gazed at it when still together; beyond that moonlight which she loved, I tried to raise up to her my affection so that it might be a consolation to her for being no longer alive, and this love for a being so remote was like a religion, my thoughts rose towards her like prayers. Desire is very powerful, it engenders belief; I had believed that Albertine would not leave me because I desired that she might not. Because I desired it, I began to believe that she was not dead; I took to reading books upon table-turning, I began to believe in the possibility of the immortality of the soul. But that did not suffice me. I required that, after my own death, I should find her again in her body, as though eternity were like life. Life, did I say! I was more exacting still. I would have wished not to be deprived for ever by death of the pleasures of which however it is not alone in robbing us. For without her death they would eventually have grown faint, they had begun already to do so by the action of long-established habit, of fresh curiosities. Besides, had she been alive, Albertine, even physically, would gradually have changed, day by day I should have adapted myself to that change. But my memory, calling up only detached moments of her life, asked to see her again as she would already have ceased to be, had she lived; what it required was a miracle which would satisfy the natural and arbitrary limitations of memory which cannot emerge from the past. With the simplicity of the old theologians, I imagined her furnishing me not indeed with the explanations which she might possibly have given me but, by a final contradiction, with those that she had always refused me during her life. And thus, her death being a sort of dream, my love would seem to her an unlooked-for happiness; I saw in death only the convenience and optimism of a solution which simplifies, which arranges everything. Sometimes it was not so far off, it was not in another world that I imagined our reunion. Just as in the past, when I knew Gilberte only from playing with her in the Champs-Elysées, at home in the evening I used to imagine that I was going to receive a letter from her in which she would confess her love for me, that she was coming into the room, so a similar force of desire, no more embarrassed by the laws of nature which ran counter to it than on the former occasion in the case of Gilberte, when after all it had not been mistaken

since it had had the last word, made me think now that I was going to receive a message from Albertine, informing me that she had indeed met with an accident while riding, but that for romantic reasons (and as, after all, has sometimes happened with people whom we have long believed to be dead) she had not wished me to hear of her recovery and now, repentant, asked to be allowed to come and live with me for ever. And, making quite clear to myself the nature of certain harmless manias in people who otherwise appear sane, I felt coexisting in myself the certainty that she was dead and the incessant hope that I might see her come into the room,

I had not yet received any news from Aimé, albeit he must by now have reached Balbec. No doubt my inquiry turned upon a secondary point, and one quite arbitrarily selected. If Albertine's life had been really culpable, it must have contained many other things of far greater importance, which chance had not allowed me to touch, as it had allowed me that conversation about the wrapper, thanks to Albertine's blushes. It was quite arbitrarily that I had been presented with that particular day, which many years later I was seeking to reconstruct. If Albertine had been a lover of women, there were thousands of other days in her life her employment of which I did not know and about which it might be as interesting for me to learn; I might have sent Aimé to many other places in Balbec, to many other towns than Balbec. But these other days, precisely because I did not know how she had spent them, did not represent themselves to my imagination. They had no existence. Things, people, did not begin to exist for me until they assumed in my imagination an individual existence. If there were thousands of others like them, they became for me representative of all the rest. If I had long felt a desire to know, in the matter of my suspicions with regard to Albertine, what exactly had happened in the baths, it was in the same manner in which, in the matter of my desires for women, and although I knew that there were any number of girls and lady's-maids who could satisfy them and whom chance might just as easily have led me to hear mentioned, I wished to know — since it was of them that Saint-Loup had spoken to me — the girl who frequented houses of ill fame and Mme. Putbus's maid. The difficulties which my health, my indecision, my 'procrastination,' as M. de Charlus called it, placed in the way of my carrying out any project, had made me put off from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, the elucidation of certain suspicions as also the accomplishment of certain desires. But I kept them in my memory promising myself that I would not forget to learn the truth of them, because they alone obsessed me (since the others had no form in my

eyes, did not exist), and also because the very accident that had chosen them out of the surrounding reality gave me a guarantee that it was indeed in them that I should come in contact with a trace of reality, of the true and coveted life.

Besides, from a single fact, if it is certain, can we not, like a scientist making experiments, extract the truth as to all the orders of similar facts? Is not a single little fact, if it is well chosen, sufficient to enable the experimenter to deduce a general law which will make him know the truth as to thousands of analogous facts?

Albertine might indeed exist in my memory only in the state in which she had successively appeared to me in the course of her life, that is to say subdivided according to a series of fractions of time, my mind, reestablishing unity in her, made her a single person, and it was upon this person that I sought to bring a general judgment to bear, to know whether she had lied to me, whether she loved women, whether it was in order to be free to associate with them that she had left me. What the woman in the baths would have to say might perhaps put an end for ever to my doubts as to Albertine's morals.

My doubts! Alas, I had supposed that it would be immaterial to me, even pleasant, not to see Albertine again, until her departure revealed to me my error. Similarly her death had shewn me how greatly I had been mistaken when I believed that I hoped at times for her death and supposed that it would be my deliverance. So it was that, when I received Aimé's letter, I realised that, if I had not until then suffered too painfully from my doubts as to Albertine's virtue, it was because in reality they were not doubts at all. My happiness, my life required that Albertine should be virtuous, they had laid it down once and for all time that she was. Furnished with this preservative belief, I could without danger allow my mind to play sadly with suppositions to which it gave a form but added no faith. I said to myself, "She is perhaps a woman-lover," as we say, "I may die to-night"; we say it, but we do not believe it, we make plans for the morrow. This explains why, believing mistakenly that I was uncertain whether Albertine did or did not love women, and believing in consequence that a proof of Albertine's guilt would not give me anything that I had not already taken into account, I was able to feel before the pictures, insignificant to anyone else, which Aimé's letter called up to me, an unexpected anguish, the most painful that I had ever yet felt, and one that formed with those pictures, with the picture, alas! of Albertine herself, a sort of precipitate, as chemists say, in which the whole was invisible and of which the text of Aimé's letter, which I isolate in a purely conventional fashion, can give no idea whatsoever, since each of the

words that compose it was immediately transformed, coloured for ever by the suffering that it had aroused.

"MONSIEUR,

"Monsieur will kindly forgive me for not having written sooner to Monsieur. The person whom Monsieur instructed me to see had gone away for a few days, and, anxious to justify the confidence which Monsieur had placed in me, I did not wish to return empty-handed. I have just spoken to this person who remembers (Mlle. A.) quite well." Aimé who possessed certain rudiments of culture meant to italicise *Mlle. A.* between inverted commas. But when he meant to write inverted commas, he wrote brackets, and when he meant to write something in brackets he put it between inverted commas. Thus it was that Françoise would say that some one*stayed* in my street meaning that he abode there, and that one could *abide*for a few minutes, meaning *stay*, the mistakes of popular speech consisting merely, as often as not, in interchanging — as for that matter the French language has done — terms which in the course of centuries have replaced one another. "According to her the thing that Monsieur supposed is absolutely certain. For one thing, it was she who looked after (Mlle. A.) whenever she came to the baths. (Mlle. A.) came very often to take her bath with a tall woman older than herself, always dressed in grey, whom the bath-woman without knowing her name recognised from having often seen her going after girls. But she took no notice of any of them after she met (Mlle. A.). She and (Mlle. A.) always shut themselves up in the dressing-box, remained there a very long time, and the lady in grey used to give at least 10 francs as a tip to the person to whom I spoke. As this person said to me, you can imagine that if they were just stringing beads, they wouldn't have given a tip of ten francs. (Mlle. A.) used to come also sometimes with a woman with a very dark skin and long-handled glasses. But (Mlle. A.) came most often with girls younger than herself, especially one with a high complexion. Apart from the lady in grey, the people whom (Mlle. A.) was in the habit of bringing were not from Balbec and must indeed often have come from quite a distance. They never came in together, but (Mlle. A.) would come in, and ask for the door of her box to be left unlocked — as she was expecting a friend, and the person to whom I spoke knew what that meant. This person could not give me any other details, as she does not remember very well, which is easily understood after so long an interval.' Besides, this person did not try to find out, because she is very discreet and it was to her advantage, for (Mlle. A.) brought her in a lot of money. She was quite sincerely touched to hear that she was dead. It is true that so young it is a great

calamity for her and for her friends. I await Monsieur's orders to know whether I may leave Balbec where I do not think that I can learn anything more. I thank Monsieur again for the little holiday that he has procured me, and which has been very pleasant especially as the weather is as fine as could be. The season promises well for this year. We hope that Monsieur will come and put in a little appearance.

"I can think of nothing else to say that will interest Monsieur."

To understand how deeply these words penetrated my being, the reader must bear in mind that the questions which I had been asking myself with regard to Albertine were not subordinate, immaterial questions, questions of detail, the only questions as a matter of fact which we ask ourselves about anyone who is not ourselves, whereby we are enabled to proceed, wrapped in an impenetrable thought, through the midst of suffering, falsehood, vice or death. No, in Albertine's case, they were essential questions: "In her heart of hearts what was she? What were her thoughts? What were her loves? Did she lie to me? Had my life with her been as lamentable as Swann's life with Odette?" And so the point reached by Aimé's reply, even although it was not a general reply — and precisely for that reason — was indeed in Albertine, in myself, the uttermost depths.

At last I saw before my eyes, in that arrival of Albertine at the baths along the narrow lane with the lady in grey, a fragment of that past which seemed to me no less mysterious, no less alarming than I had feared when I imagined it as enclosed in the memory, in the facial expression of Albertine. No doubt anyone but myself might have dismissed as insignificant these details, upon which my inability, now that Albertine was dead, to secure a denial of them from herself, conferred the equivalent of a sort of likelihood. It is indeed probable that for Albertine, even if they had been true, her own misdeeds, if she had admitted them, whether her conscience thought them innocent or reprehensible, whether her sensuality had found them exquisite or distinctly dull, would not have been accompanied by that inexpressible sense of horror from which I was unable to detach them. I myself, with the help of my own love of women, albeit they could not have been the same thing to Albertine, could more or less imagine what she felt. And indeed it was already a first degree of anguish, merely to picture her to myself desiring as I had so often desired, lying to me as I had so often lied to her, preoccupied with one girl or another, putting herself out for her, as I had done for Mlle. de Stermaria and ever so many others, not to mention the peasant girls whom I met on country roads. Yes, all my own desires helped me to understand,

to a certain degree, what hers had been; it was by this time an intense anguish in which all my desires, the keener they had been, had changed into torments that were all the more cruel; as though in this algebra of sensibility they reappeared with the same coefficient but with a minus instead of a plus sign. To Albertine, so far as I was capable of judging her by my own standard, her misdeeds, however anxious she might have been to conceal them from me — which made me suppose that she was conscious of her guilt or was afraid of grieving me — her misdeeds because she had planned them to suit her own taste in the clear light of imagination in which desire plays, appeared to her nevertheless as things of the same nature as the rest of life, pleasures for herself which she had not had the courage to deny herself, griefs for me which she had sought to avoid causing me by concealing them, but pleasures and griefs which might be numbered among the other pleasures and griefs of life. But for me, it was from without, without my having been forewarned, without my having been able myself to elaborate them, it was from Aimé's letter that there had come to me the visions of Albertine arriving at the baths and preparing her gratuity.

No doubt it was because in that silent and deliberate arrival of Albertine with the woman in grey I read the assignation that they had made, that convention of going to make love in a dressing-box which implied an experience of corruption, the well-concealed organisation of double life, it was because these images brought me the terrible tidings of Albertine's guilt that they had immediately caused me a physical grief from which they would never in time to come be detached. But at once my grief had reacted upon them: an objective fact, such as an image, differs according to the internal state in which we approach it. And grief is as potent in altering reality as is drunkenness. Combined with these images, suffering had at once made of them something absolutely different from what might be for anyone else a lady in grey, a gratuity, a bath, the street which had witnessed the deliberate arrival of Albertine with the lady in grey. All these images — escaping from a life of falsehood and misconduct such as I had never conceived — my suffering had immediately altered in their very substance, I did not behold them in the light that illuminates earthly spectacles, they were a fragment of another world, of an unknown and accursed planet, a glimpse of Hell. My Hell was all that Balbec, all those neighbouring villages from which, according to Aimé's letter, she frequently collected girls younger than herself whom she took to the baths. That mystery which I had long ago imagined in the country round Balbec and which had been dispelled after I had stayed there, which I had then hoped to grasp again when I

knew Albertine because, when I saw her pass me on the beach, when I was mad enough to desire that she might not be virtuous, I thought that she must be its incarnation, how fearfully now everything that related to Balbec was impregnated with it. The names of those stations, Toutainville, Epreville, Parville, grown so familiar, so soothing, when I heard them shouted at night as I returned from the Verdurins', now that I thought how Albertine had been staying at the last, had gone from there to the second, must often have ridden on her bicycle to the first, they aroused in me an anxiety more cruel than on the first occasion, when I beheld the places with such misgivings, before arriving at a Balbec which I did not yet know. It is one of the faculties of jealousy to reveal to us the extent to which the reality of external facts and the sentiments of the heart are an unknown element which lends itself to endless suppositions. We suppose that we know exactly what things are and what people think, for the simple reason that we do not care about them. But as soon as we feel the desire to know, which the jealous man feels, then it becomes a dizzy kaleidoscope in which we can no longer make out anything. Had Albertine been unfaithful to me? With whom? In what house? Upon what day? The day on which she had said this or that to me? When I remembered that I had in the course of it said this or that? I could not tell. Nor did I know what were her sentiments towards myself, whether they were inspired by financial interest, by affection. And all of a sudden I remembered some trivial incident, for instance that Albertine had wished to go to Saint-Mars le Vêtu, saying that the name interested her, and perhaps simply because she had made the acquaintance of some peasant girl who lived there. But it was nothing that Aimé should have found out all this for me from the woman at the baths, since Albertine must remain eternally unaware that he had informed me, the need to know having always been exceeded, in my love for Albertine, by the need to shew her that I knew; for this abolished between us the partition of different illusions, without having ever had the result of making her love me more, far from it. And now, after she was dead, the second of these needs had been amalgamated with the effect of the first: I tried to picture to myself the conversation in which I would have informed her of what I had learned, as vividly as the conversation in which I would have asked her to tell me what I did not know; that is to say, to see her by my side, to hear her answering me kindly, to see her cheeks become plump again, her eyes shed their malice and assume an air of melancholy; that is to say, to love her still and to forget the fury of my jealousy in the despair of my loneliness. The painful mystery of this impossibility of ever making her know what I had learned and of

establishing our relations upon the truth of what I had only just discovered (and would not have been able, perhaps, to discover, but for the fact of her death) substituted its sadness for the more painful mystery of her conduct. What? To have so keenly desired that Albertine should know that I had heard the story of the baths, Albertine who no longer existed! This again was one of the consequences of our utter inability, when we have to consider the matter of death, to picture to ourselves anything but life. Albertine no longer existed. But to me she was the person who had concealed from me that she had assignations with women at Balbec, who imagined that she had succeeded in keeping me in ignorance of them. When we try to consider what happens to us after our own death, is it not still our living self which by mistake we project before us? And is it much more absurd, when all is said, to regret that a woman who no longer exists is unaware that we have learned what she was doing six years ago than to desire that of ourselves, who will be dead, the public shall still speak with approval a century hence? If there is more real foundation in the latter than in the former case, the regrets of my retrospective jealousy proceeded none the less from the same optical error as in other men the desire for posthumous fame. And yet this impression of all the solemn finality that there was in my separation from Albertine, if it had been substituted for a moment for my idea of her misdeeds, only aggravated them by bestowing upon them an irremediable character.

I saw myself astray in life as upon an endless beach where I was alone and, in whatever direction I might turn, would never meet her. Fortunately, I found most appropriately in my memory — as there are always all sorts of things, some noxious, others salutary in that heap from which individual impressions come to light only one by one — I discovered, as a craftsman discovers the material that can serve for what he wishes to make, a speech of my grandmother’s. She had said to me, with reference to an improbable story which the bath-woman had told Mme. de Villeparisis: “She is a woman who must suffer from a disease of mendacity.” This memory was a great comfort to me. What importance could the story have that the woman had told Aimé? Especially as, after all, she had seen nothing. A girl can come and take baths with her friends without having any evil intention. Perhaps for her own glorification the woman had exaggerated the amount of the gratuity. I had indeed heard Françoise maintain once that my aunt Léonie had said in her hearing that she had ‘a million a month to spend,’ which was utter nonsense; another time that she had seen my aunt Léonie give Eulalie four thousand-franc notes, whereas a fifty-franc note

folded in four seemed to me scarcely probable. And so I sought — and, in course of time, managed — to rid myself of the painful certainty which I had taken such trouble to acquire, tossed to and fro as I still was between the desire to know and the fear of suffering. Then my affection might revive afresh, but, simultaneously with it, a sorrow at being parted from Albertine, during the course of which I was perhaps even more wretched than in the recent hours when it had been jealousy that tormented me. But my jealousy was suddenly revived, when I thought of Balbec, because of the vision which at once reappeared (and which until then had never made me suffer and indeed appeared one of the most innocuous in my memory) of the dining-room at Balbec in the evening, with, on the other side of the windows, all that populace crowded together in the dusk, as before the luminous glass of an aquarium, producing a contact (of which I had never thought) in their conglomeration, between the fishermen and girls of the lower orders and the young ladies jealous of that splendour new to Balbec, that splendour from which, if not their means, at any rate avarice and tradition debarred their parents, young ladies among whom there had certainly been almost every evening Albertine whom I did not then know and who doubtless used to accost some little girl whom she would meet a few minutes later in the dark, upon the sands, or else in a deserted bathing hut at the foot of the cliff. Then it was my sorrow that revived, I had just heard like a sentence of banishment the sound of the lift which, instead of stopping at my floor, went on higher. And yet the only person from whom I could have hoped for a visit would never come again, she was dead. And in spite of this, when the lift did stop at my floor, my heart throbbed, for an instant I said to myself: “If, after all, it was only a dream! It is perhaps she, she is going to ring the bell, she has come back, Françoise will come in and say with more alarm than anger — for she is even more superstitious than vindictive, and would be less afraid of the living girl than of what she will perhaps take for a ghost —’Monsieur will never guess who is here.’” I tried not to think of anything, to take up a newspaper. But I found it impossible to read the articles written by men who felt no real grief. Of a trivial song, one of them said: “It moves one to *tears*,” whereas I myself would have listened to it with joy had Albertine been alive. Another, albeit a great writer, because he had been greeted with cheers when he alighted from a train, said that he had received ‘an *unforgettable* welcome,’ whereas I, if it had been I who received that welcome, would not have given it even a moment’s thought. And a third assured his readers that, but for its tiresome politics, life in Paris would be ‘altogether delightful’ whereas I knew well that even without politics that life

could be nothing but atrocious to me, and would have seemed to me delightful, even with its politics, could I have found Albertine again. The sporting correspondent said (we were in the month of May): “This season of the year is positively painful, let us say rather disastrous, to the true sportsman, for there is nothing, absolutely nothing in the way of game,” and the art critic said of the Salon: “In the face of this method of arranging an exhibition we are overwhelmed by an immense discouragement, by an infinite regret...” If the force of the regret that I was feeling made me regard as untruthful and colourless the expressions of men who had no true happiness or sorrow in their lives, on the other hand the most insignificant lines which could, however, remotely, attach themselves either to Normandy, or to Touraine, or to hydropathic establishments, or to Léa, or to the Princesse de Guermantes, or to love, or to absence, or to infidelity, at once set before my eyes, without my having the time to turn them away from it, the image of Albertine, and my tears started afresh. Besides, in the ordinary course, I could never read these newspapers, for the mere act of opening one of them reminded me at once that I used to open them when Albertine was alive, and that she was alive no longer; I let them drop without having the strength to unfold their pages. Each impression called up an impression that was identical but marred, because there had been cut out of it Albertine’s existence, so that I had never the courage to live to the end these mutilated minutes. Indeed, when, little by little, Albertine ceased to be present in my thoughts and all-powerful over my heart, I was stabbed at once if I had occasion, as in the time when she was there, to go into her room, to grope for the light, to sit down by the pianola. Divided among a number of little household gods, she dwelt for a long time in the flame of the candle, the door-bell, the back of a chair, and other domains more immaterial such as a night of insomnia or the emotion that was caused me by the first visit of a woman who had attracted me. In spite of this the few sentences which I read in the course of a day or which my mind recalled that I had read, often aroused in me a cruel jealousy. To do this, they required not so much to supply me with a valid argument in favour of the immorality of women as to revive an old impression connected with the life of Albertine. Transported then to a forgotten moment, the force of which my habit of thinking of it had not dulled, and in which Albertine was still alive, her misdeeds became more immediate, more painful, more agonising. Then I asked myself whether I could be certain that the bath-woman’s revelations were false. A good way of finding out the truth would be to send Aimé to Touraine, to spend a few days in the neighbourhood of Mme. Bontemps’s villa. If Albertine enjoyed

the pleasures which one woman takes with others, if it was in order not to be deprived of them any longer that she had left me, she must, as soon as she was free, have sought to indulge in them and have succeeded, in a district which she knew and to which she would not have chosen to retire had she not expected to find greater facilities there than in my house. No doubt there was nothing extraordinary in the fact that Albertine's death had so little altered my preoccupations. When our mistress is alive, a great part of the thoughts which form what we call our loves come to us during the hours when she is not by our side. Thus we acquire the habit of having as the object of our meditation an absent person, and one who, even if she remains absent for a few hours only, during those hours is no more than a memory. And so death does not make any great difference. When Aimé returned, I asked him to go down to Châtellerault, and thus not only by my thoughts, my sorrows, the emotion caused me by a name connected, however remotely, with a certain person, but even more by all my actions, by the inquiries that I undertook, by the use that I made of my money, all of which was devoted to the discovery of Albertine's actions, I may say that throughout this year my life remained filled with love, with a true bond of affection. And she who was its object was a corpse. We say at times that something may survive of a man after his death, if the man was an artist and took a certain amount of pains with his work. It is perhaps in the same way that a sort of cutting taken from one person and grafted on the heart of another continues to carry on its existence, even when the person from whom it had been detached has perished. Aimé established himself in quarters close to Mme. Bontemps's villa; he made the acquaintance of a maidservant, of a jobmaster from whom Albertine had often hired a carriage by the day. These people had noticed nothing. In a second letter, Aimé informed me that he had learned from a young laundress in the town that Albertine had a peculiar way of gripping her arm when she brought back the clean linen. "But," she said, "the young lady never did anything more." I sent Aimé the money that paid for his journey, that paid for the harm which he had done me by his letter, and at the same time I was making an effort to discount it by telling myself that this was a familiarity which gave no proof of any vicious desire when I received a telegram from Aimé: "Have learned most interesting things have abundant proofs letter follows." On the following day came a letter the envelope of which was enough to make me tremble; I had guessed that it came from Aimé, for everyone, even the humblest of us, has under his control those little familiar spirits at once living and couched in a sort of trance upon the paper, the characters of his handwriting which he

alone possesses. “At first the young laundress refused to tell me anything, she assured me that Mlle. Albertine had never done anything more than pinch her arm. But to get her to talk, I took her out to dinner, I made her drink. Then she told me that Mlle. Albertine used often to meet her on the bank of the Loire, when she went to bathe, that Mlle. Albertine who was in the habit of getting up very early to go and bathe was in the habit of meeting her by the water’s edge, at a spot where the trees are so thick that nobody can see you, and besides there is nobody who can see you at that hour in the morning. Then the young laundress brought her friends and they bathed and afterwards, as it was already very hot down here and the sun scorched you even through the trees, they used to lie about on the grass getting dry and playing and caressing each other. The young laundress confessed to me that she loved to amuse herself with her young friends and that seeing Mlle. Albertine was always wriggling against her in her wrapper she made her take it off and used to caress her with her tongue along the throat and arms, even on the soles of her feet which Mlle. Albertine stretched out to her. The laundress undressed too, and they played at pushing each other into the water; after that she told me nothing more, but being entirely at your orders and ready to do anything in the world to please you, I took the young laundress to bed with me. She asked me if I would like her to do to me what she used to do to Mlle. Albertine when she took off her bathing-dress. And she said to me: ‘If you could have seen how she used to quiver, that young lady, she said to me: (oh, it’s just heavenly) and she got so excited that she could not keep from biting me.’ I could still see the marks on the girl’s arms. And I can understand Mlle. Albertine’s pleasure, for the girl is really a very good performer.”

I had indeed suffered at Balbec when Albertine told me of her friendship with Mlle. Vinteuil. But Albertine was there to comfort me. Afterwards when, by my excessive curiosity as to her actions, I had succeeded in making Albertine leave me, when Françoise informed me that she was no longer in the house and I found myself alone, I had suffered more keenly still. But at least the Albertine whom I had loved remained in my heart. Now, in her place — to punish me for having pushed farther a curiosity to which, contrary to what I had supposed, death had not put an end — what I found was a different girl, heaping up lies and deceits one upon another, in the place where the former had so sweetly reassured me by swearing that she had never tasted those pleasures which, in the intoxication of her recaptured liberty, she had gone down to enjoy to the point of swooning, of biting that young laundress whom she used to meet at sunrise on the bank of the Loire, and to whom she used to say: “Oh, it’s just heavenly.” A

different Albertine, not only in the sense in which we understand the word different when it is used of other people. If people are different from what we have supposed, as this difference cannot affect us profoundly, as the pendulum of intuition cannot move outward with a greater oscillation than that of its inward movement, it is only in the superficial regions of the people themselves that we place these differences. Formerly, when I learned that a woman loved other women, she did not for that reason seem to me a different woman, of a peculiar essence. But when it is a question of a woman with whom we are in love, in order to rid ourselves of the grief that we feel at the thought that such a thing is possible, we seek to find out not only what she has done, but what she felt while she was doing it, what idea she had in her mind of the thing that she was doing; then descending and advancing farther and farther, by the profundity of our grief we attain to the mystery, to the essence. I was pained internally, in my body, in my heart — far more than I should have been pained by the fear of losing my life — by this curiosity with which all the force of my intellect and of my subconscious self collaborated; and similarly it was into the core of Albertine's own being that I now projected everything that I learned about her. And the grief that had thus caused to penetrate to so great a depth in my own being the fact of Albertine's vice, was to render me later on a final service. Like the harm that I had done my grandmother, the harm that Albertine had done me was a last bond between her and myself which outlived memory even, for with the conservation of energy which belongs to everything that is physical, suffering has no need of the lessons of memory. Thus a man who has forgotten the charming night spent by moonlight in the woods, suffers still from the rheumatism which he then contracted. Those tastes which she had denied but which were hers, those tastes the discovery of which had come to me not by a cold process of reasoning but in the burning anguish that I had felt on reading the words: "Oh, it's just heavenly," a suffering which gave them a special quality of their own, those tastes were not merely added to the image of Albertine as is added to the hermit-crab the new shell which it drags after it, but, rather, like a salt which comes in contact with another salt, alters its colour, and, what is more, its nature. When the young laundress must have said to her young friends: "Just fancy, I would never have believed it, well, the young lady is one too!" to me it was not merely a vice hitherto unsuspected by them that they added to Albertine's person, but the discovery that she was another person, a person like themselves, speaking the same language, which, by making her the compatriot of other women, made her even more alien to myself, proved that what I had possessed of her, what I

carried in my heart, was only quite a small part of her, and that the rest which was made so extensive by not being merely that thing so mysteriously important, an. individual desire, but being shared with others, she had always concealed from me, she had kept me aloof from it, as a woman might have concealed from me that she was a native of an enemy country and a spy; and would indeed have been acting even more treacherously than a spy, for a spy deceives us only as to her nationality, whereas Albertine had deceived me as to her profoundest humanity, the fact that she did not belong to the ordinary human race, but to an alien race which moves among it, conceals itself among it and never blends with it. I had as it happened seen two paintings by Elstir shewing against a leafy background nude women. In one of them, one of the girls is raising her foot as Albertine must have raised hers when she offered it to the laundress. With her other foot she is pushing into the water the other girl, who gaily resists, her hip bent, her foot barely submerged in the blue water. I remembered now that the raising of the thigh made the same swan's-neck curve with the angle of the knee that was made by the droop of Albertine's thigh when she was lying by my side on the bed, and I had often meant to tell her that she reminded me of those paintings. But I had refrained from doing so, in order not to awaken in her mind the image of nude female bodies. Now I saw her, side by side with the laundress and her friends, recomposing the group which I had so admired when I was seated among Albertine's friends at Balbec. And if I had been an enthusiast sensitive to absolute beauty, I should have recognised that Albertine re-composed it with a thousand times more beauty, now that its elements were the nude statues of goddesses like those which consummate sculptors scattered about the groves of Versailles or plunged in the fountains to be washed and polished by the caresses of their eddies. Now I saw her by the side of the laundress, girls by the water's edge, in their twofold nudity of marble maidens in the midst of a grove of vegetation and dipping into the water like bas-reliefs of Naiads. Remembering how Albertine looked as she lay upon my bed, I thought I could see her bent hip, I saw it, it was a swan's neck, it was seeking the lips of the other girl. Then I beheld no longer a leg, but the bold neck of a swan, like that which in a frenzied sketch seeks the lips of a Leda whom we see in all the palpitation peculiar to feminine pleasure, because there is nothing else but a swan, and she seems more alone, just as we discover upon the telephone the inflexions of a voice which we do not distinguish so long as it is not dissociated from a face in which we materialise its expression. In this sketch, the pleasure, instead of going to seek the face which inspires it and which is absent, replaced

by a motionless swan, is concentrated in her who feels it. At certain moments the communication was cut between my heart and my memory. What Albertine had done with the laundress was indicated to me now only by almost algebraical abbreviations which no longer meant anything to me; but a hundred times in an hour the interrupted current was restored, and my heart was pitilessly scorched by a fire from hell, while I saw Albertine, raised to life by my jealousy, really alive, stiffen beneath the caresses of the young laundress, to whom she was saying: “Oh, it’s just heavenly.” As she was alive at the moment when she committed her misdeeds, that is to say at the moment at which I myself found myself placed, it was not sufficient to know of the misdeed, I wished her to know that I knew. And so, if at those moments I thought with regret that I should never see her again, this regret bore the stamp of my jealousy, and, very different from the lacerating regret of the moments in which I loved her, was only regret at not being able to say to her: “You thought that I should never know what you did after you left me, well, I know everything, the laundress on the bank of the Loire, you said to her: ‘Oh, it’s just heavenly,’ I have seen the bite.” No doubt I said to myself: “Why torment myself? She who took her pleasure with the laundress no longer exists, and consequently was not a person whose actions retain any importance. She is not telling herself that I know. But no more is she telling herself that I do not know, since she tells herself nothing.” But this line of reasoning convinced me less than the visual image of her pleasure which brought me back to the moment in which she had tasted it. What we feel is the only thing that exists for us, and we project it into the past, into the future, without letting ourselves be stopped by the fictitious barriers of death. If my regret that she was dead was subjected at such moments to the influence of my jealousy and assumed this so peculiar form, that influence extended over my dreams of occultism, of immortality, which were no more than an effort to realise what I desired. And so at those moments if I could have succeeded in evoking her by turning a table as Bergotte had at one time thought possible, or in meeting her in the other life as the Abbé X thought, I would have wished to do so only in order to repeat to her: “I know about the laundress. You said to her: ‘Oh, it’s just heavenly,’ I have seen the bite.” What came to my rescue against this image of the laundress, was — certainly when it had endured for any while — the image itself, because we really know only what is novel, what suddenly introduces into our sensibility a change of tone which strikes us, the things for which habit has not yet substituted its colourless facsimiles. But it was, above all, this subdivision of Albertine in many fragments, in many Albertines, which was her

sole mode of existence in me. Moments recurred in which she had merely been good, or intelligent, or serious, or even addicted to nothing but sport. And this subdivision, was it not after all proper that it should soothe me? For if it was not in itself anything real, if it depended upon the successive form of the hours in which it had appeared to me, a form which remained that of my memory as the curve of the projections of my magic lantern depended upon the curve of the coloured slides, did it not represent in its own manner a truth, a thoroughly objective truth too, to wit that each one of us is not a single person, but contains many persons who have not all the same moral value and that if a vicious Albertine had existed, it did not mean that there had not been others, she who enjoyed talking to me about Saint-Simon in her room, she who on the night when I had told her that we must part had said so sadly: “That pianola, this room, to think that I shall never see any of these things again” and, when she saw the emotion which my lie had finally communicated to myself, had exclaimed with a sincere pity: “Oh, no, anything rather than make you unhappy, I promise that I will never try to see you again.” Then I was no longer alone. I felt the wall that separated us vanish. At the moment in which the good Albertine had returned, I had found again the one person from whom I could demand the antidote to the sufferings which Albertine was causing me. True, I still wanted to speak to her about the story of the laundress, but it was no longer by way of a cruel triumph, and to shew her maliciously how much I knew. As I should have done had Albertine been alive, I asked her tenderly whether the tale about the laundress was true. She swore to me that it was not, that Aimé was not truthful and that, wishing to appear to have earned the money which I had given him, he had not liked to return with nothing to shew, and had made the laundress tell him what he wished to hear. No doubt Albertine had been lying to me throughout. And yet in the flux and reflux of her contradictions, I felt that there had been a certain progression due to myself. That she had not indeed made me, at the outset, admissions (perhaps, it is true, involuntary in a phrase that escaped her lips) I would not have sworn. I no longer remembered. And besides she had such odd ways of naming certain things, that they might be interpreted in one sense or the other, but the feeling that she had had of my jealousy had led her afterwards to retract with horror what at first she had complacently admitted. Anyhow, Albertine had no need to tell me this. To be convinced of her innocence it was enough for me to embrace her, and I could do so now that the wall was down which parted us, like that impalpable and resisting wall which after a quarrel rises between two lovers and against which kisses would be shattered.

No, she had no need to tell me anything. Whatever she might have done, whatever she might have wished to do, the poor child, there were sentiments in which, over the barrier that divided us, we could be united. If the story was true, and if Albertine had concealed her tastes from me, it was in order not to make me unhappy. I had the pleasure of hearing this Albertine say so. Besides, had I ever known any other? The two chief causes of error in our relations with another person are, having ourselves a good heart, or else being in love with the other person. We fall in love for a smile, a glance, a bare shoulder. That is enough; then, in the long hours of hope or sorrow, we fabricate a person, we compose a character. And when later on we see much of the beloved person, we can no longer, whatever the cruel reality that confronts us, strip off that good character, that nature of a woman who loves us, from the person who bestows that glance, bares that shoulder, than we can when she has grown old eliminate her youthful face from a person whom we have known since her girlhood. I called to mind the noble glance, kind and compassionate, of that Albertine, her plump cheeks, the coarse grain of her throat. It was the image of a dead woman, but, as this dead woman was alive, it was easy for me to do immediately what I should inevitably have done if she had been by my side in her living body (what I should do were I ever to meet her again in another life), I forgave her.

The moments which I had spent with this Albertine were so precious to me that I would not have let any of them escape me. Now, at times, as we recover the remnants of a squandered fortune, I recaptured some of these which I had thought to be lost; as I tied a scarf behind my neck instead of in front, I remembered a drive of which I had never thought again, before which, in order that the cold air might not reach my throat, Albertine had arranged my scarf for me in this way after first kissing me. This simple drive, restored to my memory by so humble a gesture, gave me the same pleasure as the intimate objects once the property of a dead woman who was dear to us which her old servant brings to us and which are so precious to us; my grief found itself enriched by it, all the more so as I had never given another thought to the scarf in question.

And now Albertine, liberated once more, had resumed her flight; men, women followed her. She was alive in me. I became aware that this prolonged adoration of Albertine was like the ghost of the sentiment that I had felt for her, reproduced its various elements and obeyed the same laws as the sentimental reality which it reflected on the farther side of death. For I felt quite sure that if I could place some interval between my thoughts of Albertine, or if, on the other hand, I had allowed too long an interval to elapse, I should cease to love her; a

clean cut would have made me unconcerned about her, as I was now about my grandmother. A period of any length spent without thinking of her would have broken in my memory the continuity which is the very principle of life, which however may be resumed after a certain interval of time. Had not this been the case with my love for Albertine when she was alive, a love which had been able to revive after a quite long interval during which I had never given her a thought? Well, my memory must have been obedient to the same laws, have been unable to endure longer intervals, for all that it did was, like an aurora borealis, to reflect after Albertine's death the sentiment that I had felt for her, it was like the phantom of my love.

At other times my grief assumed so many forms that occasionally I no longer recognised it; I longed to be loved in earnest, decided to seek for a person who would live with me; this seemed to me to be the sign that I no longer loved Albertine, whereas it meant that I loved her still; for the need to be loved in earnest was, just as much as the desire to kiss Albertine's plump cheeks, merely a part of my regret. It was when I had forgotten her that I might feel it to be wiser, happier to live without love. And so my regret for Albertine, because it was it that aroused in me the need of a sister, made that need insatiable. And in proportion as my regret for Albertine grew fainter, the need of a sister, which was only an unconscious form of that regret, would become less imperious. And yet these two residues of my love did not proceed to shrink at an equal rate. There were hours in which I had made up my mind to marry, so completely had the former been eclipsed, the latter on the contrary retaining its full strength. And then, later on, my jealous memories having died away, suddenly at times a feeling welled up into my heart of affection for Albertine, and then, thinking of my own love affairs with other women, I told myself that she would have understood, would have shared them — and her vice became almost a reason for loving her. At times my jealousy revived in moments when I no longer remembered Albertine, albeit it was of her that I was jealous. I thought that I was jealous of Andrée, of one of whose recent adventures I had just been informed. But Andrée was to me merely a substitute, a bypath, a conduit which brought me indirectly to Albertine. So it is that in our dreams we give a different face, a different name to a person as to whose underlying identity we are not mistaken. When all was said, notwithstanding the flux and reflux which upset in these particular instances the general law, the sentiments that Albertine had left with me were more difficult to extinguish than the memory of their original cause. Not only the sentiments, but the sensations. Different in this respect from Swann

who, when he had begun to cease to love Odette, had not even been able to recreate in himself the sensation of his love, I felt myself still reliving a past which was no longer anything more than the history of another person; my ego in a sense cloven in twain, while its upper extremity was already hard and frigid, burned still at its base whenever a spark made the old current pass through it, even after my mind had long ceased to conceive Albertine. And as no image of her accompanied the cruel palpitations, the tears that were brought to my eyes by a cold wind blowing as at Balbec upon the apple trees that were already pink with blossom, I was led to ask myself whether the renewal of my grief was not due to entirely pathological causes and whether what I took to be the revival of a memory and the final period of a state of love was not rather the first stage of heart-disease.

There are in certain affections secondary accidents which the sufferer is too apt to confuse with the malady itself. When they cease, he is surprised to find himself nearer to recovery than he has supposed. Of this sort had been the suffering caused me — the complication brought about — by Aimé's letters with regard to the bathing establishment and the young laundress. But a healer of broken hearts, had such a person visited me, would have found that, in other respects, my grief itself was on the way to recovery. No doubt in myself, since I was a man, one of those amphibious creatures who are plunged simultaneously in the past and in the reality of the moment, there still existed a contradiction between the living memory of Albertine and my consciousness of her death. But this contradiction was so to speak the opposite of what it had been before. The idea that Albertine was dead, this idea which at first used to contest so furiously with the idea that she was alive that I was obliged to run away from it as children run away from a breaking wave, this idea of her death, by the very force of its incessant onslaught, had ended by capturing the place in my mind that, a short while ago, was still occupied by the idea of her life. Without my being precisely aware of it, it was now this idea of Albertine's death — no longer the present memory of her life — that formed the chief subject of my unconscious musings, with the result that if I interrupted them suddenly to reflect upon myself, what surprised me was not, as in earlier days, that Albertine so living in myself could be no longer existent upon the earth, could be dead, but that Albertine, who no longer existed upon the earth, who was dead, should have remained so living in myself. Built up by the contiguity of the memories that followed one another, the black tunnel, in which my thoughts had been straying so long that they had even ceased to be aware of it, was suddenly broken by an interval of sunlight,

allowing me to see in the distance a blue and smiling universe in which Albertine was no more than a memory, unimportant and full of charm. Is it this, I asked myself, that is the true Albertine, or is it indeed the person who, in the darkness through which I have so long been rolling, seemed to me the sole reality? The person that I had been so short a time ago, who lived only in the perpetual expectation of the moment when Albertine would come in to bid him good night and to kiss him, a sort of multiplication of myself made this person appear to me as no longer anything more than a feeble part, already half-detached from myself, and like a fading flower I felt the rejuvenating refreshment of an exfoliation. However, these brief illuminations succeeded perhaps only in making me more conscious of my love for Albertine, as happens with every idea that is too constant and has need of opposition to make it affirm itself. People who were alive during the war of 1870, for instance, say that the idea of war ended by seeming to them natural, not because they were not thinking sufficiently of the war, but because they could think of nothing else. And in order to understand how strange and important a fact war is, it was necessary that, some other thing tearing them from their permanent obsession, they should forget for a moment that war was being waged, should find themselves once again as they had been in a state of peace, until all of a sudden upon the momentary blank there stood out at length distinct the monstrous reality which they had long ceased to see, since there had been nothing else visible.

If, again, this withdrawal of my different impressions of Albertine had at least been carried out not in echelon but simultaneously, equally, by a general retirement, along the whole line of my memory, my impressions of her infidelities retiring at the same time as those of her kindness, oblivion would have brought me solace. It was not so. As upon a beach where the tide recedes unevenly, I would be assailed by the rush of one of my suspicions when the image of her tender presence had already withdrawn too far from me to be able to bring me its remedy. As for the infidelities, they had made me suffer, because, however remote the year in which they had occurred, to me they were not remote; but I suffered from them less when they became remote, that is to say when I pictured them to myself less vividly, for the remoteness of a thing is in proportion rather to the visual power of the memory that is looking at it than to the real interval of the intervening days, like the memory of last night’s dream which may seem to us more distant in its vagueness and obliteration than an event which is many years old. But albeit the idea of Albertine’s death made

headway in me, the reflux of the sensation that she was alive, if it did not arrest that progress, obstructed it nevertheless and prevented its being regular. And I realise now that during this period (doubtless because of my having forgotten the hours in which she had been cloistered in my house, hours which, by dint of relieving me from any pain at misdeeds which seemed to me almost unimportant because I knew that she was not committing them, had become almost tantamount to so many proofs of her innocence), I underwent the martyrdom of living in the constant company of an idea quite as novel as the idea that Albertine was dead (previously I had always started from the idea that she was alive), with an idea which I should have supposed it to be equally impossible to endure and which, without my noticing it, was gradually forming the basis of my consciousness, was substituting itself for the idea that Albertine was innocent: the idea that she was guilty. When I believed that I was doubting her, I was on the contrary believing in her; similarly I took as the starting point of my other ideas the certainty — often proved false as the contrary idea had been — the certainty of her guilt, while I continued to imagine that I still felt doubts. I must have suffered intensely during this period, but I realise that it was inevitable. We are healed of a suffering only by experiencing it to the full. By protecting Albertine from any contact with the outer world, by forging the illusion that she was innocent, just as later on when I adopted as the basis of my reasoning the thought that she was alive, I was merely postponing the hour of my recovery, because I was postponing the long hours that must elapse as a preliminary to the end of the necessary sufferings. Now with regard to these ideas of Albertine's guilt, habit, were it to come into play, would do so according to the same laws that I had already experienced in the course of my life. Just as the name Guermantes had lost the significance and the charm of a road bordered with flowers in purple and ruddy clusters and of the window of Gilbert the Bad, Albertine's presence, that of the blue undulations of the sea, the names of Swann, of the lift-boy, of the Princesse de Guermantes and ever so many others had lost all that they had signified for me — that charm and that significance leaving in me a mere word which they considered important enough to live by itself, as a man who has come to set a subordinate to work gives him his instructions and after a few weeks withdraws — similarly the painful knowledge of Albertine's guilt would be expelled from me by habit. Moreover, between now and then, as in the course of an attack launched from both flanks at once, in this action by habit two allies would mutually lend a hand. It was because this idea of Albertine's guilt would become for me an idea more probable, more

habitual, that it would become less painful. But on the other hand, because it would be less painful, the objections raised to my certainty of her guilt, which were inspired in my mind only by my desire not to suffer too acutely, would collapse one by one, and as each action precipitates the next, I should pass quickly enough from the certainty of Albertine's innocence to the certainty of her guilt. It was essential that I should live with the idea of Albertine's death, with the idea of her misdeeds, in order that these ideas might become habitual, that is to say that I might be able to forget these ideas and in the end to forget Albertine herself.

I had not yet reached this stage. At one time it was my memory made more clear by some intellectual excitement — such as reading a book — which revived my grief, at other times it was on the contrary my grief — when it was aroused, for instance, by the anguish of a spell of stormy weather — which raised higher, brought nearer to the light, some memory of our love.

Moreover these revivals of my love for Albertine might occur after an interval of indifference interspersed with other curiosities, as after the long interval that had dated from her refusal to let me kiss her at Balbec, during which I had thought far more about Mme. de Guermantes, about Andrée, about Mme. de Stermaria; it had revived when I had begun again to see her frequently. But even now various preoccupations were able to bring about a separation — from a dead woman, this time — in which she left me more indifferent. And even later on when I loved her less, this remained nevertheless for me one of those desires of which we soon grow tired, but which resume their hold when we have allowed them to lie quiet for some time. I pursued one living woman, then another, then I returned to my dead. Often it was in the most obscure recesses of myself, when I could no longer form any clear idea of Albertine, that a name came by chance to stimulate painful reactions, which I supposed to be no longer possible, like those dying people whose brain is no longer capable of thought and who are made to contract their muscles by the prick of a needle. And, during long periods, these stimulations occurred to me so rarely that I was driven to seek for myself the occasions of a grief, of a crisis of jealousy, in an attempt to re-attach myself to the past, to remember her better. Since regret for a woman is only a recrudescence of love and remains subject to the same laws, the keenness of my regret was enhanced by the same causes which in Albertine's lifetime had increased my love for her and in the front rank of which had always appeared jealousy and grief. But as a rule these occasions — for an illness, a war, can always last far longer than the most prophetic wisdom has calculated — took me

unawares and caused me such violent shocks that I thought far more of protecting myself against suffering than of appealing to them for a memory.

Moreover a word did not even need to be connected, like ‘Chaumont,’ with some suspicion (even a syllable common to different names was sufficient for my memory — as for an electrician who is prepared to use any substance that is a good conductor — to restore the contact between Albertine and my heart) in order to reawaken that suspicion, to be the password, the triumphant ‘Open, Sesame’ unlocking the door of a past which one had ceased to take into account, because, having seen more than enough of it, strictly speaking one no longer possessed it; one had been shorn of it, had supposed that by this subtraction one’s own personality had changed its form, like a geometrical figure which by the removal of an angle would lose one of its sides; certain phrases for instance in which there occurred the name of a street, of a road, where Albertine might have been, were sufficient to incarnate a potential, non-existent jealousy, in the quest of a body, a dwelling, some material location, some particular realisation. Often it was simply during my sleep that these ‘repetitions,’ these ‘da capo’ of our dreams which turn back in an instant many pages of our memory, many leaves of the calendar, brought me back, made me return to a painful but remote impression which had long since yielded its place to others but which now became present once more. As a rule, it was accompanied by a whole stage-setting, clumsy but appealing, which, giving me the illusion of reality, brought before my eyes, sounded in my ears what thenceforward dated from that night. Besides, in the history of a love-affair and of its struggles against oblivion, do not our dreams occupy an even larger place than our waking state, our dreams which take no account of the infinitesimal divisions of time, suppress transitions, oppose sharp contrasts, undo in an instant the web of consolation so slowly woven during the day, and contrive for us, by night, a meeting with her whom we would eventually have forgotten, provided always that we did not see her again. For whatever anyone may say, we can perfectly well have in a dream the impression that what is happening is real. This could be impossible only for reasons drawn from our experience which at that moment is hidden from us. With the result that this improbable life seems to us true. Sometimes, by a defect in the internal lighting which spoiled the success of the play, the appearance of my memories on the stage giving me the illusion of real life, I really believed that I had arranged to meet Albertine, that I was seeing her again, but then I found myself incapable of advancing to meet her, of uttering the words which I meant to say to her, to rekindle in order to see her the torch that had been

quenched, impossibilities which were simply in my dream the immobility, the dumbness, the blindness of the sleeper — as suddenly one sees in the faulty projection of a magic lantern a huge shadow, which ought not to be visible, obliterate the figures on the slide, which is the shadow of the lantern itself, or that of the operator. At other times Albertine appeared in my dream, and proposed to leave me once again, without my being moved by her determination. This was because from my memory there had been able to filter into the darkness of my dream a warning ray of light which, lodged in Albertine, deprived her future actions, the departure of which she informed me, of any importance, this was the knowledge that she was dead. Often this memory that Albertine was dead was combined, without destroying it, with the sensation that she was alive. I conversed with her; while I was speaking, my grandmother came and went at the other end of the room. Part of her chin had crumbled away like a corroded marble, but I found nothing unusual in that. I told Albertine that I had various questions to ask her with regard to the bathing establishment at Balbec and to a certain laundress in Touraine, but I postponed them to another occasion since we had plenty of time and there was no longer any urgency. She assured me that she was not doing anything wrong and that she had merely, the day before, kissed Mlle. Vinteuil on the lips. “What? Is she here?” “Yes, in fact it is time for me to leave you, for I have to go and see her presently.” And since, now that Albertine was dead, I no longer kept her a prisoner in my house as in the last months of her life, her visit to Mlle. Vinteuil disturbed me. I sought to prevent Albertine from seeing her. Albertine told me that she had done no more than kiss her, but she was evidently beginning to lie again as in the days when she used to deny everything. Presently she would not be content, probably, with kissing Mlle. Vinteuil. No doubt from a certain point of view I was wrong to let myself be disturbed like this, since, according to what we are told, the dead can feel, can do nothing. People say so, but this did not explain the fact that my grandmother, who was dead, had continued nevertheless to live for many years, and at that moment was passing to and fro in my room. And no doubt, once I was awake, this idea of a dead woman who continued to live ought to have become as impossible for me to understand as it is to explain. But I had already formed it so many times in the course of those transient periods of insanity which are our dreams, that I had become in time familiar with it; our memory of dreams may become lasting, if they repeat themselves sufficiently often. And long after my dream had ended, I remained tormented by that kiss which Albertine had told me that she had bestowed in words which I thought that I could still hear. And

indeed, they must have passed very close to my ear since it was I myself that had uttered them.

All day long, I continued to converse with Albertine, I questioned her, I forgave her, I made up for my forgetfulness of the things which I had always meant to say to her during her life. And all of a sudden I was startled by the thought that to the creature invoked by memory to whom all these remarks were addressed, no reality any longer corresponded, that death had destroyed the various parts of the face to which the continual urge of the will to live, now abolished, had alone given the unity of a person. At other times, without my having dreamed, as soon as I awoke, I felt that the wind had changed in me; it was blowing coldly and steadily from another direction, issuing from the remotest past, bringing back to me the sound of a clock striking far-off hours, of the whistle of departing trains which I did not ordinarily hear. One day I tried to interest myself in a book, a novel by Bergotte, of which I had been especially fond. Its congenial characters appealed to me strongly, and very soon, reconquered by the charm of the book, I began to hope, as for a personal pleasure, that the wicked woman might be punished; my eyes grew moist when the happiness of the young lovers was assured. “But then,” I exclaimed in despair, “from my attaching so much importance to what Albertine may have done, I must conclude that her personality is something real which cannot be destroyed, that I shall find her one day in her own likeness in heaven, if I invoke with so many prayers, await with such impatience, learn with such floods of tears the success of a person who has never existed save in Bergotte’s imagination, whom I have never seen, whose appearance I am at liberty to imagine as I please!” Besides, in this novel, there were seductive girls, amorous correspondences, deserted paths in which lovers meet, this reminded me that one may love clandestinely, it revived my jealousy, as though Albertine had still been able to stroll along deserted paths. And there was also the incident of a man who meets after fifty years a woman whom he loved in her youth, does not recognise her, is bored in her company. And this reminded me that love does not last for ever and crushed me as though I were destined to be parted from Albertine and to meet her again with indifference in my old age. If I caught sight of a map of France, my timorous eyes took care not to come upon Touraine so that I might not be jealous, nor, so that I might not be miserable, upon Normandy where the map marked at least Balbec and Doncières, between which I placed all those roads that we had traversed so many times together. In the midst of other names of towns or villages of France, names which were merely visible or audible, the

name of Tours for instance seemed to be differently composed, no longer of immaterial images, but of venomous substances which acted in an immediate fashion upon my heart whose beatings they quickened and made painful. And if this force extended to certain names, which it had made so different from the rest, how when I remained more shut up in myself, when I confined myself to Albertine herself, could I be astonished that, emanating from a girl who was probably just like any other girl, this force which I found irresistible, and to produce which any other woman might have served, had been the result of a confusion and of the bringing in contact of dreams, desires, habits, affections, with the requisite interference of alternate pains and pleasures? And this continued after her death, memory being sufficient to carry on the real life, which is mental. I recalled Albertine alighting from a railway-carriage and telling me that she wanted to go to Saint-Mars le Vêtu, and I saw her again also with her ‘polo’ pulled down over her cheeks, I found once more possibilities of pleasure, towards which I sprang saying to myself: “We might have gone on together to Incarville, to Doncières.” There was no watering-place in the neighbourhood of Balbec in which I did not see her, with the result that that country, like a mythological land which had been preserved, restored to me, living and cruel, the most ancient, the most charming legends, those that had been most obliterated by the sequel of my love. Oh! what anguish were I ever to have to lie down again upon that bed at Balbec around whose brass frame, as around an immovable pivot, a fixed bar, my life had moved, had evolved, bringing successively into its compass gay conversations with my grandmother, the nightmare of her death, Albertine’s soothing caresses, the discovery of her vice, and now a new life in which, looking at the glazed bookcases upon which the sea was reflected, I knew that Albertine would never come into the room again! Was it not, that Balbec hotel, like the sole indoor set of a provincial theatre, in which for years past the most diverse plays have been performed, which has served for a comedy, for one tragedy, for another, for a purely poetical drama, that hotel which already receded quite far into my past? The fact that this part alone remained always the same, with its walls, its bookcases, its glass panes, through the course of fresh epochs in my life, made me more conscious that, in the total, it was the rest, it was myself that had changed, and gave me thus that impression that the mysteries of life, of love, of death, in which children imagine in their optimism that they have no share, are not set apart, but that we perceive with a dolorous pride that they have embodied themselves in the course of years in our own life.

I tried at times to take an interest in the newspapers. But I found the act of reading them repellent, and moreover it was not without danger to myself. The fact is that from each of our ideas, as from a clearing in a forest, so many roads branch in different directions that at the moment when I least expected it I found myself faced by a fresh memory. The title of Fauré's melody *le Secret* had led me to the Duc de Broglie's *Secret du Roi*, the name Broglie to that of Chaumont, or else the words 'Good Friday' had made me think of Golgotha, Golgotha of the etymology of the word which is, it seems, the equivalent of *Calvus Mons*, Chaumont. But, whatever the path by which I might have arrived at Chaumont, at that moment I received so violent a shock that I could think only of how to guard myself against pain. Some moments after the shock, my intelligence, which like the sound of thunder travels less rapidly, taught me the reason. Chaumont had made me think of the Buttes-Chaumont to which Mme. Bontemps had told me that Andrée used often to go with Albertine, whereas Albertine had told me that she had never seen the Buttes-Chaumont. After a certain age our memories are so intertwined with one another that the thing of which we are thinking, the book that we are reading are of scarcely any importance. We have put something of ourself everywhere, everything is fertile, everything is dangerous, and we can make discoveries no less precious than in Pascal's *Pensées* in an advertisement of soap.

No doubt an incident such as this of the Buttes-Chaumont which at the time had appeared to me futile was in itself far less serious, far less decisive evidence against Albertine than the story of the bath-woman or the laundress. But, for one thing, a memory which comes to us by chance finds in is an intact capacity for imagining, that is to say in this case for suffering, which we have partly exhausted when it is on the contrary ourselves that deliberately applied our mind to recreating a memory. And to these latter memories (those that concerned the bath-woman and the laundress) ever present albeit obscured in my consciousness, like the furniture placed in the semi-darkness of a gallery which, without being able to see them, we avoid as we pass, I had grown accustomed. It was, on the contrary, a long time since I had given a thought to the Buttes-Chaumont, or, to take another instance, to Albertine's scrutiny of the mirror in the casino at Balbec, or to her unexplained delay on the evening when I had waited so long for her after the Guermantes party, to any of those parts of her life which remained outside my heart and which I would have liked to know in order that they might become assimilated, annexed to it, become joined with the more pleasant memories which formed in it an Albertine internal and genuinely

possessed. When I raised a corner of the heavy curtain of habit (the stupefying habit which during the whole course of our life conceals from us almost the whole universe, and in the dead of night, without changing the label, substitutes for the most dangerous or intoxicating poisons of life some kind of anodyne which does not procure any delight), such a memory would come back to me as on the day of the incident itself with that fresh and piercing novelty of a recurring season, of a change in the routine of our hours, which, in the realm of pleasures also, if we get into a carriage on the first fine day in spring, or leave the house at sunrise, makes us observe our own insignificant actions with a lucid exaltation which makes that intense minute worth more than the sum-total of the preceding days. I found myself once more coming away from the party at the Princesse de Guermantes's and awaiting the coming of Albertine. Days in the past cover up little by little those that preceded them and are themselves buried beneath those that follow them. But each past day has remained deposited in us, as, in a vast library in which there are older books, a volume which, doubtless, nobody will ever ask to see. And yet should this day from the past, traversing the lucidity of the subsequent epochs, rise to the surface and spread itself over us whom it entirely covers, then for a moment the names resume their former meaning, people their former aspect, we ourselves our state of mind at the time, and we feel, with a vague suffering which however is endurable and will not last for long, the problems which have long ago become insoluble and which caused us such anguish at the time. Our ego is composed of the superimposition of our successive states. But this superimposition is not unalterable like the stratification of a mountain. Incessant upheavals raise to the surface ancient deposits. I found myself as I had been after the party at the Princesse de Guermantes's, awaiting the coming of Albertine. What had she been doing that evening? Had she been unfaithful to me? With whom? Aimé's revelations, even if I accepted them, in no way diminished for me the anxious, despairing interest of this unexpected question, as though each different Albertine, each fresh memory, set a special problem of jealousy, to which the solutions of the other problems could not apply. But I would have liked to know not only with what woman she had spent that evening, but what special pleasure the action represented to her, what was occurring in that moment in herself. Sometimes, at Balbec, Françoise had gone to fetch her, had told me that she had found her leaning out of her window, with an uneasy, questing air, as though she were expecting somebody. Supposing that I learned that the girl whom she was awaiting was Andrée, what was the state of mind in which Albertine awaited her,

that state of mind concealed behind the uneasy, questing gaze? That tendency, what importance did it have for Albertine? How large a place did it occupy in her thoughts? Alas, when I recalled my own agitation, whenever I had caught sight of a girl who attracted me, sometimes when I had merely heard her mentioned without having seen her, my anxiety to look my best, to enjoy every advantage, my cold sweats, I had only, in order to torture myself, to imagine the same voluptuous emotion in Albertine. And already it was sufficient to torture me, if I said to myself that, compared with this other thing, her serious conversations with me about Stendhal and Victor Hugo must have had very little weight with her, if I felt her heart attracted towards other people, detach itself from mine, incarnate itself elsewhere. But even the importance which this desire must have had for her and the reserve with which she surrounded it could not reveal to me what, qualitatively, it had been, still less how she qualified it when she spoke of it to herself. In bodily suffering, at least we do not have ourselves to choose our pain. The malady decides it and imposes it on us. But in jealousy we have to some extent to make trial of sufferings of every sort and degree, before we arrive at the one which seems appropriate. And what could be more difficult, when it is a question of a suffering such as that of feeling that she whom we loved is finding pleasure with persons different from ourselves who give her sensations which we are not capable of giving her, or who at least by their configuration, their aspect, their ways, represent to her anything but ourselves. Ah! if only Albertine had fallen in love with Saint-Loup! How much less, it seemed to me, I should have suffered! It is true that we are unaware of the peculiar sensibility of each of our fellow-creatures, but as a rule we do not even know that we are unaware of it, for this sensibility of other people leaves us cold. So far as Albertine was concerned, my misery or happiness would have depended upon the nature of this sensibility; I knew well enough that it was unknown to me, and the fact that it was unknown to me was already a grief — the unknown desires and pleasures that Albertine felt, once I was under the illusion that I beheld them, when, some time after Albertine’s death, Andrée came to see me.

For the first time she seemed to me beautiful, I said to myself that her almost woolly hair, her dark, shadowed eyes, were doubtless what Albertine had so dearly loved, the materialisation before my eyes of what she used to take with her in her amorous dreams, of what she beheld with the prophetic eyes of desire on the day when she had so suddenly decided to leave Balbec.

Like a strange, dark flower that was brought to me from beyond the grave,

from the innermost being of a person in whom I had been unable to discover it, I seemed to see before me, the unlooked-for exhumation of a priceless relic, the incarnate desire of Albertine which Andrée was to me, as Venus was the desire of Jove. Andrée regretted Albertine, but I felt at once that she did not miss her. Forcibly removed from her friend by death, she seemed to have easily taken her part in a final separation which I would not have dared to ask of her while Albertine was alive, so afraid would I have been of not succeeding in obtaining Andrée's consent. She seemed on the contrary to accept without difficulty this renunciation, but precisely at the moment when it could no longer be of any advantage to me. Andrée abandoned Albertine to me, but dead, and when she had lost for me not only her life but retrospectively a little of her reality, since I saw that she was not indispensable, unique to Andrée who had been able to replace her with other girls.

While Albertine was alive, I would not have dared to ask Andrée to take me into her confidence as to the nature of their friendship both mutually and with Mlle. Vinteuil's friend, since I was never absolutely certain that Andrée did not repeat to Albertine everything that I said to her. But now such an inquiry, even if it must prove fruitless, would at least be unattended by danger. I spoke to Andrée not in a questioning tone but as though I had known all the time, perhaps from Albertine, of the fondness that Andrée herself had for women and of her own relations with Mlle. Vinteuil's friend. She admitted everything without the slightest reluctance, smiling as she spoke. From this avowal, I might derive the most painful consequences; first of all because Andrée, so affectionate and coquettish with many of the young men at Balbec, would never have been suspected by anyone of practices which she made no attempt to deny, so that by analogy, when I discovered this novel Andrée, I might think that Albertine would have confessed them with the same ease to anyone other than myself whom she felt to be jealous. But on the other hand, Andrée having been Albertine's dearest friend, and the friend for whose sake she had probably returned in haste from Balbec, now that Andrée was proved to have these tastes, the conclusion that was forced upon my mind was that Albertine and Andrée had always indulged them together. Certainly, just as in a stranger's presence, we do not always dare to examine the gift that he has brought us, the wrapper of which we shall not unfasten until the donor has gone, so long as Andrée was with me I did not retire into myself to examine the grief that she had brought me, which, I could feel, was already causing my bodily servants, my nerves, my heart, a keen disturbance which, out of good breeding, I pretended not to notice, speaking on

the contrary with the utmost affability to the girl who was my guest without diverting my gaze to these internal incidents. It was especially painful to me to hear Andrée say, speaking of Albertine: “Oh yes, she always loved going to the Chevreuse valley.” To the vague and non-existent universe in which Albertine’s excursions with Andrée occurred, it seemed to me that the latter had, by a posterior and diabolical creation, added an accursed valley. I felt that Andrée was going to tell me everything that she was in the habit of doing with Albertine, and, while I endeavoured from politeness, from force of habit, from self-esteem, perhaps from gratitude, to appear more and more affectionate, while the space that I had still been able to concede to Albertine’s innocence became smaller and smaller, I seemed to perceive that, despite my efforts, I presented the paralysed aspect of an animal round which a steadily narrowing circle is slowly traced by the hypnotising bird of prey which makes no haste because it is sure of reaching when it chooses the victim that can no longer escape. I gazed at her nevertheless, and, with such liveliness, naturalness and assurance as a person can muster who is trying to make it appear that he is not afraid of being hypnotised by the other’s stare, I said casually to Andrée: “I have never mentioned the subject to you for fear of offending you, but now that we both find a pleasure in talking about her, I may as well tell you that I found out long ago all about the things of that sort that you used to do with Albertine. And I can tell you something that you will be glad to hear although you know it already: Albertine adored you.” I told Andrée that it would be of great interest to me if she would allow me to see her, even if she simply confined herself to caresses which would not embarrass her unduly in my presence, performing such actions with those of Albertine’s friends who shared her tastes, and I mentioned Rosemonde, Berthe, each of Albertine’s friends, in the hope of finding out something. “Apart from the fact that not for anything in the world would I do the things you mention in your presence,” Andrée replied, “I do not believe that any of the girls whom you have named have those tastes.” Drawing closer in spite of myself to the monster that was attracting me, I answered: “What! You are not going to expect me to believe that, of all your band, Albertine was the only one with whom you did that sort of thing!” “But I have never done anything of the sort with Albertine.” “Come now, my dear Andrée, why deny things which I have known for at least three years, I see no harm in them, far from it. Talking of such things, that evening when she was so anxious to go with you the next day to Mme. Verdurin’s, you may remember perhaps...” Before I had completed my sentence, I saw in Andrée’s eyes, which it sharpened to a pin-point like those stones which for that reason

jewellers find it difficult to use, a fleeting, worried stare, like the heads of persons privileged to go behind the scenes who draw back the edge of the curtain before the play has begun and at once retire in order not to be seen. This uneasy stare vanished, everything had become quite normal, but I felt that anything which I might see hereafter would have been specially arranged for my benefit. At that moment I caught sight of myself in the mirror; I was struck by a certain resemblance between myself and Andrée. If I had not long since ceased to shave my upper lip and had had but the faintest shadow of a moustache, this resemblance would have been almost complete. It was perhaps when she saw, at Balbec, my moustache which had scarcely begun to grow, that Albertine had suddenly felt that impatient, furious desire to return to Paris. “But I cannot, all the same, say things that are not true, for the simple reason that you see no harm in them. I swear to you that I never did anything with Albertine, and I am convinced that she detested that sort of thing. The people who told you were lying to you, probably with some ulterior motive,” she said with a questioning, defiant air. “Oh, very well then, since you won’t tell me,” I replied. I preferred to appear to be unwilling to furnish a proof which I did not possess. And yet I uttered vaguely and at random the name of the Buttes-Chaumont. “I may have gone to the Buttes-Chaumont with Albertine, but is it a place that has a particularly evil reputation?” I asked her whether she could not mention the subject to Gisèle who had at one time been on intimate terms with Albertine. But Andrée assured me that after the outrageous way in which Gisèle had behaved to her recently, asking a favour of her was the one thing that she must absolutely decline to do for me. “If you see her,” she went on, “do not tell her what I have said to you about her, there is no use in making an enemy of her. She knows what I think of her, but I have always preferred to avoid having violent quarrels with her which only have to be patched up afterwards. And besides, she is a dangerous person. But you can understand that when one has read the letter which I had in my hands a week ago, and in which she lied with such absolute treachery, nothing, not even the noblest actions in the world, can wipe out the memory of such a thing.” In short, if, albeit Andrée had those tastes to such an extent that she made no pretence of concealing them, and Albertine had felt for her that strong affection which she had undoubtedly felt, notwithstanding this Andrée had never had any carnal relations with Albertine and had never been aware that Albertine had those tastes, this meant that Albertine did not have them, and had never enjoyed with anyone those relations which, rather than with anyone else, she would have enjoyed with Andrée. And so when Andrée had left

me, I realised that so definite a statement had brought me peace of mind. But perhaps it had been dictated by a sense of the obligation, which Andrée felt that she owed to the dead girl whose memory still survived in her, not to let me believe what Albertine had doubtless, while she was alive, begged her to deny.

Novelists sometimes pretend in an introduction that while travelling in a foreign country they have met somebody who has told them the story of a person's life. They then withdraw in favour of this casual acquaintance, and the story that he tells them is nothing more or less than their novel. Thus the life of Fabrice del Dongo was related to Stendhal by a Canon of Padua. How gladly would we, when we are in love, that is to say when another person's existence seems to us mysterious, find some such well-informed narrator! And undoubtedly he exists. Do we not ourselves frequently relate, without any trace of passion, the story of some woman or other, to one of our friends, or to a stranger, who has known nothing of her love-affairs and listens to us with keen interest? The person that I was when I spoke to Bloch of the Duchesse de Guermantes, of Mme. Swann, that person still existed, who could have spoken to me of Albertine, that person exists always... but we never come across him. It seemed to me that, if I had been able to find women who had known her, I should have learned everything of which I was unaware. And yet to strangers it must have seemed that nobody could have known so much of her life as myself. Did I even know her dearest friend, Andrée? Thus it is that we suppose that the friend of a Minister must know the truth about some political affair or cannot be implicated in a scandal. Having tried and failed, the friend has found that whenever he discussed politics with the Minister the latter confined himself to generalisations and told him nothing more than what had already appeared in the newspapers, or that if he was in any trouble, his repeated attempts to secure the Minister's help have ended invariably in an: "It is not in my power" against which the friend is himself powerless. I said to myself: "If I could have known such and such witnesses!" from whom, if I had known them, I should probably have been unable to extract anything more than from Andrée, herself the custodian of a secret which she refused to surrender. Differing in this respect also from Swann who, when he was no longer jealous, ceased to feel any curiosity as to what Odette might have done with Forcheville, even after my jealousy had subsided, the thought of making the acquaintance of Albertine's laundress, of the people in her neighbourhood, of reconstructing her life in it, her intrigues, this alone had any charm for me. And as desire always springs from a preliminary sense of value, as had happened to me in the past with Gilberte, with

the Duchesse de Guermantes, it was, in the districts in which Albertine had lived in the past, the women of her class that I sought to know, and whose presence alone I could have desired. Even without my being able to learn anything from them, they were the only women towards whom I felt myself attracted, as being those whom Albertine had known or whom she might have known, women of her class or of the classes with which she liked to associate, in a word those women who had in my eyes the distinction of resembling her or of being of the type that had appealed to her. As I recalled thus either Albertine herself, or the type for which she had doubtless felt a preference, these women aroused in me an agonising feeling of jealousy or regret, which afterwards when my grief had been dulled changed into a curiosity not devoid of charm. And among them especially the women of the working class, on account of that life, so different from the life that I knew, which is theirs. No doubt it is only in our mind that we possess things, and we do not possess a picture because it hangs in our dining-room if we are incapable of understanding it, or a landscape because we live in front of it without even glancing at it. But still I had had in the past the illusion of recapturing Balbec, when in Paris Albertine came to see me and I held her in my arms. Similarly I obtained a contact, restricted and furtive as it might be, with Albertine's life, the atmosphere of workrooms, a conversation across a counter, the spirit of the slums, when I kissed a seamstress. Andrée, these other women, all of them in relation to Albertine — as Albertine herself had been in relation to Balbec — were to be numbered among those substitutes for pleasures, replacing one another, in a gradual degradation, which enable us to dispense with the pleasure to which we can no longer attain, a holiday at Balbec, or the love of Albertine (as the act of going to the Louvre to look at a Titian which was originally in Venice consoles us for not being able to go there), for those pleasures which, separated one from another by indistinguishable gradations, convert our life into a series of concentric, contiguous, harmonic and graduated zones, encircling an initial desire which has set the tone, eliminated everything that does not combine with it and spread the dominant colour (as had, for instance, occurred to me also in the cases of the Duchesse de Guermantes and of Gilberte). Andrée, these women, were to the desire, for the gratification of which I knew that it was hopeless, now, to pray, to have Albertine by my side, what one evening, before I knew Albertine save by sight, had been the many-faceted and refreshing lustre of a bunch of grapes.

Associated now with the memory of my love, Albertine's physical and social attributes, in spite of which I had loved her, attracted my desire on the

contrary towards what at one time it would least readily have chosen: dark girls of the lower middle class. Indeed what was beginning to a certain extent to revive in me was that immense desire which my love for Albertine had not been able to assuage, that immense desire to know life which I used to feel on the roads round Balbec, in the streets of Paris, that desire which had caused me so much suffering when, supposing it to exist in Albertine's heart also, I had sought to deprive her of the means of satisfying it with anyone but myself. Now that I was able to endure the thought of her desire, as that thought was at once aroused by my own desire, these two immense appetites coincided, I would have liked us to be able to indulge them together, I said to myself: "That girl would have appealed to her," and led by this sudden digression to think of her and of her death, I felt too unhappy to be able to pursue my own desire any further. As, long ago, the Méséglise and Guermantes ways had established the conditions of my liking for the country and had prevented me from finding any real charm in a village where there was no old church, nor cornflowers, nor buttercups, so it was by attaching them in myself to a past full of charm that my love for Albertine made me seek out exclusively a certain type of woman; I began again, as before I was in love with her, to feel the need of things in harmony with her which would be interchangeable with a memory that had become gradually less exclusive. I could not have found any pleasure now in the company of a golden-haired and haughty duchess, because she would not have aroused in me any of the emotions that sprang from Albertine, from my desire for her, from the jealousy that I had felt of her love-affairs, from my sufferings, from her death. For our sensations, in order to be strong, need to release in us something different from themselves, a sentiment, which will not find any satisfaction, in pleasure, but which adds itself to desire, enlarges it, makes it cling desperately to pleasure. In proportion as the love that Albertine had felt for certain women ceased to cause me pain, it attached those women to my past, gave them something that was more real, as to buttercups, to hawthorn-blossom the memory of Combray gave a greater reality than to unfamiliar flowers. Even of Andrée, I no longer said to myself with rage: "Albertine loved her," but on the contrary, so as to explain my desire to myself, in a tone of affection: "Albertine loved her dearly." I could now understand the widowers whom we suppose to have found consolation and who prove on the contrary that they are inconsolable because they marry their deceased wife's sister. Thus the decline of my love seemed to make fresh loves possible for me, and Albertine like those women long loved for themselves who, later, feeling their lover's desire grow feeble,

maintain their power by confining themselves to the office of panders, provided me, as the Pompadour provided Louis XV, with fresh damsels. Even in the past, my time had been divided into periods in which I desired this woman or that. When the violent pleasures afforded by one had grown dull, I longed for the other who would give me an almost pure affection until the need of more sophisticated caresses brought back my desire for the first. Now these alternations had come to an end, or at least one of the periods was being indefinitely prolonged. What I would have liked was that the newcomer should take up her abode in my house, and should give me at night, before leaving me, a friendly, sisterly kiss. In order that I might have believed — had I not had experience of the intolerable presence of another person — that I regretted a kiss more than a certain pair of lips, a pleasure more than a love, a habit more than a person, I would have liked also that the newcomers should be able to play Vinteuil's music to me like Albertine, to talk to me as she had talked about Elstir. AH this was impossible. Their love would not be equivalent to hers, I thought, whether because a love to which were annexed all those episodes, visits to picture galleries, evenings spent at concerts, the whole of a complicated existence which allows correspondences, conversations, a flirtation preliminary to the more intimate relations, a serious friendship afterwards, possesses more resources than love for a woman who can only offer herself, as an orchestra possesses more resources than a piano, or because, more profoundly, my need of the same sort of affection that Albertine used to give me, the affection of a girl of a certain culture who would at the same time be a sister to me, was — like my need of women of the same class as Albertine — merely a recrudescence of my memory of Albertine, of my memory of my love for her. And once again, I discovered, first of all that memory has no power of invention, that it is powerless to desire anything else, even anything better than what we have already possessed, secondly that it is spiritual in the sense that reality cannot furnish it with the state which it seeks, lastly that, when applied to a person who is dead, the resurrection that it incarnates is not so much that of the need to love in which it makes us believe as that of the need of the absent person. So that the resemblance to Albertine of the woman whom I had chosen, the resemblance of her affection even, if I succeeded in winning it, to Albertine's, made me all the more conscious of the absence of what I had been unconsciously seeking, of what was indispensable to the revival of my happiness, that is to say Albertine herself, the time during which we had lived together, the past in quest of which I had unconsciously gone. Certainly, upon fine days, Paris seemed to me

innumerably aflower with all these girls, whom I did not desire, but who thrust down their roots into the obscurity of the desire and the mysterious nocturnal life of Albertine. They were like the girls of whom she had said to me at the outset, when she had not begun to distrust me: “That girl is charming, what nice hair she has.” All the curiosity that I had felt about her life in the past when I knew her only by sight, and on the other hand all my desires in life were blended in this sole curiosity, to see Albertine in company with other women, perhaps because thus, when they had left her, I should have remained alone with her, the last and the master. And when I observed her hesitations, her uncertainty when she asked herself whether it would be worth her while to spend the evening with this or that girl, her satiety when the other had gone, perhaps her disappointment, I should have brought to the light of day, I should have restored to its true proportions the jealousy that Albertine inspired in me, because seeing her thus experience them I should have taken the measure and discovered the limit of her pleasures. Of how many pleasures, of what an easy life she has deprived us, I said — to myself, by that stubborn obstinacy in denying her instincts! And as once again I sought to discover what could have been the reason for her obstinacy, all of a sudden the memory came to me of a remark that I had made to her at Balbec on the day when she gave me a pencil. As I rebuked her for not having allowed me to kiss her, I had told her that I thought a kiss just as natural as I thought it degrading that a woman should have relations with another woman. Alas, perhaps Albertine had never forgotten that imprudent speech.

I took home with me the girls who had appealed to me least, I stroked their virginal tresses, I admired a well-modelled little nose, a Spanish pallor. Certainly, in the past, even with a woman of whom I had merely caught sight on a road near Balbec, in a street in Paris, I had felt the individuality of my desire and that it would be adulterating it to seek to assuage it with another person. But life, by disclosing to me little by little the permanence of our needs, had taught me that, failing one person, we must content ourselves with another — and I felt that what I had demanded of Albertine another woman, Mme. de Stermaria, could have given me. But it had been Albertine; and what with the satisfaction of my need of affection and the details of her body, an interwoven tangle of memories had become so inextricable that I could no longer detach from a desire for affection all that embroidery of my memories of Albertine’s body. She alone could give me that happiness. The idea of her uniqueness was no longer a metaphysical *a priori* based upon what was individual in Albertine, as in the case of the women I passed in the street long ago, but an *a posteriori* created by

the contingent and indissoluble overlapping of my memories. I could no longer desire any affection without feeling a need of her, without grief at her absence. Also the mere resemblance of the woman I had selected, of the affection that I asked of her to the happiness that I had known made me all the more conscious of all that was lacking before that happiness could revive. The same vacuum that I had found in my room after Albertine had left, and had supposed that I could fill by taking women in my arms, I found in them. They had never spoken to me, these women, of Vinteuil's music, of Saint-Simon's memoirs, they had not sprayed themselves with too strong a scent before coming to visit me, they had not played at interlacing their eyelashes with mine, all of which things were important because, apparently, they allow us to weave dreams round the sexual act itself and to give ourselves the illusion of love, but in reality because they formed part of my memory of Albertine and it was she whom I would fain have seen again. What these women had in common with Albertine made me feel all the more clearly what was lacking of her in them, which was everything, and would never be anything again since Albertine was dead. And so my love for Albertine which had drawn me towards these women made me indifferent to them, and perhaps my regret for Albertine and the persistence of my jealousy, which had already outlasted the period fixed for them in my most pessimistic calculations, would never have altered appreciably, had their existence, isolated from the rest of my life, been subjected merely to the play of my memories, to the actions and reactions of a psychology applicable to immobile states, and had it not been drawn into a vaster system in which souls move in time as bodies move in space. As there is a geometry in space, so there is a psychology in time, in which the calculations of a plane psychology would no longer be accurate because we should not be taking into account time and one of the forms that it assumes, oblivion; oblivion, the force of which I was beginning to feel and which is so powerful an instrument of adaptation to reality because it gradually destroys in us the surviving past which is a perpetual contradiction of it. And I ought really to have discovered sooner that one day I should no longer be in love with Albertine. When I had realised, from the difference that existed between what the importance of her person and of her actions was to me and what it was to other people, that my love was not so much a love for her as a love in myself, I might have deduced various consequences from this subjective nature of my love and that, being a mental state, it might easily long survive the person, but also that having no genuine connexion with that person, it must, like every mental state, even the most permanent, find itself one day obsolete, be

‘replaced,’ and that when that day came everything that seemed to attach me so pleasantly, indissolubly, to the memory of Albertine would no longer exist for me. It is the tragedy of other people that they are to us merely showcases for the very perishable collections of our own mind. For this very reason we base upon them projects which have all the ardour of our mind; but our mind grows tired, our memory crumbles, the day would arrive when I would readily admit the first comer to Albertine’s room, as I had without the slightest regret given Albertine the agate marble or other gifts that I had received from Gilberte.

Translator’s note: In the French text of “Albertine Disparue,” Volume I ends with this chapter.

Chapter 2 — Mademoiselle De Forcheville

It was not that I was not still in love with Albertine, but no longer in the same fashion as in the final phase. No, it was in the fashion of the earliest times, when everything that had any connexion with' her, places or people, made me feel a curiosity in which there was more charm than suffering. And indeed I was quite well aware now that before I forgot her altogether, before I reached the initial stage of indifference, I should have, like a traveller who returns by the same route to his starting-point, to traverse in the return direction all the sentiments through which I had passed before arriving at my great love. But these fragments, these moments of the past are not immobile, they have retained the terrible force, the happy ignorance of the hope that was then yearning towards a time which has now become the past, but which a hallucination makes us for a moment mistake retrospectively for the future. I read a letter from Albertine, in which she had said that she was coming to see me that evening, and I felt for an instant the joy of expectation. In these return journeys along the same line from a place to which we shall never return, when we recall the names, the appearance of all the places which we have passed on the outward journey, it happens that, while our train is halting at one of the stations, we feel for an instant the illusion that we are setting off again, but in the direction of the place from which we have come, as on the former journey. Soon the illusion vanishes, but for an instant we felt ourselves carried away once again: such is the cruelty of memory.

At times the reading of a novel that was at all sad carried me sharply back, for certain novels are like great but temporary bereavements, they abolish our habits, bring us in contact once more with the reality of life, but for a few hours only, like a nightmare, since the force of habit, the oblivion that it creates, the gaiety that it restores to us because our brain is powerless to fight against it and to recreate the truth, prevails to an infinite extent over the almost hypnotic suggestion of a good book which, like all suggestions, has but a transient effect.

And yet, if we cannot, before returning to the state of indifference from which we started, dispense ourselves from covering in the reverse direction the

distances which we had traversed in order to arrive at love, the trajectory, the line that we follow, are not of necessity the same. They have this in common, that they are not direct, because oblivion is no more capable than love of progressing along a straight line. But they do not of necessity take the same paths. And on the path which I was taking on my return journey, there were in the course of a confused passage three halting-points which I remember, because of the light that shone round about me, when I was already nearing my goal, stages which I recall especially, doubtless because I perceived in them things which had no place in my love for Albertine, or at most were attached to it only to the extent to which what existed already in our heart before a great passion associates itself with it, whether by feeding it, or by fighting it, or by offering to our analytical mind, a contrast with it.

The first of these halting-points began with the coming of winter, on a fine Sunday, which was also All Saints' Day, when I had ventured out of doors. As I came towards the Bois, I recalled with sorrow how Albertine had come back to join me from the Trocadéro, for it was the same day, only without Albertine. With sorrow and yet not without pleasure all the same, for the repetition in a minor key, in a despairing tone, of the same motif that had filled my day in the past, the absence even of Françoise's telephone message, of that arrival of Albertine which was not something negative, but the suppression in reality of what I had recalled, of what had given the day a sorrowful aspect, made of it something more beautiful than a simple, unbroken day, because what was no longer there, what had been torn from it, remained stamped upon it as on a mould.

In the Bois, I hummed phrases from Vinteuil's sonata. I was no longer hurt by the thought that Albertine had fooled me, for almost all my memories of her had entered into that secondary chemical state in which they no longer cause any anxious oppression of the heart, but rather comfort. Now and then, at the passages which she used to play most often, when she was in the habit of uttering some reflexion which I had thought charming at the time, of suggesting some reminiscence, I said to myself: "Poor little girl," but without melancholy, merely adding to the musical phrase an additional value, a value that was so to speak historic and curious like that which the portrait of Charles I by Van Dyck, so beautiful already in itself, acquires from the fact that it found its way into the national collection because of Mme. du Barry's desire to impress the King. When the little phrase, before disappearing altogether, dissolved into its various elements in which it floated still for a moment in scattered fragments, it was not

for me as it had been for Swann a messenger from Albertine who was vanishing. It was not altogether the same association of ideas that the little phrase had aroused in me as in Swann. I had been impressed, most of all, by the elaboration, the attempts, the repetitions, the ‘outcome’ of a phrase which persisted throughout the sonata as that love had persisted throughout my life. And now, when I realised how, day by day, one element after another of my love departed, the jealous side of it, then some other, drifted gradually back in a vague remembrance to the feeble bait of the first outset, it was my love that I seemed, in the scattered notes of the little phrase, to see dissolving before my eyes.

As I followed the paths separated by undergrowth, carpeted with a grass that diminished daily, the memory of a drive during which Albertine had been by my side in the carriage, from which she had returned home with me, during which I felt that she was enveloping my life, floated now round about me, in the vague mist of the darkening branches in the midst of which the setting sun caused to gleam, as though suspended in the empty air, a horizontal web embroidered with golden leaves. Moreover my heart kept fluttering at every moment, as happens to anyone in whose eyes a rooted idea gives to every woman who has halted at the end of a path, the appearance, the possible identity of the woman of whom he is thinking. “It is perhaps she!” We turn round, the carriage continues on its way and we do not return to the spot. These leaves, I did not merely behold them with the eyes of my memory, they interested me, touched me, like those purely descriptive pages into which an artist, to make them more complete, introduces a fiction, a whole romance; and this work of nature thus assumed the sole charm of melancholy which was capable of reaching my heart. The reason for this charm seemed to me to be that I was still as much in love with Albertine as ever, whereas the true reason was on the contrary that oblivion was continuing to make such headway in me that the memory of Albertine was no longer painful to me, that is to say, it had changed; but however clearly we may discern our impressions, as I then thought that I could discern the reason for my melancholy, we are unable to trace them back to their more remote meaning. Like those maladies the history of which the doctor hears his patient relate to him, by the help of which he works back to a more profound cause, of which the patient is unaware, similarly our impressions, our ideas, have only a symptomatic value. My jealousy being held aloof by the impression of charm and agreeable sadness which I was feeling, my senses reawakened. Once again, as when I had ceased to see Gilberte, the love of woman arose in me, rid of any exclusive association with any particular woman already loved, and floated like those spirits that have

been liberated by previous destructions and stray suspended in the springtime air, asking only to be allowed to embody themselves in a new creature. Nowhere do there bud so many flowers, forget-me-not though they be styled, as in a cemetery. I looked at the girls with whom this fine day so countlessly blossomed, as I would have looked at them long ago from Mme. de Villeparisis's carriage or from the carriage in which, upon a similar Sunday, I had come there with Albertine. At once, the glance which I had just cast at one or other of them was matched immediately by the curious, stealthy, enterprising glance, reflecting unimaginable thoughts, which Albertine had furtively cast at them and which, duplicating my own with a mysterious, swift, steel-blue wing, wafted along these paths which had hitherto been so natural the tremor of an unknown element with which my own desire would not have sufficed to animate them had it remained alone, for it, to me, contained nothing that was unknown.

Moreover at Balbec, when I had first longed to know Albertine, was it not because she had seemed to me typical of those girls the sight of whom had so often brought me to a standstill in the streets, upon country roads, and because she might furnish me with a specimen of their life? And was it not natural that now the cooling star of my love in which they were condensed should explode afresh in this scattered dust of nebulae? They all of them seemed to me Albertines — the image that I carried inside me making me find copies of her everywhere — and indeed, at the turning of an avenue, the girl who was getting into a motor-car recalled her so strongly, was so exactly of the same figure, that I asked myself for an instant whether it were not she that I had just seen, whether people had not been deceiving me when they sent me the report of her death. I saw her again thus at the corner of an avenue, as perhaps she had been at Balbec, getting into a car in the same way, when she was so full of confidence in life. And this other girl's action in climbing into the car, I did not merely record with my eyes, as one of those superficial forms which occur so often in the course of a walk: become a sort of permament action, it seemed to me to extend also into the past in the direction of the memory which had been superimposed upon it and which pressed so deliciously, so sadly against my heart. But by this time the girl had vanished.

A little farther on I saw a group of three girls slightly older, young women perhaps, whose fashionable, energetic style corresponded so closely with what had attracted me on the day when I first saw Albertine and her friends, that I hastened in pursuit of these three new girls and, when they stopped a carriage, looked frantically in every direction for another. I found one, but it was too late.

I did not overtake them. A few days later, however, as I was coming home, I saw, emerging from the portico of our house, the three girls whom I had followed in the Bois. They were absolutely, the two dark ones especially, save that they were slightly older, the type of those young ladies who so often, seen from my window or encountered in the street, had made me form a thousand plans, fall in love with life, and whom I had never been able to know. The fair one had a rather more delicate, almost an invalid air, which appealed to me less. It was she nevertheless that was responsible for my not contenting myself with glancing at them for a moment, but, becoming rooted to the ground, staring at them with a scrutiny of the sort which, by their fixity which nothing can distract, their application as though to a problem, seem to be conscious that the true object is hidden far beyond what they behold. I should doubtless have allowed them to disappear as I had allowed so many others, had not (at the moment when they passed by me) the fair one — was it because I was scrutinising them so closely? — darted a stealthy glance at myself, than, having passed me and turning her head, a second glance which fired my blood. However, as she ceased to pay attention to myself and resumed her conversation with her friends, my ardour would doubtless have subsided, had it not been increased a hundredfold by the following incident. When I asked the porter who they were: “They asked for Mme. la Duchesse,” he informed me. “I think that only one of them knows her and that the others were simply seeing her to the door. Here’s the name, I don’t know whether I’ve taken it down properly.” And I read: ‘Mlle. Déporcheville,’ which it was easy to correct to’d’Éporcheville,’ that is to say the name, more or less, so far as I could remember, of the girl of excellent family, vaguely connected with the Guermantes, whom Robert had told me that he had met in a disorderly house, and with whom he had had relations. I now understood the meaning of her glance, why she had turned round, without letting her companions see. How often I had thought about her, imagining her in the light of the name that Robert had given me. And, lo and behold, I had seen her, in no way different from her friends, save for that concealed glance which established between me and herself a secret entry into the parts of her life which, evidently, were concealed from her friends, and which made her appear more accessible — almost half my own — more gentle than girls of noble birth generally are. In the mind of this girl, between me and herself, there was in advance the common ground of the hours that we might have spent together, had she been free to make an appointment with me. Was it not this that her glance had sought to express to me with an eloquence that was intelligible to myself alone? My heart throbbed

until it almost burst, I could not have given an exact description of Mlle. d'Éporcheville's appearance, I could picture vaguely a fair complexion viewed from the side, but I was madly in love with her. All of a sudden I became aware that I was reasoning as though, of the three girls, Mlle. d'Éporcheville could be only the fair one who had turned round and had looked at me twice. But the porter had not told me this. I returned to his lodge, questioned him again, he told me that he could not enlighten me, but that he would ask his wife who had seen them once before. She was busy at the moment scrubbing the service stair. Which of us has not experienced in the course of his life these uncertainties more or less similar to mine, and all alike delicious? A charitable friend to whom we describe a girl that we have seen at a ball, concludes from our description that she must be one of his friends and invites us to meet her. But among so many girls, and with no guidance but a mere verbal portrait, may there not have been some mistake? The girl whom we are about to meet, will she not be a different girl from her whom we desire? Or on the contrary are we not going to see holding out her hand to us with a smile precisely the girl whom we hoped that she would be? This latter case which is frequent enough, without being justified always by arguments as conclusive as this with respect to Mlle. d'Éporcheville, arises from a sort of intuition and also from that wind of fortune which favours us at times. Then, when we catch sight of her, we say to ourself: "That is indeed the girl." I recall that, among the little band of girls who used to parade along the beach, I had guessed correctly which was named Albertine Simonet. This memory caused me a keen but transient pang, and while the porter went in search of his wife, my chief anxiety — as I thought of Mlle. d'Éporcheville and since in those minutes spent in waiting in which a name, a detail of information which we have, we know not why, fitted to a face, finds itself free for an instant, ready if it shall adhere to a new face to render, retrospectively, the original face as to which it had enlightened us strange, innocent, imperceptible — was that the porter's wife was perhaps going to inform me that Mlle. d'Éporcheville was, on the contrary, one of the two dark girls. In that event, there would vanish the being in whose existence I believed, whom I already loved, whom I now thought only of possessing, that fair and sly Mlle. d'Éporcheville whom the fatal answer must then separate into two distinct elements, which I had arbitrarily united after the fashion of a novelist who blends together diverse elements borrowed from reality in order to create an imaginary character, elements which, taken separately,— the name failing to corroborate the supposed intention of the glance — lost all their meaning. In that case my arguments would be stultified,

but how greatly they found themselves, on the contrary, strengthened when the porter returned to tell me that Mlle. d'Éporcheville was indeed the fair girl.

From that moment I could no longer believe in a similarity of names. The coincidence was too remarkable that of these three girls one should be named Mlle. d'Éporcheville, that she should be precisely (and this was the first convincing proof of my supposition) the one who had gazed at me in that way, almost smiling at me, and that it should not be she who frequented the disorderly houses.

Then began a day of wild excitement. Even before starting to buy all the bedizenments that I thought necessary in order to create a favourable impression when I went to call upon Mme. de Guermantes two days later, when (the porter had informed me) the young lady would be coming again to see the Duchess, in whose house I should thus find a willing girl and make an appointment (or I should easily be able to take her into a corner for a moment), I began, so as to be on the safe side, by telegraphing to Robert to ask him for the girl's exact name and for a description of her, hoping to have his reply within forty-eight hours (I did not think for an instant of anything else, not even of Albertine), determined, whatever might happen to me in the interval, even if I had to be carried down in a chair were I too ill to walk, to pay a long call upon the Duchess. If I telegraphed to Saint-Loup it was not that I had any lingering doubt as to the identity of the person, or that the girl whom I had seen and the girl of whom he had spoken were still distinct personalities in my mind. I had no doubt whatever that they were the same person. But in my impatience at the enforced interval of forty-eight hours, it was a pleasure, it gave me already a sort of secret power over her to receive a telegram concerning her, filled with detailed information. At the telegraph office, as I drafted my message with the animation of a man who is fired by hope, I remarked how much less disconcerted I was now than in my boyhood and in facing Mlle. d'Éporcheville than I had been in facing Gilberte. From the moment in which I had merely taken the trouble to write out my telegram, the clerk had only to take it from me, the swiftest channels of electric communication to transmit it across the extent of France and the Mediterranean, and all Robert's sensual past would be set to work to identify the person whom I had seen in the street, would be placed at the service of the romance which I had sketched in outline, and to which I need no longer give a thought, for his answer would undertake to bring about a happy ending before twenty-four hours had passed. Whereas in the old days, brought home by Françoise from the Champs-Elysées, brooding alone in the house over my

impotent desires, unable to employ the practical devices of civilisation, I loved like a savage, or indeed, for I was not even free to move about, like à flower. From this moment I was in a continual fever; a request from my father that I would go away with him for a couple of days, which would have obliged me to forego my visit to the Duchess, filled me with such rage and desperation that my mother interposed and persuaded my father to allow me to remain in Paris. But for many hours my anger was unable to subside, while my desire for Mlle. d'Éporcheville was increased a hundredfold by the obstacle that had been placed between us, by the fear which I had felt for a moment that those hours, at which I smiled in constant anticipation, of my call upon Mme. de Guermantes, as at an assured blessing of which nothing could deprive me, might not occur. Certain philosophers assert that the outer world does not exist, and that it is in ourselves that we develop our life. However that may be, love, even in its humblest beginnings, is a striking example of how little reality means to us. Had I been obliged to draw from memory a portrait of Mlle. d'Éporcheville, to furnish a description, an indication of her, or even to recognise her in the street, I should have found it impossible. I had seen her in profile, on the move, she had struck me as being simple, pretty, tall and fair, I could not have said anything more. But all the reactions of desire, of anxiety of the mortal blow struck by the fear of not seeing her if my father took me away, all these things, associated with an image which, after all, I did not remember and as to which it was enough that I knew it to be pleasant, already constituted a state of love. Finally, on the following morning, after a night of happy sleeplessness I received Saint-Loup's telegram: "de l'Orgeville, *de* preposition, *orge* the grain, barley, *ville* town, small, dark, plump, is at present in Switzerland." It was not she!

A moment before Françoise brought me the telegram, my mother had come into my room with my letters, had laid them carelessly on my bed, as though she were thinking of something else. And withdrawing at once to leave me by myself, she had smiled as she left the room. And I, who was familiar with my dear mother's little subterfuges and knew that one could always read the truth in her face, without any fear of being mistaken, if one took as a key to the cipher her desire to give pleasure to other people, I smiled and thought: "There must be something interesting for me in the post, and Mamma has assumed that indifferent air so that my surprise may be complete and so as not to be like the people who take away half your pleasure by telling you of it beforehand. And she has not stayed with me because she is afraid that in my pride I may conceal the pleasure that I shall feel and so feel it less keenly." Meanwhile, as she

reached the door she met Françoise who was coming into the room, the telegram in her hand. As soon as she had handed it to me, my mother had forced Françoise to turn back, and had taken her out of the room, startled, offended and surprised. For Françoise considered that her office conferred the privilege of entering my room at any hour of the day and of remaining there if she chose. But already, upon her features, astonishment and anger had vanished beneath the dark and sticky smile of a transcendent pity and a philosophical irony, a viscous liquid that was secreted, in order to heal her wound, by her outraged self-esteem. So that she might not feel herself despised, she despised us. Also she considered that we were masters, that is to say capricious creatures, who do not shine by their intelligence and take pleasure in imposing by fear upon clever people, upon servants, so as to shew that they are the masters, absurd tasks such as that of boiling water when there is illness in the house, of mopping the floor of my room with a damp cloth, and of leaving it at the very moment when they intended to remain in it. Mamma had left the post by my side, so that I might not overlook it. But I could see that there was nothing but newspapers. No doubt there was some article by a writer whom I admired, which, as he wrote seldom, would be a surprise to me. I went to the window, and drew back the curtains. Above the pale and misty daylight, the sky was all red, as at the same hour are the newly lighted fires in kitchens, and the sight of it filled me with hope and with a longing to pass the night in a train and awake at the little country station where I had seen the milk-girl with the rosy cheeks.

Meanwhile I could hear Françoise who, indignant at having been banished from my room, into which she considered that she had the right of entry, was grumbling: “If that isn’t a tragedy, a boy one saw brought into the world. I didn’t see him when his mother bore him, to be sure. But when I first knew him, to say the most, it wasn’t five years since he was birthed!”

I opened the *Figaro*. What a bore! The very first article had the same title as the article which I had sent to the paper and which had not appeared, but not merely the same title... why, there were several words absolutely identical. This was really too bad. I must write and complain. But it was not merely a few words, there was the whole thing, there was my signature at the foot. It was my article that had appeared at last! But my brain which, even at this period, had begun to shew signs of age and to be easily tired, continued for a moment longer to reason as though it had not understood that this was my article, just as we see an old man obliged to complete a movement that he has begun even if it is no longer necessary, even if an unforeseen obstacle, in the face of which he ought at

once to draw back, makes it dangerous. Then I considered the spiritual bread of life that a newspaper is, still hot and damp from the press in the murky air of the morning in which it is distributed, at break of day, to the housemaids who bring it to their masters with their morning coffee, a miraculous, self-multiplying bread which is at the same time one and ten thousand, which remains the same for each person while penetrating innumerably into every house at once.

What I am holding in my hand is not a particular copy of the newspaper, it is any one out of the ten thousand, it is not merely what has been written for me, it is what has been written for me and for everyone. To appreciate exactly the phenomenon which is occurring at this moment in the other houses, it is essential that I read this article not as its author but as one of the ordinary readers of the paper. For what I held in my hand was not merely what I had written, it was the symbol of its incarnation in countless minds. And so, in order to read it, it was essential that I should cease for a moment to be its author, that I should be simply one of the readers of the *Figaro*. But then came an initial anxiety. Would the reader who had not been forewarned catch sight of this article? I open the paper carelessly as would this not forewarned reader, even assuming an air of not knowing what there is this morning in my paper, of being in a hurry to look at the social paragraphs and the political news. But my article is so long that my eye which avoids it (to remain within the bounds of truth and not to put chance on my side, as a person who is waiting counts very slowly on purpose) catches a fragment of it in its survey. But many of those readers who notice the first article and even read it do not notice the signature; I myself would be quite incapable of saying who had written the first article of the day before. And I now promise myself that I will always read them, including the author’s name, but, like a jealous lover who refrains from betraying his mistress in order to believe in her fidelity, I reflect sadly that my own future attention will not compel the reciprocal attention of other people. And besides there are those who are going out shooting, those who have left the house in a hurry. And yet after all some of them will read it. I do as they do, I begin. I may know full well that many people who read this article will find it detestable, at the moment of reading it, the meaning that each word, conveys to me seems to me to be printed on the paper, I cannot believe that each other reader as he opens his eyes will not see directly the images that I see, believing the author’s idea to be directly perceived by the reader, whereas it is a different idea that takes shape in his mind, with the simplicity of people who believe that it is the actual word which they have uttered that proceeds along the wires of the telephone; at the very moment in

which I mean to be a reader, my mind adjusts, as its author, the attitude of those who will read my article. If M. de Guermantes did not understand some sentences which would appeal to Bloch, he might, on the other hand, be amused by some reflexion which Bloch would scorn. Thus for each part which the previous reader seemed to overlook, a fresh admirer presenting himself, the article as a whole was raised to the clouds by a swarm of readers and so prevailed over my own mistrust of myself which had no longer any need to analyse it. The truth of the matter is that the value of an article, however remarkable it may be, is like that of those passages in parliamentary reports in which the words: “Wait and see!” uttered by the Minister, derive all their importance only from their appearing in the setting: The President of the Council, Minister of the Interior and of Religious Bodies: “Wait and see!” (Outcry on the extreme Left. “Hear, hear!” from the Left and Centre)— the main part of their beauty dwells in the minds of the readers. And it is the original sin of this style of literature, of which the famous Lundis are not guiltless, that their merit resides in the impression that they make on their readers. It is a synthetic Venus, of which we have but one truncated limb if we confine ourselves to the thought of the author, for it is realised in its completeness only in the minds of his readers. In them it finds its fulfilment. And as a crowd, even a select crowd, is not an artist, this final seal of approval which it sets upon the article must always retain a certain element of vulgarity. Thus Sainte-Beuve, on a Monday, could imagine Mme. de Soigne in her bed with its eight columns reading his article in the *Constitutionnel*, appreciating some charming phrase in which he had long delighted and which might never, perhaps, have flowed from his pen had he not thought it expedient to load his article with it in order to give it a longer range. Doubtless the Chancellor, reading it for himself, would refer to it during the call which we would pay upon his old friend a little later. And as he took her out that evening in his carriage, the Duc de Noailles in his grey pantaloons would tell her what had been thought of it in society, unless a word let fall by Mme. d’Herbouville had already informed her.

I saw thus at that same hour, for so many people, my idea or even failing my idea, for those who were incapable of understanding it, the repetition of my name and as it were a glorified suggestion of my personality, shine upon them, in a daybreak which filled me with more strength and triumphant joy than the innumerable daybreak which at that moment was blushing at every window.

I saw Bloch, M. de Guermantes, Legrandin, extracting each in turn from every sentence the images that it enclosed; at the very moment in which I

endeavour to be an ordinary reader, I read as an author, but not as an author only. In order that the impossible creature that I am endeavouring to be may combine all the contrary elements which may be most favourable to me, if I read as an author, I judge myself as a reader, without any of the scruples that may be felt about a written text by him who confronts in it the ideal which he has sought to express in it. Those phrases in my article, when I wrote them, were so colourless in comparison with my thought, so complicated and opaque in comparison with my harmonious and transparent vision, so full of gaps which I had not managed to fill, that the reading of them was a torture to me, they had only accentuated in me the sense of my own impotence and of my incurable want of talent. But now, in forcing myself to be a reader, if I transferred to others the painful duty of criticising me, I succeeded at least in making a clean sweep of what I had attempted to do in first reading what I had written. I read the article forcing myself to imagine that it was written by some one else. Then all my images, all my reflexions, all my epithets taken by themselves and without the memory of the check which they had given to my intentions, charmed me by their brilliance, their amplitude, their depth. And when I felt a weakness that was too marked taking refuge in the spirit of the ordinary and astonished reader, I said to myself: "Bah! How can a reader notice that, there is something missing there, it is quite possible. But, be damned to them, if they are not satisfied! There are plenty of pretty passages, more than they are accustomed to find." And resting upon this ten-thousandfold approval which supported me, I derived as much sense of my own strength and hope in my own talent from the article which I was reading at that moment as I had derived distrust when what I had written addressed itself only to myself.

No sooner had I finished this comforting perusal than I who had not had the courage to reread my manuscript, longed to begin reading it again immediately, for there is nothing like an old article by oneself of which one can say more aptly that "when one has read it one can read it again." I decided that I would send Françoise out to buy fresh copies, in order to give them to my friends, I should tell her, in reality so as to touch with my finger the miracle of the multiplication of my thought and to read, as though I were another person who had just opened the *Figaro,* in another copy the same sentences. It was, as it happened, ever so long since I had seen the Guermantes, I must pay them, next day, the call which I had planned with such agitation in the hope of meeting Mlle. d'Éporcheville, when I telegraphed to Saint-Loup. I should find out from them what people thought of my article. I imagined some female reader into whose room I would

have been so glad to penetrate and to whom the newspaper would convey if not my thought, which she would be incapable of understanding, at least my name, like a tribute to myself. But these tributes paid to one whom we do not love do not enchant our heart any more than the thoughts of a mind which we are unable to penetrate reach our mind. With regard to other friends, I told myself that if the state of my health continued to grow worse and if I could not see them again, it would be pleasant to continue to write to them so as still to have, in that way, access to them, to speak to them between the lines, to make them share my thoughts, to please them, to be received into their hearts. I told myself this because, social relations having previously had a place in my daily life, a future in which they would no longer figure alarmed me, and because this expedient which would enable me to keep the attention of my friends fixed upon myself, perhaps to arouse their admiration, until the day when I should be well enough to begin to see them again, consoled me. I told myself this, but I was well aware that it was not true, that if I chose to imagine their attention as the object of my pleasure, that pleasure was an internal, spiritual, ultimate pleasure which they themselves could not give me, and which I might find not in conversing with them, but in writing remote from them, and that if I began to write in the hope of seeing them indirectly, so that they might have a better idea of myself, so as to prepare for myself a better position in society, perhaps the act of writing would destroy in me any wish to see them, and that the position which literature would perhaps give me in society. I should no longer feel any wish to enjoy, for my pleasure would be no longer in society, but in literature.

After luncheon when I went down to Mme. de Guermantes, it was less for the sake of Mlle. d'Éporcheville who had been stripped, by Saint-Loup's telegram, of the better part of her personality, than in the hope of finding in the Duchess herself one of those readers of my article who would enable me to form an idea of the impression that it had made upon the public — subscribers and purchasers — of the *Figaro*. It was not however without pleasure that I went to see Mme. de Guermantes. It was all very well my telling myself that what made her house different to me from all the rest was the fact that it had for so long haunted my imagination, by knowing the reason for this difference I did not abolish it. Moreover, the name Guermantes existed for me in many forms. If the form which my memory had merely noted, as in an address-book, was not accompanied by any poetry, older forms, those which dated from the time when I did not know Mme. de Guermantes, were liable to renew themselves in me, especially when I had not seen her for some time and when the glaring light of

the person with human features did not quench the mysterious radiance of the name. Then once again I began to think of the home of Mme. de Guermantes as of something that was beyond the bounds of reality, in the same way as I began to think again of the misty Balbec of my early dreams, and as though I had not since then made that journey, of the one twenty-two train as though I had never taken it. I forgot for an instant my own knowledge that such things did not exist, as we think at times of a beloved friend forgetting for an instant that he is dead. Then the idea of reality returned as I set foot in the Duchess's hall. But I consoled myself with the reflexion that in spite of everything it was for me the actual point of contact between reality and dreams.

When I entered the drawing-room, I saw the fair girl whom I had supposed for twenty-four hours to be the girl of whom Saint-Loup had spoken to me. It was she who asked the Duchess to 'reintroduce' me to her. And indeed, the moment I came into the room I had the impression that I knew her quite well, which the Duchess however dispelled by saying: "Oh! You have met Mlle. de Forcheville before." I myself, on the contrary, was certain that I had never been introduced to any girl of that name, which would certainly have impressed me, so familiar was it in my memory ever since I had been given a retrospective account of Odette's love affairs and Swann's jealousy. In itself my twofold error as to the name, in having remembered 'de l'Orgeville' as'd'Éporcheville' and in having reconstructed as 'd'Éporcheville' what was in reality 'Forcheville,' was in no way extraordinary. Our mistake lies in our supposing that things present themselves ordinarily as they are in reality, names as they are written, people as photography and psychology give an unalterable idea of them. As a matter of fact this is not at all what we ordinarily perceive. We see, we hear, we conceive the world quite topsy-turvy. We repeat a name as we have heard it spoken until experience has corrected our mistake, which does not always happen. Everyone at Combray had spoken to Françoise for five-and-twenty years of Mme. Sazerat and Françoise continued to say 'Mme. Sazerin,' not from that deliberate and proud perseverance in her mistakes which was habitual with her, was strengthened by our contradiction and was all that she had added of herself to the France of Saint-André-des-Champs (of the equalitarian principles of 1789 she claimed only one civic right, that of not pronouncing words as we did and of maintaining that 'hôtel,' 'été' and 'air' were of the feminine gender), but because she really did continue to hear 'Sazerin.' †

† See Swann's Way, I. 53, where, however, this, error is attributed to Eulalie. C. K. S. M.

This perpetual error which is precisely ‘life,’ does not bestow its thousand forms merely upon the visible and the audible universe but upon the social universe, the sentimental universe, the historical universe, and so forth. The Princesse de Luxembourg is no better than a prostitute in the eyes of the Chief Magistrate’s wife, which as it happens is of little importance; what is slightly more important, Odette is a difficult woman to Swann, whereupon he builds up a whole romance which becomes all the more painful when he discovers his error; what is more important still, the French are thinking only of revenge in the eyes of the Germans. We have of the universe only formless, fragmentary visions, which we complete by the association of arbitrary ideas, creative of dangerous suggestions. I should therefore have had no reason to be surprised when I heard the name Forcheville (and I was already asking myself whether she was related to the Forcheville of whom I had so often heard) had not the fair girl said to me at once, anxious no doubt to forestall tactfully questions which would have been unpleasant to her: “You don’t remember that you knew me quite well long ago... you used to come to our house... your friend Gilberte. I could see that you didn’t recognise me. I recognised you immediately.” (She said this as if she had recognised me immediately in the drawing-room, but the truth is that she had recognised me in the street and had greeted me, and later Mme. de Guermantes informed me that she had told her, as something very odd and extraordinary, that I had followed her and brushed against her, mistaking her for a prostitute.) I did not learn until she had left the room why she was called Mlle. de Forcheville. After Swann’s death, Odette, who astonished everyone by her profound, prolonged and sincere grief, found herself an extremely rich widow. Forcheville married her, after making a long tour of various country houses and ascertaining that his family would acknowledge his wife. (The family raised certain objections, but yielded to the material advantage of not having to provide for the expenses of a needy relative who was about to pass from comparative penury to opulence.) Shortly after this, one of Swann’s uncles, upon whose head the successive demise of many relatives had accumulated an enormous fortune, died, leaving the whole of his fortune to Gilberte who thus became one of the wealthiest heiresses in France. But this was the moment when from the effects of the Dreyfus case there had arisen an anti-semitic movement parallel to a more abundant movement towards the penetration of society by Israelites. The politicians had not been wrong in thinking that the discovery of the judicial error would deal a fatal blow to anti-semitism. But provisionally at least a social anti-semitism was on the contrary enhanced and exacerbated by it. Forcheville who,

like every petty nobleman, had derived from conversations in the family circle the certainty that his name was more ancient than that of La Rochefoucauld, considered that, in marrying the widow of a Jew, he had performed the same act of charity as a millionaire who picks up a prostitute in the street and rescues her from poverty and mire; he was prepared to extend his bounty to Gilberte, whose prospects of marriage were assisted by all her millions but were hindered by that absurd name 'Swann.' He declared that he would adopt her. We know that Mme. de Guermantes, to the astonishment — which however she liked and was accustomed to provoke — of her friends, had, after Swann's marriage, refused to meet his daughter as well as his wife. This refusal had been apparently all the more cruel inasmuch as what had long made marriage with Odette seem possible to Swann was the prospect of introducing his daughter to Mme. de Guermantes. And doubtless he ought to have known, he who had already had so long an experience of life, that these pictures which we form in our mind are never realised for a diversity of reasons. Among these there is one which meant that he seldom regretted his inability to effect that introduction. This reason is that, whatever the image may be, from the trout to be eaten at sunset which makes a sedentary man decide to take the train, to the desire to be able to astonish, one evening, the proud lady at a cash-desk by stopping outside her door in a magnificent carriage which makes an unscrupulous man decide to commit murder, or to long for the death of rich relatives, according to whether he is bold or lazy, whether he goes ahead in the sequence of his ideas or remains fondling the first link in the chain, the act which is destined to enable us to attain to the image, whether that act be travel, marriage, crime... that act modifies us so profoundly that we cease to attach any importance to the reason which made us perform it. It may even happen that there never once recurs to his mind the image which the man formed who was not then a traveller, or a husband, or a criminal, or a recluse (who has bound himself to work with the idea of fame and has at the same moment rid himself of all desire for fame). Besides even if we include an obstinate refusal to seem to have desired to act in vain, it is probable that the effect of the sunlight would not be repeated, that feeling cold at the moment we would long for a bowl of soup by the chimney-corner and not for a trout in the open air, that our carriage would leave the cashier unmoved who perhaps for wholly different reasons had a great regard for us and in whom this sudden opulence would arouse suspicion. In short we have seen Swann, when married, attach most importance to the relations of his wife and daughter with Mme. Bontemps.

To all the reasons, derived from the Guermantes way of regarding social life, which had made the Duchess decide never to allow Mme. and Mlle. Swann to be introduced to her, we may add also that blissful assurance with which people who are not in love hold themselves aloof from what they condemn in lovers and what is explained by their love. “Oh! I don’t mix myself up in that, if it amuses poor Swann to do stupid things and ruin his life, it is his affair, but one never knows with that sort of thing, it may end in great trouble, I leave them to clear it up for themselves.” It is the *Suave mari magno* which Swann himself recommended to me with regard to the Verdurins, when he had long ceased to be in love with Odette and no longer formed part of the little clan. It is everything that makes so wise the judgments of third persons with regard to the passions which they do not feel and the complications of behaviour which those passions involve.

Mme. de Guermantes had indeed applied to the ostracism of Mme. and Mlle. Swann a perseverance that caused general surprise. When Mme. Mole, Mme. de Marsantes had begun to make friends with Mme. Swann and to bring a quantity of society ladies to see her, Mme. de Guermantes had remained intractable but had made arrangements to blow up the bridges and to see that her cousin the Princesse de Guermantes followed her example. On one of the gravest days of the crisis when, during Rouvier’s Ministry, it was thought that there was going to be war with Germany, upon going to dine with M. de Bréauté at Mme. de Guermantes’s, I found the Duchess looking worried. I supposed that, since she was always dabbling in politics, she intended to shew that she was afraid of war, as one day when she had appeared at the dinner-table so pensive, barely replying in monosyllables, upon somebody’s inquiring timidly what was the cause of her anxiety, she had answered with a grave air: “I am anxious about China.” But a moment later Mme. de Guermantes, herself volunteering an explanation of that anxious air which I had put down to fear of a declaration of war, said to M. de Bréauté: “I am told that Marie-Aynard means to establish the Swanns. I simply must go and see Marie-Gilbert to-morrow and make her help me to prevent it. Otherwise, there will be no society left. The Dreyfus case is all very well. But then the grocer’s wife round the corner has only to call herself a Nationalist and expect us to invite her to our houses in return.” And I felt at this speech, so frivolous in comparison with the speech that I expected to hear, the astonishment of the reader who, turning to the usual column of the *Figaro*for the latest news of the Russo-Japanese war, finds instead the list of people who have given wedding-presents to Mlle. de Mortemart, the importance of an aristocratic

marriage having displaced to the end of the paper battles upon land and sea. The Duchess had come in time moreover to derive from this perseverance, pursued beyond all normal limits, a satisfaction to her pride which she lost no opportunity of expressing. “Babal,” she said, “maintains that we are the two smartest people in Paris, because he and I are the only two people who do not allow Mme. and Mlle. Swann to bow to us. For he assures me that smartness consists in not knowing Mme. Swann.” And the Duchess ended in a peal of laughter.

However, when Swann was dead, it came to pass that her determination not to know his daughter had ceased to furnish Mme. de Guermantes with all the satisfaction of pride, independence, self-government, persecution which she was capable of deriving from it, which had come to an end with the passing of the man who had given her the exquisite sensation that she was resisting him, that he was unable to make her revoke her decrees.

Then the Duchess had proceeded to the promulgation of other decrees which, being applied to people who were still alive, could make her feel that she was free to act as she might choose. She did not speak to the Swann girl, but, when anyone mentioned the girl to her, the Duchess felt a curiosity, as about some place that she had never visited, which could no longer be suppressed by her desire to stand out against Swann’s pretensions. Besides, so many different sentiments may contribute to the formation of a single sentiment that it would be impossible to say whether there was not a lingering trace of affection for Swann in this interest. No doubt — for in every grade of society a worldly and frivolous life paralyses our sensibility and robs us of the power to resuscitate the dead — the Duchess was one of those people who require a personal presence — that presence which, like a true Guermantes, she excelled in protracting — in order to love truly, but also, and this is less common, in order to hate a little. So that often her friendly feeling for people, suspended during their lifetime by the irritation that some action or other on their part caused her, revived after their death. She then felt almost a longing to make reparation, because she pictured them now — though very vaguely — with only their good qualities, and stripped of the petty satisfactions, of the petty pretensions which had irritated her in them when they were alive. This imparted at times, notwithstanding the frivolity of Mme. de Guermantes, something that was distinctly noble — blended with much that was base — to her conduct. Whereas three-fourths of the human race flatter the living and pay no attention to the dead, she would often do, after their death, what the people would have longed for her to do whom she had maltreated while

they were alive.

As for Gilberte, all the people who were fond of her and had a certain respect for her dignity, could not rejoice at the change in the Duchess's attitude towards her except by thinking that Gilberte, scornfully rejecting advances that came after twenty-five years of insults, would be avenging these at length. Unfortunately, moral reflexes are not always identical with what common sense imagines. A man who, by an untimely insult, thinks that he has forfeited for all time all hope of winning the friendship of a person to whom he is attached finds that on the contrary he has established his position. Gilberte, who remained quite indifferent to the people who were kind to her, never ceased to think with admiration of the insolent Mme. de Guermantes, to ask herself the reasons for such insolence; once indeed (and this would have made all the people who shewed some affection for her die with shame on her account) she had decided to write to the Duchess to ask her what she had against a girl who had never done her any injury. The Guermantes had assumed in her eyes proportions which their birth would have been powerless to give them. She placed them not only above all the nobility, but even above all the royal houses.

Certain women who were old friends of Swann took a great interest in Gilberte. When the aristocracy learned of her latest inheritance, they began to remark how well bred she was and what a charming wife she would make. People said that a cousin of Mme. de Guermantes, the Princesse de Nièvre, was thinking of Gilberte for her son. Mme. de Guermantes hated Mme. de Nièvre. She announced that such a marriage would be a scandal. Mme. de Nièvre took fright and swore that she had never thought of it. One day, after luncheon, as the sun was shining, and M. de Guermantes was going to take his wife out, Mme. de Guermantes was arranging her hat in front of the mirror, her blue eyes gazing into their own reflexion, and at her still golden hair, her maid holding in her hand various sunshades among which her mistress might choose. The sun came flooding in through the window and they had decided to take advantage of the fine weather to pay a call at Saint-Cloud, and M. de Guermantes, ready to set off, wearing pearl-grey gloves and a tall hat on his head said to himself: "Oriane is really astounding still. I find her delicious," and went on, aloud, seeing that his wife seemed to be in a good humour: "By the way, I have a message for you from Mme. de Virelef. She wanted to ask you to come on Monday to the Opera, but as she's having the Swann girl, she did not dare and asked me to explore the ground. I don't express any opinion, I simply convey the message. But really, it seems to me that we might..." he added evasively, for their attitude towards

anyone else being a collective attitude and taking an identical form in each of them, he knew from his own feelings that his wife's hostility to Mlle. Swann had subsided and that she was anxious to meet her. Mme. de Guermantes settled her veil to her liking and chose a sunshade. "But just as you like, what difference do you suppose it can make to me, I see no reason against our meeting the girl. I simply did not wish that we should appear to be countenancing the dubious establishments of our friends. That is all." "And you were perfectly right," replied the Duke. "You are wisdom incarnate, Madame, and you are more ravishing than ever in that hat." "You are very kind," said Mme. de Guermantes with a smile at her husband as she made her way to the door. But, before entering the carriage, she felt it her duty to give him a further explanation: "There are plenty of people now who call upon the mother, besides she has the sense to be ill for nine months of the year.... It seems that the child is quite charming. Everybody knows that we were greatly attached to Swann. People will think it quite natural," and they set off together for Saint-Cloud.

A month later, the Swann girl, who had not yet taken the name of Forcheville, came to luncheon with the Guermantes. Every conceivable subject was discussed; at the end of the meal, Gilberte said timidly: "I believe you knew my father quite well." "Why of course we did," said Mme. de Guermantes in a melancholy tone which proved that she understood the daughter's grief and with a deliberate excess of intensity which gave her the air of concealing the fact that she was not sure whether she did remember the father. "We knew him quite well, I remember him *quite well*." (As indeed she might, seeing that he had come to see her almost every day for twenty-five years.) "I know quite well who he was, let me tell you," she went on, as though she were seeking to explain to the daughter whom she had had for a father and to give the girl information about him, "he was a great friend of my mother-in-law and besides he was very intimate with my brother-in-law Palamède." "He used to come here too, indeed he used to come to luncheon here," added M. de Guermantes with an ostentatious modesty and a scrupulous exactitude. "You remember, Oriane. What a fine man your father was. One felt that he must come of a respectable family; for that matter I saw once, long ago, his own father and mother. They and he, what worthy people!"

One felt that if they had, parents and son, been still alive, the Duc de Guermantes would not have had a moment's hesitation in recommending them for a post as gardeners! And this is how the Faubourg Saint-Germain speaks to any bourgeois of the other bourgeois, whether in order to flatter him with the

exception made — during the course of the conversation — in favour of the listener, or rather and at the same time in order to humiliate him. Thus it is that an anti-Semite in addressing a Jew, at the very moment when he is smothering him in affability, speaks evil of Jews, in a general fashion which enables him to be wounding without being rude.

But while she could shower compliments upon a person, when she met him, and could then never bring herself to let him take his leave, Mme. de Guermantes was also a slave to this need of personal contact. Swann might have managed, now and then, in the excitement of conversation, to give the Duchess the illusion that she regarded him with a friendly feeling, he could do so no longer. “He was charming,” said the Duchess with a wistful smile and fastening upon Gilberte a kindly gaze which would at least, supposing the girl to have delicate feelings, shew her that she was understood, and that Mme. de Guermantes, had the two been alone together and had circumstances allowed it, would have loved to reveal to her all the depth of her own feelings. But M. de Guermantes, whether because he was indeed of the opinion that the circumstances forbade such effusions, or because he considered that any exaggeration of sentiment was a matter for women and that men had no more part in it than in the other feminine departments, save the kitchen and the wine-cellar which he had reserved to himself, knowing more about them than the Duchess, felt it incumbent upon him not to encourage, by taking part in it, this conversation to which he listened with a visible impatience.

Moreover Mme. de Guermantes, when this outburst of sentiment had subsided, added with a worldly frivolity, addressing Gilberte: “Why, he was not only a great friend of my brother-in-law Charlus, he was also a great favourite at Voisenon” (the country house of the Prince de Guermantes), as though Swann’s acquaintance with M. de Charlus and the Prince had been a mere accident, as though the Duchess’s brother-in-law and cousin were two men with whom Swann had happened to be intimate for some special reason, whereas Swann had been intimate with all the people in that set, and as though Mme. de Guermantes were seeking to make Gilberte understand who, more or less, her father had been, to ‘place’ him by one of those character sketches by which, when we seek to explain how it is that we happen to know somebody whom we would not naturally know, or to give an additional point to our story, we name the sponsors by whom a certain person was introduced.

As for Gilberte, she was all the more glad to find that the subject was dropped, in that she herself was anxious only to change it, having inherited from

Swann his exquisite tact combined with an intellectual charm that was appreciated by the Duke and Duchess who begged her to come again soon. Moreover, with the minute observation of people whose lives have no purpose, they would discern, one after another, in the people with whom they associated, the most obvious merits, exclaiming their wonder at them with the artless astonishment of a townsman who on going into the country discovers a blade of grass, or on the contrary magnifying them as with a microscope, making endless comments, taking offence at the slightest faults, and often applying both processes alternately to the same person. In Gilberte's case it was first of all upon these minor attractions that the idle perspicacity of M. and Mme. de Guermantes was brought to bear: "Did you notice the way in which she pronounced some of her words?" the Duchess said to her husband after the girl had left them; "it was just like Swann, I seemed to hear him speaking." "I was just about to say the very same, Oriane." "She is witty, she is just like her father." "I consider that she is even far superior to him. Think how well she told that story about the sea-bathing, she has a vivacity that Swann never had." "Oh! but he was, after all, quite witty." "I am not saying that he was not witty, I say that he lacked vivacity," said M. de Guermantes in a complaining tone, for his gout made him irritable, and when he had no one else upon whom to vent his irritation, it was to the Duchess that he displayed it. But being incapable of any clear understanding of its causes, he preferred to adopt an air of being misunderstood.

This friendly attitude on the part of the Duke and Duchess meant that, for the future, they might at the most let fall an occasional 'your poor father' to Gilberte, which, for that matter, was quite unnecessary, since it was just about this time that Forcheville adopted the girl. She addressed him as 'Father,' charmed all the dowagers by her politeness and air of breeding, and it was admitted that, if Forcheville had behaved with the utmost generosity towards her, the girl had a good heart and knew how to reward him for his pains. Doubtless because she was able, now and then, and desired to shew herself quite at her ease, she had reintroduced herself to me and in conversation with me had spoken of her true father. But this was an exception and no one now dared utter the name Swann in her presence.

I had just caught sight, in the drawing-room, of two sketches by Elstir which formerly had been banished to a little room upstairs in which it was only by chance that I had seen them. Elstir was now in fashion, Mme. de Guermantes could not forgive herself for having given so many of his pictures to her cousin,

not because they were in fashion, but because she now appreciated them. Fashion is, indeed, composed of the appreciations of a number of people of whom the Guermantes are typical. But she could not dream of buying others of his pictures, for they had long ago begun to fetch absurdly high prices. She was determined to have something, at least, by Elstir in her drawing-room and had brought down these two drawings which, she declared, she "preferred to his paintings."

Gilberte recognised the drawings. "One would say Elstir," she suggested. "Why, yes," replied the Duchess without thinking, "it was, as a matter of fact, your fa... some friends of ours who made us buy them. They are admirable. To my mind, they are superior to his paintings." I who had not heard this conversation went closer to the drawings to examine them. "Why, this is the Elstir that..." I saw Mme. de Guermantes's signals of despair. "Ah, yes! The Elstir that I admired upstairs. It shews far better here than in that passage. Talking of Elstir, I mentioned him yesterday in an article in the *Figaro*. Did you happen to read it?" "You have written an article in the *Figaro*?" exclaimed M. de Guermantes with the same violence as if he had exclaimed: "Why, she is my cousin." "Yes, yesterday." "In the *Figaro*, you are certain? That is a great surprise. For we each of us get our *Figaro*, and if one of us had missed it, the other would certainly have noticed it. That is so, ain't it, Oriane, there was nothing in the paper." The Duke sent for the *Figaro* and accepted the facts, as though, previously, the probability had been that I had made a mistake as to the newspaper for which I had written. "What's that, I don't understand, do you mean to say, you have written an article in the*Figaro*," said the Duchess, making an effort in order to speak of a matter which did not interest her. "Come, Basin, you can read it afterwards." "No, the Duke looks so nice like that with his big beard sweeping over the paper," said Gilberte. "I shall read it as soon as I am at home." "Yes, he wears a beard now that everybody is clean-shaven," said the Duchess, "he never does anything like other people. When we were first married, he shaved not only his beard but his moustaches as well. The peasants who didn't know him by sight thought that he couldn't be French. He was called at that time the Prince des Laumes." "Is there still a Prince des Laumes?" asked Gilberte, who was interested in everything that concerned the people who had refused to bow to her during all those years. "Why, no!" the Duchess replied with a melancholy, caressing gaze. "Such a charming title! One of the finest titles in France!" said Gilberte, a certain sort of banality emerging inevitably, as a clock strikes the hour, from the lips of certain quite intelligent persons. "Yes,

indeed, I regret it too. Basin would have liked his sister's — son to take it, but it is not the same thing; after all it is possible, since it is not necessarily the eldest son, the title may pass to a younger brother. I was telling you that in those days Basin was clean-shaven; one day, at a pilgrimage — you remember, my dear," she turned to her husband, "that pilgrimage at Paray-le-Monial — my brother-in-law Charlus who always enjoys talking to peasants, was saying to one after another: 'Where do you come from?' and as he is extremely generous, he would give them something, take them off to have a drink. For nobody was ever at the same time simpler and more haughty than Même. You'll see him refuse to bow to a Duchess whom he doesn't think duchessy enough, and shower compliments upon a kennel-man. And so, I said to Basin: 'Come, Basin, say something to them too.' My husband, who is not always very inventive —" "Thank you, Oriane," said the Duke, without interrupting his reading of my article in which he was immersed —"approached one of the peasants and repeated his brother's question in so many words: 'Where do you come from?' 'I am from Les Laumes.' 'You are from Les Laumes. Why, I am your Prince.' Then the peasant looked at Basin's smooth face and replied: ''S not true. You're an English.'" † One saw thus in these anecdotes told by the Duchess those great and eminent titles, such as that of the Prince des Laumes, rise to their true position, in their original state and their local colour, as in certain Books of Hours one sees, amid the mob of the period, the soaring steeple of Bourges.

† Translator's footnote: Mme. de Guermantes forgets that she has already told this story at the expense of the Prince de Léon. See The Captive, p. 403.

Some cards were brought to her which a footman had just left at the door. "I can't think what has come over her, I don't know her. It is to you that I am indebted for this, Basin. Not that they have done you any good, all these people, my poor dear," and, turning to Gilberte: "I really don't know how to explain to you who she is, you certainly have never heard of her, she calls herself Lady Rufus Israel."

Gilberte flushed crimson: "I do not know her," she said (which was all the more untrue in that Lady Israel and Swann had been reconciled two years before the latter's death and she addressed Gilberte by her Christian name), "but I know quite well, from hearing about her, who it is that you mean." The truth is that Gilberte had become a great snob. For instance, another girl having one day, whether in malice or from a natural want of tact, asked her what was the name of her real — not her adoptive — father, in her confusion, and as though to mitigate the crudity of what she had to say, instead of pronouncing the name as 'Souann'

she said ‘Svann,’ a change, as she soon realised, for the worse, since it made this name of English origin a German patronymic. And she had even gone on to say, abasing herself so as to rise higher: “All sorts of stories have been told about my birth, but of course I know nothing about that.”

Ashamed as Gilberte must have felt at certain moments when she thought of her parents (for even Mme. Swann represented to her and was a good mother) of such an attitude towards life, we must, alas, bear in mind that its elements were borrowed doubtless from her parents, for we do not create the whole of our own personality. But with a certain quantity of egoism which exists in the mother, a different egoism, inherent in the father’s family, is combined, which does not invariably mean that it is added, nor even precisely that it serves as a multiple, but rather that it creates a fresh egoism infinitely stronger and more redoubtable. And, in the period that has elapsed since the world began, during which families in which some defect exists in one form have been intermarrying with families in which the same defect exists in another, thereby creating a peculiarly complex and detestable variety of that defect in the offspring, the accumulated egoisms (to confine ourselves, for the moment, to this defect) would have acquired such force that the whole human race would have been destroyed, did not the malady itself bring forth, with the power to reduce it to its true dimensions, natural restrictions analogous to those which prevent the infinite proliferation of the infusoria from destroying our planet, the unisexual fertilisation of plants from bringing about the extinction of the vegetable kingdom, and so forth. From time to time a virtue combines with this egoism to produce a new and disinterested force.

The combinations by which, in the course of generations, moral chemistry thus stabilises and renders inoffensive the elements that were becoming too formidable, are infinite and would give an exciting variety to family history. Moreover with these accumulated egoisms such as must have been embodied in Gilberte there coexists some charming virtue of the parents; it appears for a moment to perform an interlude by itself, to play its touching part with an entire sincerity.

No doubt Gilberte did not always go so far as when she insinuated that she was perhaps the natural daughter of some great personage, but as a rule she concealed her origin. Perhaps it was simply too painful for her to confess it and she preferred that people should learn of it from others. Perhaps she really believed that she was hiding it, with that uncertain belief which at the same time is not doubt, which reserves a possibility for what we would like to think true, of

which Musset furnishes an example when he speaks of Hope in God. “I do not know her personally,” Gilberte went on. Had she after all, when she called herself Mlle. de Forcheville, a hope that people would not know that she was Swann’s daughter? Some people, perhaps, who, she hoped, would in time become everybody. She could not be under any illusion as to their number at the moment, and knew doubtless that many people must be murmuring: “Isn’t that Swann’s daughter?” But she knew it only with that information which tells us of people taking their lives in desperation while we are going to a ball, that is to say a remote and vague information for which we are at no pains to substitute a more precise knowledge, founded upon a direct impression. Gilberte belonged, during these years at least, to the most widespread variety of the human ostrich, the kind which buries its head in the hope not of not being seen, which it considers hardly probable, but of not seeing that other people see it, which seems to it something to the good and enables it to leave the rest to chance. As distance makes things smaller, more uncertain, less dangerous, Gilberte preferred not to be near other people at the moment when they made the discovery that she was by birth a Swann.

And as we are near the people whom we picture to ourselves, as we can picture people reading their newspaper, Gilberte preferred the papers to style her Mlle. de Forcheville. It is true that with the writings for which she herself was responsible, her letters, she prolonged the transition for some time by signing herself ‘G. S. Forcheville.’ The real hypocrisy in this signature was made manifest by the suppression not so much of the other letters of the word ‘Swann’ as of those of the word ‘Gilberte.’ In fact, by reducing the innocent Christian name to a simple ‘G,’ Mlle. de Forcheville seemed to insinuate to her friends that the similar amputation applied to the name ‘Swann’ was due merely to the necessity of abbreviation. Indeed she gave a special importance to the ‘S,’ and gave it a sort of long tail which ran across the ‘G,’ but which one felt to be transitory and destined to disappear like the tail which, still long in the monkey, has ceased to exist in man.

Notwithstanding this, in her snobbishness, there remained the intelligent curiosity of Swann. I remember that, during this same afternoon, she asked Mme. de Guermantes whether she could meet M. du Lau, and that when the Duchess replied that he was an invalid and never went out, Gilberte asked what sort of man he was, for, she added with a faint blush, she had heard a great deal about him. (The Marquis du Lau had indeed been one of Swann’s most intimate friends before the latter’s marriage, and Gilberte may perhaps herself have seen

him, but at a time when she was not interested in such people.) “Would M. de Bréauté or the Prince d’Agrigente be at all like him?” she asked. “Oh! not in the least,” exclaimed Mme. de Guermantes, who had a keen sense of these provincial differences and drew portraits that were sober, but coloured by her harsh, golden voice, beneath the gentle blossoming of her violet eyes. “No, not in the least. Du Lau was the gentleman from the Périgord, charming, with all the good manners and the absence of ceremony of his province. At Guermantes, when we had the King of England, with whom du Lau was on the friendliest terms, we used to have a little meal after the men came in from shooting... It was the hour when du Lau was in the habit of going to his room to take off his boots and put on big woollen slippers. Very well, the presence of King Edward and all the Grand Dukes did not disturb him in the least, he came down to the great hall at Guermantes in his woollen slippers, he felt that he was the Marquis du Lau d’Ollemans who had no reason to put himself out for the King of England. He and that charming Quasimodo de Breteuil, they were the two that I liked best. They were, for that matter, great friends of...” (she was about to say “your father” and stopped short). “No, there is no resemblance at all, either to Gri-gri, or to Bréauté. He was the genuine nobleman from the Périgord. For that matter, Même quotes a page from Saint-Simon about a Marquis d’Ollemans, it is just like him.” I repeated the opening words of the portrait: “M. d’Ollemans who was a man of great distinction among the nobility of the Périgord, from his own birth and from his merit, and was regarded by every soul alive there as a general arbiter to whom each had recourse because of his probity, his capacity and the suavity of his manners, as it were the cock of his province.” “Yes, he’s like that,” said Mme. de Guermantes, “all the more so as du Lau was always as red as a cock.” “Yes, I remember hearing that description quoted,” said Gilberte, without adding that it had been quoted by her father, who was, as we know, a great admirer of Saint-Simon.

She liked also to speak of the Prince d’Agrigente and of M. de Bréauté, for another reason. The Prince d’Agrigente was prince by inheritance from the House of Aragon, but his Lordship was Poitevin. As for his country house, the house that is to say in which he lived, it was not the property of his own family, but had come to him from his mother’s former husband, and was situated almost halfway between Martinville and Guermantes. And so Gilberte spoke of him and of M. de Bréauté as of neighbours in the country who reminded her of her old home. Strictly speaking there was an element of falsehood in this attitude, since it was only in Paris, through the Comtesse Molé, that she had come to know M.

de Bréauté, albeit he had been an old friend of her father. As for her pleasure in speaking of the country round Tansonville, it may have been sincere. Snobbishness is, with certain people, analogous to those pleasant beverages with which they mix nutritious substances. Gilberte took an interest in some lady of fashion because she possessed priceless books and portraits by Nattier which my former friend would probably not have taken the trouble to inspect in the National Library or at the Louvre, and I imagine that notwithstanding the even greater proximity, the magnetic influence of Tansonville would have had less effect in drawing Gilberte towards Mme. Sazerat or Mme. Goupil than towards M. d'Agrigente.

"Oh! poor Babal and poor Gri-gri," said Mme. de Guermantes, "they are in a far worse state than du Lau, I'm afraid they haven't long to live, either of them."

When M. de Guermantes had finished reading my article, he paid me compliments which however he took care to qualify. He regretted the slightly hackneyed form of a style in which there were 'emphasis, metaphors as in the antiquated prose of Chateaubriand'; on the other hand he congratulated me without reserve upon my 'occupying myself: "I like a man to do something with his ten fingers. I do not like the useless creatures who are always self-important or agitators. A fatuous breed!"

Gilberte, who was acquiring with extreme rapidity the ways of the world of fashion, announced how proud she would be to say that she was the friend of an author. "You can imagine that I shall tell people that I have the pleasure, the honour of your acquaintance."

"You wouldn't care to come with us, to-morrow, to the Opéra-Comique?" the Duchess asked me; and I thought that it would be doubtless in that same box in which I had first beheld her, and which had seemed to me then as inaccessible as the submarine realm of the Nereids. But I replied in a melancholy tone: "No, I am not going to the theatre just now; I have lost a friend to whom I was greatly attached." The tears almost came to my eyes as I said this, and yet, for the first time, I felt a sort of pleasure in speaking of my bereavement. It was from this moment that I began to write to all my friends that I had just experienced great sorrow, and to cease to feel it.

When Gilberte had gone, Mme. de Guermantes said to me: "You did not understand my signals, I was trying to hint to you not to mention Swann." And, as I apologised: "But I quite understand. I was on the point of mentioning him myself, I stopped short just in time, it was terrible, fortunately I bridled my

tongue. You know, it is a great bore," she said to her husband, seeking to mitigate my own error by appearing to believe that I had yielded to a propensity common to everyone, and difficult to resist. "What do you expect me to do," replied the Duke. "You have only to tell them to take those drawings upstairs again, since they make you think about Swann. If you don't think about Swann, you won't speak about him."

On the following day I received two congratulatory letters which surprised me greatly, one from Mme. Goupil whom I had not seen for many years and to whom, even at Combray, I had not spoken more than twice. A public library had given her the chance of seeing the *Figaro*. Thus, when anything occurs in our life which makes some stir, messages come to us from people situated so far outside the zone of our acquaintance, our memory of whom is already so remote that these people seem to be placed at a great distance, especially in the dimension of depth. A forgotten friendship of our school days, which has had a score of opportunities of recalling itself to our mind, gives us a sign of life, not that there are not negative results also. For example, Bloch, from whom I would have been so glad to learn what he thought of my article, did not write to me. It is true that he had read the article and was to admit it later, but by a counterstroke. In fact, he himself contributed, some years later, an article to the Figaro and was anxious to inform me immediately of the event. As he ceased to be jealous of what he regarded as a privilege, as soon as it had fallen to him as well, the envy that had made him pretend to ignore my article ceased, as though by the raising of a lever; he mentioned it to me but not at all in the way in which he hoped to hear me mention his article: "I know that you too," he told me, "have written an article. But I did not think that I ought to mention it to you, for fear of hurting your feelings, for we ought not to speak to our friends of the humiliations that occur to them. And it is obviously a humiliation to supply the organ of sabres and aspergills with 'five-o'clocks,' not forgetting the holy-water-stoup." His character remained unaltered, but his style had become less precious, as happens to certain people who shed their mannerisms, when, ceasing to compose symbolist poetry, they take to writing newspaper serials.

To console myself for his silence, I read Mme. Goupil's letter again; but it was lacking in warmth, for if the aristocracy employ certain formulas which slip into watertight compartments, between the initial '*Monsieur*' and the '*sentiments distingués*' of the close, cries of joy, of admiration may spring up like flowers, and their clusters waft over the barriers their entrancing fragrance. But middle-class conventionality enwraps even the content of letters in a net of 'your well-

deserved success,' at best 'your great success.' Sisters-in-law, faithful to their upbringing and tight-laced in their respectable stays, think that they have overflowed into the most distressing enthusiasm if they have written: 'my kindest regards.' 'Mother joins me' is a superlative of which they are seldom wearied.

I received another letter as well as Mme. Goupil's, but the name of the writer was unknown to me. It was an illiterate hand, a charming style. I was desolate at my inability to discover who had written to me.

While I was asking myself whether Bergotte would have liked this article, Mme. de Forcheville had replied that he would have admired it enormously and could not have read it without envy. But she had told me this while I slept: it was a dream.

Almost all our dreams respond thus to the questions which we put to ourselves with complicated statements, presentations of several characters on the stage, which however lead to nothing.

As for Mlle. de Forcheville, I could not help feeling appalled when I thought of her. What? The daughter of Swann who would so have loved to see her at the Guermantes', for whom they had refused their great friend the favour of an invitation, they had now sought out of their own accord, time having elapsed which refashions everything for us, instils a fresh personality, based upon what we have been told about them, into people whom we have not seen during a long interval, in which we ourselves have grown a new skin and acquired fresh tastes. I recalled how, to this girl, Swann used to say at times as he hugged her and kissed her: "It is a comfort, my darling, to have a child like you; one day when I am no longer here, if people still mention your poor papa, it will be only to you and because of you." Swann in anticipating thus after his own death a timorous and anxious hope of his survival in his daughter was as greatly mistaken as the old banker who having made a will in favour of a little dancer whom he is keeping and who behaves admirably, tells himself that he is nothing more to her than a great friend, but that she will remain faithful to his memory. She did behave admirably, while her feet under the table sought the feet of those of the old banker's friends who appealed to her, but all this was concealed, beneath an excellent exterior. She will wear mourning for the worthy man, will feel that she is well rid of him, will enjoy not only the ready money, but the real estate, the motor-cars that he has bequeathed to her, taking care to remove the monogram of the former owner, which makes her feel slightly ashamed, and with her enjoyment of the gift will never associate any regret for the giver. The illusions

of paternal affection are perhaps no less deceiving than those of the other kind; many girls regard their fathers only as the old men who are going to leave them a fortune. Gilberte's presence in a drawing-room, instead of being an opportunity for speaking occasionally still of her father, was an obstacle in the way of people's seizing those opportunities, increasingly more rare, that they might still have had of referring to him. Even in connexion with the things that he had said, the presents that he had made, people acquired the habit of not mentioning him, and she who ought to have refreshed, not to say perpetuated his memory, found herself hastening and completing the process of death and oblivion.

And it was not merely with regard to Swann that Gilberte was gradually completing the process of oblivion, she had accelerated in me that process of oblivion with regard to Albertine.

Under the action of desire, and consequently of the desire for happiness which Gilberte had aroused in me during those hours in which I had supposed her to be some one else, a certain number of miseries, of painful preoccupations, which only a little while earlier had obsessed my mind, had been released, carrying with them a whole block of memories, probably long since crumbled and become precarious, with regard to Albertine. For if many memories, which were connected with her, had at the outset helped to keep alive in me my regret for her death, in return that regret had itself fixed those memories. So that the modification of my sentimental state, prepared no doubt obscurely day by day by the constant disintegration of oblivion, but realised abruptly as a whole, gave me the impression which I remember that I felt that day for the first time, of a void, of the suppression in myself of a whole portion of my association of ideas, which a man feels in whose brain an artery, long exhausted, has burst, so that a whole section of his memory is abolished or paralysed.

The vanishing of my suffering and of all that it carried away with it, left me diminished as does often the healing of a malady which occupied a large place in our life. No doubt it is because memories are not always genuine that love is not eternal, and because life is made up of a perpetual renewal of our cells. But this renewal, in the case of memories, is nevertheless retarded by the attention which arrests, and fixes a moment that is bound to change. And since it is the case with grief as with the desire for women that we increase it by thinking about it, the fact of having plenty of other things to do should, like chastity, make oblivion easy.

By another reaction (albeit it was the distraction — the desire for Mlle. d'Éporcheville — that had made my oblivion suddenly apparent and

perceptible), if the fact remains that it is time that gradually brings oblivion, oblivion does not fail to alter profoundly our notion of time. There are optical errors in time as there are in space. The persistence in myself of an old tendency to work, to make up for lost time, to change my way of life, or rather to begin to live gave me the illusion that I was still as young as in the past; and yet the memory of all the events that had followed one another in my life (and also of those that had followed one another in my heart, for when we have greatly changed, we are led to suppose that our life has been longer) in the course of those last months of Albertine's existence, had made them seem to me much longer than a year, and now this oblivion of so many things, separating me by gulfs of empty space from quite recent events which they made me think remote, because I had had what is called 'the time' to forget them, by its fragmentary, irregular interpolation in my memory — like a thick fog at sea which obliterates all the landmarks — confused, destroyed my sense of distances in time, contracted in one place, extended in another, and made me suppose myself now farther away from things, now far closer to them than I really was. And as in the fresh spaces, as yet unexplored, which extended before me, there would be no more trace of my love for Albertine than there had been, in the time past which I had just traversed, of my love for my grandmother, my life appeared to me — offering a succession of periods in which, after a certain interval, nothing of what had sustained the previous period survived in that which followed — as something so devoid of the support of an individual, identical and permanent self, something so useless in the future and so protracted in the past, that death might just as well put an end to its course here or there, without in the least concluding it, as with those courses of French history which, in the Rhetoric class, stop short indifferently, according to the whim of the curriculum or the professor, at the Revolution of 1830, or at that of 1848, or at the end of the Second Empire.

Perhaps then the fatigue and distress which I was feeling were due not so much to my having loved in vain what I was already beginning to forget, as to my coming to take pleasure in the company of fresh living people, purely social figures, mere friends of the Guermantes, offering no interest in themselves. It was easier perhaps to reconcile myself to the discovery that she whom I had loved was nothing more, after a certain interval of time, than a pale memory, than to the rediscovery in myself of that futile activity which makes us waste time in decorating our life with a human vegetation that is alive but is parasitic, which likewise will become nothing when it is dead, which already is alien to all

that we have ever known, which, nevertheless, our garrulous, melancholy, conceited senility seeks to attract. The newcomer who would find it easy to endure the prospect of life without Albertine had made his appearance in me, since I had been able to speak of her at Mme. de Guermantes's in the language of grief without any real suffering. These strange selves which were to bear each a different name, the possibility of their coming had, by reason of their indifference to the object of my love, always alarmed me, long ago in connexion with Gilberte when her father told me that if I went to live in Oceania I would never wish to return, quite recently when I had read with such a pang in my heart the passage in Bergotte's novel where he treats of the character who, separated by the events of life from a woman whom he had adored when he was young, as an old man meets her without pleasure, without any desire to see her again. Now, on the contrary, he was bringing me with oblivion an almost complete elimination of suffering, a possibility of comfort, this person so dreaded, so beneficent who was none other than one of those spare selves whom destiny holds in reserve for us, and, without paying any more heed to our entreaties than a clear-sighted and so all the more authoritative physician, substitutes without our aid, by an opportune intervention, for the self that has been too seriously injured. This renewal, as it happens, nature performs from time to time, as by the decay and refashioning of our tissues, but we notice this only if the former self contained a great grief, a painful foreign body, which we are surprised to find no longer there, in our amazement at having become another self to whom the sufferings of his precursor are nothing more than the sufferings of a stranger, of which we can speak with compassion because we do not feel them. Indeed we are unaffected by our having undergone all those sufferings, since we have only a vague remembrance of having suffered them. It is possible that similarly our dreams, during the night, may be terrible. But when we awake we are another person to whom it is of no importance that the person whose place he takes has had to fly during our sleep from a band of cutthroats.

No doubt this self had maintained some contact with the old self, as a friend, unconcerned by a bereavement, speaks of it nevertheless, to those who come to the house, in a suitable tone of sorrow, and returns from time to time to the room in which the widower who has asked him to receive the company for him may still be heard weeping. I made this contact even closer when I became once again for a moment the former friend of Albertine. But it was into a new personality that I was tending to pass altogether. It is not because other people are dead that our affection for them grows faint, it is because we ourselves are

dying. Albertine had no cause to rebuke her friend. The man who was usurping his name had merely inherited it. We may be faithful to what we remember, we remember only what we have known. My new self, while it grew up in the shadow of the old, had often heard the other speak of Albertine; through that other self, through the information that it gathered from it, it thought that it knew her, it found her attractive, it was in love with her, but this was merely an affection at second hand.

Another person in whom the process of oblivion, so far as concerned Albertine, was probably more rapid at this time, and enabled me in return to realise a little later a fresh advance which that process had made in myself (and this is my memory of a second stage before the final oblivion), was Andrée. I can scarcely, indeed, refrain from citing this oblivion of Albertine as, if not the sole cause, if not even the principal cause, at any rate a conditioning and necessary cause of a conversation between Andrée and myself about six months after the conversation which I have already reported, when her words were so different from those that she had used on the former occasion. I remember that it was in my room because at that moment I found a pleasure in having semi-carnal relations with her, because of the collective form originally assumed and now being resumed by my love for the girls of the little band, a love that had long been undivided among them, and for a while associated exclusively with Albertine's person during the months that had preceded and followed her death.

We were in my room for another reason as well which enables me to date this conversation quite accurately. This was that I had been banished from the rest of the apartment because it was Mamma's day. Notwithstanding its being her day, and after some hesitation, Mamma had gone to luncheon with Mme. Sazerat thinking that as Mme. Sazerat always contrived to invite one to meet boring people, she would be able without sacrificing any pleasure to return home in good time. And she had indeed returned in time and without regret, Mme. Sazerat having had nobody but the most deadly people who were frozen from the start by the special voice that she adopted when she had company, what Mamma called her Wednesday voice. My mother was, nevertheless, extremely fond of her, was sorry for her poverty — the result of the extravagance of her father who had been ruined by the Duchesse de X.... — a poverty which compelled her to live all the year round at Combray, with a few weeks at her cousin's house in Paris and a great 'pleasure-trip' every ten years.

I remember that the day before this, at my request repeated for months past, and because the Princess was always begging her to come, Mamma had gone to

call upon the Princesse de Parme who, herself, paid no calls, and at whose house people as a rule contented themselves with writing their names, but who had insisted upon my mother's coming to see her, since the rules and regulations prevented Her from coming to us. My mother had come home thoroughly cross: "You have sent me on a fool's errand," she told me, "the Princesse de Parme barely greeted me, she turned back to the ladies to whom she was talking without paying me any attention, and after ten minutes, as she hadn't uttered a word to me, I came away without her even offering me her hand. I was extremely annoyed; however, on the doorstep, as I was leaving, I met the Duchesse de Guermantes who was very kind and spoke to me a great deal about you. What a strange idea that was to tell her about Albertine. She told me that you had said to her that her death had been such a grief to you. I shall never go near the Princesse de Parme again. You have made me make a fool of myself."

Well, the next day, which was my mother's at-home day, as I have said, Andrée came to see me. She had not much time, for she had to go and call for Gisèle with whom she was very anxious to dine. "I know her faults, but she is after all my best friend and the person for whom I feel most affection," she told me. And she even appeared to feel some alarm at the thought that I might ask her to let me dine with them. She was hungry for people, and a third person who knew her too well, such as myself, would, by preventing her from letting herself go, at once prevent her from enjoying complete satisfaction in their company.

The memory of Albertine had become so fragmentary in me that it no longer caused me any sorrow and was no more now than a transition to fresh desires, like a chord which announces a change of key. And indeed the idea of a momentary sensual caprice being ruled out, in so far as I was still faithful to Albertine's memory, I was happier at having Andrée in my company than I would have been at having an Albertine miraculously restored to life. For Andrée could tell me more things about Albertine than Albertine herself had ever told me. Now the problems concerning Albertine still remained in my mind when my affection for her, both physical and moral, had already vanished. And my desire to know about her life, because it had diminished less, was now relatively greater than my need of her presence. On the other hand, the thought that a woman had perhaps had relations with Albertine no longer provoked in me anything save the ooodesire to have relations myself also with that woman. I told Andrée this, caressing her as I spoke. Then, without making the slightest effort to harmonise her speech with what she had said a few months earlier, Andrée said to me with a lurking smile: "Ah! yes, but you are a man. And so we can't do

quite the same things as I used to do with Albertine." And whether it was that she considered that this increased my desire (in the hope of extracting confidences, I had told her that I would like to have relations with a woman who had had them with Albertine) or my grief, or perhaps destroyed a sense of superiority to herself which she might suppose me to feel at being the only person who had had relations with Albertine: "Ah! we spent many happy hours together, she was so caressing, so passionate. Besides, it was not only with me that she liked to enjoy herself. She had met a nice boy at Mme. Verdurin's, Morel. They understood each other at once. He undertook (with her permission to enjoy himself with them too, for he liked virgins) to procure little girls for her. As soon as he had set their feet on the path, he left them. And so he made himself responsible for attracting young fisher-girls in some quiet watering-place, young laundresses, who Would fall in love with a boy, but would not have listened to a girl's advances. As soon as the girl was well under his control, he would bring her to a safe place, where he handed her over to Albertine. For fear of losing Morel, who took part in it all too, the girl always obeyed, and yet she lost him all the same, for, as he was afraid of what might happen and also as once or twice was enough for him, he would slip away leaving a false address. Once he had the nerve to bring one of these girls, with Albertine, to a brothel at Corliville, where four or five of the women had her at once, or in turn. That was his passion, and Albertine's also. But Albertine suffered terrible remorse afterwards. I believe that when she was with you she had conquered her passion and put off indulging it from day to day. Then her affection for yourself was so strong that she felt scruples. But it was quite certain that, if she ever left you, she would begin again. She hoped that you would rescue her, that you would marry her. She felt in her heart that it was a sort of criminal lunacy, and I have often asked myself whether it was not after an incident of that sort, which had led to a suicide in a family, that she killed herself on purpose. I must confess that in the early days of her life with you she had not entirely given up her games with me. There were days when she seemed to need it, so much so that once, when it would have been so easy elsewhere, she could not say good-bye without taking me to bed with her, in your house. We had no luck, we were very nearly caught. She had taken her opportunity when Françoise had gone out on some errand, and you had not come home. Then she had turned out all the lights so that when you let yourself in with your key it would take you some time to find the switch, and she had not shut the door of her room. We heard you come upstairs, I had just time to make myself tidy and begin to come down. Which was quite

unnecessary, for by an incredible accident you had left your key at home and had to ring the bell. But we lost our heads all the same, so that to conceal our awkwardness we both of us, without any opportunity of discussing it, had the same idea: to pretend to be afraid of the scent of syringa which as a matter of fact we adored. You were bringing a long branch of it home with you, which enabled me to turn my head away and hide my confusion. This did not prevent me from telling you in the most idiotic way that perhaps Françoise had come back and would let you in, when a moment earlier I had told you the lie that we had only just come in from our drive and that when we arrived Françoise had not left the house and was just going on an errand. But our mistake was — supposing you to have your key — turning out the light, for we were afraid that as you came upstairs you would see it turned on again, or at least we hesitated too long. And for three nights on end Albertine could not close an eye, for she was always afraid that you might be suspicious and ask Françoise why she had not turned on the light before leaving the house. For Albertine was terribly afraid of you, and at times she would assure me that you were wicked, mean, that you hated her really. After three days she gathered from your calm that you had said nothing to Françoise, and she was able to sleep again. But she never did anything with me after that, perhaps from fear, perhaps from remorse, for she made out that she did really love you, or perhaps she was in love with some other man. In any case, nobody could ever mention syringa again in her hearing without her turning crimson and putting her hand over her face in the hope of hiding her blushes."

As there are strokes of good fortune, so there are misfortunes that come too late, they do not assume all the importance that they would have had in our eyes a little earlier. Among these was the calamity that Andrée's terrible revelation was to me. No doubt, even when bad tidings ought to make us unhappy, it so happens that in the diversion, the balanced give and take of conversation, they pass by us without stopping, and that we ourselves, preoccupied with a thousand things which we have to say in response, transformed by the desire to please our present company into some one else protected for a few moments in this new environment against the affections, the sufferings that he has discarded upon entering it and will find again when the brief spell is broken, have not the time to take them in. And yet if those affections, those sufferings are too predominant, we enter only distractedly into the zone of a new and momentary world, in which, too faithful to our sufferings, we are incapable of becoming another person, and then the words that we hear said enter at once into relation with our

heart, which has not remained out of action. But for some time past words that concerned Albertine, had, like a poison that has evaporated, lost their toxic power. She was already too remote from me.

As a wayfarer seeing in the afternoon a misty crescent in the sky, says to himself: “That is it, the vast moon,” so I said to myself: “What, so that truth which I have sought so earnestly, which I have so dreaded, is nothing more than these few words uttered in the course of conversation, words to which we cannot even give our whole attention since we are not alone!” Besides, it took me at a serious disadvantage, I had exhausted myself with Andrée. With a truth of such magnitude, I would have liked to have more strength to devote to it; it remained outside me, but this was because I had not yet found a place for it in my heart. We would like the truth to be revealed to us by novel signs, not by a phrase similar to those which we have constantly repeated to ourselves. The habit of thinking prevents us at times from feeling reality, makes us immune to it, makes it seem no more than another thought.

There is no idea that does not carry in itself a possible refutation, no word that does not imply its opposite. In any case, if all this was true, how futile a verification of the life of a mistress who exists no longer, rising up from the depths and coming to the surface just when we are no longer able to make any use of it. Then, thinking doubtless of some other woman whom we now love and with regard to whom the same change may occur (for to her whom we have forgotten we no longer give a thought), we lose heart. We say to ourselves: “If she were alive!” We say to ourselves: “If she who is alive could understand all this and that when she is dead I shall know everything that she is hiding from me.” But this is a vicious circle. If I could have brought Albertine back to life, the immediate consequence would have been that Andrée would have revealed nothing. It is the same thing as the everlasting: “You’ll see what it’s like when I no longer love you” which is so true and so absurd, since as a matter of fact we should elicit much if we were no longer in love, but when we should no longer think of inquiring. It is precisely the same. For the woman whom we see again when we are no longer in love with her, if she tells us everything, the fact is that she is no longer herself, or that we are no longer ourselves: the person who was in love has ceased to exist. There also death has passed by, and has made everything easy and unnecessary. I pursued these reflexions, adopting the hypothesis that Andrée had been telling the truth — which was possible — and had been prompted to sincerity with me, precisely because she now had relations with me, by that Saint-André-des-Champs side of her nature which Albertine,

too, had shewn me at the start. She was encouraged in this case by the fact that she was no longer afraid of Albertine, for other people's reality survives their death for only a short time in our mind, and after a few years they are like those gods of obsolete religions whom we insult without fear, because people have ceased to believe in their existence. But the fact that Andrée no longer believed in the reality of Albertine might mean that she no longer feared (any more than to betray a secret which she had promised not to reveal) to invent a falsehood which slandered retrospectively her alleged accomplice. Had this absence of fear permitted her to reveal at length, in speaking as she did, the truth, or rather to invent a falsehood, if, for some reason, she supposed me to be full of happiness and pride, and wished to pain me? Perhaps the sight of me caused her a certain irritation (held in suspense so long as she saw that I was miserable, unconsoled) because I had had relations with Albertine and she envied me, perhaps — supposing that I considered myself on that account more highly favoured than her — an advantage which she herself had never, perhaps, obtained, nor even sought. Thus it was that I had often heard her say how ill they were looking to people whose air of radiant health, and what was more their consciousness of their own air of radiant health, exasperated her, and say in the hope of annoying them that she herself was very well, a fact that she did not cease to proclaim when she was seriously ill until the day when, in the detachment of death, it no longer mattered to her that other fortunate people should be well and should know that she was dying. But this day was still remote. Perhaps she had turned against me, for what reason I knew not, in one of whose rages in which she used, long ago, to turn against the young man so learned in sporting matters, so ignorant of everything else, whom we had met at Balbec, who since then had been living with Rachel, and at the mention of whom Andrée overflowed in defamatory speeches, hoping to be sued for libel in order to be able to launch against his father disgraceful accusations the falsehood of which he would not be able to prove. Quite possibly this rage against myself had simply revived, having doubtless ceased when she saw how miserable I was. Indeed, the very same people whom she, her eyes flashing with rage, had longed to disgrace, to kill, to send to prison, by false testimony if need be, she had only to know that they were unhappy, crushed, to cease to wish them any harm, and to be ready to overwhelm them with kindnesses. For she was not fundamentally wicked, and if her non-apparent, somewhat buried nature was not the kindness which one divined at first from her delicate attentions, but rather envy and pride, her third nature, buried more deeply still, the true but not entirely realised nature, tended

towards goodness and the love of her neighbour. Only, like all those people who, being in a certain state of life, desire a better state, but knowing it only by desire, do not realise that the first condition is to break away from the former state — like the neurasthenics or morphinomaniacs who are anxious to be cured, but at the same time do not wish to be deprived of their manias or their morphine, like the religious hearts or artistic spirits attached to the world who long for solitude but seek nevertheless to imagine it as not implying an absolute renunciation of their former existence — Andrée was prepared to love all her fellow-creatures, but on the condition that she should first of all have succeeded in not imagining them as triumphant, and to that end should have humiliated them in advance. She did not understand that we ought to love even the proud, and to conquer their pride by love and not by a more overweening pride. But the fact is that she was like those invalids who wish to be cured by the very means that prolong their malady, which they like and would cease at once to like if they renounced them. But people wish to learn to swim and at the same time to keep one foot on the ground. As for the young sportsman, the Verdurins' nephew, whom I had met during my two visits to Balbec, I am bound to add, as an accessory statement and in anticipation, that some time after Andrée's visit, a visit my account of which will be resumed in a moment, certain events occurred which caused a great sensation. First of all, this young man (perhaps remembering Albertine with whom I did not then know that he had been in love) became engaged to Andrée and married her, notwithstanding the despair of Rachel to which he paid not the slightest attention. Andrée no longer said then (that is to say some months after the visit of which I have been speaking) that he was a wretch, and I realised later on that she had said so only because she was madly in love with him and thought that he did not want to have anything to do with her. But another fact impressed me even more. This young man produced certain sketches for the theatre, with settings and costumes designed by himself, which have effected in the art of to-day a revolution at least equal to that brought about by the Russian ballet. In fact, the best qualified critics regarded his work as something of capital importance, almost as works of genius and for that matter I agree with them, confirming thus, to my own astonishment, the opinion long held by Rachel. The people who had known him at Balbec, anxious only to be certain whether the cut of the clothes of the men with whom he associated was or was not smart, who had seen him spend all his time at baccarat, at the races, on the golf course or on the polo ground, who knew that at school he had always been a dunce, and had even been expelled from the lycée (to annoy his parents,

he had spent two months in the smart brothel in which M. de Charlus had hoped to surprise Morel), thought that perhaps his work was done by Andrée who, in her love for him, chose to leave him the renown, or that more probably he was paying, out of his huge private fortune at which his excesses had barely nibbled, some inspired but needy professional to create it. People in this kind of wealthy society, not purified by mingling with the aristocracy, and having no idea of what constitutes an artist — a word which to them is represented only by an actor whom they engage to recite monologues at the party given for their daughter's betrothal, at once handing him his fee discreetly in another room, or by a painter to whom they make her sit after she is married, before the children come and when she is still at her best — are apt to believe that all the people in society who write, compose or paint, have their work done for them and pay to obtain a reputation as an author as other men pay to make sure of a seat in Parliament. But all this was false, and the young man was indeed the author of those admirable works. When I learned this, I was obliged to hesitate between contrary suppositions. Either he had indeed been for years on end the 'coarse brute' that he appeared to be, and some physiological cataclysm had awakened in him the dormant genius, like a Sleeping Beauty, or else at the period of his tempestuous schooldays, of his failures to matriculate in the final examination, of his heavy gambling losses at Balbec, of his reluctance to shew himself in the tram with his aunt Verdurin's faithful, because of their unconventional attire, he was already a man of genius, distracted perhaps from his genius, having left its key beneath the door-mat in the effervescence of juvenile passions; or again, already a conscious man of genius, and at the bottom of his classes, because, while the master was uttering platitudes about Cicero, he himself was reading Rimbaud or Goethe. Certainly, there was no ground for any such hypothesis when I met him at Balbec, where his interests seemed to me to be centred solely in turning out a smart carriage and pair and in mixing cocktails. But even this is not an insuperable objection. He might be extremely vain, and this may be allied to genius, and might seek to shine in the manner which he knew to be dazzling in the world in which he lived, which did not mean furnishing a profound knowledge of elective affinities, but far rather a knowledge of how to drive four-in-hand. Moreover, I am not at all sure that later on, when he had become the author of those fine and so original works, he would have cared greatly, outside the theatres in which he was known, to greet anyone who was not in evening dress, like the 'faithful' in their earlier manner, which would be a proof in him not of stupidity, but of vanity, and indeed of a certain practical sense, a certain

clairvoyance in adapting his vanity to the mentality of the imbeciles upon whose esteem he depended and in whose eyes a dinner-jacket might perhaps shine with a more brilliant radiance than the eyes of a thinker. Who can say whether, seen from without, some man of talent, or even a man devoid of talent, but a lover of the things of the mind, myself for instance, would not have appeared, to anyone who met him at Rivebelle, at the hotel at Balbec, or on the beach there, the most perfect and pretentious imbecile. Not to mention that for Octave matters of art must have been a thing so intimate, a thing that lived so in the most secret places of his heart that doubtless it would never have occurred to him to speak of them, as Saint-Loup, for instance, would have spoken, for whom the fine arts had the importance that horses and carriages had for Octave. Besides, he may have had a passion for gambling, and it is said that he has retained it. All the same, even if the piety which brought to light the unknown work of Vinteuil arose from amid the troubled life of Montjouvain, I was no less impressed by the thought that the masterpieces which are perhaps the most extraordinary of our day have emerged not from the university certificate, from a model, academic education, upon Broglie lines, but from the fréquentation of ‘paddocks’ and fashionable bars. In any case, in those days at Balbec, the reasons which made me anxious to know him, which made Albertine and her friends anxious that I should not know him, were equally detached from his merit, and could only have brought into prominence the eternal misunderstanding between an ‘intellectual’ (represented in this instance by myself) and people in society (represented by the little band) with regard to a person in society (the young golfer). I had no inkling of his talent, and his prestige in my eyes, like that, in the past, of Mme. Blatin, had been that of his being — whatever they might say — the friend of my girl friends, and more one of their band than myself. On the other hand, Albertine and Andrée, symbolising in this respect the incapacity of people in society to bring a sound judgment to bear upon the things of the mind and their propensity to attach themselves in that connexion to false appearances, not only thought me almost idiotic because I took an interest in such an imbecile, but were astonished beyond measure that, taking one golfer with another, my choice should have fallen upon the poorest player of them all. If, for instance, I had chosen to associate with young Gilbert de Belloeuvre; apart from golf, he was a boy who had the gift of conversation, who had secured a *proxime* in the examinations and wrote quite good poetry (as a matter of fact he was the stupidest of them all). Or again if my object had been to ‘make a study for a book,’ Guy Saumoy who was completely insane, who had abducted two girls, was at least a singular type who

might ‘interest’ me. These two might have been allowed me, but the other, what attraction could I find in him, he was the type of the ‘great brute,’ of the ‘coarse brute.’ To return to Andrée’s visit, after the disclosure that she had just made to me of her relations with Albertine, she added that the chief reason for which Albertine had left me was the thought of what her friends of the little band might think, and other people as well, when they saw her living like that with a young man to whom she was not married. “Of course I know, it was in your mother’s house. But that makes no difference. You can’t imagine what all those girls are like, what they conceal from one another, how they dread one another’s opinion. I have seen them being terribly severe with young men simply because the men knew their friends and they were afraid that certain things might be repeated, and those very girls, I have happened to see them in a totally different light, much to their disgust.” A few months earlier, this knowledge which Andrée appeared to possess of the motives that swayed the girls of the little band would have seemed to me the most priceless thing in the world. What she said was perhaps sufficient to explain why Albertine, who had given herself to me afterwards in Paris, had refused to yield to me at Balbec where I was constantly meeting her friends, which I had absurdly supposed to be so great an advantage in winning her affection. Perhaps indeed it was because she had seen me display some sign of intimacy with Andrée or because I had rashly told the latter that Albertine was coming to spend the night at the Grand Hotel, that Albertine who perhaps, an hour earlier, was ready to let me take certain favours, as though that were the simplest thing in the world, had abruptly changed her mind and threatened to ring the bell. But then, she must have been accommodating to lots of others. This thought rekindled my jealousy and I told Andrée that there was something that I wished to ask her. “You did those things in your grandmother’s empty apartment?” “Oh, no, never, we should have been disturbed.” “Why, I thought... it seemed to me...” “Besides, Albertine loved doing it in the country.” “And where, pray?” “Originally, when she hadn’t time to go very far, we used to go to the Buttes-Chaumont. She knew a house there. Or else we would lie under the trees, there is never anyone about; in the grotto of the Petit Trianon, too.” “There, you see; how am I to believe you? You swore to me, not a year ago, that you had never done anything at the Buttes-Chaumont.” “I was afraid of distressing you.” As I have said, I thought (although not until much later) that on the contrary it was on this second occasion, the day of her confessions, that Andrée had sought to distress me. And this thought would have occurred to me at once, because I should have felt the need of it, if I had still been as much in

love with Albertine. But Andrée's words did not hurt me sufficiently to make it indispensable to me to dismiss them immediately as untrue. In short if what Andrée said was true, and I did not doubt it at the time, the real Albertine whom I discovered, after having known so many diverse forms of Albertine, differed very little from the young Bacchanal who had risen up and whom I had detected, on the first day, on the front at Balbec, and who had offered me so many different aspects in succession, as a town gradually alters the position of its buildings so as to overtop, to obliterate the principal monument which alone we beheld from a distance, as we approach it, whereas when we know it well and can judge it exactly, its true proportions prove to be those which the perspective of the first glance had indicated, the rest, through which we passed, being no more than that continuous series of lines of defence which everything in creation raises against our vision, and which we must cross one after another, at the cost of how much suffering, before we arrive at the heart. If, however, I had no need to believe absolutely in Albertine's innocence because my suffering had diminished, I can say that reciprocally if I did not suffer unduly at this revelation, it was because, some time since, for the belief that I feigned in Albertine's innocence, there had been substituted gradually and without my taking it into account the belief, ever present in my mind, in her guilt. Now if I no longer believed in Albertine's innocence, it was because I had already ceased to feel the need, the passionate desire to believe in it. It is desire that engenders belief and if we fail as a rule to take this into account, it is because most of the desires that create beliefs end — unlike the desire which had persuaded me that Albertine was innocent — only with our own life. To all the evidence that corroborated my original version I had stupidly preferred simple statements by Albertine. Why had I believed them? Falsehood is essential to humanity. It plays as large a part perhaps as the quest of pleasure and is moreover commanded by that quest. We lie in order to protect our pleasure or our honour if the disclosure of our pleasure runs counter to our honour. We lie all our life long, especially indeed, perhaps only, to those people who love us. Such people in fact alone make us fear for our pleasure and desire their esteem. I had at first thought Albertine guilty, and it was only my desire devoting to a process of doubt the strength of my intelligence that had set me upon the wrong track. Perhaps we live surrounded by electric, seismic signs, which we must interpret in good faith in order to know the truth about the characters of other people. If the truth must be told, saddened as I was in spite of everything by Andrée's words, I felt it to be better that the truth should at last agree with what my instinct had originally

foreboded, rather than with the miserable optimism to which I had since made a cowardly surrender. I would have preferred that life should remain at the high level of my intuitions. Those moreover which I had felt, that first day upon the beach, when I had supposed that those girls embodied the frenzy of pleasure, were vice incarnate, and again on the evening when I had seen Albertine's governess leading that passionate girl home to the little villa, as one thrust into its cage a wild animal which nothing in the future, despite appearances, will ever succeed in taming, did they not agree with what Bloch had told me when he had made the world seem so fair to me by shewing me, making me palpitate on all my walks, at every encounter, the universality of desire. Perhaps, when all was said, it was better that I should not have found those first intuitions verified afresh until now. While the whole of my love for Albertine endured, they would have made me suffer too keenly and it was better that there should have subsisted of them only a trace, my perpetual suspicion of things which I did not see and which nevertheless happened continually so close to me, and perhaps another trace as well, earlier, more vast, which was *my love itself*. Was it not indeed, despite all the denials of my reason, tantamount to knowing Albertine in all her hideousness, merely to choose her, to love her; and even in the moments when suspicion is lulled, is not love the persistence and a transformation of that suspicion, is it not a proof of clairvoyance (a proof unintelligible to the lover himself), since desire going always in the direction of what is most opposite to ourselves forces us to love what will make us suffer? Certainly there enter into a person's charm, into the attraction of her eyes, her lips, her figure, the elements unknown to us which are capable of making us suffer most intensely, so much so that to feel ourselves attracted by the person, to begin to love her, is, however innocent we may pretend it to be, to read already, in a different version, all her betrayals and her faults. And those charms which, to attract me, materialised thus the noxious, dangerous, fatal parts of a person, did they perhaps stand in a more direct relation of cause to effect to those secret poisons than do the seductive luxuriance and the toxic juice of certain venomous flowers? It was perhaps, I told myself, Albertine's vice itself, the cause of my future sufferings, that had produced in her that honest, frank manner, creating the illusion that one could enjoy with her the same loyal and unrestricted comradeship as with a man, just as a parellel vice had produced in M. de Charlus a feminine refinement of sensibility and mind. Through a period of the most utter blindness, perspicacity persists beneath the very form of predilection and affection. Which means that we are wrong in speaking of a bad choice in love, since whenever there is a

choice it can only be bad. “Did those excursions to the Buttes-Chaumont take place when you used to call for her here?” I asked Andrée. “Oh! no, from the day when Albertine came back from Balbec with you, except the time I told you about, she never did anything again with me. She would not even allow me to mention such things to her.” “But, my dear Andrée, why go on lying to me? By the merest chance, for I never try to find out anything, I have learned in the minutest details things of that sort which Albertine did, I can tell you exactly, on the bank of the river with a laundress, only a few days before her death.” “Ah! perhaps after she had left you, that I can’t say. She felt that she had failed, that she would never again be able to regain your confidence.” These last words appalled me. Then I thought again of the evening of the branch of syringa, I remembered that about a fortnight later, as my jealousy kept seeking a fresh object, I had asked Albertine whether she had ever had relations with Andrée, and she had replied: “Oh! never! Of course, I adore Andrée; I have a profound affection for her, but as though we were sisters, and even if I had the tastes which you seem to suppose, she is the last person that would have entered my head. I can swear to you by anything you like, by my aunt, by my poor mother’s grave.” I had believed her. And yet even if I had not been made suspicious by the contradiction between her former partial admissions with regard to certain matters and the firmness with which she had afterwards denied them as soon as she saw that I was not unaffected, I ought to have remembered Swann, convinced of the platonic nature of M. de Charlus’s friendships and assuring me of it on the evening of the very day on which I had seen the tailor and the Baron in the courtyard. I ought to have reflected that if there are, one covering the other, two worlds, one consisting of the things that the best, the sincerest people say, and behind it the world composed of those same people’s successive actions, so that when a married woman says to you of a young man: “Oh! It is perfectly true that I have an immense affection for him, but it is something quite innocent, quite pure, I could swear it upon the memory of my parents,” we ought ourselves, instead of feeling any hesitation, to swear that she has probably just come from her bath-room to which, after every assignation that she has with the young man in question, she dashes, to prevent any risk of his giving her a child. The spray of syringa made me profoundly sad, as did also the discovery that Albertine could have thought or called me cruel and hostile; most of all perhaps, certain lies so unexpected that I had difficulty in grasping them. One day Albertine had told me that she had been to an aerodrome, that the airman was in love with her (this doubtless in order to divert my suspicion from women,

thinking that I was less jealous of other men), that it had been amusing to watch Andrée's raptures at the said airman, at all the compliments that he paid Albertine, until finally Andrée had longed to go in the air with him. Now this was an entire fabrication; Andrée had never visited the aerodrome in question.

When Andrée left me, it was dinner-time. "You will never guess who has been to see me and stayed at least three hours," said my mother. "I call it three hours, it was perhaps longer, she arrived almost on the heels of my first visitor, who was Mme. Cottard, sat still and watched everybody come and go — and I had more than thirty callers — and left me only a quarter of an hour ago. If you hadn't had your friend Andrée with you, I should have sent for you." "Why, who was it?" "A person who never pays calls." "The Princesse de Parme?" "Why, I have a cleverer son than I thought I had. There is no fun in making you guess a name, for you hit on it at once." "Did she come to apologise for her rudeness yesterday?" "No, that would have been stupid, the fact of her calling was an apology. Your poor grandmother would have thought it admirable. It seems that about two o'clock she had sent a footman to ask whether I had an at-home day. She was told that this was the day and so up she came." My first thought, which I did not dare mention to Mamma, was that the Princesse de Parme, surrounded, the day before, by people of rank and fashion with whom she was on intimate terms and enjoyed conversing, had when she saw my mother come into the room felt an annoyance which she had made no attempt to conceal. And it was quite in the style of the great ladies of Germany, which for that matter the Guermantes had largely adopted, this stiffness, for which they thought to atone by a scrupulous affability. But my mother believed, and I came in time to share her opinion, that all that had happened was that the Princesse de Parme, having failed to recognise her, had not felt herself bound to pay her any attention, that she had learned after my mother's departure who she was, either from the Duchesse de Guermantes whom my mother had met as she was leaving the house, or from the list of her visitors, whose names, before they entered her presence, the servants recorded in a book. She had thought it impolite to send word or to say to my mother: "I did not recognise you," but — and this was no less in harmony with the good manners of the German courts and with the Guermantes code of behaviour than my original theory — had thought that a call, an exceptional action on the part of a royal personage, and what was more a call of several hours' duration, would convey the explanation to my mother in an indirect but no less convincing form, which is just what did happen. But I did not waste any time in asking my mother to tell me about the Princess's call, for I had

just recalled a number of incidents with regard to Albertine as to which I had meant but had forgotten to question Andrée. How little, for that matter, did I know, should I ever know, of this story of Albertine, the only story that could be of particular interest to me, or did at least begin to interest me afresh at certain moments. For man is that creature without any fixed age, who has the faculty of becoming, in a few seconds, many years younger, and who, surrounded by the walls of the time through which he has lived, floats within them but as though in a basin the surface-level of which is constantly changing, so as to bring him into the range now of one epoch now of another. I wrote to Andrée asking her to come again. She was unable to do so until a week had passed. Almost as soon as she entered the room, I said to her: “Very well, then, since you maintain that Albertine never did that sort of thing while she was staying here, according to you, it was to be able to do it more freely that she left me, but for which of her friends?” “Certainly not, it was not that at all.” “Then because I was too unkind to her?” “No, I don’t think so. I believe that she was forced to leave you by her aunt who had designs for her future upon that guttersnipe, you know, the young man whom you used to call ‘I am in the soup,’ the young man who was in love with Albertine and had proposed for her. Seeing that you did not marry her, they were afraid that the shocking length of her stay in your house might prevent the young man from proposing. Mme. Bontemps, after the young man had brought continual pressure to bear upon her, summoned Albertine home. Albertine after all needed her uncle and aunt, and when she found that they expected her to make up her mind she left you.” I had never in my jealousy thought of this explanation, but only of Albertine’s desire for other women and of my own vigilance, I had forgotten that there was also Mme. Bontemps who might presently regard as strange what had shocked my mother from the first. At least Mme. Bontemps was afraid that it might shock this possible husband whom she was keeping in reserve for Albertine, in case I failed to marry her. Was this marriage really the cause of Albertine’s departure, and out of self-respect, so as not to appear to be dependent on her aunt, or to force me to marry her, had she preferred not to mention it? I was beginning to realise that the system of multiple causes for a single action, of which Albertine shewed her mastery in her relations with her girl friends when she allowed each of them to suppose that it was for her sake that she had come, was only a sort of artificial, deliberate symbol of the different aspects that an action assumes according to the point of view that we adopt. The astonishment, I might almost say the shame that I felt at never having even once told myself that Albertine, in my house, was in a false

position, which might give offence to her aunt, it was not the first, nor was it the last time that I felt it. How often has it been my lot, after I have sought to understand the relations between two people and the crises that they bring about, to hear, all of a sudden, a third person speak to me of them from his own point of view, for he has even closer relations with one of the two, a point of view which has perhaps been the cause of the crisis. And if people's actions remain so indefinite, how should not the people themselves be equally indefinite? If I listened to the people who maintained that Albertine was a schemer who had tried to get one man after another to marry her, it was not difficult to imagine how they would have defined her life with me. And yet to my mind she had been a victim, a victim who perhaps was not altogether pure, but in that case guilty for other reasons, on account of vices to which people did not refer. But we must above all say to ourselves this: on the one hand, lying is often a trait of character; on the other hand, in women who would not otherwise be liars, it is a natural defence, improvised at first, then more and more organised, against that sudden danger which would be capable of destroying all life: love. On the other hand again, it is not the effect of chance if men who are intelligent and sensitive invariably give themselves to insensitive and inferior women, and are at the same time so attached to them that the proof that they are not loved does not in the least cure them of the instinct to sacrifice everything else in the attempt to keep such a woman with them. If I say that such men need to suffer, I am saying something that is accurate while suppressing the preliminary truths which make that need — involuntary in a sense — to suffer a perfectly comprehensible consequence of those truths. Without taking into account that, complete natures being rare, a man who is highly sensitive and highly intelligent will generally have little will-power, will be the plaything of habit and of that fear of suffering in the immediate present which condemns us to perpetual suffering — and that in those conditions he will never be prepared to repudiate the woman who does not love him. We may be surprised that he should be content with so little love, but we ought rather to picture to ourselves the grief that may be caused him by the love which he himself feels. A grief which we ought not to pity unduly, for those terrible commotions which are caused by an unrequited love, by the departure, the death of a mistress, are like those attacks of paralysis which at first leave us helpless, but after which our muscles begin by degrees to recover their vital elasticity and energy. What is more, this grief does not lack compensation. These sensitive and intelligent men are as a rule little inclined to falsehood. This takes them all the more by surprise inasmuch as, intelligent as they may be, they

live in the world of possibilities, react little, live in the grief which a woman has just inflicted on them, rather than in the clear perception of what she had in mind, what she was doing, of the man with whom she was in love, a perception granted chiefly to deliberate natures which require it in order to prepare against the future instead of lamenting the past. And so these men feel that they are betrayed without quite knowing how. Wherefore the mediocre woman with whom we were surprised to see them fall in love enriches the universe for them far more than an intelligent woman would have done. Behind each of her words, they feel that a lie is lurking, behind each house to which she says that she has gone, another house, behind each action, each person, another action, another person. Doubtless they do not know what or whom, have not the energy, would not perhaps find it possible to discover. A lying woman, by an extremely simple trick, can beguile, without taking the trouble to change her method, any number of people, and, what is more, the very person who ought to have discovered the trick. All this creates, in front of the sensitive and intelligent man, a universe all depth which his jealousy would fain plumb and which is not without interest to his intelligence.

Albeit I was not exactly a man of that category, I was going perhaps, now that Albertine was dead, to learn the secret of her life. Here again, do not these indiscretions which occur only after a person’s life on earth is ended, prove that nobody believes, really, in a future state. If these indiscretions are true, we ought to fear the resentment of her whose actions we are revealing fully as much on the day when we shall meet her in heaven, as we feared it so long as she was alive, when we felt ourselves bound to keep her secret. And if these indiscretions are false, invented because she is no longer present to contradict them, we ought to be even more afraid of the dead woman’s wrath if we believed in heaven. But no one does believe in it. So that it was possible that a long debate had gone on in Albertine’s heart between staying with me and leaving me, but that her decision to leave me had been made on account of her aunt, or of that young man, and not on account of women to whom perhaps she had never given a thought. The most serious thing to my mind was that Andrée, albeit she had nothing now to conceal from me as to Albertine’s morals, swore to me that nothing of the sort had ever occurred between Albertine on the one hand and Mlle. Vinteuil or her friend on the other. (Albertine herself was unconscious of her own instincts when she first met the girls, and they, from that fear of making a mistake in the object of our desire, which breeds as many errors as desire itself, regarded her as extremely hostile to that sort of thing. Perhaps later on they had learned that her tastes were

similar to their own, but by that time they knew Albertine too well and Albertine knew them too well for there to be any thought of their doing things together.) In short I did not understand any better than before why Albertine had left me. If the face of a woman is perceived with difficulty by our eyes which cannot take in the whole of its moving surface, by our lips, still more by our memory, if it is shrouded in obscurity according to her social position, according to the level at which we are situated, how much thicker is the veil drawn between the actions of her whom we see and her motives. Her motives are situated in a more distant plane, which we do not perceive, and engender moreover actions other than those which we know and often in absolute contradiction to them. When has there not been some man in public life, regarded as a saint by his friends, who is discovered to have forged documents, robbed the State, betrayed his country? How often is a great nobleman robbed by a steward, whom he has brought up from childhood, ready to swear that he was an honest man, as possibly he was? Now this curtain that screens another person's motives, how much more impenetrable does it become if we are in love with that person, for it clouds our judgment and also obscures the actions of her who, feeling that she is loved, ceases at once to attach any value to what otherwise would doubtless have seemed to her important, such as wealth for example. Perhaps moreover she is impelled to pretend, to a certain extent, this scorn of wealth in the hope of obtaining more money by making us suffer. The bargaining instinct also may be involved. And so with the actual incidents in her life, an intrigue which she has confided to no one for fear of its being revealed to us, which many people might, for all that, have discovered, had they felt the same passionate desire to know it as ourselves, while preserving freer minds, arousing fewer suspicions in the guilty party, an intrigue of which certain people have not been unaware — but people whom we do not know and should not know how to find. And among all these reasons for her adopting an inexplicable attitude towards us, we must include those idiosyncrasies of character which impel a person, whether from indifference to his own interests, or from hatred, or from love of freedom, or from sudden bursts of anger, or from fear of what certain people will think, to do the opposite of what we expected. And then there are the differences of environment, of upbringing, in which we refuse to believe because, when we are talking together, they are effaced by our speech, but which return, when we are apart, to direct the actions of each of us from so opposite a point of view that there is no possibility of their meeting. "But, my dear Andrée, you are lying again. Remember — you admitted it to me yourself,— I telephoned to you the

evening before; you remember Albertine had been so anxious, and kept it from me as though it had been something that I must not know about, to go to the afternoon party at the Verdurins' at which Mlle. Vinteuil was expected." "Yes, but Albertine had not the slightest idea that Mlle. Vinteuil was to be there." "What? You yourself told me that she had met Mme. Verdurin a few days earlier. Besides, Andrée, there is no point in our trying to deceive one another. I found a letter one morning in Albertine's room, a note from Mme. Verdurin begging her to come that afternoon." And I shewed her the note which, as a matter of fact, Françoise had taken care to bring to my notice by placing it on the surface of Albertine's possessions a few days before her departure, and, I am afraid, leaving it there to make Albertine suppose that I had been rummaging among her things, to let her know in any case that I had seen it. And I had often asked myself whether Françoise's ruse had not been largely responsible for the departure of Albertine, who saw that she could no longer conceal anything from me, and felt disheartened, vanquished. I shewed Andrée the letter: "I feel no compunction, everything is excused by this strong family feeling..." "You know very well, Andrée, that Albertine used always to say that Mlle. Vinteuil's friend was indeed a mother, an elder sister to her." "But you have misinterpreted this note. The person that Mme. Verdurin wished Albertine to meet that afternoon was not at all Mlle. Vinteuil's friend, it was the young man you call 'I am in the soup,' and the strong family feeling is what Mme. Verdurin felt for the brute who is after all her nephew. At the same time I think that Albertine did hear afterwards that Mlle. Vinteuil was to be there, Mme. Verdurin may have let her know separately. Of course the thought of seeing her friend again gave her pleasure, reminded her of happy times in the past, but just as you would be glad, if you were going to some place, to know that Elstir would be there, but no more than that, not even as much. No, if Albertine was unwilling to say why she wanted to go to Mme. Verdurin's, it is because it was a rehearsal to which Mme. Verdurin had invited a very small party, including that nephew of hers whom you had met at Balbec, to whom Mme. Bontemps was hoping to marry Albertine and to whom Albertine wanted to talk. A fine lot of people!" And so Albertine, in spite of what Andrée's mother used to think, had had after all the prospect of a wealthy marriage. And when she had wanted to visit Mme. Verdurin, when she spoke to her in secret, when she had been so annoyed that I should have gone there that evening without warning her, the plot that had been woven by her and Mme. Verdurin had had as its object her meeting not Mlle. Vinteuil but the nephew with whom Albertine was in love and for whom Mme. Verdurin was

acting as go-between, with the satisfaction in working for the achievement of one of those marriages which surprise us in certain families into whose state of mind we do not enter completely, supposing them to be intent upon a rich bride. Now I had never given another thought to this nephew who had perhaps been the initiator thanks to whom I had received her first kiss. And for the whole plane of Albertine's motives which I had constructed, I must now substitute another, or rather superimpose it, for perhaps it did not exclude the other, a preference for women did not prevent her from marrying. "And anyhow there is no need to seek out all these explanations," Andrée went on. "Heaven only knows how I loved Albertine and what a good creature she was, but really, after she had typhoid (a year before you first met us all) she was an absolute madcap. All of a sudden she would be disgusted with what she was doing, all her plans would have to be changed at once, and she herself probably could not tell you why. You remember the year when you first came to Balbec, the year when you met us all? One fine day she made some one send her a telegram calling her back to Paris, she had barely time to pack her trunks. But there was absolutely no reason for her to go. All the excuses that she made were false. Paris was impossible for her at the moment. We were all of us still at Balbec. The golf club wasn't closed, indeed the heats for the cup which she was so keen on winning weren't finished. She was certain to win it. It only meant staying on for another week. Well, off she went. I have often spoken to her about it since. She said herself that she didn't know why she had left, that she felt home-sick (the home being Paris, you can imagine how likely that was), that she didn't feel happy at Balbec, that she thought that there were people there who were laughing at her." And I told myself that there was this amount of truth in what Andrée said that, if differences between minds account for the different impressions produced upon one person and another by the same work, for differences of feeling, for the impossibility of captivating a person to whom we do not appeal, there are also the differences between characters, the peculiarities of a single character, which are also motives for action. Then I ceased to think about this explanation and said to myself how difficult it is to know the truth in this world. I had indeed observed Albertine's anxiety to go to Mme. Verdurin's and her concealment of it and I had not been mistaken. But then even if we do manage to grasp one fact like this, there are others which we perceive only in their outward appearance, for the reverse of the tapestry, the real side of the action, of the intrigue,— as well as that of the intellect, of the heart — is hidden from us and we see pass before us only flat silhouettes of which we say to ourselves: it is this, it is that; it is on her account,

or on some one's else. The revelation of the fact that Mlle. Vinteuil was expected had seemed to me an explanation all the more logical seeing that Albertine had anticipated it by mentioning her to me. And subsequently had she not refused to swear to me that Mlle. Vinteuil's presence gave her no pleasure? And here, with regard to this young man, I remembered a point which I had forgotten; a little time earlier, while Albertine was staying with me, I had met him, and he had been — in contradiction of his attitude at Balbec — extremely friendly, even affectionate with me, had begged me to allow him to call upon me, which I had declined to do for a number of reasons. And now I realised that it was simply because, knowing that Albertine was staying in the house, he had wished to be on good terms with me so as to have every facility for seeing her and for carrying her off from me, and I concluded that he was a scoundrel. Some time later, when I attended the first performances of this young man's works, no doubt I continued to think that if he had been so anxious to call upon me, it was for Albertine's sake, but, while I felt this to be reprehensible, I remembered that in the past if I had gone down to Doncieres, to see Saint-Loup, it was really because I was in love with Mme. de Guermantes. It is true that the situation was not identical, since Saint-Loup had not been in love with Mme. de Guermantes, with the result that there was in my affection for him a trace of duplicity perhaps, but no treason. But I reflected afterwards that this affection which we feel for the person who controls the object of our desire, we feel equally if the person controls that object while loving it himself. No doubt, we have then to struggle against a friendship which will lead us straight to treason. And I think that this is what I have always done. But in the case of those who have not the strength to struggle, we cannot say that in them the friendship that they affect for the controller is a mere ruse; they feel it sincerely and for that reason display it with an ardour which, once the betrayal is complete, means that the betrayed husband or lover is able to say with a stupefied indignation: "If you had heard the protestations of affection that the wretch showered on me! That a person should come to rob a man of his treasure, that I can understand. But that he should feel the diabolical need; to assure him first of all of his friendship, is a degree of ignominy and perversity which it is impossible to imagine." Now, there is no such perversity in the action, nor even an absolutely clear falsehood. The affection of this sort which Albertine's pseudo-fiancé had manifested for me that day had yet another excuse, being more complex than a simple consequence of his love for Albertine. It had been for a short time only that he had known himself, confessed himself, been anxious to be proclaimed an intellectual. For

the first time values other than sporting or amatory existed for him. The fact that I had been regarded with esteem by Elstir, by Bergotte, that Albertine had perhaps told him of the way in which I criticised writers which led her to imagine that I might myself be able to write, had the result that all of a sudden I had become to him (to the new man who he at last realised himself to be) an interesting person with whom he would like to be associated, to whom he would like to confide his plans, whom he would ask perhaps for an introduction to Elstir. With the result that he was sincere when he asked if he might call upon me, expressing a regard for me to which intellectual reasons as well as the thought of Albertine imparted sincerity. No doubt it was not *for that* that he was so anxious to come and see me and would have sacrificed everything else with that object. But of this last reason which did little more than raise to a sort of impassioned paroxysm the two other reasons, he was perhaps unaware himself, and the other two existed really, as might have existed really in Albertine when she had been anxious to go, on the afternoon of the rehearsal, to Mme. Verdurin's, the perfectly respectable pleasure that she would feel in meeting again friends of her childhood, who in her eyes were no more vicious than she was in theirs, in talking to them, in shewing them, by the mere fact of her presence at the Verdurins', that the poor little girl whom they had known was now invited to a distinguished house, the pleasure also that she might perhaps have felt in listening to Vinteuil's music. If all this was true, the blush that had risen to Albertine's cheeks when I mentioned Mlle. Vinteuil was due to what I had done with regard to that afternoon party which she had tried to keep secret from me, because of that proposal of marriage of which I was not to know. Albertine's refusal to swear to me that she would not have felt any pleasure in meeting Mlle. Vinteuil again at that party had at the moment intensified my torment, strengthened my suspicions, but proved to me in retrospect that she had been determined to be sincere, and even over an innocent matter, perhaps simply because it was an innocent matter. There remained what Andrée had told me about her relations with Albertine. Perhaps, however, even without going so far as to believe that Andrée had invented the story solely in order that I might not feel happy and might not feel myself superior to her, I might still suppose that she had slightly exaggerated her account of what she used to do with Albertine, and that Albertine, by a mental restriction, diminished slightly also what she had done with Andrée, making use systematically of certain definitions which I had stupidly formulated upon the subject, finding that her relations with Andrée did not enter into the field of what she was obliged to confess to me and that she

could deny them without lying. But why should I believe that it was she rather than Andrée who was lying? Truth and life are very arduous, and there remained to me from them, without my really knowing them, an impression in which sorrow was perhaps actually dominated by exhaustion.

As for the third occasion on which I remember that I was conscious of approaching an absolute indifference with regard to Albertine (and on this third occasion I felt that I had entirely arrived at it), it was one day, at Venice, a long time after Andrée's last visit.

Chapter 3 — Venice

My mother had brought me for a few weeks to Venice and — as there may be beauty in the most precious as well as in the humblest things — I was receiving there impressions analogous to those which I had felt so often in the past at Combray, but transposed into a wholly different and far richer key. When at ten o'clock in the morning my shutters were thrown open, I saw ablaze in the sunlight, instead of the black marble into which the slates of Saint-Hilaire used to turn, the Golden Angel on the Campanile of San Marco. In its dazzling glitter, which made it almost impossible to fix it in space, it promised me with its outstretched arms, for the moment, half an hour later, when I was to appear on the Piazzetta, a joy more certain than any that it could ever in the past have been bidden to announce to men of good will. I could see nothing but itself, so long as I remained in bed, but as the whole world is merely a vast sun-dial, a single lighted segment of which enables us to tell what o'clock it is, on the very first morning I was reminded of the shops in the Place de l'Eglise at Combray, which, on Sunday mornings, were always on the point of shutting when I arrived for mass, while the straw in the market place smelt strongly in the already hot sunlight. But on the second morning, what I saw, when I awoke, what made me get out of bed (because they had taken the place in my consciousness and in my desire of my memories of Combray), were the impressions of my first morning stroll in Venice, Venice whose daily life was no less real than that of Combray, where as at Combray on Sunday mornings one had the delight of emerging upon a festive street, but where that street was paved with water of a sapphire blue, refreshed by little ripples of cooler air, and of so solid a colour that my tired eyes might, in quest of relaxation and without fear of its giving way, rest their gaze upon it. Like, at Combray, the worthy folk of the Rue de l'Oiseau, so in this strange town also, the inhabitants did indeed emerge from houses drawn up in line, side by side, along the principal street, but the part played there by houses that cast a patch of shade before them was in Venice entrusted to palaces of porphyry and jasper, over the arched door of which the head of a bearded god (projecting from its alignment, like the knocker on a door at Combray) had the

effect of darkening with its shadow, not the brownness of the soil but the splendid blue of the water. On the *piazza*, the shadow that would have been cast at Combray by the linen-draper's awning and the barber's pole, turned into the tiny blue flowers scattered at its feet upon the desert of sun-scorched tiles by the silhouette of a Renaissance façade, which is not to say that, when the sun was hot, we were not obliged, in Venice as at Combray, to pull down the blinds between ourselves and the Canal, but they hung behind the quatrefoils and foliage of gothic windows. Of this sort was the window in our hotel behind the pillars of which my mother sat waiting for me, gazing at the Canal with a patience which she would not have displayed in the old days at Combray, at that time when, reposing in myself hopes which had never been realised, she was unwilling to let me see how much she loved me. Nowadays she was well aware that an apparent coldness on her part would alter nothing, and the affection that she lavished upon me was like those forbidden foods which are no longer withheld from invalids, when it is certain that they are past recovery. To be sure, the humble details which gave an individuality to the window of my aunt Léonie's bedroom, seen from the Rue de l'Oiseau, the asymmetry of its position not midway between the windows on either side of it, the exceptional height of its wooden ledge, the slanting bar which kept the shutters closed, the two curtains of glossy blue satin, divided and kept apart by their rod, the equivalent of all these things existed in this hotel in Venice where I could hear also those words, so distinctive, so eloquent, which enable us to recognise at a distance the house to which we are going home to luncheon, and afterwards remain in our memory as testimony that, during a certain period of time, that house was ours; but the task of uttering them had, in Venice, devolved not, as at Combray, and indeed, to a certain extent, everywhere, upon the simplest, that is to say the least beautiful things, but upon the almost oriental arch of a façade which is reproduced among the casts in every museum as one of the supreme achievements of the domestic architecture of the middle ages; from a long way away and when I had barely passed San Giorgio Maggiore, I caught sight of this arched window which had already seen me, and the spring of its broken curves added to its smile of welcome the distinction of a loftier, scarcely comprehensible gaze. And since, behind those pillars of differently coloured marble, Mamma was sitting reading while she waited for me to return, her face shrouded in a tulle veil as agonising in its whiteness as her hair to myself who felt that my mother, wiping away her tears, had pinned it to her straw hat, partly with the idea of appearing 'dressed' in the eyes of the hotel staff, but principally

so as to appear to me less ‘in mourning,’ less sad, almost consoled for the death of my grandmother; since, not having recognised me at first, as soon as I called to her from the gondola, she sent out to me, from the bottom of her heart, a love which stopped only where there was no longer any material substance to support it on the surface of her impassioned gaze which she brought as close to me as possible, which she tried to thrust forward to the advanced post of her lips, in a smile which seemed to be kissing me, in the framework and beneath the canopy of the more discreet smile of the arched window illuminated by the midday sun; for these reasons, that window has assumed in my memory the precious quality of things that have had, simultaneously, side by side with ourselves, their part in a certain hour that struck, the same for us and for them; and however full of admirable tracery its mullions may be, that illustrious window retains in my sight the intimate aspect of a man of genius with whom we have spent a month in some holiday resort, where he has acquired a friendly regard for us; and if, ever since then, whenever I see a cast of that window in a museum, I feel the tears starting to my eyes, it is simply because the window says to me the thing that touches me more than anything else in the world: “I remember your mother so well.”

And as I went indoors to join my mother who had left the window, I did indeed recapture, coming from the warm air outside, that feeling of coolness that I had known long ago at Combray when I went upstairs to my room, but at Venice it was a breeze from the sea that kept the air cool, and no longer upon a little wooden staircase with narrow steps, but upon the noble surfaces of blocks of marble, splashed at every moment by a shaft of greenish sunlight, which to the valuable instruction in the art of Chardin, acquired long ago, added a lesson in that of Veronese. And since at Venice it is to works of art, to things of priceless beauty, that the task is entrusted of giving us our impressions of everyday life, we may sketch the character of this city, using the pretext that the Venice of certain painters is coldly aesthetic in its most celebrated parts, by representing only (let us make an exception of the superb studies of Maxime Dethomas) its poverty-stricken aspects, in the quarters where everything that creates its splendour is concealed, and to make Venice more intimate and more genuine give it a resemblance to Aubervilliers. It has been the mistake of some very great artists, that, by a quite natural reaction from the artificial Venice of bad painters, they have attached themselves exclusively to the Venice which they have found more realistic, to some humble *campo*, some tiny deserted *rio*. It was this Venice that I used often to explore in the afternoon, when I did not go out

with my mother. The fact was that it was easier to find there women of the industrial class, match-makers, pearl-stringers, workers in glass or lace, working women in black shawls with long fringes. My gondola followed the course of the small canals; like the mysterious hand of a Genie leading me through the maze of this oriental city, they seemed, as I advanced, to be carving a road for me through the heart of a crowded quarter which they clove asunder, barely dividing with a slender fissure, arbitrarily carved, the tall houses with their tiny Moorish windows; and, as though the magic guide had been holding a candle in his hand and were lighting the way for me, they kept casting ahead of them a ray of sunlight for which they cleared a path.

One felt that between the mean dwellings which the canal had just parted and which otherwise would have formed a compact whole, no open space had been reserved. With the result that the belfry of the church, or the garden-trellis rose sheer above the *rio* as in a flooded city. But with churches as with gardens, thanks to the same transposition as in the Grand Canal, the sea formed so effective a way of communication, a substitute for street or alley, that on either side of the *canaletto* the churches rose from the water in this ancient, plebeian quarter, degraded into humble, much frequented mission chapels, bearing upon their surface the stamp of their necessity, of their use by crowds of simple folk, that the gardens crossed by the line of the canal allowed their astonished leaves or fruit to trail in the water and that on the doorstep of the house whose roughly hewn stone was still wrinkled as though it had only just been sawn, little boys surprised by the gondola and keeping their balance allowed their legs to dangle vertically, like sailors seated upon a swing-bridge the two halves of which have been swung apart, allowing the sea to pass between them.

Now and again there appeared a handsomer building that happened to be there, like a surprise in a box which we have just opened, a little ivory temple with its Corinthian columns and its allegorical statue on the pediment, somewhat out of place among the ordinary buildings in the midst of which it had survived, and the peristyle with which the canal provided it resembled a landing-stage for market gardeners.

The sun had barely begun to set when I went to fetch my mother from the Piazzetta. We returned up the Grand Canal in our gondola, we watched the double line of palaces between which we passed reflect the light and angle of the sun upon their rosy surfaces, and alter with them, seeming not so much private habitations and historic buildings as a chain of marble cliffs at the foot of which people go out in the evening in a boat to watch the sunset. In this way, the

mansions arranged along either bank of the canal made one think of objects of nature, but of a nature which seemed to have created its works with a human imagination. But at the same time (because of the character of the impressions, always urban, which Venice gives us almost in the open sea, upon those waves whose flow and ebb make themselves felt twice daily, and which alternately cover at high tide and uncover at low tide the splendid outside stairs of the palaces), as we should have done in Paris upon the boulevards, in the Champs-Elysées, in the Bois, in any wide thoroughfare that was a fashionable resort, in the powdery evening light, we passed the most beautifully dressed women, almost all foreigners, who, propped luxuriously upon the cushions of their floating vehicle, took their place in the procession, stopped before a palace in which there was a friend whom they wished to see, sent to inquire whether she was at home; and while, as they waited for the answer, they prepared to leave a card, as they would have done at the door of the Hôtel de Guermantes, they turned to their guide-book to find out the period, the style of the palace, not without being shaken, as though upon the crest of a blue wave, by the thrust of the flashing, prancing water, which took alarm on finding itself pent between the dancing gondola and the slapping marble. And thus any excursion, even when it was only to pay calls or to go shopping, was threefold and unique in this Venice where the simplest social coming and going assumed at the same time the form and the charm of a visit to a museum and a trip on the sea.

Several of the palaces on the Grand Canal had been converted into hotels, and, feeling the need of a change, or wishing to be hospitable to Mme. Sazerat whom we had encountered — the unexpected and inopportune acquaintance whom we invariably meet when we travel abroad — and whom Mamma had invited to dine with us, we decided one evening to try an hotel which was not our own, and in which we had been told that the food was better. While my mother was paying the gondolier and taking Mme. Sazerat to the room which she had engaged, I slipped away to inspect the great hall of the restaurant with its fine marble pillars and walls and ceiling that were once entirely covered with frescoes, recently and badly restored. Two waiters were conversing in an Italian which I translate:

“Are the old people going to dine in their room? They never let us know. It’s the devil, I never know whether I am to reserve their table (*non so se bisogna conservargli la loro tavola*). And then, suppose they come down and find their table taken! I don’t understand how they can take in*forestieri* like that in such a smart hotel. They’re not our style.”

Notwithstanding his contempt, the waiter was anxious to know what action he was to take with regard to the table, and was going to get the lift-boy sent upstairs to inquire, when, before he had had time to do so, he received his answer: he had just caught sight of the old lady who was entering the room. I had no difficulty, despite the air of melancholy and weariness that comes with the burden of years, and despite a sort of eczema, a red leprosy that covered her face, in recognising beneath her bonnet, in her black jacket, made by W—, but to the untutored eye exactly like that of an old charwoman, the Marquise de Villeparisis. As luck would have it, the spot upon which I was standing, engaged in studying the remains of a fresco, between two of the beautiful marble panels, was directly behind the table at which Mme. de Villeparisis had just sat down.

"Then M. de Villeparisis won't be long. They've been here a month now, and it's only once that they didn't have a meal together," said the waiter.

I was asking myself who the relative could be with whom she was travelling, and who was named M. de Villeparisis, when I saw, a few | moments later, advance towards the table and sit down by her side, her j old lover, M. de Norpois.

His great age had weakened the resonance of his voice, but had in | compensation given to his language, formerly so reserved, a positive in — j temperance. The cause of this was to be sought, perhaps, in certain ambitions for the realisation of which little time, he felt, remained to him, and which filled him all the more with vehemence and ardour; perhaps in the fact that, having been discarded from a world of politics to which he longed to return, he imagined, in the simplicity of his desire, that he could turn out of office, by the pungent criticisms which he launched at them, the men whose places he was anxious to fill. Thus we see politicians convinced that the Cabinet of which they are not members cannot hold out for three days. It would, however, be an exaggeration to suppose that M. de Norpois had entirely lost the traditions of diplomatic speech. Whenever 'important matters' were involved, he at once became, as we shall see, the man whom we remember in the past, but at all other times he would inveigh against this man and that with the senile violence of certain octogenarians which hurls them into the arms of women to whom they are no longer capable of doing any serious damage.

Mme. de Villeparisis preserved, for some minutes, the silence of an old woman who in the exhaustion of age finds it difficult to rise from memories of the past to consideration of the present. Then, turning to one of those, eminently practical questions that indicate the survival of a mutual af — f fection:

“Did you call at Salviati’s?”

“Yes.”

“Will they send it to-morrow?”

“I brought the bowl back myself. You shall see it after dinner. Let us see what there is to eat.”

“Did you send instructions about my Suez shares?”

“No; at the present moment the market is entirely taken up with oil shares. But there is no hurry, they are still fetching an excellent price. Here is the bill of fare. First of all, there are red mullets. Shall we try them?”

“For me, yes, but you are not allowed them. Ask for a risotto instead. But they don’t know how to cook it.”

“That doesn’t matter. Waiter, some mullets for Madame and a risotto for me.”

A fresh and prolonged silence.

“Why, I brought you the papers, the *Corrière della Sera*, the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, and all the rest of them. Do you know, there is a great deal of talk about a diplomatic change, the first scapegoat in which is to be Paléologue, who is notoriously inadequate in Serbia. He will perhaps be succeeded by Lozé, and there will be a vacancy at Constantinople. But,” M. de Norpois hastened to add in a bitter tone, “for an Embassy of such scope, in a capital where it is obvious that Great Britain must always, whatever may happen, occupy the chief place at the council-table, it would be prudent to turn to men of experience better armed to resist the ambushes of the enemies of our British ally than are diplomats of the modern school who would walk blindfold into the trap.” The angry volubility with which M. de Norpois uttered the last words was due principally to the fact that the newspapers, instead of suggesting his name, as he had requested them to do, named as a ‘hot favourite’ a young official of — the Foreign Ministry. “Heaven knows that the men of years and experience may well hesitate, as a result of all manner of tortuous manoeuvres, to put themselves forward in the place of more or less incapable recruits. I have known many of these self-styled diplomats of the empirical method who centred all their hopes in a soap bubble which it did not take me long to burst. There can be no question about it, if the Government is so lacking in wisdom as to entrust the reins of state to turbulent hands, at the call of duty an old conscript will always answer ‘Present!’ But who knows” (and here M. de Norpois appeared to know perfectly well to whom he was referring) “whether it would not be the same on the day when they came in search of some veteran full of wisdom and skill. To my mind, for everyone has a

right to his own opinion, the post at Constantinople should not be accepted until we have settled our existing difficulties with Germany. We owe no man anything, and it is intolerable that every six months they should come and demand from us, by fraudulent machinations, and extort by force and fear, the payment of some debt or other, always hastily offered by a venal press. This must cease, and naturally a man of high distinction who has proved his merit, a man who would have, if I may say so, the Emperor's ear, would wield greater authority than any ordinary person in bringing the conflict to an end."

A gentleman who was finishing his dinner bowed to M. de Norpois.

"Why, there is Prince Foggi," said the Marquis.

"Ah, I'm not sure that I know whom you mean," muttered Mme. de Villeparisis.

"Why, of course you do. It is Prince Odone. The brother-in-law of your cousin Doudeauville. You cannot have forgotten that I went shooting with him at Bonnétable?"

"Ah! Odone, that is the one who went in for painting?"

"Not at all, he's the one who married the Grand Duke N—'s sister."

M. de Norpois uttered these remarks in the cross tone of a schoolmaster who is dissatisfied with his pupil, and stared fixedly at Mme. de Villeparisis out of his blue eyes.

When the Prince had drunk his coffee and was leaving his table, M. de Norpois rose, hastened towards him and with a majestic wave of his arm, himself retiring into the background, presented him to Mme. de Villeparisis. And during the next few minutes while the Prince was standing beside their table, M. de Norpois never ceased for an instant to keep his azure pupils trained on Mme. de Villeparisis, from the weakness or severity of an old lover, principally from fear of her making one of those mistakes in Italian which he had relished but which he dreaded. Whenever she said anything to the Prince that was not quite accurate he corrected her mistake and stared into the eyes of the abashed and docile Marquise with the steady intensity of a hypnotist.

A waiter came to tell me that my mother was waiting for me, I went to her and made my apologies to Mme. Sazerat, saying that I had been interested to see Mme. de Villeparisis. At the sound of this name, Mme. Sazerat turned pale and seemed about to faint. Controlling herself with an effort: "Mme. de Villeparisis, who was Mlle. de Bouillon?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"Couldn't I just get a glimpse of her for a moment? It has been the desire of

my life."

"Then there is no time to lose, Madame, for she will soon have finished her dinner. But how do you come to take such an interest in her?"

"Because Mme. de Villeparisis was, before her second marriage, the Duchesse d'Havre, beautiful as an angel, wicked as a demon, who drove my father out of his senses, ruined him and then forsook him immediately. Well, she may have behaved to him like any girl out of the gutter, she may have been the cause of our having to live, my family and myself, in a humble position at Combray; now that my father is dead, my consolation is to think that he was in love with the most beautiful woman of his generation, and as I have never set eyes on her, it will, after all, be a pleasure..."

I escorted Mme. Sazerat, trembling with emotion, to the restaurant and pointed out Mme. de Villeparisis.

But, like a blind person who turns his face in the wrong direction, so Mme. Sazerat did not bring her gaze to rest upon the table at which Mme. de Villeparisis was dining, but, looking towards another part of the room, said:

"But she must have gone, I don't see her in the place you're pointing to."

And she continued to gaze round the room, in quest of the loathed, adored vision that had haunted her imagination for so long.

"Yes, there she is, at the second table."

"Then we can't be counting from the same point. At what I call the second table there are only two people, an old gentleman and a little hunchbacked, red-faced woman, quite hideous."

"That is she!"

In the meantime, Mme. de Villeparisis having asked M. de Norpois to make Prince Foggi sit down, a friendly conversation followed among the three of them; they discussed politics, the Prince declared that he was not interested in the fate of the Cabinet and would spend another week at least at Venice. He hoped that in the interval all risk of a ministerial crisis would have been obviated. Prince Foggi supposed for a moment that these political topics did not interest M. de Norpois, for the latter who until then had been expressing himself with such vehemence had become suddenly absorbed in an almost angelic silence which he seemed capable of breaking, should his voice return, only by singing some innocent melody by Mendelssohn or César Franck. The Prince supposed also that this silence was due to the reserve of a Frenchman who naturally would not wish to discuss Italian affairs in the presence of an Italian. Now in this, the Prince was completely mistaken. Silence, an air of indifference

were, in M. de Norpois, not a sign of reserve but the regular prelude to an intervention in important affairs. The Marquis had his eye upon nothing less (as we have seen) than Constantinople, with a preliminary settlement of the German question, with a view to which he hoped to force the hand of the Rome Cabinet. He considered, in fact, that an action on his part of international range might be the worthy crown of his career, perhaps even an avenue to fresh honours, to difficult tasks to which he had not relinquished his pretensions. For old age makes us incapable of performing our duties but not, at first, of desiring them. It is only in a third period that those who live to a very great age have relinquished desire, as they have had already to forego action. They no longer present themselves as candidates at futile elections which they tried so often to win, the Presidential election, for instance. They content themselves with taking the air, eating, reading the newspapers, they have outlived themselves.

The Prince, to put the Marquis at his ease and to shew him that he regarded him as a compatriot, began to speak of the possible successors to the Prime Minister then in office. A successor who would have a difficult task before him. When Prince Foggi had mentioned more than twenty names of politicians who seemed to him suitable for office, names to which the ex-ambassador listened with his eyelids drooping over his blue eyes and without moving a muscle, M. de Norpois broke his silence at length to utter those words which were for a score of years to supply the Chanceries with food for conversation, and afterwards, when they had been forgotten, would be exhumed by some personage signing himself ‘One Who Knows’ or ‘Testis’ or ‘Machiavelli’ in a newspaper in which the very oblivion into which they had fallen entitled them to create a fresh sensation. As I say, Prince Foggi had mentioned more than twenty names to the diplomat who remained as motionless and mute as though he were stone deaf when M. de Norpois raised his head slightly, and, in the form that had been assumed by those of his diplomatic interventions which had had the most far-reaching consequences, albeit this time with greater audacity and less brevity, asked shrewdly: “And has no one mentioned the name of Signor Giolitti?” At these words the scales fell from Prince Foggi’s eyes; he could hear a celestial murmur. Then at once M. de Norpois began to speak about one thing and another, no longer afraid to make a sound, as, when the last note of a sublime aria by Bach has been played, the audience are no longer afraid to talk aloud, to call for their hats and coats in the cloakroom. He made the difference even more marked by begging the Prince to pay his most humble respects to Their Majesties the King and Queen when next he should see them, a phrase of

dismissal which corresponds to the shout for a coachman at the end of a concert: “Auguste, from the Rue de Belloy.” We cannot say what exactly were Prince Foggi’s impressions. He must certainly have been delighted to have heard the gem: “And Signor Giolitti, has no one mentioned his name?” For M. de Norpois, in whom age had destroyed or deranged his most outstanding qualities, had on the other hand, as he grew older, perfected his bravura, as certain aged musicians, who in all other respects have declined, acquire and retain until the end, in the matter of chamber-music, a perfect virtuosity which they did not formerly possess.

However that may be, Prince Foggi, who had intended to spend a fortnight in Venice returned to Rome that very night and was received a few days later in audience by the King in connexion with the property which, as we may perhaps have mentioned already, the Prince owned in Sicily. The Cabinet hung on for longer than could have been expected. When it fell, the King consulted various statesmen as to the most suitable head of the new Cabinet. Then he sent for Signor Giolitti who accepted. Three months later a newspaper reported Prince Foggi’s meeting with M. de Norpois. The conversation was reported as we have given it here, with the difference that, instead of: “M. de Norpois asked shrewdly,” one read: “M. de Norpois said with that shrewd and charming smile which is so characteristic of him.” M. de Norpois considered that ‘shrewdly’ had in itself sufficient explosive force for a diplomat and that this addition was, to say the least, untimely. He had even asked the Quai d’Orsay to issue an official contradiction, but the Quai d’Orsay did not know which way to turn. As a matter of fact, ever since the conversation had been made public, M. Barrère had been telegraphing several times hourly to Paris, pointing out that there was already an accredited Ambassador at the Quirinal and describing the indignation with which the incident had been received throughout the whole of Europe. This indignation was nonexistent, but the other Ambassadors were too polite to contradict M. Barrère when he assured them that there could be no question about everybody’s being furious. M. Barrère, listening only to his own thoughts, mistook this courteous silence for assent. Immediately he telegraphed to Paris: “I have just had an hour’s conversation with the Marchese Visconti-Venosta,” and so forth. His secretaries were worn to skin and bone. M. de Norpois, however, could count upon the devotion of a French newspaper of very long standing, which indeed in 1870, when he was French Minister in a German capital, had rendered him an important service. This paper (especially its leading article, which was unsigned) was admirably written. But the paper became a thousand times more

interesting when this leading article (styled ‘premier-Paris’ in those far off days and now, no one knows why, ‘editorial’) was on the contrary badly expressed, with endless repetitions of words. Everyone felt then, with emotion, that the article had been ‘inspired.’ Perhaps by M. de Norpois, perhaps by some other leading man of the hour. To give an anticipatory idea of the Italian incident, let us shew how M. de Norpois made use of this paper in 1870, to no purpose, it may be thought, since war broke out nevertheless — most efficaciously, according to M. de Norpois, whose axiom was that we ought first and foremost to prepare public opinion. His articles, every word in which was weighed, resembled those optimistic bulletins which are at once followed by the death of the patient. For instance, on the eve of the declaration of war, in 1870, when mobilisation was almost complete, M. de Norpois (remaining, of course, in the background) had felt it to be his duty to send to this famous newspaper the following ‘editorial’:

“The opinion seems to prevail in authoritative circles, that since the afternoon hours of yesterday, the situation, without of course being of an alarming nature, might well be envisaged as serious and even, from certain angles, as susceptible of being regarded as critical. M. le Marquis de Norpois would appear to have held several conversations with the Prussian Minister, in order to examine in a firm and conciliatory spirit, and in a wholly concrete fashion, the different causes of friction that, if we may say so, exist. Unfortunately, we have not yet heard, at the hour of going to press, that Their Excellencies have been able to agree upon a formula that may serve as base for a diplomatic instrument.”.

Latest intelligence: “We have learned with satisfaction in well-informed circles that a slight slackening of tension appears to have occurred in Franco-Prussian relations. We may attach a specially distinct importance to the fact that M. de Norpois is reported to have met the British Minister ‘unter den Linden’ and to have conversed with him for fully twenty minutes. This report is regarded as highly satisfactory.” (There was added, in brackets, after the word ‘satisfactory’ its German equivalent ‘*befriedigend*.’) And on the following day one read in the editorial: “It would appear that, notwithstanding all the dexterity of M. de Norpois, to whom everyone must hasten to render homage for the skill and energy with which he has managed to defend the inalienable rights of France, a rupture is now, so to speak, virtually inevitable.”

The newspaper could not refrain from following an editorial couched in this vein with a selection of comments, furnished of course by M. de Norpois. The

reader may perhaps have observed in these last pages that the ‘conditional mood’ was one of the Ambassador’s favourite grammatical forms, in the literature of diplomacy. (“One would attach a special importance” for “it appears that people attach a special importance.”) But the ‘present indicative’ employed not in its regular sense but in that of the old ‘optative’ was no less dear to M. de Norpois. The comments that followed the editorial were as follows:

“Never have the public shewn themselves so admirably calm” (M. de Norpois would have liked to believe that this was true but feared that it was precisely the opposite of the truth). “They are weary of fruitless agitation and have learned with satisfaction that His Majesty’s Government would assume their responsibilities according to the eventualities that might occur. The public ask” (optative) “nothing more. To their splendid coolness, which is in itself a token of victory, we shall add a piece of intelligence amply qualified to reassure public opinion, were there any need of that. We are, indeed, assured that M. de Norpois who, for reasons of health, was ordered long ago to return to Paris for medical treatment, would appear to have left Berlin where he considered that his presence no longer served any purpose.”

Latest intelligence: “His Majesty the Emperor left Compiègne this morning for Paris in order to confer with the Marquis de Norpois, the Minister for War and Marshal Bazaine upon whom public opinion relies with absolute confidence. H. M. the Emperor has cancelled the banquet which he was about to give for his sister-in-law the Duchess of Alba. This action created everywhere, as soon as it became known, a particularly favourable impression. The Emperor has held a review of his troops whose enthusiasm is indescribable. Several Corps, by virtue of a mobilisation order issued immediately upon the Sovereign’s arrival in Paris, are, in any contingency, ready to move in the direction of the Rhine.”

Sometimes at dusk as I returned to the hotel I felt that the Albertine of long ago invisible to my eyes was nevertheless enclosed within me as in the dungeons of an internal Venice, the solid walls of which some incident occasionally slid apart so as to give me a glimpse of that past.

Thus for instance one evening a letter from my stockbroker reopened for me for an instant the gates of the prison in which Albertine abode within me alive, but so remote, so profoundly buried that she remained inaccessible to me. Since her death I had ceased to take any interest in the speculations that I had made in order to have more money for her. But time had passed; the wisest judgments of the previous generation had been proved unwise by this generation, as had occurred in the past to M. Thiers who had said that railways could never prove

successful. The stocks of which M. de Norpois had said to us: “even if your income from them is nothing very great, you may be certain of never losing any of your capital,” were, more often than not, those which had declined most in value. Calls had been made upon me for considerable sums and in a rash moment I decided to sell out everything and found that I now possessed barely a fifth of the fortune that I had had when Albertine was alive. This became known at Combray among the survivors of our family circle and their friends, and, as they knew that I went about with the Marquis de Saint-Loup and the Guermantes family, they said to themselves: “Pride goes before a fall!” They would have been greatly astonished to learn that it was for a girl of Albertine’s humble position that I had made these speculations. Besides, in that Combray world in which everyone is classified for ever according to the income that he is known to enjoy, as in an Indian caste, it would have been impossible for anyone to form any idea of the great freedom that prevailed in the world of the Guermantes where people attached no importance to wealth, and where poverty was regarded as being as disagreeable, but no more degrading, as having no more effect on a person’s social position than would a stomachache. Doubtless they imagined, on the contrary, at Combray that Saint-Loup and M. de Guermantes must be ruined aristocrats, whose estates were mortgaged, to whom I had been lending money, whereas if I had been ruined they would have been the first to offer in all sincerity to come to my assistance. As for my comparative penury, it was all the more awkward at the moment inasmuch as my Venetian interests had been concentrated for some little time past on a rosy-cheeked young glass-vendor who offered to the delighted eye a whole range of orange tones and filled me with such a longing to see her again daily that, feeling that my mother and I would soon be leaving Venice, I had made up my mind that I would try to create some sort of position for her in Paris which would save me the distress of parting from her. The beauty of her seventeen summers was so noble, so radiant, that it was like acquiring a genuine Titian before leaving the place. And would the scant remains of my fortune be sufficient temptation to her to make her leave her native land and come to live in Paris for my sole convenience? But as I came to the end of the stockbroker’s letter, a passage in which he said: “I shall look after your credits” reminded me of a scarcely less hypocritically professional expression which the bath-attendant at Balbec had used in speaking to Aimé of Albertine. “It was I that looked after her,” she had said, and these words which had never again entered my mind acted like an ‘Open, sesame!’ upon the hinges of the prison door. But a moment later the door closed once more upon the

immured victim — whom I was not to blame for not wishing to join, since I was no longer able to see her, to call her to mind, and since other people exist for us only to the extent of the idea that we retain of them — who had for an instant seemed to me so touching because of my desertion of her, albeit she was unaware of it, that I had for the duration of a lightning-flash thought with longing of the time, already remote, when I used to suffer night and day from the companionship of her memory. Another time at San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, an eagle accompanying one of the Apostles and conventionalised in the same manner revived the memory and almost the suffering caused by the two rings the similarity of which Françoise had revealed to me, and as to which I had never learned who had given them to Albertine. Finally, one evening, an incident occurred of such a nature that it seemed as though my love must revive. No sooner had our gondola stopped at the hotel steps than the porter handed me a telegram which the messenger had already brought three times to the hotel, for owing to the inaccurate rendering of the recipient's name (which I recognised nevertheless, through the corruptions introduced by Italian clerks, as my own) the post-office required a signed receipt certifying that the telegram was addressed to myself. I opened it as soon as I was in my own room, and, as I cast my eye over the sheet covered with inaccurately transmitted words, managed nevertheless to make out: "My dear, you think me dead, forgive me, I am quite alive, should like to see you, talk about marriage, when do you return? Love. Albertine." Then there occurred in me in inverse order a process parallel to that which had occurred in the case of my grandmother: when I had learned the fact of my grandmother's death, I had not at first felt any grief. And I had been really grieved by her death only when spontaneous memories had made her seem to me to be once again alive. Now that Albertine was no longer alive for me in my mind, the news that she was alive did not cause me the joy that I might have expected. Albertine had been nothing more to me than a bundle of thoughts, she had survived her bodily death so long as those thoughts were alive in me; on the other hand, now that those thoughts were dead, Albertine did not in any way revive for me, in her bodily form. And when I realised that I felt no joy at the thought of her being alive, that I no longer loved her, I ought to have been more astounded than a person who, looking at his reflexion in the glass, after months of travel, or of sickness, discovers that he has white hair and a different face, that of a middle-aged or an old man. This appalls us because its message is: "the man that I was, the fair young man no longer exists, I am another person." And yet, was not the impression that I now felt the proof of as profound a change, as total

a death of my former self and of the no less complete substitution of a new self for that former self, as is proved by the sight of a wrinkled face capped with a snowy poll instead of the face of long ago? But we are no more disturbed by the fact of our having become another person, after a lapse of years and in the natural order of events, than we are disturbed at any given moment by the fact of our being, one after another, the incompatible persons, crafty, sensitive, refined, coarse, disinterested, ambitious, which we are, in turn, every day of our life. And the reason why this does not disturb us is the same, namely that the self which has been eclipsed — momentarily in this latter case and when it is a question of character, permanently in the former case and when it is a matter of passions — is not present to deplore the other, the other which is for the moment, or for all time, our whole self; the coarse self laughs at his own coarseness, for he is a coarse person, and the forgetful man does not worry about his loss of memory, simply because he has forgotten.

I should have been incapable of resuscitating Albertine because I was incapable of resuscitating myself, of resuscitating the self of those days. Life, according to its habit which is, by incessant, infinitesimal labours, to change the face of the world, had not said to me on the morrow of Albertine's death: "Become another person," but, by changes too imperceptible for me to be conscious even that I was changing, had altered almost every element in me, with the result that my mind was already accustomed to its new master — my new self — when it became aware that it had changed; it was upon this new master that it depended. My affection for Albertine, my jealousy depended, as we have seen, upon the irradiation by the association of ideas of certain pleasant or painful impressions, upon the memory of Mlle. Vinteuil at Montjouvain, upon the precious goodnight kisses that Albertine used to bestow on my throat. But in proportion as these impressions had grown fainter, the vast field of impressions which they coloured with a hue that was agonising or soothing began to resume its neutral tint. As soon as oblivion had taken hold of certain dominant points of suffering and pleasure, the resistance offered by my love was overcome, I was no longer in love with Albertine. I tried to recall her image to my mind. I had been right in my presentiment when, a couple of days after Albertine's flight, I was appalled by the discovery that I had been able to live for forty-eight hours without her. It had been the same thing when I wrote to Gilberte long ago saying to myself: "If this goes on — for a year or two, I shall no longer be in love with her." And if, when Swann asked me to come and see Gilberte again, this had seemed to me as embarrassing as greeting a dead woman, in Albertine's case

death — or what I had supposed to be death — had achieved the same result as a prolonged rupture in Gilberte's. Death acts only in the same way as absence. The monster at whose apparition my love had — trembled, oblivion, had indeed, as I had feared, ended by devouring that love. Not only did the news that she was alive fail to revive my love, not only did it allow me to realise how far I had already proceeded on the way towards indifference, it at once and so abruptly accelerated that process that I asked myself whether in the past the converse report, that of Albertine's death, had not in like manner, by completing the effect of her departure, exalted my love and delayed its decline. And now that the knowledge that she was alive and the possibility of our reunion made her all of a sudden so worthless in my sight, I asked myself whether Françoise's insinuations, our rupture itself, and even her death (imaginary, but supposed to be true) had not prolonged my love, so true is it that the efforts of third persons and even those of fate, in separating us from a woman, succeed only in attaching us to her. Now it was the contrary process that had occurred. Anyhow, I tried to recall her image and perhaps because I had only to raise my finger to have her once more to myself, the memory that came to me was that of a very stout, masculine girl from whose colourless face protruded already, like a sprouting seed, the profile of Mme. Bontemps. What she might or might not have done with Andrée or with other girls no longer interested me. I no longer suffered from the malady which I had so long thought to be incurable and really I might have foreseen this. Certainly, regret for a lost mistress, jealousy that survives her death are physical maladies fully as much as tuberculosis or leukaemia. And yet among physical maladies it is possible to distinguish those which are caused by a purely physical agency, and those which act upon the body only through the channel of the mind. If the part of the mind which serves as carrier is the memory,— that is to say if the cause is obliterated or remote — however agonising the pain, however profound the disturbance to the organism may appear to be, it is very seldom (the mind having a capacity for renewal or rather an incapacity for conservation which the tissues lack) that the prognosis is not favourable. At the end of a given period after which a man who has been attacked by cancer will be dead, it is very seldom that the grief of an inconsolable widower or father is not healed. Mine was healed. Was it for this girl whom I saw in my mind's eye so fleshy and who had certainly grown older as the girls whom she had loved had grown older, was it for her that I must renounce the dazzling girl who was my memory of yesterday, my hope for to-morrow (to whom I could give nothing, any more than to any other, if I married

Albertine), renounce that new Albertine not “such as hell had beheld her” but faithful, and “indeed a trifle shy”? It was she who was now what Albertine had been in the past: my love for Albertine had been but a transitory form of my devotion to girlhood. We think that we are in love with a girl, whereas we love in her, alas! only that dawn the glow of which is momentarily reflected on her face. The night passed. In the morning I gave the telegram back to the hotel porter explaining that it had been brought to me by mistake and that it was not addressed to me. He told me that now that it had been opened he might get into trouble, that it would be better if I kept it; I put it back in my pocket, but determined that I would act as though I had never received it. I had definitely ceased to love Albertine. So that this love after departing so widely from the course that I had anticipated, when I remembered my love for Gilberte, after obliging me to make so long and painful a detour, itself too ended, after furnishing an exception, by merging itself, just like my love for Gilberte, in the general rule of oblivion.

But then I reflected: I used to value Albertine more than myself; I no longer value her now because for a certain time past I have ceased to see her. But my desire not to be parted from myself by death, to rise again after my death, this desire was not like the desire never to be parted from Albertine, it still persisted. Was this due to the fact that I valued myself more highly than her, that when I was in Jove with her I loved myself even more? No, it was because, having ceased to see her, I had ceased to love her, whereas I had not ceased to love myself because my everyday attachments to myself had not been severed like my attachments to Albertine. But if the attachments to my body, to my self were severed also...? Obviously, it would be the same. Our love of life is only an old connexion of which we do not know how to rid ourself. Its strength lies in its permanence. But death which severs it will cure us of the desire for immortality.

After luncheon, when I was not going to roam about Venice by myself, I went up to my room to get ready to go out with my mother. In the abrupt angles of the walls I could read the restrictions imposed by the sea, the parsimony of the soil. And when I went downstairs to join Mamma who was waiting for me, at that hour when, at Combray, it was so pleasant to feel the sun quite close at hand, in the darkness guarded by closed shutters, here, from top to bottom of the marble staircase as to which one knew no better than in a Renaissance picture, whether it was built in a palace or upon a galley, the same coolness and the same feeling of the splendour of the scene outside were imparted, thanks to the awning which stirred outside the ever-open windows through which, upon an incessant

stream of air, the cool shade and the greenish sunlight moved as though over a liquid surface and suggested the weltering proximity, the glitter, the mirroring instability of the sea.

After dinner, I went out by myself, into the heart of the enchanted city where I found myself wandering in strange regions like a character in the*Arabian Nights*. It was very seldom that I did not, in the course of my wanderings, hit upon some strange and spacious piazza of which no guidebook, no tourist had ever told me.

I had plunged into a network of little alleys, *calli* dissecting in all directions by their ramifications the quarter of Venice isolated between a canal and the lagoon, as if it had crystallised along these innumerable, slender, capillary lines. All of a sudden, at the end of one of these little streets, it seemed as though a bubble had occurred in the crystallised matter. A vast and splendid *campo* of which I could certainly never, in this network of little streets, have guessed the importance, or even found room for it, spread out before me flanked with charming palaces silvery in the moonlight. It was one of those architectural wholes towards which, in any other town, the streets converge, lead you and point the way. Here it seemed to be deliberately concealed in a labyrinth of alleys, like those palaces in oriental tales to which mysterious agents convey by night a person who, taken home again before daybreak, can never again find his way back to the magic dwelling which he ends by supposing that he visited only in a dream.

On the following day I set out in quest of my beautiful nocturnal*piazza*, I followed *calli* which were exactly alike one another and refused to give me any information, except such as would lead me farther astray. Sometimes a vague landmark which I seemed to recognise led me to suppose that I was about to see appear, in its seclusion, solitude and silence, the beautiful exiled *piazza*. At that moment, some evil genie which had assumed the form of a fresh *calle* made me turn unconsciously from my course, and I found myself suddenly brought back to the Grand Canal. And as there is no great difference between the memory of a dream and the memory of a reality, I ended by asking myself whether it was not during my sleep that there had occurred in a dark patch of Venetian crystallisation that strange interruption which offered a vast *piazza* flanked by romantic palaces, to the meditative eye of the moon.

On the day before our departure, we decided to go as far afield as Padua where were to be found those Vices and Virtues of which Swann had given me reproductions; after walking in the glare of the sun across the garden of the

Arena, I entered the Giotto chapel the entire ceiling of which and the background of the frescoes are so blue that it seems as though the radiant day has crossed the threshold with the human visitor, and has come in for a moment to stow away in the shade and coolness its pure sky, of a slightly deeper blue now that it is rid of the sun's gilding, as in those brief spells of respite that interrupt the finest days, when, without our having noticed any cloud, the sun having turned his gaze elsewhere for a moment, the azure, more exquisite still, grows deeper. In this sky, upon the blue-washed stone, angels were flying with so intense a celestial, or at least an infantile ardour, that they seemed to be birds of a peculiar species that had really existed, that must have figured in the natural history of biblical and Apostolic times, birds that never fail to fly before the saints when they walk abroad; there are always some to be seen fluttering above them, and as they are real creatures with a genuine power of flight, we see them soar upwards, describe curves, 'loop the loop' without the slightest difficulty, plunge towards the earth head downwards with the aid of wings which enable them to support themselves in positions that defy the law of gravitation, and they remind us far more of a variety of bird or of young pupils of Garros practising the *vol-plané*, than of the angels of the art of the Renaissance and later periods whose wings have become nothing more than emblems and whose attitude is generally the same as that of heavenly beings who are not winged.

When I heard, on the very day upon which we were due to start for Paris, that Mme. Putbus, and consequently her maid, had just arrived in Venice, I asked my mother to put off our departure for a few days; her air of not taking my request into consideration, of not even listening to it seriously, reawakened in my nerves, excited by the Venetian springtime, that old desire to rebel against an imaginary plot woven against me by my parents (who imagined that I would be forced to obey them), that fighting spirit, that desire which drove me in the past to enforce my wishes upon the people whom I loved best in the world, prepared to conform to their wishes after I had succeeded in making them yield. I told my mother that I would not leave Venice, but she, thinking it more to her purpose not to appear to believe that I was saying this seriously, did not even answer. I went on to say that she would soon see whether I was serious or not. And when the hour came at which, accompanied by all my luggage, she set off for the station, I ordered a cool drink to be brought out to me on the terrace overlooking the canal, and installed myself there, watching the sunset, while from a boat that had stopped in front of the hotel a musician sang 'sole mio.'

The sun continued to sink. My mother must be nearing the station. Presently,

she would be gone, I should be left alone in Venice, alone with the misery of knowing that I had distressed her, and without her presence to comfort me. The hour of the train approached. My irrevocable solitude was so near at hand that it seemed to me to have begun already and to be complete. For I felt myself to be alone. Things had become alien to me. I was no longer calm enough to draw from my throbbing heart and introduce into them a measure of stability. The town that I saw before me had ceased to be Venice. Its personality, its name, seemed to me to be lying fictions which I no longer had the courage to impress upon its stones. I saw the palaces reduced to their constituent parts, lifeless heaps of marble with nothing to choose between them, and the water as a combination of hydrogen and oxygen, eternal, blind, anterior and exterior to Venice, unconscious of Doges or of Turner. And yet this unremarkable place was as strange as a place at which we have just arrived, which does not yet know us — as a place which we have left and which has forgotten us already. I could not tell it anything more about myself, I could leave nothing of myself imprinted upon it, it left me diminished, I was nothing more than a heart that throbbed, and an attention strained to follow the development of ‘sole mio.’ In vain might I fix my mind despairingly upon the beautiful and characteristic arch of the Rialto, it seemed to me, with the mediocrity of the obvious, a bridge not merely inferior to but as different from the idea that I possessed of it as an actor with regard to whom, notwithstanding his fair wig and black garments, we know quite well that in his essential quality he is not Hamlet. So the palaces, the canal, the Rialto became divested of the idea that created their individuality and disintegrated into their common material elements. But at the same time this mediocre place seemed to me remote. In the basin of the arsenal, because of an element which itself also was scientific, namely latitude, there was that singularity in things which, even when similar in appearance to those of our own land, reveal that they are aliens, in exile beneath a foreign sky; I felt that that horizon so close at hand, which I could have reached in an hour, was a curve of the earth quite different from those made by the seas of France, a remote curve which, by the accident of travel, happened to be moored close to where I was; so that this arsenal basin, at once insignificant and remote, filled me with that blend of disgust and alarm which I had felt as a child when I first accompanied my mother to the Deligny baths; indeed in that fantastic place consisting of a dark water reflecting neither sky nor sun, which nevertheless amid its fringe of cabins one felt to be in communication with invisible depths crowded with human bodies in bathing dresses, I had asked myself whether those depths, concealed

from mortal eyes by a row of cabins which prevented anyone in the street from suspecting that they existed, were not the entry to arctic seas which began at that point, whether the Poles were not comprised in them and whether that narrow space was not indeed the open water that surrounds the Pole. This Venice without attraction for myself in which I was going to be left alone, seemed to me no less isolated, no less unreal, and it was my distress which the sound of ‘sole mio,’ rising like a dirge for the Venice that I had known, seemed to be calling to witness. No doubt I ought to have ceased to listen to it if I wished to be able to overtake my mother and to join her on the train, I ought to have made up my mind without wasting another instant that I was going, but this is just what I was powerless to do; I remained motionless, incapable not merely of rising, but even of deciding that I would rise from my chair.

My mind, doubtless in order not to have to consider the question of making a resolution, was entirely occupied in following the course of the successive lines of ‘sole mio,’ singing them mentally with the singer, in anticipating for each of them the burst of melody that would carry it aloft, in letting myself soar with it, and fall to earth again with it afterwards.

No doubt this trivial song which I had heard a hundred times did not interest me in the least degree. I could afford no pleasure to anyone else, or to myself, by listening to it religiously like this to the end. In fact, none of the elements, familiar beforehand, of this popular ditty was capable of furnishing me with the resolution of which I stood in need; what was more, each of these phrases when it came and passed in its turn, became an obstacle in the way of my making that resolution effective, or rather it forced me to adopt the contrary resolution not to leave Venice, for it made me too late for the train. Wherefore this occupation, devoid of any pleasure in itself, of listening to ‘sole mio,’ was charged with a profound, almost despairing melancholy. I knew very well that in reality it was the resolution not to go that I had adopted by the mere act of remaining where I was; but to say to myself: “I am not going,” a speech which in that direct form was impossible, became possible in this indirect form: “I am going to listen to one more line of ‘sole mio’”; but the practical significance of this figurative language did not escape me and, while I said to myself: “After all, I am only listening to another line,” I knew that the words meant: “I shall remain by myself at Venice.” And it was perhaps this melancholy, like a sort of numbing cold, that constituted the desperate but fascinating charm of the song. Each note that the singer’s voice uttered with a force and ostentation that were almost muscular came and pierced my heart; when he had uttered his last flourish and the song

seemed to be at an end, the singer had not had enough and repeated it an octave higher as though he needed to proclaim once again my solitude and despair.

My mother must by now have reached the station. In a little while she would be gone. My heart was wrung by the anguish that was caused me by — with the view of the canal that had become quite tiny now that the soul of Venice had escaped from it, of that commonplace Rialto which was no longer the Rialto,— the wail of despair that 'sole mio' had become, which, declaimed thus before the unsubstantial palaces, reduced them to dust and ashes and completed the ruin of Venice; I looked on at the slow realisation of my misery built up artistically, without haste, note by note, by the singer as he stood beneath the astonished gaze of the sun arrested in its course beyond San Giorgio Maggiore,† with the result that the fading light was to combine for ever in my memory with the throb of my emotion and the bronze voice of the singer in a dubious, unalterable and poignant alloy.

† Translator's footnote: The geography of this chapter is confusing, but it is evident that Proust has transferred the name of San Giorgio Maggiore to one of the churches on the Grand Canal. Compare also page 822.

Thus I remained motionless with a disintegrated will power, with no apparent decision; doubtless at such moments our decision has already been made: our friends can often predict it themselves. But we, we are unable to do so, otherwise how much suffering would we be spared!

But at length, from caverns darker than that from which flashes the comet which we can predict,— thanks to the unimaginable defensive force of inveterate habit, thanks to the hidden reserves which by a sudden impulse habit hurls at the last moment into the fray — my activity was roused at length; I set out in hot haste and arrived, when the carriage doors were already shut, but in time to find my mother flushed with emotion, overcome by the effort to restrain her tears, for she thought that I was not coming. Then the train started and we saw Padua and Verona come to meet us, to speed us on our way, almost on to the platforms of their stations, and, when we had drawn away from them, return — they who were not travelling and were about to resume their normal life — one to its plain, the other to its hill.

The hours went by. My mother was in no hurry to read two letters which she had in her hand and had merely opened, and tried to prevent me from pulling out my pocket-book at once so as to take from it the letter which the hotel porter had given me. My mother was always afraid of my finding journeys too long, too tiring, and put off as long as possible, so as to keep me occupied during the final

hours, the moment at which she would seek fresh distractions for me, bring out the hard-boiled eggs, hand me newspapers, untie the parcel of books which she had bought without telling me. We had long passed Milan when she decided to read the first of her two letters. I began by watching my mother who sat reading it with an air of astonishment, then raised her head, and her eyes seemed to come to rest upon a succession of distinct, incompatible memories, which she could not succeed in bringing together. Meanwhile I had recognised Gilberte's hand on the envelope which I had just taken from my pocket-book. I opened it. Gilberte wrote to inform me that she was marrying Robert de Saint-Loup. She told me that she had sent me a telegram about it to Venice but had had no reply. I remembered that I had been told that the telegraphic service there was inefficient, I had never received her telegram. Perhaps, she would refuse to believe this. All of a sudden, I felt in my brain a fact which had installed itself there in the guise of a memory leave its place which it surrendered to another fact. The telegram that I had received a few days earlier, and had supposed to be from Albertine, was from Gilberte. As the somewhat laboured originality of Gilberte's handwriting consisted chiefly, when she wrote one line, in introducing into the line above the strokes of her *t_s which appeared to be underlining the words, or the dots over her* i_s which appeared to be punctuating the sentence above them, and on the other hand in interspersing the line below with the tails and flourishes of the words immediately above it, it was quite natural that the clerk who dispatched the telegram should have read the tail of an *s* or *z* in the line above as an '-me' attached to the word 'Gilberte.' The dot over the *i* of Gilberte had risen above the word to mark the end of the message. As for her capital *G*, it resembled a gothic *A*. Add that, apart from this, two or three words had been misread, dovetailed into one another (some of them as it happened had seemed to me incomprehensible), and this was quite enough to explain the details of my error and was not even necessary. How many letters are actually read into a word by a careless person who knows what to expect, who sets out with the idea that the message is from a certain person, how many words into the sentence? We guess as we read, we create; everything starts from an initial mistake; the mistakes that follow (and not only in the reading of letters and telegrams, not only in reading as a whole), extraordinary as they may appear to a person who has not begun at the same starting-point, are all quite natural. A large part of what we believe to be true (and this applies even to our final conclusions) with a persistence equalled only by our sincerity, springs from an original misconception of our premisses.

Chapter 4 — A Fresh Light Upon Robert De Saint-Loup

“Oh, it is unheard-of,” said my mother. “Listen, at my age, one has ceased to be astonished at anything, but I assure you that there could be nothing more unexpected than what I find in this letter.” “Listen, first, to me,” I replied, “I don’t know what it is, but however astonishing it may be, it cannot be quite so astonishing as what I have found in my letter. It is a marriage. It is Robert de Saint-Loup who is marrying Gilberte Swann.” “Ah!” said my mother, “then that is no doubt what is in the other letter, which I have not yet opened, for I recognised your friend’s hand.” And my mother smiled at me with that faint trace of emotion which, ever since she had lost her own mother, she felt at every event however insignificant, that concerned human creatures who were capable of grief, of memory, and who themselves also mourned their dead. And so my mother smiled at me and spoke to me in a gentle voice, as though she had been afraid, were she to treat this marriage lightly, of belittling the melancholy feelings that it might arouse in Swann’s widow and daughter, in Robert’s mother who had resigned herself to parting from her son, all of whom my mother, in her kindness of heart, in her gratitude for their kindness to me, endowed with her own faculty of filial, conjugal and maternal emotion. “Was I right in telling you that you would find nothing more astonishing?” I asked her. “On the contrary!” she replied in a gentle tone, “it is I who can impart the most extraordinary news, I shall not say the greatest, the smallest, for that quotation from Sévigné which everyone makes who knows nothing else that she ever wrote used to distress your grandmother as much as ‘what a charming thing it is to smoke.’ We scorn to pick up such stereotyped Sévigné. This letter is to announce the marriage of the Cambremer boy.” “Oh!” I remarked with indifference, “to whom? But in any case the personality of the bridegroom robs this marriage of any sensational element.” “Unless the bride’s personality supplies it.” “And who is the bride in question?” “Ah, if I tell you straight away, that will spoil everything; see if you can guess,” said my mother who, seeing that we had not yet reached Turin, wished to keep something in reserve for me as meat and drink for the rest of the journey. “But how do you expect me to know? Is it anyone brilliant? If

Legrandin and his sister are satisfied, we may be sure that it is a brilliant marriage." "As for Legrandin, I cannot say, but the person who informs me of the marriage says that Mme. de Cambremer is delighted. I don't know whether you will call it a brilliant marriage. To my mind, it suggests the days when kings used to marry shepherdesses, though in this case the shepherdess is even humbler than a shepherdess, charming as she is. It would have stupefied your grandmother, but would not have shocked her." "But who in the world is this bride?" "It is Mlle. d'Oloron." "That sounds to me tremendous and not in the least shepherdessy, but I don't quite gather who she can be. It is a title that used to be in the Guermantes family." "Precisely, and M. de Charlus conferred it, when he adopted her, upon Jupien's niece." "Jupien's niece! It isn't possible!" "It is the reward of virtue. It is a marriage from the last chapter of one of Mme. Sand's novels," said my mother. "It is the reward of vice, it is a marriage from the end of a Balzac novel," thought I. "After all," I said to my mother, "when you come to think of it, it is quite natural. Here are the Cambremers established in that Guermantes clan among which they never hoped to pitch their tent; what is more, the girl, adopted by M. de Charlus, will have plenty of money, which was indispensable now that the Cambremers have lost theirs; and after all she is the adopted daughter, and, in the Cambremers' eyes, probably the real daughter — the natural daughter — of a person whom they regard as a Prince of the Blood Royal. A bastard of a semi-royal house has always been regarded as a flattering alliance by the nobility of France and other countries. Indeed, without going so far back, only the other day, not more than six months ago, don't you remember, the marriage of Robert's friend and that girl, the only possible justification of which was that she was supposed, rightly or wrongly, to be the natural daughter of a sovereign prince." My mother, without abandoning the caste system of Combray which meant that my grandmother would have been scandalised by such a marriage, being principally anxious to echo her mother's judgment, added: "Anyhow, the girl is worth her weight in gold, and your dear grandmother would not have had to draw upon her immense goodness, her unbounded indulgence, to keep her from condemning young Cambremer's choice. Do you remember how distinguished she thought the girl, years ago, one day when she went into the shop to have a stitch put in her skirt? She was only a child then. And now, even if she has rather run to seed, and become an old maid, she is a different woman, a thousand times more perfect. But your grandmother saw all that at a glance. She found the little niece of a jobbing tailor more 'noble' than the Duc de Guermantes." But even more necessary than to extol my

grandmother was it for my mother to decide that it was ‘better’ for her that she had not lived to see the day. This was the supreme triumph of her filial devotion, as though she were sparing my grandmother a final grief. “And yet, can you imagine for a moment,” my mother said to me, “what old father Swann — not that you ever knew him, of course — would have felt if he could have known that he would one day have a great-grandchild in whose veins the blood of mother Moser who used to say: ‘Ponchour Mezieurs’ would mingle with the blood of the Duc de Guise!” “But listen, Mamma, it is a great deal more surprising than that. For the Swanns were very respectable people, and, given the position that their son occupied, his daughter, if he himself had made a decent marriage, might have married very well indeed. But all her chances were ruined by his marrying a courtesan.” “Oh, a courtesan, you know, people were perhaps rather hard on her, I never quite believed.” “Yes, a courtesan, indeed I can let you have some startling revelations one of these days.” Lost in meditation, my mother said: “The daughter of a woman to whom your father would never allow me to bow marrying the nephew of Mme. de Villeparisis, upon whom your father wouldn’t allow me to call at first because he thought her too grand for me!” Then: “The son of Mme. de Cambremer to whom Legrandin was so afraid of having to give us a letter of introduction because he didn’t think us smart enough, marrying the niece of a man who would never dare to come to our flat except by the service stairs!... All the same your poor grandmother was right — you remember — when she said that the great nobility could do things that would shock the middle classes and that Queen Marie-Amélie was spoiled for her by the overtures that she made to the Prince de Condé’s mistress to persuade him to leave his fortune to the Due d’Aumale. You remember too, it shocked her that for centuries past daughters of the House of Gramont who have been perfect saints have borne the name Corisande in memory of Henri IV’s connexion with one of their ancestresses. These are things that may happen also, perhaps, among the middle classes, but we conceal them better. Can’t you imagine how it would have amused her, your poor grandmother?” said Mamma sadly, for the joys of which it grieved us to think that my grandmother was deprived were the simplest joys of life, a tale, a play, something more trifling still, a piece of mimicry, which would have amused her, “Can’t you imagine her astonishment? I am sure, however, that your grandmother would have been shocked by these marriages, that they would have grieved her, I feel that it is better that she never knew about them,” my mother went on, for, when confronted with any event, she liked to think that my grandmother would have received a unique impression of it which

would have been caused by the marvellous singularity of her nature and had an extraordinary importance. Did anything painful occur, which could not have been foreseen in the past, the disgrace or ruin of one of our old friends, some public calamity, an epidemic, a war, a revolution, my mother would say to herself that perhaps it was better that Grandmamma had known nothing about it, that it would have distressed her too keenly, that perhaps she would not have been able to endure it. And when it was a question of something startling like this, my mother, by an impulse directly opposite to that of the malicious people who like to imagine that others whom they do not like have suffered more than is generally supposed, would not, in her affection for my grandmother, allow that anything sad, or depressing, could ever have happened to her. She always imagined my grandmother as raised above the assaults even of any malady which ought not to have developed, and told herself that my grandmother's death had perhaps been a good thing on the whole, inasmuch as it had shut off the too ugly spectacle of the present day from that noble character which could never have become resigned to it. For optimism is the philosophy of the past. The events that have occurred being, among all those that were possible, the only ones which we have known, the harm that they have caused seems to us inevitable, and, for the slight amount of good that they could not help bringing with them, it is to them that we give the credit, imagining that without them it would not have occurred. But she sought at the same time to form a more accurate idea of what my grandmother would have felt when she learned these tidings, and to believe that it was impossible for our minds, less exalted than hers, to form any such idea. "Can't you imagine," my mother said to me first of all, "how astonished your poor grandmother would have been!" And I felt that my mother was pained by her inability to tell her the news, regretted that my grandmother could not learn it, and felt it to be somehow unjust that the course of life should bring to light facts which my grandmother would never have believed, rendering thus retrospectively the knowledge which my grandmother had taken with her of people and society false, and incomplete, the marriage of the Jupien girl and Legrandin's nephew being calculated to modify my grandmother's general ideas of life, no less than the news — had my mother been able to convey it to her — that people had succeeded in solving the problems, which my grandmother had regarded as insoluble, of aerial navigation and wireless telegraphy.

The train reached Paris before my mother and I had finished discussing these two pieces of news which, so that the journey might not seem to me too

long, she had deliberately reserved for the latter part of it, not mentioning them until we had passed Milan. And my mother continued the discussion after we had reached home: “Just imagine, that poor Swann who was so anxious that his Gilberte should be received by the Guermantes, how happy he would be if he could see his daughter become a Guermantes!” “Under another name, led to the altar as Mlle. de Forcheville, do you think he would be so happy after all?” “Ah, that is true. I had not thought of it. That is what makes it impossible for me to congratulate the little chit, the thought that she has had the heart to give up her father’s name, when he was so good to her.— Yes, you are right, when all is said and done, it is perhaps just as well that he knows nothing about it.” With the dead as with the living, we cannot tell whether a thing would cause them joy or sorrow. “It appears that the Saint-Loups are going to live at Tansonville. Old father Swann, who was so anxious to shew your poor grandfather his pond, could he ever have dreamed that the Duc de Guermantes would see it constantly, especially if he had known of his son’s marriage? And you yourself who have talked so often to Saint-Loup about the pink hawthorns and lilacs and irises at Tansonville, he will understand you better. They will be his property.” Thus there developed in our dining-room, in the lamplight that is so congenial to them, one of those talks in which the wisdom not of nations but of families, taking hold of some event, a death, a betrothal, an inheritance, a bankruptcy, and slipping it under the magnifying glass of memory, brings it into high relief, detaches, thrusts back one surface of it, and places in perspective at different points in space and time what, to those who have not lived through the period in question, seems to be amalgamated upon a single surface, the names of dead people, successive addresses, the origins and changes of fortunes, transmissions of property. Is not this wisdom inspired by the Muse whom it is best to ignore for as long as possible, if we wish to retain any freshness of impressions, any creative power, but whom even those people who have ignored her meet in the evening of their life in the have of the old country church, at the hour when all of a sudden they feel that they are less moved by eternal beauty as expressed in the carvings of the altar than by the thought of the vicissitudes of fortune which those carvings have undergone, passing into a famous private collection, to a chapel, from there to a museum, then returning at length to the church, or by the feeling as they tread upon a marble slab that is almost endowed with thought, that it covers the last remains of Arnault or Pascal, or simply by deciphering (forming perhaps a mental picture of a fair young worshipper) on the brass plate of the wooden prayer-desk, the names of the daughters of country squire or

leading citizen? The Muse who has gathered up everything that the more exalted Muses of philosophy and art have rejected, everything that is not founded upon truth, everything that is merely contingent, but that reveals other laws as well, is History.

What I was to learn later on — for I had been unable to keep in touch with all this affair from Venice — was that Mlle. de Forcheville's hand had been sought first of all by the Prince de Silistrie, while Saint-Loup was seeking to marry Mlle. d'Entragues, the Duc de Luxembourg's daughter. This is what had occurred. Mlle. de Forcheville possessing a hundred million francs, Mme. de Marsantes had decided that she would be an excellent match for her son. She made the mistake of saying that the girl was charming, that she herself had not the slightest idea whether she was rich or poor, that she did not wish to know, but that even without a penny it would be a piece of good luck for the most exacting of young men to find such a wife. This was going rather too far for a woman who was tempted only by the hundred millions, which blinded her eyes to everything else. At once it was understood that she was thinking of the girl for her own son. The Princesse de Silistrie went about uttering loud cries, expatiated upon the social importance of Saint-Loup, and proclaimed that if he should marry Odette's daughter by a Jew then there was no longer a Faubourg Saint-Germain. Mme. de Marsantes, sure of herself as she was, dared not advance farther and retreated before the cries of the Princesse de Silistrie, who immediately made a proposal in the name of her own son. She had protested only in order to keep Gilberte for herself. Meanwhile Mme. de Marsantes, refusing to own herself defeated, had turned at once to Mlle. d'Entragues, the Duc de Luxembourg's daughter. Having no more than twenty millions, she suited her purpose less, but Mme. de Marsantes told everyone that a Saint-Loup could not marry a Mlle. Swann (there was no longer any mention of Forcheville). Some time later, somebody having carelessly observed that the Duc de Châtellerault was thinking of marrying Mlle. d'Entragues, Mme. de Marsantes who was the most captious woman in the world mounted her high horse, changed her tactics, returned to Gilberte, made a formal offer of marriage on Saint-Loup's behalf, and the engagement was immediately announced. This engagement provoked keen comment in the most different spheres. Some old friends of my mother, who belonged more or less to Combray, came to see her to discuss Gilberte's marriage, which did not dazzle them in the least. "You know who Mlle. de Forcheville is, she is simply Mlle. Swann. And her witness at the marriage, the 'Baron' de Charlus, as he calls himself, is the old man who used to

keep her mother at one time, under Swann's very nose, and no doubt to his advantage." "But what do you mean?" my mother protested. "In the first place, Swann was extremely rich." "We must assume that he was not as rich as all that if he needed other people's money. But what is there in the woman, that she keeps her old lovers like that? She has managed to persuade the third to marry her and she drags out the second when he has one foot in the grave to make him act at the marriage of the daughter she had by the first or by some one else, for how is one to tell who the father was? She can't be certain herself! I said the third, it is the three hundredth I should have said. But then, don't you know, if she's no more a Forcheville than you or I, that puts her on the same level as the bridegroom who of course isn't noble at all. Only an adventurer would marry a girl like that. It appears he's just a plain Monsieur Dupont or Durand or something. If it weren't that we have a Radical mayor now at Combray, who doesn't even lift his hat to the priest, I should know all about it. Because, you understand, when they published the banns, they were obliged to give the real name. It is all very nice for the newspapers or for the stationer who sends out the intimations, to describe yourself as the Marquis de Saint-Loup. That does no harm to anyone, and if it can give any pleasure to those worthy people, I should be the last person in the world to object! What harm can it do me? As I shall never dream of going to call upon the daughter of a woman who has let herself be talked about, she can have a string of titles as long as my arm before her servants. But in an official document it's not the same thing. Ah, if my cousin Sazerat were still deputy-mayor, I should have written to him, and he would certainly have let me know what name the man was registered under."

Other friends of my mother who had met Saint-Loup in our house came to her 'day,' and inquired whether the bridegroom was indeed the same person as my friend. Certain people went so far as to maintain, with regard to the other marriage, that it had nothing to do with the Legrandin Cambremers. They had this on good authority, for the Marquise, *née*Legrandin, had contradicted the rumour on the very eve of the day on which the engagement was announced. I, for my part, asked myself why M. de Charlus on the one hand, Saint-Loup on the other, each of whom had had occasion to write to me quite recently, had made various friendly plans and proposed expeditions, which must inevitably have clashed with the wedding ceremonies, and had said nothing whatever to me about these. I came to the conclusion, forgetting the secrecy which people always preserve until the last moment in affairs of this sort, that I was less their friend than I had supposed, a conclusion which, so far as Saint-Loup was

concerned, distressed me. Though why, when I had already remarked that the affability, the ‘one-man-to-another’ attitude of the aristocracy was all a sham, should I be surprised to find myself its victim? In the establishment for women — where men were now to be procured in increasing numbers — in which M. de Charlus had surprised Morel, and in which the ‘assistant matron,’ a great reader of the *Gaulois*, used to discuss the social gossip with her clients, this lady, while conversing with a stout gentleman who used to come to her incessantly to drink champagne with young men, because, being already very stout, he wished to become obese enough to be certain of not being ‘called up,’ should there ever be a war, declared: “It seems, young Saint-Loup is ‘one of those’ and young Cambremer too. Poor wives!— In any case, if you know the bridegrooms, you must send them to us, they will find everything they want here, and there’s plenty of money to be made out of them.” Whereupon the stout gentleman, albeit he was himself ‘one of those,’ protested, replied, being something of a snob, that he often met Cambremer and Saint-Loup at his cousins’ the Ardouvillers, and that they were great womanisers, and quite the opposite of ‘all that.’ “Ah!” the assistant matron concluded in a sceptical tone, but without any proof of the assertion, and convinced that in our generation the perversity of morals was rivalled only by the absurd exaggeration of slanderous rumours. Certain people whom I no longer saw wrote to me and asked me ‘what I thought’ of these two marriages, precisely as though they had been inviting a public discussion of the height of women’s hats in the theatre or the psychological novel. I had not the heart to answer these letters. Of these two marriages, I thought nothing at all, but I did feel an immense melancholy, as when two parts of our past existence, which have been anchored near to us, and upon which we have perhaps been basing idly from day to day an unacknowledged hope, remove themselves finally, with a joyous crackling of flames, for unknown destinations, like two vessels on the high seas. As for the prospective bridegrooms themselves, they regarded their own marriages from a point of view that was quite natural, since it was a question not of other people but of themselves. They had never tired of mocking at such ‘grand marriages’ founded upon some secret shame. And indeed the Cambremer family, so ancient in its lineage and so modest in its pretensions, would have been the first to forget Jupien and to remember only the unimaginable grandeur of the House of Oloron, had not an exception occurred in the person who ought to have been most gratified by this marriage, the Marquise de Cambremer-Legrandin. For, being of a malicious nature, she reckoned the pleasure of humiliating her family above that of glorifying herself. And so, as

she had no affection for her son, and was not long in taking a dislike to her daughter-in-law, she declared that it was calamity for a Cambremer to marry a person who had sprung from heaven knew where, and had such bad teeth. As for young Cambremer, who had already shewn a certain tendency to frequent the society of literary people, we may well imagine that so brilliant an alliance had not the effect of making him more of a snob than before, but that feeling himself to have become the successor of the Ducs d'Oloron —'sovereign princes' as the newspapers said — he was sufficiently persuaded of his own importance to be able to mix with the very humblest people. And he deserted the minor nobility for the intelligent bourgeoisie on the days when he did not confine himself to royalty. The notices in the papers, especially when they referred to Saint-Loup, invested my friend, whose royal ancestors were enumerated, in a fresh importance, which however could only depress me — as though he had become some one else, the descendant of Robert the Strong, rather than the friend who, only a little while since, had taken the back seat in the carriage in order that I might be more comfortable in the other; the fact that I had had no previous suspicion of his marriage with Gilberte, the prospect of which had been revealed to me suddenly in a letter, so different from anything that I could have expected of either him or her the day before, and the fact that he had not let me know pained me, whereas I ought to have reflected that he had had a great many other things to do, and that moreover in the fashionable world marriages are often arranged like this all of a sudden, generally as a substitute for a different combination which has come to grief — unexpectedly — like a chemical precipitation. And the feeling of sadness, as depressing as a household removal, as bitter as jealousy, that these marriages caused me by the accident of their sudden impact was so profound, that later on people used to remind me of it, paying absurd compliments to my perspicacity, as having been just the opposite of what it was at the time, a twofold, nay a threefold and fourfold presentiment.

The people in society who had taken no notice of Gilberte said to me with an air of serious interest: "Ah! It is she who is marrying the Marquis de Saint-Loup" and studied her with the attentive gaze of people who not merely relish all the social gossip of Paris but are anxious to learn, and believe in the profundity of their own introspection. Those who on the other hand had known Gilberte alone gazed at Saint-Loup with the closest attention, asked me (these were often people who barely knew me) to introduce them and returned from their presentation to the bridegroom radiant with the bliss of fatuity, saying to me: "He is very nice looking." Gilberte was convinced that the name 'Marquis de

Saint-Loup' was a thousand times more important than 'Duc d'Orléans.'

"It appears that it is the Princesse de Parme who arranged young Cambremer's marriage," Mamma told me. And this was true. The Princess had known for a long time, on the one hand, by his works, Legrandin whom she regarded as a distinguished man, on the other hand Mme. de Cambremer who changed the conversation whenever the Princess asked her whether she was not Legrandin's sister. The Princess knew how keenly Mme. de Cambremer felt her position on the doorstep of the great aristocratic world, in which she was invited nowhere. When the Princesse de Parme, who had undertaken to find a husband for Mlle. d'Oloron, asked M. de Charlus whether he had ever heard of a pleasant, educated man who called himself Legrandin de Méséglise (thus it was that M. Legrandin now styled himself), the Baron first of all replied in the negative, then suddenly a memory occurred to him of a man whose acquaintance he had made in the train, one night, and who had given him his card. He smiled a vague smile. "It is perhaps the same person," he said to himself. When he discovered that the prospective bridegroom was the son of Legrandin's sister, he said: "Why, that would be really extraordinary! If he takes after his uncle, after all, that would not alarm me, I have always said that they make the best husbands." "Who are they?" inquired the Princess. "Oh, Ma'am, I could explain it all to you if we met more often. With you one can talk freely. Your Highness is so intelligent," said Charlus, seized by a desire to confide in some one which, however, went no farther. The name Cambremer appealed to him, although he did not like the boy's parents, but he knew that it was one of the four Baronies of Brittany and the best that he could possibly hope for his adopted daughter; it was an old and respected name, with solid connexions in its native province. A Prince would have been out of the question and, moreover, not altogether desirable. This was the very thing. The Princess then invited Legrandin to call. In appearance he had considerably altered, and, of late, distinctly to his advantage. Like those women who deliberately sacrifice their faces to the slimness of their figures and never stir from Marienbad, Legrandin had acquired the free and easy air of a cavalry officer. In proportion as M. de Charlus had grown coarse and slow, Legrandin had become slimmer and moved more rapidly, the contrary effect of an identical cause. This velocity of movement had its psychological reasons as well. He was in the habit of frequenting certain low haunts where he did not wish to be seen going in or coming out: he would hurl himself into them. Legrandin had taken up tennis at the age of fifty-five. When the Princesse de Parme spoke to him of the Guermantes, of Saint-Loup, he

declared that he had known them all his life, making a sort of composition of the fact of his having always known by name the proprietors of Guermantes and that of his having met, at my aunt's house, Swann, the father of the future Mme. de Saint-Loup, Swann upon whose wife and daughter Legrandin, at Combray, had always refused to call. "Indeed, I travelled quite recently with the brother of the Duc de Guermantes, M. de Charlus. He began the conversation spontaneously, which is always a good sign, for it proves that a man is neither a tongue-tied lout nor stuck-up. Oh, I know all the things that people say about him. But I never pay any attention to gossip of that sort. Besides, the private life of other people does not concern me. He gave me the impression of a sensitive nature, and a cultivated mind." Then the Princesse de Parme spoke of Mlle. d'Oloron. In the Guermantes circle people were moved by the nobility of heart of M. de Charlus who, generous as he had always been, was securing the future happiness of a penniless but charming girl. And the Duc de Guermantes, who suffered from his brother's reputation, let it be understood that, fine as this conduct was, it was wholly natural. "I don't know if I make myself clear, everything in the affair is natural," he said, speaking ineptly by force of habit. But his object was to indicate that the girl was a daughter of his brother whom the latter was acknowledging. This accounted at the same time for Jupien. The Princesse de Parme hinted at this version of the story to shew Legrandin that after all young Cambremer would be marrying something in the nature of Mlle. de Nantes, one of those bastards of Louis XIV who were not scorned either by the Duc d'Orléans or by the Prince de Conti. These two marriages which I had already begun to discuss with my mother in the train that brought us back to Paris had quite remarkable effects upon several of the characters who have figured in the course of this narrative. First of all upon Legrandin; needless to say that he swept like a hurricane into M. de Charlus's town house for all the world as though he were entering a house of ill-fame where he must on no account be seen, and also, at the same time, to display his activity and to conceal his age — for our habits accompany us even into places where they are no longer of any use to us — and scarcely anybody observed that when M. de Charlus greeted him he did so with a smile which it was hard to intercept, harder still to interpret; this smile was similar in appearance, and in its essentials was diametrically opposite to the smile which two men, who are in the habit of meeting in good society, exchange if they happen to meet in what they regard as disreputable surroundings (such as the Elysée where General de Froberville, whenever, in days past, he met Swann there, would assume, on catching sight of him, an

expression of ironical and mysterious complicity appropriate between two frequenters of the drawing-room of the Princesse des Laumes who were compromising themselves by visiting M. Grevy). Legrandin had been cultivating obscurely for a long time past — ever since the days when I used to go as a child to spend my holidays at Combray — relations with the aristocracy, productive at the most of an isolated invitation to a sterile house party. All of a sudden, his nephew's marriage having intervened to join up these scattered fragments, Legrandin stepped into a social position which retroactively derived a sort of solidity from his former relations with people who had known him only as a private person but had known him well. Ladies to whom people offered to introduce him informed them that for the last twenty years he had stayed with them in the country for a fortnight annually, and that it was he who had given them the beautiful old barometer in the small drawing-room. It so happened that he had been photographed in 'groups' which included Dukes who were related to them. But as soon as he had acquired this social position, he ceased to make any use of it. This was not merely because, how that people knew him to be received everywhere, he no longer derived any pleasure from being invited, it was because, of the two vices that had long struggled for the mastery of him, the less natural, snobbishness, yielded its place to another that was less artificial, since it did at least shew a sort of return, albeit circuitous, towards nature. No doubt the two are not incompatible, and a nocturnal tour of exploration of a slum may be made immediately upon leaving a Duchess's party. But the chilling effect of age made Legrandin reluctant to accumulate such an abundance of pleasures, to stir out of doors except with a definite purpose, and had also the effect that the pleasures of nature became more or less platonic, consisting chiefly in friendships, in conversations which took up time, and made him spend almost all his own among the lower orders, so that he had little left for a social existence. Mme. de Cambremer herself became almost indifferent to the friendly overtures of the Duchesse de Guermantes. The latter, obliged to call upon the Marquise, had noticed, as happens whenever we come to see more of our fellow-creatures, that is to say combinations of good qualities which we end by discovering with defects to which we end by growing accustomed, that Mme. de Cambremer was a woman endowed with an innate intelligence and an acquired culture of which for my part I thought but little, but which appeared remarkable to the Duchess. And so she often came, late in the afternoon, to see Mme. de Cambremer and paid her long visits. But the marvellous charm which her hostess imagined as existing in the Duchesse de Guermantes vanished as soon as she saw that the

other sought her company, and she received her rather out of politeness than for her own pleasure. A more striking change was manifest in Gilberte, a change at once symmetrical with and different from that which had occurred in Swann after his marriage. It is true that during the first few months Gilberte had been glad to open her doors to the most select company. It was doubtless only with a view to an eventual inheritance that she invited the intimate friends to whom her mother was attached, but on certain days only when there was no one but themselves, secluded apart from the fashionable people, as though the contact of Mme. Bontemps or Mme. Cottard with the Princesse de Guermantes or the Princesse de Parme might, like that of two unstable powders, have produced irreparable catastrophes. Nevertheless the Bontemps, the Cottards and such, although disappointed by the smallness of the party, were proud of being able to say: “We were dining with the Marquise de Saint-Loup,” all the more so as she ventured at times so far as to invite, with them, Mme. de Marsantes, who was emphatically the ‘great lady’ with a fan of tortoise-shell and ostrich feathers, this again being a piece of legacy-hunting. She only took care to pay from time to time a tribute to the discreet people whom one never sees except when they are invited, a warning with which she bestowed upon her audience of the Cottard-Bontemps class her most gracious and distant greeting. Perhaps I should have preferred to be included in these parties. But Gilberte, in whose eyes I was now principally a friend of her husband and of the Guermantes (and who — perhaps even in the Combray days, when my parents did not call upon her mother — had, at the age when we do not merely add this or that to the value of things but classify them according to their species, endowed me with that prestige which we never afterwards lose), regarded these evenings as unworthy of me, and when I took my leave of her would say: “It has been delightful to see you, but come again the day after to-morrow, you will find my aunt Guermantes, and Mme. de Poix; to-day I just had a few of Mamma’s friends, to please Mamma.” But this state of things lasted for a few months only, and very soon everything was altered. Was this because Gilberte’s social life was fated to exhibit the same contrasts as Swann’s? However that may be, Gilberte had been only for a short time Marquise de Saint-Loup (in the process of becoming, as we shall see, Duchesse de Guermantes)† when, having attained to the most brilliant and most difficult position, she decided that the name Saint-Loup was now embodied in herself like a glowing enamel and that, whoever her associates might be, from now onwards she would remain for all the world Marquise de Saint-Loup, wherein she was mistaken, for the value of a title of nobility, like that of shares

in a company, rises with the demand and falls when it is offered in the market.

† Translator's footnote: This is quite inexplicable. Gilberte reappears as Saint-Loup's widow while the Duc de Guermantes and his wife are still alive.

Everything that seems to us imperishable tends to destruction; a position in society, like anything else, is not created once and for all time, but, just as much as the power of an Empire, reconstructs itself at every moment by a sort of perpetual process of creation, which explains the apparent anomalies in social or political history in the course of half a century. The creation of the world did not occur at the beginning of time, it occurs every day. The Marquise de Saint-Loup said to herself, "I am the Marquise de Saint-Loup," she knew that, the day before, she had refused three invitations to dine with Duchesses. But if, to a certain extent, her name exalted the class of people, as little aristocratic as possible, whom she entertained, by an inverse process, the class of people whom the Marquise entertained depreciated the name that she bore. Nothing can hold out against such processes, the greatest names succumb to them in the end. Had not Swann known a Duchess of the House of France whose drawing-room, because any Tom, Dick or Harry was welcomed there, had fallen to the lowest rank? One day when the Princesse des Laumes had gone from a sense of duty to call for a moment upon this Highness, in whose drawing-room she had found only the most ordinary people, arriving immediately afterwards at Mme. Leroi's, she had said to Swann and the Marquis de Modène: "At last I find myself upon friendly soil. I have just come from Mme. la Duchesse de X—, there weren't three faces I knew in the room." Sharing, in short, the opinion of the character in the operetta who declares: "My name, I think, dispenses me from saying more," Gilberte set to work to flaunt her contempt for what she had so ardently desired, to proclaim that all the people in the Faubourg Saint-Germain were idiots, people to whose houses one could not go, and, suiting the action to the word, ceased to go to them. People who did not make her acquaintance until after this epoch, and who, in the first stages of that acquaintance, heard her, by that time Duchesse de Guermantes, make the most absurd fun of the world in which she could so easily have moved, seeing that she never invited a single person out of that world, and that if any of them, even the most brilliant, ventured into her drawing-room, she would yawn openly in their faces, blush now in retrospect at the thought that they themselves could ever have seen any claim to distinction in the fashionable world, and would never dare to confess this humiliating secret of their past weaknesses to a woman whom they suppose to have been, owing to an essential loftiness of her nature, incapable from her earliest moments of understanding

such things. They hear her poke such delicious fun at Dukes, and see her (which is more significant) make her behaviour accord so entirely with her mockery! No doubt they do not think of inquiring into the causes of the accident which turned Mlle. Swann into Mlle. de Forcheville, Mlle. de Forcheville into the Marquise de Saint-Loup, and finally into the Duchesse de Guermantes. Possibly it does not occur to them either that the effects of this accident would serve no less than its causes to explain Gilberte's subsequent attitude, the habit of mixing with upstarts not being regarded quite in the same light in which Mlle. Swann would have regarded it by a lady whom everybody addresses as 'Madame la Duchesse' and the other Duchesses who bore her as 'cousin.' We are always ready to despise a goal which we have not succeeded in reaching, or have permanently reached. And this contempt seems to us to form part of the character of people whom we do not yet know. Perhaps if we were able to retrace the course of past years, we should find them devoured, more savagely than anyone, by those same weaknesses which they have succeeded so completely in concealing or conquering that we reckon them incapable not only of having ever been attacked by them themselves, but even of ever excusing them in other people, let alone being capable of imagining them. Anyhow, very soon the drawing-room of the new Marquise de Saint-Loup assumed its permanent aspect, from the social point of view at least, for we shall see what troubles were brewing in it in another connexion; well, this aspect was surprising for the following reason: people still remembered that the most formal, the most exclusive parties in Paris, as brilliant as those given by the Duchesse de Guermantes, were those of Mme. de Marsantes, Saint-Loup's mother. On the other hand, in recent years, Odette's drawing-room, infinitely lower in the social scale, had been no less dazzling in its elegance and splendour. Saint-Loup, however, delighted to have, thanks to his wife's vast fortune, everything that he could desire in the way of comfort, wished only to rest quietly in his armchair after a good dinner with a musical entertainment by good performers. And this young man who had seemed at one time so proud, so ambitious, invited to share his luxury old friends whom his mother would not have admitted to her house. Gilberte, on her side, put into effect Swann's saying: "Quality doesn't matter, what I dread is quantity." And Saint-Loup, always on his knees before his wife, and because he loved her, and because it was to her that he owed these extremes of comfort, took care not to interfere with tastes that were so similar to his own. With the result that the great receptions given by Mme. de Marsantes and Mme. de Forcheville, given year after year with an eye chiefly to the establishment, upon a brilliant footing, of

their children, gave rise to no reception by M. and Mme. de Saint-Loup. They had the best of saddle-horses on which to go out riding together, the finest of yachts in which to cruise — but they never took more than a couple of guests with them. In Paris, every evening, they would invite three or four friends to dine, never more; with the result that, by an unforeseen but at the same time quite natural retrogression, the two vast maternal aviaries had been replaced by a silent nest.

The person who profited least by these two marriages was the young Mademoiselle d'Oloron who, already suffering from typhoid fever on the day of the religious ceremony, was barely able to crawl to the church and died a few weeks later. The letter of intimation that was sent out some time after her death blended with names such as Jupien's those of almost all the greatest families in Europe, such as the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Montmorency, H.R.H. the Comtesse de Bourbon-Soissons, the Prince of Modena-Este, the Vicomtesse d'Edumea, Lady Essex, and so forth. No doubt even to a person who knew that the deceased was Jupien's niece, this plethora of grand connexions would not cause any surprise. The great thing, after all, is to have grand connexions. Then, the *casus foederis* coming into play, the death of a simple little shop-girl plunges all the princely families of Europe in mourning. But many young men of a later generation, who were not familiar with the facts, might, apart from the possibility of their mistaking Marie-Antoinette d'Oloron, Marquise de Cambremer, for a lady of the noblest birth, have been guilty of many other errors when they read this communication. Thus, supposing their excursions through France to have given them some slight familiarity with the country round Combray, when they saw that the Comte de Méséglise figured among the first of the signatories, close to the Duc de Guermantes, they might not have felt any surprise. "The Méséglise way," they might have said, "converges with the Guermantes way, old and noble families of the same region may have been allied for generations. Who knows? It is perhaps a branch of the Guermantes family which bears the title of Comte de Méséglise." As it happened, the Comte de Méséglise had no connexion with the Guermantes and was not even enrolled on the Guermantes side, but on the Cambremer side, since the Comte de Méséglise, who by a rapid advancement had been for two years only Legrandin de Méséglise, was our old friend Legrandih. No doubt, taking one false title with another, there were few that could have been so disagreeable to the Guermantes as this. They had been connected in the past with the authentic Comtes de Méséglise, of whom there survived only one female descendant, the daughter of

obscure and unassuming parents, married herself to one of my aunt's tenant fanners named Ménager, who had become rich and bought Mirougrain from her and now styled himself 'Ménager de Mirougrain,' with the result that when you said that his wife was born 'de Méséglise' people thought that she must simply have been born at Méséglise and that she was 'of Méséglise' as her husband was 'of Mirougrain.'

Any other sham title would have caused less annoyance to the Guermantes family. But the aristocracy knows how to tolerate these irritations and many others as well, the moment that a marriage which is deemed advantageous, from whatever point of view, is in question. Shielded by the Duc de Guermantes, Legrandin was, to part of that generation, and will be to the whole of the generation that follows it, the true Comte de Méséglise.

Yet another mistake which any young reader not acquainted with the facts might have been led to make was that of supposing that the Baron and Baronne de Forcheville figured on the list in their capacity as parents-in-law of the Marquis de Saint-Loup, that is to say on the Guermantes side. But on this side, they had no right to appear since it was Robert who was related to the Guermantes and not Gilberte. No, the Baron and Baronne de Forcheville, despite this misleading suggestion, did figure on the wife's side, it is true, and not on the Cambremer side, because not of the Guermantes, but of Jupien, who, the reader must now be told, was a cousin of Odette.

All M. de Charlus's favour had been lavished since the marriage of his adopted niece upon the young Marquis de Cambremer; the young man's tastes which were similar to those of the Baron, since they had not prevented the Baron from selecting him as a husband for Mlle. d'Oloron, made him, as was only natural, appreciate him all the more when he was left a widower. This is not to say that the Marquis had not other qualities which made him a charming companion for M. de Charlus. But even in the case of a man of real merit, it is an advantage that is not disdained by the person who admits him into his private life and one that makes him particularly useful that he can also play whist. The intelligence of the young Marquis was remarkable and as they had already begun to say at Féterne when he was barely out of his cradle, he 'took' entirely after his grandmother, had the same enthusiasms, the same love of music. He reproduced also some of her peculiarities, but these more by imitation, like all the rest of the family, than from atavism. Thus it was that, some time after the death of his wife, having received a letter signed 'Léonor,' a name which I did not remember as being his, I realised who it was that had written to me only when I had read

the closing formula: "*Croyez à ma sympathie vraie*," the word '*vraiev*,' coming in that order, added to the Christian name Léonor the surname Cambremer.

About this time I used to see a good deal of Gilberte with whom I had renewed my old intimacy: for our life, in the long run, is not calculated according to the duration of our friendships. Let a certain period of time elapse and you will see reappear (just as former Ministers reappear in politics, as old plays are revived on the stage) friendly relations that have been revived between the same persons as before, after long years of interruption, and revived with pleasure. After ten years, the reasons which made one party love too passionately, the other unable to endure a too exacting despotism, no longer exist. Convention alone survives, and everything that Gilberte would have refused me in the past, that had seemed to her intolerable, impossible, she granted me quite readily — doubtless because I no longer desired it. Although neither of us avowed to himself the reason for this change, if she was always ready to come to me, never in a hurry to leave me, it was because the obstacle had vanished: my love.

I went, moreover, a little later to spend a few days at Tansonville. The move I found rather a nuisance, for I was keeping a girl in Paris who slept in the bachelor flat which I had rented. As other people need the aroma of forests or the ripple of a lake, so I needed her to sleep near at hand during the night and by day to have her always by my side in the carriage. For even if one love passes into oblivion, it may determine the form of the love that is to follow it. Already, in the heart even of the previous love, daily habits existed, the origin of which we did not ourselves recall. It was an anguish of a former day that had made us think with longing, then adopt in a permanent fashion, like customs the meaning of which has been forgotten, those homeward drives to the beloved's door, or her residence in our home, our presence or the presence of some one in whom we have confidence upon all her outings, all these habits, like great uniform highroads along which our love passes daily and which were forged long ago in the volcanic fire of an ardent emotion. But these habits survive the woman, survive even the memory of the woman. They become the pattern, if not of all our loves, at least of certain of our loves which alternate with the Others. And thus my home had demanded, in memory of a forgotten Albertine, the presence of my mistress of the moment whom I concealed from visitors and who filled my life as Albertine had filled it in the past. And before I could go to Tansonville I had to make her promise that she would place herself in the hands of one of my friends who did not care for women, for a few days.

I had heard that Gilberte was unhappy, betrayed by Robert, but not in the fashion which everyone supposed, which perhaps she herself still supposed, which in any case she alleged. An opinion that was justified by self-esteem, the desire to hoodwink other people, to hoodwink herself, not to mention the imperfect knowledge of his infidelities which is all that betrayed spouses ever acquire, all the more so as Robert, a true nephew of M. de Charlus, went about openly with women whom he compromised, whom the world believed and whom Gilberte supposed more or less to be his mistresses. It was even thought in society that he was too barefaced, never stirring, at a party, from the side of some woman whom he afterwards accompanied home, leaving Mme. de Saint-Loup to return as best she might. Anyone who had said that the other woman whom he compromised thus was not really his mistress would have been regarded as a fool, incapable of seeing what was staring him in the face, but I had been pointed, alas, in the direction of the truth, a truth which caused me infinite distress, by a few words let fall by Jupien. What had been my amazement when, having gone, a few months before my visit to Tansonville, to inquire for M. de Charlus, in whom certain cardiac symptoms had been causing his friends great anxiety, and having mentioned to Jupien, whom I found by himself, some love-letters addressed to Robert and signed Bobette which Mme. de Saint-Loup had discovered, I learned from the Baron's former factotum that the person who used the signature Bobette was none other than the violinist who had played so important a part in the life of M. de Charlus. Jupien could not speak of him without indignation: "The boy was free to do what he chose. But if there was one direction in which he ought never to have looked, that was the Baron's nephew. All the more so as the Baron loved his nephew like his own son. He has tried to separate the young couple, it is scandalous. And he must have gone about it with the most devilish cunning, or no one was ever more opposed to that sort of thing than the Marquis de Saint-Loup. To think of all the mad things he has done for his mistresses! No, that wretched musician may have deserted the Baron as he did, by a mean trick, I don't mind saying; still, that was his business. But to take up with the nephew, there are certain things that are not done." Jupien was sincere in his indignation; among people who are styled immoral, moral indignation is quite as violent as among other people, only its object is slightly different. What is more, people whose own hearts are not directly engaged, always regard unfortunate entanglements, disastrous marriages as though we were free to choose the inspiration of our love, and do not take into account the exquisite mirage which love projects and which envelops so entirely

and so uniquely the person with whom we are in love that the ‘folly’ with which a man is charged who marries his cook or the mistress of his best friend is as a rule the only poetical action that he performs in the course of his existence.

I gathered that Robert and his wife had been on the brink of a separation (albeit Gilberte had not yet discovered the precise nature of the trouble) and that it was Mme. de Marsantes, a loving, ambitious and philosophical mother, who had arranged and enforced their reconciliation. She moved in those circles in which the inbreeding of incessantly crossed strains and a gradual impoverishment bring to the surface at every moment in the realm of the passions, as in that of pecuniary interest, inherited vices and compromises. With the same energy with which she had in the past protected Mme. Swann, she had assisted the marriage of Jupien’s niece and brought about that of her own son to Gilberte, employing thus on her own account, with a pained resignation, the same primeval wisdom which she dispensed throughout the Faubourg. And perhaps what had made her at a certain moment expedite Robert’s marriage to Gilberte — which had certainly caused her less trouble and cost fewer tears than making him break with Rachel — had been the fear of his forming with another courtesan — or perhaps with the same one, for Robert took a long time to forget Rachel — a fresh attachment which might have been his salvation. Now I understood what Robert had meant when he said to me at the Princesse de Guermantes’s: “It is a pity that your young friend at Balbec has not the fortune that my mother insists upon. I believe she and I would have got on very well together.” He had meant that she belonged to Gomorrah as he belonged to Sodom, or perhaps, if he was not yet enrolled there, that he had ceased to enjoy women whom he could not love in a certain fashion and in the company of other women. Gilberte, too, might be able to enlighten me as to Albertine. If then, apart from rare moments of retrospect, I had not lost all my curiosity as to the life of my dead mistress, I should have been able to question not merely Gilberte but her husband. And it was, after all, the same thing that had made both Robert and myself anxious to marry Albertine (to wit, the knowledge that she was a lover of women). But the causes of our desire, like its objects for that matter, were opposite. In my case, it was the desperation in which I had been plunged by the discovery, in Robert’s the satisfaction; in my case to prevent her, by perpetual vigilance, from indulging her predilection; in Robert’s to cultivate it, and by granting her her freedom to make her bring her girl friends to him. If Jupien traced back to a quite recent origin the fresh orientation, so divergent from their original course, that Robert’s carnal desires had assumed, a

conversation which I had with Aune and which made me very miserable shewed me that the head waiter at Balbec traced this divergence, this inversion to a far earlier date. The occasion of this conversation had been my going for a few days to Balbec, where Saint-Loup himself had also come with his wife, whom during this first phase he never allowed out of his sight. I had marvelled to see how Rachel's influence over Robert still made itself felt. Only a young husband who has long been keeping a mistress knows how to take off his wife's cloak as they enter a restaurant, how to treat her with befitting courtesy. He has, during his illicit relations, learned all that a good husband should know. Not far from him at a table adjoining my own, Bloch among a party of pretentious young university men, was assuming a false air of being at his ease and shouted at the top of his voice to one of his friends, as he ostentatiously passed him the bill of fare with a gesture which upset two water-bottles: "No, no, my dear man, order! Never in my life have I been able to make head or tail of these documents. I have never known how to order dinner!" he repeated with a pride that was hardly sincere and, blending literature with gluttony, decided at once upon a bottle of champagne which he liked to see 'in a purely symbolic fashion' adorning a conversation. Saint-Loup, on the other hand, did know how to order dinner. He was seated by the side of Gilberte — already pregnant (he was, in the years that followed, to keep her continually supplied with offspring)† — as he would presently lie down by her side in their double bed in the hotel. He spoke to no one but his wife, the rest of the hotel appeared not to exist for him, but at the moment when a waiter came to take his order, and stood close beside him, he swiftly raised his blue eyes and darted a glance at him which did not last for more than two seconds, but in its limpid penetration seemed to indicate a kind of curiosity and investigation entirely different from that which might have animated any ordinary diner studying, even at greater length, a page or messenger, with a view to making humorous or other observations which he would communicate to his friends. This little quick glance, apparently quite disinterested, revealed to those who had intercepted it that this excellent husband, this once so passionate lover of Rachel, possessed another plane in his life, and one that seemed to him infinitely more interesting than that upon which he moved from a sense of duty. But it was to be discerned only in that glance. Already his eyes had returned to Gilberte who had seen nothing, he introduced a passing friend and left the room to stroll with her outside. Now, Aimé was speaking to me at that moment of a far earlier time, the time when I had made Saint-Loup's acquaintance, through Mme. de Villeparisis, at this same Balbec.

“Why, surely, Sir,” he said to me, “it is common knowledge, I have known it for ever so long. The year when Monsieur first came to Balbec, M. le Marquis shut himself up with my lift-boy, on the excuse of developing some photographs of Monsieur’s grandmother. The boy made a complaint, we had the greatest difficulty in hushing the matter up. And besides, Monsieur, Monsieur remembers the day, no doubt, when he came to luncheon at the restaurant with M. le Marquis de Saint-Loup and his mistress, whom M. le Marquis was using as a screen. Monsieur doubtless remembers that M. le Marquis left the room, pretending that he had lost his temper. Of course I don’t suggest for a moment that Madame was in the right. She was leading him a regular dance. But as to that day, no one — will ever make me believe that M. le Marquis’s anger wasn’t put on, and that he hadn’t a good reason to get away from Monsieur and Madame.” So far as this day was concerned, I am convinced that, if Aimé was not lying consciously, he was entirely mistaken. I remembered quite well the state Robert was in, the blow he struck the journalist. And, for that matter, it was the same with the Balbec incident; either the lift-boy had lied, or it was Aimé who was lying. At least, I supposed so; certainty I could not feel, for we never see more than one aspect of things. Had it not been that the thought distressed me, I should have found a refreshing irony in the fact that, whereas to me sending the lift-boy to Saint-Loup had been the most convenient way of conveying a letter to him and receiving his answer, to him it had meant making the acquaintance of a person who had taken his fancy. Everything, indeed, is at least twofold. Upon the most insignificant action that we perform, another man will graft a series of entirely different actions; it is certain that Saint-Loup’s adventure with the lift-boy, if it occurred, no more seemed to me to be involved in the commonplace dispatch of my letter than a man who knew nothing of Wagner save the duet in *Lohengrin* would be able to foresee the prelude to *Tristan*. Certainly to men, things offer only a limited number of their innumerable attributes, because of the paucity of our senses. They are coloured because we have eyes, how many other epithets would they not merit if we had hundreds of senses? But this different aspect which they might present is made more comprehensible to us by the occurrence in life of even the most trivial event of which we know a part which we suppose to be the whole, and at which another person looks as though through a window opening upon another side of the house and offering a different view. Supposing that Aimé had not been mistaken, Saint-Loup’s blush when Bloch spoke to him of the lift-boy had not, perhaps, been due after all to my friend’s pronouncing the word as ‘lighft.’ But I

was convinced that Saint-Loup's physiological evolution had not begun at that period and that he then had been still exclusively a lover of women. More than by any other sign, I could tell this retrospectively by the friendship that Saint-Loup had shewn for myself at Balbec. It was only while he was in love with women that he was really capable of friendship. Afterwards, for some time at least, to the men who did not attract him physically he displayed an indifference which was to some extent, I believe, sincere — for he had become very curt — and which he exaggerated as well in order to make people think that he was interested only in women. But I remember all the same that one day at Doncières, as I was on my way to dine with the Verdurins, and after he had been gazing rather markedly at Morel, he had said to me: "Curious, that fellow, he reminds me in some ways of Rachel. Don't you notice the likeness? To my mind, they are identical in certain respects. Not that it can make any difference to me." And nevertheless his eyes remained for a long time gazing abstractedly at the horizon, as when we think, before returning to the card-table or going out to dinner, of one of those long voyages which we shall never make, but for which we feel a momentary longing. But if Robert found certain traces of Rachel in Charlie, Gilberte, for her part, sought to present some similarity to Rachel, so as to attract her husband, wore like her bows of scarlet or pink or yellow ribbon in her hair, which she dressed in a similar style, for she believed that her husband was still in love with Rachel, and so was jealous of her. That Robert's love may have hovered at times over the boundary which divides the love of a man for a woman from the love of a man for a man was quite possible. In any case, the part played by his memory of Rachel was now purely aesthetic. It is indeed improbable that it could have played any other part. One day Robert had gone to her to ask her to dress up as a man, to leave a long tress of hair hanging down, and nevertheless had contented himself with gazing at her without satisfying his desire. He remained no less attached to her than before and paid her scrupulously but without any pleasure the enormous allowance that he had promised her, not that this prevented her from treating him in the most abominable fashion later on. This generosity towards Rachel would not have distressed Gilberte if she had known that it was merely the resigned fulfilment of a promise which no longer bore any trace of love. But love was, on the contrary, precisely what he pretended to feel for Rachel. Homosexuals would be the best husbands in the world if they did not make a show of being in love with other women. Not that Gilberte made any complaint. It was the thought that Robert had been loved, for years on end, by Rachel that had made her desire him, had made her refuse more

eligible suitors; it seemed that he was making a sort of concession to her when he married her. And indeed, at first, any comparison between the two women (incomparable as they were nevertheless in charm and beauty) did not favour the delicious Gilberte. But the latter became enhanced later on in her husband's esteem whereas Rachel grew visibly less important. There was another person who contradicted herself: namely, Mme. Swann. If, in Gilberte's eyes, Robert before their marriage was already crowned with the twofold halo which was created for him on the one hand by his life with Rachel, perpetually proclaimed in Mme. de Marsantes's lamentations, on the other hand by the prestige which the Guermantes family had always had in her father's eyes and which she had inherited from him, Mme. de Forcheville would have preferred a more brilliant, perhaps a princely marriage (there were royal families that were impoverished and would have accepted the dowry — which, for that matter, proved to be considerably less than the promised millions — purged as it was by the name Forcheville) and a son-in-law less depreciated in social value by a life spent in comparative seclusion. She had not been able to prevail over Gilberte's determination, had complained bitterly to all and sundry, denouncing her son-in-law. One fine day she had changed her tune, the son-in-law had become an angel, nothing was ever said against him except in private. The fact was that age had left unimpaired in Mme. Swann (become Mme. de Forcheville) the need that she had always felt of financial support, but, by the desertion of her admirers, had deprived her of the means. She longed every day for another necklace, a new dress studded with brilliants, a more sumptuous motor-car, but she had only a small income, Forcheville having made away with most of it, and — what Israelite strain controlled Gilberte in this?— she had an adorable, but a fearfully avaricious daughter, who counted every penny that she gave her husband, not to mention her mother. Well, all of a sudden she had discerned, and then found her natural protector in Robert. That she was no longer in her first youth mattered little to a son-in-law who was not a lover of women. All that he asked of his mother-in-law was to smoothe down some little difficulty that had arisen between Gilberte and himself, to obtain his wife's consent to his going for a holiday with Morel. Odette had lent her services, and was at once rewarded with a magnificent ruby. To pay for this, it was necessary that Gilberte should treat her husband more generously. Odette preached this doctrine to her with all the more fervour in that it was she herself who would benefit by her daughter's generosity. Thus, thanks to Robert, she was enabled, on the threshold of her fifties (some people said, of her sixties) to dazzle every table at which she dined,

every party at which she appeared, with an unparalleled splendour without needing to have, as in the past, a ‘friend’ who now would no longer have stood for it, in other words have paid the piper. And so she had entered finally, it appeared, into the period of ultimate chastity, and yet she had never been so smart.

† *Dis aliter visum*. We shall see, in the sequel, that the widowed Gilberte appears to be the mother of an only daughter. C. K. S. M.]

It was not merely the malice, the rancour of the once poor boy against the master who has enriched him and has moreover (this was in keeping with the character and still more with the vocabulary of M. de Charlus) made him feel the difference of their positions, that had made Charlie turn to Saint-Loup in order to add to the Baron’s sorrows. He may also have had an eye to his own profit. I formed the impression that Robert must be giving him a great deal of money. After an evening party at which I had met Robert before I went down to Combray, and where the manner in which he displayed himself by the side of a lady of fashion who was reputed to be his mistress, in which he attached himself to her, never leaving her for a moment, enveloped publicly in the folds of her skirt, made me think, but with an additional nervous trepidation, of a sort of involuntary rehearsal of an ancestral gesture which I had had an opportunity of observing in M. de Charlus, when he appeared to be robed in the finery of Mme. Molé or some other woman, the banner of a gynaecophil cause which was not his own but which he loved, albeit without having the right to flaunt it thus, whether because he found it useful as a protection or aesthetically charming, I had been struck, as we came away, by the discovery that this young man, so generous when he was far less rich, had become so stingy. That a man clings only to what he possesses, and that he who used to scatter money when he so rarely had any now hoards that with which he is amply supplied, is no doubt a common enough phenomenon, and yet in this instance it seemed to me to have assumed a more individual form. Saint-Loup refused to take a cab, and I saw that he had kept a tramway transfer-ticket. No doubt in so doing Saint-Loup was exercising, with a different object, talents which he had acquired in the course of his intimacy with Rachel. A young man who has lived for years with a woman is not as inexperienced as the novice for whom the girl that he marries is the first. Similarly, having had to enter into the minutest details of Rachel’s domestic economy, partly because she herself was useless as a housekeeper, and afterwards because his jealousy made him determined to keep a firm control over her private life, he was able, in the administration of his wife’s property and

the management of their household, to continue playing the part with a skill and experience which Gilberte would perhaps have lacked, who gladly relinquished the duties to him. But no doubt he was doing this principally in order to be able to support Charlie with every penny saved by his cheeseparing, maintaining him in affluence without Gilberte's either noticing or suffering by his peculations. Tears came to my eyes when I reflected that I had felt in the past for a different Saint-Loup an affection which had been so great and which I could see quite well, from the cold and evasive manner which he now adopted, that he no longer felt for me, since men, now that they were capable of arousing his desires, could no longer inspire his friendship. How could these tastes have come to birth in a young man who had been so passionate a lover of women that I had seen him brought to a state of almost suicidal frenzy because 'Rachel, when from the Lord' had threatened to leave him? Had the resemblance between Charlie and Rachel — invisible to me — been the plank which had enabled Robert to pass from his father's tastes to those of his uncle, in order to complete the physiological evolution which even in that uncle had occurred quite late in life? At times however Aimé's words came back to my mind to make me uneasy; I remembered Robert that year at Balbec; he had had a trick, when he spoke to the lift-boy, of not paying any attention to him which strongly resembled M. de Charlus's manner when he addressed certain men. But Robert might easily have derived this from M. de Charlus, from a certain stiffness and a certain bodily attitude proper to the Guermantes family, without for a moment sharing the peculiar tastes of the Baron. For instance, the Duc de Guermantes, who was free from any taint of the sort, had the same nervous trick as M. de Charlus of turning his wrist, as though he were straightening a lace cuff round it, and also in his voice certain shrill and affected intonations, mannerisms to all of which, in M. de Charlus, one might have been tempted to ascribe another meaning, to which he would have given another meaning himself, the individual expressing his peculiarities by means of impersonal and atavistic traits which are perhaps nothing more than ingrained peculiarities fixed in his gestures and voice. By this latter hypothesis, which borders upon natural history, it would not be M. de Charlus that we ought to style a Guermantes marked with a blemish and expressing it to a certain extent by means of traits peculiar to the Guermantes race, but the Duc de Guermantes who would be in a perverted family the exceptional example, whom the hereditary malady has so effectively spared that the outward signs which it has left upon him lose all their meaning. I remembered that on the day when I had seen Saint-Loup for the first time at

Balbec, so fair complexioned, fashioned of so rare and precious a substance, gliding between the tables, his monocle fluttering in front of him, I had found in him an effeminate air which was certainly not suggested by what I was now learning about him, but sprang rather from the grace peculiar to the Guermantes, from the fineness of that Dresden china in which the Duchess too was moulded. I recalled his affections for myself, his tender, sentimental way of expressing it, and told myself that this also, which might have deceived anyone else, meant at the time something quite different, indeed the direct opposite of what I had just learned about him. But from when did the change date? If it had occurred before my return to Balbec, how was it that he had never once come to see the lift-boy, had never once mentioned him to me? And as for the first year, how could he have paid any attention to the boy, passionately enamoured as he then was of Rachel? That first year, I had found Saint-Loup peculiar, as was every true Guermantes. Now he was even more individual than I had supposed. But things of which we have not had a direct intuition, which we have learned only through other people, we have no longer any opportunity, the time has passed in which we could inform our heart of them; its communications with reality are suspended; and so we cannot profit by the discovery, it is too late. Besides, upon any consideration, this discovery pained me too intensely for me to be able to derive spiritual advantage from it. No doubt, after what M. de Charlus had told me in Mme. Verdurin's house — in Paris, I no longer doubted that Robert's case was that of any number of respectable people, to be found even among the best and most intelligent of men. To learn this of anyone else would not have affected me, of anyone in the world save Robert. The doubt that Aimé's words had left in my mind tarnished all our friendship at Balbec and Doncières, and albeit I did not believe in friendship, nor did I believe that I had ever felt any real friendship for Robert, when I thought about those stories of the lift-boy and of the restaurant in which I had had luncheon with Saint-Loup and Rachel, I was obliged to make an effort to restrain my tears.

I should, as it happens, have no need to pause to consider this visit which I paid to the Combray district, which was perhaps the time in my life when I gave least thought to Combray, had it not furnished what was at least a provisional verification of certain ideas which I had formed long ago of the 'Guermantes way,' and also a verification of certain other ideas which I had formed of the 'Méséglise way.' I repeated every evening, in the opposite direction, the walks which we used to take at Combray, in the afternoon, when we went the 'Méséglise way.' We dined now at Tansonville at an hour at which in the past I

had long been asleep at Combray. And this on account of the heat of the sun. And also because, as Gilberte spent the afternoon painting in the chapel attached to the house, we did not take our walks until about two hours before dinner. For the pleasure of those earlier walks which was that of seeing as we returned home the purple sky frame the Calvary or mirror itself in the Vivonne, there was substituted the pleasure of setting forth when dusk had already gathered, when we encountered nothing in the village save the blue-grey, irregular and shifting triangle of a flock of sheep being driven home. Over half the fields night had already fallen; above the evening star the moon had already lighted her lamp which presently would bathe their whole extent. It would happen that Gilberte let me go without her, and I would move forward, trailing my shadow behind me, like a boat that glides across enchanted waters. But as a rule Gilberte came with me. The walks that we took thus together were very often those that I used to take as a child: how, then, could I help feeling far more keenly now than in the past on the ‘Guermantes way’ the conviction that I would never be able to write anything, combined with the conviction that my imagination and my sensibility had grown more feeble, when I found how little interest I took in Combray? And it distressed me to find how little I relived my early years. I found the Vivonne a meagre, ugly rivulet beneath its towpath. Not that I noticed any material discrepancies of any magnitude from what I remembered. But, separated from the places which I happened to be revisiting by the whole expanse of a different life, there was not, between them and myself, that contiguity from which is born, before even we can perceive it, the immediate, delicious and total deflagration of memory. Having no very clear conception, probably, of its nature, I was saddened by the thought that my faculty of feeling and imagining things must have diminished since I no longer took any pleasure in these walks. Gilberte herself, who understood me even less than I understood myself, increased my melancholy by sharing my astonishment. “What,” she would say, “you feel no excitement when you turn into this little footpath which you used to climb?” And she herself had so entirely altered that I no longer thought her beautiful, which indeed she had ceased to be. As we walked, I saw the landscape change, we had to climb hillocks, then came to a downward slope. We conversed, very pleasantly for me — not without difficulty however. In so many people there are different strata which are not alike (there were in her her father’s character, and her mother’s); we traverse first one, then the other. But, next day, their order is reversed. And finally we do not know who is going to allot the parts, to whom we are to appeal for a hearing. Gilberte was like one of those countries with

which we dare not form an alliance because of their too frequent changes of government. But in reality this is a mistake. The memory of the most constant personality establishes a sort of identity in the person, with the result that he would not fail to abide by promises which he remembers even if he has not endorsed them. As for intelligence, it was in Gilberte, with certain absurdities that she had inherited from her mother, very keen. I remember that, in the course of our conversations while we took these walks, she said things which often surprised me greatly. The first was: “If you were not too hungry and if it was not so late, by taking this road to the left and then turning to the right, in less than a quarter of an hour we should be at Guermantes.” It was as though she had said: “Turn to the left, then the first turning on the right and you will touch the intangible, you will reach the inaccessibly remote tracts of which we never upon earth know anything but the direction, but” (what I thought long ago to be all that I could ever know of Guermantes, and perhaps in a sense I had not been mistaken) “the ‘way.’” One of my other surprises was that of seeing the ‘source of the Vivonne’ which I imagined as something as extraterrestrial as the Gates of Hell, and which was merely a sort of rectangular basin in which bubbles rose to the surface. And the third occasion was when Gilberte said to me: “If you like, we might go out one afternoon, and then we can go to Guermantes, taking the road by Méséglise, it is the nicest walk,” a sentence which upset all my childish ideas by informing me that the two ‘ways’ were not as irreconcilable as I had supposed. But what struck me most forcibly was how little, during this visit, I lived over again my childish years, how little I desired to see Combray, how meagre and ugly I thought the Vivonne. But where Gilberte made some of the things come true that I had imagined about the Méséglise way was during one of those walks which after all were nocturnal even if we took them before dinner — for she dined so late. Before descending into the mystery of a perfect and profound valley carpeted with moonlight, we stopped for a moment, like two insects about to plunge into the blue calyx of a flower. Gilberte then uttered, perhaps simply out of the politeness of a hostess who is sorry that you are going away so soon and would have liked to shew you more of a country which you seem to appreciate, a speech of the sort in which her practice as a woman of the world skilled in putting to the best advantage silence, simplicity, sobriety in the expression of her feelings, makes you believe that you occupy a place in her life which no one else could fill. Showering abruptly over her the sentiment with which I was filled by the delicious air, the breeze that was wafted to my nostrils, I said to her: “You were speaking the other day of the little footpath, how I loved

you then!” She replied: “Why didn’t you tell me? I had no idea of it. I was in love with you. Indeed, I flung myself twice at your head.” “When?” “The first time at Tansonville, you were taking a walk with your family, I was on my way home, I had never seen such a dear little boy. I was in the habit,” she went on with a vague air of modesty, “of going out to play with little boys I knew in the ruins of the keep of Roussainville. And you will tell me that I was a very naughty girl, for there were girls and boys there of all sorts who took advantage of the darkness. The altar-boy from Combray church, Théodore, who, I am bound to confess, was very nice indeed (Heavens, how charming he was!) and who has become quite ugly (he is the chemist now at Méséglise), used to amuse himself with all the peasant girls of the district. As they let me go out by myself, whenever I was able to get away, I used to fly there. I can’t tell you how I longed for you to come there too; I remember quite well that, as I had only a moment in which to make you understand what I wanted, at the risk of being seen by your people and mine, I signalled to you so vulgarly that I am ashamed of it to this day. But you stared at me so crossly that I saw that you didn’t want it.” And, all of a sudden, I said to myself that the true Gilberte — the true Albertine — were perhaps those who had at the first moment yielded themselves in their facial expression, one behind the hedge of pink hawthorn, the other upon the beach. And it was I who, having been incapable of understanding this, having failed to recapture the impression until much later in my memory after an interval in which, as a result of our conversations, a dividing hedge of sentiment had made them afraid to be as frank as in the first moments — had ruined everything by my clumsiness. I had lost them more completely — albeit, to tell the truth, the comparative failure with them was less absurd — for the same reasons that had made Saint-Loup lose Rachel.

“And the second time,” Gilberte went on, “was years later when I passed you in the doorway of your house, a couple of days before I met you again at my aunt Oriane’s, I didn’t recognise you at first, or rather I did unconsciously recognise you because I felt the same longing that I had felt at Tansonville.” “But between these two occasions there were, after all, the Champs-Elysées.” “Yes, but there you were too fond of me, I felt that you were spying upon me all the time.” I did not ask her at the moment who the young man was with whom she had been walking along the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, on the day on which I had started out to call upon her, on which I would have been reconciled with her while there was still time, that day which would perhaps have changed the whole course of my life, if I had not caught sight of those two shadowy

forms advancing towards me side by side in the dusk. If I had asked her, I told myself, she would perhaps have confessed the truth, as would Albertine had she been restored to life. And indeed when we are no longer in love with women whom we meet after many years, is there not the abyss of death between them and ourselves, just as much as if they were no longer of this world, since the fact that we are no longer in love makes the people that they were or the person that we were then as good as dead? It occurred to me that perhaps she might not have remembered, or that she might have lied to me. In any case, it no longer interested me in the least to know, since my heart had changed even more than Gilberte's face. This last gave me scarcely any pleasure, but what was most striking was that I was no longer wretched, I should have been incapable of conceiving, had I thought about it again, that I could have been made so wretched by the sight of Gilberte tripping along by the side of a young man, and thereupon saying to myself: "It is all over, I shall never attempt to see her again." Of the state of mind which, in that far off year, had been simply an unending torture to me, nothing survived. For there is in this world in which everything wears out, everything perishes, one thing that crumbles into dust, that destroys itself still more completely, leaving behind still fewer traces of itself than Beauty: namely Grief.

And so I am not surprised that I did not ask her then with whom she had been walking in the Champs-Elysées, for I have already seen too many examples of this incuriosity that is brought about by time, but I am a little surprised that I did not tell Gilberte that, before I saw her that evening, I had sold a bowl of old Chinese porcelain in order to buy her flowers. It had indeed been, during the dreary time that followed, my sole consolation to think that one day I should be able without danger to tell her of so delicate an intention. More than a year later, if I saw another carriage bearing down upon mine, my sole reason for wishing not to die was that I might be able to tell this to Gilberte. I consoled myself with the thought: "There is no hurry, I have a whole lifetime in which to tell her." And for this reason I was anxious not to lose my life. Now it would have seemed to me a difficult thing to express in words, almost ridiculous, and a thing that would 'involve consequences.' "However," Gilberte went on, "even on the day when I passed you in the doorway, you were still just the same as at Combray; if you only knew how little you have altered!" I pictured Gilberte again in my memory. I could have drawn the rectangle of light which the sun cast beneath the hawthorns, the trowel which the little girl was holding in her hand, the slow gaze that she fastened on myself. Only I had supposed, because of the coarse gesture

that accompanied it, that it was a contemptuous gaze because what I longed for it to mean seemed to me to be a thing that little girls did not know about and did only in my imagination, during my hours of solitary desire. Still less could I have supposed that so easily, so rapidly, almost under the eyes of my grandfather, one of them would have had the audacity to suggest it.

Long after the time of this conversation, I asked Gilberte with whom she had been walking along the Avenue des Champs-Elysées on the evening on which I had sold the bowl: it was Léa in male attire. Gilberte knew that she was acquainted with Albertine, but could not tell me any more. Thus it is that certain persons always reappear in our life to herald our pleasures or our griefs.

What reality there had been beneath the appearance on that occasion had become quite immaterial to me. And yet for how many days and nights had I not tormented myself with wondering who the man was, had I not been obliged, when I thought of him, to control the beating of my heart even more perhaps than in the effort not to go downstairs to bid Mamma good-night in that same Combray. It is said, and this is what accounts for the gradual disappearance of certain nervous affections, that our nervous system grows old. This is true not merely of our permanent self which continues throughout the whole duration of our life, but of all our successive selves which after all to a certain extent compose the permanent self.

And so I was obliged, after an interval of so many years, to add fresh touches to an image which I recalled so well, an operation which made me quite happy by shewing me that the impassable gulf which I had then supposed to exist between myself and a certain type of little girl with golden hair was as imaginary as Pascal’s gulf, and which I felt to be poetic because of the long series of years at the end of which I was called upon to perform it. I felt a stab of desire and regret when I thought of the dungeons of Roussainville. And yet I was glad to be able to say to myself that the pleasure towards which I used to strain every nerve in those days, and which nothing could restore to me now, had indeed existed elsewhere than in my mind, in reality, and so close at hand, in that Roussainville of which I spoke so often, which I could see from the window of the orris-scented closet. And I had known nothing! In short Gilberte embodied everything that I had desired upon my walks, even my inability to make up my mind to return home, when I thought I could see the tree-trunks part asunder, take human form. The things for which at that time I so feverishly longed, she had been ready, if only I had had the sense to understand and to meet her again, to let me taste in my boyhood. More completely even than I had supposed,

Gilberte had been in those days truly part of the ‘Méséglise way.’

And indeed on the day when I had passed her in a doorway, albeit she was not Mlle. de l’Orgeville, the girl whom Robert had met in houses of assignation (and what an absurd coincidence that it should have been to her future husband that I had applied for information about her), I had not been altogether mistaken as to the meaning of her glance, nor as to the sort of woman that she was and confessed to me now that she had been. “All that is a long time ago,” she said to me, “I have never given a thought to anyone but Robert since the day of our engagement. And, let me tell you, that childish caprice is not the thing for which I blame myself most.”

Time Regained [Volume 7]

Le Temps Retrouvé (1931)
Translated by Sydney Schiff (1868-1944)

Chapter 1 — Tansonville

Tansonville seemed little more than a place to rest in between two walks or a refuge during a shower. Rather too countrified, it was one of those rural dwellings where every sitting-room is a cabinet of greenery, and where the roses and the birds out in the garden keep you company in the curtains; for they were old and each rose stood out so clearly that it might have been picked like a real one and each bird put in a cage, unlike those pretentious modern decorations in which, against a silver background, all the apple trees in Normandy are outlined in the Japanese manner, to trick the hours you lie in bed. I spent the whole day in my room, the windows of which opened upon the beautiful verdure of the park, upon the lilacs of the entrance, upon the green leaves of the great trees beside the water and in the forest of Méséglise. It was a pleasure to contemplate all this, I was saying to myself: “How charming to have all this greenery in my window” until suddenly in the midst of the great green picture I recognised the clock tower of the Church of Combray toned in contrast to a sombre blue as though it were far distant, not a reproduction of the clock tower but its very self which, defying time and space, thrust itself into the midst of the luminous greenery as if it were engraved upon my wndow-pane. And if I left my room, at the end of the passage, set towards me like a band of scarlet, I perceived the hangings of a little sitting-room which though only made of muslin, were of a scarlet so vivid that they would catch fire if a single sun-ray touched them.

During our walks Gilberte alluded to Robert as though he were turning away from her but to other women. It was true that his life was encumbered with women as masculine attachments encumber that of women-loving men, both having that character of forbidden fruit, of a place vainly usurped, which unwanted objects have in most houses.

Once I left Gilberte early and in the middle of the night, while still half-asleep, I called Albertine. I had not been thinking or dreaming of her, nor had I mistaken her for Gilberte. My memory had lost its love for Albertine but it seems there must be an involuntary memory of the limbs, pale and sterile imitation of the other, which lives longer as certain mindless animals or plants

live longer than man. The legs, the arms are full of blunted memories; a reminiscence germinating in my arm had made me seek the bell behind my back, as I used to in my room in Paris and I had called Albertine, imagining my dead friend lying beside me as she so often did at evening when we fell asleep together, counting the time it would take Françoise to reach us, so that Albertine might without imprudence pull the bell I could not find.

Robert came to Tansonville several times while I was there. He was very different from the man I had known before. His life had not coarsened him as it had M. de Charlus, but, on the contrary, had given him more than ever the easy carriage of a cavalry officer although at his marriage he had resigned his commission. As gradually M. de Charlus had got heavier, Robert (of course he was much younger, yet one felt he was bound to approximate to that type with age like certain women who resolutely sacrifice their faces to their figures and never abandon Marienbad, believing, as they cannot hope to keep all their youthful charms, that of the outline to represent best the others) had become slimmer, swifter, the contrary effect of the same vice. This velocity had other psychological causes; the fear of being seen, the desire not to seem to have that fear, the feverishness born of dissatisfaction with oneself and of boredom. He had the habit of going into certain haunts of ill-fame, where as he did not wish to be seen entering or coming out, he effaced himself so as to expose the least possible surface to the malevolent gaze of hypothetical passers-by, and that gust-like motion had remained and perhaps signified the apparent intrepidity of one who wants to show he is unafraid and does not take time to think.

To complete the picture one must reckon with the desire, the older he got, to appear young, and also the impatience of those who are always bored and *blasés*, yet being too intelligent for a relatively idle life, do not suffici-. ently use their faculties. Doubtless the very idleness of such people may display itself by indifference but especially since idleness, owing to the favour now accorded to physical exercise, has taken the form of sport, even when the latter cannot be practised, feverish activity leaves boredom neither time nor space to develop in.

He had become dried up and gave friends like myself no evidence of sensibility. On the other hand, he affected with Gilberte an unpleasant sensitiveness which he pushed to the point of comedy. It was not that Robert was indifferent to Gilberte; no, he loved her. But he always lied to her and this spirit of duplicity, if it was not the actual source of his lies, was constantly emerging. At such times he believed he could only extricate himself by exaggerating to a ridiculous degree the real pain he felt in giving pain to her. When he arrived at

Tansonville he was obliged, he said, to leave the next morning on business with a certain gentleman of those parts, who was expecting him in Paris and who, encountered that very evening near Combray, unhappily revealed the lie, Robert, having failed to warn him, by the statement that he was back for a month's holiday and would not be in Paris before. Robert blushed, saw Gilberte's faint melancholy smile, and after revenging himself on the unfortunate culprit by an insult, returned earlier than his wife and sent her a desperate note telling her he had lied in order not to pain her, for fear that when he left for a reason he could not tell her, she should think that he had ceased to love her; and all this, written as though it were a lie, was actually true. Then he sent to ask if he could come to her room, and there, partly in real sorrow, partly in disgust with the life he was living, partly through the increasing audacity of his successive pretences, he sobbed and talked of his approaching death, sometimes throwing himself on the floor as though he were ill. Gilberte, not knowing to what extent to believe him, thought him a liar on each occasion, but, disquieted by the presentiment of his approaching death and believing in a general way that he loved her, that perhaps he had some illness she knew nothing about, did not dare to oppose him or ask him to relinquish his journeys. I was unable to understand how he came to have Morel received as though he were a son of the house wherever the Saint-Loups were, whether in Paris or at Tansonville.

Françoise, knowing all that M. de Charlus had done for Jupien and Robert Saint-Loup for Morel, did not conclude that this was a trait which reappeared in certain generations of the Guermantes, but rather — seeing that Legrandin much loved Théodore — came to believe, prudish and narrow-minded as she was, that it was a custom which universality made respectable. She would say of a young man, were it Morel or Théodore: "He is fond of the gentleman who is interested in him and who has so much helped him." And as in such cases it is the protectors who love, who suffer, who forgive, Françoise did not hesitate between them and the youths they debauched, to give the former the *beau role*, to discover they had a "great deal of heart". She did not hesitate to blame Théodore who had played a great many tricks on Legrandin, yet seemed to have scarcely a doubt as to the nature of their relationship, for she added, "The young man understands he's got to do his share as he says: 'take me away with you, I will be fond of you and pet you,' and, *ma foi*, the gentleman has so much heart that Théodore is sure to find him kinder than he deserves, for he's a hot head while the gentleman is so good that I often say to Jeannette (Theodore's fiancée), 'My dear, if ever you're in trouble go and see that gentleman, he would lie on the

ground to give you his bed, he is too fond of Théodore to throw him out and he will never abandon him'." It was in the course of one of these colloquies that, having inquired the name of the family with whom Théodore was living in the south, I suddenly grasped that he was the person unknown to me who had asked me to send him my article in the *Figaro* in a letter the caligraphy of which was of the people but charmingly expressed.

In the same fashion Françoise esteemed Saint-Loup more than Morel and expressed the opinion, in spite of the ignoble behaviour of the latter, that the marquis had too good a heart ever to desert him unless great reverses happened to himself.

Saint-Loup insisted I should remain at Tansonville and once let fall, although plainly he was not seeking to please me, that my visit was so great a happiness for his wife that she had assured him, though she had been wretched the whole day, that she was transported with joy the evening I unexpectedly arrived, that, in fact, I had miraculously saved her from despair, "perhaps from something worse." He begged me to try and persuade her that he loved her, assuring me that the other woman he loved was less to him than Gilberte and that he intended to break with her very soon. "And yet," he added, in such a feline way and with so great a longing to confide that I expected the name of Charlie to pop out at any moment, in spite of himself, like a lottery number, "I had something to be proud of. This woman, who has proved her devotion to me and whom I must sacrifice for Gilberte's sake, never accepted attention from a man, she believed herself incapable of love; I am the first. I knew she had refused herself to everyone, so much so that when I received an adorable letter from her, telling me there could be no happiness for her without me, I could not resist it. Wouldn't it be natural for me to be infatuated with her, were it not intolerable for me to see poor little Gilberte in tears? Don't you think there is something of Rachel in her?" As a matter of fact, it had struck me that there was a vague resemblance between them. This may have been due to a certain similarity of feature, owing to their common Jewish origin, which was little marked in Gilberte, and yet when his family wanted him to marry, drew Robert towards her. The likeness was perhaps due also to Gilberte coming across photographs of Rachel and wanting to please Robert by imitating certain of the actress's habits, such as always wearing red bows in her hair, a black ribbon on her arm and dyeing her hair to appear dark. Then, fearing her sorrows affected her appearance, she tried to remedy it by occasionally exaggerating the artifice. One day, when Robert was to come to Tansonville for twenty-four hours, I was

amazed to see her come to table looking so strangely different from her present as well as from her former self, that I was as bewildered as if I were facing an actress, a sort of Theodora. I felt that in my curiosity to know what it was that was changed about her, I was looking at her too fixedly. My curiosity was soon satisfied when she blew her nose, for in spite of all her precautions, the assortment of colours upon the handkerchief would have constituted a varied palette and I saw that she was completely painted. To this was due the bleeding appearance of her mouth which she forced into a smile, thinking it suited her, while the knowledge that the hour was approaching when her husband ought to arrive without knowing whether or not he would send one of those telegrams of which the model had been wittily invented by M. de Guermantes: “Impossible to come, lie follows,” paled her cheeks and ringed her eyes.

“Ah, you see,” Robert said to me with a deliberately tender accent which contrasted with his former spontaneous affection, with an alcoholic voice and the inflection of an actor. “To make Gilberte happy! What wouldn’t I do to secure that? You can never know how much she has done for me.” The most unpleasant of all was his vanity, for Saint-Loup, flattered that Gilberte loved him, without daring to say that he loved Morel, gave her details about the devotion the violinist pretended to have for him, which he well knew were exaggerated if not altogether invented seeing that Morel demanded more money of him every day. Then confiding Gilberte to my care, he left again for Paris. To anticipate somewhat (for I am still at Tansonville), I had the opportunity of seeing him once again in society, though at a distance, when his words, in spite of all this, were so lively and charming that they enabled me to recapture the past. I was struck to see how much he was changing. He resembled his mother more and more, but the proud and well-bred manner he inherited from her and which she possessed to perfection, had become, owing to his highly accomplished education, exaggerated and stilted; the penetrating look common to the Guermantes, gave him, from a peculiar animal-like habit, a half-unconscious air of inspecting every place he passed through. Even when motionless, that colouring which was his even more than it was the other Guermantes’, a colouring which seemed to have a whole golden day’s sunshine in it, gave him so strange a plumage, made of him so rare a creature, so unique, that one wanted to own him for an ornithological collection; but when, besides, this bird of golden sunlight put itself in motion, when, for instance, I saw Robert de Saint-Loup at a party, he had a way of throwing back his head so joyously and so proudly, under the golden plumage of his slightly ruffled hair, the movement of

his neck was so much more supple, proud and charming than that of other men, that, between the curiosity and the half-social, half-zoological admiration he inspired, one asked oneself whether one had found him in the faubourg Saint-Germain or in the Jardin des Plantes and whether one was looking at a *grand seigneur* crossing a drawing-room or a marvellous bird walking about in its cage. With a little imagination the warbling no less than the plumage lent itself to that interpretation. He spoke in what he believed the *grand-siècle*style and thus imitated the manners of the Guermantes, but an indefinable trifle caused them to become those of M. de Charlus. “I must leave you an instant,” he said during that party, when M. de Marsantes was some distance away, “to pay court to my niece a moment.” As to that love of which he never ceased telling me, there were others besides Charlie, although he was the only one that mattered to him. Whatever kind of love a man may have, one is always wrong about the number of his *liaisons*, because one interprets friendships as *liaisons*, which is an error of addition, and also because it is believed that one proved *liaison* excludes another, which is a different sort of mistake. Two people may say, “I know X’s mistress,” and each be pronouncing a different name, yet neither be wrong. A woman one loves rarely suffices for all our needs, so we deceive her with another whom we do not love. As to the kind of love which Saint-Loup had inherited from M. de Charlus, the husband who is inclined that way generally makes his wife happy. This is a general law, to which the Guermantes were exceptions, because those of them who had that taste wanted people to believe they were women-lovers and, advertising themselves with one or another, caused the despair of their wives. The Courvoisiers acted more sensibly. The young Vicomte de Courvoisier believed himself the only person on earth and since the beginning of the world to be tempted by one of his own sex. Imagining that the preference came to him from the devil, he fought against it and married a charming woman by whom he had several children. Then one of his cousins taught him that the practice was fairly common, even went to the length of taking him to places where he could satisfy it. M. de Courvoisier only loved his wife the more for this and redoubled his uxorious zeal so that the couple were cited as the best *ménage* in Paris. As much could not be said for Saint-Loup, because Robert, not content with invertion, caused his wife endless jealousy by running after mistresses without getting any pleasure from them.

It is possible that Morel, being exceedingly dark, was necessary to Saint-Loup, as shadow is to sunlight. In this ancient family, one could well imagine a *grand seigneur*, blonde, golden, intelligent, dowered with every prestige,

acquiring and retaining in the depths of his being, a secret taste, unknown to everyone, for negroes. Robert, moreover, never allowed conversation to touch his peculiar kind of love affair. If I said a word he would answer, with a detachment that caused his eye-glass to fall, “Oh! I don’t know, I haven’t an idea about such things. If you want information about them, my dear fellow, I advise you to go to someone else. I am a soldier, nothing more. I’m as indifferent to matters of that kind as I am passionately interested in the Balkan Wars. Formerly the history of battles interested you. In those days I told you we should again witness typical battles, even though the conditions were completely different, such, for instance, as the great attempt of envelopment by the wing in the Battle of Ulm. Well, special as those Balkan Wars may be, Lullé Burgas is again Ulm, envelopment by the wing. Those are matters you can talk to me about. But I know no more about the sort of thing you are alluding to than I do about Sanscrit.” On the other hand, when he had gone, Gilberte referred voluntarily to the subjects Robert thus disdained when we talked together. Certainly not in connection with her husband, for she was unaware, or pretended to be unaware, of everything. But she enlarged willingly upon them when they concerned other people, whether because she saw in their case a sort of indirect excuse for Robert or whether, divided like his uncle between a severe silence on these subjects and an urge to pour himself out and to slander, he had been able to instruct her very thoroughly about them. Amongst those alluded to, no one was less spared than M. de Charlus; doubtless this was because Robert, without talking to Gilberte about Morel, could not help repeating to her in one form or another what had been told him by the violinist who pursued his former benefactor with his hatred. These conversations which Gilberte affected, permitted me to ask her if in similar fashion Albertine, whose name I had for the first time heard on her lips when the two were school friends, had the same tastes. Gilberte refused to give me this information. For that matter, it had for a long time ceased to afford me the slightest interest. Yet I continued to concern myself mechanically about it, just like an old man who has lost his memory now and then wants news of his dead son.

Another day I returned to the charge and asked Gilberte again if Albertine loved women. “Oh, not at all,” she answered. “But you formerly said that she was very bad form.” “I said that? You must be mistaken. In any case, if I did say it — but you are mistaken — I was on the contrary speaking of little love affairs with boys and, at that age, those don’t go very far.”

Did Gilberte say this to hide that she herself, according to Albertine, loved

women and had made proposals to her, or (for others are often better informed about our life than we think) did Gilberte know that I had loved and been jealous of Albertine and (others being apt to know more of the truth than we believe, exaggerating it and so erring by excessive suppositions, while we were hoping they were mistaken through lack of any supposition at all) did she imagine that I was so still, and was she, out of kindness, blind-folding me which one is always ready to do to jealous people? In any case, Gilberte's words, since the "bad form" of former days leading to the certificate of moral life and habits of to-day, followed an inverse course to the affirmations of Albertine, who had almost come to avowing half-relationship with Gilberte herself. Albertine had astonished me in this, as had also what Andrée told me, for, respecting the whole of that little band, I had at first, before knowing its perversity, convinced myself that my suspicions were unjustified, as happens so often when one discovers an innocent girl, almost ignorant of the realities of life, in a milieu which one had wrongly supposed the most depraved. Afterwards I retraced my steps in the contrary sense, accepting my original suspicions as true. And perhaps Albertine told me all this so as to appear more experienced than she was and to astonish me with the prestige of her perversity in Paris, as at first by the prestige of her virtue at Balbec. So, quite simply, when I spoke to her about women who loved women, she answered as she did, in order not to seem to be unaware of what I meant, as in a conversation one assumes an understanding air when somebody talks of Fourrier or of Tobolsk without even knowing what these names mean. She had perhaps associated with the friend of Mlle Vinteuil and with Andrée, isolated from them by an air-tight partition and, while they believed she was not one of them, she only informed herself afterwards (as a woman who marries a man of letters seeks to cultivate herself) in order to please me, by enabling herself to answer my questions, until she realised that the questions were inspired by jealousy when, unless Gilberte was lying to me, she reversed the engine. The idea came to me, that it was because Robert had learnt from her in the course of a flirtation of the kind that interested him, that she, Gilberte, did not dislike women, that he married her, hoping for pleasures which he ought not to have looked for at home since he obtained them elsewhere. None of these hypotheses were absurd, for in the case of women such as Odette's daughter or of the girls of the little band there is such a diversity, such an accumulation of alternating tastes, that if they are not simultaneous, they pass easily from a *liaison*with a woman to a passion for a man, so much so that it becomes difficult to define their real and dominant taste. Thus Albertine had sought to please me

in order to make me marry her but she had abandoned the project herself because of my undecided and worrying disposition. It was in this too simple form that I j udged my affair with Albertine at a time when I only saw it from the outside.

What is curious and what I am unable wholly to grasp, is that about that period all those who had loved Albertine, all those who would have been able to make her do what they wanted, asked, entreated, I would even say, implored me, failing my friendship, at least, to have some sort of relations with them. It would have been no longer necessary to offer money to Mme Bontemps to send me Alber-tine. This return of life, coming when it was no longer any use, profoundly saddened me, not on account of Albertine whom I would have received without pleasure if she had been brought to me, not only from Touraine but from the other world, but because of a young woman whom I loved and whom I could not manage to see. I said to myself that if she died or if I did not love her any more, all those who would have been able to bring her to me would have fallen at my feet. Meanwhile, I attempted in vain to work upon them, not being cured by experience which ought to have taught me, if it ever taught anyone anything, that to love is a bad fate like that in fairy stories, against which nothing avails until the enchantment has ceased.

"I've just reached a point," Gilberte continued, "in the book which I have here where it speaks of these things. It's an old Balzac I'm raking over to be on equal terms with my uncles, *La Fille aux yeux d'Or*, but it's incredible, a beautiful nightmare. Maybe a woman can be controlled in that way by another woman, but never by a man." "You are mistaken, I knew a woman who was loved by a man who veritably succeeded in isolating her; she could never see anyone and only went out with trusted servants." "Indeed! How that must have horrified you who are so kind. Just recently Robert and I were saying you ought to get married, your wife would cure you and make you happy." "No, I've got too bad a disposition." "What nonsense." "I assure you I have. For that matter I have been engaged, but I could not marry."

I did not want to borrow *La Fille aux yeux d'Or* from Gilberte because she was reading it, but on the last evening that I stayed with her, she lent me a book which produced a lively and mingled impression upon me. It was a volume of the unpublished diary of the Goncourts. I was sad that last evening, in going up to my room, to think that I had never gone back one single time to see the Church of Combray which seemed to be awaiting me in the midst of greenery framed in the violet-hued window. I said to myself, "Well, it must be another year, if I do not die between this and then," seeing no other obstacle but my

death and not imagining that of the church, which, it seemed to me, must last long after my death as it had lasted long before' my birth. When, before blowing out my candle, I read the passage which I transcribe further on, my lack of aptitude for writing — presaged formerly during my walks on the Guermantes side, confirmed during the visit of which this was the last evening, those eyes of departure, when the routine of habits which are about to end is ceasing and one begins to judge oneself — seemed to me less regrettable; it was as though literature revealed no profound truth while at the same time it seemed sad that it was not what I believed it. The infirm state which was to confine me in a sanatorium seemed less regrettable to me if the beautiful things of which books speak were no more beautiful than those I had seen. But, by a strange contradiction, now that this book spoke of them, I longed to see them. Here are the pages which I read until fatigue closed my eyes.

"The day before yesterday, who should drop in here, to take me to dinner with him but Verdurin, the former critic of the *Revue*, author of that book on Whistler in which truly the doings, the artistic atmosphere of that highly original American are often rendered with great delicacy by that lover of all the refinements, of all the prettinesses of the thing painted which Verdurin is. And while I dress myself to follow him, every now and then, he gives vent to a regular recitation, like the frightened spelling out of a confession by Fromentin on his renunciation of writing immediately after his marriage with 'Madeleine', a renunciation which was said to be due to his habit of taking morphine, the result of which, according to Verdurin, was that the majority of the habitués of his wife's salon, not even knowing that her husband had ever written, spoke to him of Charles Blanc, St. Victor, St. Beuve, and Burty, to whom they believed him completely inferior. 'You Goncourt, you well know, and Gautier knew also that my "Salons" was a very different thing from those pitiable "Maîtres d'autrefois" believed to be masterpieces in my wife's family.' Then, by twilight, while the towers of the Trocadero were lit up with the last gleams of the setting sun which made them look just like those covered with currant jelly of the old-style confectioners, the conversation continues in the carriage on our way to the Quai Conti where their mansion is, which its owner claims to be the ancient palace of the Ambassadors of Venice and where there is said to be a smoking-room of which Verdurin talks as though it were the drawing-room, transported just as it was in the fashion of the *Thousand and One Nights*, of a celebrated Palazzo, of which I forget the name, a Palazzo with a well-head representing the crowning of the Virgin which Verdurin asserts to be absolutely the finest of

Sansovinos and which is used by their guests to throw their cigar ashes into. And, *ma foi*, when we arrive, the dull green diffusion of moonlight, verily like that under which classical painting shelters Venice and under which the silhouetted cupola of the Institute makes one think of the Salute in the pictures of Guardi, I have somewhat the illusion of being beside the Grand Canal, the illusion reinforced by the construction of the mansion, where from the first floor, one does not see the quay, and by the effective remark of the master of the house, who affirms that the name of the rue du Bac — I am hanged if I had ever thought of it — came from the ferry upon which the religious of former days, the Miramiones, went to mass at Notre Dame. I took to reloving the whole quarter where I wandered in my youth when my Aunt de Courmont lived there on finding almost contiguous to the mansion of Verdurin, the sign of 'Petit Dunkerque', one of those rare shops surviving otherwise than vignetted in the chalks and rubbings of Gabriel de St. Aubin in which that curious eighteenth century individual came in and seated himself during his moments of idleness to bargain about pretty little French and foreign 'trifles' and the newest of everything produced by Art as a bill-head of the 'Petit Dunkerque' has it, a bill-head of which I believe we alone, Verdurin and I, possess an example and which is one of those shuttle-cock masterpieces of ornamented paper upon which, in the reign of Louis XV accounts were delivered, with its title-head representing a raging sea swarming with ships, a sea with waves which had the appearance of an illustration in the *Edition des Fermiers Généraux de l'Huître et des Plaideurs*. The mistress of the house, who places me beside her, says amiably that she has decorated her table with nothing but Japanese chrysanthemums but these chrysanthemums are disposed in vases which are the rarest works of art, one of them of bronze upon which petals of red copper seemed to be the living eflorescence of the flower. There is Cottard the doctor, and his wife, the Polish sculptor Viradobetski, Swann the collector, a Russian *grande dame*, a Princess with a golden name which escapes me, and Cottard whispers in my ear that it is she who had shot point blank at the Archduke Rudolf. According to her I have an absolutely exceptional literary position in Galicia and in the whole north of Poland, a girl in those parts never consenting to promise her hand without knowing if her betrothed is an admirer of La Faustin.

"'You cannot understand, you western people,' exclaims by way of conclusion the princess who gives me the impression, *ma foi*, of an altogether superior intelligence, 'that penetration by a writer into the intimate life of a woman.' A man with shaven chin and lips, with whiskers like a butler, beginning

with that tone of condescension of a secondary professor preparing first form boys for the Saint-Charlemagne, that is Brichot, the university don. When my name was mentioned by Verdurin he did not say a word to show that he knew our books, which means for me anger, discouragement aroused by this conspiracy the Sorbonne organises against us, bringing contradiction and hostile silence even into the charming house where I am being entertained. We proceed to table and there is then an extraordinary procession of plates which are simply masterpieces of the art of the porcelain-maker. The connoisseur, whose attention is delicately tickled during the dainty repast, listens all the more complacently to the artistic chatter — while before him pass plates of Yung Tsching with their nasturtium rims yielding to the bluish centre with its rich flowering of the water-iris, a really decorative passage with its dawn-flight of kingfishers and cranes, a dawn with just that matutinal tone which I gaze at lazily when I awake daily at the Boulevard Montmorency — Dresden plates more finical in the grace of their fashioning, whether in the sleepy anemia of their roses turning to violet in the crushed wine-lees of a tulip or with their rococo design of carnation and myosotis. Plates of Sevres trellissed by the delicate vermiculation of their white fluting, ver-ticillated in gold or bound upon the creamy plane of their *pâte tendre* by the gay relief of a golden ribbon, finally a whole service of silver on which are displayed those Lucinian myrtles which Dubarry would recognise. And what is perhaps equally rare is the really altogether remarkable quality of the things which are served in it, food delicately manipulated, a stew such as the Parisians, one can shout that aloud, never have at their grandest dinners and which reminds me of certain *cordons bleus* of Jean d'Heurs. Even the *foie gras* has no relation to the tasteless froth which is generally served under that name, and I do not know many places where a simple potato salad is thus made with potatoes having the firmness of a Japanese ivory button and the patina of those little ivory spoons with which the Chinese pour water on the fish that they have just caught. A rich red bejewelling is given to the Venetian goblet which stands before me by an amazing Léoville bought at the sale of M. Montalivet and it is a delight for the imagination and for the eye, I do not fear to say it, for the imagination of what one formerly called the jaw, to have served to one a brill which has nothing in common with that kind of stale brill served on the most luxurious tables which has received on its back the imprint of its bones during the delay of the journey, a brill not accompanied by that sticky glue generally called *sauce blanche* by so many of the chefs in great houses, but by a veritable *sauce blanche* made out of butter at five francs the pound; to see this brill in a wonderful Tching Hon dish

graced by the purple rays of a setting sun on a sea which an amusing band of lobsters is navigating, their rough tentacles so realistically pictured that they seem to have been modelled upon the living carapace, a dish of which the handle is a little Chinaman catching with his line a fish which makes the silvery azure of his stomach an enchantment of mother o' pearl. As I speak to Verdurin of the delicate satisfaction it must be for him to have this refined repast amidst a collection which no prince possesses at the present time, the mistress of the house throws me the melancholy remark: 'One sees how little you know him,' and she speaks of her husband as a whimsical oddity, indifferent to all these beauties, 'an oddity' she repeats, 'that's the word, who has more gusto for a bottle of cider drunk in the rough coolness of a Norman farm.' And the charming woman, in a tone which is really in love with the colours of the country, speaks to us with overflowing enthusiasm of that Normandy where they have lived, a Normandy which must be like an enormous English park, with the fragrance of its high woodlands à la Lawrence, with its velvet cryptomeria in their enamelled borders of pink hortensia, with its natural lawns diversified by sulphur-coloured roses falling over a rustic gateway flanked by two intertwined pear-trees resembling with its free-falling and flowering branches the highly ornamental insignia of a bronze applique by Gauthier, a Normandy which must be absolutely unsuspected by Parisians on holiday, protected as it is by the barrier of each of its enclosures, barriers which the Verdurins confess to me they did not commit the crime of removing. At the close of day, as the riot of colour was sleepily extinguished and light only came from the sea curdled almost to a skim-milk blue. 'Ah! Not the sea you know —' protests my hostess energetically in answer to my remark that Flaubert had taken my brother and me to Trouville, 'That is nothing, absolutely nothing. You must come with me, without that you will never know'— they would go back through real forests of pink-tulle flowers of the rhododendrons, intoxicated with the scent of the gardens, which gave her husband abominable attacks of asthma. 'Yes,' she insisted, 'it is true, real crises of asthma.' Afterwards, the following summer, they returned, housing a whole colony of artists in an admirable dwelling of the Middle Ages, an ancient cloister leased by them for nothing, and *ma foi*, listening to this woman who after moving in so many distinguished circles, had yet kept some of that freedom of speech of a woman of the people, a speech which shows you things with the colour imagination gives to them, my mouth watered at the thought of the life which she confessed to living down there, each one working in his cell or in the salon which was so large that it had two fireplaces. Everyone came in before

luncheon for altogether superior conversation interspersed with parlour games, reminding me of those evoked by that masterpiece of Diderot, his letters to Mlle Volland. Then after luncheon everyone went out, even on days of sunny showers, when the sparkling of the raindrops luminously filtering through the knots of a magnificent avenue of centenarian beechtrees which offered in front of the gates the vista of growth dear to the eighteenth century, and shrubs bearing drops of rain on their flowering buds suspended on their boughs, lingering to watch the delicate dabbling of a bullfinch enamoured of coolness, bathing itself in the tiny nymphembourg basin shaped like the corolla of a white rose. And as I talk to Mme Verdurin of the landscapes and of the flowers down there, so delicately pastelled by Elstir: 'But it is I who made all that known to him,' she exclaims with an indignant lifting of the head, 'everything, you understand; wonder-provoking nooks, all his themes; I threw them in his face when he left us, didn't I, Auguste? All those themes he has painted. Objects he always knew, to be fair, one must admit that. But flowers he had never seen; no, he did not know the difference between a marsh-mallow and a hollyhock. It was I who taught him, you will hardly believe me, to recognise the jasmine.' And it is, one must admit, a strange reflection that the painter of flowers, whom the connoisseurs of to-day cite to us as the greatest, superior even to Fantin-Latour, would perhaps never have known how to paint jasmine without the woman who was beside me. 'Yes, upon my word, the jasmine; all the roses he produced were painted while he was staying with me, if I did not bring them to him myself. At our house we just called him "M. Tiche". Ask Cottard or Brichot or any of them if he was ever treated here as a great man. He would have laughed at it himself. I taught him how to arrange his flowers; at the beginning he had no idea of it. He never knew how to make a bouquet. He had no natural taste for selection. I had to say to him, "No, do not paint that; it is not worth while, paint this." Oh! If he had listened to us for the arrangement of his life as he did for the arrangement of his flowers, and if he had not made that horrible marriage!' And abruptly, with eyes fevered by their absorption in a reverie of the past, with a nerve-racked gesture, she stretched forth her arms with a frenzied cracking of the joints from the silk sleeves of her bodice, and twisted her body into a suffering pose like some admirable picture which I believe has never been painted, wherein all the pent-up revolt, all the enraged susceptibilities of a friend outraged in her delicacy and in her womanly modesty can be read. Upon that she talks to us about the admirable portrait which Elstir made for her, a portrait of the Collard family, a portrait given by her to the Luxembourg when she quarrelled with the painter,

confessing that it was she who had given him the idea of painting the man in evening dress in order to obtain that beautiful expanse of linen, and she who chose the velvet dress of the woman, a dress offering support in the midst of all the fluttering of the light shades of the curtains, of the flowers, of the fruit, of the gauze dresses of the little girls like ballet-dancers' skirts. It was she, too, who gave him the idea of painting her in the act of arranging her hair, an idea for which the artist was afterwards honoured, which consisted, in short, in painting the woman, not as though on show, but surprised in the intimacy of her everyday life. 'I said to him, "When a woman is doing her hair or wiping her face, or warming her feet, she knows she is not being seen, she executes a number of interesting movements, movements of an altogether Leonardolike grace."' But upon a sign from Verdurin, indicating that the arousing of this state of indignation was unhealthy for that highly-strung creature which his wife was, Swann drew my admiring attention to the necklace of black pearls worn by the mistress of the house and bought by her quite white at the sale of a descendant of Mme de La Fayette to whom they had been given by Henrietta of England, pearls which had become black as the result of a fire which destroyed part of the house in which the Verdurins were living in a street the name of which I can no longer remember, a fire after which the casket containing the pearls was found but they had become entirely black. 'And I know the portrait of those pearls on the very shoulders of Mme de La Fayette, yes, exactly so, their portrait,' insisted Swann in the face of the somewhat wonderstruck exclamations of the guests. 'Their authentic portrait, in the collection of the Duc de Guermantes. A collection which has not its equal in the world,' he asserts and that I ought to go and see it, a collection inherited by the celebrated Duc who was the favourite nephew of Mme de Beausergent his aunt, of that Mme de Beausergent who afterwards became Mme d'Hayfeld, sister of the Marquise de Villeparisis and of the Princess of Hanover. My brother and I used to be so fond of him in old days when he was a charming boy called Basin, which as a matter of fact, is the first name of the Duc. Upon that, Doctor Cottard, with that delicacy which reveals the man of distinction, returns to the history of the pearls and informs us that catastrophes of that kind produce in the mind of people distortions similar to those one remarks in organic matter and relates in really more philosophical terms than most physicians can command, how the footman of Mme Verdurin herself, through the horror of this fire where he nearly perished, had become a different man, his hand-writing having so changed that on seeing the first letter which his masters, then in Normandy, received from him, announcing the event,

they believed it was the invention of a practical joker. And not only was his handwriting different, Cottard asserts that from having been a completely sober man he had become an abominable drunkard whom Mme Verdurin had been obliged to discharge. This suggestive dissertation continued, on a gracious sign from the mistress of the house, from the dining-room into the Venetian smoking-room where Cottard told me he had witnessed actual duplications of personality, giving as example the case of one of his patients whom he amiably offers to bring to see me, in whose case Cottard has merely to touch his temples to usher him into a second life, a life in which he remembers nothing of the other, so much so that, a very honest man in this one, he had actually been arrested several times for thefts committed in the other during which he had been nothing less than a disgraceful scamp. Upon which Mme Verdurin acutely remarks that medicine could furnish subjects truer than a theatre where the humour of an imbroglio is founded upon pathological mistakes, which from thread to needle brought Mme Cottard to relate that a similar notion had been made use of by an amateur who is the prime favourite at her children's evening parties, the Scotchman Stevenson, a name which forced from Swann the peremptory affirmation: 'But Stevenson is a great writer, I can assure you, M. de Goncourt, a very great one, equal to the greatest.' And upon my marvelling at the escutcheoned panels of the ceiling in the room where we are smoking, panels which came from the ancient Palazzo Barberini, I express my regret at the progressive darkening of a certain vase through the ashes of our *londrès*, Swann having recounted that similar stains on the leaves of certain books attest their having belonged to Napoleon I, books owned, despite his anti-Bonapartist opinions by the Duc de Guermantes, owing to the fact that the Emperor chewed tobacco, Cottard, who reveals himself as a man of penetrating curiosity in all matters, declares that these stains do not come at all from that: 'Believe me, not at all,' he insists with authority, 'but from his habit of having always near at hand, even on the field of battle, some pastilles of Spanish liquorice to calm his liver pains. For he had a disease of the liver and it is of that he died,' concluded the doctor."

I stopped my reading there for I was leaving the following day, moreover, it was an hour when the other master claimed me, he under whose orders we are for half our time. We accomplish the task to which he obliges us with our eyes closed. Every morning he surrenders us to our other master knowing that otherwise we should be unable to yield ourselves to his service. It would be curious, when our spirit has reopened its eyes, to know what we could have been

doing under that master who clouds the minds of his slaves before putting them to his immediate business. The most cunning, before their task is finished, try to peep out surreptitiously. But slumber speedily struggles to efface the traces of what they long to see. And, after all these centuries we know little about it. So I closed the Goncourt journal. Glamour of literature! I wanted to see the Cottards again, to ask them so many details about Elstir, I wanted to go and see if the "Petit Dunkerque" shop still existed, to ask permission to visit that mansion of the Verdurins where I had dined. But I experienced a vague apprehension. Certainly I did not disguise from myself that I had never known how to listen nor, when I was with others, to observe; to my eyes no old woman exhibited a pearl necklace and my ears heard nothing that was said about it. Nevertheless, I had known these people in my ordinary life, I had often dined with them; whether it was the Verdurins, or the Guermantes, or the Cottards, each had seemed to me as commonplace as did that Basin to my grandmother who little supposed he was the beloved nephew, the charming young hero, of Mme de Beausergent. All had seemed to me insipid; I remembered the numberless vulgarities of which each one was composed.... "*Et que tout cela fît un astre dans la nuit*!"

I resolved to put aside provisionally the objections against literature which these pages of Goncourt had aroused in me. Apart from the peculiarly striking naivete of the memoir-writer, I was able to reassure myself from different points of view. To begin with, in regard to myself, the inability to observe and to listen of which the journal I have quoted had so painfully reminded me was not complete. There was in me a personage who more or less knew how to observe but he was an intermittent personage who only came to life when some general essence common to many things which are its nourishment and its delight, manifested itself. Then the personage remarked and listened, but only at a certain depth and in such a manner that observation did not profit. Like a geometrician who in divesting things of their material qualities, only sees their linear substratum, what people said escaped me, for that which interested me was not what they wanted to say but the manner in which they said it in so far as it revealed their characters or their absurdities. Or rather that was an object which had always been my particular aim because I derived specific pleasure from identifying the denominator common to one person and another. It was only when I perceived it that my mind — until then dozing even behind the apparent activity of my conversation the animation of which masked to the outside world a complete mental torpor — started all at once joyously in chase, but that which

it then pursued — for example the identity of the Verdurin's salon at diverse places and periods — was situated at half-depth, beyond actual appearance, in a zone somewhat withdrawn. Also the obvious transferable charm of people escaped me because I no longer retained the faculty of confining myself to it, like the surgeon who, beneath the lustre of a female abdomen, sees the internal disease which is consuming it. It was all very well for me to go out to dinner. I did not see the guests because when I thought I was observing them I was radiographing them. From that it resulted that in collating all the observations I had been able to make about the guests in the course of a dinner, the design of the lines traced by me would form a unity of psychological laws in which the interest pertaining to the discourse of a particular guest occupied no place whatever. But were my portraits denuded of all merit because I did not compose them merely as portraits? If in the domain of painting one portrait represents truths relative to volume, to light, to movement, does that necessarily make it inferior to another quite dissimilar portrait of the same person in which, a thousand details omitted in the first will be minutely related to each other, a second portrait from which it would be concluded that the model was beautiful while that of the first would be considered ugly, which might have a documentary and even historical importance but might not necessarily be an artistic truth. Again my frivolity the moment when I was with others, made me anxious to please and I desired more to amuse people with my chatter than to learn from listening unless I went out to interrogate someone upon a point of art or unless some jealous suspicion preoccupied me. But I was incapable of seeing a thing unless a desire to do so had been aroused in me by reading; unless it was a thing of which I wanted a previous sketch to confront later with reality. Even had that page of the Goncourts not enlightened me, I knew how often I had been unable to give my attention to things or to people, whom afterwards, once their image had been presented to me in solitude by an artist, I would have gone leagues and risked death to rediscover. Then my imagination started to work, had begun to paint. And the very thing I had yawned at the year before I desired when I again contemplated it and with anguish said to myself, "Can I never see it again? What would I not give for it?" When one reads articles about people, even about mere society people, qualifying them as "the last representatives of a society of which there is no other living witness", doubtless some may exclaim, "to think that he says so much about so insignificant a person and praises him as he does", but it is precisely such a man I should have deplored not having known if I had only read papers and reviews and if I had never seen the man himself

and I was more inclined, in reading such passages in the papers, to think, “What a pity! And all I cared about then was getting hold of Gilberte and Albertine and I paid no attention to that gentleman whom I simply took for a society bore, for a pure façade, a marionnette.” The pages of the Goncourt Journal that I had read made me regret that attitude. For perhaps I might have concluded from them that life teaches one to minimise the value of reading and shows us that what the writer exalts for us is not worth much; but I could equally well conclude the contrary, that reading enhances the value of life, a value we have not realised until books make us aware of how great that value is. Strictly, we can console ourselves for not having much enjoyed the society of a Vinteuil or of a Bergotte, because the awkward middleclassness of the one, the unbearable defects of the other prove nothing against them, since their genius is manifested by their works; and the same applies to the pretentious vulgarity of an Elstir in early days. Thus the journal of the Goncourts made me discover that Elstir was none other than the “M. Tiche” who had once inflicted upon Swann such exasperating lectures at the Verdurins. But what man of genius has not adopted the irritating conversational manner of artists of his own circle before acquiring (as Elstir did, though it happens rarely) superior taste. Are not the letters of Balzac, for instance, smeared with vulgar terms which Swann would rather have died than use? And yet, it is probable that Swann, so sensitive, so completely exempt from every dislikeable idiosyncrasy, would have been incapable of writing *Cousine Bette* and *Le Curé de Tours*. Therefore, whether or no memoirs are wrong to endow with charm a society which has displeased us, is a problem of small importance, since, even if the writer of these memoirs is mistaken, that proves nothing against the value of a society which produces such genius and which existed no less in the works of Vinteuil, of Elstir and of Bergotte.

Quite at the other extremity of experience, when I remarked that the very curious anecdotes which are the inexhaustible material of the journal of the Goncourts and a diversion for solitary evenings, had been related to him by those guests whom in reading his pages we should have envied him knowing, it was not so very difficult to explain why they had left no trace of interesting memory in my mind. In spite of the ingenuousness of Goncourt, who supposed that the interest of these anecdotes lay in the distinction of the man who told them, it can very well be that mediocre people might have experienced during their lives or heard tell of curious things which they related in their turn. Goncourt knew how to listen as he knew how to observe, and I do not. Moreover, it was necessary to judge all these happenings one by one. M. de Guermantes certainly had not

given me the impression of that adorable model of juvenile grace whom my grandmother so much wanted to know and set before my eyes as inimitable according to the *Mémoires of Mme de Beausergent*. One must remember that Basin was at that time seven years old, that the writer was his aunt and that even husbands who are going to divorce their wives a few months later are loud in praise of them. One of the most charming poems of Sainte-Beuve is consecrated to the apparition beside a fountain of a young child crowned with gifts and graces, the youthful Mlle de Champlâtreux who was not more than ten years old. In spite of all the tender veneration felt by that poet of genius, the Comtesse de Noailles, for her mother-in-law the Duchesse de Noailles, born Champlâtreux, it is possible, if she were to paint her portrait, that it would contrast rather piquantly with the one Sainte-Beuve drew fifty years earlier.

What may perhaps be regarded as more disturbing, is something in between, personages in whose case what is said implies more than a memory which is able to retain a curious anecdote yet without one's having, as in the case of the Vinteuils, the Bergottes, the resource of judging them by their work; they have not created, they have only — to our great astonishment, for we found them so mediocre — inspired. Again it happens that the salon which, in public galleries, gives the greatest impression of elegance in great paintings of the Renaissance and onwards, is that of a little ridiculous bourgeoise whom after seeing the picture, I might, if I had not known her, have yearned to approach in the flesh, hoping to learn from her precious secrets that the painter's art did not reveal to me in his canvas, though her majestic velvet train and laces formed a passage of painting comparable to the most splendid of Titians. If only in bygone days I had understood that it is not the wittiest man, the best educated, the man with the best social relationships who becomes a Bergotte but he who knows how to become a mirror and is thereby enabled to reflect his own life, however commonplace, (though his contemporaries might consider him less gifted than Swann and less erudite than Bréauté) and one can say the same, with still more reason, of an artist's models. The awakening of love of beauty in the artist who can paint everything may be stimulated, the elegance in which he could find such beautiful motifs may be supplied, by people rather richer than himself — at whose houses he would find what he was not accustomed to in his studio of an unknown genius selling his canvases for fifty francs; for instance, a drawing-room upholstered in old silk, many lamps, beautiful flowers and fruit, handsome dresses — relatively modest folk, (or who would appear that to people of fashion who are not even aware of the others' existence) who for that very reason are

more in a position to make the acquaintance of an obscure artist, to appreciate him, to invite him and buy his pictures, than aristocrats who get themselves painted like a Pope or a Prime Minister by academic painters. Would not the poetry of an elegant interior and of the beautiful dresses of our period be discovered by posterity in the drawing-room of the publisher Charpentier by Renoir rather than in the portrait of the Princesse de Sagan or of the Comtesse de La Rochefoucauld by Cotte or Chaplin? The artists who have given us the most resplendent visions of elegance have collected the elements at the homes of people who were rarely the leaders of fashion of their period; for the latter are seldom painted by the unknown depositary of a beauty they are unable to distinguish on his canvases, disguised as it is by the interposition of a vulgar burlesque of superannuated grace which floats before the public eye in the same way as the subjective visions which an invalid believes are actually before him. But that these mediocre models whom I had known could have inspired, advised certain arrangements which had enchanted me, that the presence of such an one of them in the picture was less that of a model, than of a friend whom a painter wishes to figure in his canvas, was like asking oneself whether we regret not having known all these personages because Balzac painted them in his books or dedicated his books to them as the homage of his admiration, to whom Sainte-Beuve or Baudelaire wrote their loveliest verses, still more if all the Récamiers, all the Pompadours would not have seemed to me insignificant people, whether owing to a temperamental defect which made me resent being ill and unable to return and see the people I had misjudged, or because they might only owe their prestige to the illusory magic of literature which forced me to change my standard of values and consoled me for being obliged from one day to the other, on account of the progress which my illness was making, to break with society, renounce travel and going to galleries and museums in order that I could be nursed in a sanatorium. Perhaps, however, this deceptive side, this artificial illumination, only exists in memoirs when they are too recent, too close to reputations, whether intellectual or fashionable, which will quickly vanish, (and if erudition then tries to react against this burial, will it succeed in dispelling one out of a thousand of these oblivions which keep on accumulating?)

These ideas tending some to diminish, others to increase my regret that I had no gift for literature, no longer occupied my mind during the long years I spent as an invalid in a sanatorium far from Paris and I had altogether renounced the project of writing until the sanatorium was unable to find a medical staff at the beginning of 1916. I then returned, as will be seen, to a very different Paris from

the Paris where I returned in August, 1914, when I underwent medical examination, after which I went back to the sanatorium.

Chapter 2 — M. de Charlus During the War, His Opinions, His Pleasures

On one of the first evenings after my return to Paris in 1916, wanting to hear about the only thing that interested me, the war, I went out after dinner to see Mme Verdurin, for she was, together with Mme Bontemps, one of the queens of that Paris of the war which reminded one of the Directory. As the leavening by a small quantity of yeast appears to be a spontaneous germination, young women were running about all day wearing cylindrical turbans on their heads as though they were contemporaries of Mme Tallien, As a proof of public spirit they wore straight Egyptian tunics, dark and very “warlike” above their short skirts, they were shod in sandals, recalling Talma’s buskin or high leggings like those of our beloved combatants. It was, they said, because they did not forget it was their duty to rejoice the eyes of those combatants that they still adorned themselves not only with *flou* dresses but also with jewels evoking the armies by their decorative theme if indeed their material did not come from the armies and had not been worked by them. Instead of Egyptian ornaments recalling the campaign of Egypt, they wore rings or bracelets made out of fragments of shell or beltings of the “seventy-fives”, cigarette-lighters consisting of two English half-pennies to which a soldier in his dug-out had succeeded in giving a patina so beautiful that the profile of Queen Victoria might have been traced on it by Pisanello. It was again, they said, because they never ceased thinking of their own people, that they hardly wore mourning when one of them fell, the pretext being that he was proud to die, which enabled them to wear a close bonnet of white English crêpe (graceful of effect and encouraging to aspirants) while the invincible certainty of final triumph enabled them to replace the earlier cashmire by satins and silk muslins and even to wear their pearls “while observing that tact and discretion of which it is unnecessary to remind French women.”

The Louvre and all the museums were closed and when one read at the head of an article “Sensational Exhibition” one might be certain it was not an exhibition of pictures but of dresses destined to quicken “those delicate artistic delights of which Parisian women have been too long deprived.” It was thus that

elegance and pleasure had regained their hold; fashion, in default of art, sought to excuse itself, just as artists exhibiting at the revolutionary salon in 1793 proclaimed that it would be a mistake if it were regarded as “inappropriate by austere Republicans that we should be engaged in art when coalesced Europe is besieging the territory of liberty.” The dressmakers acted in the same spirit in 1916 and asserted with the self-conscious conceit of the artist, that “to seek what was new, to avoid banality, to prepare for victory, by disengaging a new formula of beauty for the generations after the war, was their absorbing ambition, the chimera they were pursuing as would be discovered by those who came to visit their salons delightfully situated in such and such a street, where the exclusion of the mournful preoccupations of the moment with the restraint imposed by circumstances and the substitution of cheerfulness and brightness was the order of the day. The sorrows of the hour might, it is true, have got the better of feminine» energy if we had not such lofty examples of courage and endurance to meditate. So, thinking of our combatants in the trenches who dream of more comfort and coquetry for the dear one at home, let us unceasingly labour to introduce into the creation of dresses that novelty which responds to the needs of the moment. Fashion, it must be conceded, is especially associated with the English, consequently with allied firms and this year the really smart thing is the *robe-tonneau* the charming freedom of which gives to all our young women an amusing and distinguished *cachet*. ‘It will indeed be one of the happiest consequences of this sad war’ the delightful chronicler added (while awaiting the recapture of the lost provinces and the rekindling of national sentiment)’to have secured such charming results in the way of dress with so little material and to have created coquetry out of nothing without ill-timed luxury and bad style. At the present time dresses made at home are preferred to those made in several series by great dress-makers, because each one is evidence of the intelligence, taste and individuality of the maker.’” As to charity, when we remember all the unhappiness born of the invasion, of the many wounded and mutilated, obviously it should become “ever more ingenious” and compel the ladies in the high turbans to spend the afternoon taking tea at the bridge-table commenting on the news from the front while their automobiles await them at the door with a handsome soldier on the seat conversing with the *chasseur*. For that matter it was not only the high cylindrical hats which were new but also the faces they surmounted. The ladies in the new hats were young women come one hardly knew whence, who had become the flower of fashion, some during the last six months, others during the last two years, others again during the last four. These

differences were as important for them as, when I made my first appearance in society, were those between two families like the Guer-mantes and the Rochefoucaulds with three or four centuries of ancient lineage. The lady who had known the Guer-mantes since 1914 considered another who had been introduced to them in 1916 a parvenue, gave her the nod of a dowager duchess while inspecting her through her *lorgnon*, and avowed with a significant gesture that no one in society knew whether the lady was even married. “All this is rather sickening,” concluded the lady of 1914, who would have liked the cycle of the newly-admitted to end with herself. These newcomers whom young men considered decidedly elderly and whom certain old men who had not been exclusively in the best society, seemed to recognise as not being so new as all that, did something more than offer society the diversions of political conversation and music in suitable intimacy; it had to be they who supplied such diversions for, so that things should seem new, whether they are so or not, in art or in medicine as in society, new names are necessary (in certain respects they were very new indeed). Thus Mme Verdurin went to Venice during the war and like those who want at any cost to avoid sorrow and sentiment, when she said it was “épatant”, what she admired was not Venice nor St. Mark’s nor the palaces, all that had given, me delight and which she cheapened, but the effect of the search-lights in the sky, searchlights about which she gave information supported by figures. (Thus from age to age a sort of realism is reborn out of reaction against the art which has been admired till then.)

The Sainte-Euverte salon was a back number and the presence there of the greatest artists or the most influential ministers attracted no one. On the other hand, people rushed to hear a word uttered by the Secretary of one Government, by the Under-Secretary of another, at the houses of the new ladies in turbans whose winged and chattering invasions filled Paris. The ladies of the first Directory had a queen who was young and beautiful called Mme Tallien; those of the second had two who were old and ugly and who were called Mme Verdurin and Mme Bontemps. Who reproached Mme Bontemps because her husband had been bitterly criticised by the*Echo de Paris* for the part he played in the Dreyfus affair? As the whole Chamber had at an earlier period become revisionist, it was necessarily among the old revisionists and the former socialists that the party of social order, of religious toleration and of military efficiency had to be recruited. M. Bontemps would have been detested in former days because the anti-patriots were then given the name of Dreyfusards, but that name had soon been forgotten and had been replaced by that of the adversary of

the three-year law. M. Bontemps on the other hand, was one of the authors of that law, therefore he was a patriot. In society (and this social phenomenon is only the application of a much more general psychological law) whether novelties are reprehensible or not, they only excite consternation until they have been assimilated and defended by reassuring elements. As it had been with Dreyfusism, so it was with the marriage of Saint-Loup and Odette's daughter, a marriage people protested against at first. Now that people met everyone they knew at the Saint-Loups', Gilberte might have had the morals of Odette herself, people would have gone there just the same and would have agreed with Gilberte in condemning undigested moral novelties like a dowager-duchess. Dreyfusism was now integrated in a series of highly respectable and customary things. As to asking what it amounted to in itself, people now thought as little about accepting as formerly about condemning it. It no longer shocked anyone and that was all about it. People remembered it as little as they do whether the father of a young girl they know was once a thief or not. At most they might say: "The man you're talking about is the brother-in-law or somebody of the same name, there was never anything against this one." In the same way there had been different kinds of Dreyfusism and the man who went to the Duchesse de Montmorency's and got the Three-Year Law passed could not be a bad sort of man. In any case, let us be merciful to sinners. The oblivion allotted to Dreyfus was *a fortiori* extended to Dreyfusards. Besides, there was no one else in politics, since everyone had to be Dreyfusards at one time or another if they wanted to be in the Government, even those who represented the contrary of what Dreyfusism had incarnated when it was new and dreadful (at the time that Saint-Loup was considered to be going wrong) namely, anti-patriotism, irreligion, anarchy, etc. Thus M. Bontemps' Dreyfusism, invisible and contemplative like that of all politicians, was as little observable as the bones under his skin. No one remembered he had been Dreyfusard, for people of fashion are absentminded and forgetful and also because time had passed which they affected to believe longer than it was and it had become fashionable to say that the pre-war period was separated from the war-period by a gulf as deep, implying as much duration, as a geological period; and even Brichot the nationalist in; alluding to the Dreyfus affair spoke of "those pre-historic days". The truth is that the great change brought about by the war was in inverse ratio to the value of the minds it touched, at all events, up to a certain point; for, quite at the bottom, the utter fools, the voluptuaries, did not bother about whether there was a war or not; while quite at the top, those who create their own world,

their own interior life, are little concerned with the importance of events. What profoundly modifies the course of their thought is rather something of no apparent importance which overthrows the order of time and makes them live in another period of their lives. The song of a bird in the Park of Montboissier, or a breeze laden with the scent of mignonette, are obviously matters of less importance than the great events of the Revolution and of the Empire; nevertheless they inspired in Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre tombe*pages of infinitely greater value.

M. Bontemps did not want to hear peace spoken of until Germany had been divided up as it was during the Middle Ages, the doom of the house of Hohenzollern pronounced, and William II sentenced to be shot. In a word, he was what Brichot called a Diehard; this was the finest brevet of citizenship one could give him. Doubtless, for the three first days Mme Bontemps had been somewhat bewildered to find herself among people who asked Mme Verdurin to present her to them, and it was in a slightly acid tone that Mme Verdurin replied: "the Comte, my dear," when Mme Bontemps said to her, "Was that not the Duc d'Haussonville you just introduced to me?" whether through entire ignorance and failure to associate the name of Haussonville with any sort of tide, or whether, on the contrary, by excess of knowledge and the association of her ideas with the*Parti des Ducs* of which she had been told M. d'Haussonville was one of the Academic members. After the fourth day she began to be firmly established in the faubourg Saint-Germain. Sometimes she could be observed among the fragments of an obscure society which as little surprised those who knew the egg from which Mme Bontemps had been hatched as the debris of a shell around a chick. But after a fortnight, she shook them off and by the end of the first month, when she said, "I am going to the Lévi's," everyone knew, without her being more precise, that she was referring to the Lévis-Mirepoix and not a single duchesse who was there would have gone to bed without having first asked her or Mme Verdurin, at least by telephone, what was in the evening's communiqué, how things were going with Greece, what offensive was being prepared, in a word, all that the public would only know the following day or later and of which, in this way, they had a sort of dress rehearsal. Mme Verdurin, in conversation, when she communicated news, used "we" in speaking of France: "Now, you see, we exact of the King of Greece that he should retire from the Pelopon-nesse, etc. We shall send him etc." And in all her discourses G.H.Q. occurred constantly ("I have telephoned to G.H.Q., etc.") an abbreviation in which she took as much pleasure as women did formerly who, not knowing the

Prince of Agrigente, asked if it was “Grigri” people were speaking of, to show they were *au courant*, a pleasure known only to society in less troubled times but equally enjoyed by the masses at times of great crisis. Our butler, for instance, when the King of Greece was discussed, was able, thanks to the papers, to allude to him like William II, as “Tino”, while until now his familiarity with kings had been more ordinary and invented by himself when he called the King of Spain “Fonfonse”. One may further observe that the number of people Mme Verdurin named “bores” diminished in direct ratio with the social importance of those who made advances to her. By a sort of magical transformation, every bore who came to pay her a visit and solicited an invitation, suddenly became agreeable and intelligent. In brief, at the end of a year the number of “bores” was reduced to such proportions that “the dread and unendurableness of being bored” which occurred so often in Mme Verdurin’s conversation and had played such an important part in her life, almost entirely disappeared. Of late, one would have said that this unendurableness of boredom (which she had formerly assured me she never felt in her first youth) caused her less pain, like headaches and nervous asthmas, which lose their strength as one grows older; and the fear of being bored would doubtless have entirely abandoned Mme Verdurin owing to lack of bores, if she had not in some measure replaced them by other recruits amongst the old “faithfuls”. Finally, to have done with the duchesses who now frequented Mme Verdurin, they came there, though they were unaware of it, in search of exactly the same thing as during the Dreyfus period, a fashionable amusement so constituted that its enjoyment satisfied political curiosity and the need of commenting privately upon the incidents read in the newspapers. Mme Verdurin would say, “Come in at five o’clock to talk about the war,” as she would have formerly said “to talk about *l’affaire* and in the interval you shall hear Morel.” Now Morel had no business to be there for he had not been in any way exempted. He had simply not joined up and was a deserter, but nobody knew it. Another star of the Salon, “Dans-les-choux”, had, in spite of his sporting tastes, got himself exempted. He had become for me so exclusively the author of an admirable work about which I was constantly thinking, that it was only when, by chance, I established a transversal current between two series of souvenirs, that I realised it was he who had brought about Albertine’s departure from my house. And again this transversal current ended, so far as those reminiscent relics of Albertine were concerned, in a channel which was dammed in full flow several years back. For I never thought any more about her. It was a channel unfrequented by memories, a line I no longer needed to follow. On the other

hand the works of “Dans-les-choux” were recent and that line of souvenirs was constantly frequented and utilised by my mind.

I must add that acquaintance with the husband of Andrée was neither very easy nor very agreeable and that the friendship one offered him was doomed to many disappointments. Indeed he was even then very ill and spared himself fatigues other than those which seemed likely to give him pleasure. He only thus classified meeting people as yet unknown to him whom his vivid imagination represented as being potentially different from the rest. He knew his old friends too well, was aware of what could be expected of them and to him they were no longer worth a dangerous and perhaps fatal fatigue. He was in short a very bad friend. Perhaps, in his taste for new acquaintances, he regained some of the mad daring which he used to display in sport, gambling and the excesses of the table in the old days at Balbec. Each time I saw Mme Verdurin, she wanted to introduce me to Andrée, apparently unable to admit that I had known her long before. As it happened, Andrée rarely came with her husband but she remained my excellent and sincere friend. Faithful to the aesthetic of her husband, who reacted against Russian ballets, she remarked of the Marquis de Polignac, “He has had his house decorated by Bakst. How can one sleep in it? I should prefer Dubufe.”

Moreover the Verdurins, through that inevitable progress of asstheticism which ends in biting one’s own tail, declared that they could not stand the modern style (besides, it came from Munich) nor white walls and they only liked old French furniture in a sombre setting.

It was very surprising at this period when Mme Verdurin could have whom she pleased at her house, to see her making indirect advances to a person she had completely lost sight of, Odette, One thought the latter could add nothing to the brilliant circle which the little group had become. But a prolonged separation, in soothing rancour, sometimes revives friendship. And the phenomenon which makes the dying utter only names formerly familiar to them and causes old people’s complaisance with childish memories, has its social equivalent. To succeed in the enterprise of bringing Odette back to her, it must be understood that Mme Verdurin did not employ the “ultras” but the less faithful *habitués* who had kept a foot in each salon. To them she said, “I don’t know why she doesn’t come here any more. Perhaps she has quarrelled with me, I haven’t quarrelled with her. What have I ever done to her? It was at my house she met both her husbands. If she wants to come back, let her know that my doors are open to her.” These words, which might have cost the pride of “*the patronne*” a good

deal if they had not been dictated by her imagination, were passed on but without success. Mme Verdurin awaited Odette but the latter did not come until certain events which will be seen later brought her there for quite other reasons than those which could have been put forward by the embassy of the faithless, zealous as it was; few successes are easy, many checks are decisive.

Things were so much the same, although apparently different, that one came across the former expressions “right thinking” and “ill-thinking” quite naturally. And just as the former communards had been anti-revisionist, so the strongest Dreyfusards wanted everybody to be shot with the full support of the generals just as at the time of the Affaire they had been against Galliffet. Mme Verdurin invited to such parties some rather recent ladies, known for their charitable works, who at first came strikingly dressed, with great pearl necklaces. Odette possessed one as fine as any and formerly had rather overdone exhibiting it but now she was in war dress, and imitating the ladies of the faubourg, she eyed them severely. But women know how to adapt themselves. After wearing them three or four times, these ladies observed that the dresses they considered *chic*were for that very reason proscribed by the people who were *chic* and they laid aside their golden gowns and resigned themselves to simplicity.

Mme Verdurin said, “It is deplorable, I shall telephone to Bontemps to do what is necessary to-morrow. They have again ‘censored’ the whole end of Norpois’ article simply because he let it be understood that they had ‘*limogé*’ Percin.” For all these women got glory out of using the shibboleth current at the moment and believed they were in the fashion, just as a middle-class woman, when M. de Bréauté or M. de Charlus was mentioned, exclaimed: “Who’s that you’re talking about? Babel de Bréauté, Même de Charlus?” For that matter, duchesses got the same pleasure out of saying “*limogé*”, for like *roturiers un peu poètes* in that respect, it is the name that matters but they express themselves in accordance with their mental category in which there is a great deal that is middle-class. Those who have minds have no regard for birth.

All those telephonings of Mme Verdurin were not without ill-effects. We had forgotten to say that the Verdurin salon though continuing in spirit, had been provisionally transferred to one of the largest hotels in Paris, the lack of coal and light having rendered the Verdurin receptions somewhat difficult in the former very damp abode of the Venetian ambassadors. Nevertheless, the new salon was by no means unpleasant. As in Venice the site selected for its water supply dictates the form the palace shall take, as a bit of garden in Paris delights one more than a park in the country, the narrow dining-room which Mme Verdurin

had at the hotel was a sort of lozenge with the radiant white of its screen-like walls against which every Wednesday, and indeed every day, the most various and interesting people and the smartest women in Paris stood out, happy to avail themselves of the luxury of the Verdurins, thanks to their fortune increasing at a time when the richest were restricting their expenditure owing to difficulty in getting their incomes. This somewhat modified style of reception enchanted Brichot who, as the social relations of the Verdurins developed, obtained additional satisfaction from their concentration in a small area, like surprises in a Christmas stocking. On certain days guests were so numerous that the dining-room of the private apartment was too small and dinner had to be served in the enormous dining-room of the hotel below where the “faithful”, while hypocritically pretending to miss the intimacy of the upper floor, were in reality delighted (constituting a select group as formerly in the little railway) to be a spectacular object of envy to neighbouring tables. In peace-time a society paragraph, surreptitiously sent to the *Figaro* or the *Gaulois*, would doubtless have announced to a larger audience than the dining-room of the Majestic could hold that Brichot had dined with the Duchesse de Duras, but since the war, society reporters having discontinued that sort of news (they got home on funerals, investitures and Franco-American banquets), the only publicity attainable was that primitive and restricted one, worthy of the dark ages prior to the discovery of Gutenberg, of being seen at the table of Mme Verdurin. After dinner, people went up to the Pattonne’s suite and the telephoning began again. Many of the large hotels were at that time full of spies, who daily took note of the news telephoned by M. Bontemps with an indiscretion fortunately counterbalanced by the complete inaccuracy of his information which was always contradicted by the event.

Before the hour when afternoon-teas had finished, at the decline of day, one could see from afar in the still, clear sky, little brown spots which, in the twilight, one might have taken for gnats or birds. Just as, when we see a mountain far away which we might take for a cloud, we are impressed because we know it really to be solid, immense and resistant, so I was moved because the brown spots in the sky were neither gnats nor birds but aeroplanes piloted by men who were keeping watch over Paris. It was not the recollection of the aeroplanes I had seen with Albertine in our last walk near Versailles that affected me for the memory of that walk had become indifferent to me.

At dinner-time the restaurants were full and if, passing in the street, I saw a poor fellow home on leave, freed for six days from the constant risk of death, fix

his eyes an instant upon the brilliantly illuminated windows, I suffered as at the hotel at Balbec when the fishermen looked at us while we dined. But I suffered more because I knew that the misery of a soldier is greater than that of the poor for it unites all the miseries and is still more moving because it is more resigned, more noble, and it was with a philosophical nod of his head, without resentment, that he who was ready to return to the trenches, observing the *embusqués* elbowing each other to reserve their tables, remarked: “One would not say there was a war going on here.”

At half-past nine, before people had time to finish their dinner, the lights were suddenly put out on account — of police regulations and at nine-thirty-five there was a renewed hustling of *embusqués* seizing their overcoats from the hands of the *chasseurs* of the restaurant where I had dined with Saint-Loup one evening of his leave, in a mysterious interior twilight like that in which magic lantern slides are shown or films at one of those cinemas towards which men and women diners were now hurrying. But after that hour, for those who, like myself, on the evening of which I am speaking, had remained at home for dinner and went out later to see friends, certain quarters of Paris were darker than the Combray of my youth; visits were like those one made to neighbours in the country. Ah! if Albertine had lived, how sweet it would have been, on the evenings when I dined out, to make an appointment with her under the arcades. At first I should have seen nobody, I should have had the emotion of believing she would not come, when all at once I should have seen one of her dear grey dresses in relief against the black wall, her smiling eyes would have perceived me and we should have been able to walk arm-in-arm without anyone recognising or interfering with us and to have gone home together. Alas, I was alone and it was as though I were making a visit to a neighbour in the country, one of those calls such as Swann used to pay us after dinner, without meeting more passers-by in the obscurity of Tansonville as he walked down that little twisting path to the street of St. Esprit, than I encountered this evening in the alley between the rue Clothilde and the rue Bonaparte, now a sinuous, rustic path. And as sections of countryside played upon by rough weather are unspoiled by a change in their setting, on evenings swept by icy winds, I felt myself more vividly on the shore of an angry sea than when I was at that Balbec of which I so often dreamed. And there were other elements which had not before existed in Paris and made one feel as though one had arrived from the train for a holiday in the open country, such as the contrast of light and shade at one’s feet on moonlit evenings. Moonlight produces effects unknown to towns

even in full winter; its rays played on the snow of the Boulevard Haussman unswept by workmen as on an Alpine glacier. The outlines of the trees were sharply reflected against the golden-blue snow as delicately as in certain Japanese pictures or in some backgrounds by Raphael. They lengthened on the ground at the foot of the trees as in nature when the setting sun reflects the trees which rise at regular intervals in the fields. But by a refinement of exquisite delicacy, the meadow upon which these shadows of ethereal trees were cast, was a field of Paradise, not green but of a white so brilliant on account of the moon shedding its rays on the jade-coloured snow, that one would have said it was woven of petals from the blossoms of pear-trees. And in the squares the divinities of the public fountains holding a jet of ice in their hands seemed made of a two-fold substance and, as though the artist had married bronze to crystal to produce it. On such rare days all the houses were black; but in spring, braving the police regulation once in a while, a particular house, perhaps only one floor of a particular house, or even only one room on that floor, did not close its shutters and seemed suspended by itself on impalpable shadows like a luminous projection, like an apparition without consistency. And the woman one's raised eyes perceived, isolated in the golden penumbra of the night in which oneself seemed lost, in which she too seemed abandoned, was endowed with the veiled, mysterious charm of an Eastern vision. At length one passed on and no living thing interrupted the rhythm of monotonous and hygienic tramping in the darkness.

***

I was reflecting that it was a long time since I had seen any of the personages with whom this work has been concerned. In 1914, during the two months I passed in Paris, I had once perceived M. de Charlus and had met Bloch and Saint-Loup, the latter only twice. It was certainly on the second occasion that he seemed to be most himself, and to have overcome that unpleasant lack of sincerity I had noticed at Tansonville to which I referred earlier. On this occasion, I recognised all his lovable qualities of former days. The first time I had seen him was at the beginning of the week that followed the declaration of war and while Bloch displayed extremely chauvinistic sentiments, Saint-Loup alluded to his own failure to join up with an irony that rather shocked me. Saint-Loup was just back from Balbec. "All who don't go and fight," he exclaimed with forced gaiety, "whatever reason they give, simply don't want to be killed,

it’s nothing but funk.” And with a more emphatic gesture than when he alluded to others, “And if I don’t rejoin my regiment, it’s for the same reason.” Before that, I had noticed in different people that the affectation of laudable sentiments is not the only disguise of unworthy ones, that a more original way is to exhibit the latter so that, at least, one does not seem to be disguising them. In Saint-Loup this tendency was strengthened by his habit, when he had done something for which he might have been censured, of proclaiming it as though it had been done on purpose, a habit he must have acquired from some professor at the War School with whom he had lived on terms of intimacy and for whom he professed great admiration. So I interpreted this outbreak as the affirmation of sentiments he wanted to exhibit as having inspired his evasion of military service in the war now beginning. “Have you heard,” he asked as he left me, “that my Aunt Oriane is about to sue for divorce? I know nothing about it myself. People have often said it before and I’ve heard it announced so often that I shall wait until the divorce is granted before I believe it. I may add that it isn’t surprising; my uncle is a charming man socially and to his friends and relations and in one way he has more heart than my aunt. She’s a saint, but she takes good care to make him feel it. But he’s an awful husband; he has never ceased being unfaithful to his wife, insulting her, ill-treating her and depriving her of money into the bargain. It would be so natural if she left him that it’s a reason for its being true and also for its not being true just because people keep on saying so. And after all, she has stood it for so long.... Of course, I know there are ever so many false reports which are denied and afterwards turn out to be true.” That made me ask him whether, before he married Gilberte, there had ever been any question of his marrying Mlle de Guermantes. He started at this and assured me it was not so, that it was only one of those society rumours born, no one knows how, which disappear as they come, the falsity of which does not make those who believe them more cautious, for no sooner does another rumour of an engagement, of a divorce or of a political nature arise than they give it immediate credence and pass it on. Forty-eight hours had not passed before certain facts proved that my interpretation of Robert’s words was completely wrong when he said, “All those who are not at the front are in a funk.” Saint-Loup had only said this to show off and appear psychologically original while he was uncertain whether his services would be accepted. But at that very moment he was moving heaven and earth to be accepted, showing less originality in the sense he had given to that word, but that he was more profoundly French, more in conformity with all that was best in the French of St. André-des-Champs, gentlemen, bourgeois, respectable

servants of gentlemen, or those in revolt against gentlemen, two equally French divisions of the same family, a Françoise offshoot and a Sauton offshoot, from which two arrows flew once more to the same target which was the frontier. Bloch was delighted to hear this avowal of cowardice by a Nationalist (who, in truth, was not much of a Nationalist) and when Saint-Loup asked him if he was going to join up, he made a grimace like a high-priest and replied “shortsighted.” But Bloch had completely changed his opinion about the war when he came to see me in despair some days later for, although he was shortsighted, he had been passed for service. I was taking him back to his house when we met Saint-Loup. The latter had an appointment with a former officer, M. de Cambremer, who was to present him to a colonel at the Ministry of War, he told me. “Cambremer is an old acquaintance of yours, you know Cancan as well as I do.” I replied that, as a fact, I did know him and his wife too, but that I did not greatly appreciate them. Yet I was so accustomed, ever since I first made their acquaintance, to consider his wife an unusual person with a thorough knowledge of Schopenhauer who had access to an intellectual *milieu* closed to her vulgar husband, that I was at first surprised when Saint-Loup remarked: “His wife is an idiot, you can have her; but he’s an excellent fellow, gifted and extremely agreeable,” By the idiocy of the wife, no doubt Saint-Loup meant her mad longing to get into the best society which that society severely condemned and, by the qualities of the husband, those his niece implied when she called him the best of the family. Anyhow, he did not bother himself about duchesses but that sort of intelligence is as far removed from the kind that characterises thinkers as is the intelligence the public respects because it has enabled a rich man “to make his pile.” But the words of Saint-Loup did not displease me since they recalled that pretentiousness is closely allied to stupidity and that simplicity has a subtle but agreeable flavour. It is true I had no occasion to savour that of M. de Cambremer. But that is exactly why one being is so many different beings apart from differences of opinion. I had only known the shell of M. de Cambre-mer and his charm, attested by others, was unknown to me. Bloch left us in front of his door, overflowing with bitterness against Saint-Loup, telling him that those “beautiful red tabs” parading about at Staff Headquarters run no risk and that he, an ordinary second class private had no wish to “get a bullet through his skin for the sake of William.” “It seems that the Emperor William is seriously ill,” Saint-Loup answered. Bloch, like all those people who have something to do with the Stock Exchange, received any sensational news with peculiar credulity added, “it is said even that he is dead.” On the Stock Exchange every, sovereign who is ill,

whether Edward VII or William II, is dead; every city on the point of being besieged, is taken. “It is only kept secret,” Bloch went on, “so that German public opinion should not be depressed. But he died last night. My father has it from ‘the best sources’.” “The best sources” were the only ones of which M. Bloch senior took notice, when, through the luck of possessing certain “influential connections” he received the as yet secret news that the Exterior Debt was going to rise or de Beers fall. Moreover, if at that very moment there was a rise in de Beers or there were offers of Exterior Debt, if the market of the first was “firm and active” and that of the second “hesitating and weak”, “the best sources” remained nevertheless “the best sources.” Bloch too announced the death of the Kaiser with a mysteriously important air, but also with rage. He was particularly exasperated to hear Robert say the “Emperor William.” I believe under the knife of the guillotine Saint-Loup and M. de Guermantes would not have spoken of him otherwise. Two men in society who were the only living souls on a desert island where they would not have to give proof of good breeding to anyone, would recognise each other by those marks of breeding just as two Latinists would recognise each other’s qualifications through correct quotations from Virgil. Saint-Loup would never, even under torture, have said other than “Emperor William”; yet the *savoir vivre* is all the same a bondage for the mind. He who cannot reject it remains a mere man of society. Yet elegant mediocrity is charming — especially for the generosity and unexpressed heroism that go with it — in comparison with the vulgarity of Bloch, at once braggart and mountebank, who shouted at Saint-Loup: “Can’t you say simply ‘William’? That’s it, you’re in a funk, even here you’re ready to crawl on your stomach to him. Pshaw! they’ll make nice soldiers at the front, they’ll lick the boots of the Boches. You red-tabs are fit to parade in a circus, that’s all.”

“That poor Bloch will have it that I can do nothing but parade,” Saint-Loup remarked with a smile when we left our friend. And I felt that parading was not at all what Robert was after, though I did not then realise his intention as I did later when the cavalry being out of action, he applied to serve as an infantry officer, then as a *Chasseur á pied* and finally when the sequel came which will be read later. But Bloch had no idea of Robert’s patriotism simply because the latter did not express it. Though Bloch made professions of nefarious anti-militarism once he had been passed for service, he had declared the most chauvinistic opinions when he believed he would be exempted for shortsightedness. Saint-Loup would have been incapable of making such declarations, because of a certain moral delicacy which prevents one from

expressing the depth of sentiments which are natural to us. My mother would not have hesitated a second to sacrifice her life for my grandmother's and would have suffered intensely from being unable to do so. Nevertheless I cannot imagine retrospectively a phrase on her lips such as "I would give my life for my mother." Robert was equally silent about his love for France and in that he seemed to me much more Saint-Loup (as I imagined his father to have been) than Guermantes. He would also have been incapable of such expressions owing to his mind having a certain moral bias. Men who do their work intelligently and earnestly have an aversion to those who want to make literature out of what they do, to make it important. Saint-Loup and I had not been either at the Lycée or at the Sorbonne together, but each of us had separately attended certain lectures by the same masters and I remember his smile when he alluded to those who, because, undeniably, their lectures were exceptional tried to make themselves out men of genius by giving ambitious names to their theories. Little as we spoke of it, Robert laughed heartily. Our natural predilection was not for the Cottards or Brichots, though we had a certain respect for those who had a thorough knowledge of Greek or medicine and did not for that reason consider they need play the charlatan. Just as all my mother's actions were based upon the feeling that she would have given her life for her mother, as she had never formulated this sentiment which in any case she would have considered not only useless and ridiculous but indecent and shameful to express to others, so it was impossible to imagine Saint-Loup (speaking to me of his equipment, of the different things he had to attend to, of our chances of victory, of the little value of the Russian army, of what England would do) enunciating one of those eloquent periods to which even the most sympathetic minister is inclined to give vent when he addresses deputies and enthusiasts. I cannot, however, deny, on this negative side which prevented his expressing the beautiful sentiments he felt that there was a certain effect of the "Guermantes spirit" of which so many examples were afforded by Swann. For if I found him a Saint-Loup more than anything else, he remained a Guermantes as well and owing to that, among the many motives which excited his courage there were some dissimilar to those of his Doncières friends, those young men with a passion for their profession with whom I had dined every evening and of whom so many were killed leading their men at the Battle of the Marne or elsewhere. Such young socialists as might have been at Doncières when I was there, whom I did not know because they were not in Saint-Loup's set, were able to satisfy themselves that the officers in that set were in no way "aristos" in the arrogantly proud and basely pleasure-

loving sense which the “populo” officers from the ranks, and the Freemasons, gave to the word. And equally, the aristocratic officer discovered the same patriotism amongst those Socialists whom when I was at Doncières in the midst of the Affair Dreyfus, I heard them accuse of being anti-patriotic. The deep and sincere patriotism of soldiers had taken a definite form which they believed intangible and which it enraged them to see aspersed, whereas the Radical-Socialists who were, in a sense, unconscious patriots, independents, without a defined religion of patriotism, did not realise what a profound reality underlay what they believed to be vain and hateful formulas. Without doubt, Saint-Loup, like them, had grown accustomed to developing as the truest part of himself, the exploration and the conception of better schemes in view of greater strategic and tactical success, so that for him as for them the life of the body was of relatively small importance and could be lightly sacrificed to that inner life, the vital kernel around which personal existence had only the value of a protective epidermis. I told Saint-Loup about his friend, the director of the Balbec Grand Hotel, who, it appeared had, at the outbreak of war, alleged that there had been disaffection in certain French regiments which he called “defec-tuosity” and had accused what he termed “Prussian militarists” of provoking it, remarking with a laugh, “My brother’s in the trenches. They’re only thirty meters from the Boches” until it was discovered that he was a Boche himself and they put him in a concentration camp. “Apropos of Balbec, do you remember the former lift-boy of the hotel?” Saint-Loup asked me in the tone of one who seems not to know much about the person concerned and was counting upon me for enlightenment. “He’s joining up and wrote me to get him entered in the aviation corps.” Doubtless the lift-boy was tired of going up and down in the closed cage of the lift and the heights of the staircase of the Grand Hotel no longer sufficed for him. He was going to “get his stripes” otherwise than as a concierge, for our destiny is not always what we had believed. “I shall certainly support his application,” Saint-Loup said, “I told Gilberte again this morning, we shall never have enough aeroplanes. It is through them we shall observe what the enemy is up to; they will deprive him of the chief advantage m an attack, surprise; the best army will perhaps be the one that has the best eyes. Has poor Françoise succeeded in getting her nephew exempted?” Françoise who had for a long while done everything in her power to get her nephew exempted, on a recommendation through the Guermantes to General de St. Joseph being proposed to her, had replied despairingly: “Oh! That would be no use there’s nothing to be done with that old fellow, he’s the worst sort of all, he’s patriotic!” From the beginning of the war, Françoise whatever

sorrow it had brought her, was of opinion that the “poor Russians” must not be abandoned since we were “allianced”. The butler, persuaded that the war would not last more than ten days and would end by the signal victory of France, would not have dared, for fear of being contradicted by events, to predict a long and indecisive one, nor would he have had enough imagination. But, out of this complete and immediate victory he tried to extract beforehand whatever might cause anxiety to Françoise. “It may turn out pretty rotten; it appears there are many who don’t want to go to the front, boys of sixteen are crying about it.” He also tried to provoke her by saying all sorts of disagreeable things, what he called “pulling her leg” by “pitching an apostrophe at her” or “flinging her a pun.” “Sixteen years old! Sainted Mary!” exclaimed Françoise, and then, with momentary suspicion, “But they said they only took them after they were twenty, they’re only children at sixteen.” “Naturally, the papers are ordered to say that. For that matter, the whole youth of the country will be at the front and not many will come back. In one way that will be a good thing, a good bleeding is useful from time to time, it makes business better. Yes, indeed, if some of these boys are a bit soft and chicken-hearted and hesitate, they shoot them immediately, a dozen bullets through the skin and that’s that. In a way it’s got to be done and what does it matter to the officers? They get their *pesetas* all the same and that’s all they care about.” Françoise got so pale during these conversations that one might well fear the butler would cause her death from heart disease. But she did not on that account lose her defects. When a girl came to see me, however much the old servant’s legs hurt her, if ever I went out of my room for a moment I saw her on the top of the steps, in the hanging cupboard, in the act, she pretended, of looking for one of my coats to see if the moths had got into it, in reality to spy upon us. In spite of all my remonstrances, she kept up her insidious manner of asking indirect questions and for some time had been making use of the phrase “because doubtless.” Not daring to ask me, “Has that lady a house of her own?” she would say with her eyes lifted timidly like those of a gentle dog, “Because doubtless that lady has a house of her own,” avoiding the flagrant interrogation in order to be polite and not to seem inquisitive. And further, since those servants we most care for — especially if they can no longer render us much service or even do their work — remain, alas, servants and mark more clearly the limits (which we should like to efface) of their caste in proportion to the extent to which they believe they are penetrating ours, Françoise often gave vent to strange comments about my person (in order to tease me, the butler would have said) which people in our own world would not make. For instance, with a

delight as dissimulated but also as deep as if it had been a case of serious illness, if I happened to be hot and the perspiration (to which I paid no attention) was trickling down my forehead, she would say, “My word! You’re drenched” as though she were astonished by a strange phenomenon, smiling with that contempt for something indecorous with which she might have remarked, “Why, you’re going out without your collar!” while adopting a concerned tone intended to cause one discomfort. One would have thought I was the only person in the universe who had ever been “drenched”. For, in her humility, in her tender admiration for beings infinitely inferior to her, she adopted their ugly forms of expression. Her daughter complained of her to me, “She’s always got something to say, that I don’t close the doors properly and *patatipatali et patatapatala*.” Françoise doubtless thought it was only her insufficient education that had deprived her until now of this beautiful expression. And on her lips, on which formerly flowered the purest French, I heard several times a day, “*Et patati patall patata patala*.” As to that it is curious how little variation there is not only in the expressions but in the thoughts of the same individual. The butler, being accustomed to declare that M. Poincaré had evil motives, not of a venal kind but because he had absolutely willed the war, repeated this seven or eight times a day before the same ever interested audience, without modifying a single word or gesture or intonation. Although it only lasted about two minutes, it was invariable like a performance. His mistakes in French corrupted the language of Françoise quite as much as the mistakes of her daughter.

She hardly slept, she hardly ate, she had the communiqués read to her, though she did not understand them, by the butler who understood them little better and in whom the desire to torment Françoise was often dominated by a superficial sort of patriotism; he remarked with a sympathetic chuckle when speaking of the Germans, “That will stir them up a bit, our old Joffre is planning a comet to fall on them.” Françoise did not understand what comet he was talking about but felt none the less that this phrase was one of those charming and original extravagances to which a well-bred person must reply, so with good humour and urbanity, shrugging her shoulders with the air of saying “He’s always the same,” she tempered her tears with a smile. At all events she was happy that her new butcher boy who in spite of his calling was somewhat timorous, (although he had begun in the slaughter-house) was too young to join up; otherwise, she would have been capable of going to the Minister of War about him. The butler could not believe the communiqués were other than excellent and that the troops were not approaching Berlin, as he had read, “We

have repulsed the enemy with heavy losses on their side," actions that he celebrated as though they were new victories. For my part, I was horrified by the rapidity with which the theatre of these victories approached Paris and I was astonished that even the butler, who had seen in a communiqué that an action had taken place close to Lens, had not been alarmed by reading in the next day's paper that the result of this action had turned to our advantage at Jouy-le-Vicomte to which we firmly held the approaches. The butler very well knew the name of Jouy-le-Vicomte which was not far from Combray. But one reads the papers as one wants to with a bandage over one's eyes without trying to understand the facts, listening to the soothing words of the editor as to the words of one's mistress. We are beaten and happy because we believe ourselves unbeaten and victorious.

I did not stay long in Paris and returned fairly soon to my sanatorium. Though in principle the doctor treated his patients by isolation, I had received on two different occasions letters from Gilberte and from Robert. Gilberte wrote me (about September, 1914) that much as she would have liked to remain in Paris in order to get news from Robert more easily, the perpetual "taube" raids over Paris had given her such a fright, especially on her little girl's account, that she had fled from Paris by the last train which left for Combray, that the train did not even reach Com-bray and it was only thanks to a peasant's cart upon which she had made a ten hours journey in atrocious discomfort that she had at last been able to get to Tansonville. "And what do you think awaited your old friend there?" Gilberte closed her letter by saying. "I had left Paris to get away from the German aeroplanes, imagining that at Tansonville I should be sheltered from everything. I had not been there two days when what do you think happened! The Germans were invading the region after beating our troops near La Fere and a German staff, followed by a regiment, presented themselves at the gate of Tansonville and I was obliged to take them in without a chance of escaping, not a train, nothing." Had the German staff behaved well or was one supposed to read into the letter of Gilberte the contagious effect of the spirit of the Guermantes who were of Bavarian stock and related to the highest aristocracy in Germany, for Gilberte was inexhaustible about the perfect behaviour of the staff and of the soldiers who had only asked "permission to pick one of the forget-me-nots which grew at the side of the lake," good behaviour she contrasted with the unbridled violence of the French fugitives who had traversed the estate and sacked everything before the arrival of the German generals. Anyhow, if Gilberte's letter was, in certain respects, impregnated with the "Guermantes

spirit,"— others would say it was her Jewish internationalism, which would probably not be true, as we shall see — the letter I received some months later from Robert was much more Saint-Loup than Guermantes for it reflected all the liberal culture he had acquired and was altogether sympathetic. Unhappily he told me nothing about the strategy as he used to in our conversations at Doncières and did not mention to what extent he considered the war had confirmed or disproved the principles which he then exposed to me. The most he told me was that since 1914, several wars had succeeded each other, the lessons of each influencing the conduct of the following one. For instance, the theory of the "break through" had been completed by the thesis that before the "break through" it was necessary to overwhelm the ground occupied by the enemy with artillery. Later it was discovered, on the contrary, that this destruction made the advance of infantry and artillery impossible over ground so pitted with thousands of shell-holes that they became so many obstacles. "War," he said, "does not escape the laws of our old Hegel. It is a state of perpetual becoming." This was little enough of all I wanted to know. But what disappointed me more was that he had no right to give me the names of the generals. And indeed, from what little I could glean from the papers, it was not those of whom I was so much concerned to know the value in war, who were conducting this one. Geslin de Bourgogne, Galliffet, Négrier were dead, Pau had retired from active service almost at the beginning of the war. We had never talked about Joffre or Foch or Castlenau or Pétain. "My dear boy," Robert wrote, "if you saw what these soldiers are like, especially those of the people, the working class, small shopkeepers who little knew the heroism of which they were capable and would have died in their beds without ever being suspected of it, facing the bullets to succour a comrade, to carry off a wounded officer and, themselves struck, smile at the moment they are going to die because the staff surgeon tells them that the trench had been re-captured from the Germans; I can assure you, my dear boy, that it gives one a wonderful idea of what a Frenchman is and makes us understand the historic epochs which seemed rather extraordinary to us when we were at school. The epic is so splendid that, like myself, you would find words useless to describe it. In contact with such grandeur the word "poilu" has become for me something which I can no more regard as implying an allusion or a joke than when we read the word "chouans". I feel that the word "poilu" is awaiting great poets like such words as "Deluge" or "Christ" or "Barbarians" which were saturated with grandeur before Hugo, Vigny and the rest used them. To my mind, the sons of the people are the best of all but everyone is fine. Poor

Vaugoubert, the son of the Ambassador, was wounded seven times before being killed and each time he came back from an expedition without being “scooped,” he seemed to be excusing himself and saying that it was not his fault. He was a charming creature. We had seen a great deal of each other and his poor parents obtained permission to come to his funeral on condition that they didn’t wear mourning nor stop more than five minutes on account of the bombardment. The mother, a great horse of a woman, whom you perhaps know, may have been very unhappy but one would not have thought so. But the father was in such a state, I assure you, that I, who have become almost insensible through getting accustomed to seeing the head of a comrade I was talking to shattered by a bomb or severed from his trunk, could hardly bear it when I saw the collapse of poor Vaugoubert who was reduced to a rag. It was all very well for the general to tell him it was for France that his son died a hero’s death, that only redoubled the sobs of the poor man who could not tear himself away from his son’s body. Well, that is why we can say, ‘they will not get through.’ Such men as these, my poor valet or Vaugoubert, have prevented the Germans from getting through. Perhaps you have thought we do not advance much, but that is not the way to reason; an army feels itself victorious by intuition as a dying man knows he is done for. And we know that we are going to be the victors and we will it so that we may dictate a just peace, not only for ourselves, but a really just peace, just for the French and just for the Germans”. As heroes of mediocre and banal mind, writing poems during their convalescence, placed themselves, in order to describe the war, not on the level of the events which in themselves are nothing, but on the level of the banal aesthetic of which they had until then followed the rules, speaking as they might have done ten years earlier of the “bloody dawn,” of the “shuddering flight of victory,” Saint-Loup, himself much more intelligent and artistic, remained intelligent and artistic and for my benefit noted with taste the landscapes while he was immobilised at the edge of a swampy forest, just as though he had been shooting duck. To make me grasp contrasts of shade and light which had been “the enchantment of the morning,” he referred to certain pictures we both of us loved and alluded to a page of Romain Rolland or of Nietzsche with the independence of those at the front who unlike those at the rear, were not afraid to utter a German name, and with much the same coquetry that caused Colonel du Paty de Clam to declaim in the witnesses’ room during the Zola affair as he passed by Pierre Quillard, a Dreyfusard poet of the extremest violence whom he did not know, verses from the latter’s symbolic drama “La Fille aux Mains coupées,” Saint-Loup, when he spoke to me of a

melody of Schumann gave it its German title and made no circumlocution to tell me, when he had heard the first warble at the edge of a forest, that he had been intoxicated as though the bird of that “sublime Siegfried” which he hoped to hear again after the war, had sung to him. And now on my second return to Paris I had received on the day following my arrival another letter from Gilberte who without doubt had forgotten the one she had previously written me, to which I have alluded above, for her departure from Paris at the end of 1914 was represented retrospectively in quite different fashion. “Perhaps you do not realise, my dear friend,” she wrote me, “that I have now been at Tansonville two years. I arrived there at the same time as the Germans. Everybody wanted to prevent me going, I was treated as though I were mad. ‘What,’ they said to me, ‘you are safe in Paris and you want to leave for those invaded regions just as everybody else is trying to get away from them?’ I recognised the justice of this reasoning but what was to be done? I have only one quality, I am not a coward or, if you prefer, I am faithful, and when I knew that my dear Tansonville was menaced I did not want to leave our old steward there to defend it alone; it seemed to me that my place was by his side. And it is, in fact, thanks to that resolution that I was able to save the Château almost completely — when all the others in the neighbourhood, abandoned by their terrified proprietors, were destroyed from roof to cellar — and not only was I able to save the Château but also the precious collections which my dear father so much loved.” In a word, Gilberte was now persuaded that she had not gone to Tansonville, as she wrote me in 1914, to fly from the Germans and to be in safety, but, on the contrary, in order to meet them and to defend her Château from them. As a matter of fact, they (the Germans) had not remained at Tansonville, but she did not cease to have at her house a constant coming and going of officers which much exceeded that which reduced Françoise to tears in the streets of Combray and to live, as she said this time with complete truth, the life of the front. Also she was referred to eulogistically in the papers because of her admirable conduct and there was a proposal to give her a decoration. The end of her letter was perfectly accurate: “You have no idea of what this war is, my dear friend, the importance of a road, a bridge or a height. How many times, during these days in this ravaged countryside, have I thought of you, of our walks you made so delightful, while tremendous fights were going on for the capture of a hillock you loved and where so often we had been together. Probably you, like myself, are unable to imagine that obscure Roussainville and tiresome Méséglise, whence our letters were brought and where one went to fetch the doctor when you were ill, are now

celebrated places. Well, my dear friend, they have for ever entered into glory in the same way as Austerlitz or Valmy. The Battle of Méséglise lasted more than eight months, the Germans lost more than one hundred thousand men there, they destroyed Méséglise but they have not taken it. The little road you so loved, the one we called the stiff hawthorn climb, where you professed to be in love with me when you were a child, when all the time I was in love with you, I cannot tell you how important that position is. The great wheatfield in which it ended is the famous 'slope 307' the name you have so often seen recorded in the communiqués. The French blew up the little bridge over the Vivonne which, you remember, did not bring back your childhood to you as much as you would have liked. The Germans threw others across; during a year and a half, they held one half of Combray and the French the other." The day following that on which I received this letter, that is to say the evening before the one when, walking in the darkness, I heard the sound of my foot-steps while reflecting on all these memories, Saint-Loup, back from the front and on the point of returning there, had paid me a visit of a few minutes only, the mere announcement of which had greatly stirred me. Françoise at first was going to throw herself upon him, hoping she would be able to get the butcher boy exempted; his class was going to the front in a year's time. But she restrained herself, realising the uselessness of the effort, since, for some time the timid animal-killer had changed his butcher-shop and, whether the owner of ours feared she would lose our custom, or whether it was simply in good faith, she declared to Françoise that she did not know where this boy "who for that matter would never make a good butcher" was employed. Françoise had looked everywhere for him, but Paris is big, there are a large number of butchers' shops and however many she went into she never was able to find the timid and blood-stained young man.

When Saint-Loup entered my room I had approached him with that diffidence, with that sense of the supernatural one felt about those on leave as we feel in approaching a person attacked by a mortal disease, who nevertheless gets up, dresses himself and walks about. It seemed that there was something almost cruel in these leaves granted to combatants, at the beginning especially, for, those who had not like myself lived far from Paris, had acquired the habit which removes from things frequently experienced the root-deep impression which gives them their real significance. The first time one said to oneself, "They will never go back, they will desert"— and indeed they did not come from places which seemed to us unreal merely because it was only through the papers we had heard of them and where we could not realise they had been taking part in

Titanic combats and had come back with only a bruise on the shoulder — they came back to us for a moment from the shores of death itself and would return there, incomprehensible to us, filling us with tenderness, horror and a sentiment of mystery like the dead who appear to us for a second and whom, if we dare to question them, at most reply, “You cannot imagine.” For it is extraordinary, in those who have been resurrected from the front, for, among the living that is what men on leave are, or in the case of the dead whom a hypnotised medium evokes, that the only effect of this contact with the mystery is to increase, were that possible, the insignificance of our intercourse with them. Thus, approaching Robert who had a scar on his forehead more august and mysterious to me than a footprint left upon the earth by a giant, I did not dare ask him a question and he only said a few simple words. And those words were little different from what they would have been before the war, as though people, in spite of the war, continued to be what they were; the tone of intercourse remains the same, the matter differs and even then —? I gathered that Robert had found resources at the front which had made him little by little forget that Morel had behaved as badly to him as to his uncle. Nevertheless he had preserved a great friendship for him and now and then had a sudden longing to see him again which he kept on postponing. I thought it more considerate towards Gilberte not to inform Robert, if he wanted to find Morel, he had only to go to Mme Verdurin’s. On my remarking to Robert with a sense of humility how little one felt the war in Paris, he said that even there it was sometimes “rather extraordinary”. He was alluding to a raid of zeppelins there had been the evening before and asked me if I had had a good view of it in the same way as he would formerly have referred to a piece of great aesthetic beauty at the theatre. One can imagine that at the front there is a sort of coquetry in saying, “It’s marvellous! What a pink — and that pale green!” when at that instant one can be killed, but it was not that which moved Saint-Loup about an insignificant raid on Paris. When I spoke to him about the beauty of the aeroplanes rising in the night, he replied, “And perhaps the descending ones are still more beautiful. Of course they are marvellous when they soar upwards, when they’re about to form *constellation* thus obeying laws as precise as those which govern astral constellations, for what is a spectacle to you is the assemblage of squadrons, orders being given to them, their despatch on scout duty, etc. But don’t you prefer the moment when, mingling with the stars, they detach themselves from them to start on a chase or to return after the maroon sounds, when they ‘loop the loop’, even the stars seem to change their position. And aren’t the sirens rather Wagnerian, as they should be, to salute the

arrival of the Germans, very like the national hymn, very ‘Wacht am Rhein’ with the Crown Prince and the Princesses in the Imperial box; one wonders whether aviators or Walkyries are up there.” He seemed to get pleasure out of comparing aviators with Walkyries, and explained them on entirely musical principles. “*Dame*! the music of sirens is like the prancing of horses; we shall have to await the arrival of the Germans to hear Wagner in Paris.” From certain points of view the comparison was not false. The city seemed a formless and black mass which all of a sudden passed from the depth of night into a blaze of light, and in the sky, where one after another, the aviators rose amidst the shrieking wail of the sirens while, with a slower movement, more insidious and therefore more alarming, for it made one think they were seeking ah object still invisible but perhaps close to us, the searchlights swept unceasingly, scenting the enemy, encircling him with their beams until the instant when the pointed planes flashed like arrows in his wake. And in squadron after squadron the aviators darted from the city into the sky like Walkyries. Yet close to the ground, at the base of the houses, some spots were in high light and I told Saint-Loup, if he had been at home the evening before, he would have been able, while he contemplated the apocalypse in the sky, to see on the earth, as in the burial of the Comte d’Orgaz by Greco, where those contrasting planes are parallel, a regular vaudeville played by personages in night-gowns, whose Well-known names ought to have been sent to some successor of that Ferrari whose fashionable notes it had so often amused him and myself to parody. And we should have done so again that day as though there had been no war, although about a very “war-subject”, the dread of zeppelins realised, the Duchesse de Guermantes superb in her night-dress, the Duc de Guermantes indescribable in his pink pyjamas and bath-gown, etc., etc. “I am sure,” he said, “that in all the large hotels one might have seen American Jewesses in their chemises hugging to their bursting breasts pearl necklaces which would buy them a ‘busted’ duke. On such nights, the Hotel Ritz must resemble an exchange and mart emporium.”

I asked Saint-Loup if this war had confirmed our conclusions at Doncières about war in the past. I reminded him of the proposition which he had forgotten, for instance about the parodies of former battles by generals of the future. “The feint,” I said to him, “is no longer possible in these operations where the advance is prepared with such accumulation of artillery and what you have since told me about reconnaissance by aeroplane which obviously you could not have foreseen, prevents the employment of Napoleonic ruses.” “How mistaken you are,” he answered, “obviously this war is new in relation to former wars for it is

itself composed of successive wars of which the last is an innovation on the preceding one. It is necessary to adapt oneself to the enemy's latest formula so as to defend oneself against him; then he starts a fresh innovation and yet, as in other human things, the old tricks always come off. No later than yesterday evening the most intelligent of our military critics wrote: 'When the Germans wanted to deliver East Prussia they began the operation by a powerful demonstration in the south against Warsaw, sacrificing ten thousand men to deceive the enemy. When at the beginning of 1915 they created the mass manoeuvre of the Arch-Duke Eugène in order to disengage threatened Hungary, they spread the report that this mass was destined for an operation against Serbia. Thus, in 1800 the army which was about to operate against Italy was definitely indicated as a reserve army which was not to cross the Alps but to support the armies engaged in the northern theatres of war. The ruse of Hindenburg attacking Warsaw to mask the real attack on the Mazurian Lakes, imitates the strategy of Napoleon in 1812.' You see that M. Bidou repeats almost the exact words of which you remind me and which I had forgotten. And as the war is not yet finished, these ruses will be repeated again and again and will succeed because they are never completely exposed and what has done the trick once will do it again because it was a good trick." And in fact, for a long time after that conversation with Saint-Loup, while the eyes of the Allies were fixed upon Petrograd against which capital it was believed the Germans were marching, they were preparing a most powerful offensive against Italy. Saint-Loup gave me many other examples of military parodies or, if one believes that there is not a military art but a military science, of the application of permanent laws. "I will not say, there would be contradiction in the words," added Saint-Loup, "that the art of war is a science. And if there is a science of war there is diversity, dispute and contradiction between its professors, diversity partly projected into the category of Time. That is rather reassuring, for, as far as it goes, it indicates that truth rather than error is evolving." Later he said to me, "See in this war the ideas on the possibility of the break-through, for instance. First it is believed in, then we come back to the doctrine of invulnerability of the fronts, then again to the possible but risky break-through, to the necessity of not making a step forward until the objective has been first destroyed (the dogmatic journalist will write that to assert the contrary is the greatest foolishness), then, on the contrary, to that of advancing with a very light preparation by artillery, then to the invulnerability of the fronts as a principle in force since the war of 1870, from that the assertion that it is a false principle for this war and therefore

only a relative truth. False in this war because of the accumulation of masses and of the perfecting of engines (see Bidou of the 2nd July, 1918), an accumulation which at first made one believe that the next war would be very short, then very long, and finally made one again believe in the possibility of decisive victories. Bidou cites the Allies on the Somme, the Germans marching on Paris in 1918. In the same way, at each victory of the Germans, it is said:'the ground gained is nothing, the towns are nothing, what is necessary is to destroy the military force of the adversary.' Then the Germans in their turn adopt this theory in 1918 and Bidou curiously explains (and July, 1918) that the capture of certain vital points, certain essential areas, decides the victory. It is moreover a particular turn of his mind. He has shown how, if Russia were blockaded at sea, she would be defeated and that an army enclosed in a sort of vast prison camp is doomed to perish."

Nevertheless, if the war did not modify the character of Saint-Loup, his intelligence, developed through an evolution in which heredity played a great part, had reached a degree of brilliancy which I had never seen in him before. How far away was the young golden-haired man formerly courted or who aspired to be, by fashionable ladies and the dialectician, the doctrinaire who was always playing with words. To another generation of another branch of his family, much as an actor taking a part formerly played by Bressant or Delaunay, he, blonde, pink and golden was like a successor to M. de Charlus, once dark, now completely white. However much he failed to agree with his uncle about the war, identified as he was with that part of the aristocracy which was for France first and foremost whereas M. de Charlus was fundamentally a defeatist, to those who had not seen the original "creator of the part" he displayed his powers as a controversialist. "It seems that Hindenburg is a revelation," I said to him. "An old revelation of tit-for-tat or a future one. They ought, instead of playing with the enemy, to let Mangin have his way, beat Austria and Germany to their knees and Européanise Turkey instead of Montenegrinising France." "But we shall have the help of the United States," I suggested. "At present all I see is the spectacle of Divided States. Why not make greater concessions to Italy and frighten them with dechristianising France?" "If your Uncle Charlus could hear you!" I said. "Really you would not be sorry to offend the Pope a bit more and he must be in despair about what may happen to the throne of Francis Joseph. For that matter he's in the tradition of Talleyrand and the Congress of Vienna." "The era of the Congress of Vienna has gone full circle;" he answered; "one must substitute concrete for secret diplomacy. My uncle is at bottom an

impenitent monarchist who would swallow carps like Mme Molé or scarps like Arthur Meyer as long as his carps and scarps were cooked à la Chambord. Through hatred of the tricolour flag I believe he would rather range himself under the red rag, which he would accept in good faith instead of the white standard." Of course, these were only words and Saint-Loup was far from having the occasionally basic originality of his uncle. But his disposition was as affable and delightful as the other's was suspicious and jealous and he remained, as at Balbec, charming and pink under his thick golden hair. The only thing in which his uncle would not have surpassed him was in that mental attitude of the faubourg Saint-Germain with which those who believe themselves the most detached from it are saturated and which simultaneously gives them respect for men of intelligence who are not of noble birth (which only flourishes in the nobility and makes revolution so unjust) and silly self-complacency. It was through this mixture of humility and pride, of acquired curiosity of mind and inborn sense of authority, that M. de Charlus and Saint-Loup by different roads and holding contrary opinions had become to a generation of transition, intellectuals interested in every new idea and talkers whom no interrupter could silence. Thus a rather commonplace individual would, according to his disposition, consider both of them either dazzling or bores.

While recalling Saint-Loup's visit I had made a long-detour on my way to Mme Verdurin's and I had nearly reached the bridge of the Invalides. The lamps (few and far between, on account of Gothas) were lighted a little too early, for the change of hours had been prematurely determined for the summer season (like the furnaces which are lighted and extinguished at fixed dates) while night still came quickly and above the partly-illumined city, in one whole part of the sky — a sky which ignored summer and winter and did not deign to observe that half-past eight had become half-past nine — it still continued to be daylight. In all that part of the city, dominated by the towers of the Trocadero, the sky had the appearance of an immense turquoise-tinted sea, which, at low-tide, revealed a thin line of black rocks or perhaps only fishermen's nets aligned next each other and which were tiny clouds. A sea, now the colour of turquoise which was bearing unknowing man with it in the immense revolution of an earth upon which they are mad enough to continue their own revolutions, their vain wars such as this one now drenching France in blood. In fact one became giddy looking at the lazy, beautiful sky which deigned not to change its time-table and prolonged in its blue tones the lengthened day above the lighted city; it was no longer a spreading sea, but a vertical gradation of blue glaciers. And the towers

of the Troca-dero seeming so close to those turquoise heights were in reality as far away from them as those twin towers in a town of Switzerland which, from far away, seem to neighbour the mountain-slopes. I retraced my steps but as I left the Bridge of the Invalides behind me there was no more day in the sky, nor scarcely a light in all the city and stumbling here and there against the dust-bins, mistaking my road, I found myself, unexpectedly and after following a labyrinth of obscure streets, upon the Boulevards. There the impression of the East renewed itself and to the evocation of the Paris of the Directoire succeeded that of the Paris of 1815. As then, the disparate procession of uniforms of Allied troops, Africans in baggy red trousers, white-turbaned Hindus, created for me, out of that Paris where I was walking, an exotic imaginary city in an East minutely exact in costume and colour of the skins but arbitrarily chimerical in scenery, just as Carpaccio made of his own city a Jerusalem or a Constantinople by assembling therein a crowd whose marvellous medley of colour was not more varied than this. Walking behind two Zouaves who did not seem to notice him, I perceived a great stout man in a soft, felt hat and a long cloak, to whose mauve coloured face I hesitated to put the name of an actor or of a painter equally well-known for innumerable sodomite scandals. In any case feeling certain I did not know the promenader, I was greatly surprised, when his glance met mine, to notice that he was embarrassed and made as though to stop and speak to me, like one who wants to show you that you are not surprising him in an occupation he would rather have kept secret. For a second I asked myself who was saying good-evening to me. It was M. de Charlus. One could say of him that the evolution of his disease or the revolution of his vice had reached that extreme point where the small primitive personality of the individual, his ancestral qualities, were entirely obscured by the interposition of the defect or generic evil which accompanied them. M. de Charlus had gone as far as it was possible for him to go, or rather, he was so completely marked by what he had become, by habits that were not his alone but also those of many other inverts, that, at first, I had taken him for one of these following the zouaves on the open boulevard; in fact, for another of their kind who was not M. de Charlus, not a *grand seigneur*, not a man of mind and imagination and who only resembled the baron through that appearance common to them all and to him as well which, until one looked closer, had covered everything. It was thus that, having wanted to go to Mme Verdurin's, I met M. de Charlus. And certainly I should not have found him as I used to at her house; their quarrel had only become accentuated and Mme Verdurin often made use of present conditions to discredit him further. Having

said for a long time that he was used up, finished, more old-fashioned in his pretended audacities than the most pompous nonentities, she now comprised that condemnation in a general indictment by saying that he was “pre-war”. According to the little clan, the war had placed between him and the present, a gulf which relegated him to a past that was completely dead. Moreover — and that concerned rather the political world which was less well-informed — Mme Verdurin represented him as done for, as complete a social as an intellectual outsider. “He sees no one, no one receives him,” she told M. Bontemps, whom she easily convinced. Moreover there was some truth in what she said. The situation of M. de Charlus had changed. Caring less and less about society, having quarrelled with everybody owing to his petulant disposition and, having through conviction of his own social importance, disdained to reconcile himself with most of those who constituted the flower of society, he lived in a relative isolation which, unlike that in which Mme de Villeparisis died, was not caused by the ostracism of the aristocracy but by something which appeared to the eyes of the public worse, for two reasons. M. de Charlus’ bad reputation, now well-known, caused the ill-informed to believe that that accounted for people not frequenting his society, while actually it was he who, of his own accord, refused to frequent them, so that the effect of his own atrabilious humour appeared to be that of the hostility of those upon whom he exercised it. Besides that, Mme de Villeparisis had a great rampart; her family. But M. de Charlus had multiplied the quarrels between himself and his family, which, moreover appeared to him uninteresting, especially the old faubourg side, the Courvoisier set. He who had made so many bold sallies in the field of art, unlike the Courvoisiers, had no notion that what would have most interested a Bergotte was his relationship with that old faubourg, his having the means of describing the almost provincial life lived by his cousins in the rue de la Chaise or in the Place du Palais Bourbon and the rue Garancière. A point of view less transcendent and more practical was represented by Mme Verdurin who affected to believe that he was not French. “What is his exact nationality? Is he not an Austrian?” M. Verdurin innocently inquired. “Oh, no, not at all,” answered the Comtesse Molé, whose first gesture rather obeyed her good sense than her rancour. “Nothing of the sort, he’s a Prussian,” pronounced *la Patronne*: “I know, I tell you. He told us often enough he was a hereditary peer of Prussia and a ‘Serene Highness’.” “All the same, the Queen of Naples told me —” “As to her, you know she’s an awful spy,” exclaimed Mme Verdurin who had not forgotten the attitude which the fallen sovereign had displayed at her house one evening. “I know it most positively.

She only lives by spying. If we had a more energetic Government, all those people would be in a concentration camp. And in any case you would do well not to receive that charming kind of society, for I happen to know that the Minister of the Interior has got his eye on them and your house will be watched. Nothing will convince me that during two years Charlus was not continually spying at my house." And thinking probably, that there might be some doubt as to the interest the German Government might take, even in the most circumstantial reports on the organisation of the "little clan", Mme Verdurin, with the soft, confidential manner of a person who knows the value of what she is imparting and that it seems more significant if she does not raise her voice, "I tell you, from the first day I said to my husband,'the way in which this man has inveigled himself into our house is not to my liking. There's something suspicious about it.' Our estate was on a very high point at the back of a bay. I am certain he was entrusted by the Germans to prepare a base there for their submarines. Certain things surprised me and now I understand them. For instance, at first he would not come by train with the other guests. I had offered in the nicest way to give him a room in the château. Well, not a bit of it, he preferred living at Doncières where there were an enormous number of troops. All that stank in one's nostrils of espionage." As to the first of these accusations directed against the Baron de Charlus, that of being out of fashion, society people were quite ready to accept Mme Verdurin's point of view. This was ungrateful of them for M. de Charlus who had been, up to a point their poet, had the art of extracting from social surroundings a sort of poetry into which he wove history, beauty, the picturesque, comedy and frivolous elegance. But fashionable people, incapable of understanding poetry, of which they saw none in their own lives, sought it elsewhere and placed a thousand feet above M. de Charlus men infinitely inferior to him, who affected to despise society and, on the other hand, professed social and political-economic theories. M. de Charlus delighted in an unpro-fessedly lyrical form of wit with which he described the knowing grace of the Duchesse of X's dresses and alluded to her as a sublime creature. This caused him to be looked upon as an idiot by those women in society who thought that the Duchesse of X was an uninteresting fool, that dresses are made to be worn without drawing attention to them and who, thinking themselves more intelligent, rushed to the Sorbonne or to the Chamber if Deschanel was going to speak. In short, people in society were disillusioned with M. de Charlus, not because they had got through him but because they had never grasped his rare intellectual value. He was considered pre-war, old-

fashioned, just because those least capable of judging merit, most readily accept the edicts of passing fashion; so far from exhausting, they have hardly even skimmed the surface of men of quality in the preceding generation whom they now condemn en bloc because they are offered the label of a new generation they will understand just as little. As to the second accusation against M. de Charlus, that of Germanism, the happy-medium mentality of people in society made them reject it, but they encountered an indefatigable and particularly cruel interpreter in Morel, who, having managed to retain in the press and even in society the position which M. de Charlus had succeeded in getting him by expending twice as much trouble as he would have taken in depriving him of it, pursued the Baron with implacable hatred; this was not only cruel on the part of Morel, but doubly wrong, for whatever his relations with the Baron might have been, Morel had experienced the rare kindness his patron hid from so many people. M. de Charlus had treated the violinist with such generosity, with such delicacy, had shown such scruple about not breaking his word, that the idea of him which Charlie had retained was not at all that of a vicious man (at most he considered the Baron's vice a disease) but of one with the noblest ideas and the most exquisite sensibility he had ever known, a sort of saint. He denied it so little that though he had quarrelled with him he said sincerely enough to his relations, "You can confide your son to him, he would only have the best influence upon him." Indeed when he tried to injure him by his articles, in his mind he jeered, not at his vices but, at his virtues. Before the war, certain little broad-sheets, transparent to what are called the "initiates", had begun to do the greatest harm to M. de Charlus. Of one of these entitled *The Misadventure of a pedantic Duchess, the Old Age of the Baroness* Mme Verdurin had bought fifty copies, in order to lend them to her acquaintances, and M. Verdurin, declaring that Voltaire himself never wrote anything better, read them aloud to his friends. Since the war it was not the invertion of the Baron alone that was denounced, but also his alleged Germanic nationality. "Frau Bosch", "Frau voh der Bosch" were the customary surnames of M. de Charlus. One effusion of poetic character had borrowed from certain dance melodies in Beethoven, the title "Une Allemande". Finally, two little novels,*Oncle d'Amérique et Tante de Francfort*, and *Gaillard d'arrière*, read in proof by the little clan, had given delight to Brichot himself who remarked, "Take care the most noble and puissant Anastasia doesn't do us in." The articles themselves were better done than their ridiculous titles would have led one to suppose. Their style derived from Bergotte but in a way which perhaps only I could recognise, for this reason. The writings of Bergotte had had

no influence upon Morel. Fecundation had occurred in so peculiar and exceptional a fashion that I must register it here. I have indicated in its place the special way Bergotte had of selecting his words and pronouncing them when he talked. Morel, who had met him in early days, gave imitations of him at the time in which he mimicked his speech perfectly, using the same words as Bergotte would have used. So now Morel transcribed conversations à la Bergotte but without transmuting them into what would have represented Bergotte's style of writing. As few people had talked with Bergotte, they did not recognise the tonality which was quite different from his style. That oral fertilisation is so rare that I wanted to mention it here; for that matter, it produces only sterile flowers.

Morel, who was at the Press Bureau and whose irregular situation was unknown, made the pretence, with his French blood boiling in his veins like the juice of the grapes of Combray, that to work in an office during the war was not good enough and that he wanted to join up (which he could have done at any moment he pleased) while Mme Verdurin did everything in her power to persuade him to remain in Paris. Certainly she was indignant that M. de Cambremer, in spite of his age, had a staff job, and she remarked about every man who did not come to her house, "Where has he found means of hiding?" And if anyone affirmed that so and so had been in the front line from the first day she answered, lying unscrupulously or from the mere habit of falsehood, "Not a bit of it, he has never stirred from Paris, he is doing something about as dangerous as promenading around the Ministries. I tell you I know what I am talking about because I have got it from someone who has seen him." But in the case of "the faithful" it was different. She did not want them to go and alluded to the war as a "boring business" that took them away from her; and she took all possible steps to prevent them going which gave her the double pleasure of having them at dinner and, when they did not come or had gone, of abusing them behind their backs for their pusillanimity. The "faithful" had to lend themselves to this *embusquage* and she was distressed when Morel pretended to be recalcitrant and told him, "By serving in the Press Bureau you are doing your bit, and more so than if you were at the front. What is required is to be useful, really to take part in the war, to be of it. There are those who are of it and *embusqués*; you are of it and don't you bother, everyone knows you are and no one can have a word to say against you." Under different circumstances, when men were not so few and when she was not obliged as now to have chiefly women, if one of them lost his mother she did not hesitate to persuade him that he could unhesitatingly continue to go to her receptions. "Sorrow is felt in the heart. If you were to go to a ball

(she never gave any) I should be the first to advise you not to, but here at my little Wednesdays or in a box at the theatre, no one can be shocked. Everybody knows how grieved you are." Now, however, men were fewer, mourning more frequent, she did not have to prevent them from going into society, the war saw to that. But she wanted to persuade them that they were more useful to France by stopping in Paris, in the same way as she would formerly have persuaded them that the defunct would have been more happy to see them enjoying themselves. All the same she got very few men, and sometimes, perhaps, she regretted having brought about the rupture with M. de Charlus, which could never be repaired.

But if M. de Charlus and Mme Verdurin no longer saw each other, each of them — with certain minor differences — continued as though nothing had changed, Mme Verdurin to receive and M. de Charlus to go about his own pleasures. For example, at Mme Verdurin's house, Cottard was present at the receptions in the uniform of a Colonel of *l'Ile du Rève*rather similar to that of a Haitian Admiral, and upon the lapel of which a broad sky-blue ribbon recalled that of the *Enfants de Marie*; as to M. de Charlus, finding himself in a city where mature men who had up to then been his taste had disappeared, he had, like certain Frenchmen who run after women when they are in France but who live in the Colonies, at first from necessity, then from habit, acquired a taste for little boys.

Furthermore, one of the characteristic features of the Salon Verdurin disappeared soon after, for Cottard died "with his face to the enemy" the papers said, though he had never left Paris; the fact was he had been overworked for his time of life and he was followed shortly afterwards by M. Verdurin, whose death caused sorrow to one person only — would one believe it?— Elstir. I had been able to study his work from a point of view which was in a measure final. But, as he grew older, he associated it superstitiously with the society which had supplied his models and, after the alchemy of his intuitions had transmuted them into works of art, gave him his public. More and more inclined to the belief that a large part of beauty resides in objects as, at first, he had adored in Mme Elstir that rather heavy type of beauty he had studied in tapestries and handled in his pictures, M. Verdurin's death signified to him the disappearance of one of the last traces of the perishable social framework, falling into limbo as swiftly as the fashions in dress which form part of it — that framework which supports an art and certifies its authenticity like the revolution which, in destroying the elegancies of the eighteenth century, would have distressed a painter of *fêtes*

galantes or afflicted Renoir when Montmartre and the Moulin de la Galette disappeared. But, above all, with M. Verdurin disappeared the eyes, the brain, which had had the most authentic vision of his painting, wherein that painting lived, as it were, in the form of a cherished memory. Without doubt young men had emerged who also loved painting, but another kind of painting, and they had not, like Swann, like M. Verdurin, received lessons in taste from Whistler, lessons in truth from Monet, which enabled them to judge Elstir with justice! Also he felt himself more solitary when M. Verdurin, with whom he had, nevertheless, quarrelled years ago, died and it was as though part of the beauty of his work had disappeared with some of that consciousness of beauty which had until then, existed in the world.

The change which had been effected in M. de Charlus' pleasures remained intermittent. Keeping up a large correspondence with the front, he did not lack mature men home on leave. Therefore, in a general way, Mme Verdurin continued to receive and M. de Charlus to go about his pleasures as if nothing had happened. And still for two years the immense human entity called France, of which even from a purely material point of view one can only feel the tremendous beauty if one perceives the cohesion of millions of individuals who, like cellules of various forms fill it like so many little interior polygons up to the extreme limit of its perimeter, and if one saw it on the same scale as infusoria or cellules see a human body, that is to say, as big as Mont Blanc, was facing a tremendous collective battle with that other immense conglomerate of individuals which is Germany. At a time when I believed what people told me, I should have been tempted to believe Germany, then Bulgaria, then Greece when they proclaimed their pacific intentions. But since my life with Albertine and with Françoise had accustomed me to suspect those motives they did not express, I did not allow any word, however right in appearance of William II, Ferdinand of Bulgaria or Constantine of Greece to deceive my instinct which divined what each one of them was plotting. Doubtless my quarrels with Françoise and with Albertine had only been little personal quarrels, mattering only to the life of that little spiritual cellule which a human being is. But in the same way as there are bodies of animals, human bodies, that is to say, assemblages of cellules, which, in relation to one of them alone, are as great as a mountain, so there exist enormous organised groupings of individuals which we call nations; their life only repeats and amplifies the life of the composing cellules and he who is not capable of understanding the mystery, the reactions and the laws of those cellules, will only utter empty words when he talks about struggles between nations. But if he is master of the psychology of individuals, then these colossal masses of conglomerate individuals facing one another will assume in his eyes a more formidable beauty than a fight born only of a conflict between two characters, and he will see them on the scale on which the body of a tall man would be seen by infusoria of which it would require more than ten thousand to fill one cubic milimeter. Thus for some time past the great figure of France, filled to its perimeter with millions of little polygons of various shapes and the other figure of Germany filled with even more polygons were having one of those quarrels which, in a smaller measure, individuals have.

But the blows that they were exchanging were regulated by those

numberless boxing-matches of which Saint-Loup had explained the principles to me. And because, even in considering them from the point of view of individuals they were gigantic assemblages, the quarrel assumed enormous and magnificent forms like the uprising of an ocean which with its millions of waves seeks to demolish a secular line of cliffs or like giant glaciers which, with their slow and destructive oscillation, attempt to disrupt the frame of the mountain by which they are circumscribed. In spite of this, life continued almost the same for many people who have figured in this narrative, notably for M. de Charlus and for the Verdurins, as though the Germans had not been so near to them; a permanent menace in spite of its being concentrated in one immediate peril leaving us entirely unmoved if we do not realise it. People pursue their pleasures from habit without ever thinking, were etiolating and moderating influences to cease, that the proliferation of the infusoria would attain its maximum, that is to say, making a leap of many millions of leagues in a few days and passing from a cubic millimeter to a mass a million times larger than the sun, at the same time destroying all the oxygen of the substances upon which we live, that there would no longer be any humanity or animals or earth, and, without any notion that an irremediable and quite possible catastrophe might be determined in the ether by the incessant and frantic energy hidden behind the apparent immutability of the sun, they go on with their business, without thinking of these two worlds, one too small, the other too large for them to perceive the cosmic menace which hovers around us. Thus the Verdurins gave their dinners (soon, after the death of M. Verdurin, Mme Verdurin alone) and M. de Charlus went about his pleasures, without realising that the Germans — immobilised, it is true, by a bleeding barrier which was always being renewed — were at an hour's automobile drive from Paris. One might say the Verdurins did, nevertheless, think about it, since they had a political salon where the situation of the armies and of the fleets was discussed every day. As a matter of fact, they thought about those hecatombs of annihilated regiments, of engulfed seafarers, but an inverse operation multiplies to such a degree what concerns our welfare and divides by such a formidable figure what does not concern it, that the death of millions of unknown people hardly affects us more unpleasantly than a draught. Mme Verdurin, who suffered from headaches on account of being unable to get *croissants* to dip into her coffee, had obtained an order from Cottard which enabled her to have them made in the restaurant mentioned earlier. It had been almost as difficult to procure this order from the authorities as the nomination of a general. She started her first *croissant* again on the morning the papers an-announced the wreck of

the *Lusitania*. Dipping it into her coffee, she arranged her newspaper so that it would stay open without her having to deprive her other hand of its function of dipping, and exclaimed with horror, “How awful! It’s more frightful than the most terrible tragedies.” But those drowning people must have seemed to her reduced a thousand-fold, for, while she indulged in these saddening reflections, she was filling her mouth and the expression on her face, induced, one supposes, by the savour of the *croissant*, precious remedy for her headache, was rather that of placid satisfaction.

M. de Charlus went beyond not passionately desiring the victory of France; without avowing it, he wanted, if not the triumph of Germany, at least that she should not, as everybody desired, be destroyed. The reason of this was that in quarrels the great assemblages of individuals called nations behave, in a certain measure, like individuals. The logic which governs them is within them and is perpetually remoulded by passion like that of people engaged in a love-quarrel or in some domestic dispute, such as that of a son with his father, of a cook with her mistress, of a woman with her husband. He who is in the wrong believes himself in the right, as was the case with Germany, and he who is in the right supports it with arguments which only appear irrefutable to him because they respond to his anger. In these quarrels between individuals, in order to be convinced that one of the parties is in the right — the surest plan is to be that party; no onlooker will ever be so: completely convinced of it. And an individual, if he be an integral part of a nation, is himself merely a cellule of an individual which is the nation. Stuffing people’s heads full of words means nothing. If, at a critical period in the war, a Frenchman had been told that his country was going to be beaten, he would have been desperate as though he were himself about to be killed by the “Berthas”. Really, one fills one’s own head with hope which is a sort of instinct of self-preservation in a nation if one is really an integral member of it. To remain blind to what is false in the claims of the individual called Germany, to see justice in every claim of the individual called France, the surest way was not for a German to lack judgment and for a Frenchman to possess it but for both to be patriotic. M. de Charlus, who had rare moral qualities, who was accessible to pity, generous, capable of affection and of devotion, was in contrast, for various reasons, amongst them that a Bavarian duchess had been his mother, without patriotism. In consequence he belonged as much to the body of Germany as to the body of France. If I had been devoid of patriotism myself, instead of feeling myself one of the cellules in the body of France, I think my way of judging the quarrel would not have been the same as

formerly. In my adolescence, when I believed exactly what I was told, doubtless, on hearing the German Government protest its good faith, I should have been inclined to believe it, but now for a long time I had realised that our thoughts do not always correspond with our words.

But actually I can only imagine what I should have done if I had not been a member of the agent, France, as in my quarrels with Albertine, when my sad appearance and my choking throat were, as parts of my being, too passionately interested on my own behalf for me to reach any sort of detachment. That of M. de Charlus was complete. Since he was only a spectator, everything had the inevitable effect of making him Germanophile because, though not really French, he lived in France. He was very keen-witted and in all countries fools outnumber the rest; no doubt, if he had lived in Germany the German fools defending an unjust cause with passionate folly would — have equally irritated him; but living in France, the French fools, defending a just cause with passionate folly, irritated him no less. The logic of passion, even in the service of justice, is never irrefutable by one who remains dispassionate. M. de Charlus acutely noted each false argument of the patriots. The satisfaction a brainless fool gets out of being in the right and out of the certainty of success, is particularly irritating. M. de Charlus was maddened by the triumphant optimism of people who did not know Germany and its power as he did, who every month were confident that she would be crushed the following month, and when a year had passed were just as ready to believe in a new prognostic as if they had not with equal confidence credited the false one they had forgotten, or if they were reminded of it, replied that, “it was not the same thing.” M. de Charlus, whose mind contained some depth, might perhaps not have understood in Art that the “it isn’t the same thing” offered as an argument by the detractors of Monet in opposition to those who contended that “they said the same thing about Delacroix”, corresponded to the same mentality. And then M. de Charlus was merciful, the idea of a vanquished man pained him, he was always for the weak, and could not read the accounts of trials in the papers without feeling in his own flesh the anguish of the prisoner and a longing to assassinate the judge, the executioner and the mob who delighted in “seeing justice done”. In any case, it was now certain that France could not be beaten and he knew that the Germans were famine-stricken and would be obliged sooner or later to surrender at discretion. This idea was also more unpleasant to him owing to his living in France. His memories of Germany were, after all, dimmed by time, whereas the French who unpleasantly gloated in the prospect of crushing Germany, were

people whose defects and antipathetic countenances were familiar to him. In such a case we feel more compassionate towards those unknown to us, whom we can only imagine, than towards those whose vulgar daily life is lived close to us, unless we feel completely one of them, one flesh with them; patriotism works this miracle, we stand by our country as we do by ourselves in a love quarrel. The war, too, acted on M. de Charlus as an extraordinarily fruitful culture of those hatreds of his which were born from one instant to another, lasted a very short time, but during it were exceedingly violent. Reading the papers, the triumphant tone of the articles daily representing Germany laid low, “the beast at bay, reduced to impotence”, at a time when the contrary was only too true, drove him mad with rage by their irresponsible and ferocious stupidity. The papers were in part edited at that time by well-known people who thus found a way of “doing their bit”; by the Brichots, the Norpois, by the Legrandins. M. de Charlus longed to meet and pulverise them with his bitterest irony. Always particularly well informed about sexual taints, he recognised them in others who, imagining themselves unsuspected, delighted in denouncing the sovereigns of the “Empires of prey”, Wagner et cetera as culprits in this respect. He yearned to encounter them face to face so that he could rub their noses in their own vices before the world and leave these insulters of a fallen foe demolished and dishonoured. Finally M. de Charlus had a still further reason for being the Germanophile he was. One was that as a man of the world he had lived much amongst people in society, amongst men of honour who will not shake hands with a scamp; he knew their niceties and also their hardness, he knew they were insensible to the tears of a man they expel from a club, with whom they refuse to fight a duel, even if their act of “moral purity” caused the death of the black sheep’s mother. Great as his admiration had been for England, that impeccable England incapable of lies preventing corn and milk from entering Germany was in a way a nation of chartered gentlemen, of licensed witnesses and arbiters of honour, whilst to his mind some of Dostoevsky’s disreputable rascals were better. But I never could understand why he identified such characters with the Germans since the latter do not appear to us to have displayed the goodness of heart which, in the case of the former, lying and deceit failed to prejudice. Finally, a last trait will complete the Germanophilism of M. de Charlus, which he owed through a peculiar reaction to his “Charlisme”. He considered Germans very ugly, perhaps because they were a little too close to his own blood, he was mad about Moroccans but above all about Anglo-Saxons whom he saw as living statues of Phidias. In him sexual gratification was inseparable from the idea of

cruelty and (how strong this was I did not then realise) the man who attracted him seemed like a kind of delightful executioner. He would have thought, if he had sided against the Germans, that he was acting as he only did in his hours of self-indulgence, that is, in a sense contrary to his naturally merciful nature, in other words, impassioned; by seductive evil and desiring to crush virtuous ugliness. He was like that at the time of the murder of Rasputine at a supper party *a la* Dostoevsky, which impressed people by its strong Russian flavour (an impression which would have been much stronger if the public had been aware of all that M. de Charlus knew), because life deceives us so much that we come to believing that literature has no relation with it and we are astonished to observe that the wonderful ideas books have presented to us are gratuitously exhibited in everyday life, without risk of being spoilt by the writer, that for instance, a murder at a supper-party, a Russian incident, should have something Russian about it.

The war continued indefinitely and those who had announced years ago from a reliable source that negotiations for peace had begun, specifying even the clauses of the armistice, did not take the trouble, when they talked with you, to excuse themselves for their false information. They had forgotten it and were ready sincerely to circulate other information which they would forget equally quickly. It was the period when there were continuous raids of Gothas. The air perpetually quivered with the vigilant and sonorous vibration of the French aeroplanes. But sometimes the siren rang forth like a harrowing appeal of the Walkyries, the only German music one had heard since the war — until the hour when the firemen announced that the alarm was finished, while the maroon, like an invisible newsboy, communicated the good news at regular intervals and cast its joyous clamour into the air.

M. de Charlus was astonished to discover that even men like Brichot who, before the war, had been militarist and reproached France for not being sufficiently so, were not satisfied with blaming Germany for the excesses of her militarism, but even condemned her for admiring her army. Doubtless, they changed their view when there was a question of slowing down the war against Germany and rightly denounced the pacifists. Yet Brichot, as an example of inconsistency, having agreed in spite of his failing sight, to give lectures on certain books which had appeared in neutral countries, exalted the novel of a Swiss in which two children, who fell on their knees in admiration of the symbolic vision of a dragoon, are denounced as the seed of militarism. There were other reasons why this denunciation should displease M. de Charlus, who

considered that a dragoon can be exceedingly beautiful. But still more he could not understand the admiration of Brichot, if not for the book which the baron had not read, at all events for its spirit which was so different from that which distinguished Brichot before the war. Then everything that was soldierlike was good, whether it was the irregularities of a General de Boisdeffre, the travesties and machinations of a Colonel du Paty de Clam or the falsifications of Colonel Henry. But by that extraordinary *volte-face*(which was in reality only another face of that most noble passion, patriotism, necessarily militarised when it was fighting against Dreyfusism which then had an anti-militarist tendency and now was almost anti-militarist since it was fighting against Germany, the super-militarist country), Brichot now cried: “Oh! What an admirable exhibition, how seemly, to appeal to youth to continue brutality for a century, to recognise no other culture than that of violence: a dragoon! One can imagine the sort of vile soldiery we can expect of a generation brought up to worship these manifestations of brute force.” “Now, look here,” M. de Charlus said to me, “you know Brichot and Cambremer. Every time I see them, they talk to me about the extraordinary lack of psychology in Germany. Between ourselves, do you believe that until now they have cared much about psychology or that even now they are capable of proving they possess any? But, believe me, I am not exaggerating. Even when the greatest Germans are in question, Nietzsche or Goethe, you will hear Brichot say ‘with that habitual lack of psychology which characterises the Teutonic race’. Obviously there are worse things than that to bear but you must admit that it gets on one’s nerves. Norpois is more intelligent, I admit, though he has never been other than wrong from the beginning. But what is one to say about those articles which excite universal enthusiasm? My dear Sir, you know as well as I do what Brichot’s value is, and I have a liking for him even since the feud which has separated me from his little tabernacle, on account of which I see him much less. Still, I have a certain respect for this college dean, a fine speaker and an erudite, and I avow that it is extremely touching, at his age and in bad health as he is, for he has become sensibly so in these last years, that he should have given himself up to what he calls service. But whatever one may say, good intention is one thing, talent another and Brichot never had talent. I admit that I share his admiration for certain grandeurs of the war. At most, however, it is extraordinary that a blind partisan of antiquity like Brichot, who never could be ironical enough about Zola seeing more beauty in a workman’s home, in a mine than in historic palaces or about Goncourt putting Diderot above Homer and Watteau above Raphael, should repeat

incessantly that Thermopylae or Austerlitz were nothing in comparison with Vauquois. This time the public, which resisted the modernists of Art and Literature, follows those of the war, because it's the fashion to think like that and small minds are not overwhelmed by the beauty but by the enormous scale of the war. They never write Kolossal without a K but at bottom what they bow down to is indeed colossal."

"It is a curious thing," added M. de Charlus, with that little high voice he adopted at times, "I hear people who look quite happy all day long and drink plenty of excellent cocktails, say they will never be able to see the war through, that their hearts aren't strong enough, that they cannot think of anything else and that they will die suddenly, and the extraordinary thing is that it actually happens; how curious! Is it a matter of nourishment, because they only eat things which are badly cooked or because, to prove their zeal, they harness themselves to some futile task which interferes with the diet that preserved them? Anyhow, I have registered a surprising number of these strange premature deaths, premature at all events, so far as the desire of the dead person was concerned. I do not remember exactly what I was saying to you about Brichot and Norpois admiring this war but what a singular way to talk about it. To begin with, have you remarked that pullulation of new idioms used by Norpois which, exhausted by daily use — for really he is indefatigable and I believe the death of my Aunt Ville-parisis gave him a second youth — are immediately replaced by others that are in general use. Formerly, I remember you used to be amused by noting these modes of language which appear, are kept going for a time, and then disappear: 'He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind', 'The dog barks, the caravan passes', 'Find me a good politic and I shall produce good finance for you, said Baron Louis'. These are symptoms which it would be exaggerated to take too tragically but which must be taken seriously, 'To work for the King of Prussia', (for that matter this last has been revived as was inevitable). Well, since, alas, I have seen so many of them die we have had the 'Scrap of paper', 'the Robber Empires', 'the famous Kultur which consists in assassinating defenceless women and children', 'Victory, as the Japanese say, will be to him who can endure a quarter of an hour longer than the other', 'The Germano-Turanians', 'Scientific barbarity', 'if we want to win the war in accordance with the strong expression of Mr. Lloyd George', in fact, there are no end of them; the *mordant* of the troops, and the *cran* of the troops. Even the sentiments of the excellent Norpois undergo, owing to the war, as complete a modification as the composition of bread or the rapidity of transport. Have you observed that the excellent man,

anxious to proclaim his desires as though they were a truth on the point of being realised, does not, all the same, dare to use the future tense which might be contradicted by events, but has adopted instead the verb ‘know’.” I told M. de Charlus that I did not understand what he meant. I must observe here that the Duc de Guermantes did not in the least share the pessimism of his brother. He was, moreover, as Anglophile as M. de Charlus was Anglophobe. For instance, he considered M. Caillaux a traitor who deserved to be shot a thousand times over. When his brother asked him for proofs of this treason, M. de Guermantes answered that if one only condemned people who signed a paper on which they declared “I have betrayed”, one would never punish the crime of treason. But in case I should not have occasion to return to it, I will also remark that two years later the Duc de Guermantes, animated by pure anti-Caillauxism, made the acquaintance of an English military attaché and his wife, a remarkably well-read couple, with whom he made friends as he did with the three charming ladies at the time of the Dreyfus Affair and that from the first day he was astounded, in talking of Caillaux, whose conviction he held to be certain and his crime patent, to hear one of the charming and well-read couple remark, “He will probably be acquitted, there is absolutely nothing against him.” M. de Guermantes tried to allege that M. de Norpois, in his evidence had exclaimed, looking the fallen Caillaux in the face, “You are the Giolitti of France, yes, M. Caillaux, you are the Giolitti of France.” But the charming couple smiled and ridiculed M. de Norpois, giving examples of his senility and concluded that he had thus addressed a M. Caillaux overthrown according to the *Figaro*, but probably in reality a very sly M. Caillaux. The opinions of the Duc de Guermantes soon changed. To attribute this change to the influence of an English woman is not as extreme as it might have seemed if one had prophesied even in 1919, when the English called the Germans Huns and demanded a ferocious sentence on the guilty, that their opinion was to change and that every decision which could sadden France and help Germany would be supported by them. To return to M. de Charlus. “Yes,” he said, in reply to my not understanding him, “‘to know’ in the articles of Norpois takes the place of the future tense, that is, expresses the wishes of Norpois, all our wishes, for that matter,” he added, perhaps not with complete sincerity. “You understand that if ‘know’ had not replaced the simple future tense one might, if pressed, admit that the subject of this verb could be a country. For instance, every time Brichot said ‘America “would not know” how to remain indifferent to these repeated violations of right,’ ‘the two-headed Monarchy “would not know” how to fail to mend its ways’, it is clear that such

phrases express the wishes of Norpois (his and ours) but, anyhow, the word can still keep its original sense in spite of its absurdity, because a country can ‘know’, America can ‘know’, even the two-headed Monarchy itself can ‘know’ (in spite of its eternal lack of psychology) but that sense can no longer be admitted when Brichot writes ‘the systematic devastations “would not know” how to persuade the neutrals’, or ‘the region of the Lakes “would not know” how to avoid shortly falling into the hands of the Allies’, or ‘the results of the elections in the neutral countries “would not know” how to reflect the opinion of the great majority in those countries’. Now it is clear that these devastations, these Lakes and these results of elections are inanimate things which cannot ‘know’. By that formula Norpois is simply addressing his injunctions to the neutrals (who, I regret to observe, do not seem to obey him) to emerge from their neutrality or exhorts the Lakes no longer to belong to the ‘Boches’.” (M. de Charlus put the same sort of arrogance into his tone in pronouncing the word *boches* as he did formerly in the train to Balbec when he alluded to men whose taste is not for women,) “Moreover, did you observe the tricks Norpois made use of in opening his articles on neutrals ever since 1914? He begins by declaring emphatically that France has no right to mix herself up in the politics of Italy, Roumania, Bulgaria, et cetera. It is ‘for those powers alone to decide with complete independence, consulting only their national interests, whether or not they are to abandon their neutrality.’ But if the preliminary declarations of the article (which would formerly have been called the exordium) are so markedly disinterested, what follows is generally much less so. Anyhow, as he goes on M. de Norpois says substantially, ‘it follows that those powers only who have allied themselves with the side of Right and Justice will secure material advantages from the conflict. It cannot be expected that the Allies will compensate those nations which, following the line of least resistance, have not placed their sword at the service of the Allies, by granting them territories from which, for centuries the cry of their oppressed brethren has been raised in supplication’. Norpois, having taken this first step towards advising intervention, nothing stops him and he now offers advice more and more thinly disguised, not only as to the principle but also as to the appropriate moment for intervention. ‘Naturally,’ he says, playing as he would himself call it, the good apostle, ‘it is for Italy, for Roumania alone to decide the proper hour and the form under which it will suit them to intervene. They cannot, however, be unaware that if they delay too long, they run the risk of missing the crucial moment. Even now Germany trembles at the thud of the Russian cavalry. It is obvious that the nations which have only

flown to help in the hour of victory of which the resplendent dawn is already visible, can in no wise have a claim to the rewards they can still secure by hastening, et cetera, et cetera'. It is like at the theatre when they say,'the last remaining seats will very soon be gone. This is a warning to the dilatory', an argument which is the more stupid that Norpois serves it up every six months and periodically admonishes Roumania: 'The Hour has come for Roumania to make up her mind whether she desires or not to realise her national aspirations. If she waits much longer, she will risk being too late'. And though he has repeated the admonition for two years, the 'too late' has not yet come to pass and they keep on increasing their offers to Roumania. In the same way he invites France et cetera to intervene in Greece as a protective power because the treaty which bound Greece to Serbia has not been maintained. And, really and truly, if France were not at war and did not desire the assistance of the benevolent neutrality of Greece, would she think of intervening as a protective power and would not the moral sentiment which inspires her reprobation of Greece for not keeping her engagements with Serbia, be silenced the moment the question arose of an equally flagrant violation in the case of Roumania and Italy who, like Greece, I believe with good reason, have not fulfilled their obligations, which were less imperative and extensive than is supposed, as Allies of Germany. The truth is that people see everything through their newspaper and how can they do otherwise, seeing that they themselves know nothing about the peoples or the events in question. At the time of the 'Affaire' which stirred all passions during that period from which it is now the right thing to say we are separated by centuries, for the war-philosophers have agreed that all links with the past are broken, I was shocked at seeing members of my own family give their esteem to anti-clericals and former Communists whom their paper represented as anti-Dreyfusards and insult a general of high birth and a Catholic who was a revisionist. I am no less shocked to see the whole French people execrate the Emperor Francis Joseph, whom they used rightly to venerate; I am able to assure you of this, for I used to know him well and he honoured me by treating me as his cousin. Ah! I have not written to him since the war," he added as though avowing a fault for which he knew he could not be blamed. "Yes, let me see, I did write once, only the first year. But it doesn't matter. It doesn't in the least change my respect for him, but I have many young relatives fighting in our lines and they would, I know, consider that I was acting very badly if I kept up a correspondence with the head of a nation at war with us. Let him who wishes criticise me," he added, as if he were boldly exposing himself to my reproof; "I

did not want a letter signed Charlus to arrive at Vienna in such times as these. The chief criticism that I should direct against the old sovereign is that a *Seigneur* of his rank, head of one of the most ancient and illustrious houses in Europe, should have allowed himself to be led by the nose by that little upstart of a country squire very intelligent for that matter but a pure *parvenu* like William of Hohenzollern. That is not the least shocking of the anomalies of this war." And as, once he adopted the nobiliary point of view which for him overshadowed everything else, M. de Charlus was capable of the most childish extravagances, he told me, in the same serious tone as if he were speaking of the Marne or of Verdun, that there were most interesting and curious things which should not be excluded by any historian of this war. "For instance," he said, "people are so ignorant that no one has observed this remarkable point: the Grand-Master of the Order of Malta, who is a pure-bred Boche, does not on that account cease living at Rome where, as Grand-Master of our Order he enjoys exterritorial privileges. Isn't that interesting?" he added with the air of saying, "You see you have not wasted your evening by meeting me." I thanked him and he assumed the modest air of one who is not asking for payment. "Ah! What was I telling you? Oh, yes, that people now hated Francis Joseph according to their paper. In the cases of the King Constantine of Greece and the Czar of Bulgaria the public has wavered between aversion and sympathy according to reports that they were going to join the Entente or what Norpois calls 'the Central Empires'. It is like when he keeps on telling us every moment that the hour of Venizelos is going to strike. I do not doubt that Venizelos is a man of much capacity but how do we know that his country wants him so much? He desired, we are informed, that Greece should keep her engagements with Serbia. So we ought to know what those engagements were and if they were more binding than those which Italy and Roumania thought themselves justified in violating. We display an anxiety about the way in which Greece executes her treaties and respects her constitution that we certainly should not have were it not to our interest. If there had been no war, do you believe that the guaranteeing powers would even have paid the slightest attention to the dissolution of the Chamber? I observe that one by one they are withholding their support from the King of Greece so as to be able to throw him out or imprison him the day that he has no army to defend him. I was telling you that the public only judges the King of Greece and the Czar of Bulgaria by the papers, and how could they do otherwise since they do not know them? I used to see a great deal of them and knew them well. When Constantine of Greece was Crown Prince he was a marvel of beauty. I have

always believed that the Emperor Nicholas had a great deal of sentiment for him. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, of course. Princess Christian spoke of it openly, but she's a fiend. As to the Czar of the Bulgarians, he's a sly hussy, a regular show-figure, but very intelligent, a remarkable man. He's very fond of me."

M. de Charlus, who could be so pleasant, became odious when he touched on these subjects. His self-complacency irritated one like an invalid who keeps on assuring you how well he is. I have often thought that the "faithful" who so much wanted the avowals withheld by the tortuous personage of Balbec, could not have put up with his ostentatious but uneasy display of his mania and would have felt as uncomfortable as if a morphino-maniac took out his syringe in front of them; probably they would soon have had enough of the confidences they thought they would relish. Besides, one got sick of hearing everybody relegated without proof to a category to which he belonged himself though he denied it. In spite of his intelligence, he had constructed for himself in that connection a narrow little philosophy (at the base of which there was perhaps a touch of that peculiar way of looking at life which characterised Swann) which attributed everything to special causes and, as always happens when a man is conscious of bordering on his own particular defect, he was unworthy of himself and yet unusually self-satisfied. So it came about that so earnest, so noble-minded a man could wear that idiotic smile when he enunciated: "as there are strong presumptions of the same character in regard to Ferdinand of Coburg's relations with the Emperor William, that might be the reason why Czar Ferdinand placed himself by the side of the Robber-Empires. *Dame*, after all, that is quite comprehensible. One is generous to one's sister, one doesn't refuse her anything. To my mind it would be a very charming explanation of the alliance of Germany and Bulgaria." And M. de Charlus laughed as long over this stupid explanation as though it had been an ingenious one which, even if there had been any justification for it, was as puerile as the observations he made about the war when he judged it from the feudal point of view of from that of a Knight of the Order of Jerusalem. He finished with a sensible observation: "It is astonishing that the public, though it only judges men and things in the war by the papers, is convinced that it is exercising its own initiative." M. de Charlus was right about that. I was told that Mme de Forcheville's silences and hesitations were worth witnessing for the sake of her facial expression when she announced with deep personal conviction: "No, I do not believe that they will take Warsaw", "I am under the impression that it will not last a second winter." "What I do not want is a lame peace." "What alarms me, if you care for my opinion, is the Chamber."

“Yes, I believe, all the same, they can break through.” In enunciating these phrases, Odette’s features assumed a knowing look which was emphasised when she remarked: “I don’t say that the German armies don’t fight well, but they lack that *cran* as we call it.” In using that expression (or the word *mordant* in connection with the troops) she made a gesture of kneading with her hand, putting her head on one side and half-closing her eyes like an art-student. Her language bore more traces than ever of her admiration for the English whom she was no longer content to call as she used to “our neighbours across the Channel”, or “our friends the English”, but nothing less than “our loyal allies”. Unnecessary to say that she never neglected to use in all contexts the expression “fair play” in order to show that the English considered the Germans unfair players. “Fair play is what is needed to win the war, as our brave allies say.” And she rather awkwardly associated the name of her son-in-law with everything that concerned the English soldiers and alluded to the pleasure he found in living on intimate terms with the Australians, as also with the Scottish, the New Zealanders and the Canadians. “My son-in-law, Saint-Loup, knows the slang of all those brave ‘tommies’. He knows ho’w to make himself understood by those who came from the far ‘Dominions’ and he would just as soon fraternise with the most humble private as with the general commanding the base.”

Let this digression about Mme de Forcheville, while I am walking along the boulevard side by side with M. de Charlus, justify a longer one, to elucidate the relations of Mme Verdurin with Brichot at this period. If poor Brichot, like Norpois, was judged with little indulgence by M. de Charlus (because the latter was at once extremely acute and, unconsciously, more or less Germanophile) he was actually treated much worse by the Verdurins. The latter were, of course, chauvinist, and they ought to have liked Brichot’s articles which, for that matter, were not inferior to many publications considered delectable by Mme Verdurin. The reader will, perhaps, recall that, even in the days of La Raspelière, Brichot had become, instead of the great man they used to think him, if not a Turk’s head like Saniette, at all events the object of their thinly disguised raillery. Nevertheless, he was still one of the “faithfuls” which assured him some of the advantages tacitly allotted by the statutes to all the foundation and associated members of the little group. But as, gradually, perhaps owing to the war or through the rapid crystallisation of the long-delayed fashionableness with which all the necessary but till then invisible elements had long since saturated the Verdurin Salon, that salon had been opened to a new society and as the “faithfuls”, at first the bait for this new society, had ended by being less and less

frequently invited, so a parallel phenomenon was taking place in Brichot's case. In spite of the Sorbonne, in spite of the Institute, his fame had, until the war, not outgrown the limits of the Verdurin salon. But when almost daily he began writing articles embellished with that false brilliance we have so often seen him lavishly dispensing for the benefit of the "faithful" and as he possessed a real erudition which, as a true Sorbonian, he did not seek to hide under some of the graces he gave to it, society was literally dazzled. For once, moreover, it accorded its favour to a man who was far from being a nonentity and who could claim attention owing to the fertility of his intelligence and the resources of his memory. And while three duchesses went to spend the evening at Mme Verdurin's, three others contested the honour of having the great man at their table; and when the invitation of one of them was accepted, she felt herself the freer because Mme Verdurin, exasperated by the success of his articles in the faubourg Saint-Germain, had taken care not to have him at her house when there was any likelihood of his encountering there some brilliant personage whom he did not yet know and who would hasten to capture him. Brichot in his old age was satisfied to bestow on journalism in exchange for liberal emoluments, all the distinction he had wasted gratis and unrecognised in the Verdurins' salon (for his articles gave him no more trouble than his conversation, so good a talker and so learned was he) and this might have brought him unrivalled fame and at one moment seemed on the eve of doing so, had it not been for Mme Verdurin. Certainly Brichot's articles were far from being as remarkable as society people believed them to be. The vulgarity of the man was manifest at every instant under the pedantry of the scholar. And over and above imagery which meant nothing at all ("the Germans can no longer look the statue of Beethoven in the face", "Schiller must have turned in his grave", "the ink which initialled the neutrality of Belgium was hardly dry", "Lenin's words mean no more than the wind over the steppes") there were trivialities such as "Twenty thousand prisoners, that's something like a figure". "Our Command will know how to keep its eyes open once for all". "We mean to win; one point, that's all". But mixed up with that nonsense, there were so much knowledge, intelligence and good reasoning. Now Mme Verdurin never began one of Brichot's articles without the anticipatory satisfaction of expecting to find absurdities in it and read it with concentrated attention so as to be certain not to let any of them escape her. Unfortunately there always were some, one hardly had to wait. The most felicitous quotation from an almost unknown author, unknown at all events, by the writer of the work Brichot referred to, was made use of to prove his

unjustifiable pedantry and Mme Verdurin awaited the dinner-hour with impatience so that she could let loose her guests' shrieks of laughter, "Well! What about our Brichot this evening? I thought of you when I was reading the quotation from Cuvier. Upon my word, I believe he's going crazy." "I haven't read it yet," said a "faithful". "What, you haven't read it yet? You don't know the delights in store for you. It's so perfectly idiotic that I nearly died of laughing." And delighted that someone or other had not yet read the particular article so that she could expose Brichot's absurdities herself, Mme Verdurin told the butler to bring the*Temps* and began to read it aloud, emphasising the most simple phrases. After dinner, throughout the evening, the anti-Brichot campaign continued, but with a pretence of reserve. "I'm not reading this too loud because I'm afraid that down there," she pointed at the Comtesse Molé, "there's a lingering admiration for this rubbish. Society people are simpler than one would think." While they wanted Mme Molé to hear what they were saying about her, they pretended the contrary by lowering their voices, and she, in cowardly fashion, disowned Brichot whom in reality she considered the equal of Michelet. She agreed with Mme Verdurin and yet, so as to end on a note which seemed to her incontrovertible, added, "One cannot deny that it is well written." "You call that well written," rejoined Mme Verdurin, "I consider that it's written like a pig," a sally which raised a society laugh, chiefly because Mme Verdurin, rather abashed by the word "pig", had uttered it in a whisper, with her hand over her lips. Her vindictiveness towards Brichot increased the more because he naively displayed satisfaction at his success in spite of ill-humour provoked by the censorship each time, as he said, with his habitual use of slang to show he was not too don-like, it had *caviardé* a part of his article. To his face Mme Verdurin did not let him perceive how poor an opinion she had of his articles except by a sullen demeanour which would have enlightened a more perceptive man. Once only she reproached him with using "I" so often. As a matter of fact he did so, partly from professional habit; expressions like: "I admit that", "I am aware that the enormous development of the fronts necessitates", et cetera, et cetera imposed themselves on him but still more because as a former militant anti-Dreyfusard who had surmised the German preparations long before the war, he had grown accustomed to continually writing: "I have denounced them since 1897", "I pointed it out in 1901", "I. warned them in my little brochure, very scarce to-day '*habent sua fata libelli*'" and thus the habit had taken root. He blushed deeply at Mme Verdurin's bitter observation. "You are right, madame. One who loved the Jesuits as little as M. Combes, before he had been privileged

with a preface by our charming master in delightful scepticism, Anatole France, who, unless I err, was my adversary — before the deluge, said that the 'I' was always detestable." From that moment Brichot replaced "I" by "we", but "we" did not prevent the reader from seeing that the writer was speaking about himself, on the contrary it enabled him never to cease talking about himself, making a running commentary out of his least significant sentences and composing an article simply on a negation, invariably protected by "we". For instance, Brichot had stated, maybe, in another article that the German armies had lost some of their value, he would then begin as follows: "'We' are not going to disguise the truth. 'We' have said that these German armies had lost some of their value. 'We' have not said that they were not still of great value. Still less shall 'we' say that they have no value at all, any more than 'we' should say that ground is gained which is not gained, et cetera, et cetera." In short, Brichot would have been able, merely by enunciating everything he would not say and by recalling everything that he had been saying for years and what Clausewitz, Ovid, Apollonius of Tyana had said so and so many centuries ago, easily to constitute the material of a large volume. It is a pity he did not publish it because those articles crammed with erudition are now difficult to obtain. The faubourg Saint-Germain, instructed by Mme Verdurin, began laughing at Brichot at her house, but, once they got away from the little clan, they continued to admire him. Then laughing at him became the fashion as it had been the fashion to admire him, and even those ladies who continued to be secretly interested in him, had no sooner read one of his articles, than they stopped and laughed at them in company, so as not to appear less intelligent than others. Brichot had never been so much talked about in the little clan as at this period, but with derision. The criterion of the intelligence of every newcomer was his opinion of Brichot's articles; if he responded unsatisfactorily the first time, they soon taught him how to judge people's intelligence. "Well, my dear friend," continued M. de Charlus, "all this is appalling and there's a good deal more to deplore than tiresome articles. They talk about vandalism, about the destruction of statues, but is not the destruction of so many wonderful young men who were polychrome statues of incomparable beauty also vandalism? Is not a city in which there are no more beautiful men like a city in which all the statuary has been destroyed? What pleasure can I have in going to dinner at a restaurant where I am served by old moss-grown pot-bellies who look like Père Didon, if not by women in mob caps who make me think I am at a Bouillon Duval. Exactly, my dear fellow, and I think I have the right to say so, for the Beautiful is as much the Beautiful in

living matter. A fine pleasure to be served by rickety creatures with spectacles the reason of whose exemption can be read in their faces. Nowadays, if one wants to gratify one's eyes with the sight of a good-looking person in a restaurant, one must no longer seek him among the waiters but among the customers. And one may see a servant again, often as they are changed, but what about that English lieutenant who has been to the restaurant for the first time and will perhaps be killed to-morrow? When Augustus of Poland, as Morand, the delightful author of *Clarisse* narrates, exchanged one of his regiments against a collection of Chinese pots, in my opinion he did a bad business. To think that all those splendid footmen six feet high, who adorned the monumental staircases of our beautiful lady friends, have all been killed, most of them having joined up because people kept on telling them that the war would only last two months. Ah! little did they know, as I did, the power of Germany, the valour of the Prussian race," he added, forgetting himself. And then, noticing that he had allowed his point of view to be too clearly seen, he continued: "It is not so much Germany as the war itself that I fear for France. People imagine that the war is only a gigantic boxing-match at which they are gazing from afar, thanks to the papers. But that is completely untrue. It is a disease which, when it seems cured at one spot crops up in another. To-day, Noyon will be relieved, to-morrow we shall have neither bread nor chocolate, the day after, he who believed himself safe and would, if needs must, be ready to die an unimagined death, will be horrified to read in the papers that his class has been called up. As to monuments, the destruction of a unique masterpiece like Rheims is not so terrible to me as to witness the destruction of such numbers of *ensembles* which made the smallest village of France instructive and charming." Immediately I began thinking of Combray and how in former days I had thought myself diminished in the eyes of Mme de Guermantes by avowing the modest situation which my family occupied there. I wondered if it had not been revealed to the Guermantes and to M. de Charlus whether by Legrandin or Swann or Saint-Loup or Morel. But that this might have been divulged was less painful to me than retrospective explanations. I only hoped that M. de Charlus would not allude to Combray. "I do not want to speak ill of the Americans, monsieur," he continued, "it seems they are inexhaustibly generous and, since there has been no orchestral conductor in this war and each entered the dance considerably after the other and the Americans began when we were almost finished, they may have an ardour which four years of war has quenched among us. Even before the war they loved our country and our art and paid high prices for our masterpieces of which they

have many now. But it is precisely this deracinated art, as M. Barrés would say, which is the reverse of everything which made the supreme charm of France. The Chateau explained the church which in its turn, because it had been a place of pilgrimage, explained the *chanson de geste*. As an illustration, I need not elaborate my own origin and my alliances; for that matter we are not concerned with that, but recently I had to settle some family interests and in spite of a certain coolness which exists between myself and the Saint-Loup family, I had to pay a visit to my niece who lives at Combray. Combray was only a little town like so many others, but our ancestors were represented as patrons in many of the painted windows of the church, in others our arms were inscribed. We had our chapel there and our tombs. This church was destroyed by the French and by the English because it served as an observation post for the Germans. All that medley of surviving history and of art which was France is being destroyed and it is not over yet. Of course I am not so ridiculous as to compare for family reasons the destruction of the Church of Combray with that of the Cathedral of Rheims which was a miracle of a Gothic cathedral in its spontaneous purity of unique statuary, or that of Amiens. I do not know if the raised arm of St. Firmin is smashed to atoms to-day. If it is, the the most noble affirmation of faith and of energy has disappeared from this world." "The symbol of it, monsieur," I answered, "I love symbols as you do, but it would be absurd to sacrifice to the symbol the reality which it symbolises. The cathedrals must be adored until the day when in order to preserve them, it would be necessary to deny the truths which they teach. The raised arm of St. Firmin, with an almost military gesture, said: 'Let us be broken if honour demands it. Do not sacrifice men to stones whose beauty arises from having for a moment established human verities.'". "I understand what you mean," answered M. de Charlus, "and M. Barrés who alas! has been the cause of our making too many pilgrimages to the statue of Strasbourg and to the tomb of M. Deroulède, was moving and graceful when he wrote that the Cathedral of Rheims itself was less dear to us than the life of one of our infantrymen. This assertion makes the rage of our newspapers against the German general who said that the Cathedral of Rheims was less precious to him than the life of a German soldier, rather ridiculous. And what is so exasperating and harrowing is that every country says the same thing. The reasons given by the industrialist associations of Germany for retaining possession of Belfort as indispensable for the preservation of their country against our ideas of revenge are the same as those of Barrés exacting Mayence to protect us against the velleities of invasion by the Boches. How is it that the restitution of Alsace-

Lorraine appeared to France an insufficient motive for a war and yet a sufficient motive for continuing it and for declaring it anew each year? You seem to believe the victory of France certain; I hope so with all my heart, you don't doubt that, but ever since, rightly or wrongly, the Allies believe that their own victory is assured (for my own part, of course, I should be delighted with such a solution, but I observe a great many paper victories, pyrrhic victories at a cost not revealed to us) and that the Boches are no longer confident of victory, we see Germany seeking peace and France wanting to prolong the war; that just France rightly desiring to make the voice of justice heard should be also France the compassionate, and make words of pity heard, were it only for the sake of her children, so that when spring-days come round and flowers bloom again, they will brighten other things than tombs. Be frank, my dear friend, you yourself exposed the theory to me that things only exist thanks to a perpetually renewed creation. You used to say that the creation of the world did not take place once and for all, but necessarily continues day by day. Well, if you said that in good faith you cannot except the war from that theory. It is all very well for our excellent Norpois to write (trotting out one of those rhetorical accessories he loves, like 'the dawn of victory' and 'General Winter') 'now that Germany has wanted war, the die is cast' the truth is that every day war is declared anew. Therefore he who wants to continue it is as culpable as he who began it, perhaps more, for the latter could not perhaps foresee all its horrors. And there is nothing to show that so prolonged a war, even if it has a victorious issue, will not have perils. It is difficult to talk about things which have no precedent and of repercussions on the organism of an operation which is attempted for the first time. Generally, it is true, we get over these novelties we're alarmed about quite well. The shrewdest Republican thought it mad to bring about the Disestablishment of the Church and it passed like a letter through the post. Dreyfus was rehabilitated, Picquart was made Minister of War without anybody saying a word. Nevertheless, what may not happen after such an exhaustion as that induced by an uninterrupted war lasting for several years? What will the men do when they come back? Will they be tired out? Will fatigue have broken them or driven them mad? All this may turn out badly, if not for France, at least for the Government and perhaps for the form of Government. Formerly you made me read the admirable Aimée de Coigny by Maurras. I should be much surprised if some Aimée de Coigny did not anticipate from the war which our Republic is making, developments expected by Aimée de Coigny in 1812 from the war the Empire was then making. If that Aimée de Coigny actually does

exist, will her hopes be realised? I hope not. To return to the war itself: did the Emperor William begin it? I strongly doubt it and if so, what act has he committed that Napoleon, for instance, did not commit? Acts I, personally, consider abominable but I am astonished they should inspire so much horror in the Napoleonic incense-burners, in those who, on the day of the declaration of war, shrieked like General X: 'I have been awaiting this day for forty years. It is the greatest day of my life;' Heaven knows if anyone protested more loudly than I when society gave a disproportionate position to the Nationalists, to soldiers, when every friend of the Arts was accused of doing things which were injurious to the Fatherland, when every unwarlike civilisation was considered deleterious. Hardly an authentic social figure counted in comparison with a general, Some crazy woman or other nearly introduced me to M. Syveton! You will tell me that all I was concerned to uphold were laws of society; but, in spite of their apparent frivolity, they might perhaps have prevented many excesses. I have always honoured those who defend grammar and logic and it is only realised fifty years later that they have averted great dangers. And our Nationalists are the most Germanophobe, the most Die-hard of men, but during the last fifteen years their philosophy has entirely changed. As a fact, they are now urging the continuation of the war but it is only to exterminate a belligerent race and from love of peace. For the warlike civilisation they thought so beautiful fifteen years ago now horrifies them; not only they reproach Prussia with having allowed the military element in her country to predominate, but they consider that at all periods military civilisations were destructive of everything they have now discovered to be precious, including in the Arts that of gallantry. It suffices for one of their critics to be converted to nationalism for him to become at once a friend of peace; he is persuaded that in all warlike civilisations women play a humiliating and lowly part. One does not venture to reply that the ladies of the Knights in the Middle Ages and Dante's Beatrice were perhaps placed on a throne as elevated as M. Becque's heroines. I am expecting one of these days to find myself placed at table below a Russian revolutionary or perhaps only below one of our generals who make war because of their horror of war and in order to punish a people for cultivating an ideal which they themselves considered the only invigorating one fifteen years ago. The unhappy Czar was still honoured some months ago because he called the Conference of the Hague, but now that we are saluting free Russia we forget her only title to glory, thus the wheel of the world turns. And yet Germany uses so many of the same expressions as France that one might think that she's copying her. She never stops saying that she is fighting for her

existence. When I read: ‘We are fighting against an implacable and cruel enemy until we have obtained a peace which will guarantee our future against all aggression and in order that the blood of our brave soldiers should not have been shed in vain,’ or ‘who is not with us is against us’, I do not know if this phrase is Emperor William’s or M. Poincaré’s, for each one has used the same words with variations twenty times, though to tell you the truth I must confess that the Emperor in this case was the imitator of the President of the Republic. France would not perhaps have held to prolonging the war if she had remained weak, but neither would Germany perhaps have been in such a hurry to finish it if she had not ceased to be strong, I mean, to be as strong as she was, for you will see she is still strong enough.” He had got into the habit of talking very loud from nervousness, from seeking relief from impressions which, having never cultivated any art, he felt impelled to cast forth, as an aviator his bombs, into an open field where his words struck no one, and especially in society where they fell haphazard and where he was listened to with attention owing to snobbishness and where he so tyrannised his audience that one could say it was intimidated. On the boulevards this harangue was, moreover, a mark of his scorn for passers-by on whose account he no more lowered his voice than he would have moved aside for them. But there his voice exploded and astounded, and, especially when his remarks were sufficiently intelligible for passers-by to turn round, the latter might have had us arrested as defeatists. I drew M. de Charlus’ attention to this but succeeded only in exciting his hilarity: “Admit that it really would be funny,” he said. “After all, one never knows, anyone of us risks every evening being in the news-column the following day; and, if it comes to that, why shouldn’t I be shot in the ditch of Vincennes? The same thing happened to my great-uncle the Duc d’Enghien, Thirst for noble blood delights the populace which in this respect displays more refinement than lions. As to those animals, you know, if Mme. Verdurin only had a scratch on her nose, she’d say they had sprung upon, what in my youth one would have called her *pif*.” And he began to laugh with his mouth wide open as though he had been alone in a room. At moments, seeing certain rather suspicious individuals emerging from a gloomy passage near where M. de Charlus was passing and congregating at some distance from him, I wondered whether he would prefer me to leave him alone or stay with him. Thus, one who met an old man subject to epileptic fits whose incoherent behaviour foreshadowed the probable imminence of an attack, would ask himself whether his company is desired as a support or feared as that of a witness from whom he might wish to hide the attack and whose mere presence

perhaps might induce it whereas complete quiet might prevent it, while the possible event from which he cannot decide whether to fly or not, is revealed by the zigzag walk of the patient, similar to that of a drunken man. In the present case of M. de Charlus, the various divergent positions, signs of a possible incident of which I was not sure whether he wished it to happen or feared that my presence would prevent it, were, by an ingenious setting, not assumed by the baron himself who was walking straight on, but by a whole company of actors. All the same I think he preferred avoiding the encounter for he drew me into a side street more obscure than the boulevard and where there was a constant stream of soldiers of every army and of every nation, a juvenile influx compensating and consoling M. de Charlus for the reflux of all those men to the frontier which had caused that frightful void in Paris in the first days of the mobilisation. M. de Charlus unceasingly admired the brilliant uniforms passing before us which made Paris as cosmopolitan as a port, as unreal as a painted scene composed of architectural forms making a background for the most varied and seductive costumes. He retained all his respect and affection for certain *grandes dames* who were accused of defeatism, just as he did for those who had formerly been accused of Dreyfusism. He only regretted that in condescending to be political, they should have given a hold to “the polemics of journalists.” His view was unchanged so far as they were concerned. For his frivolity was so systematic that birth combined with beauty and other glamours was the lasting thing, and the war, like the Dreyfus Affair, a vulgar and fugitive fashion. Had the Duchesse de Guermantes been shot as an overture to a separate peace with Austria, he would have considered it heroic and no more degrading than it seems to-day that Marie Antoinette was sentenced to decapitation. At that moment, M. de Charlus, looking as noble as a St. Vallier or a St. Mégrin, was erect, rigid, solemn, spoke gravely, making none of those gestures and movements which reveal those of his kind. Yet why is it there are none whose voice is just right? At the very moment when he was talking of the most serious things, there was still that false note which needed tuning. And M. de Charlus literally did not know which way to look next, raising his head as though he felt the need of an opera-glass, which, however, would not have been much use to him, for, on account of the zeppelin raid of the previous day having aroused the vigilance of the public authorities, there were soldiers right up to the sky. The aeroplanes I had seen some hours earlier, like insects or brown spots upon the evening blue, continued to pass into the night deepened still more by the partial extinction of the street lamps like luminous faggots. The greatest impression of beauty given us by

these flying human stars was perhaps that of making us look at the sky whither one rarely turned one's eyes in that Paris of which in 1914 I had seen the almost defenceless beauty awaiting the menace of the approaching enemy. Certainly there was now, as then, the ancient unchanged splendour of a moon cruelly, mysteriously serene, which poured upon the still intact monuments the useless loveliness of her light, but, as in 1914, and more than in 1914, there was something else, other lights and intermittent beams which, one realised, whether they came from aeroplanes or from the searchlights of the Eiffel Tower, were directed by an intelligent will, by a protective vigilance which caused that same emotion, inspired that same gratitude and calm I had experienced in Saint-Loup's room, in the cell of that military cloister where so many fervent and disciplined hearts were being prepared for the day when without a single hesitation they were to consummate their sacrifice in the fullness of youth.

During the raid of the evening before the sky was more agitated than the earth, but when it was over, the sky became comparatively calm but, like the sea after a tempest, not completely so. Aeroplanes rose like rockets into the sky to rejoin the stars and searchlights moved slowly across the sky divided into sections by their pale star dust like wandering Milky Ways. The aeroplanes so mingled with the stars that one could almost imagine oneself in another hemisphere looking at new constellations. M. de Charlus expressed his admiration for these aviators and, as he could no more help giving free play to his Germano-philism than to his other inclinations, although he denied both, said to me: "Moreover, I must add that I admire the Germans in their Gothas just as much. And think of the courage that is needed to go in those zeppelins. They are simply heroes. And if they do throw their bombs upon civilians, don't our batteries fire upon theirs? Are you afraid of Gothas and cannon?" I avowed that I was not, but perhaps I was wrong. Having got into the habit, through idleness, of postponing my work from day to day, I doubtless supposed death might deal in the same way with me. How could one be afraid of a shell which you are convinced will not strike you that day? Moreover, these isolated ideas of bombs thrown, of possible death, added nothing tragic to the image I had formed of the passing German airships, until, one evening, I might see a bomb thrown towards us from one of them as it was tossed and segmented in the storm-clouds or from an aeroplane which, though I knew its murderous errand, I had till then regarded as celestial. For the ultimate reality of danger is only perceived through something new and irreducible to what one has previously known which we call an impression and which is often, as was the case now, summed up in a line, a

line which would disclose a purpose, a line in which there was a latent power of action which modified it; thus upon the Pont de la Concorde around the menacing and pursued aeroplane, as though the fountains of the Champs Elysées, of the Place de la Concorde, of the Tuileries, were reflected in the clouds, searchlights like jets of luminous water pierced the sky like arrows, lines full of purpose, the foreseeing and protective purpose of powerful and wise men towards whom I felt that same gratitude as on the night in quarters at Doncières when their power deigned to watch over us with such splendid precision.

The night was as beautiful as in 1914 when Paris was equally menaced. The moonbeams seemed like soft, continuous magnesium-light offering for the last time nocturnal visions of beautiful sites such as the Place Vendôme and the Place de la Concorde, to which my fear of shells which might destroy them lent a contrasting richness of as yet untouched beauty as though they were offering up their defenceless architecture to the coming blows. “You are not afraid?” repeated M. de Charlus. “Parisians do not seem to realise their danger. I am told that Mme Verdurin gives parties every day. I only know it by hearsay for I know absolutely nothing about them; I have entirely broken with them,” he added, lowering not only his eyes as if a telegraph boy had passed by, but also his head and his shoulders and lifting his arms with a gesture that signified: “I wash my hands of them!” “At least I can tell you nothing about them,” (although I had not asked him). “I know that Morel goes there a great deal” (it was the first, time he had spoken to me about him). “It is suggested that he much regrets the past, that he wants to make it up with me again,” he continued, showing simultaneously the credulity of a suburban who remarks: “It is commonly said that France is negotiating more than ever with Germany, even that *pourparlers* are taking place” and of the lover whom the worst rebuffs cannot discourage. “In any case, if he wants to, he has only to say so. I am older than he is and it is not for me to take the first step.” And indeed the useless-ness of his saying so was abundantly evident. But, besides, he was not even sincere and for that reason one was embarrassed about M. de Charlus because, when he said it was not for him to take the first step, he was, on the contrary, making one and was hoping that I should offer to bring about a reconciliation. Certainly I knew the naïve or assumed credulity of those who care for someone or even who are simply not invited by him, and impute to that person a wish he has never expressed in spite of fulsome importunities.

It must here be noted, that, unhappily, the very next day, M. de Charlus suddenly found himself face to face with Morel in the street. The latter in order

to excite his jealousy took him by the arm and told him some tales that were more or less true and when M. de Charlus, bewildered and urgently wanting Morel to stay with him that evening, entreated him not to go away, the other, catching sight of a friend, said good-bye. M. de Charlus, in a fury, hoping that the threat which, as may be imagined, he was never likely to execute, would make Morel remain with him, said to him: “Take care, I shall be revenged,” and Morel turned away with a laugh, smacking his astonished friend on the back and putting his arm round him. From the sudden tremulous intonation with which M. de Charlus, in talking of Morel, had emphasised his words, from the pained expression in the depth of his eyes, I had the impression that there was something more behind his words than ordinary insistence. I was not mistaken and I will relate at once the two incidents which later proved it. (I am anticipating by many years in regard to the second of these incidents, which was after the death of M. de Charlus and that only occurred at a much later period. We shall have occasion to see him again several times, very different from the man we have hitherto known and in particular, when we see him the last time, it will be at a period when he had completely forgotten Morel). The first of these events happened only two years after the evening when I was walking down the boulevards, as I say, with M. de Charlus. I met Morel. Immediately I thought of M. de Charlus, of the pleasure it would give him to see the violinist, and I begged the latter to go and see him, were it only once. “He has been good to you,” I told Morel. “He is now old, he might die, one must liquidate old quarrels and efface their memory.” Morel appeared entirely to share my view as to the desirability of a reconciliation. Nevertheless, he refused categorically to pay a single visit to M. de Charlus. “You are wrong,” I said to him. “Is it obstinacy or indolence or perversity or ill-placed pride or virtue (be sure that won’t be attacked), or is it coquetry?” Then the violinist, distorting his face into an avowal which no doubt cost him dear, answered with a shiver: “No, it is none of those reasons. As to virtue, I don’t care a damn, as to perversity, on the contrary, I’m beginning to pity him, nor is it from coquetry, that would be futile. It is not from idleness, there are days together when I do nothing but twiddle my thumbs. No, it has nothing to do with all that, it is — I beg you tell no one, and it is folly for me to tell you — it’s — it’s because I’m afraid.” He began trembling in all his limbs. I told him I did not understand what he meant. “Don’t ask me; don’t let us say any more about it. You don’t know him as I do. I could tell you things you’ve no idea of.” “But what harm could he do you? Less still if there were no resentment between you. And, besides, you know at bottom he is very kind.”

“Yes, indeed, I know it. I know that he is kind and full of delicacy and right feeling. But leave me alone, don’t talk about it, I beg you, I’m ashamed that I’m afraid of him.” The second incident dates from after the death of M. de Charlus. There were brought to me several *souvenirs* which he had left me and a letter enclosed in three envelopes written at least ten years before his death. But he had at that time been so seriously ill that he had made his will, then he had partially recovered before falling into the condition in which we shall see him later on the day of an afternoon party at the Princesse de Guermantes’. The letter had remained in a casket with objects he had left to certain friends, for seven years; seven years during which he had completely forgotten Morel. The letter written in a very fine yet firm hand was as follows: “My dear friend, the ways of Providence are sometimes inscrutable. It makes use of the sin of an inferior individual to prevent a just man’s fall from virtue. You know Morel, you know where he came from, from what fate I wanted to raise him, so to speak, to my own level. You know that he preferred to return, not merely to the dust and ashes from which every man, for man is veritably a phoenix, can be reborn, but into the slime and mud where the viper has its being. He let himself sink and thus preserved me from falling into the pit. You know that my arms contain the device of Our Lord Himself: ‘*Inculcabis super leonem et aspidem*’, with a man represented with a lion and a serpent at his feet as a heraldic support. Now if the lion in me has permitted itself to be trampled on, it is because of the serpent and its prudence which is sometimes too lightly called a defect, because the profound wisdom of the Gospel has made of it a virtue, at least a virtue for others. Our serpent whose hisses were formerly harmoniously modulated when he had a charmer — himself greatly charmed for that matter — was not only a musical reptile but possessed to the point of cowardice that virtue which I now hold for divine, prudence.. It was this divine prudence which made him resist the appeals which I sent him to come and see me. And I shall have neither peace in this world nor hope of forgiveness in the next if I do not make this avowal to you. It is he who in this matter was the instrument of divine wisdom, for I had resolved that he should not leave me alive. It was necessary that one or the other of us should disappear. I had decided to kill him. God himself inspired his prudence to preserve me from a crime. I do not doubt but that the intercession of the Archangel Michael, my patron saint, played a great part in this matter, and I implore him to forgive me for having so much neglected him during many years and for having requited him so ill for the innumerable bounties he has shown me, especially in my fight against evil. I owe to his service, I say it from the

fulness of my faith and my intelligence, that the Celestial Father inspired Morel not to come and see me. And now it is I who am dying. Your faithful and devoted *Semper idem*, P. G. Charlus." Then I understood Morel's fear. Certainly there were both pride and literature in that letter, but the avowal was true. And Morel knew better than I did that "almost mad side" which Mme de Guer-mantes recognised in her brother-in-law and which was not limited, as I had supposed until then, to momentary outbursts of superficial and futile passion.

But we must retrace our steps. I am still walking down the boulevards beside M. de Charlus, who is using me as a vague intermediary for overtures of peace between him and Morel. Observing that I did not reply, he thus continued: "As to that, I do not know why he doesn't play any more. Apparently there is no more music, under the pretext of the war, but they dance and dine out. These fêtes represent what will be perhaps, if the Germans advance further, the last days of our Pompeii. It only needs the lava of some German Vesuvius (their naval guns are not less terrible than a volcano) to surprise them at their toilet and eternalise their gesture by interrupting it; children will later on be educated by illustrations of Mme Molé about to put the last layer of paint on her face before going to dine with her sister-in-law, or Sosthène de Guermantes finishing painting her false eyebrows. It will be lecturing material for the Brichots of the future; the frivolity of a period after ten centuries is worthy of the most serious erudition, especially if it has been preserved intact by a volcanic irruption in which matter akin to lava was thrown by bombardment. What documents for future history! When asphyxiating gases analogous to those emitted by Vesuvius and earthquakes like those which buried Pompeii will preserve intact all the remaining imprudent women who have not fled to Bayonne with their pictures and their statues. Moreover, has it not been Pompeii, a bit at a time every evening, for more than a year? These people flying to their cellars, not to bring out an old bottle of Mouton-Rothschild or of St. Emilion, but to hide themselves and their most precious possessions like the priests of Herculaneum surprised by death at the moment when they were carrying off the sacred vessels. Attachment to an object always brings death to the possessor. Paris was not, like Herculaneum, founded by Hercules. But what similarities force themselves upon one and that lucidity which has come to us is not only of our period, every period possessed it. If we think that to-morrow we may share the fate of the cities of Vesuvius, the women of those days believed they were menaced with the fate of the Cities of the Plain. They have discovered on the walls of one of the houses of Pompeii the inscription: 'Sodom and Gomorra.'" I do not know if

it was this name of Sodom and the ideas which it aroused in him, or whether it was that of the bombardment which made M. de Charlus lift for an instant his eyes to Heaven, but he soon brought them down to earth again. “I admire all the heroes of this war,” he said. “My dear fellow, take all those English soldiers whom I thought of somewhat lightly at the beginning of the war as mere football-players presumptuous enough to measure themselves against professionals — and what professionals! Well, merely aesthetically they are athletes of Greece, yes, of Greece, my dear fellow, these are the youths of Plato or rather of the Spartans. A friend of mine went to their camp at Rouen and saw marvels of which one has no idea. It is no longer Rouen, it is another town. Of course there is still the old Rouen with the emaciated saints of the Cathedral. That is beautiful also, but it is another thing. And our *poilus*! I cannot tell you what a savour I find in our*poilus*, in our little ‘*parigots*.’ There, like that one who is passing so free and easy in that droll, wide-awake manner. I often stop and have a word with them. What quick intelligence, what good sense! And the boys from the Provinces, how nice they are with their rolling r’s and their country jargon. I have always lived a great deal in the country, I have slept in the farms, I know how to talk to these people. But our admiration for the French must not allow us to underestimate our enemies, that diminishes ourselves. And you don’t know what a German soldier is, you’ve never seen them as I have, on parade doing the goose-step in ‘Unter den Linden.’” In returning to the ideal of virility he had touched on at Balbec which in the course of time had taken a philosophic form, he made use of absurd arguments and at moments, even when he showed superiority, these forced one to perceive the limitations of a mere man of fashion, even though he was an intelligent man of fashion; “You see,” he said, “that superb fellow, the German soldier, is a strong, healthy being, who only thinks of the greatness of his country, ‘Deutschland uber Alles’ which isn’t as stupid as it sounds, and while they prepare themselves in virile fashion we are steeped in dilettantism.” That word probably signified to M. de Charlus something analogous to literature, for immediately, recalling without doubt that I loved literature and, for a time, had the intention of devoting myself to it, he tapped me on the shoulder (taking the opportunity of leaning on it until I felt as bad as I used to during my military service from the recoil of a “76”) and remarked, as though to soften the reproach: “Yes, we have ruined ourselves by dilettantism, all of us, you too, remember, you can repeat your *mea culpa* like me. We have all been too dilettante.” Through surprise at the reproach, lack of the spirit of repartee, deference towards my interlocutor and touched by his friendly

kindness, I replied, as though, at his invitation, I ought also to strike my breast. And this was perfectly senseless, for I had not a shadow of dilettantism to reproach myself with. “Well,” he said, “I’ll leave you,” the knot of men which had escorted us some distance having at last disappeared, “I’m going home to bed like an old gentleman, the war seems to have changed all our habits — one of Norpois’ aphorisms.” As to that, I knew that M. de Charlus would not be less surrounded by soldiers because he was at home for he had transformed his mansion into a military hospital, yielding in that less to his obsession than to his good heart.

It was a clear, still night and, in my imagination, the Seine, flowing between its circular bridges, circular through a combination of structure and reflection, resembled the Bosphorus, the moon symbolising, may-be, that invasion which the defeatism of M. de Charlus predicted or the cooperation of our Mussulman brothers with the armies of France, thin and curved like a sequin, seemed to be placing the Parisian sky under the oriental sign of the crescent. For an instant longer M. de Charlus stopped, facing a Senegalese and, in farewell took my hand and crushed it, a German habit, peculiar to people of the baron’s sort, continuing for some minutes to knead it, as Cottard would have said, as though the baron wanted to impart to my joints a suppleness they had not lost. In the case of blind people touch supplements the vision to a certain extent; I hardly know which sense this kneading took the place of. Perhaps he believed he was only pressing my hand, as, no doubt, he also believed he was only glancing at the Senegalese who passed into the shadows and did not deign to notice he was being admired. But in both cases M. de Charlus made a mistake; there was an excess of contact and of staring. “Is not the whole Orient of Decamps, of Fromentin, of Ingres, of Delacroix in all this?” he remarked, still immobilised by the departure of the Senegalese. “You know that I am never interested in things and people except as a painter or as a philosopher. Besides, I’m too old. But what a pity, to complete the picture, that one of us two is not an odalisque.”

It was not the Orient of Decamps or even of Delacroix which began haunting my imagination when the baron left me, but the old Orient of the*Thousand and One Nights* which I had so much loved. Losing myself more and more in the network of black streets, I was thinking of the Caliph Haroun Al Raschid in quest of adventures in the lost quarters of Bagdad. Moreover, heat, due to the weather and to my walking, had made me thirsty, but all the bars had been closed long since and on account of the shortage of petrol the few taxis I met, driven by Levantines or negroes, did not even trouble to respond to my

signs. The only place where I could have obtained something to drink and have regained the strength to return home, would have been a hotel. But in the street, rather far from the centre, I had now reached, all the hotels had been closed since the Gothas began hurling their bombs on Paris. The same applied to nearly all the shops whose proprietors, owing to the dearth of employees or because they themselves had taken fright and had fled to the country, had left upon their doors the usual notice, written by hand, announcing their reopening at a distant and problematical date. Those establishments which survived, announced in the same fashion they they would only open twice a week, and one felt that misery, desolation and fear inhabited the whole quarter. I was the more surprised to observe, amongst these abandoned houses, one where, in contrast, life seemed to have conquered fear and failure and which seemed to be full of activity and opulence. Behind the closed shutters of every window, lights, shaded to conform to police regulations, revealed complete indifference to economy and every few moments the door opened to admit some new visitor. This hotel must have excited the jealousy of the neighbouring shopkeepers (on account of the money which its owners must be making) and my curiosity was aroused on noticing an officer emerge from it at a distance of some fifteen paces which was too far for me to be able to recognise him in the darkness.

Yet something about him struck me. It was not his face for I could not see it nor was it his uniform which was disguised in an ample cloak, it was the extraordinary disproportion between the number of different points past which his body flitted and the minute number of seconds employed in an exit, which resembled an attempted sortie by someone besieged. This made me believe, though I could not formally recognise him — whether by his outline, his slimness or his gait, or — even by his velocity but by a sort of ubiquity peculiar to him — that it was Saint-Loup. Who-ever he was, the officer with this gift of occupying so many different points in space in so short a time, had disappeared, without noticing me, in a cross street, and I stood asking myself whether or not I should enter this hotel the modest appearance of which made me doubt if it was really Saint-Loup who had emerged from it. I now remembered that Saint-Loup had got himself unhappily mixed up in an espionage affair owing to the appearance of his name in some letters seized upon a German officer. Full justice had been rendered him by the military authority but in spite of myself I related that fact to what I now saw. Was that hotel used as a meeting-place by spies? The officer had been gone some moments when I saw several privates of various arms enter and this added to my suspicions; and I was extremely thirsty. “It is

probable I can get something to drink here," I said to myself and I took advantage of that to try and satisfy my curiosity in spite of my apprehensions. I do not think, however, that it was curiosity which decided me to climb up the several steps of the little staircase at the end of which the door of a sort of vestibule was open, no doubt on account of the heat. I believed at first that I should not be able to satisfy it for I saw several people come and ask for rooms, to whom the reply was given that there was not a single one vacant. Soon I grasped that all the people of the place had against them was that they did not belong to that nest of spies, for an ordinary sailor presented himself and they immediately gave him No. 28. I was able, thanks to the darkness, without being seen myself, to observe several soldiers and two men of the working class who were talking quietly in a small, stuffy room showily decorated with coloured portraits of women out of magazines and illustrated reviews. The men were expressing patriotic opinions: "There's no help for it, one must do like the rest," said one. "Certainly, I don't think I'm going to be killed," another said in answer to a wish I had not heard, and who, I gathered, was leaving the following day for a dangerous post. "Just think of it, at twenty-two! It would be pretty stiff after only doing six months!" he cried in a tone revealing, more even than a desire to live, the justice of his reasoning as though being only twenty-two ought to give him a better chance of not being killed, in fact, that it was impossible he should be. "In Paris it's wonderful," said another, "one wouldn't think there was a war on. Are you joining up, Julot?" "Of course I'm joining up. I want to go and have a smack at those dirty Boches." "That Joffre! He's a chap who slept with Minister's wives, he's not done anything." "It's rotten to hear that sort of stuff," interrupted an aviator who was somewhat older, turning towards the last speaker, a workman. "I advise you not to talk like that when you get to the front or the *poilus* will very soon have you out of it." The banality of this conversation gave me no great desire to hear more and I was about to go up or down when my attention was roused by hearing the following words which made me tremble. "It is extraordinary that the *patron* has not come back yet, at this time of night. I don't know where he'll find those chains." "But the other is already chained up." "Yes, of course he's chained — in a way. If I were chained like that I'd pretty soon free myself." "But the padlock is locked." "Oh! It's locked all right but if one tried, one could force it open. The trouble is the chains aren't long enough. You aren't going to explain that sort of thing to me, considering I was beating him the whole night till my hands bled." "Well, you'll have to take a turn at it to-night." "No, it's not my turn, it's Maurice's. It will be my turn on Sunday. The

patron promised me." Now I knew why the sailor's strong arms were needed. If peaceful citizens had been refused admittance, it was not because the hotel was a nest of spies. An atrocious crime was going to be consummated if someone did not arrive in time to discover it and have the guilty arrested. On this threatened yet peaceful night all this seemed like a dream story and I deliberately entered the hotel with the determination of one who wants to see justice done with the enthusiasm of a poet. I lightly touched my hat and those present, without disturbing themselves, answered my salute more or less politely. "Will you please tell me whom I can ask for a room and for something to drink?" "Wait a minute, the*patron* has gone out." "But the chief is upstairs," suggested one of them. "You know perfectly well you can't disturb him." "Do you think they'll give me a room?" "Yes, I believe so, 43 must be free," said the young man who was sure of not being killed because he was only twenty-two, making room for me on the sofa beside him. "It would be a good thing to open the window, there's an awful lot of smoke here," said the aviator, and indeed each of them had a pipe or a cigarette. "Yes, that's all right, but shut the shutters first; you know lights are forbidden on account of zeppelins." "There won't be any more zeppelins, the papers said that they'd all been shot down." "They won't come! They won't come! What do you know about it? When you've been fifteen months at the front as I have, when you've shot down your five German aeroplanes, then you'll be able to talk. It's absurd to believe the papers. They were over Compiègne yesterday and killed a mother with her two children." The young man who hoped not to be killed and who had an energetic, open and sympathetic face spoke with ardent eyes and with profound pity. "There's no news of big Julot. His godmother hasn't had a letter from him for eight days and it's the first time he has been so long without giving her any news." "Who's his godmother?" "The lady who keeps the place of convenience below Olympia." "Do they sleep together?" "What are you talking about, she's a perfectly respectable married woman. She sends him money every week because she's got a good heart. She's a jolly good sort." "So you know big Julot?" "Do I know him?" The young man of twenty-two answered hotly. "He's one of my most intimate friends. There aren't many I think as much of as I do of him, he's a good pal, always ready to do one a turn. It would be a bad look out if anything happened to him." Someone proposed a game of dice and from the fevered fashion in which the young man cast them and called out the results with his eyes starting out of his head, it was easy to see that he had the temperament of a gambler. I could not quite grasp what someone else said to him just then but he suddenly cried in a tone of deep

resentment. “Julot a pimp! He may say he is but he bloody well isn’t. I’ve seen him pay his women. Yes I have. I don’t say that Algerian Jeanne hasn’t ever given him a bit. But never more than five francs, a woman in a house, earning more than fifty francs a day. To think of a man letting a woman give him only five francs. And now she’s at the front, she’s having a pretty hard life, I admit, but she earns what she likes and she never sends him anything. Julot a pimp, indeed there’d be plenty of pimps at that rate. Not only he isn’t a pimp, but I think he’s a fool into the bargain.” The oldest of the party, whom no doubt the *patron* had entrusted with keeping a certain amount of order, having gone out for a moment, only heard the end of the conversation but he stared at me and seemed visibly annoyed at the effect which it might have produced upon me. Without specially addressing the young man of twenty-two who had been exposing and developing his theory of venal love, he remarked in a general way: “You’re talking too much and too loud The window is open. People are asleep at this hour. You know, if the *patron* heard you, there would be trouble.” Just at that moment there was a sound of a door, opening, and everybody kept quiet, thinking it was the *patron*. But it was only a foreign chauffeur, whom everybody welcomed. When the young man of twenty-two, seeing the superb watch-chain extending across the new-comer’s waistcoat, bestowed on him a questioning and laughing glance followed by a frown of his eyebrows at the same time giving me a severe wink, I understood that the first glance meant “Hullo! Where did you steal that? All my congratulations!” and the second “Don’t say anything. We don’t know this chap, so look out.” Suddenly the *patron* came in sweating, carrying several yards of heavy chains, strong enough to chain up several prisoners and said: “I’ve got a nice load here. If all of you were not so lazy, I shouldn’t be obliged to go myself.” I told him I wanted a room for some hours only, “I could not find a carriage and I am not very well, but I should like to have something taken up to my room to drink.” “Pierrot, go to the cellar and fetch some cassis and tell them to prepare No. 43. There’s No. 7 ringing. They say they’re ill! Nice sort of illness! They’re after cocaine, they look half-doped. They ought to be chucked out. Have a pair of sheets been put in No. 22? There you are, there’s No. 7 ringing again. Run and see. What are you doing there, Maurice? You know very well you’re expected, go up to 14 his, and look sharp!” Maurice went out rapidly, following the *patron*who was evidently annoyed that I had seen his chains. “How is it you’re so late?” inquired the young man of twenty-two of the chauffeur. “What do you mean, so late, I’m an hour too early. But it’s too hot to walk about, my appointment’s only at midnight.” “But who are

you here for?" "For Pamela la Charmeuse," answered the oriental chauffeur, whose laugh disclosed beautiful white teeth. "Ah!" exclaimed the young man of twenty-two. Soon I was shown up to No. 43 but the atmosphere was so unpleasant and my curiosity so great that, having drunk my cassis, I descended the stairs, then, seized with another idea, I went up again and, without stopping at the floor where my room was, I went right up to the top. All of a sudden, from a room which was isolated at the end of the corridor, I seemed to hear stifled groans. I went rapidly towards them and applied my ear to the door. "I implore you, pity, pity, unloose me, unchain me, do not strike me so hard," said a voice. "I kiss your feet, I humiliate myself, I won't do it again, have pity." "I won't, you blackguard," replied another voice, "and as you're screaming and dragging yourself about on your knees like that, I'll tie you to the bed. No mercy!" And I heard the crack of a cat-o'nine-tails, probably loaded with nails for it was followed by cries of pain. Then I perceived that there was a lateral peep-hole in the room, the curtain of which they had forgotten to draw. Creeping softly in that direction, I glided up to the peep-hole and there on the bed, like Prometheus bound to his rock, squirming under the strokes of a cat-o-nine-tails, which was, as a fact, loaded with nails, wielded by Maurice, already bleeding and covered with bruises which proved he was not submitting to the torture for the first time, I saw before me M. de Charlus. All of a sudden the door opened and someone entered who, happily, did not see me. It was Jupien. He approached the Baron with an air of respect and an intelligent smile. "Well! Do you need me?" The Baron requested Jupien to send Maurice out for a moment. Jupien put him out with the greatest heartiness. "We can't be heard, I suppose?" asked the Baron. Jupien assured him that they could not. The Baron knew that Jupien, though he was as intelligent as a man of letters, had no sort of practical sense, and talked in front of designing people with hidden meanings that deceived no one, mentioning surnames everyone knew. "One second," interrupted Jupien who had heard a bell ring in room No. 3. It was a Liberal Deputy who was going away. Jupien did not need to look at the number of the bell, he knew the sound of it, as the deputy came after luncheon every day. That particular day he had been obliged to change his hour because he had to attend his daughter's marriage at mid-day at St. Pierre de Chaillot So he had come in the evening, but wanted to get away in good time because of his wife who got anxious if he came home late, especially in these times of bombardment. Jupien made a point of accompanying him to the door so as to show deference towards the honourable gentleman without any eye to his own advantage. For while the deputy

repudiating the exaggerations of the Action Française (he would for that matter have been incapable of understanding a line of Charles Maurras or of Léon Daudet), was on good terms with Ministers who were flattered at being invited to his shooting parties, Jupien would never have dared to solicit the slightest help from him in his occasional difficulties with the police. He fully understood, if he had risked talking about such matters to the wealthy and timid legislator, he would not have been spared the most harmless raid but would instantly have lost the most generous of his customers. Having accompanied the deputy to the door, the latter pulled his hat over his eyes, raised his collar and gliding rapidly away as he did in his electoral campaigns, believed he was hiding his face. Jupien — going up again to M. de Charlus, said: “It was M. Eugène.” At Jupien’s, as in lunatic asylums, people were only called by their first names, but, to satisfy the curiosity of the habitués and increase the prestige of his house, he took care to add the surnames in a whisper. Sometimes, however, Jupien did not know the identity of his clients, so he invented them and said that this one was a stockbroker, another a man of title or an artist; trifling and amusing mistakes so far as those whom he wrongly named were concerned. He finally quite resigned himself to ignorance as to the identity of M. Victor. Jupien further had the habit of pleasing the Baron by doing the contrary of what is considered the right thing at certain parties: “I am going to introduce M. Lebrun to you” (in his ear: “he calls himself M. Lebrun but in reality he’s a Russian Grand-Duke.)” In another sense, Jupien did not think it interesting enough to introduce a milkman to M. de Charlus, but, with a wink: “He’s a sort of milkman, but over and above that he’s one of the most dangerous *apaches* in Belleville.” (The rollicking way in which Jupien said “*apache*” was worth seeing). And as though this observation were not enough, he added others such as: “He has been sentenced several times for stealing and burgling houses. He was sent to Fresnes for fighting (the same jolly air) with people in the street whom he half crippled and he has been in an African battalion where he killed his sergeant.”

The Baron was slightly annoyed with Jupien because he knew that everybody more or less in that house he had charged his factotum to buy and have run by an underling, owing to the indiscretions of the uncle of Mlle d’Oloran late Mme de Cambremer, was aware of his personality and his name, (fortunately many believed it was a pseudonym and so deformed it that the Baron was protected by their stupidity, not by Jupien’s discretion). Eased by the knowledge that they could not be overheard, the Baron said to him: “I did not want to speak before that little fellow. He’s very nice and does his best but he’s

not brutal enough. His face pleases me but he calls me a low debauchee as though he had learnt it by heart." "Oh dear no! No one has said a word to him," Jupien answered without realising the unlikelihood of the assertion. "As a matter of fact he was mixed up in the murder of a concierge in La Villette." "Indeed? That is rather interesting," said the Baron with a smile. "But I've just secured a butcher, a slaughterer, who looks rather like him; by a bit of luck he happened to look in. Would you like to try him?" "Yes, with plea-ure." I watched the man of the slaughter-house enter. He did look a little like "Maurice" but, what was more curious, both of them were of a type that I had never been able to define but which I then realised was also exemplified in Morel; if not in his face as I knew it, at least in a cast of features that the eyes of love, seeing Morel differently from me, might have fitted into his countenance. From the moment that I had made within myself a model with features borrowed from my recollections of what Morel might represent to someone else, I realised that those two young men, of whom one was a jeweller's boy and the other a hotel-employee, were vaguely his successors. Must one conclude that M. de Charlus, at all events on one side of his love-affairs, was always faithful to the same type and that the lust which caused him to select these two young men was the same which had caused him to stop Morel on the platform of the station of Doncières, that all three resembled a little that youth whose form, engraved in the sapphire eyes of M. de Charlus, gave to his gaze the peculiar something which had frightened me on that first day at Balbec. Or, was it that his love for Morel had modified the type he favoured and he was now seeking men who resembled Morel to console himself for the latter's desertion? Another supposition was that perhaps in spite of appearances there had never been between Morel and himself any relations but those of friendship and that M. de Charlus had made Jupien procure these young men because they sufficiently resembled Morel for him to have the illusion that Morel was taking pleasure with him. It is true, bearing in mind all that M. de Charlus had done for Morel, that this supposition seems improbable, if one did not know that love forces great sacrifices from us for the being we love and sometimes the sacrifice of our very desire which, moreover, is the less easily exorcised because the being we love feels that we love him the more. What takes away the likelihood of such a supposition was the highly strung and profoundly passionate temperament of M. de Charlus, similar in that respect to Saint-Loup, which might at first have played the same part in his relations with Morel, though a more decent and negative part, as his nephew's early relations with Rachel. The relations one has with a woman one loves (and that can apply

also to love for a youth) can remain platonic for other reasons than the chastity of the woman or the unsensual nature of the love she inspires. The reason may be that the lover is too impatient and by the very excess of his love is unable to await the moment when he will obtain his desires by sufficient pretence of indifference. Continually, he returns to the charge, he never ceases writing to her whom he loves, he is always trying to see her, she refuses herself, he becomes desperate. From that time she knows, if she grants him her company, her friendship, that these benefits will seem so considerable to one who believed he was going to be deprived of them, that she need grant nothing more and that she can take advantage of the moment when he can no longer bear being unable to see her and when, at all costs, he must put an end to the struggle by accepting a truce which will impose upon him a platonic relationship as its preliminary condition. Moreover, during all the time that preceded this truce, the lover, in a constant state of anxiety, ceaselessly hoping for a letter, a glance, has long ceased thinking of the physical desire which at first tormented him but which has been exhausted by waiting and has been replaced by another order of longings more painful still if left unsatisfied. The pleasure formerly anticipated from caresses will later be accorded but transmuted into friendly words and promises of intercourse which brings delicious moments after the strain of uncertainty or after a look impregnated with such coldness that it seemed to remove the loved one beyond hope of his ever seeing her again. Women divine all this and know they can afford the luxury of never yielding to those who, from the first, have betrayed their inextinguishable desire. A woman is enchanted if, without giving anything, she can receive more than she generally gets when she does give herself. On that account highly-strung men believe in the chastity of their idol. And the halo with which they surround her is also a product, but, as we see, an indirect one, of their excessive love. There is in woman something of the unconscious function of drugs which are cunning without knowing it, like morphine. They are not indispensable in the case of those to whom they give the blessings of sleep and real well-being. By such they will not be bought at their weight in gold, taken in exchange for everything the sick man possesses, it is by those other unfortunates (they may, indeed, be the same but altered in the course of years) to whom the drug brings no sleep, gives them no pleasure but who, without it, are a prey to an agitation to which they must at all costs put an end, even though to do so means death. And M. de Charlus, whose case, with the slight difference due to the similarity of sex, can be included in the general laws of love, though he belonged to a family more ancient than the Capets

themselves, rich and sought after by the most exclusive society, while Morel was nobody, might say to him as he had said to me: “I am a prince and I desire your welfare,” nevertheless Morel was his master if he did not yield to him. And perhaps, to know he was loved was sufficient to make him determine not to. The disgust of distinguished people for snobs who want to force themselves upon them, the virile man has for the invert, the woman for every man who is too much in love with her. M. de Charlus not only had every advantage, he might perhaps have offered immense bribes to Morel, yet it is likely that they would have been unavailing in opposition to the latter’s will. M. de Charlus had something in common with the Germans to whom he belonged by his origin and who, in the war now proceeding, were, as the Baron too often repeated, conquerors on every front. But what use were their victories since each one left the Allies more resolved than ever to refuse them the peace and reconciliation they wanted. Thus Napoleon invaded Russia and magnanimously invited the authorities to present themselves to him. But no one came.

I went downstairs and entered the little ante-room where Maurice, uncertain whether they would call him back or not and whom Jupien had told to wait, was about to join in a game of cards with one of his friends. They were much excited about a croix-de-guerre which had been found on the floor and did not know who had lost it or to whom to send it back so that the rightful owner should not be worried about it. They then started talking about the bravery of an officer who had been killed trying to save his orderly. “All the same there are good people amongst the rich. I would have got killed with pleasure for such a man as that!” exclaimed Maurice who evidently only managed to inflict his ghastly flagellations on the Baron from mechanical habit, ignorance, need of money and preference for making it without working although, perhaps, it gave him more trouble. And as M. de Charlus had feared, he was possibly a good-hearted fellow, and certainly he seemed plucky. Tears almost came into his eyes when he spoke of the death of the officer and the young man of twenty-two was equally moved. “Ah! They’re fine fellows! Poor devils like us have nothing to lose. But a gentleman who’s got lots of stuff, who can go and take his*aperitif* every day at six o’clock, it’s really a bit thick. One can jaw as much as one likes, but when one sees chaps like that die, really it’s pretty stiff. God oughtn’t to let rich people like that die, besides, they’re useful to working people. The damned Boches ought to be killed to the last man of them for doing in a man like that. And look what they’ve done at Louvain, cutting off the heads of little children! I don’t know, I am not any better than anyone else but I’d rather have my throat cut than

obey savages like that; they aren't men, they are out and out savages, you can't deny it." In fact all these boys were patriots. One, only slightly wounded in the arm, was not on such a high level as the others as he said, having shortly to return to the front: "Damn it, I wish it had been a proper wound" (one which procures exemption) just as Mme Swann formerly used to say, "I've succeeded in catching a tiresome influenza." The door opened again for the chauffeur who had gone to take the air for a moment. "Hullo!" he said, "is it over already? It wasn't long!" noticing Maurice who, he supposed, was engaged in whipping the man they nick-named after a newspaper of that period, "The man in chains." "It may not seem long to you who've been out for a walk," answered Maurice, annoyed for it to be known that he had not pleased the customer upstairs, "but if you'd been obliged to keep on whipping like me in this heat! If it weren't for the fifty francs he gives —!" "Besides, he's a man who talks well, one feels he's had an education. Did he say it would soon be over?" "He said we shan't get them, that it will end without either side winning." "*Bon sang de bon sang*! He must be a Boche." "I told you you were talking too loud," said a man older than the others, noticing me. "Have you done with your room?" "Shut up, you're not master here." "Yes, I've finished and I've come to pay." "You'd better pay the *patron*. Maurice, go and fetch him." "I don't want to disturb you." "It doesn't disturb me." Maurice went upstairs and came back. "The *patron* is coming down," he said. I gave him two francs for his trouble. He blushed with pleasure: "Thank you very much. I shall send them to my brother who's a prisoner. No, he's all right, it depends on the camp." Meanwhile, two extremely elegant customers in dress coats and white ties under their overcoats, they seemed Russians from their slight accent, were standing in the doorway deliberating if they should enter. It was visibly the first time they had come there. They must have been told where the place was and seemed divided between desire, temptation and extreme fright. One of the two, a handsome young man, kept repeating every minute to the other, with a half-questioning, half-persuasive smile, "After all, we don't care a damn." He might say he did not mind the consequences, but he was not so indifferent as his words suggested for his remark did not result in his entering but on the contrary, in another glance at his friend, followed by the same smile and the same, "After all we don't care a damn." It was this "we don't care a damn," an example among thousands of that expressive language so different from what we generally speak, in which emotion makes us vary what we meant to say and in its place make use of phrases emerging from an unknown lake where live expressions without relation

to one's thought and for that very reason reveal it. I remember that Albertine once, when Françoise noiselessly entered the room just at the moment when my friend was lying beside me nude, exclaimed in spite of herself, to warn me: "Ah! here's that beauty Françoise." Françoise, whose sight was not good, and who was crossing the room some distance from us, apparently saw nothing. But the abnormal words "that beauty Françoise" which Albertine had never used in her life, spontaneously revealed their origin; Françoise knew they had escaped Albertine through emotion and understanding without seeing, went off muttering in her patois, the word "*poutana*". Much later on, when Bloch having become the father of a family, married one of his daughters to a Catholic, an ill-bred person informed her that he had heard she was the daughter of a Jew and asked her what her name had been. The young woman who had been Miss Bloch since her birth, answered, pronouncing Bloch in the German fashion as the Duc de Guermantes might have done, that is, pronouncing the Ch not like "K" but with the Germanic "ch".

To go back to the scene of the hotel, (into which the two Russians had finally decided to penetrate —"after all we don't care a damn") the *patron*had not yet come back when Jupien entered and rated them for talking too loud, saying that the neighbours would complain. But he stood dumbfounded on seeing me. "Get out all of you this instant!" he cried. Immediately all of them jumped up, whereupon I said: "It would be better if these young men stayed here and I went outside with you a moment." He followed me, much troubled, and I explained to him why I had come. One could hear customers asking the *patron* if he could not introduce them to a footman, a choir boy, a negro chauffeur. All professions interested these old madmen; soldiers of all arms and the allies of all nations. Some especially favoured Canadians, feeling the charm of their accent which was so slight that they did not know whether it was of old France or of England. On account of their kilts and because of the lacustrine dreams associated with such lusts, Scotchmen were at a premium, and as every mania owes its peculiar character, if not its aggravation, to circumstances, an old man, whose prurient cravings had all been sated, demanded with insistence to be made acquainted with a mutilated soldier. Steps were heard on the stairs. With the indiscretion which was natural to him, Jupien could not resist telling me it was the Baron who was coming down, that he must not on any account see me but if I would enter the little room contiguous to the passage where the young men were, he would open the shutter, a trick he had invented for the Baron to see and hear without being seen and which would now operate in my favour against him.

“Only don’t make a noise,” he said. And half pushing me into the darkness, he left me. Moreover, he had no other room to offer me, his hotel, in spite of the war, being full. The room I had just left had been taken by the Vicomte de Courvoisier who, having been able to leave the Red Cross at X—— for two days, had come to amuse himself for an hour in Paris before returning to the Chateau de Courvoisier where he would tell the Vicomtesse he had been unable to catch the last train. He had no notion that M. de Charlus was only a few yards away from him and the former had as little, never having encountered his cousin at Jupien’s house, the latter being ignorant of the carefully disguised identity of the Vicomte. The Baron soon came in, walking with some difficulty on account of his bruises which he must, nevertheless, have got used to. Although his debauch was finished and he was only going in to give Maurice the money he owed him, he directed a circular glance upon the young men gathered there which was at once tender and inquisitive and evidently expected to have the pleasure of a quite platonic but amorously prolonged chat with each of them. I noticed in all the lively frivolity he displayed towards the harem by which he seemed almost intimidated, those twistings of the body and tossings of the head, those sensitive glances I had noticed on the evening of his first arrival at La Raspelière, graces inherited from one of his grandmothers whom I had not known and which, masked in ordinary life by more virile expressions, were coquettishly displayed when he wanted to please an inferior audience by appearing a *grande dame*. Jupien had recommended them to the goodwill of the Baron by telling him they were hooligans of Belleville and that they would go to bed with their own sisters for a louis. In actual fact, Jupien was both lying and telling the truth. Better and more sensitive than he told the Baron they were, they did not belong to a class of miscreants. But those who believed them so talked to them with entire good faith as if these terrible fellows were doing the same. However, much a sadist may believe he is with an assassin, his own pure sadist soul is not on that account changed and he is hypnotised by the lies of these fellows who aren’t in the least assassins but who, wanting to turn an easy penny, wordily bring their father, their mother or their sister to life and kill them again, turn and turn about, because they get interrupted in their conversation with the customer they are trying to please. The customer is bewildered in his simplicity and, in his absurd conception of the guilty gigolo revelling in mass-murders, is astounded at the culprit’s lies and contradictions. All of them seemed to know M. de Charlus who stayed some time talking to each of them in what he thought was his vernacular, from pretentious affectation of local colour and also from the

sadistic pleasure of mixing himself up in a crapulous life. “It’s disgusting,” he said, “I saw you in front of Olympia with two street-women, just to get some coppers out of them. That’s a nice way of deceiving me.” Happily for the young man who was thus addressed, he had no time to declare that he had never accepted coppers from a woman which would have diminished the excitement of M. de Charlus and he reserved his protest for the end of the latter’s sentence, replying, “Oh, no! I do not deceive you.” These words caused M. de Charlus a lively pleasure and as, in his own despite, his natural intelligence prevailed over his affectation, he turned to Jupien: “It’s nice of him to say that and he says it so charmingly, one would think it was true. And, after all, what does it matter whether it’s true or not if he makes one believe it. What sweet little eyes he’s got. Come here, boy, I’m going to give you two big kisses for your trouble. You’ll think of me in the trenches, won’t you? Is it very hard?” “Oh, my God. There are days when a shell passes close to you!” and the young man began imitating the noise of a shell, of aeroplanes and so on. “But one must do like the rest and. you can be sure we shall go on to the end.” “Till the end,” replied the pessimistic Baron in a melancholy tone. “Haven’t you read in the papers that Sarah Bernhardt said France would go on till the end. The French will let themselves be killed to the last man.” “I don’t doubt for a single instant that the French will bravely be killed to the last man,” M. de Charlus answered as though it were the most natural thing in the world, in spite of his having no intention of doing anything whatever, but with the intention of correcting any impression of pacifism he might give in moments of forgetfulness, “I don’t doubt it, but I am asking myself to what extent Mme Sarah Bernhardt is qualified to speak in the name of France — Ah, I seem to know this charming young man,” pointing at another whom he had probably never seen. He saluted him as he would have saluted a prince at Versailles and, so as to profit by the opportunity and have a supplementary pleasure gratis, like when I was small and went with my mother to give an order to Boissier or Gouache and one of the ladies offered me a bonbon from one of the glass vases in the midst of which she presided, he took the hand of the charming young man and pressed it for a long time in his Prussian fashion, fixing his eyes upon him and smiling for the interminable time photographers used to take in posing us when the light was bad. “Monsieur, I am charmed, I am enchanted to make your acquaintance. He has such lovely hair,” he said, turning to Jupien. Then he moved over to Maurice to give him his fifty francs and put his arm round his waist. “You never told me you had lined an old Belleville bitch,” M. de Charlus guffawed with ecstasy, sticking his face close to

that of Maurice. “Oh, monsieur le Baron,” protested the gigolo whom they had forgotten to warn, “how can you believe such a thing?” Whether it was false or whether the alleged culprit really thought it was an abominable thing he had to deny, the boy went on: “To touch my own kind, even a German as it is war is one thing, but a woman and an old woman at that!” This declaration of virtuous principles had the effect of a cold water douche upon the Baron, who moved coldly away from Maurice, none the less giving him his money, but with the air of one who is “put off”, someone who has been “done” but who doesn’t want to make a fuss, one who pays but is dissatisfied.

The bad impression produced upon the Baron was, moreover, increased by the way in which the beneficiary thanked him: “I am going to send this to my old people and I shall keep a little for my pal at the front.” These touching sentiments disappointed M. de Charlus almost as much as did his rather conventional peasant-like expression. Jupien sometimes warned them that they had to be “more vicious”. Then one of them with the air of confessing something satanic would adventure: “I’ll tell you something, Baron, but you won’t believe me. When I was a boy I looked through the key-hole and saw my parents embracing each other. Isn’t that vicious? You seem to believe that I’m drawing the long bow but I swear I’m not. It’s the exact truth.” This fictitious attempt at perversity which only revealed stupidity and innocence, exasperated M. de Charlus. The most determined burglar, robber or assassin would not have satisfied him for they do not talk about their crimes, and, moreoever, there is in the sadist — good as he may be, indeed the better he is — a thirst for evil that malefactors cannot satisfy. The handsome young man, realising his mistake, might say, “he’d let him have it hot and heavy,” and push audacity to the point of telling the Baron to “bloody well make a date” with him, the charm was dissipated. The humbug was as transparent as in books whose authors insist on writing slang. In vain the young man gave him details of all his obscenities with his women, M. de Charlus was only struck by how little they amounted to. For that matter that was not only the result of insincerity, for nothing is more limited than vice. In that sense one can really use a common expression and say that one is always turning in the same vicious circle.

“How simple he is, one would never say he was a Prince,” the habitués commented when M. de Charlus had gone escorted downstairs by Jupien to whom the Baron did not cease complaining about the decency of the young man. From the dissatisfied manner of Jupien, he had been trying to train the young man in advance and one felt that the false assassin would presently get a good

dressing down. “He’s quite contrary to what you told me,” added the Baron so that Jupien should profit by the lesson for another time. “He seems to have a nice nature, he expresses sentiments of respect for his family.” “All the same, he doesn’t get on with his father at all,” objected Jupien, “they live together but each goes to a different bar.” Obviously that was rather a feeble crime in comparison with assassination but Jupien found himself taken aback. The Baron said nothing more because, though he wanted his pleasures prepared for him, he also needed the illusion that they were not prepared. “He’s an out-and-out ruffian, he told you all that to take you in, you’re too simple,” Jupien added, to exculpate himself but in so doing only wounded the pride of M. de Charlus the more. While talking of M. de Charlus being a prince the young men in the establishment were deploring the death of someone about whom the gigolos said, “I don’t know his name but it appears he is a baron,” and who was no other than the Prince de Foux (the father of Saint-Loup’s friend). While the Prince’s wife believed he was spending most of his time at the Club, in reality he was spending hours with Jupien chattering and telling stories about society in the presence of blackguards. He was a fine, handsome man like his son. It is extraordinary that M. de Charlus did not know that he shared his tastes; doubtless this was because the, Baron had only seen him in society. People went so far as to say that he had actually gone to the length of practising these tastes upon his son when he was still at College, which was probably false. On the other hand, very well-informed about habits many are ignorant of, he kept a careful watch upon the people his son frequented. One day a man of low extraction followed the young Prince de Foux as far as his father’s mansion and threw a missive through a window which the father had picked up. But though this follower was not, aristocratically speaking, of the same society as M. de Foux, he was from another point of view, and he had no difficulty in finding among their common associates an intermediary who made M. de Foux hold his tongue by proving that it was the young man who had provoked the advance from a man much older than himself. And that was quite credible, the Prince de Foux having succeeded in protecting his son from bad company outside, but not from his heredity. It may be added that young Prince de Foux, like his father, unsuspected in this respect by people in society, went to extreme lengths with another class.

“He’s said to have a million a year to spend,” said the young man of twenty-two to whom this statement did not seem incredible. Soon the sound of M. de Charlus’ carriage was heard. At that moment I perceived someone accompanied

by a soldier leaving a neighbouring room with a slow step, a person who looked to me like an old lady in a black dress. I soon saw my mistake, it was a priest; that rare and in France extremely exceptional thing, a bad priest. Apparently the soldier was chaffing his companion about the incompatability of his conduct with his cloth for the priest, holding his finger in front of his hideous face with the grave gesture of a doctor of theology, answered sententiously: “Well, what do you expect of me, I am not” (I was expecting him to say a saint) “an angel.” There was nothing for him to do but go and he took leave of Jupien, who, having returned from escorting the Baron, was going upstairs, but, owing to his bewilderment, the bad priest had forgotten to pay for his room. Jupien, whose presence of mind never abandoned him, rattling the box in which the customers’ contributions were put remarked: “For the expenses of the service, Monsieur l’Abbé.” The repulsive personage apologised, handed over his money and departed. Jupien came and fetched me from the obscure cavern whence I had not dared move. “Go into the vestibule for a moment where the young men are sitting — it’s quite all right as you’re a lodger — while I go and shut up your room.” The *patron* was there and I paid him. At that moment, a young man in a dinner-jacket entered and with an air of authority demanded of the *patron*: “Can I have Léon to-morrow morning at a quarter to eleven instead of eleven because I’m lunching out?” “That depends on how long the Abbé keeps him,” the*patron* answered. This appeared to dissatisfy the young man in the dinner-jacket who seemed about to curse the Abbé but his anger took another form when he perceived me. Going straight up to the *patron*, he asked in an angry voice: “Who’s that? What does this mean?” The *patron*, much embarrassed, explained that my presence was of no importance, I was merely a lodger. The young man in the dinner-jacket was by no means appeased by this explanation and kept on repeating: “This is extremely unpleasant; it’s the sort of thing that ought not to happen. You know I hate it and I shan’t put my foot inside this place again.” The execution of the threat did not seem, however, to be imminent for though he went away in a rage, he again expressed the wish that Léon should be free at a quarter to eleven if not at half-past ten. Jupien returned and took me downstairs. “I don’t want you to have a bad opinion of me,” he said, “this house doesn’t bring in as much money as you might think. I’m obliged to have respectable lodgers, though, if I depended only on them, I should lose money. Here to the contrary of the Mount Carmels, it is thanks to vice that virtue can exist. If I’ve taken this house, or rather, if I have had it taken by the *patron* whom you’ve seen, it’s only to render service to the Baron and to distract his old age.” Jupien

did not want to talk only about sadistic performances like those I had seen or about the Baron's vices. The latter even for conversation, for company or to play cards with, now only liked common people who exploited him. Doubtless, snobbishness about low company is just as comprehensible as the opposite. In the case of M. de Charlus, the two kinds had long been interchangeable; no one in society was smart enough to associate with and in the underworld, no one was base enough. "I hate anything middling," he said, "the bourgeois comedy is irksome. Give me either princesses of classical tragedy or broad farce, no half-and-half, Phèdre or Les Saltimbanques. But, talk as he might, the equilibrium between these two forms of snobbery had been upset. Whether owing to an old man's fatigue or the extension of sensuality to the most banal intercourse, the Baron only lived now with inferiors. Thus unconsciously he was accepting succession from such of his great ancestors as the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, the Prince d'Harcourt, the Duc de Berry whom Saint-Simon exhibits as spending their lives with their lackeys who got enormous sums out of them, to such a point that when people went to see these great gentlemen they were shocked to find them familiarly playing cards and drinking with their servants. "It's chiefly," added Jupien, "to save him being bored, because, you see, the Baron is a great baby. Even now, when he has got everything here he wants, he must run after adventures and play the villain. And, generous though he is, some time or other this behaviour may lead to trouble. Only the other day the *chasseur*of a hotel nearly died of fright because of the money the Baron offered him. Fancy! To come to his house, what imprudence! This lad, who only liked women, was very relieved when he understood what the Baron wanted. The Baron's promises of money made the lad believe he was a spy and he was consoled when he knew that he was not being asked to betray his country but only to surrender his body which is perhaps not any more moral but less dangerous and certainly easier." Listening to Jupien I said to myself: "What a pity M. de Charlus is not a novelist or a poet, not in order to describe what he sees, but the stage reached by M. de Charlus in relation to desire causes scandals to arise round him, forces him to take life seriously, to emotionalise pleasure, prevents him from becoming static through taking a purely ironical and exterior view of things, reopens in him a constant source of pain. Almost every time he makes overtures, he risks outrage if not prison. Not the education of children but that of poets is accomplished by blows. Had M. de Charlus been a novelist, the protection the house controlled by Jupien afforded him (though a police raid was always on the cards) by reducing the risks he ran from casual street encounters, would have been a misfortune for

him. But M. de Charlus was only a dilettante in Art who did not dream of writing and had no gift for it. “Moreover, I’ll admit to you,” continued Jupien, “that I haven’t much scruple about making money out of this sort of job. I can’t disguise from you that I like it, that it’s to my taste. And is it a crime to get a salary for things one doesn’t consider wrong? You are better educated than I am and doubtless you will tell me that Socrates did not consider he was justified in receiving money for his lessons. But in our day professors of philosophy are not like that nor are doctors nor painters nor playwrights nor theatrical managers. Don’t imagine that this business forces one to associate only with low people. It is true that the manager of an establishment of this kind, like a great courtesan, only receives men but he receives men who are important in all sorts of ways and who are generally on equal terms with the most refined, the most sensitive and the most amiable of their kind. This house might easily be transformed, I assure you, into an intellectual bureau and a news agency.” But I was still occupied with thinking of the blows I had seen M. de Charlus receive. And, to tell the truth when one knew M. de Charlus, his pride, his satiation with social amusements, his caprices which changed so readily into passion for men of the worst class and of the lowest kind, one could easily understand that he was glad to possess the large fortune which, when enjoyed by a parvenu, enables him to marry his daughter to a duke and to invite Highnesses to his shooting parties, and permitted him to exercise authority in one, perhaps in several, establishments where there were permanently young men with whom he took his pleasure. Perhaps, indeed, he did not need to be vicious for that. He was the successor of so many great gentlemen and princes of the blood or dukes who, Saint-Simon tells us, never associated with anyone fit to speak to. “Meanwhile,” I said to Jupien: “this house is something very different, it is rather a pandemonium than a mad house, since the madness of the lunatics who are there is placed upon the stage and visually reconstituted. I believed, like the Caliph in the *Thousand and One Nights*, that I had, at the critical moment, come to the rescue of a man who was being ill-treated and another story of the *Thousand and One Nights* was realised before my eyes, in which a woman is changed into a dog and allows herself to be beaten in order to regain her former shape.” Jupien, realising that I had seen the Baron being whipped, was much concerned. He remained silent a moment, then, suddenly, with that pretty wit of his own that had so often struck me when he greeted Françoise or myself in the court-yard of our house with such graceful phrases: “You talk of stories in the *Thousand and One Nights*” he said. “I know one which is not without relevance to the title of a

book which I caught sight of at the Baron's house" (he was alluding to a translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* which I had sent to M. de Charlus). "If you ever wanted one evening to see, I won't say forty but ten thieves, you have only to come here; to be sure I'm there, you have only to look up and if my little window is left open and the light is on, it will mean that I am there and that you can come in; that is my Sesame. I only refer to Sesame; as to the Lilies, if you're seeking for them I advise you to look elsewhere," and saluting me somewhat cavalierly, for an aristocratic connection and a band of young men whom he controlled like a pirate-chief had given him a certain familiarity, he took leave of me. He had hardly left me when blasts of a siren were immediately followed by violent barrage firing. It was evident that a German aviator was hovering close over our heads and suddenly a violent explosion proved that he had hurled one of his bombs.

Many who had not wanted to run away had collected in the same room at Jupien's. Though they did not know each other they belonged more or less to the same wealthy and aristocratic society. The aspect of each inspired a repugnance due, doubtless, to their indulging in degrading vices. The face of one of them, an enormous fellow, was covered with red blotches like a drunkard's. I afterward learnt that, at first, he was not one but enjoyed making youths drink and that, later on, in fear of being mobilised, (though he seemed to be over fifty) as he was very fat, he started to drink without stopping until he exceeded the weight of a hundred kilos, beyond which men were exempted. And now the trick had turned into a passion, and however much people tried to prevent him, he always went back to the liquor-merchant. But the moment he spoke one could see, in spite of his mediocre intelligence, that he was a man of considerable education and culture. Another young society man of remarkably distinguished appearance, came in. In his case, there were as yet no exterior stigmata of vice but, what was worse, there were internal ones. Tall, with an attractive face, his manner of speech indicated a different order of intelligence to that of his alcoholic neighbour, indeed, without exaggeration, a very remarkable one. But whatever he said was accompanied by a facial expression suited to a different remark. Though he owned a complete storehouse of human expressions, he might have lived in another world, for he used them in the wrong order and seemed to scatter smiles and glances haphazard without relation to the remarks he was making or hearing. I hope for his sake if, as seems likely, he is still alive, that he was not the victim of an organic disease but of a passing disorder. Probably, if those men had been ordered to produce their visiting cards one

would have been surprised to observe that they all belonged to the upper class of society. But every sort of vice and the greatest vice of all, lack of will which prevents a man from resisting it, brought them together there, in separate rooms, it is true, but every evening, I was told, so that if ladies in society still knew their names, they were gradually forgetting their faces. They still received invitations but habit always brought them back to that composite resort of evil repute. They concealed it but little from themselves, being in this respect different from the little chasseurs, workmen, et cetera, who ministered to their pleasure. And besides many obvious reasons this can be explained by the following one. For a commercial employee or a servant to go there was like a respectable woman going to a place of assignation. Some of them who had been there refused ever again to do so and Jupien himself telling lies to save their reputation or to prevent competition, declared: “Oh, no, he doesn’t come to my place and he wouldn’t want to.” For men in society it is of less importance, in that other people in society do not go to such places and neither know anything about them nor concern themselves with other people’s business.

At the beginning of the alarm I had left Jupien’s house. The streets had become entirely dark. Only now and then an enemy aeroplane which was flying low enough cast a light on the spot where he was going to throw a bomb. I could no longer find my way and thought of that day when going to La Raspelière I had met an aviator like a god reining back his horse. I was thinking that this time the encounter would have a different end, that the God of Evil would kill me. I hurried my steps to escape like a traveller pursued by a water-spout, yet I turned in a circle round dark places from which I could not escape. At last the flames of a fire lighted me and I was able to rediscover my road whilst the cannon boomed unceasingly. But my thought turned elsewhere. I thought of Jupien’s house now reduced perhaps to cinders for a bomb had fallen quite close to me just as I was coming out of that house upon which M. de Charlus might prophetically have written “Sodom” as an unknown inhabitant of Pompeii had done with no less prescience when, possibly, as a prelude to the catastrophe, the volcanic eruption began. But what did sirens or Gothas matter to those who had come there bent on gratifying their lusts? We never think of the framework of nature which surrounds our passion. The tempest rages on the sea, the ship heaves and pitches on every side, avalanches fall from the windswept sky and, at most, we allow ourselves to pause a moment, to ward off an inconvenience caused us by that immense scene, in which both we and the human body we desire, are the tiniest atoms. The premonitory siren of the bombs troubled the inhabitants of Jupien’s

house as little as would an iceberg. More than that, the menace of a physical danger freed them from the fear by which they had been so long unhealthily obsessed. It is false to believe that the scale of fears corresponds to that of the dangers which inspire them. One might be frightened of sleeplessness and yet not of a duel, of a rat and not of a lion. For some hours the police would be concerned only for the lives of the population, a matter of small consequence, for it did not threaten to dishonour them.

Some of the habitués, recovering their moral liberty were the more tempted by the sudden darkness in the streets. Some of these Pompeians upon whom the fire of Heaven was already pouring, descended into the Métro passages which were as dark as catacombs. They knew, of course, that they would not be alone there. And the darkness which bathes everything as in a new element had the effect, an irresistibly tempting one for certain people, of eliminating the first phase of lust and enabling them to enter, without further ado the domain of caresses which as a rule, demands preliminaries. Whether the libidinous aim is directed towards a woman or a man, assuming that approach is easy and that the sentimentalities that go on eternally in a drawing-room in the day time can be dispensed with, even in the evening however ill-lit the street, there must, at least, be a preamble when only the eyes can devour the corn within the ear, when the fear of passers-by or even of the one pursued prevents the follower getting further than vision and speech. But in darkness the whole bag of tricks goes by the board, hands, lips, bodies, come into immediate play. Then there is the excuse of the darkness itself and of the mistakes it engenders if a bad reception is met with, but if on the contrary, there is the immediate response of a body which, instead of withdrawing, comes closer, the inference that the woman or the man approached is equally licentious and vicious, adds the additional thrill of being able to bite into the fruit without lusting after it with the eyes and without asking permission. And still the darkness continued. Plunged in this new element Jupien's habitués imagined themselves travellers witnessing a phenomenon of nature such as a tidal-wave or an eclipse and instead of indulgence in a pre-arranged debauch, were seeking fortuitous adventures in the unknown, and celebrating, to the accompaniment of the volcanic thunder of bombs — as though in a Pompeian brothel — secret rites in the tenebrous shadows of the catacombs. To such events the Pompeian paintings at Jupien's were appropriate for they recalled the end of the French Revolution at the somewhat similar period of the Directoire which was now beginning. Already in the anticipation of peace, new dances organised in darkness so as not too openly to infringe police

regulations, were rioting in the night. And as an accompaniment certain artistic opinions, less anti-German than during the first years of the war, enabled stifled minds to expand though a brevet of civic virtue was needed by him who ventured to express them. A professor wrote a remarkable book on Schiller of which the papers took notice. But before mentioning the author, the publishers inscribed the volume with a statement like a printing licence, to the effect that he had been at the Marne and at Verdun, that he had had five mentions, and two sons killed. Upon that, there was loud praise of the lucidity and depth of the author's work upon Schiller, who could be qualified as great as long as he was alluded to as a great Boche and not as a great German, and thus the articles were passed by the Censor. As I approached my home I was meditating on how quickly the consciousness ceases to collaborate with our habits, leaving them to develop on their own account without further concerning itself with them and how astonished we are, when we base our judgment of an individual merely on externals as though they comprehended the whole of him, at the actions of a man whose moral or intellectual value may develop independently in a completely different direction. Obviously it was a fault of upbringing or the entire lack of upbringing combined with a preference for earning money in the easiest way (many different kinds of work might be easier as it happens, but does not a sick man fabricate a far more painful existence out of manifold privations and remedies than the often comparatively mild illness against which he thinks he is thus defending himself?) or at all events, in the least laborious way, which had caused these youths, so to speak, in complete innocence and for small pay to do things which gave them no pleasure and must at first have inspired them with the strongest repugnance. Accordingly one might consider them fundamentally rotten but they were not only wonderful soldiers in the war, brave to a degree, but often good-hearted fellows if not decent people in civil life. They no longer realised what was moral or immoral in the life they led because it was that of their surroundings. Thus, in studying certain periods of ancient history we are sometimes amazed to observe that people who were individually good, participated without scruple in mass assassinations and human sacrifices, which probably seemed to them perfectly natural things. For him who reads the history of our period two thousand years hence, it will in the same way seem to have allowed gentle and pure consciences to be plunged in a vital environment to which they adapted themselves though it will then appear just as monstrously pernicious. And what is more, I knew no man more gifted with intelligence and sensibility than Jupien for those charming acquisitions which constituted the

intellectual fabric of his discourse, did not come to him from school instruction or from university culture which might have made him remarkable, while so many young men in society got no profit from them whatever. It was his spontaneous, innate sense, his natural taste which enabled him from occasional haphazard and unguided readings in his spare moments to compose his way of speaking so rightly that all the symmetries of language were set off and showed their beauty in it. Yet the business in which he was engaged could with good reason be considered, if one of the most lucrative, one of the lowest imaginable. As to M. de Charlus, disdain as he might "what people say", how was it that a feeling of personal dignity and self-respect had not forced him to resist sensual indulgences for which the only excuse was complete insanity? It could only be that in his case, as in that of Jupien, the habit of isolating morality from a whole order of actions (which, for that matter, must occur in a function such as that of a judge, sometimes in that of a statesman and others) had been acquired so long ago that, no longer demanding his judgment or moral sentiment, it had become aggravated from day to day until it had reached a point where this consenting Prometheus had allowed himself to be nailed by force to the rock of pure matter. Certainly I realised that therein a new phase declared itself in the disease of M. de Charlus which, ever since I first perceived and judged it as stage by stage it revealed itself to my eyes, had continued to evolve with ever-increasing speed. The poor Baron could not now be far distant from the final term, from death, if indeed that was not preceded, according to the predictions and hopes of Mme Verdurin, by a poisoning which at his age could only hasten his death. Nevertheless, perhaps I used an inaccurate expression in saying rock of pure matter. It is possible that a little mind still survived in that pure matter. This madman knew, in spite of everything, that he was mad, that he was the prey at such moments of insanity .since he knew perfectly well that the man who was beating him was no wickeder than the little boys in battle-games who draw lots to decide which of them is to play the Prussian and upon whom all the others fall in true patriotic ardour and pretended hatred. A prey to insanity into which, nevertheless, some of M. de Charlus' personality entered; for even in its aberrations, human nature (as in our loves and in our journeys) still betrays the need of faith through the exactions of truth. When I told Françoise about a church in Milan — a city she would probably never see — or about the Cathedral of Rheims — even about that of Arras!— which she would never be able to see since they had been more or less destroyed, she envied the rich people who were able to afford the sight of such treasures and cried with

nostalgic regret: “Ah, how wonderful it must be!” Yet she, who had lived in Paris so many years, had never had the curiosity to go and see Notre Dame! It was just because Notre Dame belonged to Paris, to the city where her daily life was spent and where in consequence it was difficult for our old servant (as it would have been for me if the study of architecture had not modified in certain respects Combray instincts) to situate the objects of her dreams. There is imminent in those we love a certain dream which we cannot always discern but which we pursue. It was my belief in Bergotte and in Swann which made me love Gilberte, my belief in Gilbert the Bad which had made me fall in love with Mme de Guermantes. And what a great sweep of ocean had been included in my love, the saddest, the most jealous the most personal ever, for Albertine. In that love of one creature towards whom one’s whole being is urged, there is already something of aberration. Arid are not the very diseases of the body, at least those closely associated with the nervous system, in some measure peculiar tastes or peculiar fears contracted by our organs, by our articulation, which thus discover for themselves a horror of certain climates as inexplicable and as obstinate as the fancy certain men display for a woman who wears an eyeglass, or for circus-riders? Who shall ever say with what lasting and curious dream that desire aroused time after time at the sight of a circus rider, is associated; as unconscious and as mysterious as is, for example, the influence of a certain town, in appearance similar to others but in which a lifelong sufferer from asthma is able, for the first time, to breathe freely.

Aberrations are like passions which a morbid strain has overlaid, yet, in the craziest of them love can still be recognised. M. de Charlus’ insistence that the chains which bound his feet and hands should be of attested strength, his demand to be tried at the bar of justice and, from what Jupien told me, for ferocious accessories there was great difficulty in obtaining even from sailors (the punishment they used to inflict having been abolished even where the discipline is strictest, on ship-board), at the base of all this there was M. de Charlus’ constant dream of virility proved, if need be, by brutal acts and all the illumination the reflections of which within himself though to us invisible, he projected on judicial and feudal tortures which embellished an imagination coloured by the Middle Ages. This sentiment was in his mind each time he said to Jupien: “There won’t be any alarm this evening anyhow, for I can already see myself reduced to ashes by the fire of Heaven like an inhabitant of Sodom,” and he affected to be frightened of the Gothas not because he really had the smallest fear of them but to have a pretext the moment the sirens sounded of dashing into

the shelter of the Métropolitain, where he hoped to get a thrill from midnight frictions associated in his mind with vague dreams of prostrations and subterranean dungeons in the Middle Ages. Finally his desire to be chained and beaten revealed, with all its ugliness, a dream as poetic as the desire of others to go to Venice or to keep dancing girls. And M. de Charlus held so much to the illusion of reality which this dream gave him that Jupien was compelled to sell the wooden bed which was in room No. 43, and replace it by one of iron which went better with the chains.

At last the maroon sounded as I arrived home. The noise of approaching firemen was announced by a small boy and I met Françoise coming up from the cellar with the butler. She had thought me dead. She told me that Saint-Loup had excused himself for coming in to see if he had not let his *croix de guerre* fall when calling that morning. He had only just noticed he had lost it and having to rejoin his regiment the next day had wanted at all costs to see if it was not at my house. He and Françoise had searched everywhere without success. Françoise believed he must have lost it before coming to see me, for, she said, she could almost have sworn he did not have it on when she saw him; in this she was mistaken, which shows the value of witnesses and of recollections. I felt immediately by the unenthusiastic way they spoke of him that Saint-Loup had not produced a good impression on Françoise and the butler. Saint-Loup's efforts to court danger were the exact opposite of those made by the butler's son and Françoise's nephew to get themselves exempted, but judging from their own standpoint, Françoise and the butler could not believe that. They were convinced that rich people are always protected. For that matter had they even known the truth about Robert's heroic bravery, they would not have been moved by it. He never talked of "Boches", he praised the bravery of the Germans, he had not attributed our failure to secure victory from the first day, to treason. That was what they wanted to hear and that was what they would have considered a mark of courage. So, while they continued searching for the *croix de guerre*, I, who had not much doubt as to where that cross had been lost, found them cold on the subject of Robert. Though Saint-Loup had been amusing himself in equivocal fashion that evening, it was only while awaiting news of Morel; he had been seized with longing to see him again, and had made use of all his connections to discover the corps Morel was in, supposing him to have joined up, but, so far, he had received only contradictory answers. I advised Françoise and the butler to go to bed but the latter was never in any hurry to leave Françoise since, thanks to the war, he had found a still more efficacious way of tormenting her than telling

her about the expulsion of the nuns and the Dreyfus affair. That evening and whenever I was near them during the time I spent in Paris, I heard the butler say to poor, frightened Françoise: “They’re not in a hurry, of course; they’re waiting for the ripe pear, the day that they take Paris they’ll have no mercy.” “My God! Blessed Virgin Mary!” cried Françoise, “isn’t it enough for them to have conquered poor Belgium. She suffered enough at the time of her ‘invahition’.” “Belgium, Françoise. Why! What they did to Belgium is nothing to what they’ll do here.” The war having thrown upon the people’s conversation-market a number of new expressions which they only knew visually through reading the papers without being able to pronounce them, the butler added, “You’ll see, Françoise they are preparing a new attack of a greater *enverjure* than ever before.” In protest, if not out of pity for Françoise or from strategic common-sense, at least for grammar’s sake, I told them that the right way to pronounce the word was *envergure*, but I only succeeded in making Françoise repeat the terrible word every time I entered the kitchen. The butler, much as he enjoyed frightening his fellow-servant, was equally pleased to show his master, though he was only a former gardener of Combray and now a butler, that he was a good Frenchman of the order of St. André dès-Champs and possessed the privilege, since the declaration of the rights of man, to pronounce *enverjure*, with complete independence and not to accept orders on a matter which had nothing to do with his service and, in regard to which, in consequence of the Revolution, no one had any right to correct him, since he was my equal. I had, therefore, the irritation of hearing Françoise talk about an operation of great *enverjure*with an insistence which was intended to prove to me that that pronunciation was, in fact, not that of ignorance but of maturely-considered determination. The butler indiscriminately applied a suspicious “they” to the Government and the papers: “They talk of the losses of the Boches, they don’t talk of ours which, it appears, are ten times greater. They tell us that they’re at the last gasp, that they’ve got nothing to eat. I believe they’ve got a hundred times more to eat than we have. It’s all very well but they’ve no right to humbug us like that. If they had nothing to eat they wouldn’t be able to fight like the other day when they killed a hundred thousand youngsters less than twenty years old.” He thus continually exaggerated the triumphs of the Germans as he did formerly those of the Radicals, and told tales of their atrocities so as to make the victories of the enemy still more painful to Françoise who kept on exclaiming: “Sainted Mother of Angels! Sainted Mother of God!” Sometimes he tried being unpleasant to her in another way by saying: “For that matter, we’re no better than they are. What

we’re doing in Greece is no nicer than what they did in Belgium. You’ll see, we shall have the whole world against us and we shall have to fight the lot,” while, actually, the exact contrary was the truth. On days when news was good he revenged himself on Françoise by assuring her the war would last thirty-five years and that if, by chance, a possible peace came, it would not last more than a few months and would be succeeded by battles in comparison with which those of to-day were child’s play and that after them nothing would be left of France. The victory of the Allies if not close at hand, seemed at any rate assured, and unfortunately it must be admitted that this displeased the butler. For, having identified the world-war and the rest of it with his campaign against Françoise (whom he liked, all the same, just as one likes a person whom one daily enrages by defeating him at dominoes) victory was represented to him in terms of the first conversation he would have with her thereafter when he would be irritated by hearing her say: “Well, it’s finished at last, and they’ll have to give us a great deal more than we gave them in ‘71.” Really, he always believed this must happen in the end for an unconscious patriotism made him think, like all Frenchmen, who were victims of an illusion similar to my own ever since I had been ill, that victory like my recovery was coming to-morrow. He took the upper hand of Françoise by announcing that though victory might come about, her heart would bleed from it, because a revolution would swiftly follow and then invasion. “Ah! That bloody old war, the Boches will be the ones to recover quick from it! Why, Françoise! They’ve already made hundreds of millions out of it. But don’t you imagine they’re going to give us a penny of it. They may put that in the papers,” he added for prudence sake and to be on the safe side, “to keep people quiet just as they’ve been saying for three years that the war would be finished the next day. I can’t understand how people can be such fools as to believe it.” Françoise was the more worried by his comments because, as a matter of fact, she had believed the optimists in preference to the butler and had seen that the war, which was to end in a fortnight in spite of the “invahition of poor Belgium,” lasted for ever, that there was no advance, a phenomenon of fixation of the fronts the sense of which she could not understand, and that one of her innumerable godsons to whom she gave everything she received from us, had told her that this, that and the other things were concealed from the public. “All that will fall upon the working-class,” the butler remarked in conclusion, “and they’ll take your field from you, Françoise.” “Oh, my God!” But he preferred miseries that were close at hand and devoured the papers, hoping to announce a defeat to Françoise, and awaited news like Easter eggs, which should

be bad enough to terrify Françoise without his suffering material disadvantages therefrom. Thus a Zeppelin-raid enchanted him because he could watch Françoise hiding in the cellar while he felt convinced that in so large a city as Paris, bombs would not just fall upon our house. Then Françoise began to get back her Combray pacifism. She even began doubting the "German atrocities". "At the beginning of the war they told us the Germans were assassins, brigands, regular bandits —*bbboches*." (If she put several b's to Boches it was because it seemed plausible enough to accuse the Germans of being assassins but to call them Boches seemed almost impossible in its enormity). Still, it was rather difficult to grasp what mysteriously horrible sense Françoise gave to the word Boche since she was talking about the beginning of the war and uttered the word so doubtfully. For the doubt that the Germans were criminals might be ill-founded in fact but did not in itself contain a contradiction from a logical point of view but how could anyone doubt that they were Boches since that word in the popular tongue means German and nothing else. Perhaps she was merely repeating violent comments she had heard at the time when a particular emphasis was given to the word Boche. "I used to believe all that," she said, "but I'm now wondering if we aren't really just as big rogues as they are." This blasphemous thought had been cunningly fostered in Françoise by the butler who, observing that his fellow-servant had a certain weakness for King Constantine of Greece, continually represented that we did not allow him to have any food until he surrendered. The abdication of the sovereign had further moved Françoise to declare: "We're no better than they are. If we were in Germany we should do the same." I did not see much of her at that time as she often went to stay with cousins of hers about whom my mother one day said to me: "You know, they're richer than you are." In that connection a very beautiful thing happened, frequent enough at that period throughout the country, which, had there been historians to perpetuate its memory, would have borne witness to the grandeur of France, to the grandeur of her soul, that grandeur of St. André-des-Champs which was displayed no less by civilians at the rear than by the soldiers who fell at the Marne. A nephew of Françoise had been killed at Berry-au-Bac who was also a nephew of those millionaire cousins of Françoise, former café proprietors long since retired with a fortune. This young man of twenty-five, himself the proprietor of a little café, without other means, was called up and left his young wife to keep the little bar alone, hoping to return in a few months. He was killed and the following happened. These millionaire cousins of Françoise upon whom this young woman, widow of their nephew, had no claim whatever, left their

home in the country to which they had retired ten years previously and again took over the café but without taking a penny. Every morning at six o'clock the millionaire wife, a true gentlewoman, dressed herself as did her young lady daughter to assist their niece and cousin by marriage, and for three years they washed glasses and served meals from early morning till half-past-nine at night without a day of rest. In this book in which there is not a single event which is not fictitious, in which there is not a single personage "*a clef*", where I have invented everything to suit the requirements of my presentation, I must, in homage to my country, mention as personages who did exist in real life, these millionaire relations of Françoise who left their retirement to help their bereaved niece. And, persuaded that their modesty will not be offended for the excellent reason that they will never read this book, it is with childlike pleasure and deeply moved, that, unable to give the names of so many others who acted similarly and, thanks to whom France has survived, I here transcribe their name, a very French one, Larivière. If there were certain contemptible*embusqués* like the imperious young man in the dinner-jacket whom I saw at Jupien's and whose sole preoccupation was to know whether he could have Léon at half-past-ten because he was lunching out, they are more than made up for by the innumerable mass of Frenchmen of St. André-des-Champs, by all those superb soldiers beside whom I place the Larivières. The butler, to quicken the anxieties of Françoise showed her some old *Readings for All* he had discovered somewhere, on the cover of which (the copies dated from before the war) figured "The Imperial Family of Germany". "Here is our master of to-morrow," said the butler to Françoise, showing her "Guillaume". She opened her eyes wide, then pointing at the feminine personage beside him in the picture, she added, "And there is the Guillaumesse."

My departure from Paris was retarded by news which, owing to the pain it caused me, rendered me incapable of moving for some time. I had learnt, in fact, of the death of Robert Saint-Loup, killed, protecting the retreat of his men, on the day following his return to the front. No man less than he, felt hatred towards a people (and as to the Emperor, for special reasons which may have been mistaken, he believed that William II had rather sought to prevent war than to unleash it). Nor did he hate Germanism; the last words I heard him utter six days beforej were those at the beginning of a Schumann song which he hummed to me in German on my staircase; indeed on account of neighbours I had to ask him to keep quiet. Accustomed by supreme good breeding to refrain from apologies, invective and phrase, in the face of the enemy he had avoided, as he did at the

moment of mobilisation, whatever might have preserved his life by a self-effacement in action which his manners symbolised, even to his way of closing my cab-door when he saw me out, standing bare-headed every time I left his house. For several days I remained shut up in my room thinking about him. I recalled his arrival at Balbec that first time when in his white flannels and his greenish eyes moving like water he strolled through the hall adjoining the large dining-room with its windows open to the sea. I recalled the uniqueness of a being whose friendship I had then so greatly desired. That desire had been realised beyond my expectation, yet it had given me hardly a moment's pleasure, and afterwards I had realised all the qualities as well as other things which were hidden under that elegant appearance. He had bestowed all, good and bad, without stint, day by day, and on the last he stormed a trench with utter generosity, putting all he possessed at the service of others, just as one evening he had run along the sofas of the restaurant so as not to inconvenience me. That I had, after all, seen him so little in so many different places, under so many different circumstances separated by such long intervals, in the hall of Balbec, at the café of Rivebelle, in the Doncières Cavalry barracks and military dinners, at the theatre where he had boxed a journalist's ears, at the Princesse de Guermantes', resulted in my retaining more striking and sharper pictures of his life, feeling a keener sorrow at his death than one often does in the case of those one has loved more but of whom one has seen so much that the image we retain of them is but a sort of vague average of an infinite number of pictures hardly different from each other and also that our sated affection has not preserved, as in the case of those we have seen for limited moments in the course of meetings unfulfilled in spite of them and of ourselves, the illusion of greater potential affection of which circumstances alone had deprived us. A few days after the one on which I had seen Saint-Loup tripping along behind his eye-glass and had imagined him so haughty in the hall of Balbec there was another figure I had seen for the first time upon the Balbec beach and who now also existed only as a memory — Albertine — walking along the sand that first evening indifferent to everybody and as akin to the sea as a seagull. I had so soon fallen in love with her that, not to miss being with her every day I never left Balbec to go and see Saint-Loup. And yet the history of my friendship with him bore witness also to my having ceased at one time to love Albertine, since, if I had gone away to stay with Robert at Doncières, it was out of grief that Mme de Guermantes did not return the sentiment I felt for her. His life and that of Albertine so late known to me, both at Bal-bee and both so soon ended, had hardly crossed each other; it

was he, I repeated to myself, visualising that the flying shuttle of the years weaves threads between memories which seemed at first to be completely independent of each other, it was he whom I sent to Mme Bontemps when Albertine left me. And then it happened that each of their two lives contained a parallel secret I had not suspected. Saint-Loup's now caused me more sadness than Albertine's for her life had become to me that of a stranger. But I could not console myself that hers like that of Saint-Loup had been so short. She and he both often said when they were seeing to my comfort: "You are so ill," and yet it was they who were dead, they whose last presentment I can visualise, the one facing the trench, the other after her accident, separated by so short an interval from the first, that even Albertine's was worth no more to me than its association with a sunset on the sea. Françoise received the news of Saint-Loup's death with more pity than Albertine's. She immediately adopted her rôle of mourner and bewailed the memory of the dead with lamentations and despairing comments. She manifested her sorrow and turned her face away to dry her eyes only when I let her see my own tears which she pretended not to notice. Like many highly-strung people the agitation of others horrified her, doubtless because it was too like her own. She wanted to draw attention to the slightest stiff-neck or giddiness she had managed to get afflicted with. But if I spoke of one of my own pains she became stoical and grave and made a pretence of not hearing me. "Poor marquis!" she would say, although she could not help thinking he had done everything in his power not to go to the front and once there to escape danger. "Poor lady!" she would say, alluding to Mme de Marsantes, "how she must have wept when she heard of the death of her son! If only she had been able to see him again! But perhaps it was better she was not able to because his nose was cut in two. He was completely disfigured." And the eyes of Françoise filled with tears through which nevertheless the cruel curiosity of the peasant peered. Without doubt Françoise condoled with Mme de Marsantes with all her heart but she was sorry not to witness the form her grief had taken and that she could not luxuriate in the spectacle of her affliction. And as she liked crying and liked me to see her cry, she worked herself up by saying: "I feel it dreadfully." And she observed the traces of sorrow in my face with an eagerness which made me pretend to a kind of hardness when I spoke of Robert. In a spirit of imitation and because she had heard others say so, for there are *clichés* in the servants' quarters just as in coteries, she repeated, not without the complaisance of the poor: "All his wealth did not prevent his dying like anyone else and it's no good to him now." The butler profited by the opportunity to remark to Françoise that it was

certainly sad but that it scarcely counted compared with the millions of men who fell every day in spite of all the efforts of the Government to hide it. But this time the butler did not succeed in causing Françoise more pain as he had hoped, for she answered: “It’s true they died for France too, but all of them are unknown and it’s always more interesting when one has known people.” And Françoise who revelled in her tears, added: “Be sure and let me know if the death of the marquis is mentioned in the paper.”

Robert had often said to me with sadness long before the war: “Oh, don’t let us talk about my life, I am doomed in advance.” Was he then alluding to the vice which he had until then succeeded in hiding from the world, the gravity of which he perhaps exaggerated as young people do who make love for the first time or who even earlier seek solitary gratification and imagine themselves like plants which cannot disseminate their pollen without dying? Perhaps in Saint-Loup’s case this exaggeration arose as in that of children from the idea of an unfamiliar sin, a new sensation possessing an almost terrifying power which later on is attenuated. Or had he, owing to his father’s early death, the presentiment of his premature end. Such a presentiment seems irrational and yet death seems subject to certain laws. One would think, for instance, that people born of parents who died very old or very young are almost forced to die at the same age, the former sustaining sorrows and incurable diseases till they are a hundred, the latter carried off, in spite of a happy, healthy existence at the inevitable and premature date by a disease so timely and accidental (however deep its roots in the organism) that it seems to be a formality necessary to the actuality of death. And is it not possible that accidental death itself — like that of Saint-Loup, linked as it was with his character in more ways than I have been able to say — is also determined beforehand, known only to gods invisible to man, but revealed by a special and semi-conscious sadness (and even expressed to others as sincerely as we announce misfortunes which, in our inmost hearts, we believe we shall escape and which nevertheless happen) in him who bears the fatal date and perceives it continuously within himself, like a device.

He must have been very beautiful in those last hours, he who in this life had seemed always, even when he sat or walked about in a drawing-room, to contain within himself the dash of a charge and to disguise smilingly the indomitable will-power centred in his triangle-shaped head when he charged for the last time. Disencumbered of its books, the feudal turret had become warlike again and that Guer-mantes was more himself in death — he was more of his breed, a Guermantes and nothing more and this was symbolised at his funeral in the

church of Saint-Hilaire-de-Combray hung with black draperies where the “G” under the closed coronet divested of initials and titles betokened the race of Guermantes which he personified in death. Before going to the funeral which did not take place at once I wrote to Gilberte. Perhaps I ought to have written to the Duchesse de Guermantes but I imagined that she would have accepted the death of Robert with the indifference I had seen her display about so many others who had seemed so closely associated with her life, and perhaps even that, with her Guermantes spirit, she would want to show that j superstition about blood ties meant nothing to her. I was too ill to write to everybody. I had formerly believed that she and Robert liked each other in the society sense, which is the same as saying that they exchanged affectionate expressions when they felt so disposed. But when he was away from her, he did not hesitate to say that she was a fool and if she sometimes found a selfish pleasure in his society, I had noticed that she was incapable of giving herself the smallest trouble, of using her power in the slightest degree to render him a service or even to prevent some misfortune happening to him. The spitefulness she had shown in refusing to recommend him to General Saint-Joseph when Robert was going back to Morocco proved that her goodwill towards him when he married was only a sort of compromise that cost her nothing. So that I was much surprised when I heard that, owing to her being ill when Robert was killed, her people considered it necessary to hide the papers from her for several days (under fallacious pretexts) for fear of the shock that would have been caused her by their announcement of his death. But my surprise was greater when I learnt that after she had been told the truth, the Duchesse de Guermantes wept the whole day, fell ill and took a long time — more than a week, which was long for her — to console herself. When I heard about her grief, I was touched and it enabled everyone to say, as I do, that there was a great friendship between them. But when I remember how many petty slanders, how much ill-will entered into that friendship, I realise how small a value society attaches to it. Moreover somewhat later, under circumstances which were historically more important though they touched my heart less, Mme de Guermantes appeared, in my opinion, in a still more favourable light. It will be remembered that as a girl she had displayed audacious impertinence towards the Imperial family of Russia and after her marriage, spoke about them with a freedom amounting to social tactlessness, yet she was perhaps the only person, after the Russian Revolution, who gave proof of extreme devotion to the Grand-Dukes and Duchesses. The very year which preceded the war she had annoyed the Grande-Duchesse Vladimir by calling the Comtesse of Hohenfelsen, the

morganatic wife of the Grand-Duc Paul, the “Grande-Duchesse Paul”. But, no sooner had the Russian Revolution broken out, than our Ambassador at St. Petersburg, M. Paléologue (“Paléo” for diplomatic society which, like the other, has its pseudo-witty abbreviations), was harassed by telegrams from the Duchesse de Guermantes who wanted news of the Grande-Duchesse Maria Pavlovna and for a long time the only marks of sympathy and respect which that Princess received came to her exclusively from Mme de Guermantes.

Saint-Loup caused, if not by his death, at least by what he had done in the weeks that preceded it, troubles greater than those of the Duchesse. What happened was that the day following the evening when I had seen M. de Charlus, the day on which he had said to Morel: “I shall be revenged,” Saint-Loup’s hunt for Morel had ended, by the general, under whose orders Morel ought to have been, discovering that he was a deserter and having him sought out and arrested. To excuse himself to Saint-Loup for the punishment which was going to be inflicted on a person he had been interested in, the general had written to inform Saint-Loup of it. Morel was convinced that his arrest was due to the rancour of M. de Charlus. He remembered the words “I shall be revenged” and, thinking this was the revenge, he demanded to be heard. “It is true,” he declared, “that I deserted but, if I have been influenced to evil courses, is it altogether my fault?” Without compromising himself, he gave accounts of M. de Charlus and of M. d’Argencourt with whom he had also quarrelled, concerning matters which these two, with the twofold exuberance of lovers and of inverts, had told him, which caused the simultaneous arrest of M. de Charlus and M. d’Argencourt. This arrest caused, perhaps, less distress to these two than the knowledge that each had been the unwilling rival of the other and the proceedings disclosed an enormous number of other and more obscure rivals picked up daily in the street. They were, moreover, quickly released as was Morel because the letter written to Saint-Loup by the general was returned to him with the mention: “Dead on the field of honour.” The general, in honour of the dead, decided that Morel should simply be sent to the front; he there behaved bravely, escaped all dangers and, when the war was over, returned with the cross which, earlier, M. de Charlus had vainly solicited for him and which he thus got indirectly through the death of Saint-Loup. I have since often thought, when recalling the croix-de-guerre lost at Jupien’s, that if Saint-Loup had survived he would have been easily able to get elected deputy in the election which followed the war, thanks to the frothy idiocy and to the halo of glory which it left behind it, thanks also to centuries of prejudice being, on that account, abolished and if the loss of a finger procured a

brilliant marriage and entrance into an aristocratic family, the croix-de-guerre, though it were won in an office, took the place of a profession of faith and ensured a triumphant election to the Chamber of Deputies, almost to the French Academy. The election of Saint-Loup would, on account of his “sainted” family, have made M. Arthur Meyer pour out floods of tears and ink. But perhaps Saint-Loup loved the people too sincerely to gain their suffrages although they would, doubtless, have forgiven him his democratic ideas for the sake of his noble birth. Saint-Loup would perhaps have exposed the former with success before a chamber composed of aviators and those heroes would have understood him as would have done a few other elevated minds. But owing to the pacifying effect of the *Bloc National*, a lot of old political rascals had been fished up and were always elected. Those who were unable to enter a Chamber of aviators went about soliciting the votes of Marshals, of a President of the Republic, of a President of the Chamber, etc. in the hope of at least becoming members of the French Academy. They would not have favoured Saint-Loup but they did another of Jupien’s customers, that deputy of Liberal Action, and he was re-elected unopposed. He did not stop wearing his territorial officer’s uniform although the war had been over a long time. His election was joyfully welcomed by all the newspapers who had formed the Coalition on the strength of his name, with the help of rich and noble ladies who wore rags out of conventional sentimentality and fear of taxes, while men on the Stock Exchange ceaselessly bought diamonds, not for their wives but because, having no confidence in the credit of any country, they sought safety in tangible wealth, and incidentally made de Beers go up a thousand francs. Such imbecility was somewhat irritating but one was less indignant with the *Bloc National* when, suddenly, the Victims of Bolshevism appeared on the scene; Grand-Duchesses in tatters whose husbands and sons had been in turn assassinated. Husbands in wheelbarrows, sons stoned and deprived of food, forced to labour amidst jeers and finally thrown into pits and buried alive because they were said to be sickening of the plague and might infect the community. The few who succeeded in escaping suddenly reappeared and added new and terrifying details to this picture of horror.

Chapter 3 — An Afternoon Party at the House of the Princesse de Guermantes

The new sanatorium to which I then retired did not cure me any more than the first one and a long time passed before I left it. During my railway-journey back to Paris the conviction of my lack of literary gifts again assailed me. This conviction which I believed I had discovered formerly on the Guermantes side, that I had recognised still more sorrowfully in my daily walks at Tansonville with Gilberte before going back to dinner or far into the night, and which on the eve of departure I had almost identified, after reading some pages of the Mémoires of the Goncourts, as being synonymous with the vanity and lie of literature, a thought less sad perhaps but still more dismal if its reason was not my personal incompetence but the non-existence of an ideal in which I had believed, that conviction which had not for long re-entered my mind, struck me anew and with more lamentable force than ever. It was, I remember, when the train stopped in open country and the sun lit half-way down their stems the line of trees which ran alongside the railway. “Trees,” I thought, “you have nothing more to tell me, my cold heart hears you no more. I am in the midst of Nature, yet it is with boredom that my eyes observe the line which separates your luminous countenance from your shaded trunks. If ever I believed myself a poet I now know that I am not one. Perhaps in this new and barren stage of my life, men may inspire me as Nature no longer can and the years when I might perhaps have been able to sing her beauty will never return.” But in offering myself the consolation that possible observation of humanity might take the place of impossible inspiration, I was conscious that I was but seeking a consolation which I knew was valueless. If really I had the soul of an artist, what pleasure should I not be now experiencing at the sight of that curtain of trees lighted by the setting sun, of those little field-flowers lifting themselves almost to the foot-board of the railway carriage, whose petals I could count and whose colours I should not dare describe as do so many excellent writers, for can one hope to communicate to the reader a pleasure one has not felt? A little later I had observed with the same indifference, the lenses of gold and of orange into which

the setting sun had transformed the windows of a house; and then, as the hour advanced, I had seen another house which seemed made of a strange pink substance. But I had made these various observations with the indifference I might have felt if, when walking in a garden with a lady, I had remarked a leaf of glass and further on an object like alabaster the unusual colour of which would not have distracted me from agonising boredom but which I had pointed at out of politeness to the lady and to show her that I had noticed them though they were coloured glass and stucco. In the same way as a matter of conscience I registered within myself as though to a person who was accompanying me and who would have been capable of getting more pleasure than I from them, the fiery reflections in the window-panes and the pink transparence of the house. But that companion whose notice I had drawn to these curious effects was doubtless of a less enthusiastic nature than many well disposed people whom such a sight would have delighted, for he had observed the colours without any sort of joy.

Since my name was on their visiting-lists, my long absence from Paris had not prevented old friends from sending me invitations and when, on getting home, I found together with an invitation for the following day to a supper given by La Berma in honour of her daughter and her son-in-law, another for an afternoon reception at the Prince de Guermantes', my sad reflections in the train were not the least of the motives which counselled me to go there. I told myself it really was not worth while to deprive myself of society since I was either not equipped for or not up to the precious "work" to which I had for so long been hoping to devote myself "to-morrow" and which, may be, corresponded to no reality. In truth, this reasoning was negative and merely eliminated the value of those which might have kept me away from this society function. But what made me go was that name of Guermantes which had so far gone out of my head that, when I saw it on the invitation card, it awakened a beam of attention and laid hold of a fraction of the past buried in the depths of my memory, a past associated with visions of the forest domain, its rich luxuriance once again assuming the charm and significance of the old Combray days when, before going home, I passed into the Rue de l'Oiseau and saw from outside, like dark lacquer, the painted window of Gilbert le Mauvais, Sire of Guermantes. For a moment the Guermantes seemed once more utterly different from society people, incomparable with them or with any living beings, even with a king, beings issuing from gestation in the austere and virtuous atmosphere of that sombre town of Combray where my childhood was spent, and from the whole past represented by the little street whence I gazed up at the painted window. I longed

to go to the Guermantes' as though it would bring me back my childhood from the deeps of memory where I glimpsed it. And I continued to re-read the invitation until the letters which composed the name, familiar and mysterious as that of Combray itself, rebelliously recaptured their independence and spelled to my tired eyes a name I did not know.

My mother was going to a small tea-party with Mme Sazerat so I had no scruple about attending the Princesse de Guermantes' reception. I ordered a carriage to take me there for the Prince de Guermantes no longer lived in his former mansion but in a magnificent new one which he had had built in the Avenue du Bois. One of the mistakes of people in society is that they do not realise, if they want us to believe in them, that they must first believe in themselves or at least that they must have some respect for the elements essential to our belief. At a time when I made myself believe even though I knew the contrary, that the Guermantes lived in their palace by virtue of hereditary privilege, to penetrate into the palace of a magician or a fairy, to have those doors open before me which are closed until the magical formula has been uttered seemed to me as difficult as to obtain an interview with the sorcerer and the fairy themselves. Nothing was easier than to convince myself that the old servant engaged the previous day at Potel and Chabot's was the son or grandson or descendant of those who served the family long before the revolution and I had infinite good will in calling the picture which had been bought the preceding month at Bernheim junior's the portrait of an ancestor. But the charm must not be decanted, memories cannot be isolated and now that the prince de Guermantes had himself destroyed my illusion by going to live in the Avenue du Bois, there was little of it left. Those ceilings which I had feared would fall at the sound of my name and under which so much of my former awe and fantasy might still have lingered, now sheltered the evening parties of an American woman of no interest to me. Of course things have no power in themselves and since it is we who impart it to them, some middle-class school-boy might at this moment be standing in front of the mansion in the Avenue du Bois and feeling as I did formerly about the earlier one. And this because he would still be at the age of faith which I had left far behind; I had lost that privilege as one loses the child's power to digest milk which we can only consume in small quantities whilst babies can suck it down indefinitely without taking breath. At least the Guermantes' change of domicile had the advantage for me that the carriage which had come to take me there and in which I was making these reflections had to pass through the streets which go towards the Champs Elysées. Those

streets were at the time very badly paved, yet the moment the carriage entered them I was detached from my thoughts by a sensation of extreme sweetness; it was as though, all at once, the carriage was rolling along easily and noiselessly, like, when the gates of a park are opened, one seems to glide along a drive covered with fine gravel or dead leaves. There was nothing material about it but suddenly I felt emancipated from exterior obstacles as though I need no longer make an effort to adapt my attention as we do almost unconsciously when faced with something new; the streets through which I was then passing were those long forgotten ones which Françoise and I used to take when we were going to the Champs Elysées. The road itself knew where it was going, its resistance was overcome. And like an aviator who rolls painfully along the ground until, abruptly, he breaks away from it, I felt myself being slowly lifted towards the silent peaks of memory. Those particular streets of Paris, will, for me, always be composed of a different substance from others. When I reached the corner of the rue Royale where formerly an open-air street-seller used to display the photographs beloved of Françoise, it seemed to me that the carriage accustomed in the course of years to turning there hundreds of times was compelled to turn of itself. I was not traversing the same streets as those who were passing by, I was gliding through a sweet and melancholy past composed of so many different pasts that it was difficult for me to identify the cause of my melancholy. Was it due to those pacings to and fro awaiting Gilberte and fearing she would not come? Was it that I was close to a house where I had been told that Albertine had gone with Andrée or was it the philosophic significance a street seems to assume when one has used it a thousand times while one was obsessed with a passion which has come to an end and borne no fruit like when after luncheon I made fevered expeditions to gaze at the play-bills of *Phèdre* and of the *Black Domino* while they were still moist with the bill-sticker’s paste? Reaching the Champs Elysées and not much wanting to hear the whole of the concert at the Guermantes’, I stopped the carriage and was able to get out of it to walk a few steps, when I noticed a carriage likewise about to stop. A man with glazed eyes and bent body was deposited rather than sitting in the back of it, and was making efforts to hold himself straight such as a child makes when told to behave nicely. An untouched forest of snow-white hair escaped from under his straw hat while a white beard like those snow attaches to statues in public gardens depended from his chin. It was M. de Charlus sitting beside Jupien (prodigal of attentions), convalescing from an attack of apoplexy (of which I was ignorant; all I had heard being that he had lost his eyesight, a passing matter, for he now saw

clearly). He seemed, unless until then he had been in the habit of dyeing his hair and that he had been forbidden to do so because of the fatigue it involved, to have been subjected to some sort of chemical precipitation which had the effect of making his hair shine with such a brilliant and metallic lustre that the locks of his hair and beard spouted like so many geysers of pure silver and clad the aged and fallen prince with the Shakespearean majesty of a King Lear. The eyes had not remained unaffected by this total convulsion, this metallurgical alteration of the head; but by an inverse phenomenon they had lost all their lustre. What was most moving was the feeling that the lustre had been lent to them by moral pride and that owing to this having been lost, the physical and even the intellectual life of M. de Charlus survived his aristocratic hauteur which one had supposed to be embodied in it. At that very moment there passed in a victoria, doubtless also going to the Prince de Guermantes', Mme de Sainte-Euverte whom formerly the Baron did not consider smart enough to be worth knowing. Jupien, who was taking care of him like a child, whispered in his ear that it was a personage he knew, Mme de Sainte-Euverte. Immediately, with infinite trouble and with the concentration of an invalid who wants to appear capable of movements still painful to him, M. de Charlus uncovered, bowed and wished Mme de Sainte-Euverte good-day with the respect he might have shown if she had been the Queen of France. The very difficulty of thus saluting her may have been the reason of it, through realising the poignancy of doing something painful and therefore doubly meritorious on the part of an invalid and doubly flattering to the lady to whom it was addressed. Like kings, invalids exaggerate politeness. Perhaps also there was a lack of co-ordination in the Baron's movements caused by disease of the marrow and brain and his gestures exceeded his intention. For myself I rather perceived therein a sort of quasi-physical gentleness, a detachment from the realities of life which strikes one in those about to enter the shadows of death. The profuse exposure of his silver-flaked head revealed a change less profound than this unconscious worldly humility which, reversing all social relationships, brought low in the presence of Mme de Sainte-Euverte, would have brought low — showing thereby its debility — in the presence of the least important American woman (who might at last have secured from the Baron a consideration until then withheld) a snobbishness which had seemed the most arrogant. For the Baron still lived, could still think; his intelligence survived. And, more than a chorus of Sophocles on the humbled pride of Oedipus, more even than death itself or any funeral speech, the Baron's humble and obsequious greeting of Mme de Sainte-Euverte proclaimed the perishable

nature of earthly grandeurs and of all human pride. M. de Charlus who, till then, would not have consented to dine with Mme de Sainte-Euverte now bowed down to the ground before her. It may, of course, be that he thus bowed to her through ignorance of her rank (for the rules of the social code can be obliterated by a stroke like any other part of the memory) perhaps by an inco-ordination which transposed to the plane of apparent humility his uncertainty — which might otherwise have been haughty — regarding the identity of the passing lady. He saluted her, in fact, with the timid politeness of a child told by its mother to say good-morning to grown-up people. And a child he had become, without a child's pride. For Mme de Sainte-Euverte to receive the homage of M. de Çharlus was a world of gratified snobbery as, formerly, it was a world of snobbery for the Baron to refuse it her. And M. de Charlus had, at one blow, destroyed that precious and inaccessible character which he had succeeded in making Mme de Sainte-Euverte believe was an essential part of himself by the concentrated timidity, the frightened eagerness with which he raised his hat and let loose the foaming torrents of his silver hair as he stood uncovered before her with the eloquent deference of a Bossuet. After Jupien had assisted the Baron to descend, I saluted him and he began speaking to me very fast and so indistinctly that I could not understand him and when, for the third time, I asked him to repeat what he said, it provoked a gesture of impatience which surprised me because of the previous impassiveness of his face which was doubtless due to the effects of paralysis. But when I succeeded in grasping his whispered words I realised that the invalid's intelligence was completely intact. There were moreover two M. de Charluses without counting others. Of the two the intellectual one spent the whole time complaining that he was approaching amnesia, that he was constantly pronouncing one word or one letter instead of another. But coincidentally, the other M. de Charlus, the subconscious one which wanted to be envied as much as the other to be pitied, stopped, like the leader of an orchestra at the beginning of a passage in which his musicians are floundering, and with infinite ingeniousness attached what followed to the word he had wrongly used but which he wanted one to believe he had deliberately chosen. Even his memory was uninjured; indeed he indulged in the exceedingly fatiguing coquetry of resuscitating some ancient and insignificant recollection in connexion with myself to prove to me that he had preserved or recovered all his mental acuteness. For instance, without moving his head or his eyes and without varying his inflection, he said to me: "Look! There's a post on which there's a notice exactly like the one where I was standing the first time I saw you at

Avranches — no at Balbec, I mean." And it was actually an advertisement of the same product. At first I had difficulty in understanding what he said, as at first, one is unable to see in a darkened room, but like eyes which become accustomed to the dusk, my ears soon became accustomed to his pianissimo. I believe too that it got stronger as he went on speaking, whether because the weakness came partly from nervous apprehension which diminished while he was being distracted by someone or whether, on the contrary, the weakness was real and the strength of his voice was temporarily stimulated by excitement which was injurious to him and made strangers say: "He's getting better, he mustn't think about his illness," whereas, on the contrary, it made him worse. Be this as it may, the Baron, at this particular moment, cast up his words with greater vigour like the tide does its waves in bad weather. An effect of his recent stroke was to make his voice sound like stones rolling under his words. And as he went on talking to me of the past, no doubt to show he had not lost his memory, he evoked it funereally, yet without sadness. He kept on enumerating the various members of his family or of his set who were dead, apparently less because he was sorry they had departed than because of his satisfaction at having survived them; in reminding himself of their death, he seemed to become more conscious of his own recovery. He enumerated almost triumphantly but in a monotonous tone accompanied by a slight stammer and with a sort of sepulchral resonance: "Hannibal de Bréauté, dead! Antoine de Mouchy, dead! Charles Swann, dead! Adalbert de Montmorency, dead! Baron de Talleyrand, dead! Sosthène de Doudeauville, dead!" And each time the word "dead" seemed to fall upon the defunct like a shovelful of earth, the heavier for the gravedigger wanting to press them ever deeper into the tomb.

The Duchesse de Létourville, who was not going to the reception of the Princesse de Guermantes because she had been ill for a long time, at that moment passed by us on foot and noticing the Baron whose attack she had not heard about, stopped to say good-day to him. But the illness from which she had been suffering did not make her better understand the illness of others which she bore with an impatience and nervous irritation in which there was perhaps a good deal of pity. Hearing the Baron's defective pronunciation and the mistakes in some of his words and observing the difficulty with which he moved his arm, she glanced in turn at Jupien and at me as though she were asking the explanation of such a shocking phenomenon. As we did not answer she directed a long, sad, reproachful stare at M. de Charlus himself, apparently vexed at his being seen out with her in a condition as unusual as if he were wearing neither

tie nor shoes. When the Baron made another mistake in his pronunciation, the distress and indignation of the Duchesse increased, and she cried at the Baron: “Palamède?” in the interrogatory and exasperated tone of neurasthenic people who cannot bear waiting a moment and who, if one asks them in immediately and apologises for not being completely dressed, remark bitterly, not to excuse themselves but to accuse you: “Oh, I see I’m disturbing you!” as though the person they are disturbing had done something wrong. Finally, she left us with a still more concerned air, saying to the Baron: “You’d better go home.”

M. de Charlus wanted to sit down and rest in a chair while Jupien and I took a few steps together, and painfully extracted a book from his pocket which seemed to me to be a prayer-book. I was not sorry to learn some details about the Baron’s health from Jupien. “I am glad to talk to you, monsieur,” said Jupien, “but we won’t go further than the Rond-Point. Thank God, the Baron is better now, but I don’t dare leave him long alone. He’s always the same, he’s too good-hearted, he’d give everything he has to others and that isn’t all, he remains as much of a *coureur* as if he were a young man and I’m obliged to keep my eye on him.” “The more so,” I replied, “as he has recovered his own. I was greatly distressed when I was told that he had lost his eye-sight.” “His paralysis did, indeed, have that effect, at first he couldn’t see at all. Just think that during the cure which, as a matter of fact, did him a lot of good, for several months he couldn’t see any more than if he’d been blind from birth.” “At least, that must have made part of your supervision unnecessary.” “Not the least in the world! We had hardly arrived at a hotel than he asked me what such and such a person on the staff was like. I assured him they were all awful, but he knew it couldn’t be as universal as I said and that I must be lying about some of them. There’s that *petit polisson* again! And then he got a sort of intuition, perhaps from a voice, I don’t know, and managed to send me away on some urgent commission. One day — excuse me for telling you all this, but as you once by chance entered the temple of impurity, I have nothing to hide from you” (for that matter he always got a rather unpleasant satisfaction out of revealing secrets) “I came back from one of those pretended urgent commissions quickly because I thought it had been arranged on purpose, when just as I approached the Baron’s room I heard a voice ask: ‘What?’ and the Baron’s answer: ‘Do you mean to say it’s the first time?’ I entered without knocking and what was my horror! The Baron, misled by the voice which was indeed more mature than is habitual at that age (and at that time he was completely blind) he, who formerly only liked grown men, was with a child not ten years old.”

I was told that at that period he was nearly every day a prey to attacks of mental depression characterised not exactly by divagation but by confessing at the top of his voice — in front of third parties whose presence and censoriousness he had forgotten — opinions he usually hid, such as his Germanophilism. So, long after the end of the war he was bewailing the defeat of the Germans, amongst whom he included himself and said bitterly: “We shall have to be revenged. We have proved the power of our resistance and we were the best organised,” or else his confidences took another form and he exclaimed in a rage: “Don’t let Lord X— or the Prince of X—, come and tell me again what they said the other day for it was all I could do to prevent myself replying, ‘You know, because you’re one of them, at least, as much as I am.’” Needless to add that when M. de Charlus thus gave vent at times when he was, as they say, not all there, to these Germanophile and other avowals, people in his company such as Jupien or the Duchesse de Guermantes were in the habit of interrupting his imprudent words and giving to the third party who was less intimate and more indiscreet a forced but honourable interpretation of his words. “Oh, my God,” called Jupien, “I had good reason not to want to go far away. There he is starting a conversation with a gardener boy. Good-day, sir, it’s better I should go, I can’t leave my invalid alone a moment; he’s nothing but a great baby.”

I got out of the carriage again a little before reaching the Princesse de Guermantes’ and began thinking again of that lassitude, that weariness with which I had tried the evening before to note the railway line which separated the shadow from the light upon the trees in one of the most beautiful countrysides in France. Certainly such intellectual conclusions as I had drawn from these thoughts did not affect my sensibility so cruelly to-day, but they re-mained the same, for, as always happened when I succeeded in breaking away from my habits, going out at an unaccustomed hour to some new place, I derived a lively pleasure from it.

To-day, the pleasure of going to a reception at Mme de Guermantes’, seemed to me purely frivolous, but since I now knew that I could expect to have no other than frivolous pleasures, what was the use of my not accepting them? I repeated to myself that in attempting this description I had experienced none of that enthusiasm which I is not the only but the first criterion of talent. I began now to draw on my memory for “snapshots”, notably snapshots it had taken at Venice but the mere mention of the word made Venice as boring to me as a photographic exhibition and I was conscious of no more taste or talent in visualising what I had formerly seen than yesterday in describing what I had

observed with a meticulous and mournful eye. In a few minutes so many charming friends I had not seen for so long would doubtless be asking me not to cut myself off and to spend some time with them. I had no reason to refuse them since I now had the proof that I was good for nothing, that literature could no longer give me any joy whether because of my lack of talent or because it was a less real thing than I had believed.

When I remembered what Bergotte had said to me: “You are ill but one cannot be sorry for you because you possess the delights of the mind,” I saw how much he had been mistaken. How little delight I got out of this sterile lucidity. I might have added that if sometimes I had tasted pleasures — not those of the mind — I had always exhausted them with a different woman so that even if destiny were to grant me a hundred years of healthy life it would only be adding successive lengths to an existence already in a straight line which there was no object in lengthening further. As to the “delights of the mind”, could I thus name those cold and sterile reflections which my clear-sighted eye or my logical reasoning joylessly summarised? But sometimes illumination comes to our rescue at the very moment when all seems lost; we have knocked at every door and they open on nothing until, at last, we stumble unconsciously against the only one through which we can enter the kingdom we have sought in vain a hundred years — and it opens.[1]

Reviewing the painful reflections of which I have just been speaking, I had entered the courtyard of the Guermantes’ mansion and in my distraction I had not noticed an approaching carriage; at the call of the link-man I had barely time to draw quickly to one side, and in stepping backwards I stumbled against some unevenly placed paving stones behind which there was a coach-house. As I recovered myself, one of my feet stepped on a flagstone lower than the one next it. In that instant all my discouragement disappeared and I was possessed by the same felicity which at different moments of my life had given me the view of trees which seemed familiar to me during the drive round Balbec, the view of the belfries of Martinville, the savour of the madeleine dipped in my tea and so many other sensations of which I have spoken and which Vinteuil’s last works had seemed to synthesise. As at the moment when I tasted the madeleine, all my apprehensions about the future, all my intellectual doubts, were dissipated. Those doubts which had assailed me just before, regarding the reality of my literary gifts and even regarding the reality of literature itself were dispersed as though by magic. This time I vowed that I should not resign myself to ignoring why, without any fresh reasoning, without any definite hypothesis, the insoluble

difficulties of the previous instant had lost all importance as was the case when I tasted the madeleine. The felicity which I now experienced was undoubtedly the same as that I felt when I ate the madeleine, the cause of which I had then postponed seeking. There was a purely material difference in the images evoked. A deep azure intoxicated my eyes, a feeling of freshness, of dazzling light enveloped me and in my desire to capture the sensation, just as I had not dared to move when I tasted the madeleine because of trying to conjure back that of which it reminded me, I stood, doubtless an object of ridicule to the link-men, repeating the movement of a moment since, one foot upon the higher flagstone, the other on the lower one. Merely repeating the movement was useless; but if, oblivious of the Guermantes' reception, I succeeded in recapturing the sensation which accompanied the movement, again the intoxicating and elusive vision softly pervaded me as though it said "Grasp me as I float by you, if you can, and try to solve the enigma of happiness I offer you." And then, all at once, I recognised that Venice which my descriptive efforts and pretended snapshots of memory had failed to recall; the sensation I had once felt on two uneven slabs in the Baptistry of St. Mark had been given back to me and was linked with all the other sensations of that and other days which had lingered expectant in their place among the series of forgotten years from which a sudden chance had imperiously called them forth. So too the taste of the little madeleine had recalled Combray. But how was it that these visions of Combray and of Venice at one and at another moment had caused me a joyous certainty sufficient without other proofs to make death indifferent to me? Asking myself this and resolved to find the answer this very day, I entered the Guermantes' mansion, because we always allow our inner needs to give way to the part we are apparently called upon to play and that day mine was to be a guest. On reaching the first floor a footman requested me to enter a small boudoir-library adjoining a buffet until the piece then being played had come to an end, the Princesse having given orders that the doors should not be opened during the performance. At that very instant a second premonition occurred to reinforce the one which the uneven paving-stones had given me and to exhort me to persevere in my task. The servant in his ineffectual efforts not to make a noise had knocked a spoon against a plate. The same sort of felicity which the uneven paving-stones had given me invaded my being; this time my sensation was quite different, being that of great heat accompanied by the smell of smoke tempered by the fresh air of a surrounding forest and I realised that what appeared so pleasant was the identical group of trees I had found so tiresome to observe and describe when I was uncorking a

bottle of beer in the railway carriage and, in a sort of bewilderment, I believed for the moment, until I had collected myself, so similar was the sound of the spoon against the plate to that of the hammer of a railway employee who was doing something to the wheel of the carriage while the train was at a standstill facing the group of trees, that I was now actually there. One might have said that the portents which that day were to rescue me from my discouragement and give me back faith in literature, were determined to multiply themselves, for a servant, a long time in the service of the Prince de Guermantes, recognised me and, to save me going to the buffet, brought me some cakes and a glass of orangeade into the library. I wiped my mouth with the napkin he had given me and immediately, like the personage in the *Thousand and One Nights* who unknowingly accomplished the rite which caused the appearance before him of a docile genius, invisible to others, ready to transport him far away, a new azure vision passed before my eyes; but this time it was pure and saline and swelled into shapes like bluish udders. The impression was so strong that the moment I was living seemed to be one with the past and (more bewildered still than I was on the day when I wondered whether I was going to be welcomed by the Princesse de Guermantes or whether everything was going to melt away), I believed that the servant had just opened the window upon the shore and that everything invited me to go downstairs and walk along the sea-wall at high tide; the napkin upon which I was wiping my mouth had exactly the same kind of starchiness as that with which I had attempted with so much difficulty to dry myself before the window the first day of my arrival at Balbec and within the folds of which, now, in that library of the Guermantes mansion, a green-blue ocean spread its plumage like the tail of a peacock. And I did not merely rejoice in those colours, but in that whole instant which produced them, an instant towards which my whole life had doubtless aspired, which a feeling of fatigue or sadness had prevented my ever experiencing at Balbec but which now, pure, disincarnated and freed from the imperfections of exterior perceptions, filled me with joy. The piece they were playing might finish at any moment, and I should be obliged to enter the drawing room. So I forced myself to try to penetrate as quickly as possible into the nature of those identical sensations I had felt three times within a few minutes so as to extract the lesson I might learn from them. I did not stop to consider the extreme difference which there is between the true impression which we have had of a thing and the artificial meaning we give to it when we employ our will to represent it to ourselves, for I remembered with what relative indifference Swann had been able to speak formerly of the i days

when he was loved, because beneath the words, he felt something else than them, and the immediate pain Vinteuil's little phrase had caused him by giving him back those very days themsleves as he had formerly felt them, and I understood but too well that the sensation the uneven paving-stones, the taste of the madeleine, had aroused in me, bore no relation to that which I had so often attempted to reconstruct of Venice, of Balbec and of Combray with the aid of a uniform memory. Moreover, I realised that life can be considered commonplace in spite of its appearing so beautiful at particular moments because in the former case one judges and underrates it on quite other grounds than itself, upon images which have no life in them. At most I noted additionally that the difference there is between each real impression — differences which explain why a uniform pattern of life cannot resemble it — can probably be ascribed to this: that the slightest word we have spoken at a particular period of our life, the most insignificant gesture to which we have given vent, were surrounded, bore upon them the reflection of things which logically were unconnected with them, were indeed isolated from them by the intelligence which did not need them for reasoning purposes but in the midst of which — here, the pink evening-glow upon the floral wall-decoration of a rustic restaurant, a feeling of hunger, sexual desire, enjoyment of luxury — there, curling waves beneath the blue of a morning sky enveloping musical phrases which partly emerge like mermaids' shoulders — the most simple act or gesture remains enclosed as though in a thousand jars of which each would be filled with things of different colours, odours and temperature; not to mention that those vases placed at intervals during the growing years throughout which we ceaselessly change, if only in dream or in thought, are situated at completely different, levels and produce the impression of strangely varying climates. It is true that these changes have occurred to us without our being aware of them; but the distance between the memory which suddenly returns and our present personality as similarly between two memories of different years and places, is so great that it would suffice, apart from their specific uniqueness, to make comparison between; them impossible. Yes, if a memory, thanks to forgetfulness, has been unable to contract any tie, to forge any link between itself and the present, if it has remained in its own place, of its own date, if it has kept its distance, its isolation in the hollow of a valley or on the peak of a mountain, it makes us suddenly breathe an air new to us just because it is an air we have formerly breathed, an air purer than that the poets have vainly called Paradisiacal, which offers that deep sense of renewal only because it has been breathed before, inasmuch as the

true paradises are paradises we have lost. And on the way to it, I noted that there would be great difficulties in creating the work of art I now felt ready to undertake without its being consciously in my mind, for I should have to construct each of its successive parts out of a different sort of material. The material which would be suitable for memories at the side of the sea would be quite different from those of afternoons at Venice which would demand a material of its own, a new one, of a special transparency and sonority, compact, fresh and pink, different again if I wanted to describe evenings at Rivebelle where, in the dining-room open upon the garden, the heat was beginning to disintegrate, to descend and come to rest on the earth, while the rose-covered walls of the restaurant were lighted up by the last ray of the setting sun and the last water-colours of daylight lingered in the sky. I passed rapidly over all these things, being summoned more urgently to seek the cause of that happiness with its peculiar character of insistent certainty, the search for which I had formerly adjourned. And I began to discover the cause by comparing those varying happy impressions which had the common quality of being felt simultaneously at the actual moment and at a distance in time, because of which common quality the noise of the spoon upon the plate, the unevenness of the paving-stones, the taste of the madeleine, imposed the past upon the present and made me hesitate as to which time I was existing in. Of a truth, the being within me which sensed this impression, sensed what it had in common in former days and now, sensed its extra-temporal character, a being which only appeared when through the medium of the identity of present and past, it found itself in the only setting in which it could exist and enjoy the essence of things, that is, outside Time. That explained why my apprehensions on the subject of my death had ceased from the moment when I had unconsciously recognised the taste of the little madeleine because at that moment the being that I then had been was an extra-temporal being and in consequence indifferent to the vicissitudes of the future. That being had never come to me, had never manifested itself except when I was inactive and in a sphere beyond the enjoyment of the moment, that was my prevailing condition every time that analogical miracle had enabled me to escape from the present. Only that being had the power of enabling me to recapture former days, Time Lost, in the face of which all the efforts of my memory and of my intelligence came to nought.

And perhaps, if just now I thought that Bergotte had spoken falsely when he referred to the joys of spiritual life it was because I then gave the name of spiritual life to logical reasonings which had no relation with it, which, had no

relation with what now existed in me — just as I found society and life wearisome because I was judging them from memories without Truth while now that a veritable moment of the past had been born again in me three separate times, I had such a desire to live.

Nothing but a moment of the past? Much more perhaps; something which being common to the past and the present, is more essential than both.

How many times in the course of my life reality had disappointed me because at the moment when I perceived it, my imagination, which was my only means of enjoying beauty, could not be applied to it by virtue of the inevitable law which only allows us to imagine that which is absent. And now suddenly the effect of this hard law had become neutralised, held in suspense by a marvellous expedient of nature which had caused a sensation to flash to me — sound of a spoon and of a hammer, uneven paving-stones — simultaneously in the past which permitted my imagination to grasp it and in the present in which the shock to my senses caused by the noise had effected a contact between the dreams of the imagination and that of which they are habitually deprived, namely, the idea of existence — and thanks to that stratagem had permitted that being within me to secure, to isolate and to render static for the duration of a lightning flash that which it can never wholly grasp, a fraction of Time in its pure essence. When, with such a shudder of happiness, I heard the sound common, at once, to the spoon touching the plate, to the hammer striking the wheel, to the unevenness of the paving-stones in the courtyard of the Guermantes' mansion and the Baptistry of St. Mark's, it was because that being within me can only be nourished on the essence of things and finds in them alone its subsistence and its delight. It languishes in the observation by the senses of the present sterilised by the intelligence awaiting a future constructed by the will out of fragments of the past and the present from which it removes still more reality, keeping that only which serves the narrow human aim of utilitarian purposes. But let a sound, a scent already heard and breathed in the past be heard and breathed anew, simultaneously in the present and in the past, real without being actual, ideal without being abstract, then instantly the permanent and characteristic essence hidden in things is freed and our true being which has for long seemed dead but was not so in other ways awakes and revives, thanks to this celestial nourishment. An instant liberated from the order of time has recreated in us man liberated from the same order, so that he should be conscious of it. And indeed we understand his faith in his happiness even if the mere taste of a madeleine does not logically seem to justify it; we understand that the name of death is

meaningless to him for, placed beyond Time, how can he fear the future? But that illusion which brought near me a moment of the past incongruous to the present, would not last. Certainly we can prolong the visions of memory by willing it which is no more than turning over an illustrated book. Thus formerly, when I was going for the first time to the Princesse de Guermantes' from the sun-lit court of our house in Paris, I had lazily focused my mind at one moment on the square where the church of Combray stood, at another on the sea shore of Balbec, as I might have amused myself by turning over a folio of water-colours of different places I had visited and cataloguing these mnemonic illustrations with the egotistical pleasure of a collector, I might have said: "After all, I have seen some beautiful things in my life." Doubtless, in that event, my memory would have been asserting different sensations but it would only have been combining their homogeneous elements. That was a different thing from the three memories I had just experienced which, so far from giving me a more flattering notion of my personality, had, on the contrary, almost made me doubt its very existence. Thus, on the day when I dipped the madeleine in the hot infusion, in the heart of that place where I happened to be (whether that place was, as then, my room in Paris or, as to-day, the Prince de Guermantes' library) there had been the irradiation of a small zone within and around myself, a sensation (taste of the dipped madeleine, metallic sound, feeling of the uneven steps) common to the place where I then was and also to the other place (my Aunt Léonie's room, the railway carriage, the Baptistry of St. Mark's). And, at the very moment when I was thus reasoning, the strident sound of a water-pipe, exactly like those long screeches which one heard on board excursion steamers at Balbec, made me experience (as had happened to me once in a large restaurant in Paris at the sight of a luxurious dining-room half empty, summerlike and hot) something more than a mere sensation like one I had, one late afternoon at Balbec, when, all the tables symmetrically laid with linen and silver, the large bow-windows wide open to the sun slowly setting on the sea with its wandering ships, I had only to step across the window-frame hardly higher than my ankle, to be with Albertine and her friends who were walking on the sea-wall. It was not only the echo, the duplication of a past sensation that the water-conduit had caused me to experience, it was the sensation itself. In that case as in all the preceding ones, the common sensation had sought to recreate the former place around itself whilst the material place in which the sensation occurred, opposed all the resistance of its mass to this immigration into a Paris mansion of a Norman seashore and a railway-embankment. The marine dining-room of

Balbec with its damask linen prepared like altar cloths to receive the setting sun had sought to disturb the solidity of the Guermantes' mansion, to force its doors, and had made the sofas round me quiver an instant as on another occasion the tables of the restaurant in Paris had done. In all those resurrections, the distant place engendered by the sensation common to them all, came to grips for a second with the material place, like a wrestler. The material place was always the conqueror and always the conquered seemed to me the more beautiful, so much so that I remained in a state of ecstasy upon the uneven pavement as I did with my cup of tea, trying to retain with the moment of their appearance, to make reappear as they escaped, that Combray, that Venice, that Balbec, invading, yet repelled, which came before my eyes only immediately to abandon me in the midst of a newer scene which yet was penetrable by the past. And if the material place had not been at once the conqueror I think I should have lost consciousness; for these resurrections of the past, for the second that they last, are so complete that they not only force our eyes to cease seeing the room which is before them in order to see the railway bordered by trees or the rising tide, they force our nostrils to breathe the air of those places which are, nevertheless, so far away, our will to choose between the diverse alternatives it offers us, our whole personality to believe itself surrounded by them, or at least to stumble between them and the material world, in the bewildering uncertainty we experience from an ineffable vision on the threshold of sleep.

So, that which the being within me, three or four times resurrected, had experienced, were perhaps fragments of lives snatched from time which, though viewed from eternity, were fugitive. And yet I felt that the happiness given me at those rare intervals in my life was the only fruitful and authentic one. Does not the sign of unreality in others consist in their inability to satisfy us, as, for instance, in the case of social pleasures which, at best, cause that discomfort which is provoked by unwholesome food, when friendship is almost a pretence, since, for whatever moral reasons he may seek it, the artist who gives up an hour of work to converse for that time with a friend knows that he is sacrificing a reality to an illusion (friends being friends only in the sense of a sweet madness which overcomes us in life and to which we yield, though at the back of our minds we know it to be the error of a lunatic who imagines the furniture to be alive and talks to it) owing to the sadness which follows its satisfaction — like that I felt the day I was first introduced to Albertine when I gave myself the trouble, after all not great, to obtain something — to make the acquaintance of the girl — which only seemed to me unimportant because I had obtained it. Even

a deeper pleasure such as that which I might have felt when I loved Albertine was in reality only perceived by contrast with my anguish when she was no longer there, for when I was sure she would return as on the day when she came back from the Trocadéro, I only experienced a vague boredom whereas the deeper I penetrated into the sound of the spoon on the plate or the taste of tea, the more exalted became my delight that my Aunt Léonie's chamber and later the whole of Combray and both its sides had entered my room. And now I was determined to concentrate my mind on that contemplation of the essence of things, to define it to myself, but how and by what means? Doubtless at the moment when the stiffness of the table-napkin had brought back Balbec to me and, for an instant, caressed my imagination not only with a view of the sea as it was that morning but with the scent of the room, with the swiftness of the wind, with an appetite for breakfast, with wavering between various walks, all those things attached to a sensation of space like winged wheels in their delirious race, doubtless at the moment when the unevenness of the two pavements had prolonged in all directions and dimensions my arid and crude visions of Venice and St. Mark's, and all the emotions I had then experienced, relating the square to the church, the landing-stage to the square, the canal to the landing-stage, to everything the eye saw, to that whole world of longings which is in reality only perceived by the spirit, I had been tempted to set forth if not to Venice because of the inclement season, at least, to Balbec. But I did not stop an instant at that thought; not only did I realise that countries were not that which their name pictured to me and my imagination represented them but that it was only in my dreams, and hardly then, that a place consisting of pure matter, was spread out before me clear and distinct from those common things one can see and touch. But even in regard to those images of another kind, of the memory, I knew that I had not found any beauty in Balbec when I went there and that the beauty memory had left in me was no longer the same at my second visit. I had too clearly proved the impossibility of expecting from reality that which was within myself. It was not in the Square of St. Mark any more than during my second visit to Balbec or on my return to Tansonville to see Gilberte that I should find Lost Time and the journey which once more tempted me with the illusion that these old impressions existed outside myself and were situated in a certain spot could not be the means I was seeking. I would not allow myself to be lured again; it was necessary for me to know at last, if indeed it were possible to attain that which, disappointed as I had always been by places and people, I had (in spite of a concert-piece by Vinteuil which had seemed to say the contrary)

believed unrealisable. I was not, therefore, going to attempt another experience on the road which I had long known to lead nowhere. Impressions such as those which I was attempting to render permanent could only vanish at the contact of a direct enjoyment which was powerless to give birth to them. The only way was to attempt to know them more completely where they existed, that is, within myself and by so doing to illuminate them in their depths. I had never known any pleasure at Balbec any more than I had in living with Albertine except what was perceptible afterwards. And if in recapitulating the disappointments of my life as I had so far lived it, they led me to believe that its reality must reside elsewhere than in action and, if, in following the vicissitudes of my life, I did not summarise them as a matter of pure hazard, I well knew that the disappointment of a journey and the disappointment of love were not different disappointments but varying aspects which, according to the conditions to which they apply, are inflicted upon us by the impotence, difficult for us to realise, of material pleasure and effective action. Again reflecting on that extra-temporal delight caused whether by the sound of the spoon or by the taste of the madeleine, I said to myself: “Was this the happiness suggested by the little phrase of the Sonata, which Swann was deceived into identifying with the pleasure of love and was not endowed to find in artistic creation; that happiness which had made me respond as to a presentiment of something more supraterrestrial still than the little phrase of the Sonata, to the red and mysterious appeal of that septet which Swann did not know, having died like so many others, before the truth, meant for them, had been revealed?” Moreover, it would have done him no good, for that phrase might symbolise an appeal but it could not create the force which would have made of Swann the writer he was not. And yet I reminded myself after a moment and after having thought over those resurrections of memory, that in another way, obscure impressions had sometimes, as far back as Combray and on the Guer-mantes’ side, demanded my thought, in the same way as those mnemonic resurrections, yet they did not contain an earlier experience but a new truth, a precious image which I was trying to discover by efforts of the kind one makes to remember something as though our loveliest ideas were like musical airs which might come to us without our having ever heard them and which we force ourselves to listen to and write down. I reminded myself with satisfaction, (because it proved that I was the same then and that it represented a fundamental quality of my nature) and also with sadness in the thought that since then I had made no progress, that, as far back as at Combray, I was attempting to concentrate my mind on a compelling image, a cloud, a triangle, a belfry, a

flower, a pebble, believing that there was perhaps something else under those symbols I ought to try to discover, a thought which these objects were expressing in the manner of hieroglyphic characters which one might imagine only represented material objects. Doubtless such deciphering was difficult, but it alone could yield some part of the truth. For the truths which the intelligence apprehends through direct and clear vision in the daylight world are less profound and less necessary than those which life has communicated to us unconsciously through an intuition which is material only in so far as it reaches us through our senses and the spirit of which we can elicit. In fact, in this case as in the other, whether it was a question of impressions given me by a view of the Martinville belfry or memories like those of the two uneven paving-stones or the taste of the madeleine, it was necessary to attempt to interpret them as symbols of so many laws and ideas, by trying to think, that is, by trying to educe my sensation from its obscurity and con-vert it into an intellectual equivalent. And what other means were open to me than the creation of a work of art? Already the consequences pressed upon my spirit; for whether it was a question of memories like the sound of the spoon and the taste of the madeleine or of those verities expressed in forms the meaning of which I sought in my brain, where, belfries, wild herbs, what not, they composed a complex illuminated scroll, their first characteristic was that I was not free to choose them, that they had been given to me as they were. And I felt that that must be the seal of their authenticity. I had not gone to seek the two paving-stones in the courtyard against which I had struck. But it was precisely the fortuitousness, the inevitablity of the sensation which safeguarded the truth of the past it revived, of the images it set free, since we feel its effort to rise upwards to the light and the joy of the real recaptured. That fortuitousness is the guardian of the truth of the whole series of contemporary impressions which it brings in its train, with that infallible proportion of light and shade, of emphasis and omission, of memory and forgetfulness, of which the conscious memory or observation are ignorant.

That book of unknown signs within me (signs in relief it seemed, for my concentrated attention, as it explored my unconscious in its search, struck against them, circled round them like a diver sounding) no one could help me read by any rule, for its reading consists in an act of creation in which no one can take our place and in which no one can collaborate. And how many turn away from writing it, how many tasks will one not assume to avoid that one! Every event, whether it was the Dreyfus affair or the war, furnished excuses to writers for not deciphering that book; they wanted to assert the triumph of Justice, to

recreate the moral unity of the nation and they had no time to think of literature. But those were only excuses because either they did not possess or had ceased to possess genius, that is, instinct. For it is instinct which dictates duty and intelligence which offers pretexts for avoiding it. But excuses do not exist in art, intentions do not count there, the artist must at all times follow his instinct, which makes art the most real thing, the most austere school in life and the true last judgment. That book which is the most arduous of all to decipher is the only one which reality has dictated, the only one printed within us by reality itself. Whatever idea life has left in us, its material shape, mark of the impression it has made on us, is still the necessary pledge of its truth. The ideas formulated by the intellect have only a logical truth, a possible truth, their selection is arbitrary. Our only book is that one not made by ourselves whose characters are already imaged. It is not that the ideas we formulate may not be logically right but that we do not know if they are true. Intuition alone, however tenuous its consistency, however improbable its shape, is a criterion of truth and, for that reason, deserves to be accepted by the mind because it alone is capable, if the mind can extract that truth, of bringing it to greater perfection and of giving it pleasure without alloy. Intuition for the writer is what experiment is for the learned, with the difference that in the case of the learned the work of the intelligence precedes and in the case of the writer it follows. That which we have not been forced to decipher, to clarify by our own personal effort, that which was made clear before, is not ours. Only that issues from ourselves which we ourselves extract from the darkness within ourselves and which is unknown to others. And as art exactly recomposes life, an atmosphere of poetry surrounds those truths within ourselves to which we attain, the sweetness of a mystery which is but the twilight through which we have passed. An oblique ray from the setting sun brings instantly back to me a time of which I had never thought again, when, in my childhood, my Aunt Léonie had a fever which Dr. Percepied had feared was typhoid and they had made me stop for a week in the little room Eulalie had in the church square, where there was only a matting on the floor and a dimity curtain at the window humming in the sunlight to which I was unaccustomed. And when I think how the memory of that little room of an old servant suddenly added to my past life an extension so different from its other side and so delightful, I remember, as a contrast, the nullity of impressions left on my mind by the most sumptuous parties in the most princely mansions. The only thing that was distressing in Eulalie’s room was that owing to the proximity of the viaduct, one heard the noise of passing trains at night. But as I knew that this

roaring proceeded from regulated machines, it did not terrify me as much as the roars of a mammoth, prowling near by in savage freedom, would have done in prehistoric days.

Thus I had already reached the conclusion that we are in no wise free in the presence of a work of art, that we do not create it as we please but that it pre-exists in us and we are compelled as though it were a law of nature to discover it because it is at once hidden from us and necessary. But is not that discovery, which art may enable us to make, most precious to us, a discovery of that which for most of us remains for ever unknown, our true life, reality as we have ourselves felt it and which differs so much from that which we had believed that we are filled with delight when chance brings us an authentic revelation of it? I was sure of this from the very falsity of so-called realistic art which would not be so deceptive if we had not in the course of life, contracted the habit of giving what we feel an expression so different that, after a time, we believe it to be reality itself. I felt that it was not necessary for me to incommode myself with the diverse literary theories which had for a time troubled me — notably those that criticism had developed at the time of the Dreyfus affair and which had again resumed their sway during the war, which tended to "make the artist come out of his ivory tower" and, instead of using frivolous or sentimental subjects as his material, to picture great working-class movements or if not the crowd, at all events rather than insignificant idlers —("I avow," said Bloch, "that the portraits of these futile people are indifferent to me")— noble intellectuals or heroes. Before even considering their logical content, these theories seemed to me to denote amongst those who entertained them, a proof of inferiority like a well brought-up child, who, being sent out to lunch at a friend's house, hearing someone say: "We speak out, we are frank," realises that the words signify a moral quality inferior to a pure and simple good act about which nothing is said. Authentic art does not proclaim itself for it is achieved in silence. Moreover, those who thus theorise, use ready-made expressions which singularly resemble those of the imbeciles they castigate. And perhaps it is rather by the quality of the language than by the particular aesthetic that we can judge the level which intellectual and moral work has reached. But inversely this quality of language (and we can study the laws of character equally well in a serious as in a frivolous subject as an anatomist can study the laws of anatomy on the body of an imbecile just as well as on that of a man of talent; the great moral laws as well as those which govern the circulation of the blood or renal elimination making small difference between the intellectual value of individuals) with which

theorists think they can dispense, those who admire theorists believe to be of no great intellectual value and in order to discern it, require it to be expressed in direct terms because they are unable to infer it from the beauty of imagery. Hence that vulgar temptation of an author to write intellectual works. A great indelicacy. A work in which there are theories is like an object upon which the price is marked. Further, this last only expresses a value which, in literature, is diminished by logical reasoning. We reason, that is, our mind wanders, each time our courage fails to force us to pursue an intuition through all the successive stages which end in its fixation, in the expression of its own reality. The reality that must be expressed resides, I now realised, not in the appearance of the subject but in the degree of penetration of that intuition to a depth where that appearance matters little, as symbolised by the sound of the spoon upon the plate, the stiffness of the table-napkin, which were more precious for my spiritual renewal than many humanitarian, patriotic, international conversations. More style, I had heard said in those days, more literature of life. One can imagine how many of M. de Norpois' simple theories "against flute-players" had flowered again since the war. For all those who, lacking artistic sensibility, that is, submission to the reality within, may be equipped with the faculty of reasoning for ever about art, and even were they diplomatists or financiers associated with the "realities" of the present into the bargain, they will readily believe that literature is a sort of intellectual game which is destined to be eliminated more and more in the future. Some of them wanted the novel to be a sort of cinematographic procession. This conception was absurd. Nothing removes us further from the reality we perceive within ourselves than such a cinematographic vision. Just now as I entered this library, I remembered what the Goncourts say about the beautiful original editions it contains and I promised myself to have a look at them whilst I was shut in here. And still following my argument, I took up one after another of the precious volumes without paying much attention to them when, inattentively opening one of them, *François le Champi,* by George Sand, I felt myself disagreeably affected as by some impression out of harmony with my thoughts, until I suddenly realised with an emotion which nearly brought tears to my eyes how much that impression was in harmony with them. It was as at the moment when in the mortuary vault the undertakers' men are lowering the coffin of a man who has rendered services to his country and his son pressing the hands of the last friends who file past the tomb, suddenly hearing a flourish of trumpets under the windows, would be horrified by what he supposed a mockery designed to insult his sorrow, while

another who had controlled himself until then, would be unable to restrain his tears because he realised that what he heard was the music of a regiment which was sharing his mourning and wanting to render homage to the remains of his father. Such was the painful impression I had experienced in reading the title of a book in the Prince de Guermantes' library, a title which communicated the idea to me that literature really does offer us that world of mystery I had no longer found in it. And yet, *François le Champi* was not a very remarkable book but the name, like the name of Guermantes, was unlike those I had known later. The memory of what had seemed incomprehensible when my mother read it to me, was aroused by its title and in the same way that the name of Guermantes (when I had not seen the Guermantes' for a long time) contained for me the whole of feudalism,— so *François le Champi*contained the whole essence of the novel — dispossessing for an instant the commonplace ideas of which the stuffy novels of George Sand are composed. At a dinner party where thought is always superficial I might no doubt have spoken of *François le Champi* and the Guermantes' as though neither were associated with Combray. But when, as at this moment, I was alone, I plunged to a greater depth. At that time the idea that a particular individual whose acquaintance I had made in society was the cousin of Mme de Guermantes, that is to say, the cousin of a personage on a magic lantern slide, seemed to me incomprehensible and just as much, that the finest books I had read should be, I do not even say superior which they nevertheless were but equal to this extraordinary *François le Champi*. This was an old childish impression with which my memories of childhood and of my family were tenderly associated and which at first I had not recognised. At the first instant I had angrily asked myself who this stranger was who had done me a violence and the stranger was myself, the child I once was whom the book had revived in me, for recognising only the child in me, the book had at once summoned him, wanting only to be seen with his eyes, only to be loved with his heart and only to talk to him. And that book my mother had read aloud to me almost until morning at Combray, retained for me all the charm of that night. Certainly "the pen" of George Sand, to use one of Brichot's expressions, (he loved to say that a book was written by "a lively pen") did not appear to me a magical pen as it so long did to my mother before she modelled her literary tastes on mine. But it was a pen I had unconsciously electrified, as schoolboys sometimes amuse themselves by doing, and now a thousand trifles of Combray which I had not for so long seen, leaped lightly and spontaneously forth and came and hung on head over heels to the magnet in an endless chain vibrating

with memories. Certain minds which love mystery like to believe that objects preserve something of the eyes which have looked at them, that monuments and pictures are seen by us under an impalpable veil which the contemplative love of so many worshippers has woven about them through the centuries. That chimera would become true if they transposed it into the domain of the only reality there is for us all, into the domain of their own sensibility.

Yes, in that sense and only in that sense; but much more so, for if we see again a thing which we looked at formerly it brings back to us, together with our past vision, all the imagery with which it was instinct. This is because objects — a book bound like others in its red cover — as soon as they have been perceived by us become something immaterial within us, partake of the same nature as our preoccupations or our feelings at that time and combine, indissolubly with them. A name read in a book of former; days contains within its syllables the swift wind and the brilliant sun of the moment when we read it. In the slightest sensation conveyed by the humblest aliment, the smell of coffee and milk, we recover that vague hope of fine weather which enticed us when the day was dawning and the morning sky uncertain; a sun-ray is a vase filled with perfumes, with sounds, with moments, with various humours, with climates. It is that essence which art worthy of the name must express and if it fails, one can yet derive a lesson from its failure (while one can never derive anything from the successes of realism) namely that that essence is in a measure subjective and incommunicable.

More than this, a thing we saw at a certain period, a book we read, does not remain for ever united only with what was then around us; it remains just as faithfully one with us as we then were and can only be recovered by the sensibility restoring the individual as he then was. If, ever in thought, I take up *François le Champi* in the library, immediately a child rises within me and replaces me, who alone has the right to read that title *François le Champi* and who reads it as he read it then with the same impression of the weather out in the garden, with the same old dreams about countries and life, the same anguish of the morrow. If I see a thing of another period, another young man will emerge. And my personality of to-day is only an abandoned quarry which believes that all it contains is uniform and monotonous, but from which memory, like a sculptor of ancient Greece, produces innumerable statues. I say, everything we see again, for books, behaving in that respect like things, through the way their cover opens, through the quality of the paper, can preserve within themselves as vivid a memory of how I then imagined Venice or of the wish I had to go there,

as the sentences themselves. More vivid even, for the latter are sometimes an impediment like the photograph of a friend whom one recalls less after looking at it than when one contents oneself with thinking of him. Certainly in the case of many books of my youth, even, alas, those by Bergotte himself, when I happened to take them up on an evening I was tired, it was as though I had taken a train in the hope of obtaining repose by seeing different scenes and by breathing the atmosphere of former days. It often happens that the desired evocation is hindered by prolonged reading. There is one of Bergotte's books (the copy in this library contained a toadying and most platitudinous dedication to the Prince) which I read through one winter day some time ago when I could not see Gilberte, and I failed to discover those pages I formerly so much loved. Certain words made me think they were those pages but they were not. Where was the beauty I then found in them? Yet the snow which covered the Champs Èlysées on the day I read it still covers the volume. I see it still. And for that reason, had I been tempted to become a bibliophile like the Prince de Guermantes, I should only have been one in a way of my own, one who seeks a beauty independent of the value proper to the book and which consists for collectors in knowing the libraries through which it has passed, that it was given when such and such an event occurred to such and such a sovereign, to such and such a celebrity, in following its life from sale to sale; that beauty of a book which is in a sense historical, would not have been lost upon me. But I should extract that beauty with better will from the history of my own life, that is to say, not as a book-fancier; and it would often happen that I attached that beauty, not to the material volume itself but to a work such as this *François le Champi* contemplated for the first time in my little room at Combray during that night, perhaps the sweetest and the saddest of my life, when, alas, (at a time when the mysterious Guermantes seemed very inaccessible to me) I had wrung from my parents that first abdication from which I was able to date the decline of my health and of my will, my renunciation of a difficult task which every ensuing day made more painful — a task reassumed to-day in the library of those very Guermantes, on the most wonderful day when not only the former gropings of my thought but even the aim of my life and perhaps that of art were illuminated. Moreover, I should have been capable of interesting myself in the copies of books themselves in a living sense. The first edition of a work would have been more precious to me than the others but I should have understood by the first edition the one I read for the first time. I should seek original editions but by that I should mean books from which I got an original impression. For the

impressions that follow are no longer original. I should collect the bindings of novels of former days, but they would be the days when I read my first novels, the days when my father repeated so often “Sit up straight”. Like the dress in which we have seen a woman for the first time, they could help me to recover my love of then, the beauty which I had supplanted by so many images, ever less loved; in order to find it again, I who am no longer the self who felt it, must give place to the self I then was in order that he shall recall what he alone knew, what the self of to-day does not know. The library which I should thus collect would have a greater value still, for the books I read formerly at Combray, at Venice, enriched now by memory with spacious illuminations representing the church of Saint-Hilaire, the gondola moored at the foot of San Giorgio Maggiore on the Grand Canal incrusted with flashing sapphires, would have become worthy of those medallioned scrolls and historic bibles which the collector never opens in order to read the text but only to be again enchanted by the colours with which some competitor of Fouquet has embellished them and which constitute all the value of the work. And yet to open those books read formerly only to look at the images which did not then adorn them would seem to me so dangerous that even in that sense, the only one I understand, I should not be tempted to become a bibliophile. I know too well how easily the images left by the mind are effaced by the mind. It replaces the old ones by new which have not the same power of resurrection. And if I still had the *François le Champi* which my mother selected one day from the parcel of books my grandmother was to give me for my birthday, I would never look at it; I should be too much afraid that, little by little, my impressions of to-day would insert themselves in it and blot out the earlier ones, I should be too fearful of its becoming so much a thing of the present that when I asked it to evoke again the child who spelt out its title in the little room at Combray, that child, unable to recognise its speech, would no longer respond to my appeal and would be for ever buried in oblivion.

The idea of a popular art like that of a patriotic art, even if it were not dangerous, seems to me absurd. If it were a matter of making it accessible to the masses one would have to sacrifice the delicacies of form “suitable for idle people”; and I had frequented people in society enough to know that it is they who are the veritable unlettered not the working electricians. In that respect a popular art-form should rather be intended for members of the Jockey Club than for those of the General Confederation of Labour; as to subjects, popular novels intoxicate the people like books written for children. They seek distraction through reading, and workmen are as inquisitive about princes as princes are

about workmen. From the beginning of the war M. Barrés said that the artist (such as Titian) must above all work for the glory of his country. But he could only serve it as an artist, that is to say, on the condition, when he studies the laws of art, serves his apprenticeship and makes discoveries as intricate as those of science, that he must think of nothing — were it even his fatherland — except the truth he has to face. Do not let us imitate the revolutionaries who on account of their civic spirit despised when they did not destroy the works of Watteau and La Tour, painters who did more for the honour of France than all who took part in the Revolution. A soft-hearted person would not, perhaps, of his own accord choose anatomy as a subject of study. It was not the goodness of his virtuous heart, great though that was, which made Choderlos de Laclos write *Liaisons dangereuses* nor was it Flaubert's preference for the small or great *bourgeoisie* which made him select "Madame Bovary" and "*L'Education sentimentale*" as subjects. Some people say that the art of a period of speed must be brief like those who said the war would be short before it had taken place. By the same reasoning, the railway should have killed contemplation. Yet it was vain to regret the period of stage-coaches for the automobile, in taking their place, still stops for tourists in front of abandoned churches.

A picture of life brings with it multiple and varied sensations. The sight, for instance, of the cover of a book which has been read spins from the character of its title the moonbeams of a distant summer-night. The taste of our morning coffee brings us that vague hope of a fine day which formerly so often smiled at us in the unsettled dawn from a fluted bowl of porcelain which seemed like hardened milk. An hour is not merely an hour, it is a vase filled with perfumes, with sounds, with projects, with climates. What we call reality is a relation between those sensations and those memories which simultaneously encircle us — a relation which a cinematographic vision destroys because its form separates it from the truth to which it pretends to limit itself — that unique relation which the writer must discover in order that he *may link two different states of being together for ever in a phrase. In describing objects one can make those which figure in a particular place succeed each other indefinitely; the truth will only begin to emerge from the moment that the writer takes two different objects, posits their relationship, the analogue in the world of art to the only relationship of causal law in the world of science, and encloses it within the circle of fine style. In this, as in life, he fuses a quality common to two sensations, extracts their essence and in order to withdraw them from the contingencies of time, unites them in a metaphor, thus chaining them together with the indefinable bond*

of a verbal alliance. Was not nature herself from this point of view, on the track of art, was she not the beginning of art, she who often only permitted me to realise the beauty of an object long afterwards in another, mid-day at Combray only through the sound of its bells, mornings at Doncières only through the groans of our heating apparatus. The relationship may be of little interest, the objects commonplace, the style bad, but unless there is that relationship, there is nothing. A literature which is content with "describing things", with offering a wretched summary of their lines and surfaces, is, in spite of its prétention to realism, the furthest from reality, the one which impoverishes us and saddens us the most, however much it may talk of glory and grandeur, for it abruptly severs communication between our present self, the past of which objects retain the essence and the future in which they encourage us to search for it again. But there is more. If reality were that sort of waste experience approximately identical in everyone because when we say: "bad weather", "war", "cab-stand", "lighted restaurant", "flower garden", everybody knows what we mean — if reality were that, no doubt a sort of cinematographic film of these things would suffice and "style", "literature" isolating itself from that simple datum would be an artificial hors d'oeuvre. But is it so in reality? If I tried to render conscious to myself what takes place in us at the moment a circumstance or an event makes a certain impression, if, on the day I crossed the Vivonne bridge, the shadow of a cloud on the water made me jump for joy and ejaculate "hullo!" if, listening to a phrase of Bergotte, all I could make of my impression were an expression such as "Admirable!" which did not specially apply to it, if, annoyed by somebody's bad behaviour, Bloch uttered words with no particular relevance to so sordid an adventure: such as "I consider it fantastic for a man to behave like that", or if flattered at being well received by the Guermantes and perhaps a little drunk on their wine, I could not help saying to myself in an undertone as I left them: "After all, they're charming people whom it would be delightful to spend one's life with," I perceived that to express those impressions, to write that essential book, whichus the only true one, a great writer does not, in the current meaning of the word, invent it, but, since it exists already in each one of us, interprets it. The duty and the task of a writer are those of an interpreter.

And if, where an inaccurate mode of expression inspired by the writer's self-esteem is concerned, the straight-ening-out of the oblique inner utterance (which diverges more and more from the original mental impression) until it makes one with the straight line which should have issued from that impression, if that straightening-out is an uneasy process against which our idleness rebels, there

are other cases, of love, for instance, where that same straightening-out becomes painful. All our feigned indifferences, all our natural indignation at its inevitable lies, so like our own, in a word, all that we constantly said when we were unhappy or deceived, not only to the being we loved but even to ourselves while awaiting her, sometimes aloud in the silence of our chamber, marked by: “No, really such behaviour is unbearable,” and “I’ve decided to see you for the last time. I can’t deny the pain it causes,” to bring back what was really and truly felt from where it had strayed, is to abolish everything we most clung to, the matter of our passionate self-communion during fevered moments when, face to face with ourselves, we asked what letter we could write, what should be our next step.

Even when we seek artistic delights for the sake of the impression they make on us, we manage quickly to dispense with the impression itself and to fix our attention on that element in it which enables us to experience pleasure without penetrating to its depth, and thinking we can communicate it to others in conversation because we shall be talking to them about something common to them and to us, the personal root impression is eliminated. In the very moments when we are the most disinterested spectators of nature, of society, of love, of art itself — as all impression is two-fold, half-sheathed in the object, prolonged in ourselves by another half which we alone can know — we hasten to neglect the latter, that is to say, the only one on which we should concentrate and fasten merely on the other half which, being unfathomable because it is exterior to ourselves, causes us no fatigue; we consider the effort to perceive the little groove which a musical phrase or the view of a church has hollowed in ourselves too arduous. But we play the symphony over and over again, we go back to look at the church until — in that flight far away from our own life which we have not the courage to face called erudition — we get to know them as well, and in the same way as the most accomplished musical or archaeological amateur. And how many stop at that point, get nothing from their impression, and ageing useless and unsatisfied, remain sterile celibates of art! To them come the same discontents as to virgins and idlers whom the fecundity of labour would cure. They are more exalted when they talk about works of art than real artists, for their enthusiasm, not being an incentive to the hard task of penetrating to the depths, expands outwards, heats their conversation and empurples their faces; they think they are doing something by shrieking at the tops of their voices: “Bravo! Bravo!” after the performance of a composition they like. But these manifestations do not force them to clarify the character of their admiration, so

they learn nothing. Nevertheless, this futile admiration overflows in their most ordinary conversation and causes them to make gestures, grimaces and movements of the head when they talk of art: “I was at a concert where they were playing music which I can assure you did not thrill me. Then they began the quartette. Ah! My word! That changed it! (The face of the amateur at that moment expresses anxious apprehension as if he were thinking: ‘I see sparks flying, there’s a smell of burning, there’s a fire!’) Bless my soul! This is maddening! It’s badly composed but it’s flabbergasting! This is no ordinary work.” But laughable as those amateurs may be, they are not altogether to be despised. They are the first attempts of nature to create an artist, as formless and unviable as the antediluvian animals which preceded those of to-day and which were not created to endure. These whimsical and sterile amateurs affect us much as did those first mechanical contrivances which could not leave the earth, in which, though the secret means remained to be discovered, was contained the aspiration of flight. “And, old fellow,” adds the amateur, taking you by the arm, “it’s the eighth time I’ve heard it and I swear to you it won’t be the last.” And in truth since they do not assimilate from art what is really nourishing, they perpetually need artistic stimulus, because they are a prey to a craving which can never be assuaged. So they will go on applauding the same work for a long time to come, believing that their presence is a duty, such as others fulfil at a board-meeting or a funeral. Then come other works whether of literature, of painting or of music which create opposition. For the faculty of starting ideas or systems and above all of assimilating them has always been much more frequent even amongst those who create, than real taste, but has been extended since the reviews, the literary papers, have multiplied (and with them the artificial profession of writers and artists). Thus the best of the young, the most intelligent, the most intense, preferred works of an elevated moral, sociological or religious tendency. They imagined that such considerations constitute the value of a work, thus renewing the error of the Davids, the Chenavards, the Brunetières; they prefer to Bergotte whose lightest phrases really exacted a much deeper return to oneself, writers who seemed more profound only because they wrote less well. The complexity of Bergotte’s writing was only meant for society people, was the comment of these democrats, who thus did society people an honour they did not deserve. But from the moment that works of art are judged by reasoning, nothing is stable or certain, one can prove anything one likes. Whereas the reality of genius is a benefaction, an acquisition for the world at large, the presence of which must first be identified beneath the more obvious

modes of thought and style, criticism stops at this point and assesses writers by the form instead of the matter. It consecrates as a prophet a writer who, while expressing in arrogant terms his contempt for the school which preceded him, brings no new message. This constant aberration of criticism has reached a point where a writer would almost prefer to be judged by the general public (were it not that it is incapable of understanding the researches an artist has been attempting in a sphere unknown to it). For there is more analogy between the instinctive life of the public and the genius of a great writer which is itself but instinct, realised and perfected, to be listened to in a religious silence imposed upon all others, than there is in the superficial verbiage and changing criteria of self-constituted judges. Their wrangling renews itself every ten years for the kaleidoscope is not composed only of groups in society but of social, political and religious ideas which obtain a momentary expansion, thanks to their refraction in the masses but survive only so long as their novelty influences minds which exact little in the way of proof. Again, parties and schools succeed each other, always catering to the same mentalities, men of relative intelligence prone to extravagances from which minds more scrupulous and more difficult to convince, abstain. Unhappily, just because the former are only half-minds they require action to complete themselves and as through this they exercise more influence than superior minds, they impose themselves on the mass and create a constituency not merely of unmerited reputations and unjustifiable rancours but also of civil and exterior warfare from which a little self-criticism might have saved them. Now the enjoyment a well-balanced mind, a heart which is really alive, gets from the beautiful thought of a master, is undoubtedly wholesome, but valuable as are those who properly appreciate that thought (how many are there in twenty years?) they are reduced by their very enjoyment to being no more than the enlarged consciousness of another. A man may have done everything in his power to be loved by a woman who would only make him unhappy but has not succeeded, in spite of all his attempts during years, in obtaining an assignation with her. Instead of seeking to express his sufferings and the danger from which he has escaped, he ceaselessly re-reads this thought of Labruyère making it represent a thousand implications and the most moving memories of his own life: “Men often want to love and I do not know how to, they seek defeat without being able to encounter it and, if I may say so, are forced to remain free.” Whether this thought had this meaning or not for him who wrote it (for it to have that meaning he ought to have said “to be loved” instead of “to love” and it would have been more beautiful), it is certain that this sensitive man of letters

endows the thought with life, swells it with significance until it bursts within him and he cannot repeat it without a feeling of immense satisfaction, so completely true and beautiful does it seem to him, although, after all, he has added nothing to it and it remains simply a thought of Labruyère.

How can a literature of notations have any value since it is beneath the little things it notes that the reality exists (the grandeur in the distant sound of an aeroplane, in the outline of the belfry of Saint-Hilaire, the past in the savour of a madeleine) these being without significance in themselves if one does not disengage it from them. Accumulated little by little in the memory, the chain of all the obscure impressions where nothing! of what we actually experienced remains, constitutes our thought, our life, reality and it is that lie which a so-called "lived art" would only reproduce, an art as crude as life, without beauty, a reproduction so wearisome and futile of what our eyes have seen and our intelligence has observed, that one asks oneself how he who makes that his aim can find in it the exultant stimulus which gives zest to work. The grandeur of veritable art, to the contrary of what M. de Norpois called "a dilettante's amusement", is to recapture, to lay hold of, to make one with ourselves that reality far removed from the one we live in, from which we separate ourselves more and more as the knowledge which we substitute for it acquires a greater solidity and impermeability, a reality we run the risk of never knowing before we die but which is our real, our true life at last revealed and illumined, the only life which is really lived and which in one sense lives at every moment in all men as well as in the artist. But they do not see it because they do not seek to illuminate it. And thus their past is encumbered with innumerable "negatives" which remain useless because the intelligence has not "developed" them. To lay hold of our life; and also the life of others; for a writer's style and also a painter's are matters not of technique but of vision. It is the revelation, impossible by direct and conscious means, of the qualitative difference there is in the way in which we look at the world, a difference which, without art, would remain for ever each man's personal secret. By art alone we are able to get outside ourselves, to know what another sees of this universe which for him is not ours, the landscapes of which would remain as unknown to us as those of the moon. Thanks to art, instead of seeing one world, our own, we see it multiplied and as many original artists as there are, so many worlds are at our disposal, differing more widely from each other than those which roll round the infinite and which, whether their name be Rembrandt or Ver Meer, send us their unique rays many centuries after the hearth from which they emanate is extinguished. This labour of the artist to

discover a means of apprehending beneath matter and experience, beneath words, something different from their appearance, is of an exactly contrary nature to the operation in which pride, passion, intelligence and habit are constantly engaged within us when we spend our lives without self-communion, accumulating as though to hide our true impressions, the terminology for practical ends which we falsely call life. In short, this complex art is precisely the only living art. It alone expresses for others and makes us see, our own life, that life which cannot observe itself, the outer forms of which, when observed, need to be interpreted and often read upside down, in order to be laboriously deciphered. The work of our pride, our passion, our spirit of imitation, our abstract intelligence, our habits must be undone by art which takes the opposite course and returning to the depths where the real has its unknown being, makes us pursue it. It is, of course, a great temptation to recreate true life, to renew impressions. But courage of all kinds is required, even sentimental courage. For it means above all, abrogating our most cherished illusions, ceasing to believe in the objectivity of our own elaborations and, instead of soothing ourselves for the hundredth time with the words “she was very sweet”, reading into them “I liked kissing her”. Of course what I had experienced in hours of love every other man experiences. But what one has experienced is like certain negatives which show black until they are placed under a lamp and they too must be looked at from the back; we do not know what a thing is until we have approached it with our intelligence. Only when the intelligence illuminates it, when it has intellectualised it, we distinguish, and with how much difficulty, the shape of that which we have felt, and I realised also that the suffering I had formerly experienced with Gilberte in realising that our love has nothing to do with the being who inspires it, is salutary as a supplementary aid to knowledge. (For, however short a time our life may last it is only while we are suffering that our thoughts, in a constant state of agitation and change, cause the depths within us to surge as in a tempest to a height where we see that they are subject to laws which, until then, we could not observe, because the calm of happiness left those depths undisturbed. Perhaps only in the case of a few great geniuses is it possible for this movement to be constantly felt without their suffering turmoil and sadness; but again it is not certain, when we contemplate the spacious and uniform development of their serene achievements that we are not too much taking for granted that the buoyancy of the work implies that of its creator, who perhaps, on the contrary, was continuously unhappy.) But principally because if our love is not only for a Gilberte, what gives us so much pain is not that it is

also the love of an Albertine but because it is a more durable part of our soul than the various selves which successively die in us, each of which would selfishly retain it, a part of our soul which must, whatever the pain, detach itself from those beings so that we should understand and constitute their generality and impart the meaning of that love to all men, to the universal consciousness and not to one woman, then to another with which first one, then another of our successive selves has desired to unite.

It was, therefore, necessary for me to discover the meaning of the slightest signs that surrounded me (Guermantes, Albertine, Gilberte, Saint-Loup, Balbec, et cetera) which I had lost sight of owing to habit. We have to learn that to preserve and express reality when we have attained it, we must isolate it from everything that our habit of haste accumulates in opposition to it. Above all, I had, therefore to exclude words spoken by the lips but not by the mind; those humorous colloquialisms which after much social intercourse, we get accustomed to using artificially, which fill the mind with lies, those purely physical words uttered with a knowing smile by the writer who lowers himself by transcribing them, that little grimace which, for instance, constantly deforms the spoken phrase of a Sainte-Beuve, whereas real books must be children not of broad daylight and small-talk but of darkness and silence. And since art minutely reconstructs life round the verities one has apprehended in oneself, an atmosphere of poetry will always float round them, the sweetness of a mystery which is only the remains of twilight through which we have had to pass, the indication, like that of a measuring rod, of the depth of a work. (For that depth is not inherent in certain subjects as is believed by materialist-spiritual novelists, since they cannot penetrate beneath the world of appearances and their lofty intentions, like those virtuous tirades habitual to people who are incapable of the smallest kindly effort, must not prevent our observing that they have not even the mental power to throw off the ordinary banalities acquired by imitation.)

As to the verities which the intellect — even of highly endowed minds — gathers in the open road, in full daylight their value can be very great; but those verities have rigid outlines and are flat, they have no depth because no depths have been sounded to reach them — they have not been recreated. It often happens that writers who no longer exhibit these verities, as they grow old, only use their intelligence which has acquired more and more power; and though for this reason, their mature works are more able they have not the velvety quality of their youthful ones.

Nevertheless, I felt that the truths the intellect extracts from immediate

reality are not to be despised for they might enshrine, with matter less pure but, nevertheless, vitalised by the mind, intuitions the essence of which, being common to past and present, carries us beyond time, but which are too rare and precious to be the only elements in a work of art. I felt a mass of truths pressing on my notice, relative to passions, characters and habits which could be thus used. We can, perhaps, attach every creature who has caused us unhappiness to a divinity of which she is only the most fragmentary reflection, a divinity the contemplation of whom in the realm of idea will give us immediate happiness instead of our former pain. The whole art of living is to regard people who cause us suffering as, in a degree, enabling us to accept its divine form and thus to populate our daily life with divinities. The perception of these truths gave me joy albeit it reminded me that if I had discovered more than one of them through suffering, I had discovered as many in the course of the most commonplace indulgences. Then a new light arose in me, less brilliant indeed than the one that had made me perceive that a work of art is the only means of regaining lost time. And Ï understood that all the material of a literary work was in my past life, I understood that I had acquired it in the midst of frivolous amusements, in idleness, in tenderness and in pain, stored up by me without my divining its destination or even its survival, as the seed has in reserve all the ingredients which will nourish the plant. Like the seed I might die when the plant had developed and I might find I had lived for it without knowing it, without my life having ever seemed to require contact with the books I wanted to write and for which when I formerly sat down at my table, I could find no subject. Thus all my life up to that day might have been or might not have been summed up under the title: “A vocation?” In one sense, literature had played no active part in my life. But, in another, my life, the memories of its sorrows, of its joys, had been forming a reserve like albumen in the ovule of a plant. It is from this that the plant draws its nourishment in order to transform itself into seed at a time when one does not yet know that the embryo of the plant is developing though chemical phenomena and secret but very active respirations are taking place in it. Thus my life had been lived in constant contact with the elements which would bring about its ripening. And those who would later derive nourishment from it would be as ignorant of the process that supplied it as those who eat the products of grain are unaware of the rich aliments it contains though they have manured the soil in which it was grown and have enabled it to reach maturity. In this connection the comparisons which are false if one starts from them may be true if one ends by them. The writer envies the painter, he would like to make

sketches and notes and, if he does so, he is lost. Yet, in writing, there is not a gesture of his characters, a mannerism, an accent, which has not impregnated his memory; there is not a single invented character to whom he could not give sixty names of people he has observed, of whom one poses for a grimace, another for an eyeglass, another for his temper, another for a particular movement of the arms. And the writer discovers that if his aspiration to be a painter could not be consciously realised, he has nevertheless filled his notebook with sketches without being aware of it. For, owing to his instinct, the writer long before he knew he was going to be one, habitually avoided looking at all sorts of things other people noticed, and was, in consequence, accused by others of absent-mindedness and by himself of being incapable of attention and observation, while all the time he was ordering his eyes and his ears to retain for ever what to others seemed puerile, the tone in which a phrase had been uttered, the facial expression and movement of the shoulders of a particular person at a particular moment perhaps years ago, who was otherwise unknown to him, and this because he had heard that tone before or felt he might hear it again, that it was a recurrent and permanent characteristic. It is the feeling for the general in the potential writer, which selects material suitable to a work of art because of its generality. He only pays attention to others, however dull and tiresome, because in repeating what their kind say like parrots, they are for that very reason prophetic birds, spokesmen of a psychological law. He recalls only what is general. Through certain ways of speaking, through a certain play of features and through certain movements of the shoulders even though they had been seen when he was a child, the life of others remains within himself and when later on he begins writing, that life will help to recreate reality, possibly by the use of that movement of the shoulders common to many people. This movement is as true to life as though it had been noted by an anatomist, but the writer expresses thereby a psychological verity by grafting on to the shoulders of one individual the neck of another, both of whom had only posed to him for a moment.

It is uncertain whether in the creation of a literary work the imagination and the sensibility are not interchangeable and whether the second, without disadvantage, cannot be substituted for the first just as people whose stomach is incapable of digesting entrust this function to their intestines. An innately sensitive man who has no imagination could, nevertheless write admirable novels. The suffering caused him by others and the conflict provoked by his efforts to protect himself against them, such experiences interpreted by the intelligence might provide material for a book as beautiful as if it were imagined

and invented and as objective, as startling and unexpected as the author's imaginative fancy would have been, had he been happy and free from persecution. The stupidest people unconsciously express their feelings by their gestures and their remarks and thus demonstrate laws they are unaware of which the artist brings to light. On account of this, the vulgar wrongly believe the writer to be mischievous for the artist sees an engaging generality in an absurd individual and no more imputes blame to him than a surgeon despises his patient for being affected with a chronic ailment of the circulation. Moreover, no one is less inclined to scoff at absurd people than the artist. Unfortunately he is more unhappy than mischievous where his own passions are concerned; though he recognises their generality just as much in his own case, he escapes personal suffering less easily. Obviously, we prefer to be praised rather than insulted and still more when a woman we love deceives us, what would we not give that it should be otherwise. But the resentment of the affront, the pain of the abandonment would in that event have been worlds we should never have known, the discovery of which, painful as it may be for the man, is precious for the artist. In spite of himself and of themselves, the mischievous and the ungrateful must figure in his work. The publicist involuntarily associates the rascals he has castigated with his own celebrity. In every work of art we can recognise the man the artist has most hated, and alas, even the women he has most loved. They were posing for the writer at the very moment when, against his will, they were making him suffer the most. When I was in love with Albertine I fully realised she did not love me and I had to resign myself to her only teaching me the pain of love even at its dawn. And when we try to extract generality from our sorrow so as to write about it we are a little consoled, perhaps for another reason than those I have hitherto given, which is, that thinking in a general way, writing is a sanitary and indispensable function for the writer and gives him satisfaction in the same way that exercise, sweating and baths do a physical man. To tell the truth I revolted somewhat against this. However much I might believe that the supreme truth of life is in art, however little I was capable of the effort of memory needed to feel love for Albertine again as to mourn my grandmother anew, I asked myself whether, nevertheless a work of art of which neither of them was conscious could be for those poor dead the fulfilment of their destiny. My grandmother whom I had watched with so much indifference while she lay near me in her last agony. Ah! could I, when my work is done, wounded beyond remedy, suffer, in expiation, long hours of abandonment by all as I lie dying! Moreover, I had an infinite pity for beings less

dear, even indifferent to me and of how many destinies had my thought used the sufferings, even only the absurdities in my attempts to understand them. All those beings who revealed truths to me and who were no longer there, seemed to me to have lived a life from which I alone profited and as though they had died for me. It was sad for me to think that in my book, my love which was once everything to me, would be so detached from a being that various readers would apply it textually to the love they experienced for other women. But why should I be horrified by this posthumous infidelity, that this man or that should offer unknown women as the object of my sentiment, when that infidelity, that division of love between several beings began with my life and long before I began writing? I had indeed suffered successively through Gilberte, through Mme de Guermantes, through Albertine. Successively also I had forgotten them and only my love, dedicated at different times to different beings, had lasted. I had anticipated the profanation of my memories by unknown readers. I was not far from being horrified with myself as, perhaps, some nationalist party might be in whose name hostilities had been provoked and who alone had benefited from a war in which many noble victims had suffered and died without even knowing the issue of the struggle which, for my grandmother, would have been such a complete reward. And the single consolation she never knew, that at last I had set to work, was, such being the fate of the dead, that though she could not rejoice in my progress she had at least been spared consciousness of my long inactivity, of the frustrated life which had been such a pain to her. And certainly there were many others besides my grandmother and Albertine from whom I had assimilated a word, a glance, but of whom as individual beings I remembered nothing; a book is a great cemetery in which, for the most part, the names upon the tombs are effaced. Sometimes, on the other hand, one writes a well remembered name without knowing whether anything else survives of the being who bore it. That young girl with the deep sunken eyes, with the haunting voice, is she there? And if she is, in which part, where are we to look for her under the flowers? But since we live remote from individual lives, since we no longer retain our deepest feelings such as my love for my grandmother and for Albertine, since they are now no more than meaningless words, since we can talk about these dead with people in society to whose houses it still gives us pleasure to go atter the death of all we loved, if there is yet a means of learning to understand those forgotten words, should we not use it even though we had first to find a universal language in which to express them so that, thus rendered permanent, they would form the ultimate essence of those who are gone and

remain an acquisition in perpetuity of every soul? Indeed, if we could explain that law of change which has made those words of the dead unintelligible to us, might not our inferiority become a new force? Furthermore the work in which our sorrows have collaborated, may perhaps be interpreted as an indication both of atrocious suffering and of happy consolation in the future. Indeed, if we say that the loves, the sorrows of the poet have served him, that they have aided him to construct his work, that the unknown women who least suspected, one with her mischief-making, the other with her raillery, that they were each contributing their stone towards the building of the monument they would never see, one does not sufficiently reflect that the life of the writer is not finished with that work, that the same nature which caused him the sorrow that coloured his work, will remain his after the work is finished, will cause him to love other women in circumstances which would be similar if they were not slightly changed by time which modifies conditions in the subject himself, in his appetite for love and in his resistance to suffering. From this first point of view his work must be considered only as an unhappy love which inevitably presages others and which causes his life to resemble it, so that the poet hardly needs to continue writing, so completely will he discover the semblance of what will happen anticipated in what he has written. Thus my love for Albertine and the degree m which it differed was already engrossed in my love for Gilberte in the midst of those joyous days when for the first time I heard Albertine's name mentioned by her aunt, without suspecting that that insignificant germ would one day develop and spread over my whole life. But from another point of view, work is an emblem of happiness because it teaches us that in all love the general has its being close beside the particular and passes from the second to the first by a gymnastic which strengthens the writer against sorrow through making him pass over its cause in order to probe to its essence. In fact, as I was to experience thereafter, when I had realised my vocation, even at a time of anguish caused by love, the object of one's passion becomes so completely merged in the universal during one's working hours, that for the time being, one forgets her existence and only feels one's heartache as a physical pain. It is true that it is a question of moments and that the effect seems to be the contrary if work comes afterwards. For when beings, who by their badness, their insignificance, succeed, in spite of ourselves, in destroying our illusions, are themselves reduced to impotence by being separated from the amorous chimera we had forged for ourselves, if we then put ourselves to work, our spirit raises them anew, identifies them, for the needs of self-analysis, with beings we once loved and in this case, literature doing over

again the work undone by disillusion bestows a sort of survival on sentiments which have ceased to exist. Certainly we are obliged to relive our particular suffering with the courage of a physician who tries over again upon himself an experiment with a dangerous serum. But we ought to think of it under a general form which enables us to some extent to escape from its control by making all men co-partners in our sorrow and this is not devoid of a certain gratification. Where life closes round us, intelligence pierces an egress, for if there is no remedy for unrequited love, one emerges from the verification of suffering if only by drawing its relevant conclusions. The intellect does not recognise situations in life which have no issue. And I had to resign myself, since nothing can last except by becoming general (unless the mind lies to itself) by accepting the idea that even those beings who were dearest to the writer have ultimately only posed to him as to painters. Sometimes when a painful section has remained at the stage of a sketch, a new tenderness, a new suffering comes which enables us to finish it and fill it out. One has no need to complain of the lack of new and helpful sorrows for plenty are forthcoming and one will not have to wait long for them. All the same, it is necessary to hasten to profit by them for they do not last very long; either we console ourselves or if they are too strong and the heart is not too sound, one dies. In love our successful rival, as well call him our enemy, is our benefactor. He immediately adds to a being who only excited in us an insignificant physical desire, an enormously enhanced value which we confuse with it. If we had no rivals, physical gratification would not be transformed into love, that is to say, if we had no rivals or believed we had none, for they need not actually exist. That illusory life which our suspicion and jealousy give to rivals who have no existence, is sufficient for our good. Happiness is salutary for the body but sorrow develops the powers of the spirit. Moreover, does it not on each occasion reveal to us a law which is no less indispensable for the purpose of bringing us back to truth, of forcing us to take things seriously by pulling up the weeds of habit, scepticism, frivolity and indifference. It is true that that truth which is incompatible with happiness, with health, is not always compatible with life itself. Sorrow ends by killing. At each fresh overmastering sorrow one more vein projects and develops its mortal sinuousness across our brows and under our eyes. Thus, little by little, those terribly ravaged faces of Rembrandt, of Beethoven, are made, at which people once mocked. And those pockets under the eyes and wrinkles in the forehead would not be there if there had not been such suffering in the heart. But since forces can change into other forces, since heat which has duration becomes light and the electricity in a lightning-flash can

photograph, since our heavy heartache can with each recurrent sorrow raise above itself like a flag, a visible and permanent symbol, let us accept the physical hurt for the sake of the spiritual knowledge and let our bodies disintegrate, since each fresh fragment which detaches itself now becomes more luminously revealing so that we may complete our task at the cost of suffering not needed by others more gifted, building it up and adding to it in proportion to the emotions that destroy our life. Ideas are substitutes for sorrows; when the latter change into ideas they lose part of their noxious action on our hearts and even at the first instant their very transformation disengages a feeling of joy. Substitutes only in the order of time, however, for it would seem that the first element is idea and that sorrow is only the mode in which certain ideas first enter us. But there are many families in the group of ideas, some are immediately joys. These reflections made me discover |a stronger and more accurate sense of the truth of which I had often had a presentiment, notably when Mme de Cambremer was surprised that I could abandon a remarkable man like Elstir for the sake of Albertine. Even from the intellectual point of view I felt she was wrong but I did not know that what she was misunderstanding were the lessons through which one makes one's apprenticeship as a man of letters. The objective value of the arts has little say in the matter; what it is necessary to extract and bring to light are our sentiments, our passions, which are the sentiments and passions of all men. A woman we need makes us suffer, forces from us a series of sentiments, deeper and more vital than a superior type of man who interests us. It remains to be seen, according to the plane on which we live, whether we shall discover that the pain the infidelity of a woman has caused us is a trifle when compared with the truths thereby revealed to us, truths that the woman delighted at having made us suffer would hardly have grasped. In any case, such infidelities are not rare. A writer need have no fear of undertaking a long labour. Let the intellect get to work; in the course of it there will be more than enough sorrows to enable him to finish it. Happiness serves hardly any other purpose than to make unhappiness possible. When we are happy, we have to form very tender and strong links of confidence and attachment for their rupture to cause us the precious shattering called misery. Without happiness, if only that of hoping, there would be no cruelty and, therefore, no fruit of misfortune. And more than a painter who needs to see many churches in order to paint one church, a writer, to obtain volume, consistency, generality and literary reality, needs many beings in order to express one feeling, for if art is long and life is short one can say on the other hand, that if inspiration is short, the sentiments it has to express are not much longer. Our

passions shape our books, repose writes them in the intervals. When inspiration is reborn, when we are able to take up our work again, the woman who posed to us for our sentimental reaction can no longer make us feel it. We must continue to paint her from another model and if that is a treachery to the first, in a literary sense, thanks to the similarity of our sentiments which make a work at one and the same time a memory of our past loves and the starting point of new ones, there is no great disadvantage in the exchange. That is one of the reasons why studies in which an attempt is made to guess whom an author has been writing about, are fatuous. For even a direct confession is at the very least intercalated between different episodes in the life of the author, the early ones which inspired it, the later ones which no less inspired the successive loves whose peculiarities were a tracing of the preceding ones. For we are not as faithful to the being we have most loved as we are to ourselves and sooner or later we forget her — since that is one of our characteristics — so as to start loving another. At the very most, she whom we have so much loved has given a particular form to that love which will make us faithful to her even in our infidelity. We should feel a need to take the same morning walks with her successor and to bring her home in the same fashion in the evening and we should give her also much too much money. (That circulation of money we give to women is curious; because of it, they make us miserable and so help us to write books — one might almost say that works of literature are like artesian wells, the deeper the suffering, the higher they rise.) These substitutions add something disinterested and more general to work, and are also a lesson in austerity; we ought not to attach ourselves to beings, it is not beings who exist in reality and are amenable to description, but ideas. And we must not lose time while we can still dispose of these models. For those who pose for happiness are not, as a rule, able to spare us many sittings. But those who pose to us for sorrow give us plenty of sittings in the studio we only use at those periods. That studio is within ourselves. Those periods are a picture of our life with its divers sufferings. For they contain others and just when we think we are calm, a new one is born, new in all senses of the word; perhaps because unforeseen situations force us to enter into deeper contact with ourselves, the painful dilemmas in which love places us at every instant, instruct us, disclose to us successively the matter of which we are made.

Moreover, even when suffering does not supply by its revelation the raw material of our work, it helps us by stimulating us to it. Imagination, thought, may be admirable mechanisms but they can also be inert. Suffering alone sets them going. Thus when Françoise, noticing that Albertine came in by any door

of the house that happened to be open as a dog would, spreading disorder wherever she went, ruining me, causing me infinite unhappiness, she said (for at that time I had already done some articles and translations), “Ah, if only monsieur had engaged a well-educated little secretary who would have put all monsieur’s rolls of paper in order instead of that girl who only wastes his time,” perhaps I was wrong in thinking she was talking good sense. Perhaps Albertine had been more useful to me, even from the literary point of view, in making me lose my time and in causing me sorrow than a secretary who would have arranged my papers. But all the same, when a creature is so badly constituted (perhaps in nature that being is man) that he cannot love unless he suffers and that he must suffer to learn truth, the life of such a being becomes in the end very exhausting. The happy years are those that are wasted; we must wait for suffering to drive us to work. The idea of preliminary suffering is associated with that of work, we dread every fresh undertaking because we are thereby reminded of the pain in store for us before we can conceive it. And, realising that suffering is the best thing life has to offer, we think of death without horror and almost as a deliverance. And yet, if that thought was somewhat repellent to me, we have to be sure we have not played with life and profited by other people’s lives to write books but the exact opposite. The case of the noble Werther was, alas, not mine. Without believing an instant in Albertine’s love, twenty times I wanted to kill myself for her; I had ruined myself and destroyed my health for her. When it is a question of writing, we have to be scrupulous, look close and cast out what is not true. But when it is only a question of our own lives, we ruin ourselves, make ourselves ill, kill ourselves for the sake of lies. Of a truth, it is only out of the matrix of those lies (if one is too old to be a poet) that we can extract a little truth. Sorrows are obscure and hated servitors against whom we contend, under whose sway we fall more and more, sinister servitors whom we cannot replace but who by strange and devious ways lead us to truth and to death. Happy those who have encountered the former before the latter and for whom, closely as one may follow the other, the hour of truth sounds before the hour of death.

Furthermore, I realised that the most trivial episodes of my past life had combined to give me the lesson of idealism from which I was now going to profit. Had not my meetings with M. de Charlus, for instance, even before his Germanophilism had given me the same lesson, and better than my love for Mme de Guermantes or for Albertine, better than the love of Saint-Loup for Rachel, proved to me how little material matters, that everything can be made of it by thought, a verity that the phenomenon of sexual inversion, so little

understood, so idly condemned, enhances even more than that of love of women, instructive as that is; the latter shows us beauty flying from the woman we no longer love and residing in a face which others consider extremely ugly, which indeed might have displeased us and probably will later on; but it is still more remarkable to observe such a face under the cap of an omnibus conductor, receiving all the homage of a *grand seigneur*, who has for that abandoned a beautiful princesse. Did not my astonishment each time that I again saw the face of Gilberte, of Mme de Guermantes, of Albertine in the Champs Elysées, in the street, on the shore, prove that a memory can only be prolonged in a direction which diverges from the impression with which it formerly coincided and from which it separates itself more and more. The writer must not mind if the invert gives his heroines a masculine visage. This peculiar aberration is the only means open to the invert of applying generality to what he reads. If M. de Charlus had not given Morel's face to the unfaithful one over whom Musset sheds tears in the *Nuit d'Octobre* or in the *Souvenir*, he would neither have wept nor understood since it was by that road alone, narrow and tortuous though it might be, that he had access to the verities of love. It is only through a custom which owes its origin to the insincere language of prefaces and dedications that a writer says "my reader". In reality, every reader, as he reads, is the reader of himself. The work of the writer is only a sort of optic instrument which he offers to the reader so that he may discern in the book what he would probably not have seen in himself. The recognition of himself in the book by the reader is the proof of its truth and *vice-versa*, at least in a certain measure, the difference between the two texts being often less attributable to the author than to the reader. Further, a book may be too learned, too obscure for the simple reader, and thus be only offering him a blurred glass with which he cannot read. But other peculiarities (like inversion) might make it necessary for the reader to read in a certain way in order to read well; the author must not take offence at that but must, on the contrary, leave the reader the greatest liberty and say to him: "Try whether you see better with this, with that, or with another glass."

If I have always been so much interested in dreams, is it not because, compensating duration with intensity they help us to understand better what is subjective in love? And this by the simple fact that they render real with prodigious speed what is vulgarly called *nous mettre une femme dans la peau* to the point of falling passionately in love for a few minutes with an ugly one, which in real life would require years of habit, of union and — as though they had been invented by some miraculous doctor — intravenal injections of love as

they can also be of suffering; with equal speed the amorous suggestion is dissipated and sometimes not only the nocturnal beloved has ceased to be such and has again become the familiar ugly one but something more precious is also dissipated, a whole picture of ravishing sentiments, of tenderness, of delight, of regrets, vaguely communicated to the mind, a whole shipload of passion for Cythera of which we should take note against the moment of waking up, shades of a beautiful truth which are effaced like a painting too dim to restore. Well, perhaps it was also because of the extraordinary tricks dreams play with time! that they fascinated me so much. Had I not in a single night, in one minute of a night, seen days of long ago which had been relegated to those great distances where we can distinguish hardly any of the sentiments we then felt, melt suddenly upon me, blinding me with their brightness as though they were giant aeroplanes instead of the pale stars we believed, making me see again all they had once held for me, giving me back the emotion, the shock, the vividness of their immediate nearness, then recede, when I woke, to the distance they had miraculously traversed, so that one believes, mistakenly however, that they are one of the means of recovering lost Time.

I had realised that only grossly erroneous observation places everything in the object while everything is in the mind; I had lost my grandmother in reality many months after I had lost her in fact, I had seen the aspect of people vary according to the idea that I or others formed of them, a single person become many according to the number of people who saw him (the various Swanns at the beginning of this work according to who met him; the Princesse de Luxembourg according to whether she was seen by the first President or by me) even according to a single person over many years (the variations of Guermantes and Swann in my own experience). I had seen love endow another with that which is only in the one who loves. And I had realised all this the more because I had stretched to its extreme limits the distance between objective reality and love; (Rachel from Saint-Loup's point of view and from mine, Albertine from mine and from Saint-Loup's, Morel or the omnibus conductor or other people from M. de Charlus' point of view). Finally, in a certain measure the germanophilism of M. de Charlus, like the gaze of Saint-Loup at the photograph of Albertine, had helped me for a moment to detach myself, if not from my germanophobia at least from my belief in its pure objectivity and to make me think that perhaps it was with hate as with love and that in the terrible sentence which France is now pronouncing on Germany, whom she regards as outside the pale of humanity, there is an objectivity of feeling like that which made Rachel

and Albertine seem so precious, the one to Saint-Loup, the other to me. What made it seem possible, in fact, that this wickedness was not entirely intrinsic to Germany was that I myself had experienced successive loves at the end of which the object of each one appeared to have no value and I had also seen my country experience successive hates which had caused to appear as traitors — a thousand times worse than the Germans to whom these traitors were supposed to be betraying France — Dreyfusards like Reinach with whom patriots were now collaborating against a country every member of which was necessarily a liar, a ferocious beast and an imbecile except, of course, those Germans who had espoused the French cause such as the King of Roumania and the Empress of Russia. It is true that the anti-Dreyfusard, would have replied: “It is not the same thing.” But, as a matter of fact, it never is the same thing, any more than it is the same person; were that not so, in the presence of an identical phenomenon he who is its dupe could not believe that qualities or defects are inherent in it and would only blame his own subjective condition.

The intellect has no difficulty, then, in basing a theory upon this difference (the teaching of the congregations according to Radicals, is against nature, it is impossible for the Jewish race to assimilate nationalism, the secular hatred of the Germans for the Latin race, the yellow races being momentarily rehabilitated). That subjective influence was equally marked among neutral Germanophiles who had lost the faculty of understanding or even of listening, the instant the German atrocities in Belgium were spoken of. (And, after all, there were real ones.) I remarked that the subjective nature of hatred as in vision itself, did not prevent the object possessing real qualities or defects and in no way caused reality to disappear in a pure “relativeness”. And if, after so many years and so much lost time, I felt the stirring of this vital pool within humanity even in international relationships, had I not apprehended it at the very beginning of my life when I read one of Bergotte’s novels in the Combray garden and even if to-day I turn those forgotten pages, and see the schemes of a wicked character, I cannot lay down the book until I assure myself, by skipping a hundred pages, that towards the end the villain is duly humiliated and lives long enough to know that his sinister purposes have been foiled. For I could no longer recall what happened to the characters, in that respect not unlike those who will be seen this afternoon at Mme de Guermantes’, the past life of whom, at all events of many of them, is as shadowy as though I had read of them in a half-forgotten novel.

Did the Prince of Agrigente end by marrying Mlle X? Or was it not the brother of Mlle X who was to marry the sister of the Prince of Agrigente, or was

I confusing them with something I had once read or dreamed? The dream remained one of the facts of my life which had most impressed me, which had most served to convince me of the purely mental character of reality, a help I should not despise in the composition of my work. When I lived for love in a somewhat more disinterested fashion, a dream would bring my grandmother singularly close to me, making her cover great spaces of lost time, and so with Albertine whom I began to love again because, in my sleep, she had supplied me with an attenuated version of the story of the laundress. I believed that dreams might sometimes in this way be the carriers of truths and impressions that my unaided effort or encounters in the outside world could not bring me, that they would arouse in me that desire or yearning for certain non-existent things which is the condition for work, for abstraction from habit and for detaching oneself from the concrete. I should not disdain this second, this nocturnal muse, who might sometimes replace the other.

I had seen aristocrats become vulgar when their minds (like that of the Duc de Guermantes for instance) were vulgar. “You aren’t shy?” he asked, as Cottard might have done. In medicine, in the Dreyfus affair, during the war, I had seen people believe that truth is a thing owned and possessed by ministers and doctors, a yea or a nay which has no need of interpretation, which-enables a radiographie plate to indicate, without interpretation, what is the matter with an invalid, which enables those in power to know that Dreyfus was guilty, to know (without despatching Roques to investigate on the spot) whether Sarrail had the necessary resources to advance at the same time as the Russians. There had not been an hour of my life which might not have thus served to teach me, as I have said, that only crudely erroneous perception places everything in the object; while, to the contrary, everything is in the mind. In short, if I reflected, the matter of my experience came to me from Swann, not simply through what concerned himself and Gilberte. It was he who, ever since the Combray days, had given me the desire to go to Balbec, where, but for him, my parents would never have had the notion of sending me and but for which I should never have known Albertine. True, I associated certain things with her face as I saw her first, gazing towards the sea. In one sense I was right in associating them with her for if I had not walked by the sea that day, if I had not known her, all those ideas would not have developed (unless, at least, they had been developed by another). I was wrong again because that inspiring pleasure we like to identify retrospectively with the beautiful countenance of a woman, comes from our senses and, in any case, it was quite certain that Albertine, the then Albertine,

would not have understood the pages I should write. But it was just on that account, (and that is a warning not to live in too intellectual an atmosphere) because she was so different from me that she had made me productive through suffering, and, at first, even through the simple effort required to imagine that which differs from oneself. Had she been able to understand these pages, she would have been unable to inspire them. But without Swann I should not even have known the Guermantes, since my grandmother would not have rediscovered Mme de Villeparisis, I should not have made the acquaintance of Saint-Loup and of M. de Charlus which in turn caused me to know the Duchesse de Guermantes and, through her, her cousin, so that my very presence at this moment at the Prince de Guermantes' from which suddenly sprang the idea of my work (thus making me owe Swann not only the matter but the decision) also came to me from Swann, a rather flimsy pedestal to support the whole extension of my life. (In that sense, this Guermantes side derived from Swann's side.) But very often the author of a determining course in our lives is a person much inferior to Swann, in fact, a completely indifferent individual. It would have sufficed for some schoolfellow or other to tell me about a girl it would be nice for me to meet at Balbec (where in all probability I should not have met her) to make me go there. So it often happens that later on one runs across a schoolfellow one does not like and shakes hands with him without realising that the whole subsequent course of one's life and work has sprung from his chance remark: "You ought to come to Balbec." We feel no gratitude toward him nor does that prove us ungrateful. For in uttering those words he in no wise foresaw the tremendous consequences they might entail for us. The first impulse having been given, one's sensibility and intelligence exploited the circumstances which engendered each other without his any more foreseeing my union with Albertine than the masked ball at the Guermantes'. Doubtless, his agency was necessary and, through it, the exterior form of our life, even the raw material of our work sprang from him. Had it not been for Swann, my parents would never have had the idea of sending me to Balbec but that did not make him responsible for the sufferings which he indirectly caused me; these were due to my own weakness as his had been responsible for the pain Odette caused him. But in thus determining the life I was to lead, he had thereby excluded all the lives I might otherwise have lived. If Swann had not told me about Balbec I should never have known Albertine, the hotel dining-room, the Guermantes. I should have gone elsewhere; I should have known other people, my memory like my books would have been filled with quite different pictures, which I cannot even

imagine but whose unknowable novelty allures me and makes me sorry I was not drawn that way and that Albertine, the Balbec shore, Rivebelle and the Guermantes did not remain unknown to me for ever.

Jealousy is a good recruiting sergeant who, when there is an empty space in our picture, goes and finds the girl we want in the street. She may not be pretty at first, but she soon fills the blank and becomes so when we get jealous of her.

Once we are dead we shall get no pleasure from our picture being so complete. But this thought is in no way discouraging for we feel that life is rather more complex than is generally supposed, likewise circumstances and and there is a pressing need of proving this complexity. Jealousy is not necessarily born from a look, from something we hear or as the result of reflection; we can find it ready for us between the leaves of a directory — what in Paris is called *Tout-Paris* and in the country *The Annuaire des Châteaux*. Absent-mindedly, we had heard that a certain pretty girl we no longer thought about, had gone to pay a visit of some days to her sister in the Pas-de-Calais. With equal indifference it had occurred to us previously that, possibly, this pretty girl had been made love to by M. E. whom she never saw now because she no longer frequented the bar where she used to meet him. Who and what might her sister be, a maid perhaps? From discretion, we had never asked her. And now, lo and behold! Opening by chance the *Annuaire des Châteaux* we discover that M. E. owns a country house in the Pas-de-Calais near Dunkerque. There is no further room for doubt; to please the pretty girl, he has taken her sister as a maid, and if the pretty girl does not see him any more in the bar it is because he has her come to his house and, though he lives in Paris nearly the whole year round, he cannot dispense with her even while he is in the Pas-de-Calais. The paint-brushes, drunk with rage and love, paint and paint. But supposing, after all, it is not that, supposing that really M. E. did not any longer see the pretty girl and had only recommended her sister to his brother who lives the whole year round in the Pas-de-Calais, so that, by chance, she has gone to see her sister at a time when M. E. is not there, seeing that they had ceased to care for each other. Unless indeed the sister is nota maid in the Château or anywhere else but that her family happens to live in the Pas-de-Calais. Our original distress surrenders to the latest supposition which soothes our jealousy. But what does that matter? Jealousy buried within the pages of the *Annuaire des Châteaux* has come just at the right moment, for now the empty space in the canvas has been filled and the whole picture has been capitally composed, thanks to jealousy having evoked the apparition of the pretty girl whom we neither care for nor are jealous of.

At that moment the butler came to tell me that the first piece was over and that I could leave the library and enter the drawing-rooms. That reminded me of where I was. But I was in no wise disturbed in my argument by the fact that a fashionable entertainment, a return into society, provided the point of departure towards a new life I had been unable to find the way to in solitude. There was nothing extraordinary about this, an influence which had roused the eternal man in me being no more necessarily linked to solitude than to society (as I had once believed, as perhaps was the case formerly, as perhaps it might still have been, if I had developed harmoniously instead of having suffered that long break which only now seemed to be reaching its end). For, as I only felt that impression of beauty when there was imposed upon the actual sensation however insignificant, another akin to it which, spontaneously reborn in me, expanded the first one simultaneously over several periods and filled my soul, in which my ordinary single sensations left a void, with a generalising essence, there was no reason why I should not just as well receive such sensations from society as from nature, since they occur haphazard, provoked doubtless by a peculiar excitement owing to which, on days when one happens to be outside the normal course of one's life, even the most simple things begin to cause reactions which habit spares our nervous system. My purpose was to discover the objective reason of its being exactly and only that class of sensations which must lead to a work of art, by pursuing the reflections I had been bent on linking together in the library, for I felt that the emancipation of my spiritual life was now complete enough for me to be able to sustain my thought in the midst of guests in the drawing-room just as well as alone in the library; I should know how to preserve my solitude from that point of view even in the midst of that numerous company. Indeed, for the same reason that great events in the outer world have no influence upon our mental powers and that a mediocre writer living in an epic period will, nevertheless, remain a mediocre writer what was dangerous in society was the worldly disposition one brought to it. But, of itself, it will no more make us mediocre than a war of heroes can make a bad poet sublime. In any case, whether it was theoretically advantageous or not that a work of art should be thus constituted, and awaiting the further examination of that question, it was undeniable so far as I was concerned, that when any really aesthetic intuitions came to me it had always been as a result of sensations of that nature. True, they had been rare enough in my life but they dominated it, and I could recover from the past some of those heights I had mis-takenly allowed myself to lose sight of (and I did not mean to do so again). This much I could now say, that if in my

case this was an idiosyncrasy due to the exclusive significance it had for me, I was reassured by discovering that it was related to characteristics less marked yet discernible and fundamentally analogous in the case of certain writers. Is not the most beautiful part of the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* assimilable with my sensations relative to the madeleine: "Yesterday evening I was walking alone.... I was drawn from my reflections by the warbling of a thrush perched upon the highest branch of a birch tree. At that instant the magical sound brought my paternal home before my eyes; I forgot the catastrophes of which I had been a witness and, transported suddenly into the past, I saw again that country where I had so often heard the thrush sing." And is not this, one of the two or three most beautiful passages in the*Mémoires*: "A delicate and subtle odour of heliotrope was exhaled by a cluster of scarlet runners in flower; that odour was not brought us by a breeze from the homeland but by a wild Newfoundland wind, without relation to the exiled plant, without sympathy with memory and joy. In that perfume which beauty had not breathed nor purified in its breast nor spread abroad upon its path, in that perfume permeated by the light of dawn, of culture and of life, there was all the melancholy of regret, of exile and of youth." One of the masterpieces of French literature *Sylvie* by Gérard de Nerval, contains, in regard to Combourg, just like the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, a sensation of the same order as the taste of the madeleine and the warbling of the thrush. Finally, in the case of Baudelaire, such reminiscences are still — more numerous, evidently less fortuitous and consequently, in my opinion, decisive. It is the poet himself who with greater variety and leisure seeks consciously in the odour of a woman, of her hair and of her breast, those inspiring analogies which evoke for him "*l'azur du ciel immense et rond*" and "*un port rempli de flammes et de mâts*". I was seeking to recall those of Baudelaire's verses which are based upon the transposition of such sensations, so that I might place myself in so noble a company and thus obtain confirmation that the work I no longer had any hesitation in undertaking, merited the effort I intended to consecrate to it, when, reaching the foot of the staircase leading from the library, I found myself all of a sudden in the great salon and in the midst of a fête which seemed to me entirely different from those I had formerly attended and which began to disclose a peculiar aspect and to assume a new significance. From the instant I entered the great salon, in spite of my firmly retaining within myself the point I had reached in the project I had been forming, a startlingly theatrical sensation burst upon my senses which was to raise the gravest obstacles to my enterprise. Obstacles I should, doubtless, surmount but which, while I continued to muse upon the

conditions of a work of art, were about to7 interrupt my reasoning by the repetition a hundred times over of the consideration most calculated to make me hesitate. At the first moment I did not understand why I failed to recognise the master of the house and his guests, why they all appeared to have “made a head”, generally powdered, which completely changed them. The Prince, receiving his guests, still preserved that air of a jolly king of the fairies he suggested to my mind the first time I saw him, but now, having apparently submitted to the disguise he had imposed upon his guests, lie had tricked himself out in a white beard and dragged his feet heavily along as though they were soled with lead. He seemed to be representing one of the ages of man. His moustache was whitened as though the hoar-frost in Tom Thumb’s forest clung to it. It seemed to inconvenience his stiffened mouth and once he had produced his effect, he ought to have taken it off. To tell the truth, I only recognised him by reasoning out his identity with himself from certain familiar features. I could not imagine what that little Lezensac had put on his face, but while others had grown white, some as to half of their beard, some only as to their moustaches, he had found means, without the help of dyes, to cover his face with wrinkles and his eyebrows with bristling hairs; moreover, all this suited him ill, his countenance seemed to have hardened and bronzed and he wore an appearance of solemnity that aged him so much that he could no longer be taken for a young man. At the same moment I was astonished to hear addressed as Duc de Chatellerault a little old man with the silver moustache of an ambassador of whom only the slightest likeness reminded me of the young man whom I had once met calling on Mme de Villeparisis. In the case of the first person whom I succeeded in identifying by abstracting his natural features from his travesty by an effort of memory, my first thought ought to have been and perhaps was, for an instant, to congratulate him on being so marvellously made up that, at first, one had the same sort of hesitation in recognising him as is felt by an audience which, though informed by the programme, remains for a moment dumbfounded and then bursts into applause when some great actor, taking a part in which he looks completely different from himself, walks on to the stage. From that point of view the most extraordinary of all was my personal enemy M. d’Argencourt; he was, verily, the *clou* of the party. Not only had he replaced a barely silvered beard by one of incredible whiteness, he had so tricked himself out by those little material changes which reconstitute and exaggerate personality and, more than that, apparently modify character, that this man, whose pompous and starchy stiffness still lingered in my memory, had changed into an old beggar who

inspired no respect, an aged valetudinarian so authentic that his limbs trembled and the swollen features, once so arrogant, kept on smiling with silly beatitude. Pushed to this degree, the art of disguise becomes something more, it becomes a transformation. Indeed, some trifles might certify that it was actually M. d'Argencourt who offered this indescribable and picturesque spectacle, but how many successive facial states should I not have had to trace if I wanted to reconstruct the physiognomy of M. d'Argencourt whom I had formerly known and who had now succeeded, although he only had the use of his own body, in producing something so entirely different. It was obviously the extreme limit that haughtiest of faces could reach without disintegration, while that stiffest of figures was no more than a boiled rag shaking about from one spot to another. It was only by the most fleeting memory of a particular smile which formerly sometimes tempered for an instant M. d'Argencourt's arrogant demeanour, that one realised the possibility that this smile of an old, broken-down, second-hand clothes-dealer might represent the punctilious gentleman of former days. But even admitting it was M. d'Argencourt's intention to use the old meaning smile, the prodigious transformation of his face, the very matter of the eye with which he expressed it had become so different that the expression was that of another. I almost burst into laughter as I looked at this egregious old guy, as emolliated in his comical caricature of himself as M. de Charlus, paralysed and polite, was tragical. M d'Argencourt, in his incarnation of a moribund buffoon by Regnard, exaggerated by Labiche, was as easy of access, as urbane as was the King Lear of M. de Charlus who uncovered himself with deference before the most commonplace acquaintance who saluted him. All the same, I refrained from expressing my admiration for the remarkable performance. It was less my former antipathy which prevented me than his having reached a condition so different from himself that I had the illusion of standing before another as amiable, disarming and inoffensive as the Argencourt of former days was supercilious, hostile and nefarious. So entirely a different personage that, watching this snow-man imitating General Dourakine falling into second childhood, grinning so ineffably comic and white, it seemed to me that a human being could undergo metamorphoses as complete as those of certain insects. I had the impression of observing through the glass of a showcase in a natural history museum what the sharpest and most stable features of an insect had turned into and I could no longer feel the sentiments which M. d'Argencourt had always inspired in me when I stood looking at this soft chrysalis which rather vibrated than moved. So I kept my silence, I did not congratulate M. d'Argencourt on offering a spectacle

which seemed to assign the limits within which the transformation of the human body can operate. Certainly, in the wings of a theatre or during a costume ball, politeness inclines one to exaggerate the difficulty, even to go so far as to affirm the impossibility of recognising the person in travesty. Here, on the contrary an instinct warned me that dissimulation was demanded, that these compliments would have been the reverse of flattering because such a transformation was not intended and I realised what I had not dreamed of when I entered this drawing-room, that every entertainment, however simple, when it takes place long after one has ceased to go into society and however few of those one has formerly known it brings together, gives the effect of a costume ball and the most successful one of all, at which one is truly puzzled by others, for the heads have been in the making for a long time without their wishing it and cannot be got rid of by toilet operations when the party is over. Puzzled by others! Alas! We ourselves puzzle them. The difficulty I experienced in putting the required name to the faces around me seemed to be shared by all those who perceived mine, for they paid no more attention to me than if they had never seen me before or were trying to disentangle from my appearance the memory of someone else.

M. d'Argencourt's success with this astonishing "turn", certainly the most striking picture in his burlesque I could possibly have of him, was like an actor who makes a last appearance on the stage before the curtain falls amidst roars of laughter. If I no longer felt any antagonism to him, it was because he had returned to the innocence of babyhood and had no recollection of his contemptuous opinion of me, no recollection of having seen M. de Charlus suddenly leave go of my arm, whether because none of those sentiments survived in him or because in order to reach me they would have been so deformed by physical refractions that their meaning would have completely changed on the way, so that M. d'Argencourt appeared to have become amiable because he no longer had the power to express his malevolence and to curb his chronic and irritating hilarity. To compare him with an actor is an overstatement for, having no conscious mind at all, he was like a shaky doll with a woollen beard stuck on his face pottering about the room, like a scientific or philosophical marionette mimicking a part in a funeral ceremony or a lecture at the Sorbonne, simultaneously illustrating the vanity of all things and representing a natural history specimen. A Punch and Judy show of puppets, of which one could only identify those one had known by viewing them simultaneously at several levels graded in the background, which gave them depth and forced one to the mental effort of combining eye and memory as one

gazed at these old phantoms. A Punch and Judy show of puppets bathed in the immaterial colours of years, of puppets which exteriorised Time, Time usually invisible, which to attain visibility seeks and fastens on bodies to exhibit wherever it can, with its magic lantern. Immaterial like Golo on the door-handle of my room at Combray, the new and unrecognisable M. d'Argencourt was a revelation of Time by rendering it partially visible. In the new elements composing M. d'Argencourt's face and personality one could read a sum of years, one could recognise the symbolical figure of life, not permanent as it appears to us, but as it is, a constantly changing atmosphere in which the haughty nobleman caricatures himself in the evening as an old clothes-dealer.

In the case of others these changes, these positive transformations seemed to proceed from the sphere of natural history and it was surprising to hear a name applied to a person, not, as in the case of M. d'Argencourt, with the characteristics of a new and different species but with the exterior features of another person altogether. As in the case of M. d'Argencourt there were unsuspected potentialities which time had elicited from such and such a young girl, and though these potentialities were purely physiognomical or corporeal, they seemed to have moral implications. If the features of a face change, if they unite differently, if they contract slowly but continuously, they assume, with that changed aspect, another significance. Thus, a particular woman who had formerly given one an impression of aridity and shallowness and who had now acquired an enlargement of the cheeks and an unforeseeable bridge on her nose occasioned the same surprise, often an agreeable one, as a sensitive and thoughtful remark, a fine and highminded act which one would never have expected of her. Unhoped for horizons opened around that new nose. Kindness and tenderness, formerly undreamed of became possible with those cheeks. From that chin one might hope for things unimaginable from the preceding one. These new facial features implied altered traits of character; the hard, scraggy girl had become a buxom, generous dowager. It was not in the zoological sense like M. d'Argencourt, but in the social and moral sense that one could say she had become a different person. In all these ways an afternoon party such as this was something much more valuable than a vision of the past for it offered me something better than the successive pictures I had missed of the past separating itself from the present, namely, the relationship between the present and the past; it was like what used to be called a panopticon but a panopticon of years, a view not of a monument but of a person situated in the modifying perspective of Time.

The woman whose lover M. d'Argencourt had been, was not much changed, if one reckoned the time that had passed, that is, her face was not so completely demolished into that of a creature which has continuously disintegrated throughout his journey into the abyss, the direction of which we can only express by equally vain comparisons since we can only borrow them from the world of space and which, whether we estimate them in terms of height or length or depth have only the merit of conveying to us that this inconceivable yet perceptible dimension exists. The need, so as to give a name to a face, of what amounted to climbing up the years, compelled me later to reconstruct retrospectively the years about which I had never thought, so as to give them their proper order. From this point of view and so as not to allow myself to be deceived by the apparent identity of space, the perfectly new aspect of a being like M. d'Argencourt was a striking revelation of the reality of the era which generally seems an abstraction, in the same way as dwarf trees or giant baobabs illustrate a change of latitude. Then life appears to us like a fairyland where one can watch the baby becoming adolescent, man becoming mature and inclining to the grave. And, since it is through perpetual change that one grasps that these beings, observed at considerable intervals, are so different, one realises that one has been obeying the same law as these creatures which are so transformed that they no longer resemble, though they have never ceased to be — just because they have never ceased to be — what we thought them before,

A young woman I had formerly known, now snow-white and reduced to a little malevolent old woman, seemed to prove that, in the final act, it was necessary that characters should be made up to be unrecognisable. But her brother had remained so erect, so exactly as he was, that the whitening of his upturned moustache seemed surprising on so young a face. The snowy whiteness of beards which had been completely black made the human landscape of that afternoon party melancholy as do the first brown leaves of a summer one has hardly begun enjoying when autumn comes. Thus I who from infancy, had lived from day to day, with a sort of fixed idea of myself derived from others as well as myself, perceived for the first time, after witnessing the metamorphosis of all these people, that the time which had gone by for them, had gone by for me also and this revelation threw me into consternation. Indifferent as their ageing was to me, now that theirs heralded the approach of my own, I was disconsolate. This approach was indeed announced by one verbal blow after another at intervals, which sounded to my ears like blasts from the trumpets of Judgment Day. The first was uttered by the Duchesse de Guermantes; I had just seen her pass

between a double row of gaping people who, without realising how the marvellous artifice of her dress and aesthetic worked on them, moved by the sight of her scarlet head, her salmon-like flesh strangled with jewels just emerging from its black lace fins, gazed at the hereditary sinuosity of her figure as they might have done at some ancient jewel-bedecked fish in which the protective genius of the Guermantes' family was incarnated. "Ah!" she exclaimed on seeing me, "what a joy to see you, you my oldest friend!" In my youthful vanity of Combray days which never permitted me to count myself among her friends who actually shared that mysterious Guermantes' life, one of her accredited friends like M. de Bréauté or M. de Forestille or Swann, like so many who were dead, I might have been flattered but, instead, I was extremely miserable. "Her oldest friend!" I thought, "She's exaggerating, perhaps one of the oldest but am I really —" At that moment one of the Prince's nephews came up to me and remarked: "You who are an old Parisian." An instant later a note was brought me. I had, on my arrival, seen one of the young Létourvilles whose relationship to the Duchesse I could not remember but who knew me a little. He had just left Saint-Cyr and thinking to myself he would be a charming acquaintance like Saint-Loup, who could initiate me into military affairs and their incidental changes, I had told him I would find him later so that we could arrange to dîne together, for which he thanked me effusively. But I had remained dreaming in the library too long and the note he had left was to tell me that he was not able to wait and gave me his address. This coveted comrade ended his letter thus: "With respectful regard, your young friend, Létourville". "Young friend!" Thus I used formerly to address people thirty years older than myself, Legrandin, for instance. That sub-lieutenant whom I was regarding as a comrade called himself my young friend. So it was not only military methods which had changed since then and from M. de Létourville's standpoint I was not a comrade but an old gentleman and I was separated from M. de Létourville to whom I imagined that I appeared as I did to myself as though by the opening arms of an invisible compass which placed me at such a distance from that young sub-lieutenant that to him who called himself my young friend I was an elderly gentleman.

Almost immediately afterwards someone spoke of Bloch and I asked if they were talking of young Bloch or his father (of whose death during the war I was unaware). It was said he died of emotion when France was invaded. "I did not know that he had any children, not even that he was married," said the Duchesse, "but evidently it is the father we're talking about for there's nothing young about

him.” She added, laughing, “He might have grown-up sons.” Then I realised she was talking about my old friend. As it happened, he came in a few minutes later and I had difficulty in recognising him. He had now adopted the name of Jacques du Rozier, under which it would have needed the nose of my grandfather to scent the sweet valley of Hebron and the bond of Israel which my friend seemed to have finally broken. A modish Englishness had completely changed his appearance and every thing that could be effaced was moulded into the semblance of a plaster cast. His former curly hair was now smoothed out flat, was parted in the middle and shone with cosmetics. His nose was still red and prominent and appeared to be swollen by a sort of permanent catarrh which perhaps explained the nasal accent with which he lazily drawled his phrases, for, he had discovered, in addition to a way of doing his hair to suit his complexion, a voice to the former nasal tone of which he had added an air of peculiar disdain to suit the inflamed contours of his nose. And thanks to hairdressing, to the elimination of his moustache, to his smartness of style and to his will, that Jewish nose had disappeared as a hump can almost be made to look like a straight back by being carefully disguised. But the significance of Bloch’s physiognomy was changed above all by a redoubtable eyeglass. The mechanical effect produced in Bloch’s face by this monocle enabled him to dispense with all those difficult duties to which the human countenance must submit, that of looking amiable, of expressing humour, good nature and effort. Its mere presence in Bloch’s face made it unnecessary to consider whether it was good-looking or not, like when a shop-assistant shows you an English object and says it is “le grand chic”, and you don’t dare consider whether you like it or not. And then he installed himself behind his glass in a haughty, distant and comfortable attitude as though it were an eight-fold mirror, and by making his face suit his flat hair and his eyeglass his features no longer expressed anything whatever. On that face of Bloch’s were super-imposed that vapid and self-opinionated expression, those feeble movements of the head which soon find their point of stasis, and with which I should have identified the out-worn learning of a complacent old gentleman if I had not at last recognised that the man facing me was an old friend, whom my memories had endowed with the continuous vigour of youth which he seemed now completely to lack. I had known him on the threshold of life, he had been my school-fellow and unconsciously, I was regarding him, like myself, as though we were both living in the period of our youth. I heard it said that he looked quite his age and I was surprised to notice some familiar signs of it in his face. Then I realised that, in fact, he was old and

that life makes its old men out of adolescents who last many years.

Someone hearing I was not well asked if I was not afraid to catch the "grippe" which was raging at that time while another benevolent individual reassured me by remarking: "Don't be afraid, it only attacks the young, people of your age don't run much risk of it." I noticed that the servants had recognised me and whispered my name, and a lady said she had heard them remark in their vernacular: "There goes old —" (This was followed by my name.)

On hearing the Duchesse de Guermantes say, "Of course! I knew the Marshal? But I knew others who were much more representative, the Duchesse de Galliera, Pauline de Périgord, Mgr. Dupanloup," I naively regretted not having known those she called relics of the *ancien régime*. I ought to have remembered that we call *ancien regime* what we have only known the end of; what is perceived thus on the horizon assumes a mysterious grandeur and seems the last chapter of a world we shall never see again; but as we go on it is soon we ourselves who are on the horizon for the generations behind us, the horizon continues to recede and the world which seemed finished begins again. "When I was a young girl," added Mme de Guermantes, "I even saw the Duchesse de Dino. I'm no longer twenty-five, you know." Her last words displeased me; she need not have said that, it would have been all right for an old woman. "As to yourself," she continued, "you're always the same, you haven't, so to speak, changed at all," and that gave me almost more pain than if she had said the contrary for it proved, by the mere fact of being remarkable, how much time had passed. "You're astonishing, my dear friend. You're always youn," a melancholy remark since there is only sense in it when we have, in fact, if not in appearance, become old. And she gave me a final blow by adding: "I've always regretted you did not get married. But, who knows! After all, perhaps you're happier as it is. You would have been old enough to have sons in the war and if they had been killed like poor Robert Saint-Loup (I often think of him) with your sensitiveness, you would not have survived them." And I could see myself as in the first truth-telling mirror I might encounter in the eyes of old men who had in their own opinion remained young as I believed I had, and who when I offered myself as an example of old age, in order that they should deny it, would by the look they gave me, show not the slightest pretence that they saw me otherwise than they saw themselves. For we do not see ourselves as we are, our age as it is, but each of us sees it in the other as though in a mirror. And, no doubt, many would have been less unhappy than I to realise they were old. At first, some face age as they do death, with indifference, not because they have more courage than others but

because they have less imagination. But a man who, since boyhood has had one single idea in his mind, whose idleness and delicate health, just because they cause the postponement of its realisation, annul each wasted day because the disease which hastens the ageing of his body retards that of his spirit, such a man is more overwhelmed when he realises that he has never ceased living in Time than another who, having no inner life, regulates himself by the calendar and does not suddenly discover the aggregate of years he has been daily though unconsciously adding up. But there .was a graver reason for my pain; I discovered that des-tructive action of Time at the very moment when I wanted to elucidate, to intellectualise extra-temporal realities in a work of art.

In the case of certain people present at this party, the successive substitution of cellules had brought about so complete a change during my absence from society, such an entire metamorphosis, that I could have dined opposite them in a restaurant a hundred times without any more imagining I had formerly known them than I could have guessed the royalty of an incognito sovereign or the vice of a stranger. The comparison is inadequate in the matter of names, for one can imagine an unknown seated in front of you being a criminal or a king whilst those I had known, or rather, the people I had known who bore their name, were so different that I could not believe them the same. Nevertheless, as I would have done in taking the idea of sovereignty or of vice as a starting-point which soon makes us discern in the stranger (whom one might so readily have treated with amiability or the reverse while one was blindfolded) a distinguished or suspicious appearance, I applied myself to introducing into the face of a woman entirely unknown to me the idea that she was Mme Sazerat. And I ended by establishing my former notion of this face which would have remained utterly unknown to me, entirely that of another woman, as it had lost as fully the human attributes I had known as though it were that of a man changed into a monkey, were it not that the name and the statement of her identity put me in the way of solving the problem in spite of its difficulty. Sometimes, however, the old picture came to life with sufficient precision for me to confront the two and like a witness in the presence of an accused person, I had to say: “No, I do not recognise her.”

A young woman asked me: “Shall we go and dine together at a restaurant?” and when I replied: “With pleasure, if you don’t mind dining alone with a young man,” I heard the people round me giggle and I added hastily, “or rather with an old one.” I realised that the words which caused the laughter were of the kind my mother might have used in speaking of me; for my mother I always remained a

child and I perceived that I was looking at myself from her point of view. Had I registered, as she did, changes since my childhood, they would have been very old ones for I had stopped at the point where people once used to say, almost before it was true, “Now he really is almost a young man.” That was what I was now thinking but tremendously late. I had not perceived how much I had changed but how did the people who laughed at me know? I had not a grey hair, my moustache was black. I should have liked to ask them how this awful fact revealed itself. And now I understood what old age was — old age, which, of all realities, is perhaps the one of which we retain a purely abstract notion for the longest time, looking at calendars, dating our letters, seeing our friends get married, the children of our friends, without realising its significance, whether through dread or through idleness, until the day when an unknown effigy like M. d’Argencourt teaches us that we are living in a new world; until the when we, who seem to him like his grandfather, treat the grandson of one of our women friends as a comrade and he laughs as though at a joke. And then I understood what is f meant by death, love, joys of the mind, usefulness of sorrow and vocation. For if names had lost their meaning for me, words had unfolded it. The beauty of images is lodged at the back of things, that of ideas in front, so that the first no longer cause us wonder when we reach them and we only understand the second when we have passed beyond them.

The cruel discovery I had now made regarding the lapse of Time could only enrich my ideas and add to the material of my book. Since I had decided that it could not consist only of pure intuitions, namely those beyond Time, amongst the verities with which I intended to frame them, those which are concerned with Time, Time, in which men, societies and nations bathe and change, would have an important place. I should not be mindful only of those alterations to which the aspect of human beings must submit, of which new examples presented themselves at every moment, for still considering my work now begun with decision strong enough to resist temporary distraction, I continued to say, “How do you do?” and talk to people I knew. Age, moreover, had not marked all of them in similar fashion. Someone asked my name and I was told it was M. de Cambremer. To show he had recognised me he inquired: “Do you still suffer from those feelings of suffocation?” On my replying in the affirmative, he went on: “You see that that does not prevent longevity,” as though I were a centenarian. I was speaking to him with my eyes fixed upon two or three features which my thought was reducing to a synthesis of my memories of his personality quite different from what he now represented. He half turned his

head for a moment and I then perceived that he had become unrecognisable owing to the adjunction to his cheeks of enormous red pockets which prevented him from opening his mouth and his eyes properly, so much so that I stood stupefied not wanting to show that I noticed this sort of anthrax to which it was more becoming that he should allude first. But since, like a courageous invalid, he made no allusion to it and laughed, I feared to seem lacking in feeling if I did not inquire and in tact if I did. “But don’t they come more rarely as one grows old?” he asked, referring to the suffocated feeling. I told him not. “Well, my sister has them much less now than formerly,” he remarked with an air of contradiction, as though it must be the same in my case, as though age were a remedy which had been good for Mme de Gaucourt and therefore salutary for me. Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin now approached and I felt more and more afraid of seeming insensitive in not deploring what I remarked on her husband’s face and yet I did not dare speak first. “You must be pleased to see him again,” she said. “Is he well?” I answered hesitatingly. “As you see,” she replied. She had never even noticed the growth which offended my vision and which was only another of the masks which Time had attached to the Marquis’ face, but so gradually and progressively that the Marquise had noticed nothing. When M, de Cambremer had finished questioning me about my attacks of suffocation it was my turn to ask someone, in a whisper, if the Marquis’ mother was still alive. She was. In appreciating the passage of time, it is only the first step that counts. At first it is painful to realise that so much time has passed, afterwards one is surprised it is not more. One begins by being unable to realise that the thirteenth century is so far away and afterwards finds difficulty in believing that any churches of that period survive though they are innumerable in France. In a few instants that slower process had taken place in me which happens to those who can scarcely believe a person they know is sixty and fifteen years later are equally incredulous when they hear he is still alive and no more than seventy-five. I asked M. de Cambremer how his mother was. “Splendid as ever,” he answered, using an adjective which to the contrary of those tribes which treat aged parents without pity applies in certain families to old people whose use of the physical faculties, such as hearing, walking to church and bearing bereavement without feeling depressed, endows them with extreme moral beauty in the eyes of their children.

If certain women proclaimed their age by make-up, certain men on whose faces I had never noticed cosmetics accentuated their age by ceasing to use them, now that they were no longer concerned to charm. Amongst these was

Legrandin. The disappearance of the pink in his lips and cheeks which I had never suspected of being an artifice, gave his skin a grey hue and his long-drawn and mournful features the sculptured and lapidary precision of an Egyptian God. A God! More like one who had come back from the dead. He had not only lost the courage to paint himself but to smile, to put life into his manner and to talk with animation. It was astonishing to see him so pale, so beaten, only emitting a word now and then which had the insignificance of those uttered by the dead when they are evoked. One wondered what prevented him from being lively, talkative and entertaining, as at a séance, one is struck by the insignificant replies of the spirit of a man who was brilliant when he was alive, to questions susceptible of interesting developments. And one realised that old age had substituted a pale and tenuous phantom for the highly-coloured and alert Legrandin. Certain people's hair had not gone white. I noticed this when the Prince de Guermantes' old footman went to speak to his master. The ample whiskers which stood out from his cheeks had like his neck retained that red-pink which he could not be suspected of obtaining by dye like the Duchesse de Guermantes. But he did not seem less old on that account. One only felt that there are species of man like mosses and lichens in the vegetable kingdom which do not change at the approach of winter.

In the case of guests whose faces had remained intact, age showed itself in other ways; they only seemed to be inconvenienced when they had to walk; at first, something seemed wrong with their legs, later only, one grasped that age had attached soles of lead to their feet. Some, like the Prince of Agrigente, had been embellished by age. This tall, thin, dispirited-looking man with hair which seemed to remain eternally red, had, by means of a metamorphosis analogous to that of insects, been succeeded by an old man whose red hair, like a worn-out table-cloth had been replaced by white. His chest had assumed an unheard of and almost warrior-like protuberance which must have necessitated a regular bursting of the frail chrysalis I had known; a self-conscious gravity tinged his eyes which beamed with a newly acquired benevolence towards all and sundry. And as, in spite of the change in him, there was still a certain resemblance between the vigorous prince of now and the portrait my memory preserved, I was filled with admiration of the recreative power of Time which, while respecting the unity of the being and the laws of life, finds means of thus altering appearance and of introducing bold contrasts in two successive aspects of the same individual. Many people could be immediately identified but like rather bad portraits of themselves in which an unconscientious and malevolent artist

had hardened the features of one, taken away the freshness of complexion or slight-ness of figure of another and darkened the look of a third. Comparing these images with those retained by my memory, I liked less those displayed to me now, in the same way as we dislike and refuse the photograph of a friend because we don't consider it a pleasant likeness. I should have liked to say to each one of them who showed me his portrait: "No, not that one, it doesn't do you justice, it isn't you." I should not have ventured to add: "Instead of your beautiful straight nose you have now got the hooked nose of your father"; it was, in fact, a new familial nose. In short, the artist Time had produced all these models in such a way as to be recognisable without being likenesses, not because he had flattered but because he had aged them. That particular artist works very slowly. Thus the replica of the face of Odette, a barely outlined sketch of which I perceived in that of Gilberte on the day I first saw Bergotte, had been worked by time into the most perfect resemblance (as will be seen shortly) like painters who keep a work a long time and add to it year by year. In several cases I recognised not only the people themselves but themselves as they used to be, like Ski, for instance, who was no more changed than a dried flower or fruit, a type of those amateur "celibates of art" who remain ineffectual and unfulfilled in their old age. Ski had, in thus remaining an incomplete experiment, confirmed my theories about art. Others similarly affected were in no sense amateurs; they were society people interested in nothing, whom age had not ripened and if it had drawn a curve of wrinkles round their faces and given them an arch of white hair, they yet remained chubby and retained the sprightliness of eighteen. They were not old men but extremely faded young men of eighteen. Little would have been needed to efface the withering effects of years, and death would have had no more trouble in giving youth back to their faces than is needed to restore a slightly soiled portrait to its original brightness. I reflected also on the illusion which dupes us into crediting an aged celebrity with virtue, justice and loveliness of soul, my feeling being that such famous people, forty years earlier, had been terrible young men and that there was no reason to suppose that they were not just as vain, cunning, self-sufficient and tricky now.

Yet in complete contrast with these last I was surprised when I conversed with men and women who were formerly unbearable, to discover that they had almost entirely lost their defects, whether because life had disappointed or satisfied their ambitions and thus freed them from presumption or from bitterness. A rich marriage which makes both effort and ostentation unnecessary, perhaps too the influence of a wife, a slowly-acquired sense of values other than

those in which light-headed youth exclusively believes had enlarged their characters and brought out their qualities. With age such individuals seemed to have acquired a different personality like trees which seem to assume a new character with their autumnal tints. In their case age manifested itself as a form of morality they used not to possess, in the case of others it was physical in character and so new to me that a particular person such as Mme de Souvré, for instance, seemed simultaneously familiar and a stranger. A stranger for I could not believe it was she and, in responding to her bow, I could not help letting her notice my mental effort to establish which of three or four people (of whom Mme de Souvré was not one) I was bowing to with a warmth which must have astonished her for, in fear of being too distant if she were an intimate friend, I had made up for the uncertainty of my recognition by the warmth of my smiling handshake. On the other hand, her new aspect was familiar to me. It was one I had, in the course of my life, often observed in stout, elderly women without then suspecting that, many years before, they might have resembled Mme de Souvré. So different was this aspect from the one I had known in the past that I might have thought her a character in a fairy story which first appears as a young girl, then as a stout matron and finally, no doubt, turns into a tottering, bowbacked old woman. She looked like an exhausted swimmer far from shore who painfully manages to keep her head above the waves of time which were submerging her. After looking long at her irresolute face, wavering like a treacherous memory which cannot retain former appearances, I succeeded somehow in recovering something by indulging in a little game of eliminating the squares and hexagons which age had affixed to those cheeks. But it was by no means always geometrical figures that it affixed to the faces of the women. In the Duchesse de Guermantes' cheeks which had remained remarkably unchanged though they now seemed compounded of nougat, I distinguished a trace of verdigris, a tiny bit of crushed shell and a fleshiness difficult to define because it was slighter than a mistletoe-berry and less transparent than a glass bead.

Some men walked lame and one knew it was not on account of a carriage accident but of a stroke and that they had, as people say, one foot in the grave. This was gaping for half-paralysed women like Mme de Franquetot who seemed to be unable to pull away their raiment caught in the stones of the vault, as though they could not recover their footing, with their heads held low, their bodies bent into a curve like the one between life and death they were now descending to their final extinction. Nothing could resist the movement of the

parabola which was carrying them off, trying tremblingly to rise, their quivering fingers failed them. Certain faces under the hood of their white hair wore the rigidity, the sealed eyelids of those about to die, their constantly moving lips seemed to be mumbling the prayer of the dying.

If a face retained its linear form, white hair replacing blond or black sufficed to make it look like that of another. Theatrical costumiers know that a powdered wig so dis-guises a person as to make him unrecognisable. The young Marquis de Beausergent whom I had met in Mme de Cambremer's box when he was a sub-lieutenant on the day when Mme de Guermantes was in her sister's box, still had perfectly regular features, even more so, because the physiological rigidity of arteriosclerosis exaggerated the impassive physiognomy of the dandy and gave his features the intense and almost grimacing immobility of a study by Mantegna or Michael Angelo. His formerly brick-red skin had become gravely pale; silver hair, slight stoutness, Doge-like dignity and a chronic fatigue which gave him a constant longing for sleep, combined to produce a new and impressive majesty. A rectangle of white beard had replaced a similar rectangle of blond so perfectly that, noticing that my former sub-lieutenant now had five stripes, my first thought was to congratulate him not on having been promoted Colonel but on being one so completely that he seemed to have borrowed not only the uniform but also the solemn and serious appearance of his father the Colonel. In the case of another man, a white beard had succeeded a blond one but as his face had remained gay, smiling and youthful, it made him appear redder and more active and by increasing the brightness of his eyes, gave this worldling who had remained young the inspired appearance of a prophet. The transformation which white hair and other elements had effected, particularly in women, would have claimed my attention less if it had involved a change of colour only, for that may charm the eyes whereas a change of personality troubles the mind. Actually to recognise someone, more still, to identify him you have been unable to recognise, is to think two contradictory things under a single denomination, it is the same as saying that he who was here, the being we recall, is here no longer and that he who is here is one we never knew, that means piercing a mystery almost as troubling as that of death of which it is indeed the preface and the herald. For I knew what these changes meant and what they preluded and so that whitening of the women's hair in addition to so many other changes deeply moved me. Somebody mentioned a name and I was stupefied to know it applied at one and the same time to my former blonde dance-partner and to the stout elderly lady who moved ponderously past me. Except for a certain

pinkness of complexion their name was perhaps the only thing in common between these two women who differed so much — the one in my memory and this one at the Guermantes' reception — the young *ingénue* and the theatrical dowager. That my dancer had managed to annex that huge carcass, that she had succeeded in slowing down her cumbersome movements like a metronome, that all she should have preserved of her youth were her cheeks, fuller certainly but freckled as ever, that for the erstwhile dainty blonde there should have been substituted this old pot-bellied Marshal, life must have achieved more destruction and reconstruction than is needed to replace a spire by a dome and when one remembered that the operation had been carried out not upon inert matter but upon flesh which only changes insensibly, the overwhelming contrast between this apparition and the being I remembered removed her into a past which, rather than remote, was almost incredible. It was difficult to reunite the two aspects, to think of the two creatures under the same denomination; for in the same way that one has difficulty in realising that a dead body was alive or that he who was alive is dead to-day, it is almost as difficult, and the difficulty is the same (for the annihilation of youth, the destruction of a personality full of strength and vitality is the beginning of a void), to conceive that she who was young is old, when the aspect of this old woman juxtaposed on that of the young one seems so completely to exclude it that in turn it is the old woman, then the young one, then again the old one which appear to you as in a dream and one cannot believe that this was ever that, that the matter of that one is herself which had not escaped elsewhere, but thanks to the adroit manipulations of time, had become this one, that the same matter has never left the same body — if one did not have the name as an indication as well as the affirmative testimony of friends to which the copperas, erstwhile exiguous between the gold of the wheat ears to-day buried beneath the snow, alone gives an appearance of credibility. One was terrified on considering the periods which must have passed since such a revolution had been accomplished in the geology of the human countenance, to observe the erosions that had taken place beside the nose, the immense deposits on the cheeks which enveloped the face with their opaque and refractory mass. I had always thought of our own individuality at a given moment in time as a polypus whose eye, an independent organism, although associated with it, winks at a scatter of dust without orders from the mind, still more, whose intestines are infected by an obscure parasite without the intelligence being aware of it, and similarly of the soul as a series of selves juxtaposed in the course of life but distinct from each other which would die in turn or take turn about like those

different selves which alternately took possession of me at Combray when evening came. But I had also observed that these moral cellules which constitute a being are more durable than itself. I had seen the vices and the bravery of the Guer-mantes return in Saint-Loup, as I had seen the strange and swift defects and then the loyal semitism of Swann. I could see it again in Bloch. After he had lost his father the idea, besides the strong familial sentiment which often exists in Jewish families, that his father was superior to everyone, had given the form of a cult to his love for him. He could not bear losing him and had shut himself up for nearly a year in a sanatorium. He had replied to my condolences in a deeply felt but almost haughty tone, so enviable did he consider me for having been acquainted with that distinguished man whose carriage and pair he would have gladly given to a historical museum. And at his family table (for contrary to what the Duchesse de Guermantes believed, he was married) the same anger which animated M. Bloch senior against M. Nissim Bernard animated Bloch against his father-in-law. He made the same attacks on him. In the same way when I listened to the, talk of Cottard, Brichot and so many others I had felt that by culture and fashion a single undulation propagates identical modes of speech and thought in the whole expanse of space, and in the same way, throughout the duration of time, great fundamental currents raise from the depths of the ages the same angers, the same sorrows, the same boasts, the same manias, throughout superimposed generations, each section accepting the criteria of various levels of the same series and reproducing, like shadows upon successive screens, pictures similar to though often less insignificant than that which brought Bloch and his father-in-law, M. Bloch senior and M. Nissim Bernard and others I never knew, to blows.

There were men I knew there with whose relations I was also acquainted without ever realising that they had a feature-in common; in admiring the white-haired old hermit into whom Legrandin had changed, I suddenly observed, I could say discovered with a zoologist’s satisfaction, in his ironed-out cheeks, the same construction as in those of his young nephew, Léonor de Cambremer, who-however, did not seem to bear any resemblance to him; to this preliminary common feature I added another I had not until now remarked, then others, none of which composed the synthesis his youthfulness ordinarily offered me, so that soon I had a sort of caricature of him, deeper and more lifelike than a literal resemblance would have been; his uncle now seemed to me young Cambremer who, for fun, had assumed the appearance of the old man he would eventually be, so completely indeed that it was not only what youth of the past had become

but what youth of to-day would change into that had given me such an intensified sense of Time.

Women tried to keep touch with the particular charm which had most distinguished them but the fresh matter that time had added to their faces would not permit of it. The features moulded by beauty, having disappeared in roost cases, they tried to construct another one with the relics. By displacing the centre of perspective if not of gravity in the face and recomposing its features to accord with the new character, they began building up a new sort of beauty at fifty as a man takes up a new profession late in life or as soil no longer good for the vine is used to produce beetroot. This caused a new youth to flower round the new features. But those who had been too beautiful or too ugly could not accommodate themselves to these transformations. The former modelled like marble on definitive lines which cannot be changed, crumbled away like a statue, the latter who had some facial defect had even an advantage over them. To start with it was only they whom one immediately recognised. One knew there were not two mouths in Paris like theirs which enabled me to distinguish them in the course of a party at which I had recognised nobody. And they did not even appear to have aged. Age is human and being monsters they had no more changed than whales. There were other men and women who did not seem to have aged; their outlines were as slim, their faces as young as ever. But, if one approached them closely so as to talk to them, the face with its smooth skin and delicate contours appeared different and as happens when one examines a vegetable body under a microscope, watery or ensanguined spots exuded. I observed sundry greasy marks on skin I had believed to be smooth which gave me a feeling of disgust. The outline did not resist this enlargement; at a close view that of the nose had been deflected and rounded, had been invaded by the same oily patches as the rest of the face and when it met the eyes, the latter disappeared into pockets which destroyed the resemblance with the former face one thought one had rediscovered. Thus those guests who had an appearance of youth at a distance, became old as one got near to them and could observe the enlargement and distribution of the facial planes. In fact their age seemed to depend upon the spectator so placing himself as to envisage them as young by observing them only at a distance which, deprived of the glass supplied to a long-sighted person by an optician, diminishes the object; their age, like the presence of infusoria in a glass of water, was brought about less by the progress of years than by the scale of enlargement in the observer’s vision.

In general the amount of white hair was an index of depth in time like

mountain summits which appear to be on the same level as others until the brilliance of their snowy whiteness reveals their height above them. And even that could not always be said, especially about women. Thus the Princesse de Guermantes' locks, when they were grey, had the brilliance of silvery silk round her protuberant brow but now having determined to become white seemed to be made of wool and stuffing and resembled soiled snow. It also occurred that blonde dancing girls had not merely annexed, together with their white hair, the friendship of duchesses they had not previously known, but having formerly done nothing but dance, art had touched them with its grace. And, like those illustrious ladies in the eighteenth century who became religious, they lived in flats full of cubist paintings, with a cubist painter working only for them and they living only for him.

Old men whose features had changed attempted to fix on them permanently the fugitive expressions adopted for a pose, thinking they would secure a better appearance or palliate its defects; they seemed to have become unchangeable snapshots of themselves.

All these people had taken so much time to make up their disguises that, as a rule, they escaped the notice of those who lived with them, indeed often a reprieve was granted them and, during the interval, they had been able to remain themselves until quite late in life. But this deferred disguise was then accomplished more quickly and was, in any case, inevitable. Thus I had always known Mme X charming and erect and for long she remained so, too long indeed, for like a person who must not forget to put on her Turkish disguise before dark, she had waited till the last moment and precipitately transformed herself into the old Turkish lady her mother formerly resembled.

At the party I discovered one of my early friends whom I had formerly seen nearly every day during ten years. Someone reintroduced us to each other. As I went near to him, he said with a voice I well remembered: "What a joy for me after so many years!" but what a surprise for me! His voice seemed to be proceeding from a perfected phonograph for though it was that of my friend, it issued from a great greyish man whom I did not know and the voice of my old comrade seemed to have been housed in this fat old fellow by means of a mechanical trick. Yet I knew that it was he, the person who introduced us after all that time not being the kind to play pranks. He declared that I had not changed by which I grasped that he did not think he had. Then I looked at him again and except that he had got so fat, he had kept a good deal of his former personality. Nevertheless, I found it impossible to realise it and I tried to recall

him. In his youth he had blue eyes that were always smiling and moving, apparently searching for something I was unaware of, which may have been disinterested truth, perhaps pursued in perpetual doubt with a boy's fugitive respect for family friends. Having become an influential politician, capable and despotic, those blue eyes which had never succeeded in finding what they were after had become immobilised and this gave them a sharp expression like a frowning-eye-brow, while gaiety, unconsciousness and innocence had changed into design and disingenuousness. Emphatically he had changed into another person — then suddenly, in reply to a word of mine, he burst into laughter, the jolly familiar laugh of former days which suited the perpetual gay mobility of his glance. Musical fanatics hold that Z's music orchestrated by X becomes something absolutely different. These are shades which ordinary people cannot grasp, but the wild stifled laugh of a child beneath an eye pointed like a well-sharpened blue pencil, though a little on one side, is something more than a difference in orchestration. When his laughter ceased I would have liked to reconstruct my friend, but like Ulysses in the Odyssey, throwing himself upon the body of his dead mother, like a medium vainly trying to obtain from an apparition a reply which shall identify it, like a visitor to an electrical exhibition who cannot accept the voice from a phonograph as the spontaneous utterance of a human being, I ceased to recognise my friend.

It is necessary, however, to make this reserve that the beat of time itself can in certain cases be accelerated or slowed down. Four or five years before, I had by chance, met in the street Vicomtesse de St. Fiacre (daughter-in-law of the Guermantes' friend). Her sculptured features had seemed to assure her eternal youth and indeed she still was young. But now, in spite of her smiles and greetings, I failed to recognise her in a lady whose features had so gone to pieces that the outline of her face could not be restored. What had happened was that for three years she had been taking cocaine and other drugs. Her eyes deeply and darkly rimmed were haggard, her mouth had a strange twitch. She had, it seems, got up for this reception though she was in the habit of remaining in bed or on a sofa for months. Time has these express and special trains which bring about premature old age but on a parallel line return trains circulate which are almost as rapid. I took M. de Courgivaux for his son; he looked younger and though he must have been past fifty, appeared to be no more than thirty. He had found an intelligent doctor, had avoided alcohol and salt and so had become thirty again, hardly even that because he had had his hair cut that morning.

A curious thing is that the phenomenon of age seemed in its modalities to

take note of certain social customs. Great gentlemen who had been in the habit of wearing the plainest alpaca and old straw hats which a bourgeois would not have put on his head, had aged in the same way as the gardeners and peasants in the midst of whom they had lived. Their cheeks were stained brown inl patches and their faces had grown yellow and had sunk flat like a book. And I thought, too, of those who were not there because they could not be, of how their secretary, in an attempt to give them the illusion of survival, would excuse them by one of those telegrams the Princess received on occasion from such as had been ill or dying for years, who can rise no more nor even move and, surrounded by frivolous or assiduous visitors, the former attracted like inquisitive tourists, the latter by the faith of pilgrims, lie, with closed eyes clasping their breviary, their bedclothes partly thrown back like a mortuary shroud, chiselled into a skeleton beneath the pale, distended skin like marble on a tomb.

Certainly, some women were recognisable because their faces had remained almost the same and they wore their grey hair to harmonise with the season like autumn leaves. But in others and in some men their identity was so impossible to establish — for instance between the dark voluptuary one remembered and the old monk of now — that their transformation made one think, rather than of the actor's art, of that of the amazing mimic of whom Fregoli remains the prototype. That old woman yonder is about to weep because she knows that the indefinable and melancholy smile which was formerly her charm cannot even irradiate the surface of the mask old age has affixed to her. Now, discouraged from attempts to please she more adroitly resigns herself to using it as though it were a theatrical mask to make people laugh. But in the case of nearly all the women there was no limit to their efforts to fight against age; they held the mirror of their faces towards beauty, vanishing like a setting sun whose last rays they passionately long to retain. Some sought to smooth out, to extend the white surface, renouncing the piquancy of menaced dimples, quelling the resistance of a smile doomed and disarmed, while others, realising that their beauty had finally departed, took refuge in expression, as one compensates the loss of the voice by the art of diction, and hung on to a pout, to a smirk, to a pensive gaze, or to a smile to which muscular incoordination gave the appearance of weeping.

A stout lady bade me good afternoon during the moment that these varied thoughts were pressing upon my mind. For an instant I hesitated to reply to her, fearing she might be taking me for someone else, then her confidence making me think the contrary and fearing she was someone with whom I might at one time have been intimate, I exaggerated the affability of my smile while my gaze

still sought in her features the name I could not find. Thus an uncertain candidate for matriculation searches the face of the examiner for the answer he would be wiser to seek in his own memory. So I smiled and stared at the features of the stout lady. They appeared to be those of Mme de Forcheville and my smile became tinged with respect and my indecision began to cease when a second later, the stout lady said: “You were taking me for mamma, I know I’m getting to look exactly like her,” and I recognised Gilberte.

Moreover, even among men who had been subjected to only a slight change, whose moustaches only had become white, one felt that the change was not purely material. One saw them as through a coloured mist or glass which affected their facial aspect with a sort of fogginess and revealed what they allowed one to observe as if it were life-size though in reality it was far away, not in the sense of space, but, fundamentally, like being on another shore whence they had as much trouble in recognising us as we them. Perhaps Mme de Forcheville who looked to me as though she had been injected with paraffin which swells the skin and prevents it from sagging, was unique in presenting the appearance of a courtesan of an earlier period who had been embalmed for eternity. “You took me for my mother,” Gilberte had said and it was true. For that matter it was a compliment to the daughter. Moreover, it was not only in the last-named that familiar features had reappeared, as invisible till then in her face as the inturned parts of a seed-pod, the eventual opening out of which would never be suspected. Thus the enormous maternal bridge in one as in the other transformed towards the fifties a nose till then inflexibly straight. In the case of another daughter of a banker, her complexion of flower-like freshness had become copper-coloured through the reflection of the gold which the father had so freely manipulated. Some even ended by resembling the quarter where they lived, bearing upon their countenances a sort of reflection of the rue de l’Arcade or the Avenue du Bois or the rue de l’Elysée. But they reproduced more than anything else the features of their parents.

One starts with the idea that people have remained the same and one discovers that they have got old. But if one starts by thinking them old, one does not find them so bad. In Odette’s case it was not merely that; her appearance, when one knew her age and expected her to be an old woman seemed a more miraculous challenge to the laws of chronology than the conservation of radium to those of nature. If I had not recognised her at first, it was not because she had changed but because she had not. Having realised in the course of the last hour what additions time made to people and the subtraction that was needed to

rediscover their personalities, I rapidly added to the old Odette the number of years which had passed over her with the result that I found someone before my eyes who could not possibly be her precisely because this someone was the Odette of former days.

Which was the effect of paint and which of dye? With her flat golden hair arranged at the back like the ruffled chignon of a doll surmounting a face with a doll-like expression of surprise and superimposed upon that an equally flat sailor hat of straw of the period of the 1878 Exhibition (in which she certainly had figured and if she had then been as old as now, she would have been one of its choicest features) she looked as though she were a young woman playing a part in a Christmas revue featuring the Exhibition of 1878.

Close to us, a minister of the pre-Boulangist period who had again become a minister, passed by, bowing right and left to ladies with a tremulous and distant smile, as though imprisoned in the past like a little phantom figure manipulated by an unseen hand which had reduced his size and changed his substance so that he looked like a pumice-stone reproduction of himself. This former Prime Minister, now cultivated by the faubourg Saint-Germain, had once been the object of criminal proceedings and had been execrated by society and by the populace. But thanks to the renewal of the social elements in both groupings and the extinction of individual passions, memories disappear, no one remembered and he was honoured. There is no disgrace great enough to make a man lose heart if he bears in mind that at the end of a certain number of years our buried mistakes will be but invisible dust upon which nature’s flowers will smile peacefully. The individual momentarily under a cloud, through the equilibrium brought about by Time between the new and the old social strata, will easily assert his authority over them and be the object of their deference and admiration. Only, this is Time’s business; and at the moment of his troubles, he was inconsolable because the young milk-maid opposite had heard the crowd call him a swindler and shake their fists at him when he was in the soup. The young milk-maid does not see things on the plane of time and is unaware that men to whom the morning paper offers the incense of flattery were yesterday of bad repute and that the man who just now escaped prison, while perhaps, he was thinking of that young milk-maid, and who had not the humility to utter conciliatory words which might have secured him sympathy, will one day be glorified by the press and sought after by duchesses. Time also heals family quarrels. At the Princesse de Guermantes’ there was a couple, each of whom had had an uncle; these two uncles were not content merely to fight a duel but each

had sent the other his concierge or his butler as his representative for the occasion, so as to humiliate him by showing he was not fit to be treated as a gentleman. Such tales were asleep in the papers of thirty years ago and nobody knew anything about them. Thus the Princesse de Guermantes' salon illuminated and forgetful, flowered like a peaceful cemetery. There Time had not only disintegrated those of the past, it had made possible and created new associations.

To return to our politician. In spite of the change in his physical substance, a change as complete as the moral transformation he now roused in the public, in a word, in spite of the many years gone by since he was Prime Minister, he had become a Minister again. The present Prime Minister had given the one of forty years ago a post in the new Cabinet much as theatrical managers entrust a part to one of their earlier women associates who has been long in retirement but whom they consider more capable than younger ones of performing it with delicacy, of whose embarrassed situation they are, moreover, aware and who, at nearly eighty, still shows that age has scarcely impaired an artistic integrity which amazes the public within a few days of her death.

Mme de Forcheville presented an appearance so miraculous that one would have said not that she had grown young, but that, with all her carmine and rouge, she had reflowered. Even more than an incarnation of the Universal Exhibition of 1878, she could have been the chief attraction of a horticultural exhibition to-day. To me, at all events, she did not seem to be saying: "I am the Exhibition of 1878" but "I am the *Allée des Acacias*of 1892." To me it was as though she were still part of it. And, because she had not changed, she seemed hardly to be living, she was like a sterilised rose. When I wished her good afternoon, she tried for a moment vainly to put a name to my face. I gave it her and at once, thanks to its evocative magic, I ceased to wear the appearance of Arbousier or of Kangouroo apparently bestowed on me by age, and she began talking to me with that peculiar voice, applauded in the smaller theatres, which enchanted people so much when they were invited to meet her at lunch and discovered that they could have as much as they liked of it with every word she uttered. That voice had retained the same futile cordiality, the same slight English accent. And yet, just as her eyes seemed to be looking at me from a distant shore, her voice was sad, almost appealing like that of the dead in the Odyssey. Odette ought to have gone on acting. I paid her a compliment on her youth. She answered: "You are charming, my dear, thanks." And as it was difficult for her to express any sentiment, however sincere, without revealing her anxiety to be fashionable, she

repeated several times: “Thanks so much, thanks so much.” And I, who had formerly made long journeys only to catch a glimpse of her in the Bois, who, when first I went to her house, had listened to the words that fell from her lips as though they were pearls, found the moments now spent with her interminable; I knew not what to say and I left her. Alas, she was not always to remain thusy Less than three years afterwards, I was to see her at an evening party given by Gilberte, not fallen into second childhood but somewhat decayed, no longer able to hide under a mask-like face what she was thinking — thinking is saying too much — what she was feeling, moving her head about, pursing her lips, shaking her shoulders at everything she felt, like a drunken man or a child or like certain inspired poets who, unconscious of their surroundings, compose their poems when they are in company or at table, and, to the alarm of their astonished hostess, knit their brows and make grimaces. Mme de Forcheville’s feelings — except the one that brought her to Gilberte’s party, tenderness for her beloved child, her pride in so brilliant an entertainment, a pride which could not veil the mother’s melancholy that she no longer counted — these feelings were never happy and were inspired by her perpetual self-defence against rudeness meted out to her, the timid defence of a child. One constantly heard people say: “I don’t know if Mme de Forcheville recognises me, perhaps I ought to be introduced over again.” “You can dispense with that,” (someone replied at the top of his voice neither knowing nor caring that Gilberte’s mother could hear every word) “you won’t get any fun out of it. Leave her alone. She’s a bit daft.” Furtively, Mme de Forcheville cast a glance from her still beautiful eyes at the insulting speakers, then quickly looked away, for fear of seeming to have heard, while, bowing beneath the blow, she restrained her weak resentment with quivering head and heaving breast, and glanced towards another equally ruthless guest. Nor did she seem too greatly overwhelmed for she had been ailing several days and had hinted to her daughter to postpone the party which the latter had refused. Mme de Forcheville did not love her the less; the presence of the Duchesses, the admiration the company manifested for the new mansion, flooded her heart with joy, and when the Marquise de Sebran was announced, this lady representing, with much effort, the highest peak of fashion, Mme de Forcheville felt she had been a good and far-seeing mother and that her maternal task had been accomplished. A fresh lot of contemptuous guests brought on another solitary colloquy if a mute language only expressed by gesticulation can be called talking. Beautiful still, she had become as never previously, an object of infinite sympathy for now the whole world betrayed her who had once betrayed Swann

and the rest; now that the rôles were reversed, she had become too weak to defend herself against men. And soon she would be unable to defend herself against death. After that anticipation, let us go back three years, to the reception at the Prince de Guermantes'.

Bloch, having asked me to introduce him to the master of the house I did not make a shadow of difficulty. The embarrassment I had felt the first time at the Prince de Guermantes' evening party seemed natural enough then but now it seemed as simple a matter to introduce one of his guests to him as to bring someone to his house who had not been invited. Was this because, since those far distant days, I had become an intimate though a long-forgotten intimate, of a society in which I was once a stranger or was it because, not being a true man of the world, what causes that type embarrassment had no existence for me, now my shyness had passed? Or, again, was it because these people had little by little shed their first, their second and their third fictitious aspects in my presence and that I sensed, under the Prince's disdainful manner, a human longing to know people, to make the acquaintance of those even whom he affected to despise? Finally, was it because the Prince had changed like those others, arrogant in their youth and in their maturity, whom old age had softened (the more so that they had for long known by sight men against whose antecedents they had reacted and whom they now knew to be on good terms with their own acquaintances) especially if old age is assisted by virtues or vices which broaden social relationships or by a social revolution which causes a political conversion such as the Prince's to Dreyfusism?

Bloch interrogated me as I formerly did others when I first entered society, and as I still did, about people I formerly knew socially and who were now as far away, as isolated, as those Combray folk I had often wanted to place. But Combray was so distinct from and impossible to reconcile with the outer world that it was like a piece of a jig-saw puzzle that could not be fitted into the map of France. "Then I can't have any idea of what the Prince de Guermantes used to be like from my knowledge of Swann or M. de Charlus?" Bloch asked. For some time I used to borrow his way of putting things and now he often imitated mine. "Not the least." "But how did they actually differ?" "You would have had to hear them talk together to grasp it. Now Swann is dead and M. de Charlus is not far from it. But the difference was enormous." And while Bloch's eye gleamed as he thought of what the conversation of these marvellous people must have been, I was thinking that I had exaggerated my pleasure in their society, having never got any until I was alone and could differentiate them in my imagination. Did

Bloch realise this? “Perhaps you’ve coloured it all a bit too much,” he remarked. “Look at our hostess, the Princesse de Guermantes, I know she’s no longer young but, after all, it isn’t so very long ago that you spoke of her incomparable charm and her marvellous beauty. Certainly I admit she has the grand manner and she also has the extraordinary eyes you described to me, but I don’t see that she’s so wonderful as all that. Obviously she’s high-bred but still...” I had to explain to Bloch that we weren’t alluding to the same person. The Princesse de Guermantes was dead and the Prince, ruined by the German defeat, had married ex-Mme Verdurin whom Bloch had not recognised. “You’re mistaken, I’ve looked up the Gotha of this year,” Bloch naively confessed, “and I found that the Prince de Guermantes was living in this very mansion and had married someone of great importance. Wait a minnte, now I’ve got it, Sidonie, Duchesse de Duras, *née* des Beaux.” This was a fact, for Mme Verdurin, shortly after her husband’s death married the old ruined Duc de Duras, who thus made her the Prince de Guermantes’ cousin and died after they had been married two years. He had supplied a very useful means of transition for Mme Verdurin who by a third marriage had become Princesse de Guermantes and now occupied a great position in the faubourg Saint-Germain which would have much astonished Combray where the ladies of the rue de l’Oiseau, Mme Goupil’s daughter and Mme Sazerat’s daughter-in-law had said with a laugh, years before Mme Verdurin became Princesse de Guermantes: “The Duchesse de Duras!” as though Mme Verdurin were playing a part at the theatre. The caste principle maintained that she should die Mme Verdurin and that the title which, in their eyes, could never confer any new social prestige, merely produced the bad effect of getting herself “talked about”; that expression which in all social categories is applied to a woman who has a lover, was also applied in the faubourg Saint-Germain to people who published books and in the Combray bourgeoisie to those who make marriages which for one reason or another are considered unsuitable. When Mme Verdurin married the Prince de Guermantes they must have said he was a sham Guermantes, a swindler. For myself, the realisation that a Princesse de Guermantes still existed, who had nothing to do with her who had so much charmed me and who was now no more, whom death had left defenceless, was intensely saddening as it was to witness the objects once owned by Princesse Hedwige such as her Château and everything else, pass to another. Succession to a name is sad like all successions and seems like an usurpation; and the uninterrupted stream of new Princesses de Guer-mantes would flow until the millennium, the name held from age to age by different women would always be

that of one living Princesse de Guermantes, a name that ignored death, that was indifferent to change and heartaches and which would close over those who had worn it like the sea in its serene and immemorial placidity.

But, in contradiction to that permanence, the former *habitués*asserted that society had completely changed, that people were now received who in their day would never have been and that, as one says, was “true and not true”. It was not true because they were not taking the curve of time into consideration, the result of which is that the present generation see the new people at their point of arrival whereas those of the past saw them at their point of departure. And when the latter entered society, there were new arrivals whose point of departure was remembered by others. One generation brings about a change while it took the bourgeois name of a Colbert centuries to become noble. On the other hand, it was true, for if the social position of people changes, the most ineradicable ideas and customs (as also fortunes, marriages and national hatreds) change also, amongst them even that of only associating with fashionable people. Not only does snobbishness change its form but it might be forgotten like the! war and Radicals and Jews be admitted to the Jockey Club.

Certainly even the exterior change in faces I had known was only the symbol of an internal change effected day by day. Perhaps these people continued doing the same things every day but the idea they had about these things and about the people they associated with having a little life in it, resulted after some years, in those things and people being different under the same names and it would have been strange if the faces of the latter had not changed.

If in these periods of twenty years, the conglomerates of coteries had been demolished and reconstructed to suit new stars, themselves destined to disappear and to reappear, crystallisations and dispersals followed by new crystallisations had taken place in people’s souls. If the Duchesse de Guermantes had been many people to me, such and such a person had been a favourite of Mme de Guermantes or of Mme Swann at a period preceding the Dreyfus Affair, and a fanatic or imbecile afterwards because the Dreyfus Affair had changed their social valuations and regrouped people round parties which had since been unmade and remade. Time serves us powerfully by adding its influence to purely intellectual affinities; it is the passage of time that causes us to forget our antipathies, our contempts, and the very causes which gave birth to them. If anyone had formerly analysed the modish elegance of young Mme Léonor de Cambremer, he would have discovered that she was the niece of the shopkeeper in our courtyard, to wit, Jupien, and that what had especially added to her

prestige was that her father procured men for M. de Charlus. Yet, in combination, all this had produced an effect of brilliance, the now distant causes being unknown to most of the newcomers in society and forgotten by those who had been aware of them and valued to-day's effulgence more highly than yesterday's disgrace, for we always take a name at its present-day valuation. So the interest of these social transformations was that they, too, were an effect of lost time and a phenomenon of memory.

Amongst the present company, there was a man of considerable importance who in a recent notorious trial, had given evidence depending for its value on his high moral probity, in deference to which Judge and Counsel had unanimously bowed and the conviction of two people had been brought about. There was a general movement of interest and respect when he entered. It was Morel. I was perhaps the only one present who knew that he had first been kept by M. de Charlus, then by Saint-Loup and simultaneously by a friend of Saint-Loup. In spite of our common recollections, he wished me good day with cordiality though with a certain reserve. He recalled the time when we met at Balbec and those memories represented for him the beauty and melancholy of youth.

But there were people whom I failed to recognise because I had not known them, for time had exercised its chemistry on the composition of society as it had upon people themselves. The milieu, the specific nature of which was defined by affinities which attracted to it the great princely names of Europe and by the repulsion which separated from it any element which was not aristocratic, where I had found a material refuge for that name of Guermantes to which it lent its ultimate reality, had itself been subjected to a profound modification in the essential constitution which I had believed stable. The presence of people whom I had seen in quite other social groupings and who, it had seemed to me, could never penetrate into this one, astonished me less than the intimate familiarity with which they were received and called by their first names; a certain *ensemble* of aristocratic prejudices, of snobbery which until recently automatically protected the name of Guermantes from everything that did not harmonise with it, had ceased to function.

Certain foreigners of distinction, who, when I made my *début* in society, gave grand dinner-parties to which they only invited the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duchesse de Guermantes and the Princesse de Parme, and when they went to those ladies' houses were accorded the place of honour, passing for what was most illustrious in the society of the time, which perhaps they were, had disappeared without leaving a trace. Were they on a diplomatic mission or

were they remaining at home? Perhaps a scandal, a suicide, a revolution had prevented their return to society or were they perhaps German? Anyhow, their name only derived its lustre from their former position and was no longer borne by anyone: people did not even know to whom I was alluding and if I tried to spell out their names believed they were “rastaquouères”.

The best friends of those who, according to the old social code, ought not to have been there, were to my great astonishment, extremely well-born people who only bothered to come to the Princesse de Guermantes’ for their new acquaintances’ sake. What most characterised this new society was its prodigious aptitude for breaking up class distinctions.

The springs of a machine which had been strained were bent or broken and no longer worked, a thousand strange bodies penetrated it, deprived it of its homogeneity, its distinction, its colour. The faubourg Saint-Germain, like a senile duchesse, responded with timid smiles to the insolent servants who invaded its drawing-rooms, drank its orangeade and introduced their mistresses to it. Again I had that sense of time having drained away, of the annihilation of part of my vanished past presented to me less vitally by the destruction of this coherent unity (which the Guermantes’ salon had been) of elements whose presence, recurrence and co-ordination were explained by a thousand shades of meaning, by a thousand reasons, than by the fact that the consciousness of those shades and meanings which caused one who was present to be there because he belonged there, because he was there by right while another who elbowed him was a suspicious newcomer, had been itself destroyed. That ignorance was not ‘. only social but political and of every kind. For the memory of individuals is not coincident with their lives and the younger ones who had never experienced what their elders remembered, now being members of society, very legitimately in the nobiliary sense, the beginnings of certain people being unknown or forgotten, took them where they found them, at the point of their elevation or fall, believing it had always been so, that the Princesse de Guermantes and Bloch had always occupied the highest position and that Clemenceau and Viviani had always been Conservatives. And, as certain facts have greater historic duration than others, the execrated memory of the Dreyfus Affair lingered vaguely in their minds owing to what their fathers had told them and if they were informed that Clemenceau had been a Dreyfusard they replied: “It’s not possible; you’re making a mistake, he was on the other side.” Ministers with a shady past and former prostitutes were held to be paragons of virtue. Someone having asked a young man of good family if there had not been something equivocal in the past

of Gilberte's mother, the young aristocrat answered that, as a matter of fact, she had, early in life, married an adventurer called Swann, but afterwards she had married one of the most prominent men in society, the Comte de Forcheville. Doubtless some people in that drawing-room, the Duchesse de Guermantes for instance, would have smiled at this statement (the denial of social qualifications to Swann seeming preposterous to me although formerly at Combray I had believed in common with my great-aunt, that Swann could not possibly know princesses) and so would other women who might have been there, but who now hardly ever went into society, the Duchesses de Montmorency, de Mouchy, de Sagan, who had been Swann's intimate friends, though they had never caught sight of Forcheville who was unknown in society when they frequented it. But society as it was only existed like faces which have changed and blonde hair now white, in the memory of people whose numbers diminished every day. During the war Bloch gave up going about and frequenting his former haunts where he cut a poor figure. On the other hand, he kept on publishing works, the sophistry of which I made a point of repudiating, so as not to be beguiled by it, but which, nevertheless, gave young men and ladies in society the impression of uncommon intellectual depth, even of a sort of genius. It was only after making a complete break between his earlier and his present worldliness that he had entered on a new phase of his life and presented the appearance of a famous and distinguished man in a reconstructed society. Young men were, of course, unaware of his early beginnings in society and the few names he recalled were those of former friends of Saint-Loup which gave a sort of retrospective and undefined elasticity to his present prestige. In any case, he seemed to them one of those men of talent who at all periods have flourished in good society and no one thought he had ever been otherwise.

After I had finished talking to the Prince de Guermantes, Bloch took possession of me and introduced me to a young woman who had often heard the Duchesse de Guermantes speak of me. If those of the new generation considered the Duchesse de Guermantes nothing particular because she knew actresses and others, the ladies of her family, now old, always regarded her as exceptional, partly because they were familiar with her high birth and heraldic distinction and her intimacies with what Mme de Forcheville would have called in her pseudo-English, "royalties", but also because she disdained going to family parties, was terribly bored by them and they knew they could never count on her. Her theatrical and political associations, which were completely misunderstood, only increased her preciousness in their eyes and, therefore, her prestige. So that

whereas in the political and artistic spheres she was a somewhat indefinable being, a sort of *défroquée* of the faubourg Saint-Germain who goes about with under-secretaries of State and theatrical stars, if anyone in the faubourg Saint-Germain gave a grand party, they said: “Is it any use inviting Marie Sosthènes? She won’t come. Still, for the sake of appearances — but she won’t turn up.” And if, late in the evening, Marie Sosthènes appeared in a brilliant dress and stood in the doorway with a look of hard contempt for all her relations, if, maybe, she remained an hour, it was a most important party for the dowager who was giving it, in the same way as in early days, when Sarah Bernhardt promised a theatrical manager her assistance upon which he did not count, and not only came but with infinite compliance and simplicity recited twenty pieces instead of one. The presence of Marie Sosthènes, to whom Ministers spoke condescendingly though she, nevertheless, continued to cultivate more and more of them (that being the way of the world) classified the dowager duchess’s evening party attended by only the most exclusive ladies above all the other parties given by all the other dowager duchesses that “season” (as again Mme de Forcheville would have said) at which Marie Sosthènes, one of the most fashionable women of the day, had not taken the trouble to put in an appearance. The name of the young woman to whom Bloch had introduced me was entirely unknown to me and those of the different Guermantes could not be very familiar to her, for she asked an American woman how Mme de Saint-Loup came to be so intimate with the most distinguished people at the reception. This American was married to the Comte de Furcy, an obscure relative of the Forchevilles who to her represented everything that was most brilliant in society. So she answered in a matter-of-course way: “It’s only because she was born a Forcheville, nothing is better than that.” Although Mme de Furcy naïvely believed the name of Forcheville to be superior to that of Saint-Loup, at least she knew who the latter was. But of this, the charming friend of Bloch and of the Duchesse de Guermantes was absolutely ignorant and being somewhat bewildered, when a young girl presently asked her how Mme de Saint-Loup was related to their host, the Prince de Guermantes, she replied in good faith: “Through the Forchevilles”, a piece of information which that young woman passed on, as though she knew all about it, to one of her friends who, having a bad temper and an excitable disposition, got as red as a turkey-cock when a gentleman told her it was not through the Forchevilles that Gilberte belonged to the Guermantes, while he, thinking he had made a mistake, adopted her version and did not hesitate to propagate it. For this American woman, dinner-parties and social functions were

a sort of Berlitz school. She repeated names she heard without any knowledge of their significance. Someone was explaining to someone else that Gilberte had not inherited Tansonville from her father, M. de Forcheville, that it was a family property of her husband's, being close to the Guermantes' estate and originally in the possession of Mme de Marsantes, but owing to its being heavily mortgaged, had been bought back by Gilberte as a marriage dowry. Finally, a gentleman of the old school reminiscing about Swann being a friend of the Sagans and the Mouchys and Bloch's American friend asking him how I came to know Swann, Bloch informed her that I had met him at Mme de Guermantes', not being aware that I had known him through his being our neighbour in the country and through his being known to my grandfather as a boy. Such mistakes, which are considered serious in all conservative societies, have been made by the most famous men. St.-Simon, to prove that Louis XIV's ignorance was so great that "it caused him sometimes to commit himself in public to the grossest absurdities" only gives two examples of it; the first was that the King being unaware that Rénel belonged to the family of Clermont-Gallerande and that St.-Hérem belonged to that of Montmorin, treated them as men of no standing. So far as St.-Hérem was concerned we are consoled by knowing that the King did not die in error, for he was put right "very late" by M. de la Rochefoucauld. "Moreover," adds St.-Simon with some pity, "he had to explain (to the King) what these families were whose name conveyed nothing to him." The oblivion which so quickly buries the recent past combined with general ignorance, result reactively in erudition being attributed to some little knowledge, the more precious for its rarity, concerning people's genealogies, their real social position, whether such and such a marriage was for love, for money or otherwise; this knowledge is much esteemed in societies where a conservative spirit prevails and my grandfather possessed it to a high degree regarding the bourgeoisdom of Combray and of Paris. St.-Simon esteemed this knowledge so much that, in holding up the Prince de Conti's remarkable intelligence to admiration, before even mentioning the sciences, or rather as as though it were the most important one, he eulogised him for possessing "a very beautiful mind, luminous, just, exact, comprehensive, infinitely well-stored, which forgot nothing, which was acquainted with genealogy, its chimeras and realities, of distinguished politeness, respecting rank and merit, showing in every way what princes of the blood ought to be and what they no longer are. He even went into details regarding their usurpations and through historical literature and conversations, derived the means of judging what was commendable in their birth and occupation." In less

brilliant fashion but with equal accuracy, my grandfather was familiar with everything concerning the *bourgeoisie* of Combray and of Paris and savoured it with no less appreciation. Epicures of that kind who knew that Gilberte was not Forcheville nor Mme de Cambremer Méséglise nor the youngest a Valintonais were few in number. Few, and perhaps not even recruited from the highest aristocracy (it is not necessarily the devout or even Catholics who are most learned in the Golden Legend or the stained windows of the thirteenth century) but often forming a secondary aristocracy, keener about that with which it hardly has any contact and which on that account it has the more leisure for studying, its members meeting and making each other's acquaintance with satisfaction, enjoying succulent repasts at which genealogies are discussed like the Society of Bibliophiles or the Friends of Rheims. Ladies are not asked to such gatherings, but when the husbands go home, they say to their wives: "I have been to a most interesting dinner; M. de la Raspelière was there and charmed us by explaining that that Mme de Saint-Loup with the pretty daughter was not born Forcheville at all. It's a regular romance."

The young woman who was a friend of Bloch and of the Duchesse de Guermantes was not only elegant and charming, she was also intelligent and conversation with her was agreeable but was a matter of difficulty to me because not only was the name of my questioner new to me but also those of many to whom she referred and who now apparently formed the basis of society. On the other hand, it was a fact that, in compliance with her wish that I should tell her things, I referred to many who meant nothing to her; they had fallen into oblivion, at all events, those who had shone only with the lustre of their personality and had not the generic permanence of some celebrated aristocratic family the exact title of which the young woman rarely knew, making inaccurate assumptions as to the birth of those whose names she had heard the previous evening at a dinner-party and which, in most cases, she had never heard before, as she only began to go into society some years after I had left it, (partly because she was still young, but also because she had only been living in France a short time and had not got to know people immediately). So, if we had a vocabulary of names in common, the individuals we fitted to them were different. I do not know how the name of Mme Leroi fell from my lips, but by chance, my questioner had heard it mentioned by some old friend of Mme de Guermantes who was making up to her. Not as it should have been, however, as was clear from the disdainful answer of the snobbish young woman: "Oh! I know who Mme Leroi is! She was an old friend of Bergotte's," in a tone which implied "A

person I should not want at my house." I knew that Mme de Guermantes' old friend, as a thorough society man imbued with the Guermantes' spirit, of which one characteristic was not to seem to attach importance to aristocratic intercourse, had not been so ill-bred and anti-Guermantes as to say: "Mme Leroi who knew all the Highnesses and Duchesses" but had referred to her as "rather an amusing woman. One day she said so and so to Bergotte." But for people who know nothing about these matters, such conversational information is equivalent to what the press gives to the public which believes, according to its paper, alternatively that M. Loubet or M. Reinach are robbers or honourable citizens. In the eyes of my young questioner Mme Leroi had been a sort of Mme Verdurin during her first period but with less prestige and the little*clan* limited to Bergotte. By pure chance, this young woman happened to be amongst the last who were likely to hear the name of Mme Leroi. Today nobody knows anything about her which actually is quite as it should be. Her name does not even figure in the index of Mme de Villeparisis' posthumous memoirs although Mme Leroi had been much in her mind. The Marquise did not omit mentioning Mme Leroi because the latter had not been particularly amiable to her during her life-time but because neither Mme Leroi's life nor her death were of interest so that the Marquise's silence was dictated less by social umbrage than by literary tact. My conversation with Bloch's smart young friend was agreeable but the difference between our two vocabularies made her uneasy though it was instructive to me. In spite of our knowing that the years go by, that old age gives place to youth, that the most solid fortunes and thrones vanish, that celebrity is a passing thing, our way of rendering this knowledge conscious to ourselves and, so to speak, of accepting the impress of this universe whirled along by time upon our mental retina, is static. So that we always see as young those we knew young and those whom we knew as old people we embellish retrospectively with the virtues of old age, so that we unreservedly pin our faith to the credit of a millionaire and to the protection of a king though our reason tells us that both may be powerless fugitives tomorrow. In the more restricted field of society as in a simple problem which leads up to a more complex one of the same order, the unintelligibleness resulting from my conversation with this young woman owing to our having lived in a particular society at an interval of twenty-five years, impressed me with the importance of history and may have strengthened my own sense of it. The truth is that this ignorance of the real situation which every ten years causes the newly-elected to rise and seem as though the past had never existed, which prevents an American who has just landed knowing that M. de Charlus occupied

the highest social position in Paris at a period when Bloch had none whatever, and that Swann who put himself about for M. Bontemps had been the Prince of Wales's familiar friend, that ignorance exists not only among new-comers but also amongst contiguous societies, and, in the case of the last named as in the case of the others is also an effect (now exercised upon the individual instead of on the social curve) of Time. Doubtless we may change our milieu and our manner of life, but our memory retaining the thread of our identical personality attaches to itself, at successive periods, the memory of societies in which we lived, were it forty years earlier. Bloch at the Prince de Guermantes' perfectly remembered the humble Jewish environment in which he had lived when he was eighteen, and Swann, when he no longer loved Mme Swann but a woman who served tea at Colombin's which, for a time Mme Swann considered fashionable as she had the Thé de la Rue Royale, perfectly well knew his own social value for he remembered Twickenham and knew why he preferred going to Colombin's rather than to the Duchesse de Broglie's and knew equally well, had he been a thousand times less "*chic*", that would not have prevented him going to Colombin's or to the Hotel Ritz since anyone can go there who pays. Doubtless too Bloch's or Swann's friends remembered the obscure Jewish society and the invitations to Twickenham and thus friends, like more shadowy selves, of Swann and Bloch did not in their memory separate the elegant Bloch of to-day from the sordid Bloch of formerly or the Swann who went to Colombin's in his old age from the Swann of Buckingham Palace. But, in life, those friends were, in some measure, Swann's neighbours, their lives had developed sufficiently near his for their memory to contain him; whereas in the case of others further away from Swann, not exactly socially but in intimacy, who had known him more vaguely and whose meetings with him had been rarer, memories as numerous had given rise to more superficial views of his personality. And, such strangers, after thirty years, remember nothing accurately enough about a particular individual's past to modify what he represents to their view in the present. I had heard people in society say of Swann in his last years, as though it were his title to celebrity: "Are you talking about the Swann who goes to Colombin's?" Now, I heard people who ought to have known better, remark in alluding to Bloch, "Do you mean the Guermantes Bloch, the intimate friend of the Guermantes?" These mistakes, which cut a life in two and, isolating him in the present, construct another man, a creation of yesterday, a man who is the mere compendium of his present-day habits (whereas he bears within himself the continuity which links him to his past) these mistakes are also the effect of

time, but they are not a social phenomenon, they are a phenomenon of memory. At that instant an example presented itself of a quite different kind, it is true, but on that account the more striking, of those oblivions which modify our conception of people. Mme de Guermantes' young nephew, the Marquis de Villemandois, had formerly displayed a persistent insolence towards me which had induced me, in a spirit of reprisal, to adopt so offensive an attitude towards him that we had tacitly become enemies. Whilst I was reflecting about time at this afternoon party at the Princesse de Guermantes' he asked to be introduced to me and then told me he was under the impression that I had been acquainted with his parents, that he had read some of my articles and wanted to make or remake my acquaintance. It is true that with increasing age he, like many overbearing people of a weightier sort, had become less supercilious and, moreover, I was being talked about in his set because of articles (of small importance for that matter) I had been writing. But these grounds for his cordiality and advances were only accessory. The chief one, or at least the one which brought others into play, was that, either because he had a worse memory than I or attached less significance to my reprisals than I to his attacks, owing to my being less important in his eyes than he in mine, he had entirely forgotten our hostility. At most, my name recalled to his mind that he had seen me or somebody belonging to me at one of his aunt's houses and not being quite certain whether he had met me before or not, he at once started talking about his aunt at whose house he thought he might have met me, remembering he had often heard me spoken of there but not remembering our quarrel. Often a name is all that remains to us of a being, not only when he is dead but even while he is alive. And our memories about him are so vague and peculiar, correspond so little to the reality of the past that though we entirely forget that we nearly fought a duel with him, we remember that, when he was a child, he wore odd-looking yellow gaiters in the Champs Elysées, of which, although we remind him of them, he has no recollection. Bloch had come in, leaping like a hyena. I thought, "He's coming into a drawing-room which he could never have penetrated twenty years ago." But he was also twenty years older and he was nearer death, what good will it do him? Looking at him closely, I perceived in the face upon which the light now played, which from further away and when less illumined seemed to reflect youthful gaiety whether because it actually survived there or I evoked it, the almost alarming visage of an old Shylock anxiously awaiting in the wings the moment to appear upon the stage, reciting his first lines under his breath. In ten years he would limp into these drawing-rooms dragging his feet over their

heavy piled carpets, a master at last, and would be bored to death by having to go to the La Trémouilles. How would that profit him?

I could the better elicit from these social changes truths sufficiently important to serve as a unifying factor in a portion of my work that they were not, as I might at first have been tempted to believe, peculiar to our period. At the time when I had hardly reached the point of entering the Guermantes' circle, I was more of a new-comer than Bloch himself to-day and I must then have observed human elements which, though integrated in it, were entirely foreign to it, recently assembled elements which must have seemed strangely new to the older set from whom I did not differentiate them and who, believed by the dukes to have always been members of the faubourg, had either themselves been *parvenus* or if not they, their fathers or grandfathers. So it was not the quality of its members which made that society brilliant but its power to assimilate more or less completely people who fifty years later would appear just as good as those who now belonged to it. Even in the past with which I associated the name of Guermantes in order to do it honour in the fullest measure, with reason moreover, for under Louis XIV the semi-royal Guermantes were more supreme than to-day, the phenomenon I had studied was equally apparent. For instance, had they not then allied themselves by marriage with the Colbert family, to-day Considered of high degree, since a Rochefoucauld considers a Colbert a good match. But it was not because the Col-berts, then plain bourgeois, were noble that the Guermantes formed alliances with them, it was they who became noble by marrying into the Guermantes family. If the riame of Haussonville is extinguished with the death of the present representative of that family, he will perhaps derive his distinction from being descended from Mme de Staël, while, before the Revolution, M. d'Haussonville, one of the first gentlemen in the kingdom, gratified his vanity as towards M. de Broglie by not deigning to know M. de Staël's father and by no more condescending to introduce him to M. de Broglie than the latter would have done to M. d'Haussonville, never imagining that his own son would marry the daughter, his friend's son the grand-daughter of the authoress of *Corinne*. I realised from the way that the Duchesse de Guermantes talked to me that I might have cut a figure in society as an untitled man of fashion who is accepted as having always belonged to the aristocracy like Swann in former days and after him M. Lebrun and M. Ampère, all of them friends of the Duchesse de Broglie who herself at the beginning was, so to speak, hardly in the best society. The first times I had dined at Mme de Guermantes' how often I must have shocked men like M. de Beaucerfeuil, less by my presence than by remarks showing that I was entirely ignorant of the associations

which constituted his past and gave form to his social experience. Bloch would, when very old, preserve memories of the Guermantes' salon as it appeared to him now ancient enough for him to feel the same surprise and resentment as M. de Beaucerfeuil at certain intrusions and ignorances. And besides, he would have acquired and dispensed amongst those about him qualities of tact and discretion which I had believed to be the particular gift of men like M. de Norpois and which are incarnated in those who seem to us most likely to be deficient in them. Moreover, I had supposed myself exceptional in being admitted into the Guermantes set. But when I got away from myself and my immediate ambient, I observed that this social phenomenon was not as isolated as it first seemed and that from the Combray basin where I was born many jets of water had risen, like myself, above the liquid pool which was their source. Of course, circumstances and individual character have always a share in the matter and it was in quite different ways that Legrandin (by the curious marriage of his nephew) had in his turn penetrated this *milieu*, that Odette's daughter had become related to it, that Swann and finally I myself, had entered it. To myself who had been enclosed within my life, seeing it from within, Legrandin's way appeared to have no relevance to mine and to have gone in another direction, in the same way as one who follows the course of a river through a deep valley does not see that, in spite of its windings, it is the same stream. But, from the bird's eye view of a statistician who ignores reasons of sentiment and the imprudences which lead to the death of an individual and only counts the number of people who die in a year, one could observe that many people starting from the same environment as that with which the beginning of this narrative has been concerned reach another quite different and it is likely that, just as in every year there are an average number of marriages, any other well-to-do and refined bourgeois *milieu*would have furnished about the same proportion of people like Swann, like Legrandin, like myself and like Bloch, who would be rediscovered in the ocean of "Society". Moreover they are recognisable, for if young Comte de Cambremer impressed society with his grace, distinction and modishness, I recognised in those qualities as in his good looks and ardent ambition, the characteristics of his uncle Legrandin, that is to say, an old and very bourgeois friend of my parents, though one who had an aristocratic bearing.

Kindness, which is simply maturity, ends in sweetening natures originally more acid than Bloch's, and is as prevalent as that sense of justice which, if we are in the right, should make us fear a prejudiced judge as little as one who is our friend. And Bloch's grand-children would be well-mannered and discreet from

birth. Bloch had perhaps not reached that point yet. But I remarked that he who formerly affected to be compelled to take a two hours' railway-journey to see someone who hardly wanted to see him, now that he received many invitations not only to luncheon and to dinner but to come and spend a fortnight here and there, refused many of them without talking about it or boasting he had received them. Discretion in action and in words had come to him with age and social position, a sort of social old-age, one might say. Undoubtedly Bloch was formerly as indiscreet as he was incapable of kindness and friendly service. But certain defects and certain qualities belong less to one or another individual from the social point of view than to one or another period of his life. They are almost exterior to individuals who pass through the projection of their light as at varying solstices which are pre-existent, universal and inevitable. Doctors who want to find out whether a particular medicine has diminished or increased the acidity of the stomach, whether it quickens or lessens its secretions, obtain results which differ, not according to the stomach from the secretions of which they have extracted a little gastric juice, but according to the effects disclosed at an early or late stage through the action of the medicine upon it.

***

Thus at each of the moments of its duration the name of Guermantes considered as a unity of all the names admitted within and about itself suffered some dispersals, recruited new elements like gardens where flowers only just in bud yet about to replace others already faded, are indistinguishable from the mass which seems the same save to those who have not observed the new-comers and keep in their mind's eye the exact picture of those that have disappeared.

More than one of the persons whom this afternoon party had collected or whose memory it evoked, provided me with the successive appearances he had presented under widely dissimilar circumstances. The individual rose before me again as he had been and, in doing so, called forth the various aspects of my own life, like different perspectives in a countryside where a hill or a castle seems at one moment to be to the right, at another to the left, to dominate a forest or emerge from a valley, thus reminding the traveller of changes of direction and altitude in the road he has been following. As I went further and further back I finally discovered pictures of the same individual, separated by such long intervals, represented by such distinct personalities, with such different meanings

that, as a rule, I eliminated them from my field of recollection when I believed I had made contact with them, and often ceased believing they were the same people I had formerly known. Chance illumination was required for me to be able to attach them, like in an etymology, to the original significance they had for me. Mlle Swann throwing some thorny roses to me from the other side of the hedge, with a look I had retrospectively attributed to desire; the lover, according to Combray gossip, of Mme Swann, staring at me from behind that same hedge with a hard look which also did not warrant the interpretation I gave to it then and who had changed so completely since I failed to recognise him at Balbec as the gentleman looking at a notice near the casino, and whom I happened to think of once every ten years, saying to myself: “That was M. de Charlus, how curious!”, Mme de Guermantes at Dr. Percepied’s wedding, Mme Swann in pink at my great-uncle’s, Mme de Cambremer, Legrandin’s sister, who was so smart that he was afraid we should want him to introduce us to her, and so many more pictures of Swann, Saint-Loup, etc. which, when I recalled them, I liked now and then to use as a frontispiece on the threshold of my relations with these different people but which actually seemed to me mere fancies rather than impressions left upon my mind by the individual with whom there was no longer any link. It is not only that certain people have the power of remembering and others not (without living in a state of permanent oblivion like Turkish ambassadors) which always enables the latter to find room — the new precedent having vanished in a week or the following one having exorcised it — for a fresh item of news contradicting the last. Even if memories are equal, two persons do not remember the same things. One would hardly notice an act which another would feel intense remorse about while he will grasp at a word almost unconsciously let fall by the other as though it were a characteristic sign of good-will. Self-interest implicit in not being wrong in our pre-judgment limits the time we shall remember it and encourages us to believe we never indulged in it. Finally, a deeper and more unselfish interest diversifies memories so thoroughly that a poet who has forgotten nearly all the facts of which one reminds him retains a fugitive impression of them. As a result of all this, after twenty years’ absence one discovers involuntary and unconscious forgiveness instead of anticipated resentments and on the other hand, hatreds the cause of which one cannot explain (because one has forgotten the bad impression one had made). One forgets dates as one does the history of people one has known best. And because twenty years had passed since Mme de Guermantes had first seen Bloch, she would have sworn that he was born in her set and had been nursed by the

Duchesse de Chartres when he was two years old.

How many times these people had returned to my vision in the course of their lives, the differing circumstances of which seemed to offer identical characteristics under diverse forms and for various ends; and the diversity of my own life at its turning-points through which the thread of each of these lives had passed was compounded of lives seemingly the most distant from my own as if life itself only disposed of a limited number of threads for the execution of the most varied designs. What, for instance, were more separate in my various pasts than my visits to my Uncle Adolphe, than the nephew of Mme de Villeparisis, herself cousin of the Marshal, than Legrandin and his sister, than the former waistcoat maker, Françoise's friend in the court-yard of our home. And now all these different threads had been united to produce here, the woof of the Saint-Loup *ménage*, there, that of the young Cambremers, not to mention Morel and so many others the conjunction of which had combined to form circumstances so compact that they seemed to make a unity of which the personages were mere elements. And my life was already long enough for me to have found in more than one case a being to complete another in the conflicting spheres of my memory. To an Elstir whose fame was now assured I could add my earliest memories of the Verdurins, of the Cottards, of conversations in Rivebelle restaurant on the morning when I first met Albertine and many others. In the same way, a collector who is shown the wing of an altar screen, remembers the church or museum or private collection in which the others are dispersed (as also, by following sale-catalogues or searching among dealers in antiques, he finally discovers the twin object to the one he possesses which makes them a pair and thus can mentally reconstitute the predella and the entire altar-piece). As a bucket let down or hauled up a well by a windlass touches the rope or the sides every now and then, there was not a personage, hardly even an event in my life, which had not at one time or another played different parts. If, after years I rediscovered the simplest social relationship or even a material object in my memory, I perceived that life had been ceaselessly weaving threads about it which in the end became a beautiful velvet covering like the emerald sheath of a water-conduit in an ancient park.

It was not only in appearance that these people were like dream-figures, their youth and love had become to themselves a dream. They had forgotten their very resentments and hatreds and, to be sure that this individual was the one they had not spoken to for ten years, they would have needed a register which even then would have had the vagueness of a dream in which an insult has been

offered them by one unknown. Such dreams account for those contrasts in political life where people who once accused each other of murder and treason are members of the same Government. And dreams become as opaque as death in the case of old men on days following those of love-making. On such days no one was allowed to ask the President of the Republic any questions; he had forgotten everything. After he had been allowed to rest for some days, the recollection of public affairs returned to him fortuitously as in a dream. Sometimes it was not a single image only that presented itself to my mind of one whom I had since known to be so different. It was during the same years that Bergotte had seemed a sweet, divine old man to me that I had been paralysed at the sight of Swann's grey hat and his wife's violet cloak, by the glamour of race which surrounded the Duchesse de Guermantes even in a drawing-room as though I stood gazing at ghosts; almost fabulous origins of relationships subsequently so banal which these charming myths lengthened into the past with the brilliance projected into the heavens by the sparkling tail of a comet. And even relations such as mine with Mme de Souvré, which had not begun in mystery, which were to-day so hard and worldly, revealed themselves at their beginnings in a smile, calm, soft and flatteringly expressed in the fulness of an afternoon by the sea, on a spring evening in Paris in the midst of smart equipages, of clouds of dust, of sunshine moving like water. And perhaps Mme de Souvré would not have been worth while if she had been detached from her frame like those monuments — the Salute for instance — which, without any great beauty of their own are so perfectly adapted to their site, and she had her place in a collection of memories which I estimated at a certain price, taking one with another, without going too closely into the particular value of Mme de Souvré's personality.

A thing by which I was more impressed, in the case of people who had undergone physical and social change was the different notion they had of each other. In old days Legrandin despised Bloch and never spoke to him; now he was most amiable to him. It was not in the least owing to Bloch's more prominent position which in this case was negligible, for social changes inevitably bring about respective changes in position amongst those who have been subjected to them. No. It was that people, that is, people as we see them, do not retain the uniformity of a picture when we look back on them. They evolve in relation to our forgetfulness. Sometimes we even go so far as to confuse them with others. "Bloch, that's the man who came from Combray," and when he said Bloch, the person meant me. Inversely Mme Sazerat was convinced that a historical thesis

on Philippe II was by me whereas it was by Bloch. Apart from these substitutions one forgets the bad turns people have done us, their unpleasantness, one forgets that last time we parted without shaking hands and, in contrast, we remember an earlier period when we were on good terms. Legrandin's affability with Bloch was referable to that earlier period, whether because he had forgotten a phase of his past or that he judged it better to ignore it, a mixture, in fact, of forgiveness, forgetfulness and indifference which is also an effect of Time. Moreover, even in love, the memories we have of each other are not the same. I had known Albertine to remind me in the most remarkable way of something I had said to her during the early days of our acquaintance which I had completely forgotton while she had no recollection whatever of another fact implanted in my head like a stone for ever. Our parallel lives resemble paths bordered at intervals by flower-vases placed symmetrically but not facing each other. It is still more comprehensible that one hardly remembers who the people were one knew slightly or one remembers something else about them further back, something suggested by those amongst whom one meets them again who have only just made their acquaintance and endow them with qualities and a position they never had but which the forgetful person wholly accepts.

Doubtless life, in casting these people upon my path on different occasions, had presented them in surrounding circumstances which had shrunk my view of them and prevented my knowing their essential characters. Of those Guermantes even, who had been the subject of such wonderful dreams, at my first approach to them, one had appeared in the guise of an old friend of my grandmother's, another in that of a gentleman who had stared at me so unpleasantly in the grounds of the casino (for, between us and other beings there is a borderland of contingencies, as, from my readings at Combray, I knew there was one of perceptions which prevent reality and mind being placed in absolute contact). So that it was only after the event, by relating them to a name, that my acquaintance with them had become to me acquaintance with the Guermantes. But perhaps it was that very thing which made life seem more poetic to me when I thought about that mysterious race with the piercing eyes and beaks of birds, that pink, golden, unapproachable race which the force of blind and differing circumstances had presented so naturally to my observation, to my intercourse, even to my intimacy, that when I wanted to know Mlle de Stermaria or to have dresses made for Albertine, I applied to the Guermantes, as to my most helpful friends. Certainly it bored me at times to go and see them as to go and see others I knew in society. The charm of the Duchesse de Guermantes, even, like that of

certain of Bergotte's pages, was only discernible to me at a distance and disappeared when I was near her, for it lay in my memory and in my imagination, and yet, the Guermantes, like Gilberte, were different from other people in society in that their roots were plunged more deeply in my past when I dreamed more and believed more in individuals. That past filled me with weariness while talking to one or the other of them, for it was associated with those imaginings of my childhood which had once seemed the most beautiful and inaccessible and I had to console myself by confusing the value of their possession with the price at which my desire had appraised them like a merchant whose books are in disorder. But my past relations with other beings were magnified by dreams more ardent and hopeless with which my life opened so richly, so entirely dedicated to them that I could hardly understand how it was that what they yielded was this exiguous, narrow, mournful ribbon of a despised and unloved intimacy in which I could discover no trace of what had once been their mystery, their fever and their loveliness.

***

"What has become of the Marquise d'Arpajon?" asked Mme de Cambremer. "She's dead," answered Bloch. "You're confusing her with the Comtesse d'Arpajon who died last year," the Princesse de Malte joined the discussion. The young widow of a very wealthy old husband, the bearer of a great name, she had been much sought in marriage and from that had derived a great deal of self-assurance. "The Marquise d'Arpajon died too about a year ago." "I can assure you it isn't a year," answered Mme de Cambremer. "I was at a musical party at her house less than a year ago." Bloch could no more take part in the discussion than a society gigolo for all these deaths of aged people were too far away from him, whether owing to the great difference in age or to his recent entry into a different society which he approached, as it were, from the side, at a period of its decline into a twilight in which the memory of an unfamiliar past could not illuminate it. And for those of the same age and of the same society death had lost its strange significance. Moreover every day people were at the point of death of whom some recovered while others succumbed, so that one was not certain whether a particular individual one rarely saw had recovered from his cold on the chest or whether he had passed away. Deaths multiplied and lives became increasingly uncertain in those aged regions. At these crossroads of two generations and two societies which for different reasons were ill-placed for

identifying death, it became confused with life, the former had been socialised and become an incident, which qualified a person more or less without the tone in which it was mentioned signifying that this incident ended everything so far as that person was concerned. So people said: “You’ve forgotten. So and so is dead,” as they might have said: “He’s decorated, he’s a member of the Academy,” or — which came to the same thing as it prevented his coming to parties —”he has gone to spend the winter in the south,” or “he’s been ordered to the mountains.” In the case of well-known men, what they left helped people to remember they were dead. But in the case of ordinary members of society, people got muddled about whether they were dead or not, partly because they did not know them well and had forgotten their past but more because they bothered little about the future one way or the other. And the difficulty people had in sorting out marriages, absences, retirements to the country and deaths of old people in society equally illustrated the insignificance of the dead and the indifference of the living.

“But if she’s not dead how is it one doesn’t see her any more nor her husband either?” asked an old maid who liked to be thought witty. “I tell you,” answered her mother who, though fifty years old, never missed a party, “it’s because they’re old and at that age people don’t go out.” It was as though there lay in front of the cemetery a closed city of the aged with lamps always alight in the fog. Mme de Sainte-Euverte closed the debate by saying that the Comtesse d’Arpajon had died the year before after a long illness, but the Marquise d’Arpajon had also died suddenly “from some quite trifling cause,” a death which thus resembled the lives of them all and, in the same fashion, explained that she had passed away without anyone being aware of it and excused those who had made a mistake. Hearing that Mme d’Arpajon was really dead, the old maid cast an alarmed glance at her mother fearing that the news of the death of one of her contemporaries might be a shock to her; she imagined in anticipation people alluding to her own mother’s death by explaining that “she died as the result of a shock through the death of Mme d’Arpajon.” But on the contrary, her mother’s expression was that of having won a competition against formidable rivals whenever anyone of her own age passed away. Their death was her only means of being agreeably conscious of her own existence. The old maid, aware that her mother had not seemed sorry to say that Mme d’Arpajon was a recluse in those dwellings from which the aged and tired seldom emerge, noticed that she was still less upset to hear that the Marquise had entered that ultimate abode from which no one returns. This affirmation of her mother’s indifference aroused

the caustic wit of the old maid. And, later on, to amuse her friends, she gave a humorous imitation of the lively fashion with which her mother rubbed her hands as she said: “Goodness me, so that poor Mme d’Arpajon is dead.” She thus pleased even those who did not need death to make them glad they were alive. For every death is a simplification of life for the survivors; it relieves them of being grateful and of being obliged to make visits. Nevertheless, as I have said, M. Verdurin’s death was not thus welcomed by Elstir.

***

A lady went out for she had other afternoon receptions to go to and she was to take tea with two queens. She was the society courtesan I formerly knew, the Princesse de Nissau. Apart from her figure having shrunk — which gave her head the appearance of being lower than it was formerly, of having what is called “one foot in the grave”— one would have said that she had hardly aged. She remained, with her Austrian nose and delightful mien a Marie-Antoinette preserved, embalmed, thanks to a thousand cunningly combined cosmetics which gave her face the hue of lilac. Her face wore that regretful soft expression of being compelled to go with a sweet half-promise to return, of inconspicuous withdrawal because of numerous exclusive invitations. Born almost on the steps of a throne, married three times, protected long and luxuriously by great bankers, the confused memories of her innumerable pasts, not to speak of the caprices she had indulged, weighed on her as lightly as her beautiful round eyes, her painted face and her mauve dress. As, taking French leave, she passed me, I bowed and she, taking my hand, fixed her round violet orbs upon me as if to say: “How long since we met, do let us talk of it next time.” She pressed my hand, not quite sure whether there had or had not been a passage between us that evening she drove me from the Duchesse de Guermantes’. She merely took a chance by seeming to suggest something that had never been, which was not difficult for she looked tender over a strawberry-tart and assumed, about her compulsion to leave before the music was over, an attitude of despairing yet reassuring abandonment. Moreover, in her uncertainty about the incident with me, her furtive pressure did not detain her long and she did not say a word. She only looked at me in a way that said: “How long! How long!” as there passed across her vision her husbands, the different men who had kept her, two wars — and her star-like eyes, like astronomic dials carved in opal, registered in quick succession all those solemn hours of a far-away past she conjured back each time she uttered a

greeting which was always an excuse. She left me and floated to the door so as not to disturb me, to show me that if she did not stop and talk to me it was because she had to make up the time she had lost pressing my hand so as not to keep the Queen of Spain waiting. She seemed to go through the door at racing-pace. And she was, as a fact, racing to her grave.

Meanwhile, the Princesse de Guermantes kept repeating in an excited way in the metallic voice caused by her false teeth: “That’s it, we’ll form a group. I love the intelligence of youth, it so co-operates! Ah, what a ‘mugician’ you are.” She was talking with her large eyeglass in a round eye which was partly amused and partly excusing itself for not being able to keep it up but till the end she decided to “co-operate” and “form a group”.

***

I sat down by the side of Gilberte de Saint-Loup. We talked a great deal about Robert. Gilberte alluded to him deferentially as to a superior being whom she wanted me to know she admired and understood. We reminded each other that many of the ideas he had formerly expressed about the art of war (for he had often exposed the same theses at Tansonville as at Doncières and later) had been verified by the recent one. “I can’t tell you how much the slightest thing he told me at Doncierès strikes me now as it did during the war. The last words I heard him say when we parted never to meet again were that he was expecting of Hindenburg, a Napoleonic General, a type of Napoleonic battle the object of which is to separate two adversaries, perhaps, he said, the English and ourselves. Now scarcely a year after Robert’s death a critic whom he much admired and who obviously exercised great influence on his military ideas, M. Henri Bidou, said that Hindenburg’s offensive in March, 1918 was ‘a battle of separation by one adversary massed against two in line, a manœuvre which the Emperor successfully executed in 1796 on the Apennines and failed with in 1815 in Belgium’. Some time before that Robert was comparing battles with plays in which it is sometimes difficult to know what the author means because he has changed his plot in the course of the action. Now, as to this interpretation of the German offensive of 1918, Robert would certainly not be of M. Bidou’s opinion. But other critics think that Hindenburg’s success in the direction of Amiens, then his forced halt then his success in Flanders, then again the halt, accidentally made Amiens and afterwards Boulogne objectives he had not previously planned. And as everyone can reconstruct a play in his own way, there are those

who see in this offensive the threat of a terrific march on Paris, others disordered hammer blows to annihilate the English Army. And even if the General's orders are opposed to one or the other conception, critics will always be able to say, as Mounet-Sully did to Coquelin who affirmed that the 'Misanthrope' was not the depressing drama he made it appear (for Molière's contemporaries testify that his interpretation was comic and made people laugh): 'Well, then, Molière made a mistake.'"

"And you remember," Gilberte replied, "what he said about aeroplanes, he expressed himself so charmingly, every army must be an Argus with a hundred eyes. Alas, he did not live to see the verification of his predictions." "Oh, yes, he did," I answered, "he knew very well that, at the battle of the Somme, they were beginning to blind the enemy by piercing his eyes, destroying his aeroplanes and captive balloons." "Oh yes! So they did." Since she had taken to living in her mind, she had become somewhat pedantic. "And it was he who foretold a return to the old methods. Do you know that the Mesopotamian expeditions in this war" (she must have read this at the time in Brichot's articles) "keep reminding one of the retreat of Xenophon; to get from the Tigris to the Euphrates the English Commander made use of canoes, long narrow boats, the gondolas of that country, which the ancient Chaldeans had made use of." Her words gave me that feeling of stagnation in the past which is immobilised in certain places by a sort of specific gravity to such a degree that one finds it just as it was. I avow that, thinking of my readings at Balbec, not far from Robert, I had been much impressed — as I was when I discovered Mme de Sévigné's intrenchment in the French countryside — to observe, in connection with the siege of Kut-el-Amara (Kut-the-Emir just as we say Vaux-le-Vicomte, Boilleau-l'Evêque, as the curé of Combray would have said if his thirst for etymology had extended to Oriental languages) the recurrence, near Bagdad, of that name Bassorah about which we hear so much in the *Thousand and One Nights*, whence, long before General Townsend, Sinbad the Sailor, in the times of the Caliphs, embarked or disembarked whenever he left or returned to Bagdad.

"There was a side of the war he was beginning to perceive," I said, "which is that it is human, that it is lived like a love or a hatred, can be recounted like a romance, and consequently if people keep on repeating that strategy is a science, it does not help them to understand it because it is not strategic. The enemy no more knows our plans than we know the motive of a woman we love, and perhaps we do not know ours either. In the offensive of March, 1918 was the object of the Germans to take Amiens? We know nothing about it. Perhaps they

did not either and it was their advance westwards towards Amiens which determined their plan. Even admitting that war is scientific it is still necessary to paint it like Elstir painted the sea, by the use of another sense and using imagination and beliefs as a starting-point, to rectify them little by little as Dostoevski narrated a life. Moreover, it is but too obvious that war is rather medical than strategic since it brings in its train un-355 foreseen accidents the clinician hopes to avoid, such as the Russian Revolution."

Throughout this conversation, Gilberte had spoken of Robert with a deference which seemed rather addressed to my former friend than to her dead husband. She seemed to be saying: "I know how much you admired him, believe me, I knew and understood what a superior creature he was." And yet the love she certainly no longer felt for his memory may perhaps have been the distant cause of the peculiarities in her present life. For Andrée was now Gilberte's inseparable friend. Although the former had for some time, chiefly because of her husband's talent, begun to enter, not, of course, the Guermantes set but an infinitely more fashionable society than that which she formerly frequented, people were astonished that the Marquise de Saint-Loup condescended to become her best friend. That fact seemed to be a sign of Gilberte's preference for what she believed to be an artistic life and for a positive social forfeiture. That may be the true explanation. Another, however, came to my mind, always convinced that images assembled somewhere are generally the reflection or in some fashion the effect of a former grouping different from though symmetrical with other images extremely distant from the second group. I thought that if Andrée, her husband and Gilberte were seen together every evening it was possibly because many years earlier Andrée's future husband had lived with Rachel and then left her for Andrée. It is probable that Gilberte lived in a society too far removed from and above theirs to know anything about it. But she must have learned of it later when Andrée went up and she came down enough for them to meet. Then the woman for whom a man had abandoned Rachel although she, Rachel, preferred him to Robert, must have been dowered with much prestige in the eyes of Gilberte.

In the same way, perhaps, the sight of Andrée recalled to Gilberte the youthful romance of her love for Robert and also inspired her respect for Andrée who was still loved by the man so adored by Rachel whom Gilberte knew Saint-Loup had preferred to herself. Perhaps, on the other hand, these memories played no part in Gilberte's predilection for this artistic couple and it was only the result, as in many other cases, of the development of tastes common amongst

society women for acquiring new experience and simultaneously lowering themselves. Perhaps Gilberte had forgotten Robert as completely as I had Albertine and even if she knew it was Rachel whom the artist had left for Andrée she never thought about it because it never played any part in her liking for them. The only way of ascertaining whether my first explanation was either possible or true would have been through the evidence of the interested parties and then only if they proffered their confidence with clarity and sincerity. And the first is rarely met with, the second never.

"But how is it that you are here at this crowded reception?" asked Gilberte. "It's not like you to come to a massacre like this. I might have expected to meet you anywhere rather than in one of these omnium-gatherums of my aunt; she is my aunt you know," she added subtly; for having become Mme de Saint-Loup considerably before Mme Verdurin entered the family, she considered herself a Guermantes from the beginning of time and, in consequence, affected by the *mésalliance* of her uncle with Mme Verdurin whom, it is true, she had heard the family laugh at a thousand times whereas, of course, it was only when she was not there that they alluded to the *mesalliance* of Saint-Loup and herself. She affected, moreover the greater disdain for this undistinguished aunt because the Princesse de Guermantes, owing to a sort of perversity which impels intelligent people to escape from the bondage of fashion, also owing to the need displayed by ageing people of memories that will form a background to their newly acquired position, would say about Gilberte: "That's no new relationship for me, I knew the young woman's mother very well; why, she was my cousin Marsantes' great friend. It was at my house she met Gilberte's father. As to poor Saint-Loup, I used to know all his family, his uncle was once an intimate friend of mine at La Raspelière." "You see, the Verdurins were not Bohemians at all," people said to me when they heard the Princesse de Guermantes talk in that way, "they were old friends of Mme de Saint-Loup's family." I was, perhaps, the only one who knew, through my grandfather, that indeed the Verdurins were not Bohemians, but it was not exactly because they had known Odette. But it is as easy to give accounts of the past which nobody knows anything about as it is of travels in countries where no one has ever been. "Well," concluded Gilberte, "as you do sometimes emerge from your ivory tower, would not a little intimate party at my house amuse you? I should invite sympathetic souls who would be more to your taste. A big affair like this is not for you. I saw you talking to my Aunt Oriane who may have the best qualities in the world but we shouldn't be libelling her, should we, if we said she doesn't belong to the élite of the mind?" I

could not impart to Gilberte the thoughts which had occupied me during the last hour but I thought she might provide me with distraction which, however, I should not get from talking literature with the Duchesse de Guermantes nor with her either. Certainly I intended to start afresh from the next day to live in solitude but, this time, with a real object. Even at my own house I should not let people come to see me during my working hours, for my duty to my work was more important than that of being polite or even kind. Doubtless, those who had not seen me for a long time would come, and believing me restored to health, would be insistent. When their day's work was finished or interrupted, they would insist on coming, having need of me as I once had of Saint-Loup, because, as had happened at Combray when my parents reproached me just when, unknown to them, I was forming the most praiseworthy resolution, the internal timepieces allotted to mankind are not all regulated to the same hour; one strikes the hour of rest when another strikes that of work, one that of a judge's sentence when the guilty has repented and that of his inner perfectioning has struck long before. But to those who came to see me or sent for me, I should have the courage to answer that I had an urgent appointment about essential matters it was necessary for me to regulate without further delay, an appointment of capital importance with myself. And yet, though indeed there be little relation between our real self and the other — because of their homonymy and their common body, the abnegation which makes us sacrifice easier duties, pleasures even, seems to others egoism. Moreover, was it not to concern myself with them that I was going to live far apart from those who would complain that they never saw me, to concern myself with them more fundamentally than I could have done in their presence, so that I might reveal them to themselves, make them realise themselves. How would it have profited if, for years longer, I had wasted my nights by letting the words they had just uttered fade into an equally vain echo of my own, for the sake of the sterile pleasure of a social contact which excludes all penetrating thought? Would it not be better I should try to describe the curve, to elicit the law that governed their gestures, their words, their lives, their nature? Unhappily, I should be compelled to fight against that habit of putting myself in another's place which, though it may favour the conception of a work retards its execution. For, through an excess of politeness it makes us sacrifice to others not merely our pleasure but our duty even though putting oneself in the place of others, duty, whatever form it may take, even, were it helpful, that of remaining at the rear when one can render no service at the front, appears contrary to the truth, to be our pleasure. And far from believing myself unhappy because of a life without

friends, without conversation, as some of the greatest have believed, I realised that the force and elation spent in friendship are a sort of false passport to an individual intimacy that leads nowhere and turns us back from a truth to which they might have conducted us. But anyhow, should intervals of repose and social intercourse be necessary to me, I felt that instead of the intellectual conversations which society people believe interesting to writers, light loves with young flowering girls would be the nourishment I might, at the most, allow my imagination, like the famous horse which was fed on nothing but roses. All of a sudden I longed again for what I had dreamed of at Balbec, when I saw Albertine and Andrée disporting themselves with their friends on the sea-shore before I knew them. But alas, those I now so much longed for, I could find no more. The years which had transformed all those I had seen to-day including Gilberte herself must, beyond question, have made of the other survivors as, had she not perished, of Albertine, women very different from the girls I remembered. I suffered at the thought of their attaint for time's changes do not modify the images in our memory. There is nothing more painful than the contrast between the alteration in beings and the fixity of memory, than the realisation that what our memory keeps green has decayed and that there can be no exterior approach to the beauty within us which causes so great a yearning to see it once more. The intense desire for those girls of long ago which my memory excited, could never be quenched unless I sought its satisfaction in another being as young. I had often suspected that what seems unique in a creature we desire does not belong to that individual. But the passage of time gave me completer proof, since after twenty years I now wanted, instead of the girls I had known, those possessing their youth. Moreover, it is not only the awakening of physical desire that corresponds to no reality because it ignores the passing of time. At times I prayed that, by a miracle, my grandmother and Albertine had, in spite of my reason, survived and would come to me. I believed I saw them, my heart leaped towards them. But I forgot that, if they had been alive, Albertine would almost have the appearance of Mme Cottard at Balbec and that my grandmother at ninety-five would not exhibit the beautiful, calm, smiling face I still imagined hers as arbitrarily as we picture God the Father with a beard or as, in the seventeenth century, the heroes of Homer were represented in the company of noblemen with no regard to chronology. I looked at Gilberte and I did not think, "I should like to see you again." But I told her it would certainly give me pleasure if she invited me to meet young girls, of whom I should ask no more than to evoke reveries and sorrows of former days, perhaps,

on some unlikely day, to allow me the privilege of one chaste kiss. As Elstir loved to see incarnated in his wife the Venetian beauty he so often painted in his works, I excused myself for being attracted through a certain aesthetic egoism towards beautiful women who might cause me suffering, and I cultivated a sort of idolatry for future Gilbertes, future Duchesses de Guermantes and Albertines who I thought might inspire me like a sculptor in the midst of magnificent antique marbles. I ought, nevertheless, to have remembered that each experience had been preceded by my sense of the mystery which pervaded them and that, instead of asking Gilberte to introduce me to young girls I should have done better to journey to those shores where nothing binds them to us, where an impassable gulf lies between them and us, where, though they are about to bathe two paces away on the beach, they are separated from us by the impossible. It was thus that my sentiment of mystery had enshrined first Gilberte, then the Duchesse de Guermantes, Albertine, so many others. True, the unknown and almost unknowable had become the common, the familiar, the indifferent or the painful, yet it retained something of its former charm. And, to tell the truth, (as in those calendars the postman brings us when he wants his Christmas box,) there was not one year of my life that did not have the picture of a woman I then desired as its frontispiece or interleaved in its days; a picture sometimes the more arbitrary that I had not even seen her, as for instance, Mme Putbus' maid, Mlle d'Orgeville or some other girl whose name I had noticed in a society column amongst those of other charming dancers. I imagined her beautiful, I fell in love with her, I created an ideal being, queen of the provincial country-side where, I gleaned from the *Annuaire des Châteaux*, her family owned an estate. In the case of women I had known, that countryside was at least a double one. Each one of them emerged at a different point of my life, standing like protective local divinities first in the midst of the countryside of my dreams, a setting which patterned my life and to which my imagination clung; then perceived by the memory in the various places where I had known her, places she recalled because of her association with them; for though our life wanders, our memory is sedentary and, project ourselves as we may, our memories riveted to places from which we are detached, remain at home like temporary acquaintances made by a traveller in some city in which he leaves them to live their lives and finish their days as though he were still standing beside the church, in front of the door, beneath the trees in the avenue. Thus the shadow of Gilberte lengthened from the front of a church in l'Ile de France where I had imagined her to the drive of a park on the Méséglise side, that of Mme de Guermantes from the damp path

over which red and violet grapes hung in clusters to the morning-gold of a Paris pavement. And this second personality, not born of desire but of memory, was not in either case the only one. I had known each in different circumstances and periods and in each she was another for me or I was another, bathed in dreams of another colour. And the law which had governed the dreams of each year now gathered round them the memories of the woman I had each time known, that which concerned the Duchesse de Guermantes of my childhood was concentrated by magnetic energy round Combray and that which concerned the Duchesse de Guermantes who invited me to luncheon about a sensitive being of a different kind; there were several Duchesses de Guermantes as there had been several Mme Swanns since the lady in pink, separated from each other by the colourless ether of years and I could no more jump from one to the other than I could fly from here to another planet. Not only separated but different, decked out with dreams at different periods as with flora indis-coverable in another planet. So true was this that, having decided not to go to luncheon either with Mme de Forcheville or with Mme de Guermantes, so completely would that have transported me into another world, I could only tell myself that the one was the Duchesse de Guermantes, descendant of Geneviève de Brabant and the other was the lady in pink, because within me an educated man asserted the fact with the same authority as a scientist who stated that a nebulous Milky Way was composed of particles of a single star. In the same way Gilberte, whom I nevertheless, asked absent-mindedly to introduce me to girls like her former self, was now nothing more to me than Mme de Saint-Loup. As I looked at her, I did not start dreaming of the part my admiration of Bergotte, whom she had also forgotten, had formerly played in my love of her for I now only thought of Bergotte as the author of his books, without remembering, except during rare and isolated flashes, my emotion when I was introduced to him, my disappointment, my astonishment at his conversation in the drawing-room with the white rugs, full of violets, where such a number of lamps were brought so early and placed upon so many different tables. All the memories which composed the original Mlle Swann were, in fact, foreshortened by the Gilberte of now, held back by the magnetic attraction of another universe, united to a sentence of Bergotte and bathed in the perfume of hawthorn. The fragmentary Gilberte of to-day listened smilingly to my request and setting herself to think, she became serious and appeared to be searching for something in her head. Of this I was glad as it prevented her from noticing a group seated not far from us, the sight of which would not have been agreeable to her. The Duchesse de

Guermantes was engaged in an animated conversation with a horrible old woman whom I stared at without having the slightest idea who she was. “How extraordinary to see Rachel here,” Bloch passing at that moment, whispered in my ear. The magic name instantly broke the spell which had laid the disguise of this unknown and foul old woman upon Saint-Loup’s mistress and I recognised her at once. In this case as in others, as soon as names were supplied to faces I could not recognise, the spell was broken and I knew them. All the same, there was a man there I could not recognise even when I was supplied with his name and I believed it must be a homonym for he bore no sort of likeness to the one I had formerly known and come across afterwards. It was the same man, after all, only greyer and fatter but he had removed his moustache and with it, his personality. It was indeed Rachel, now a celebrated actress, who was to recite verses of Musset and La Fontaine during the reception, with whom Gilberte’s aunt, the Duchesse de Guermantes, was then talking. The sight of Rachel could in no case have been agreeable to Gilberte and I was annoyed to hear she was going to recite because it would demonstrate her intimacy with the Duchesse. The latter, too long conscious of being the leader of fashion, (not realising that a situation of that kind only exists in the minds of those who believe in it and that many newcomers would not believe she had any position at all unless they saw her name in the fashion-columns and knew she went everywhere) nowadays only visited the faubourg Saint-Germain at rare intervals, saying that it bored her to death and went to the other extreme by lunching with this or that actress whose company pleased her.

The Duchesse still hesitated to invite Balthy and Mistinguette, whom she thought adorable, for fear of a scene with M. de Guermantes, but in any case Rachel was her friend. From this the new generation concluded, notwithstanding her name, that the Duchesse de Guermantes must be a*demi-castor* who had never been the “real thing”. It is true that Mme de Guermantes still took the trouble to ask certain sovereigns for whose friendship two other great ladies were her rivals, to luncheon. But they rarely came to Paris and knew people of no particular position, and as the Duchesse, owing to the Guermantes partiality for old forms (for though well-bred people bored her, she liked good manners) announced, “Her Majesty has commanded the Duchesse de Guermantes, has deigned, et cetera,” the newcomers, ignorant of these formulas, assumed that the Duchesse’s position had diminished. From Mme de Guermantes’ standpoint, her intimacy with Rachel might indicate that we were mistaken in believing her condemnation of fashion to be a hypocritical pose at a time when her refusal to

go to Mme de Sainte-Euverte's seemed to be due to snobbishness rather than to intelligence and her objection to the marquise on the ground of stupidity to be attributable to the latter's failure to attain her snobbish ambitions. But this intimacy with Rachel might equally signify that the Duchesse's intelligence was meagre, unsatisfied and desirous, very late, of expressing itself, combined with a total ignorance of intellectual realities and a fanciful spirit which makes ladies of position say, "What fun it will be" and finish their evenings in what actually is the most excruciating boredom, forcing themselves on someone to whom they have nothing to say so as to stand a moment by his bedside in an evening cloak, after which, observing that it is very late, they go off to bed.

It may be added that for some little time, the versatile Duchesse had felt a strong antipathy towards Gilberte which might make her take particular pleasure in receiving Rachel, which moreover enabled her to proclaim one of the Guermantes' maxims, namely, that they were too numerous to take up a quarrel or to go into mourning among themselves, a sort of "it's not my business" independence which it had been expedient to adopt in regard to M. de Charlus who, had they espoused his cause, would have made them quarrel with everybody. As to Rachel, if she had actually taken a good deal of trouble to make friends with the Duchesse (trouble which the Duchesse had been unable to detect in the affected disdain and pretentious rudeness which made her believe the actress was not at all a snob) doubtless it came about from the fascination exercised upon society people by hardened bohemians which is parallel to that which bohemians feel about people in society, a double reaction which corresponds, in the political order, to the reciprocal curiosity and desire to be allies displayed by nations who have fought against each other. But Rachel's wish to be friends with the Duchesse might have a more peculiar reason. It was at the house of Mme de Guermantes and from Mme de Guermantes herself that she once suffered her greatest humiliation. Rachel had not forgotten though, little by little, she had pardoned it but the singular prestige the Duchesse had derived from it in her eyes, would never be effaced. The colloquy from which I wanted to draw Gilberte's attention was fortunately interrupted, for the mistress of the house came to fetch Rachel, the moment having come for her recitation, so she left the Duchesse and appeared upon the platform.

While these incidents were taking place a spectacle of a very different kind was to be seen at the other end of Paris. La Berma had asked some people to come to tea with her in honour of her daughter and her son-in-law but the guests were apparently in no hurry to arrive. Having learned that Rachel was to recite

poems at the Princesse de Guermantes' (which greatly shocked la Berma, a great artist to whom Rachel was still a courtesan given minor parts, because Saint-Loup paid for her stage-wardrobe, in plays in which la Berma took the principal rôle, more shocked still by the report in town that though the invitations were sent in the name of the Princesse de Guermantes, it was Rachel who was receiving there) la Berma had written insistently to some of her faithful friends not to fail to come to her tea party, knowing they were also friends of the Princesse de Guermantes when she was Mme Verdurin. But the hours passed and no one arrived. When Bloch was asked to go he replied naively: "No, I prefer going to the Princesse de Guermantes'." And, alas, everyone else had made up his mind to do likewise. La Berma, attacked by a mortal disease which prevented her from going into society except on rare occasions, had become worse, since, in order to satisfy her daughter's demand for luxuries which her ailing and idle son-in-law could not provide, she had again gone on the stage. She knew she was shortening her life, but only cared to please her daughter to whom she brought the great prestige of her fame as to her son-in-law whom she detested but flattered because, as she knew her daughter adored him, she feared, if she did not conciliate him, he would, out of spite, keep them apart. La Berma's daughter, who was not entirely cruel and was secretly loved by the doctor who was attending her mother, allowed herself to be persuaded that these performances of Phèdre were not very dangerous to the invalid. In a measure she had forced the doctor to say so and had retained only that out of the many things he forbade and which she ignored; in reality the doctor had said that there was no harm in la Berma's performances, to please the young woman whom he loved, and perhaps through ignorance as well, knowing that the disease was incurable anyhow, on the principle that one readily accepts the shortening of the sufferings of invalids when in doing so one is the gainer, perhaps also through stupidly supposing it would please la Berma herself and must, therefore, do her good, a foolish notion in which he felt justified when, a box being sent him by la Berma's children for which he left all his patients in the lurch, he had found her as full of life on the stage as she had appeared moribund in her own house. And our habits do, indeed, in large measure, enable even our organisms to accommodate themselves to an existence which at first seemed impossible. We have all seen an old circus performer with a weak heart accomplish acrobatic tricks which no one would believe his heart could stand. La Berma was in the same degree a stage veteran to whose exactions her organs so much adapted themselves that forfeiting prudence, she could, without the public discerning it, produce the illusion of

health only affected by an imaginary nervous ailment. After the scene of Hippolyte's declaration, though la Berma well knew the terrible night to which she was returning, her admirers applauded her to the echo and declared her more beautiful than ever. She went back in a state of horrible suffering but happy to bring her daughter the bank-notes which, with the playfulness of a former child of the streets, she was in the habit of tucking into her stocking whence she proudly extracted them, hoping for a smile or a kiss. Unhappily, these notes only enabled son-in-law and daughter to add new decorations to their house adjoining that of their mother, in consequence of which, incessant hammering interrupted the sleep which the great tragedian so much needed. To conform to changes of fashion and to the taste of Messrs, de X or de Y, whom they hoped to entertain, they redecorated every room in the house. La Berma, realising that the sleep which alone could have calmed her suffering, had fled, resigned herself to not sleeping any more, not without a secret contempt for elegancies which were hastening her death and making her last days a torture. Doubtless she despised such decrees of fashion owing to a natural resentment of things that injure us which we are powerless to avoid. But it was also because, conscious of the genius within her, she had acquired in her early youth the realisation of their futility and had remained faithful to the tradition she had always reverenced and of which she was the incarnation, which made her judge things and people as she would have done thirty years earlier — Rachel, for instance, not as the fashionable actress she had become but as the little prostitute she had been. In truth, la Berma was no better than her daughter; it was from her heredity and from the contagion of example which admiration had rendered more, effective, that her daughter had derived her egotism, her pitiless raillery, her unconscious cruelty. But, la Berma, in thus saturating her daughter with her own defects, had delivered herself. And even if la Berma's daughter had not had workmen in her house she would have exhausted her mother through the ruthless and irresponsible force of attraction of youth which infects old age with the madness of trying to assimilate it. Every day there was a luncheon party and they would have considered la Berma selfish to deny them that pleasure, or even not to be there as they counted on the magical presence of the illustrious mother to attract, not without difficulty, new social relationships which had to be hauled in by the ears. They "promised" her to these new acquaintances for some party elsewhere so as to show them "civility". And the poor mother, engaged in a grave colloquy with death who had taken up his abode in her, had to get up and go out. The more so that, at this period, Réjane, in all the lustre of her talent, was giving

performances abroad with enormous success and the son-in-law anxious that la Berma should not be eclipsed, wanted as profuse an effulgence for the family and forced la Berma to make tours during which she had to have injections of morphia which might cause her death at any moment because of the state of her kidneys. The same magnet of fashion and social prestige had on the day of the Princesse de Guermantes' party, acted as an air-pump and had drawn la Berma's most faithful habitués there with the power of hydraulic suction, while at her own house there was absolute void and death. One young man had come, being uncertain whether the party at la Berma's would be equally brilliant or not. When she saw the time pass and realised that everyone had thrown her over, she had tea served and sat down to table as though to a funereal repast. There was nothing left in la Berma's face to recall her whose photograph had so deeply moved me one mid-Lenten evening long ago; death, as people say, was written in it. At this moment she verily resembled a marble of Erechtheum. Her hardened arteries were half petrified, long sculptural ribbons were traced upon her cheeks with a mineral rigidity. The dying eyes were relatively living in contrast with the terrible ossified mask and shone feebly like a serpent asleep in the midst of stones. Nevertheless, the young man who had sat down to the table out of politeness was continually looking at the time, attracted as he was to the brilliant party at the Guermantes'. La Berma had no word of reproach for the friends who had abandoned her naively hoping she was unaware they had gone to the Guermantes'. She only murmured: "Fancy a Rachel giving a party at the Princesse de Guermantes'; one has to come to Paris to see a thing like that!" and silently and with solemn slowness ate forbidden cakes as though she were observing some funeral rite. The tea-party was the more depressing that the son-in-law was furious that Rachel, whom he and his wife knew well, had not invited them. His despair was the greater that the young man who had been invited, told him he knew Rachel well enough, if he went to the Guermantes' at once, to ask her to invite the frivolous couple at the last moment. But la Berma's daughter knew the low level to which her mother relegated Rachel and that, to solicit an invitation from the former prostitute, would have been tantamount to killing her, and she told the young man and her husband that such-a thing was out of the question. But she revenged herself during tea by adopting an air of being deprived of amusement and bored by that tiresome mother of hers. The latter pretended not to notice her daughter's sulkiness and every now and then addressed an amiable word to the young man, their only guest, in a dying voice. But soon the whirlwind which was blowing everybody to the Guermantes' and

had blown me there prevailed; he got up and left, leaving Phèdre or death, one did not know which, to finish eating the funereal cakes with her daughter and her son-in-law.

The conversation Gilberte and I were having was interrupted by the voice of Rachel who had just stood up. Her performance was intelligent, for it assumed the unity of the poem as pre-existent apart from the recital and that we were only listening to a fragment of it, as though we were for a moment within earshot of an artist walking along a road. But the audience was bewildered at the sight of the woman bending her knees and throwing out her arms as though she were holding some invisible being in them, before she uttered a sound, and then becoming suddenly bandy-legged and starting to recite very familiar lines in a tone of supplication.

The announcement of a poem which nearly everybody knew had given satisfaction. But when they saw Rachel before beginning, peering about like one who is lost, lifting imploring hands and giving vent to sobs with every word everyone felt embarrassed and shocked by the exaggeration. No one had ever supposed that reciting verses was this sort of thing. But, by degrees, one gets accustomed to it and one forgets the first feeling of discomfort; one begins analysing the performance and mentally comparing various forms of recitation so as to say to oneself that one thing or the other is better or worse. It is like when, on seeing a barrister the first time in an ordinary lawsuit stand forward, lift his arm from the folds of his gown and begin in a threatening tone, one does not dare look at one’s neighbours. One feels it is ridiculous, but perhaps, after all, it is magnificent and one waits to see. Everybody looked at each other, not knowing what sort of face to put on; some of the younger ones whose manners were less restrained stifled bursts of laughter. Each person cast a stealthy look at the one next to him, that furtive look one bestows on a guest more knowing than oneself at a fashionable dinner when at the side of one’s plate one observes a strange instrument, a lobster fork or a sugar-sifter one does not know how to wield, hoping to watch him using it so that one can copy him. One behaves similarly when someone quotes a verse one does not know but wants to appear to know and which, like giving way to someone else at a door, one leaves to a better-informed person the pleasure of identifying as though we were doing him a favour. Thus those who were listening waited with bent head and inquisitive eye for others to take the initiative in laughter, criticism, tears or applause. Mme de Forcheville, come expressly from Guermantes whence the Duchesse, as we shall see later on, had been virtually expelled, adopted an attentive and strained

appearance which was all but positively disagreeable, either to show she knew all about it and was not present as a mere society woman, or out of hostility to those less versed in literature who might talk to her about something else or because she was trying by complete concentration, to make up her mind whether she liked it or not because though, perhaps, she thought it “interesting”, she did not “approve” the manner in which certain verses were delivered. This attitude might more properly have been adopted one would have thought, by the Princesse de Guermantes. But as it was her own house and she had become as miserly as she had rich she made up her mind to give just five roses to Rachel and see to the *claque* for her. She excited enthusiasm and created general approval by her loud exclamations of delight. Only in that respect did she become a Verdurin again; she conveyed the impression of listening to the verses for her own pleasure, of really preferring them to be recited to her alone and of its being a matter of chance that five hundred people had come by her permission to share her pleasure in secrecy. I noticed, however, without its affording my vanity any satisfaction since she had become old and ugly, that Rachel gave me a surreptitious wink. Throughout the recital she let me perceive by a subtly conveyed yet expressive smile that she was soliciting my acquiescence in her advances. But certain old ladies, unaccustomed to poetic recitations, remarked *sotto voce* to their neighbours: “Did you see that?” alluding to the actress’s tragi-comic miming which was too much for them. The Duchesse de Guermantes sensed the wavering of opinion and determining to assure the performer’s triumph, exclaimed “marvellous!” in the very middle of a poem which she believed finished. Upon this several guests emphasised the exclamation with a gesture of appreciation, less with the object of displaying their approval of the recital than the terms they were on with the Duchesse. When the poem was finished, we were close to Rachel who thanked Mme de Guermantes and as I was with the latter, took advantage of the opportunity to address me graciously. I then realised that, unlike the impassioned gaze of M. de Vaugoubert’s son which I had assumed to be a salutation intended for another, Rachel’s significant smile, instead of being meant as an invitation was only intended to provoke my recognition and the bow I now made to her. “I am sure he does not know me,” the actress remarked to the Duchesse in a mincing manner. “On the contrary,” I asserted, “I recognised you immediately.”

If, while that woman was reciting some of La Fontaine’s most beautiful verses, she had only been thinking, whether out of goodwill, stupidity or embarrassment, of the awkwardness of approaching me, during the same time

Bloch had only thought of how he could bound, like one who is escaping from a beleaguered city, if not over the bodies at all events on the feet of his neighbours, to congratulate the actress the moment the recital was over, whether from a mistaken sense of obligation or from a desire to show off. “It was beautiful,” he said to her and, having thus relieved himself, he turned his back on her and made such a noise in resuming his seat that Rachel had to wait several minutes before she could begin her second poem. It was the *Deux pigeons* and when it was over, Mme de Monrieuval went up to Mme de Saint-Loup who, she knew, was well-read but did not remember that she had her father’s subtle and sarcastic wit, and asked her: “It’s one of La Fontaine’s fables, isn’t it?” thinking so but not being sure, for she only knew the fables slightly and believed they were children’s tales unsuitable for recitation in society. Doubtless the good woman supposed that, to have such a success, the artist must have parodied them. Gilbert, till then impassive, confirmed the notion, for as she disliked Rachel and wanted to convey that with such a diction nothing of the fables remained, her answer was given with that tinge of malice which left simple people uncertain what Swann really meant. Though she was Swann’s daughter, she was more modern than he — like a duck hatched by a chicken — and being as a rule rather *lakist*, would have contented herself with saying: “I thought it most moving, a charming sensibility”, but Gilberte answered Mme de Monrieuval in Swann’s fanciful fashion which people often made the mistake of taking literally: “A quarter is the interpreter’s invention, a quarter crazy, a quarter meaningless, the rest La Fontaine,” which enabled Mme de Monrieuval to assert that what people had been listening to was not the *Deux pigeons* of La Fontaine, but a composition of which at the most a quarter was La Fontaine, at which nobody was surprised owing to their extraordinary ignorance.

But one of Bloch’s friends having arrived late, the former painted a wonderful picture of Rachel’s performance, getting a peculiar pleasure out of exaggerating its merits and holding forth to someone about modernist diction though it had not given him the slightest satisfaction. Then Bloch again congratulated Rachel with overdone emotion in a squeaky voice, told her she was a genius and introduced his friend who declared he had never admired anyone so much and Rachel, who now knew ladies in the best society and unconsciously copied them, answered: “I am flattered, honoured, by your appreciation.” Bloch’s friend asked Rachel what she thought of la Berma. “Poor woman! It appears she’s in a state of poverty. I will not say she had no talent, though it was not real talent for, at bottom, she only liked horrors, but certainly

she was useful, she played in a lively fashion and she was a well-meaning, generous creature and has ruined herself for others. She has made nothing for a long time because the public no longer cares for the things she plays in. To tell the truth," she added with a laugh, "I must tell you that my age did not enable me to hear her till her last period when I was too young to form an opinion." "Didn't she recite poetry well?" Bloch's friend ventured the question to flatter her: "As to that," she replied, "she never could recite a single line, it was prose, Chinese, Volapuk, anything you like except verse. Moreover, as I tell you, I hardly heard her and only quite at the last," to appear youthful, "but I've been told she was no better formerly, rather the reverse."

I realised that the passing of time does not necessarily bring about progress in the arts. And in the same way that a seventeenth century writer who was without knowledge of the French Revolution, scientific discoveries and the war, can be superior to another of this period and that Fagon was, perhaps, as great a physician as du Boulbon (the superiority of genius compensating in this case the inferiority of knowledge) so la Berma was a hundred times greater than Rachel and time, by placing her at the top of the tree together with Elstir, had consecrated her genius.

One must not be surprised that Saint-Loup's former mistress sneered at la Berma, she would have done so when she was young, so how would she not do so now. Let a society woman of high intelligence and of amiable disposition become an actress, displaying great talent in her new profession and meeting with nothing but success, if one happened to be in her company some time later, one would be surprised at hearing her talk a language which was not hers but that of people of the theatre, assume their peculiar kind of coarse familiarity towards their colleagues and all the rest of the habits acquired by those who have been on the stage for thirty years. Rachel behaved similarly without having been in society.

Mme de Guermantes, in her decline, had felt new curiosities rising within her. Society had nothing more to give her. The fact that she occupied the highest position in it was, as we have seen, as plain to her as the height of the blue sky above the earth. She did not consider that she had to assert a position she regarded as unassailable. On the other hand, she wanted to extend her reading and attend more performances. As in former days, all the choicest and most exclusive spirits gathered familiarly in the little garden to drink orangeade amidst the perfumed breezes and clouds of pollen, to be entertained of an evening by her taste for and understanding of what was best in society, now

another sort of appetite made her want to know the reasons of some literary controversy, to make the acquaintance of its protagonists and of actresses. Her tired mind demanded a new stimulant. To know such people, she now made advances to women with whom formerly she would not have exchanged cards, and who made much of their intimacy with the director of some review or other in the hope of getting hold of the Duchesse. The first actress she invited believed herself to be the only one admitted to a wonderful social milieu which seemed less wonderful to the second when the latter saw who had preceded her. The Duchesse believed her position to be unchanged because she received royalties at some of her evening parties. In reality she, the only representative of stainless blood, herself a born Guermantes, who could sign “Guermantes” when she did not sign “Duchesse de Guermantes”, she who represented to her own sisters-in-law something infinitely precious, like a Moses saved from the waters, a Christ escaped into Egypt, a Louis XVII fled from the Temple, purest of pure breeds, now sacrificed it all, doubtless, for the sake of that congenital need of mental nourishment which caused the social desuetude of Mme de Villeparisis and had herself become a sort of Mme de Villeparisis at whose house snobbish women were afraid of meeting this person or that and whom young men, observing the accomplished fact without knowing what had preceded it, believed to be a Guermantes of inferior vintage, of a poor year, a *déclassée*Guermantes. In her new environment she remained what she had been more than she supposed and went on believing that being bored implied intellectual superiority and expressed this sentiment with a violence that made her voice sound harsh. When I talked about Brichot to her she said: “He bored me enough for twenty years,” and when Mme de Cambremer suggested her re-reading “what Schopenhauer said about music,” she commented on the remark with asperity: “Re-read! That’s a gem! Please not that.” Then old Albon smiled because he recognised one of the forms of the Guermantes’ spirit.

“People can say what they like, it’s admirable, there’s the right note and character in it, it’s an intelligent rendering, nobody ever recited verses like it,” the Duchesse said of Rachel, for fear Gilberte would sneer at her. The latter moved away to another group to avoid conflict with her aunt who, indeed, was extremely dull when she talked about Rachel. But considering the best writers cease to display any talent with increase of age or from excess of production, one can excuse society women for having less sense of humour as they get old. Swann missed the Princesse des Laumes’ delicacy in the hard wit of the Duchesse de Guermantes. Late in life, tired by the slightest effort, Mme de

Guermantes gave vent to an immense number of stupid observations. It is true that every now and then, even in the course of this very afternoon, she was again the woman I once knew and talked about society matters with her former verve. But in spite of the sparkling words and the accompanying charm which for so many years had held under their sway the most distinguished men in Paris, her wit scintillated, so to speak, in a vacuum. When she was about to say something funny, she paused the same number of seconds as she used to but when the jest came, there was no point in it. However, few enough people noticed it. The continuity of the proceeding made them think the spirit survived like people who have a fancy for particular kinds of cakes and go to the same shop for them without noticing that they have deteriorated. Even during the war the Duchesse had shown signs of this decay. If anyone used the word culture, she stopped, smiled, her beautiful face lighted up and she ejaculated: “la K K K Kultur” and made her friends, who were fervents of the Guermantes’ spirit, roar with laughter. It was, of course, the same mould, the same intonation, the same smile that had formerly delighted Bergotte, who, for that matter, had he lived, would have kept his pithy phrases, his interjections, his periods of suspense, his epithets, to express nothing. But newcomers were sometimes taken aback and if they happened to turn up on a day when she was neither bright nor in full possession of her faculties, they said, “What a fool she is.” Moreover, the Duchesse so timed her descent into a lower sphere as not to allow it to affect those of her family from whom she drew aristocratic prestige. If, to play her part as protectress of the arts, she invited a minister or a painter to the theatre and he asked her naively whether her sister-in-law or her husband were in the audience, the Duchesse intimidated him by a show of audacity and answered disdainfully: “I don’t know. When I go out I don’t bother about my family. For politicians and artists I’m a widow.” In this way she prevented the too obtrusive parvenu from getting rebuffs — and herself reprimands — from M. de Marsantes and Basin.

I told Mme de Guermantes I had met M. de Charlus. She thought him more deteriorated than he was, it being the habit of people in society to see differences of intelligence in various people in their world amongst whom it is about uniform and also in the same person at different periods of his life. She added: “He was always the very image of my mother-in-law and the likeness is more striking than ever.” There was nothing remarkable in that. We know, as a matter of fact, that certain women are reproduced in certain men with complete fidelity, the only mistake being the sex. We cannot qualify this as *felix culpa*, for sex reacts upon personality and feminism becomes effeminacy, reserve suceptibility

and so on. This does not prevent a man's face, even though bearded, from being modelled on lines transferable to the portrait of his mother. There was nothing but a ruin of the old M. de Charlus left but under all the layers of fat and rice powder one could recognise the remnants of a beautiful woman in her eternal youth.

"I can't tell you how much pleasure it gives me to see you," the Duchesse continued, "goodness, when was it we last met?" "Calling upon Mme d'Agrigente where I often used to see you." "Ah, of course, I often went there, my dear friend, as Basin was in love with her then. I could always be found with his particular friend of the moment because he used to say: 'Mind you go and see her.' I must confess that sort of 'digestion-call' he made me pay when he had satisfied his appetite was rather troublesome. I got accustomed to that, but the tiresome part was being obliged to keep these relationships up after he had done with them. That always made me think of Victor Hugo's verse '*Emporte le bonheur et laisse-moi l'ennui*.' I accepted it smilingly like poetry but it wasn't fair. At least he might have let me be fickle about his mistresses; making-up his accounts with the series he had enough of didn't leave me an afternoon to myself. Well, those days seem sweet compared to the present. I can consider it flattering that he has started being unfaithful to me again because it makes me feel young. But I prefer his earlier manner. I suppose it was so long since he had done that sort of thing that he didn't know how to set about it. But all the same, we get on quite well together. We talk together and rather like each other." The Duchesse said this for fear I might think they had completely separated and, just as people say when someone is very ill: "He still likes to talk, I was reading to him for an hour this morning," she added: "I'll tell him you're here, he'd like to see you," and went up to the Duc who was sitting on a sofa talking to a lady. But when he saw his wife approaching him, he looked so angry that she had no alternative but to retire. "He's engaged; I don't know what he is up to, we shall see presently," Mme de Guermantes said, leaving me to make what I liked of the situation. Bloch approached us and asked us in the name of his American friend who the young Duchesse over there was. I told him she was the niece of M. de Bréauté, about whom Bloch, who had never heard his name, wanted particulars. "Ah, Bréauté!" exclaimed Mme de Guermantes, addressing me, "you remember! Goodness, how long ago it is!" Then turning to Bloch, "He was a snob if you like; his people lived near my mother-in-law. That won't interest you, it's amusing for my old friend," she indicated me, "he used to know all about them in old days as I did." These words and many things in Mme de Guermantes'

manner showed the time that had passed since then. Her friendships and opinions had so changed since the time she was referring to that she had come to thinking her charming Babel a snob. He, on the other hand, had not only receded in time, but, a thing I had not realised when I entered society and believed him one of those notabilities of Paris which would always be associated with his social history like with that of Colbert in the reign of Louis XIV, he also had a provincial label as a country neighbour of the old Duchesse and it was in that capacity that the Princesse des Laumes had been associated with him. Nevertheless, this Bréauté, barren of his one time wit, relegated to a past which dated him and proved he had since been completely forgotten by the Duchesse and her circle, formed a link between the Duchesse and myself which I could never have believed that first evening at the Opéra Comique when he had appeared to me like a nautical God in his marine cave, because she recalled that I had known him, consequently that I had been her friend, if not of the same social circle as herself, that I had frequented that circle for a far longer time than most of the people present; she recalled him and yet not clearly enough to remember certain details which were then my vital concern, that I was not invited to the Guermantes' place in the country and was only a small bourgeois of Combray when she came to Mlle Percepied's marriage mass, that, in spite of all Saint-Loup's requests, she did not invite me to her house during the year following Bréauté's appearance with her at the Opéra Comique. To me that was of capital importance for it was exactly then that the life of the Duchesse de Guermantes seemed to me like a paradise I could not enter, but for her it was the same indifferent existence she was accustomed to, and owing to my having often dined at her house later on, and to my having, even earlier, been her aunt's and her nephew's friend, she no longer remembered at what period our intimacy had begun nor realised the anachronism of making it start several years too early. For that made it seem as though I had known the Mme de Guermantes of that marvellous Guermantes name, that I had been received by the name of golden syllables in the faubourg Saint-Germain when I had merely dined with a lady who was even then nothing more to me than a lady like any other and who had invited me not to descend into the submarine kingdom of the nereids but to spend the evening in her cousin's box. "If you want to know all about Bréauté, who isn't worth it," she added to Bloch, "ask my friend who is worth a hundred of him. He has dined fifty times at my house with Bréauté. Wasn't it at my house that you met him? Anyhow, you met Swann there." And I was as surprised that she imagined I might have met M. de Bréauté elsewhere than at her house and

frequented that circle before I knew her as I was to observe that she imagined I had first known Swann at her house. Less untruthfully than Gilberte when she said that Bréauté was “one of my old neighbours in the country; I like talking to him about Tansonville,” whereas he did not in those days go to the Swann’s at Tansonville, I might have remarked: “He was a country neighbour who often came to see us in the evening,” in reference to Swann, who in truth, recalled something very different from the Guermantes, “It’s rather difficult to explain,” she continued. “He was a man to whom Highnesses meant everything. He told a lot of rather funny stories about Guermantes people and my mother-in-law and Mme de Varambon before she was in attendance on the Princesse de Parme. But who cares about Mme de Varambon now? My friend here knew about all this, but it’s done with now, they’re people whose names are forgotten and, for that matter, they didn’t deserve to survive.” And I realised, in spite of that unified thing society seems to be, where, in fact, social relationships reach their greatest concentration, where everything gets known about everybody, that areas of it remain in which time causes changes that cannot be grasped by those who only enter it when its configuration has changed. “Mme de Varambon was an excellent creature who said unbelievably stupid things,” continued the Duchesse, insensitive to that poetry of the incomprehensible which is an effect of time, and concerned only with extracting human elements assimilable with literature of the Meilhac kind and with the Guermantes spirit, “at one time she had a mania for constantly chewing cough drops called”— she laughed to herself as she recalled the name so familiar formerly, so unknown now to those she was addressing —”Pastilles Géraudel. ‘Mme de Varambon,’ my mother-in-law said to her, “‘if you go on swallowing those Géraudel pastilles, you’ll get a stomach-ache.’ ‘But, Mme la Duchesse,’ answered Mme de Varambon, ‘how can I hurt my stomach since they go into the bronchial tubes?’ It was she who said, ‘The Duchesse has got such a beautiful cow that it looks like a stallion.’” Mme de Guermantes would have gladly gone on telling stories about Mme de Varambon of which we knew hundreds but the name did not evoke in Bloch’s memory any of those associations rekindled in us by the mention of Mme de Varambon, of M. de Bréauté, of the Prince d’Agrigente, who perhaps, on that account, exercised a glamour in his eyes I knew to be exaggerated but understood, though not because I had felt it, since our own weaknesses and absurdities seldom make us more indulgent to those of others even when we have thrust them into the light.

The past had been so transformed in the mind of the Duchesse or the demarcations which existed in my own had always been so absent from hers,

that what had been an important event for me had passed unperceived by her and she endowed me with a social past which she made recede too far. For the Duchesse shared that notion of time past which I had just acquired, and contrary to my illusion which shortened it, she lengthened it, notably in not reckoning with that undefined line of demarcation between the period when she represented a name to me, then the object of my love — and the period during which she had become merely a woman in society like any other. Moreover, I only went to her house during that second period when she had become another to me. But these differences escaped her eyes and she would not have thought it more singular that I should have been at her house two years earlier because she did not know that she was then another person to me, her personality not appearing to her, as to me, discontinuous.

I told the Duchesse that Bloch believed it was the former Princesse de Guermantes who was receiving to-day, “That reminds me of the first evening when I went to the Princesse de Guermantes’ and believed I was not invited and that they were going to turn me out, when you wore a red dress and red shoes.” “Gracious, how long ago that is!” she answered, thus emphasising the passage of time. She gazed sadly into the distance but particularly insisted on the red dress. I asked her to describe it to me, which she did with complaisance. “Those dresses aren’t worn nowadays. They were the fashion then.” “But it was pretty, wasn’t it?” She was always afraid of saying anything that might not be to her advantage. “Yes, I thought it very pretty. It isn’t the fashion now but it will be again. All fashions come back, in dress, in music, in painting,” she added with emphasis, imagining something original in this philosophy. But the sadness of growing old gave her a lassitude belied by her smile. “You’re sure they were red shoes; I thought they were gold ones?” I assured her that my memory was exact on the point without detailing the circumstances which enabled me to be so certain. “You’re charming to remember,” she said tenderly, for women call those charming who remember their beauty as artists do those who remember their works. Moreover, however distant the past, so determined a woman as the Duchesse is unlikely to forget it. “Do you remember,” she said, as she thanked me for remembering her dress and her shoes, “Basin and I brought you back that evening and there was a girl coming to see you after midnight. Basin laughed heartily about your having visitors at that time of night.” I did, indeed, remember that Albertine came to see me that night after the evening party at the Princesse de Guermantes’. I remembered it quite as well as the Duchesse, I to whom Albertine was now as indifferent as she would have been to Mme de

Guermantes, had the latter known that the young girl on whose account I had not gone to their house, was Albertine. Long after our hearts have forsaken the poor dead, their indifferent dust remains, like an alloy, mingled with events of the past and, though we love them no more, when we evoke a room, a path, a road they lived in or traversed with us, we are compelled, so that the place they occupied may not remain untenanted, to think of them though we neither regret nor name nor identify them. (Mme de Guermantes did not identify the girl who was to come that evening, had never known her name and only referred to her because of the hour and the circumstances.) Those are the final and least enviable forms of survival.

If the opinions the Duchesse subsequently expressed regarding Rachel were indifferent in themselves, they interested me because they, too, marked a new hour on the dial. For the Duchesse had no more forgotten her evening party in which Rachel figured than had the latter and the memory had not undergone the slightest transformation. “I must tell you,” she said, “that I am the more interested to hear her recite and to witness her success that I discovered her, appreciated her, treasured her, imposed her, at a time when she was ignored and laughed at. You may be surprised, my dear friend, to know that the first time she was heard in public was at my house. Yes, while all the would-be advanced people like my new cousin”— she ironically indicated the Princesse de Guermantes who to her was still Mme Verdurin, “would have let her starve without condescending to listen to her. I considered her interesting and gave her the prestige of performing at my house before the smartest audience we could get together. I can say, though it sounds stupid and pretentious, for fundamentally talent doesn’t need protection, that I launched her. Of course she didn’t need me.” I made a gesture of protest and observed that Mme de Guermantes was quite ready to welcome it. “You evidently think talent has need of support? Perhaps, after all, you’re right. You’re repeating what Dumas formerly told me. In this case, I am extremely flattered if I do count for something, however little, not in the talent, of course, but in the reputation of an artist like her.” Mme de Guermantes preferred to abandon her idea that talent bursts like an abscess because it was more flattering for herself, but also because for some time now, she had been receiving new people and being rather worn out, she had practised humility by seeking information and asking others their opinion in order to form one. “It isn’t necessary for me to tell you,” she resumed, “that this intelligent public which is called society saw nothing in it. They objected to her and scoffed at her. I might tell them it was original and curious,

something different from what-had been done before, no one believed me, as they never did believe me in anything. It was the same with the thing she recited, a piece by Maeterlinck. Now it's well known, but then everyone laughed at it though I considered it admirable. It surprises even myself considering I was only a peasant with the education of a country-girl, that I spontaneously admired things of that kind. I could not, of course, have explained why, but it gave me pleasure, it moved me. Why, Basin, who is anything but sensitive, was struck by its effect on me. At that time, he said: 'I don't want you to listen to these absurdities any more, they make you ill,' and it was true. They take me for a hard woman and really I am a bundle of nerves."

At this moment an unexpected incident occurred. A footman came to tell Rachel that la Berma's daughter and son-in-law wanted to speak to her. We have seen that the daughter had opposed her husband when he wanted to get an invitation from Rachel. But, after the departure of the young man, the boredom of the young couple left alone with their mother had grown, the thought that others were amusing themselves tormented them; in brief, availing themselves of la Berma's retirement to her bedroom to spit blood, they had quickly put on their smartest clothes, called a carriage and had arrived at the Princesse de Guermantes' without being invited. Rachel hardly grasped the situation, but secretly flattered, adopted an arrogant tone and told the footman she could not be disturbed, they must write and explain the object of their unusual proceeding. The footman came back with a card on which la Berma's daughter had scribbled that she and her husband could not resist the pleasure of hearing Rachel recite and asked her to let them come in. Rachel gloated over the pretext and her own triumph and replied that she was very sorry but that the recitation was over. In the anteroom, the footmen were winking at each other while the couple in vain awaited admission. The shame of their humiliation, the consciousness of the insignificance, the nullity of Rachel in her mother's eyes, pushed la Berma's daughter into pursuing to the end the step she had risked simply for amusement. She sent a message to Rachel that she would take it as a favour, even if she could not hear her recite, to be allowed to shake hands with her. Rachel at the moment, was talking to an Italian Prince who was said to be after her large fortune, the source of which her social relationships somewhat concealed. She took stock of the reversal of situations which now placed the children of the illustrious Berma at her feet. After informing everyone about the incident in the most charming fashion, she sent the young couple a message to come in, which they did without being asked twice, ruining la Berma's social prestige at one blow as they had

previously destroyed her health. Rachel had realised that her condescension would result in her being considered kinder and the young couple baser than her refusal. So she received them with open arms and with the affectation of a patroness in the limelight who can put aside her magnificence, said: “But of course, I’m delighted to see you, the Princesse will be charmed”. As she did not know that at the theatre she was supposed to have done the inviting, she may have feared, if she refused entry to la Berma’s children, that they might have doubted not her goodwill for that would have been indifferent to her — but her influence. The Duchesse de Guermantes moved away instinctively, for in proportion to anyone’s appearing to court society, he diminished in her esteem. At the moment she only felt it for Rachel’s kindness and would have turned her back on la Berma’s children if they had been introduced to her. Meanwhile, Rachel was composing the gracious phrases with which she, the following day, would overwhelm la Berma in the wings: “I was harrowed, distressed that your daughter should have been kept waiting in the anteroom. If I had only known! She sent me card after card.” She was enchanted to offer this insult to la Berma. Perhaps, had she known it would be a mortal blow, she might have hesitated. People like to persecute others but without exactly putting themselves in the wrong and without hounding them to death. Moreover, where was she wrong? She might say laughingly a few days later: “That’s pretty thick, I meant to be far nicer to her children than she ever was to me, and now they nearly accuse me of killing her. I take the Duchesse to witness.” It seems as though the children of great actors inherit all the evil and pretence of stage-life without accomplishing the determined work that springs from it as did this mother. Great actresses frequently die the victims of domestic plots which are woven round them, as happens so often at the close of dramas they play in.

Gilberte, as we have seen, wanted to avoid a conflict with her aunt on the subject of Rachel. She did well; it was not an easy matter to undertake the defence of Odette’s daughter in opposition to Mme de Guermantes, so great was her animosity owing to what the Duchesse told me about the new form the Duc’s infidelity had taken, which, extraordinary as it might appear to those who knew her age, was with Mme de Forcheville.

When one remembered Mme de Forcheville’s present age, it did, indeed, seem extraordinary. But Odette had probably begun the life of a courtesan very young. And we encounter women who reincarnate themselves every ten years in new love affairs and sometimes drive some young wife to despair because of her husband’s deserting her for them when one actually thought they were dead.

The life of the Duchesse was a very unhappy one, and one reason for it simultaneously brought about the lowering of M. de Guermantes' social standard. He, sobered by advancing age though still robust, had long ceased being unfaithful to Mme de Guermantes, but had suddenly become infatuated with Mme de Forcheville without knowing how he had got involved in the liaison.

It had assumed such proportions that the old man, in this last love affair, imitating his own earlier amative proceedings, so secluded his mistress that, if my love for Albertine had been a multiple variation of Swann's for Odette, M. de Guermantes' recalled mine for Albertine. She had to take all her meals with him and he was always at her house. She boasted of this to friends who, but for her, would never have known the Duc and who came to her house to make his acquaintance, as people visit a courtesan to get to know the king who is her lover. It is true that Mme de Forcheville had been in society for a long time. But beginning over again, late in life, to be kept by such a haughty old man who played the most important part in her life, she lowered herself by ministering only to his pleasure, buying peignoirs and ordering food he liked, flattering her friends by telling them that she had spoken to him about them, as she told my great-uncle she had spoken about him to the Grand-Duke who then sent him cigarettes, in a word, she once more tended, in spite of the position she had secured in society, to become, owing to force of circumstances, what she had been to me when I was a child, the lady in pink. Of course, my Uncle Adolphe had been dead many years. But does the substitution of new people for old prevent us from beginning the same life over again? Doubtless she adapted herself to the new conditions out of cupidity, but also because, somewhat sought after socially when she had a daughter to marry, she had been left in the background when Gilberte married Saint-Loup. She knew that the Duc would do what she liked, that he would bring her any number of duchesses who would not be reluctant to score off their friend Oriane and, perhaps, was stimulated into the bargain by the prospect of gratifying her feminine sentiment of rivalry at the expense of the outraged Duchesse. The Duc de Guermantes' exclusive Courvoisier nephews, Mme de Marsantes, the Princesse de Trania, went to Mme de Forcheville's in the expectation of legacies without troubling whether or no this caused pain to Mme de Guermantes, about whom Odette, stung by Mme de Guermantes' disdain, said the most evil things. This liaison with Mme de Forcheville, which was only an imitation of his early ones, caused the Duc de Guermantes to miss for the second time being elected President of the Jockey

Club and honorary member of the Académie des Beaux Arts just as M. de Charlus' public association with Jupien was the cause of his failure to be elected President of the Union Club and of the Society of Friends of Old Paris. Thus the two brothers, so different in their tastes, had fallen into disrepute on account of the same indolence and lack of will, more pleasantly observable in the case of their grandfather, a member of the French Academy, which led to the normal proclivities of one and the abnormal habits of the other degrading both.

The old Duc did not go out any more, he spent his days and evenings at Odette's. But to-day, as she herself had come to the Princesse de Guermantes' party, he had dropped in to see her for a moment, in spite of the annoyance of meeting his wife. I dare say I should not have recognised him if the Duchesse had not drawn my attention to him. He was now nothing but a ruin, but a splendid one; grander than a ruin, he had the romantic beauty of a rock beaten by a tempest. Scourged from every side by the waves of suffering, by rage at his suffering, his face, slowly crumbling like a block of granite almost submerged by the towering seas, retained the style, the suavity I had always admired. It was defaced like a beautiful antique head we are glad to possess as an ornament in a library. But it seemed to belong to an earlier period than it did, not only because its matter had acquired a rude brokenness in the place of its former grace but also because an involuntary expression caused by failing health, resisting and fighting death, by the arduousness of keeping alive, had replaced the old delicacy of mien and exuberance. The arteries had lost all their suppleness and had imprinted a sculptured hardness on the once expressive features. And, unconsciously, the Duc revealed by the contours of his neck, his cheeks, his brow, a being forced to hold on grimly to every moment and as though tossed by a tragic storm, his sparse white locks dashed their spray over the invaded promontory of his visage. And like the weird and spectral reflection an approaching storm sweeping everything before it, gives to rocks till then of another colour, I knew that the leaden grey of his hard, worn cheeks, the woolly whiteness of his unkempt hair, the wavering light which lingered in his almost unseeing eyes, were the but too real pigment borrowed from a fantastic palette with which was inimitably painted the prophetic shadows of age and the terrifying proximity of death. The Duc only stayed a few moments but long enough for me to see that Odette made fun of him to her younger aspirants. But it was strange that he who used to be almost ridiculous when he assumed the pose of a stage-king, was now endowed with a noble mien, resembling in that his brother whom also old age had relieved of accessories. And like his brother,

once so arrogant, though in a different way, he seemed almost respectful. For he had not suffered the eclipse of M. de Charlus, reduced to bowing with a forgetful invalid's politeness to those he had formerly disdained, but he was very old and when he went through the door and wanted to go down the stairs to go away, old age, that most miserable condition which casts men from their high estate as it did the Kings of Greek tragedy, old age gripped him, forced him to halt on that road of the cross which is the life of an impotent menaced by death, so that he might wipe his streaming brow and tap to find the step which escaped his foothold because he needed help to ensure it, help against his swimming eyes, help he was unknowingly imploring ever so gently and timidly from others. Old age had made him more than august, it had made him a suppliant.

Thus in the faubourg Saint-Germain the apparently impregnable positions of the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes and of the Baron de Charlus had lost their inviolability as everything changes in this world through the action of an interior principle which had never occurred to them; in the case of M. de Charlus it was the love of Charlie who had enslaved him to the Verdurins and then gradual decay, in the case of Mme de Guermantes a taste for novelty and for art, in the case of M. de Guermantes an exclusive love, as he had had so many in his life, rendered more tyrannical by the feebleness of old age to which the austerity of the Duchesse's salon where the Duc no longer put in an appearance and which, for that matter, had almost ceased functioning, offered no resistance by its power of rehabilitation. Thus the face of things in life changes, the centre of empires, the register of fortunes, the chart of positions, all that seemed final, are perpetually remoulded and during his life-time a man can witness the completest changes just where those seemed to him least possible.

Unable to do without Odette, always at her house and in the same armchair from which old age and gout made it difficult for him to rise, M. de Guermantes let her receive her friends who were only too pleased to be introduced to the Duc, to give him the lead in conversation, and listen to his talk of former society, of the Marquise de Villeparisis and of the Duc de Chartres.

At moments, beneath the old pictures collected by Swann which, with this *Restauration* Duc and his beloved courtesan, completed the old-fashioned picture, the lady in pink interrupted him with her chatter and he stopped short, and stared at her with a ferocious glare. Possibly he had discovered that she, as well as the duchesse, occasionally made stupid remarks, perhaps an old man's fancy made him think that one of Mme de Guermantes' intemperate passages of humour had interrupted what he was saying and he thought himself back in the

Guermantes' mansion as caged beasts may imagine themselves free in African wilds. Raising his head sharply, he fixed his little yellow eyes, which once had the gleam of a wild animal's, on her in one of those sustained scowls which made me shiver when Mme de Guermantes told me about them. Thus the Duc glared at the audacious lady in pink, but she held her own, did not remove her eyes from him and at the end of a moment which seemed long to the spectators, the old wild beast, tamed, remembered he was no longer at large in the Sahara of his own home, but in his cage in the Jardin des Plantes at Mme de Forcheville's and he withdrew his head, from which still depended a thick fringe of blonde-white hair, into his shoulders and resumed his discourse. Apparently he had not understood what Mme de Forcheville said, which as a rule, meant little. He permitted her to ask her friends to dinner with him. A mania which was a relic of his former love affairs and did not surprise Odette, accustomed as she was to the same habit in Swann and which reminded me of my life with Alber-tine, was to insist on people going early so that he could say good-night to Odette last. It is unnecessary to add that the moment he had gone she invited other people. But the Duc had no suspicion of that, or preferred not to seem to suspect it; the vigilance of old men diminishes with their sight and hearing. After a certain age Jupiter inevitably changes into one of Molière's characters — into the absurd Géronte — not into the Olympian lover of Alcmene. And Odette deceived M. de Guermantes and took care of him with neither charm nor generosity of spirit. She was commonplace in that as in everything else. Life had given her good parts but she could not play them and, meanwhile, she was playing at being a recluse. It was a fact that whenever I wanted to see her, I could not, because M. de Guermantes, desirous of reconciling the exactions of his hygiene with those of his jealousy, only allowed her to have parties in the day time and on the further condition that there was no dancing. She frankly avowed the seclusion in which she lived and this for various reasons. The first was that she imagined, although I had only published a few articles and studies, that I was a well-known author which caused her to remark naively, returning to the past when I went to see her in the Avenue des Acacias and later at her house: "Ah, if I could have then foreseen that that boy would one day be a great writer." And having heard that writers are glad to be with women in order to document themselves and hear love stories, she readopted her rôle of courtesan to entertain me: "Fancy, once there was a man who was crazy about me and I adored him. We were having a divine time together. He had to go to America and I was to go with him. On the eve of his departure I thought it would be more beautiful not to risk that such a

wonderful love should come to an end. We spent our last evening together. He believed I should go with him. It was a delirious night of infinite voluptuousness and despair, for I knew I should never see him again. In the morning I gave my ticket to a traveller I did not know. He wanted to buy it but I answered: 'No, you are rendering me such service in accepting it that I do not want the money.'" There was another story: "One day I was in the Champs Elysées. M. de Bréauté, whom I had only seen once, looked at me so significantly that I stopped and asked him how he dared look at me like that. He answered: 'I'm looking at you because you've got an absurd hat on.' It was true. It was a little hat with pansies on it and the fashions of that period were awful. But I was furious and I said to him: 'I don't permit you to talk to me like that.' It began to rain and I said: 'I might forgive you if you had a carriage.' 'Oh, well, that's all right, I've got one and I'll accompany you home.' 'No, I shall be glad to accept your carriage but not you.' I got into the carriage and he departed in the rain. But that evening he came to my house. We had two years of wild love together. Come and have tea with me," she went on "and I'll tell you how I made M. de Forcheville's acquaintance. Really," with a melancholy air, "my life has been a cloistered one, for I've only had great loves for men who were terribly jealous of me. I don't speak of M. de Forcheville; he was quite indifferent and I only cared for intelligent men, but, you see, M. Swann was as jealous as this poor Duc for whose sake I sacrifice my life because he is unhappy at home. But it was M. Swann I loved madly, and one can sacrifice dancing and society and everything to please a man one loves or even to spare him anxiety. Poor Charles, he was so intelligent, so seductive, exactly the kind of man I liked." Perhaps it was true. There was a time when Swann pleased her and it was exactly when she was not "his kind". To tell the truth, she never had been "his kind", then or later. And yet he had loved her so long and so painfully. He was surprised afterwards when he realised the contradiction of it. But there would be none if we consider how great a proportion of suffering women who aren't "their kind" inflict on men. That is probably due to several causes; first because they are not our kind, we let ourselves be loved without loving; through that we adopt a habit we should not acquire with a woman who is our kind. The latter, knowing she was desired, would resist and only accord occasional meetings and thus would not gain such a foothold in our lives that if, later on, we came to love her and then, owing to a quarrel or a journey, we found ourselves alone and without news of her, she would deprive us not of one bond but a thousand. Again this habit is sentimental because there is no great physical desire at its base and if love is born, the brain

works better; romance takes the place of a physical urge. We do not suspect women who are not our kind, we allow them to love us and if we afterwards love them we love them a hundred times more than the others, without getting from them the relief of satisfied desire. For these reasons and many others, the fact that we experience our greatest sorrows with women who are not our kind, is not only due to that derisive illusion which permits the realisation of happiness only under the form that pleases us least. A woman who is our kind is rarely dangerous, for she does not care about us, satisfies us, soon abandons us and does not install herself in our lives. What is dangerous and produces suffering in love is not the woman herself, it is her constant presence, the eagerness to know what she is doing every moment; it is not the woman, it is habit. I was coward enough to say that what she told me about Swann was kind, not to say noble on her part, but I knew it was not true and that her frankness was mixed up with lies. I reflected with horror, as little by little she told me her adventures, on all that Swann had been ignorant of and of how much he would have suffered, for he had associated his sensibility with that creature and had guessed to the point of certainty, from nothing but her glance at an unknown man or woman, that they attracted her. Actually she told me all this only to supply what she believed was a subject for novels. She was wrong, not because she could not at any time have furnished my imagination with abundant material but it would have had to be in less intentional fashion and by my agency disengaging, unknown to her, the laws that governed her life.

M. de Guermantes kept his thunders for the Duchesse to whose mixed gatherings Mme de Forcheville did not hesitate to draw the irritated attention of the Duc. Moreover, the Duchesse was very unhappy. It is true that M. de Charlus to whom I had once spoken about it, suggested that the first offence had not been on his brother’s side, that the legend of the Duchesse’s purity was in reality composed of an incalculable number of skilfully dissimulated adventures. I had never heard of them. To nearly everyone Mme de Guermantes was nothing of the sort and the belief that she had always been irreproachable was universal. I could not decide which of the two notions was true for truth is nearly always unknown to three-quarters of the world. I recalled certain azure and fugitive glances of the Duchesse de Guermantes in the nave of the Combray church but, in truth, they refuted neither of these opinions for each could give a different and equally acceptable meaning to them. In the madness of boyhood I had for a moment taken them as messages of love to myself. Later, I realised that they were but the benevolent glances which a suzeraine such as the one in the stained

windows of the church bestowed on her vassals. Was I now to believe that my first idea was the right one, and that if the Duchesse never spoke to me of love, it was because she feared to compromise herself with a friend of her aunt and of her nephew rather than with an unknown boy she had met by chance in the church of St. Hilaire de Combray?

The Duchesse might have been pleased for the moment that her past seemed more consistent for my having shared it, but she resumed her attitude of a society woman who despises society in replying to a question I asked her about the provincialism of M. de Bréauté, whom at the earlier period I had placed in the same category as M. de Sagan or M. de Guermantes. As she spoke, the Duchesse took me round the house. In the smaller rooms, the more intimate friends of the hosts were sitting apart to enjoy the music. In one of them, a little Empire salon where one or two frock-coated gentlemen sat upon a sofa listening, there was a couch curved like a cradle placed alongside the wall close to a Psyche leaning upon a Minerva, in the hollow of which a young woman lay extended. Her relaxed and — languid attitude, which the entrance of the Duchesse in no way disturbed, contrasted with the brilliance of her Empire dress of a glittering silk beside which the most scarlet of fuchsias would have paled, encrusted with a pearl tissue in the folds of which the floral design appeared to be embedded. She slightly bent her beautiful brown head to salute the Duchesse. Although it was broad daylight, she had had the heavy curtains drawn to give herself up to the music, and the servants had lighted an urn on a tripod to prevent people stumbling. In answer to my question the Duchesse told me she was Mme de Sainte-Euverte and I wanted to know what relation she was of the Mme de Sainte-Euverte I had known. She was the wife of one of her great-nephews and Mme de Guermantes appeared to suggest that she was born a La Rochefoucauld but emphasised that she herself had never known the Sainte-Euvertes. I recalled to her mind the evening party, of which, it is true, I was only aware by hearsay, when, as Princesse des Laumes, she had renewed her acquaintance with Swann. Mme de Guermantes affirmed she had never been to that party but she had always been rather a liar and had become more so. Madame de Sainte-Euverte’s salon — somewhat faded with time — was one she preferred ignoring and I did not insist. “No,” she said, “the person you may have met at my house because he was amusing, was the husband of the woman you refer to. I never had any social relations with her.” “But she was a widow?” “You thought so because they were separated; he was much nicer than she.” At last I realised that a huge, extremely tall and strong man with snow-white hair, whom I met everywhere but whose

name I never knew, was the husband of Mme de Sainte-Euverte and had died the year before. As to the niece, I never discovered whether she lay extended on the sofa listening to the music without moving for anyone because of some stomach trouble or because of her nerves or phlebitis or a coming accouchement or a recent one which had gone wrong. The likely explanation was that she thought she might as well play the part of a Récamier figure on her couch in that shimmering red dress. She little knew that she had: given birth to a new development of that name of Sainte-Euverte which, at so many intervals, marked the distance and continuity of Time. It was Time she was rocking in that cradle where the name of Sainte-Euverte flowered in a fuchsia-red silk in the Empire style. Mme de Guer-mantes declared that she had always detested Empire style; that meant, she detested it now, which was true, because she followed the fashions though not closely. Without complicating the matter by alluding to David of whose work she knew something, when she was a girl she considered Ingres the most boring of draughtsmen, then suddenly the most beguiling of new masters, so much so that she detested Delacroix. By what process she had returned to this creed of reprobation matters little, since such shades of taste are reflected by art-critics ten years before these superior women talk about them. After criticising the Empire style, she excused herself for talking about such insignificant people as the Sainte-Euvertes and of rubbish like Bréauté's provincialism for she was as far from realising the interest they had for me as Mme de Sainte-Euverte de la Rochefoucauld looking after her stomach or her Ingres pose, was from suspecting that her name was my joy, her husband's name, not the far more famous one of her family, and that to me it represented the function of cradling time in that room full of temporal associations. "How can all this nonsense interest you?" the Duchesse remarked. She uttered these words under her breath and nobody could have caught what she said. But a young man (who was to be of interest to me later because of a name much more familiar to me formerly than Sainte-Euverte) rose with an exaggerated air of being disturbed and went further away to listen in greater seclusion. They were playing the Kreutzer Sonata but he, having read the programme wrong, believed it was a piece by Ravel which he had been told was as beautiful as Palestrina but difficult to understand. In his abrupt change of place, he knocked, owing to the half darkness, against a tea-table which made a number of people turn their heads and thus afforded them an agreeable diversion from the suffering they were undergoing in listening religiously to the Kreutzer Sonata. And Mme de Guermantes and I who were the cause of this little scene, hastened into another

room. “Yes,” she continued, “how can such nonsense interest a man with your talent? Like just now when I saw you talking to Gilberte de Saint-Loup, it isn’t worthy of you. For me that woman is just nothing, she isn’t even a woman; she’s unimaginably pretentious and bourgeoise,” for the Duchesse mixed up her aristocratic prejudices with her championship of truth. “Indeed, ought you to come to places like this? To-day, after all, it may be worth while because of Rachel’s recitation. But, well as she did it, she doesn’t extend herself before such an audience. You must come and lunch alone with her and then you’ll see what a wonderful creature she is. She’s a hundred times superior to everyone here. And after luncheon she shall recite Verlaine to you and you’ll tell me what you think of it.” She boasted to me specially about these luncheon parties to which X and Y always came. For she had acquired the characteristic that distinguishes the type of woman who has a “Salon” whom she formerly despised (though she denied it to-day), the chief sign of whose superior eclecticism is to have “all the men” at their houses. If I told her that a certain great lady who went in for a “salon” spoke ill of Mme Rowland, the Duchesse burst out laughing at my simplicity and said: “Of course, she had ‘all *the* men’ at her house and the other tried to take them away from her.” Mme de Guermantes continued: “It passes my comprehension that you can come to this sort of thing — unless it’s for studying character,” she added the last words doubtfully and suspiciously, afraid to go too far because she was not sure what that strange operation consisted of.

“Don’t you think,” I asked her, “it’s painful for Mme de Saint-Loup to have to listen, as she did just now, to her husband’s former mistress?” I observed that oblique expression coming over Mme de Guermantes’ face which connects what someone has said with unpleasant factors. These may remain unspoken but words with serious implications do not always receive verbal or written answers. Only fools solicit twice an answer to a foolish letter which was a *gaffe;* for such letters are only answered by acts and the correspondent whom the fool thinks careless, will call him Monsieur the next time he meets him instead of by his first name. My allusion to Saint-Loup’s liaison with Rachel was not so serious and could not have displeased Mme de Guermantes more than a second by reminding her that I had been Robert’s friend, perhaps his confidant about the mortification he had been caused when he obtained the Duchesse’s permission to let Rachel appear at her evening party. Mme de Guermantes’ face did not remain clouded and she answered my question about Mme Saint-Loup: “I may tell you that I believe it to be a matter of indifference to her, for Gilberte never loved her husband. She is a horrible little creature. All she wanted was the position, the

name, to be my niece, to get out of the slime to which her one idea now is to return. I can assure you all that pained me deeply for poor Robert's sake because though he may not have been an eagle, he saw it all and a good many things besides. Perhaps I ought not to say so because, after all, she's my niece and I've no proof that she was unfaithful to him, but there were all sorts of stories about her. But supposing I tell you that I know Robert wanted to fight a duel with an officer of Méséglise. And it was on account of all that that Robert joined up. The war was a deliverance from his family troubles and if you care for my opinion, he was not killed, he took care to get himself killed. She feels no sort of sorrow, she even astonishes me by the cynicism with which she displays her indifference, and that greatly pains me because I was very fond of Robert. It may perhaps surprise you because people don't know me, but I still think of him. I forget no one. He told me nothing but he knew I guessed it all. But, dear me, if she loved her husband ever so little, could she bear with such complete indifference being in the same drawing-room with a woman whose passionate lover he was for years, indeed one might say always, for I know for certain it went on even during the war. Why, she would spring at her throat," the Duchesse cried, quite forgetting that she herself had acted cruelly by inviting Rachel and staging the scene she regarded as inevitable if Gilberte loved Robert. "No!" she concluded, "that woman is a pig." Such an expression was possible in the mouth of Mme de Guermantes owing to her easy and gradual descent from the Guermantes environment to the society of actresses and with this she affected an eighteenth century manner she considered refreshing on the part of one who could afford herself any liberty she chose. But the expression was also inspired by her hatred of Gilberte, by the need of striking her in effigy in default of physically. And she thought she was thereby equally justifying her action towards Gilberte or rather against her, in society, in the family, even in connection with her interest in Robert's inheritance. But sometimes facts of which we are ignorant and which we could not imagine supply an apparent justification of our judgments. Gilberte, who doubtless inherited some of her mother's traits (and I dare say I had unconsciously surmised this when I asked her to introduce me to girls) after reflecting on my request and so that any profits that might accrue should not go out of the family, a conclusion the effrontery of which was greater than I could have imagined, came up to me presently and said: "If you'll allow me, I'll fetch my young daughter, she's over there with young Mortemart and other youngsters of no importance. I'm sure she'll be a charming little friend for you." I asked her if Robert had been pleased to have a

daughter. “Oh, he was very proud of her but, of course, it’s my belief, seeing what his tastes were,” Gilberte naïvely added, “he would have preferred a boy.” This girl, whose name and fortune doubtless led her mother to hope she would marry a prince of the blood and thus crown the whole edifice of Swann and of his wife, later on married an obscure man of letters, for she was quite unsnobbish, and caused the family to fall lower in the social scale than the level from which she originated. It was afterwards very difficult to convince the younger generation that the parents of this obscure household had occupied a great social position.

The surprise and pleasure caused me by Gilberte’s words were quickly replaced while Mme de Saint-Loup disappeared into another room, by the idea of past Time which Mlle de Saint-Loup had brought back to me in her particular way without my even having seen her. In common with most human beings, was she not like the centre of cross-roads in a forest, the point where roads converge from many directions? Those which ended in Mlle de Saint-Loup were many and branched out from every side of her. First of all, the two great sides where I had walked so often and dreamt so many dreams, came to an end in her — through her father, Robert de Saint-Loup, the Guermantes side and through Gilberte, her mother, the side of Méséglise which was Swann’s side. One, through the mother of the young girl and the Champs Elysées, led me to Swann, to my evenings at Combray, to the side of Méséglise, the other, through her father, to my afternoons at Balbec where I saw him again near the glistening sea. Transversal roads already linked those two main roads together. For through the real Balbec where I had known Saint-Loup and wanted to go, chiefly because of what Swann had told me about its churches, especially about the Persian church and again through Robert de Saint-Loup, nephew of the Duchesse de Guermantes I reunited Combray to the Guermantes’ side. But Mlle de Saint-Loup led back to many other points of my life, to the lady in pink who was her grandmother and whom I had seen at my great-uncle’s house. Here there was a new cross-road, for my great-uncle’s footman who had announced me that day and who, by the gift of a photograph, had enabled me to identify the lady in pink, was the uncle of the young man whom not only M. de Charlus but also Mlle de Saint-Loup’s father had loved and on whose account her mother had been made unhappy. And was it not the grandfather of Mlle de Saint-Loup, Swann, who first told me about Vinteuil’s music as Gilberte had first told me about Albertine? And it was through speaking to Albertine about Vinteuil’s music that I had discovered who her intimate girl-friend was and had started that

life with her which had led to her death and to my bitter sorrows. And it was again Mlle de Saint-Loup's father who had tried to bring back Albertine to me. And I saw again all my life in society, whether at Paris in the drawing-rooms of the Swanns and the Guermantes', or in contrast, at the Verdurins' at Balbec, uniting the two Combray sides with the Champs Elysées and the beautiful terraces of the Raspelière. Moreover, whom of those we have known are we not compelled inevitably to associate with various parts of our lives if we relate our acquaintance with them? The life of Saint-Loup described by myself would be unfolded in every kind of scene and would affect the whole of mine, even those parts of it to which he was a stranger, such as my grandmother or Albertine. Moreover, contrast them as one might, the Verdurins were linked to Odette through her past, with Robert de Saint-Loup through Charlie and how great a part had Vinteuil's music played in their home! Finally, Swann had loved the sister of Legrandin and the latter had known M. de Charlus whose ward young Cambremer had married. Certainly, if only our hearts were in question, the poet was right when he spoke of the mysterious threads which life breaks. But it is still truer that life is ceaselessly weaving them between beings, between events, that it crosses those threads, that it doubles them to thicken the woof with such industry that between the smallest point in our past and all the rest, the store of memories is so rich that only the choice of communications remains. It is possible to say, if I tried to make conscious use of it and to recall it as it was, that there was not a single thing that served me now which had not been a living thing, living its own personal life in my service though transformed by that use into ordinary industrial matter. And my introduction to Mlle de Saint-Loup was going to take place at Mme Verdurin's who had become Princesse de Guermantes! How I thought back on the charm of those journeys with Albertine, whose successor I was going to ask Mlle de Saint-Loup to be — in the little tram going towards Doville to call on Mme Verdurin, that same Mme Ver-durin who had cemented and broken the love of Mlle de Saint-Loup's grandfather and grandmother before I loved Albertine. And all round us were the pictures of Elstir who introduced me to Albertine and as though to melt all my pasts into one, Mme Verdurin, like Gilberte, had married a Guermantes.

We should not be able to tell the story of our relations with another, however little we knew him without registering successive movements in our own life. Thus every individual — and I myself am one of those individuals — measured duration by the revolution he had accomplished not only round himself but round others and notably by the positions he had successively occupied with

relation to myself.

And, without question, all those different planes, upon which Time, since I had regained it at this reception, had exhibited my life, by reminding me that in a book which gave the history of one, it would be necessary to make use of a sort of spatial psychology as opposed to the usual flat psychology, added a new beauty to the resurrections my memory was operating during my solitary reflections in the library, since memory, by introducing the past into the present without modification, as though it were the present, eliminates precisely that great Time-dimension in accordance with which life is realised.

I saw Gilberte coming towards me. I, to whom Saint-Loup's marriage and all the concern it then gave me (as it still did) were of yesterday, was astonished to see beside her a young girl whose tall, slight figure marked the lapse of time to which I had, until now, been blind.

Colourless, incomprehensible time materialised itself in her, as it were, so that I could see and touch it, had moulded her into a graven masterpiece while upon me alas, it had but been doing its work. However, Mlle de Saint-Loup stood before me. She had deep cleanly-shaped, prominent and penetrating eyes. I noticed that the line of her nose was on the same pattern as her mother's and grandmother's, the base being perfectly straight, and though adorable, was a trifle too long. That peculiar feature would have enabled one to recognise it amongst thousands and I admired Nature for having, like a powerful and original sculptor, effected that decisive stroke of the chisel at exactly the right point as it had in the mother and grandmother. That charming nose, protruding rather like a beak had the Saint-Loup not the Swann curve. The soul of the Guermantes' had vanished but the charming head with the piercing eyes of a bird on the wing was poised upon her shoulders and threw me, who had known her father, into a dream. She was so beautiful, so promising. Gaily smiling, she was made out of all the years I had lost; she symbolised my youth.

Finally, this idea of Time had the ultimate value of the hand of a clock. It told me it was time to begin if I meant to attain that which I had felt in brief flashes on the Guermantes' side and during my drives with Mme de Villeparisis, that indefinable something which had made me think life worth living. How much more so now that it seemed possible to illuminate that life lived in darkness, at last to make manifest in a book the truth one ceaselessly falsifies. Happy the man who could write such a book. What labour awaited him. To convey its scope would necessitate comparison with the noblest and most various arts. For the writer, in creating each character, would have to present it

from conflicting standpoints so that his book should have solidity, he would have to prepare it with meticulous care, perpetually regrouping his forces as for an offensive, to bear it as a load, to accept it as the object of his life, to build it like a church, to follow it like a régime, to overcome it like an obstacle, to win it like a friendship, to nourish it like a child, to create it like a world, mindful of those mysteries which probably only have their explanation in other worlds, the presentiment of which moves us most in life and in art. Parts of such great books can be no more than sketched for time presses and perhaps they can never be finished because of the very magnitude of the architect's design. How many great cathedrals remain unfinished? Such a book takes long to germinate, its weaker parts must be strengthened, it has to be watched over, but afterwards it grows of itself, it designates our tomb, protects it from evil report and somewhat against oblivion. But to return to myself. I was thinking more modestly about my book and it would not even be true to say that I was thinking of those who would read it as my readers. For, as I have already shown, they would not be my readers, but the readers of themselves, my book being only a sort of magnifying-glass like those offered by the optician of Combray to a purchaser. So that I should ask neither their praise nor their blame but only that they should tell me if it was right or not, whether the words they were reading within themselves were those I wrote (possible devergencies in this respect might not always arise from my mistake but sometimes because the reader's eyes would not be those to whom my book was suitable). And, constantly changing as I expressed myself better and got on with the task I had undertaken, I thought of how I should devote myself to it at that plain white table, watched over by Françoise. As all those unpretentious creatures who live near us have a certain intuition of what we are trying to do and as I had so far forgotten Albertine that I forgave Françoise for her hostility to her, I should work near her and almost like her (at least as she used to formerly for now she was so old that she could hardly see), for it would be by pinning supplementary leaves here and there that I should build up my book, so to speak, like a dress rather than like a cathedral. When I could not find all the sheets I wanted, all my "*paperoles*" as Françoise called them, when just that one was missing that I needed, Françoise would understand my apprehension, for she always said she could not sew if she had not got the exact thread-number and sort of button she wanted and because, from living with me, she had acquired a sort of instinctive understanding of literary work, more right than that of many intelligent people and still more than that of stupid ones. Thus when I used to write my articles for the *Figaro*, while the old butler with

that exaggerated compassion for the severity of toil which is unfamiliar, which cannot be observed, even for a habit he had not got himself like people who say to you, “How it must tire you to yawn like that,” honestly pitied writers and said: “What a head-breaking business it must be,” Françoise, to the contrary, divined my satisfaction and respected my work. Only she got angry when I told Bloch about my articles before they appeared, fearing he would forestall me and said: “You aren’t suspicious enough of all these people, they’re copyists.” And Bloch, in fact, did offer a prospective alibi by remarking each time that I sketched something he liked: “Fancy! that’s curious, I’ve written something very much like that; I must read it to you.” (He could not then have read it to me because he was going to write it that evening.)

In consequence of sticking one sheet on another, what Françoise called my *paperoles* got torn here and there. In case of need she would be able to help me mend them in the same way as she patched worn parts of her dresses, or awaiting the glazier as I did the printer, when she stuck a bit of newspaper in a window instead of the glass pane. Holding up my copy-books devoured like worm-eaten wood, she said: “It’s all moth-eaten, look, what a pity, here’s the bottom of a page which is nothing but a bit of lace,” and, examining it like a tailor: “I don’t think I can mend it, it’s done for, what a shame; perhaps those were your most beautiful ideas. As they said at Combray, there are no furriers who know their job as well as moths, they always go for the best materials.”

Moreover, since individualities (human or otherwise) would in this book be constructed out of numerous impressions which, derived from many girls, many churches, many sonatas, would serve to make a single sonata, a single church and a single girl, should I not be making my book as Françoise made that *boeuf à la mode*, so much savoured by M. de Norpois of which the jelly was enriched by many additional carefully selected bits of meat? And at last I should achieve that for which I had so much longed and believed impossible during my walks on the Guermantes’ side as I had believed it was impossible, when I came home, to go to bed without embracing my mother, or later, that Albertine loved women, an idea I finally accepted unconsciously, for our greatest fears like our greatest hopes are not beyond our capacity and it is possible to end by dominating the first and realising the second. Yes, this newly-formed idea of time warned me that the hour had come to set myself to work. It was high time. The anxiety which had taken possession of me when I entered the drawing-room and the made-up faces gave me the notion of lost time, was justified. Was there still time? The mind has landscapes at which it is only given us to gaze for a time. I

had lived like a painter climbing a road which overlooks a lake hidden by a curtain of rocks and trees. Through a breach he perceives it, it lies before him, he seizes his brushes, but already darkness has come and he can paint no longer, night upon which day will never dawn again.

A condition of my work as I had conceived it just now in the library was that I must fathom to their depths impressions which had first to be recreated through memory. And my memory was impaired. Therefore as I had not yet begun, I had reason for apprehension, for even though I thought, in view of my age, that I had some years before me, my hour might strike at any moment. I had, in fact, to regard my body as the point of departure, which meant that I was constantly under the menace of a two-fold danger, without and within. And even when I say this it is only for convenience of expression. For the internal danger as in that of cerebral haemorrhage is also external, being of the body. And the body is the great menace of the mind. We are less justified in saying that the thinking life of humanity is a miraculous perfectioning of animal and physical life than that it is an imperfection in the organisation of spiritual life as rudimentary as the communal existence of protozoa in colonies or the body of the whale etc., so imperfect, indeed, that the body imprisons the spirit in a fortress; soon the fortress is assailed at all points and in the end the spirit has to surrender. But in order to satisfy myself by distinguishing the two sorts of danger which threatened my spirit and beginning by the external one, I remembered that it had often already happened in the course of my life, at moments of intellectual excitement when some circumstance had completely arrested my physical activity, for instance when I was leaving the restaurant of Rivebelle in a half-intoxicated condition in order to go to a neighbouring casino, that I felt the immediate object of my thought with extreme vividness and realised that it was a matter of chance not only that the object had not yet entered my mind but that its survival depended upon my physical existence. I cared little enough then. In my lighthearted gaiety I was neither prudent nor apprehensive. It mattered little to me that this happy thought flew away in a second and disappeared in the void. But now it was no longer so because the joy I experienced was not derived from a subjective nervous tension which isolates us from the past, but, on the contrary, from an extension of the consciousness in which the past, recreated and actualised, gave me, alas but for a moment, a sense of eternity. I wished that I could leave this behind me to enrich others with my treasure. My experience in the library which I wanted to preserve was that of pleasure but not an egoistical pleasure or at all events it was a form of egoism which is useful to others (for all

the fruitful altruisms of Nature develop in an egoistical mode; human altruism which is not egoism, is sterile, it is that of a writer who interrupts his work to receive a friend who is unhappy, to accept some public function or to write propaganda articles).

I was no longer indifferent as when I returned from Rivebelle; I felt myself enlarged by this work I bore within me (like something precious and fragile, not belonging to me, which had been confided to my care and which I wanted to hand over intact to those for whom it was destined). And to think that when, presently, I returned home, an accident would suffice to destroy my body and that my lifeless mind would have for ever lost the ideas it now contained and anxiously preserved within its shaky frame before it had time to place them in safety within the covers of a book. Now, knowing myself the bearer of such a work, an accident which might cost my life was more to be dreaded, was indeed (by the measure in which this work seemed to me indispensable and permanent) absurd, when contrasted with my wish, with my vital urge, but not less probable on that account since accidents due to material causes can take place at the very moment when an opposing will, which they unknowingly annihilate, renders them monstrous, like the ordinary accident of knocking over a water-jug placed too near the edge of a table and thus disturbing a sleeping friend one acutely desires not to waken.

I knew very well that my brain was a rich mineral basin where there was an enormous and most varied area of precious deposits. But should I have the time to exploit them? I was the only person capable of doing so, for two reasons. With my death not only would the one miner capable of extracting the minerals disappear, but with him, the mineral itself. And the mere collision of my automobile with another on my way home would suffice to obliterate my body and my spirit would have to abandon my new ideas for ever. And by a strange coincidence, that reasoned fear of danger was born at the very moment when the idea of death had become indifferent to me. The fear of no longer existing had formerly horrified me at each new love I experienced,— for Gilberte, for Albertine — because I could not bear the thought that one day the being who loved them might not be there; it was a sort of death. But the very recurrence of this fear led to its changing into calm confidence.

If the idea of death had cast a shadow over love, the memory of love had for long helped me not to fear death. I realised that death is nothing new, ever since my childhood I had been dead numbers of times. To take a recent period, had I not cared more for Albertine than for my life? Could I then have conceived my

existence without my love for her? And yet I no longer loved her, I was no longer the being who loved her but a different one who did not love her and I had ceased to love her when I became that other being. And I did not suffer because I had become that other, because I no longer loved Albertine; and certainly it did not seem to me a sadder thing that one day I should have no body than it had formerly seemed not to love Albertine. And yet how indifferent it all was to me now. These successive deaths, so feared by the self they were to destroy, so indifferent, so sweet, were they, once they were accomplished, when he who feared them was no longer there to feel them, had made me realise how foolish it would be to fear death. And now that it had been for a while indifferent to me I began fearing it anew, in another form, it is true, not for myself but for my book for the achievement of which that life, menaced by so many dangers, was, at least, for a period, indispensable. Victor Hugo says: “The grass must grow and children die.” I say that the cruel law of art is that beings die and that we ourselves must die after we have exhausted suffering so that the grass, not of oblivion but of eternal life, should grow, fertilised by works upon which generations to come will gaily picnic without care of those who sleep beneath it. I have spoken of external dangers but there were internal ones also. If I were preserved from an accident without, who knows whether I might not be prevented from profiting from my immunity by an accident within, by some internal disaster, some cerebral catastrophe, before the months necessary for me to write that book, had passed. A cerebral accident was not even necessary. I had already experienced certain symptoms, a curious emptiness in the head and a forgetfulness of things I only found by luck as one does on going through one’s things and finding something one had not been looking for; I was a treasurer from whose broken coffer his riches were slipping away. When presently I went back home by the Champs Elysées who could say that I should not be struck down by the same evil as my grandmother when, one day she came for a walk with me which was to be her last, without her ever dreaming of such a thing, in that ignorance which is our lot when the hand of the clock reaches the moment when the spring is released that strikes the hour. Perhaps the fear of having already almost traversed the minute that precedes the first stroke of the hour, when it is already preparing to strike, perhaps the fear of that blow which was about to crash through my brain was like an obscure foreknowledge of what was coming to pass, a reflection in the consciousness of a precarious state of the brain whose arteries are about to give way, which is no less possible than the sudden acceptance of death by the wounded who, if their lucidity remains and

both doctor and will to live deceive them, yet see what is coming and say: “I am going to die, I am ready,” and write their last farewells to their wife.

That obscure premonition of what had to be came to me in a singular form before I began my book. One evening I was at a party and people said I was looking better than ever and were astonished that I showed so little signs of age. But that evening I came near falling three times going downstairs. I had only gone out for a couple of hours but when I got home, my memory and power of thought had gone and I had neither strength nor life in me. If they had come to proclaim me King or arrest me, I should have allowed them to do what they liked with me without saying a word, without even opening my eyes, like those who at the extreme point of sea-sickness, crossing the Caspian Sea, would offer no resistance if they were going to be thrown into the sea. Properly speaking I was not ill but I was as incapable of taking care of myself as old people active the evening before, who have fractured their thigh and enter a phase of existence which is only a preliminary, be it short or long, to inevitable death. One of my selves the one that recently went to one of those barbaric feasts which are called dinners in society attended by white cravated men and plumed, half-nude women whose values are so topsy-turvy that a person who does not go to a dinner to which he has accepted an invitation or only puts in an appearance at the roast commits in their eyes a greater crime than the most immoral acts as lightly discussed in the course of it as illness and death which provide the only excuse for not being there, as long as the hostess has been informed in time to notify the fourteenth guest that someone has died,— that self had kept its scruples and lost its memory. On the other hand, the other self, the one who conceived this work, remembered I had received an invitation from Mme Molé and had heard that Mme Sazerat’s son was dead. I had made up my mind to use an hour of respite after which I should not be able to utter a word or swallow a drop of milk, tongue-tied like my grandmother during her death agony, for the purpose of excusing myself to Mme Molé and expressing my condolences to Mme Sazerat. But shortly afterwards, I forgot I had to do it. Happy oblivion! For the memory of my work was on guard and was going to use that hour of survival to lay my first foundations. Unhappily, taking up a copy-book, Mme Molé’s invitation card slipped out of it. Instantly, the forgetful self which dominates the other in the case of all those scrupulous savages who dine out, put away the copy-book and began writing to Mme Molé (who would doubtless have thought more of me had she known that I had put my reply to her invitation before my architectural work). Suddenly, as I was answering, I remembered that Mme Sazerat had lost

her son, so I wrote her too and having thus sacrificed the real duty to the fictitious obligation of proving my politeness and reasonableness, I fell lifeless, closed my eyes and for a whole week was only able to vegetate. Yet, if all my useless duties to which I was prepared to sacrifice the real one, went out of my head in a few minutes, the thought of my edifice never left me for an instant. I did not know whether it would be a church where the faithful would gradually learn truth and discover the harmony of a great unified plan or whether it would remain, like a Druid monument on the heights of a desert island, unknown for ever. But I had made up my mind to consecrate to it the power that was ebbing away, reluctantly almost, as though to leave me time to elaborate the structure before the entrance to the tomb was sealed. I was soon able to show an outline of my project. No one understood it. Even those who sympathised with my perception of the truth I meant later to engrave upon my temple, congratulated me on having discovered it with a microscope when, to the contrary, I had used a telescope to perceive things which were indeed very small because they were far away but every one of them a world. Where I sought universal laws I was accused of burrowing into the “infinitely insignificant”. Moreover, what was the use of it all, I had a good deal of facility when I was young and Bergotte had highly praised my schoolboy efforts. But instead of working I had spent my time in idleness and dissipation, in being laid up and taken care of and in obsessions and I was starting my work on the eve of death without even knowing my craft. I had no longer the strength to face either my human obligations or my intellectual ones, still less both. As to the first, forgetfulness of the letters I had to write somewhat simplified my task. Loss of memory helped to delete social obligations which were replaced by my work. But, at the end of a month, association of ideas suddenly brought back remorseful memories and I was overwhelmed by my feeling of impotence. I was surprised at my own indifference to criticisms of my work but from the time when my legs had given way when I went downstairs I had become indifferent to everything; I only longed for rest until the end came. It was not because I counted on posthumous fame that I was indifferent to the judgments of the eminent to-day. Those who pronounced upon my work after my death could think what they pleased of it. I was no more concerned about the one than the other. Actually, if I thought about my work and not about the letters which I ought to have answered, it had ceased to be because I considered the former so much more important as I did at the time when I was idle and afterwards when I tried to work, up to the day when I had had to hold on to the banisters of the stair-case. The organisation of my

memory, of my preoccupations, was linked to my work perhaps because, while the letters I received were forgotten an instant later, the idea of my work was continuously in my mind, in a state of perpetual becoming. But it too had become importunate. My work was like a son whose dying mother must still unceasingly labour in the intervals of inoculations and cuppings. She may love him still but she only realises it through the excess of her care of him. And my powers as a writer were no longer equal to the egoistical exactions of the work. Since the day on the staircase, nothing in the world, no happiness, whether it came from friendships, from the progress of my work or from hope of fame, reached me except as pale sunlight that had lost its power to warm me, to give me life or any desire whatever and yet was too brilliant in its paleness for my weary eyes which closed as I turned towards the wall. As much as I could tell from the movement of my lips, I might have had a very slight smile in the corner of my mouth when a lady wrote me: “I was surprised not to get an answer to my letter,” Nevertheless, that reminded me and I answered it. I wanted to try, so as not to be thought ungrateful, to be as considerate to others as they to me. And I was crushed by imposing these super-human fatigue’s on my dying body.

This idea of death installed itself in me definitively as love does. Not that I loved death, I hated it. But I dare say I had thought of it from time to time as one does of a woman one does not yet love and now the thought of it adhered to the deepest layer of my brain so thoroughly that I could not think of anything without its first traversing the death zone and even if I thought of nothing and remained quite still, the idea of death kept me company as incessantly as the idea of myself. I do not think that the day when I became moribund, it was the accompanying factors such as the impossibility of going downstairs, of remembering a name, of getting up, which had by unconscious reasoning given me the idea that I was already all but dead, but rather that it had all come together, that the great mirror of the spirit reflected a new reality. And yet I did not see how I could pass straight from my present ills to death without some warning. But then I thought of others and how people die every day without it seeming strange to us that there should be no hiatus between their illness and their death. I thought even that it was only because I saw them from the inside (far more than through deceitful hope) that certain ailments did not seem to me necessarily fatal, taken one at a time, although I thought I was going to die, just like those who certain that their time has come, are nevertheless easily persuaded that their not being able to pronounce certain words has nothing to do with apoplexy or heart failure but is due to the tongue being tired, to a nerve condition

akin to stammering, owing to the exhaustion consequent on indigestion.

In my case it was not the farewell of a dying man to his wife that I had to write, it was something longer and addressed to more than one person. Long to write! At best I might attempt to sleep during the day-time. If I worked it would only be at night but it would need many nights perhaps a hundred, perhaps a thousand. And I should be harassed by the anxiety of not knowing whether the Master of my destiny, less indulgent than the Sultan Sheriar, would, some morning when I stopped work, grant a reprieve until the next evening. Not that I had the ambition to reproduce in any fashion the *Thousand and One Nights*, anymore than the *Mémoires of Saint-Simon*, they too written by night, nor any of the books I had so much loved and which superstitiously attached to them in my childish simplicity as I was to my later loves, I could not, without horror, imagine different from what they were. As Elstir said of Chardin, one can only recreate what one loves by repudiating it. Doubtless my books, like my fleshly being, would, some day, die. But one must resign oneself to death. One accepts the thought that one will die in ten years and one's books in a hundred. Eternal duration is no more promised to works than to men. It might perhaps be a book as long as the *Thousand and One Nights* but very different. It is true that when one loves a work one would like to do something like it but one must sacrifice one's temporal love and not think of one's taste but of a truth which does not ask what our preferences are and forbids us to think of them. And it is only by obeying truth that one may some day encounter what one has abandoned and having forgotten the *Arabian Nights* or the *Mémoires of Saint-Simon* have written their counterpart in another period. But had I still time? Was it not too late?

In any case, if I had still the strength to accomplish my work, the circumstances, which had to-day in the course of the Princesse de Guermantes' reception simultaneously given me the idea of it and the fear of not being able to carry it out, would specifically indicate its form of which I had a presentiment formerly in Combray church during a period which had so much influence upon me, a form which, normally, is invisible, the form of Time. I should endeavour to render that Time-dimension by transcribing life in a way very different from that conveyed by our lying senses. Certainly, our senses lead us into other errors, many episodes in this narrative had proved to me that they falsify the real aspect of life. But I might, if it were needful, to secure the more accurate interpretation I proposed, be able to leave the locality of sounds unchanged, to refrain from detaching them from the source the intelligence assigns to them, although

making the rain patter in one's room or fall in torrents into the cup from which we are drinking is, in itself, no more disconcerting than when as they often have, artists paint a sail or a peak near to or far away from us, according as the laws of perspective, variation in colour and ocular illusion make them appear, while our reason tells us that these objects are situated at enormous distances from us.

I might, although the error would be more serious, continue the fashion of putting features into the face of a passing woman, when instead of nose and cheeks and chin there was nothing there but an empty space in which our desire was reflected. And, a far more important matter, if I had not the leisure to prepare the hundred masks suitable to a single face, were it only as the eyes see it and in the sense in which they read its features, according as those eyes hope or fear or, on the other hand, as love and habit which conceal changes of age for many years, see them, indeed, even if I did not undertake, in spite of my liaison with Albertine proving that without it everything is fictitious and false, to represent people not from outside but from within ourselves where their smallest acts may entail fatal consequences, and to vary the moral atmosphere according to the different impressions on our sensibility or according to our serene sureness that an object is insignificant whereas the mere shadow of danger multiplies its size in a moment, if I could not introduce these changes and many others (the need for which, if one means to portray the truth has constantly been shown in the course of this narrative) into the transcription of a universe which had to be completely redesigned, at all events I should not fail to depict therein man, as having the extension, not of his body but of his years, as being forced to the cumulatively heavy task which finally crushes him, of dragging them with him wherever he goes. Moreover, everybody feels that we are occupying an unceasingly increasing place in Time, and this universality could only rejoice me since it is the truth, a truth suspected by each one of us which it was my business to try to elucidate. Not only does everyone feel that we occupy a place in Time but the most simple person measures that place approximately as he might measure the place we occupy in space. Doubtless we often make mistakes in this measurement but that one should believe it possible to do it proves that one conceives of age as something measurable.

And often I asked myself not only whether there was still time but whether I was in a condition to accomplish my work. Illness which had rendered me a service by making me die to the world (for if the grain does not die when it is sown, it remains barren but if it dies it will bear much fruit), was now perhaps going to save me from idleness as idleness had preserved me from facility.

Illness had undermined my strength and, as I had long noticed, had sapped the power of my memory when I ceased to love Albertine. And was not the recreation of the memory of impressions it was afterwards necessary to fathom, to illuminate, to transform into intellectual equivalents, one of the conditions, almost the essential condition, of a work of art such as I had conceived just now in the library? Ah, if I only still had the powers that were intact on the evening I had evoked when I happened to notice François le Champi. My grandmother's lingering death and the decline of my will and of my health dated from that evening of my mother's abdication. It was all settled at the moment when, unable to await the morning to press my lips upon my mother's face, I had taken my resolution, I had jumped out of bed and had stood in my nightshirt by the window through which the moonlight shone, until I heard M. Swann go away. My parents had accompanied him, I had heard the door open, the sound of bell and closing door. At that very moment, in the Prince de Guermantes' mansion, I heard the sound of my parents' footsteps and the metallic, shrill, fresh echo of the little bell which announced M. Swann's departure and the coming of my mother up the stairs; I heard it now, its very self, though its peal rang out in the far distant past. 'Then thinking of all the events which intervened between the instant when I had heard it and the Guermantes' reception I was terrified to think that it was indeed that bell which rang within me still, without my being able to abate its shrill sound, since, no longer remembering how the clanging used to stop, in order to learn, I had to listen to it and I was compelled to close my ears to the conversations of the masks around me. To get to hear it close I had again to plunge into myself. So that ringing must always be there and with it, between it and the present, all that indefinable past unrolled itself which I did not know I had within me. When it rang I already existed and since, in order that I should hear it still, there could be no discontinuity, I could have had no instant of repose or of non-existence, of nonthinking, of non-consciousness, since that former instant clung to me, for I could recover it, return to it, merely by plunging more deeply into myself. It was that notion of the embodiment of Time, the inseparableness from us of the past that I now had the intention of bringing strongly into relief in my work. And it is because they thus contain the past that human bodies can so much hurt those who love them, because they contain so many memories, so many joys and desires effaced within them but so cruel for him who contemplates and prolongs in the order of time the beloved body of which he is jealous, jealous to the point of wishing its destruction. For after death Time leaves the body and memories — indifferent and pale — are

obliterated in her who exists no longer and soon will be in him they still torture, memories which perish with the desire of the living body.

I had a feeling of intense fatigue when I realised that all this span of time had not only been lived, thought, secreted by me uninterruptedly, that it was my life, that it was myself, but more still because I had at every moment to keep it attached to myself, that it bore me up, that I was poised on its dizzy summit, that I could not move without taking it with me.

The day on which I heard the distant, far-away sound of the bell in the Combray garden was a land-mark in that enormous dimension which I did not know I possessed. I was giddy at seeing so many years below and in me as though I were leagues high.

I now understood why the Duc de Guermantes, whom I admired when he was seated because he had aged so little although he had so many more years under him than I, had tottered when he got up and wanted to stand erect — like those old Archbishops surrounded by acolytes, whose only solid part is their metal cross — and had moved, trembling like a leaf on the hardly approachable summit of his eighty-three years, as though men were perched upon living stilts which keep on growing, reaching the height of church-towers, until walking becomes difficult and dangerous and, at last, they fall. I was terrified that my own were already so high beneath me and I did not think I was strong enough to retain for long a past that went back so far and that I bore within me so painfully. If at least, time enough were alloted to me to accomplish my work, I would not fail to mark it with the seal of Time, the idea of which imposed itself upon me with so much force to-day, and I would therein describe men, if need be, as monsters occupying a place in Time infinitely more important than the restricted one reserved for them in space, a place, on the, contrary, prolonged immeasurably since, simultaneously touching widely separated years and the distant periods they have lived through — between which so many days have ranged themselves — they stand like giants immersed in Time.

1 — In the French text of *Le Temps Retrouvé*, vol. I ends here.