

CROISILLES

By Alfred De Musset

I

At the beginning of the reign of Louis XV., a young man named Croisilles, son of a goldsmith, was returning from Paris to Havre, his native town. He had been intrusted by his father with the transaction of some business, and his trip to the great city having turned out satisfactorily, the joy of bringing good news caused him to walk the sixty leagues more gaily and briskly than was his wont; for, though he had a rather large sum of money in his pocket, he travelled on foot for pleasure. He was a good-tempered fellow, and not without wit, but so very thoughtless and flighty that people looked upon him as being rather weak-minded. His doublet buttoned awry, his periwig flying to the wind, his hat under his arm, he followed the banks of the Seine, at times finding enjoyment in his own thoughts and again indulging in snatches of song; up at daybreak, supping at wayside inns, and always charmed with this stroll of his through one of the most beautiful regions of France. Plundering the apple-trees of Normandy on his way, he puzzled his brain to find rhymes (for all these rattlepates are more or less poets), and tried hard to turn out a madrigal for a certain fair damsel of his native place. She was no less than a daughter of a fermier-général, Mademoiselle Godeau, the pearl of Havre, a rich heiress, and much courted. Croisilles was not received at M. Godeau's otherwise than in a casual sort of way, that is to say, he had sometimes himself taken there articles of jewelry purchased at his father's. M. Godeau, whose somewhat vulgar surname ill-fitted his immense fortune, avenged himself by his arrogance for the stigma of his birth, and showed himself on all occasions enormously and pitilessly rich. He certainly was not the man to allow the son of a goldsmith to enter his drawing-room; but, as Mademoiselle Godeau had the most beautiful eyes in the world, and Croisilles was not ill-favored, and as nothing can prevent a fine fellow from falling in love with a pretty

girl, Croisilles adored Mademoiselle Godeau, who did not seem vexed thereat. Thus was he thinking of her as he turned his steps toward Havre; and, as he had never reflected seriously upon anything, instead of thinking of the invincible obstacles which separated him from his lady-love, he busied himself only with finding a rhyme for the Christian name she bore. Mademoiselle Godeau was called Julie, and the rhyme was found easily enough. So Croisilles, having reached Honfleur, embarked with a satisfied heart, his money and his madrigal in his pocket, and as soon as he jumped ashore ran to the paternal house.

He found the shop closed, and knocked again and again, not without astonishment and apprehension, for it was not a holiday; but nobody came. He called his father, but in vain. He went to a neighbor's to ask what had happened; instead of replying, the neighbor turned away, as though not wishing to recognize him. Croisilles repeated his questions; he learned that his father, his affairs having long been in an embarrassed condition, had just become bankrupt, and had fled to America, abandoning to his creditors all that he possessed.

Not realizing as yet the extent of his misfortune, Croisilles felt overwhelmed by the thought that he might never again see his father. It seemed to him incredible that he should be thus suddenly abandoned; he tried to force an entrance into the store; but was given to understand that the official seals had been affixed; so he sat down on a stone, and giving way to his grief, began to weep piteously, deaf to the consolations of those around him, never ceasing to call his father's name, though he knew him to be already far away. At last he rose, ashamed at seeing a crowd about him, and, in the most profound despair, turned his steps towards the harbor.

On reaching the pier, he walked straight before him like a man in a trance, who knows neither where he is going nor what is to become of him. He saw himself irretrievably lost, possessing no longer a shelter, no means of rescue and, of course, no longer any friends. Alone,

wandering on the sea-shore, he felt tempted to drown himself, then and there. Just at the moment when, yielding to this thought, he was advancing to the edge of a high cliff, an old servant named Jean, who had served his family for a number of years, arrived on the scene.

"Ah! my poor Jean!" he exclaimed, "you know all that has happened since I went away. Is it possible that my father could leave us without warning, without farewell?"

"He is gone," answered Jean, "but indeed not without saying good-bye to you."

At the same time he drew from his pocket a letter, which he gave to his young master. Croisilles recognized the handwriting of his father, and, before opening the letter, kissed it rapturously; but it contained only a few words. Instead of feeling his trouble softened, it seemed to the young man still harder to bear. Honorable until then, and known as such, the old gentleman, ruined by an unforeseen disaster (the bankruptcy of a partner), had left for his son nothing but a few commonplace words of consolation, and no hope, except, perhaps, that vague hope without aim or reason which constitutes, it is said, the last possession one loses.

"Jean, my friend, you carried me in your arms," said Croisilles, when he had read the letter, "and you certainly are to-day the only being who loves me at all; it is a very sweet thing to me, but a very sad one for you; for, as sure as my father embarked there, I will throw myself into the same sea which is bearing him away; not before you nor at once, but some day I will do it, for I am lost."

"What can you do?" replied Jean, not seeming to have understood, but holding fast to the skirt of Croisilles' coat; "What can you do, my dear master? Your father was deceived; he was expecting money which did not come, and it was no small amount either. Could he stay here? I have seen him, sir, as he made his fortune, during the thirty years that

I served him. I have seen him working, attending to his business, the crown-pieces coming in one by one. He was an honorable man, and skilful; they took a cruel advantage of him. Within the last few days, I was still there, and as fast as the crowns came in, I saw them go out of the shop again. Your father paid all he could, for a whole day, and, when his desk was empty, he could not help telling me, pointing to a drawer where but six francs remained: 'There were a hundred thousand francs there this morning!' That does not look like a rascally failure, sir? There is nothing in it that can dishonor you."

"I have no more doubt of my father's integrity," answered Croisilles, "than I have of his misfortune. Neither do I doubt his affection. But I wish I could have kissed him, for what is to become of me? I am not accustomed to poverty, I have not the necessary cleverness to build up my fortune. And, if I had it, my father is gone. It took him thirty years, how long would it take me to repair this disaster? Much longer. And will he be living then? Certainly not; he will die over there, and I cannot even go and find him; I can join him only by dying."

Utterly distressed as Croisilles was, he possessed much religious feeling. Although his despondency made him wish for death, he hesitated to take his life. At the first words of this interview, he had taken hold of old Jean's arm, and thus both returned to the town. When they had entered the streets and the sea was no longer so near:

"It seems to me, sir," said Jean, "that a good man has a right to live and that a misfortune proves nothing. Since your father has not killed himself, thank God, how can you think of dying? Since there is no dishonor in his case, and all the town knows it is so, what would they think of you? That you felt unable to endure poverty. It would be neither brave nor Christian; for, at the very worst, what is there to frighten you? There are plenty of people born poor, and who have never had either mother or father to help them on. I know that we are not all alike, but, after all, nothing is impossible to God. What would you do in such a case? Your father was not born rich, far from it,--

meaning no offence--and that is perhaps what consoles him now. If you had been here, this last month, it would have given you courage. Yes, sir, a man may be ruined, nobody is secure from bankruptcy; but your father, I make bold to say, has borne himself through it all like a man, though he did leave us so hastily. But what could he do? It is not every day that a vessel starts for America. I accompanied him to the wharf, and if you had seen how sad he was! How he charged me to take care of you; to send him news from you!--Sir, it is a right poor idea you have, that throwing the helve after the hatchet. Every one has his time of trial in this world, and I was a soldier before I was a servant. I suffered severely at the time, but I was young; I was of your age, sir, and it seemed to me that Providence could not have spoken His last word to a young man of twenty-five. Why do you wish to prevent the kind God from repairing the evil that has befallen you? Give Him time, and all will come right. If I might advise you, I would say, just wait two or three years, and I will answer for it, you will come out all right. It is always easy to go out of this world. Why will you seize an unlucky moment?"

While Jean was thus exerting himself to persuade his master, the latter walked in silence, and, as those who suffer often do, was looking this way and that as though seeking for something which might bind him to life. As chance would have it, at this juncture, Mademoiselle Godeau, the daughter of the fermier-général, happened to pass with her governess. The mansion in which she lived was not far distant; Croisilles saw her enter it. This meeting produced on him more effect than all the reasonings in the world. I have said that he was rather erratic, and nearly always yielded to the first impulse. Without hesitating an instant, and without explanation, he suddenly left the arm of his old servant, and crossing the street, knocked at Monsieur Godeau's door.

II

When we try to picture to ourselves, nowadays, what was called a "financier" in times gone by, we invariably imagine enormous corpulence, short legs, a gigantic wig, and a broad face with a triple chin,--and it is not without reason that we have become accustomed to form such a picture of such a personage. Everyone knows to what great abuses the royal tax-farming led, and it seems as though there were a law of nature which renders fatter than the rest of mankind those who fatten, not only upon their own laziness, but also upon the work of others.

Monsieur Godeau, among financiers, was one of the most classical to be found,--that is to say, one of the fattest. At the present time he had the gout, which was nearly as fashionable in his day as the nervous headache is in ours. Stretched upon a lounge, his eyes half-closed, he was coddling himself in the coziest corner of a dainty boudoir. The panel-mirrors which surrounded him, majestically duplicated on every side his enormous person; bags filled with gold covered the table; around him, the furniture, the wainscot, the doors, the locks, the mantel-piece, the ceiling were gilded; so was his coat. I do not know but that his brain was gilded too. He was calculating the issue of a little business affair which could not fail to bring him a few thousand louis; and was even deigning to smile over it to himself when Croisilles was announced. The young man entered with an humble, but resolute air, and with every outward manifestation of that inward tumult with which we find no difficulty in crediting a man who is longing to drown himself. Monsieur Godeau was a little surprised at this unexpected visit; then he thought his daughter had been buying some trifle, and was confirmed in that thought by seeing her appear almost at the same time with the young man. He made a sign to Croisilles not to sit down but to speak. The young lady seated herself on a sofa, and Croisilles, remaining standing, expressed himself in these terms:

"Sir, my father has failed. The bankruptcy of a partner has forced him to suspend his payments and unable to witness his own shame he has

fled to America, after having paid his last sou to his creditors. I was absent when all this happened; I have just come back and have known of these events only two hours. I am absolutely without resources, and determined to die. It is very probable that, on leaving your house, I shall throw myself into the water. In all probability, I would already have done so, if I had not chanced to meet, at the very moment, this young lady, your daughter. I love her, from the very depths of my heart; for two years I have been in love with her, and my silence, until now, proves better than anything else the respect I feel for her; but today, in declaring my passion to you, I fulfill an imperative duty, and I would think I was offending God, if, before giving myself over to death, I did not come to ask you Mademoiselle Julie in marriage. I have not the slightest hope that you will grant this request; but I have to make it, nevertheless, for I am a good Christian, sir, and when a good Christian sees himself come to such a point of misery that he can no longer suffer life, he must at least, to extenuate his crime, exhaust all the chances which remain to him before taking the final and fatal step."

At the beginning of this speech, Monsieur Godeau had supposed that the young man came to borrow money, and so he prudently threw his handkerchief over the bags that were lying around him, preparing in advance a refusal, and a polite one, for he always felt some good-will toward the father of Croisilles. But when he had heard the young man to the end, and understood the purport of his visit, he never doubted one moment that the poor fellow had gone completely mad. He was at first tempted to ring the bell and have him put out; but, noticing his firm demeanor, his determined look, the fermier-général took pity on so inoffensive a case of insanity. He merely told his daughter to retire, so that she might be no longer exposed to hearing such improprieties.

While Croisilles was speaking, Mademoiselle Godeau had blushed as a peach in the month of August. At her father's bidding, she retired, the young man making her a profound bow, which she did not seem to notice. Left alone with Croisilles, Monsieur Godeau coughed, rose,

then dropped again upon the cushions, and, trying to assume a paternal air, delivered himself to the following effect:

"My boy," said he, "I am willing to believe that you are not poking fun at me, but you have really lost your head. I not only excuse this proceeding, but I consent not to punish you for it. I am sorry that your poor devil of a father has become bankrupt and has skipped. It is indeed very sad, and I quite understand that such a misfortune should affect your brain. Besides, I wish to do something for you; so take this stool and sit down there."

"It is useless, sir," answered Croisilles. "If you refuse me, as I see you do, I have nothing left but to take my leave. I wish you every good fortune."

"And where are you going?"

"To write to my father and say good-bye to him."

"Eh! the devil! Any one would swear you were speaking the truth. I'll be damned if I don't think you are going to drown yourself."

"Yes, sir; at least I think so, if my courage does not forsake me."

"That's a bright idea! Fie on you! How can you be such a fool? Sit down, sir, I tell you, and listen to me."

Monsieur Godeau had just made a very wise reflection, which was that it is never agreeable to have it said that a man, whoever he may be, threw himself into the water on leaving your house. He therefore coughed once more, took his snuff-box, cast a careless glance upon his shirt-frill, and continued:

"It is evident that you are nothing but a simpleton, a fool, a regular baby. You do not know what you are saying. You are ruined, that's

what has happened to you. But, my dear friend, all that is not enough; one must reflect upon the things of this world. If you came to ask me--well, good advice, for instance,--I might give it to you; but what is it you are after? You are in love with my daughter?"

"Yes, sir, and I repeat to you, that I am far from supposing that you can give her to me in marriage; but as there is nothing in the world but that, which could prevent me from dying, if you believe in God, as I do not doubt you do, you will understand the reason that brings me here."

"Whether I believe in God or not, is no business of yours. I do not intend to be questioned. Answer me first: where have you seen my daughter?"

"In my father's shop, and in this house, when I brought jewelry for Mademoiselle Julie."

"Who told you her name was Julie? What are we coming to, great heavens! But be her name Julie or Javotte, do you know what is wanted in any one who aspires to the hand of the daughter of a fermier-général?"

"No, I am completely ignorant of it, unless it is to be as rich as she."

"Something more is necessary, my boy; you must have a name."

"Well! my name is Croisilles."

"Your name is Croisilles, poor wretch! Do you call that a name?"

"Upon my soul and conscience, sir, it seems to me to be as good a name as Godeau."

"You are very impertinent, sir, and you shall rue it."

"Indeed, sir, do not be angry; I had not the least idea of offending you. If you see in what I said anything to wound you, and wish to punish me for it, there is no need to get angry. Have I not told you that on leaving here I am going straight to drown myself?"

Although M. Godeau had promised himself to send Croisilles away as gently as possible, in order to avoid all scandal, his prudence could not resist the vexation of his wounded pride. The interview to which he had to resign himself was monstrous enough in itself; it may be imagined, then, what he felt at hearing himself spoken to in such terms.

"Listen," he said, almost beside himself, and determined to close the matter at any cost. "You are not such a fool that you cannot understand a word of common sense. Are you rich? No. Are you noble? Still less so. What is this frenzy that brings you here? You come to worry me; you think you are doing something clever; you know perfectly well that it is useless; you wish to make me responsible for your death. Have you any right to complain of me? Do I owe a son to your father? Is it my fault that you have come to this? Mon Dieu! When a man is going to drown himself, he keeps quiet about it--"

"That is what I am going to do now. I am your very humble servant."

"One moment! It shall not be said that you had recourse to me in vain. There, my boy, here are three louis d'or: go and have dinner in the kitchen, and let me hear no more about you."

"Much obliged; I am not hungry, and I have no use for your money."

So Croisilles left the room, and the financier, having set his conscience at rest by the offer he had just made, settled himself more comfortably in his chair, and resumed his meditations.

Mademoiselle Godeau, during this time, was not so far away as one might suppose; she had, it is true, withdrawn in obedience to her father; but, instead of going to her room, she had remained listening behind the door. If the extravagance of Croisilles seemed incredible to her, still she found nothing to offend her in it; for love, since the world has existed, has never passed as an insult. On the other hand, as it was not possible to doubt the despair of the young man, Mademoiselle Godeau found herself a victim, at one and the same time, to the two sentiments most dangerous to women--compassion and curiosity. When she saw the interview at an end, and Croisilles ready to come out, she rapidly crossed the drawing-room where she stood, not wishing to be surprised eavesdropping, and hurried towards her apartment; but she almost immediately retraced her steps. The idea that perhaps Croisilles was really going to put an end to his life troubled her in spite of herself. Scarcely aware of what she was doing, she walked to meet him; the drawing-room was large, and the two young people came slowly towards each other. Croisilles was as pale as death, and Mademoiselle Godeau vainly sought words to express her feelings. In passing beside him, she let fall on the floor a bunch of violets which she held in her hand. He at once bent down and picked up the bouquet in order to give it back to her, but instead of taking it, she passed on without uttering a word, and entered her father's room. Croisilles, alone again, put the flowers in his breast, and left the house with a troubled heart, not knowing what to think of his adventure.

III

Scarcely had he taken a few steps in the street, when he saw his faithful friend Jean running towards him with a joyful face.

"What has happened?" he asked; "have you news to tell me?"

"Yes," replied Jean; "I have to tell you that the seals have been officially broken and that you can enter your home. All your father's

debts being paid, you remain the owner of the house. It is true that all the money and all the jewels have been taken away; but at least the house belongs to you, and you have not lost everything. I have been running about for an hour, not knowing what had become of you, and I hope, my dear master, that you will now be wise enough to take a reasonable course."

"What course do you wish me to take?"

"Sell this house, sir, it is all your fortune. It will bring you about thirty thousand francs. With that at any rate you will not die of hunger; and what is to prevent you from buying a little stock in trade, and starting business for yourself? You would surely prosper."

"We shall see about this," answered Croisilles, as he hurried to the street where his home was. He was eager to see the paternal roof again. But when he arrived there so sad a spectacle met his gaze, that he had scarcely the courage to enter. The shop was in utter disorder, the rooms deserted, his father's alcove empty. Everything presented to his eyes the wretchedness of utter ruin. Not a chair remained; all the drawers had been ransacked, the till broken open, the chest taken away; nothing had escaped the greedy search of creditors and lawyers; who, after having pillaged the house, had gone, leaving the doors open, as though to testify to all passers-by how neatly their work was done.

"This, then," exclaimed Croisilles, "is all that remains after thirty years of work and a respectable life,--and all through the failure to have ready, on a given day, money enough to honor a signature imprudently given!"

While the young man walked up and down given over to the saddest thoughts, Jean seemed very much embarrassed. He supposed that his master was without ready money, and that he might perhaps not even have dined. He was therefore trying to think of some way to question

him on the subject, and to offer him, in case of need, some part of his savings. After having tortured his mind for a quarter of an hour to try and hit upon some way of leading up to the subject, he could find nothing better than to come up to Croisilles, and ask him, in a kindly voice:

"Sir, do you still like roast partridges?"

The poor man uttered this question in a tone at once so comical and so touching, that Croisilles, in spite of his sadness, could not refrain from laughing.

"And why do you ask me that?" said he.

"My wife," replied Jean, "is cooking me some for dinner, sir, and if by chance you still liked them--"

Croisilles had completely forgotten till now the money which he was bringing back to his father. Jean's proposal reminded him that his pockets were full of gold.

"I thank you with all my heart," said he to the old man, "and I accept your dinner with pleasure; but, if you are anxious about my fortune, be reassured. I have more money than I need to have a good supper this evening, which you, in your turn, will share with me."

Saying this, he laid upon the mantel four well-filled purses, which he emptied, each containing fifty louis.

"Although this sum does not belong to me," he added, "I can use it for a day or two. To whom must I go to have it forwarded to my father?"

"Sir," replied Jean, eagerly, "your father especially charged me to tell you that this money belongs to you, and, if I did not speak of it before, it was because I did not know how your affairs in Paris had turned

out. Where he has gone your father will want for nothing; he will lodge with one of your correspondents, who will receive him most gladly; he has moreover taken with him enough for his immediate needs, for he was quite sure of still leaving behind more than was necessary to pay all his just debts. All that he has left, sir, is yours; he says so himself in his letter, and I am especially charged to repeat it to you. That gold is, therefore, legitimately your property, as this house in which we are now. I can repeat to you the very words your father said to me on embarking: 'May my son forgive me for leaving him; may he remember that I am still in the world only to love me, and let him use what remains after my debts are paid as though it were his inheritance.' Those, sir, are his own expressions; so put this back in your pocket, and, since you accept my dinner, pray let us go home."

The honest joy which shone in Jean's eyes, left no doubt in the mind of Croisilles. The words of his father had moved him to such a point that he could not restrain his tears; on the other hand, at such a moment, four thousand francs were no bagatelle. As to the house, it was not an available resource, for one could realize on it only by selling it, and that was both difficult and slow. All this, however, could not but make a considerable change in the situation the young man found himself in; so he felt suddenly moved--shaken in his dismal resolution, and, so to speak, both sad and, at the same time, relieved of much of his distress. After having closed the shutters of the shop, he left the house with Jean, and as he once more crossed the town, could not help thinking how small a thing our affections are, since they sometimes serve to make us find an unforeseen joy in the faintest ray of hope. It was with this thought that he sat down to dinner beside his old servant, who did not fail, during the repast, to make every effort to cheer him.

Heedless people have a happy fault. They are easily cast down, but they have not even the trouble to console themselves, so changeable is their mind. It would be a mistake to think them, on that account, insensible or selfish; on the contrary they perhaps feel more keenly

than others and are but too prone to blow their brains out in a moment of despair; but, this moment once passed, if they are still alive, they must dine, they must eat, they must drink, as usual; only to melt into tears again at bed-time. Joy and pain do not glide over them but pierce them through like arrows. Kind, hot-headed natures which know how to suffer, but not how to lie, through which one can clearly read,--not fragile and empty like glass, but solid and transparent like rock crystal.

After having clinked glasses with Jean, Croisilles, instead of drowning himself, went to the play. Standing at the back of the pit, he drew from his bosom Mademoiselle Godeau's bouquet, and, as he breathed the perfume in deep meditation, he began to think in a calmer spirit about his adventure of the morning. As soon as he had pondered over it for awhile, he saw clearly the truth; that is to say, that the young lady, in leaving the bouquet in his hands, and in refusing to take it back, had wished to give him a mark of interest; for otherwise this refusal and this silence could only have been marks of contempt, and such a supposition was not possible. Croisilles, therefore, judged that Mademoiselle Godeau's heart was of a softer grain than her father's and he remembered distinctly that the young lady's face, when she crossed the drawing-room, had expressed an emotion the more true that it seemed involuntary. But was this emotion one of love, or only of sympathy? Or was it perhaps something of still less importance,--mere commonplace pity? Had Mademoiselle Godeau feared to see him die--him, Croisilles--or merely to be the cause of the death of a man, no matter what man? Although withered and almost leafless, the bouquet still retained so exquisite an odor and so brave a look, that in breathing it and looking at it, Croisilles could not help hoping. It was a thin garland of roses round a bunch of violets. What mysterious depths of sentiment an Oriental might have read in these flowers, by interpreting their language! But after all, he need not be an Oriental in this case. The flowers which fall from the breast of a pretty woman, in Europe, as in the East, are never mute; were they but to tell what they have seen while reposing in that lovely bosom, it would be enough for

a lover, and this, in fact, they do. Perfumes have more than one resemblance to love, and there are even people who think love to be but a sort of perfume; it is true the flowers which exhale it are the most beautiful in creation.

While Croisilles mused thus, paying very little attention to the tragedy that was being acted at the time, Mademoiselle Godeau herself appeared in a box opposite.

The idea did not occur to the young man that, if she should notice him, she might think it very strange to find the would-be suicide there after what had transpired in the morning. He, on the contrary, bent all his efforts towards getting nearer to her; but he could not succeed. A fifth-rate actress from Paris had come to play *Méropé*, and the crowd was so dense that one could not move. For lack of anything better, Croisilles had to content himself with fixing his gaze upon his lady-love, not lifting his eyes from her for a moment. He noticed that she seemed pre-occupied and moody, and that she spoke to every one with a sort of repugnance. Her box was surrounded, as may be imagined, by all the fops of the neighborhood, each of whom passed several times before her in the gallery, totally unable to enter the box, of which her father filled more than three-fourths. Croisilles noticed further that she was not using her opera-glasses, nor was she listening to the play. Her elbows resting on the balustrade, her chin in her hand, with her far-away look, she seemed, in all her sumptuous apparel, like some statue of *Venus* disguised en *marquise*. The display of her dress and her hair, her rouge, beneath which one could guess her paleness, all the splendor of her toilet, did but the more distinctly bring out the immobility of her countenance. Never had Croisilles seen her so beautiful. Having found means, between the acts, to escape from the crush, he hurried off to look at her from the passage leading to her box, and, strange to say, scarcely had he reached it, when Mademoiselle Godeau, who had not stirred for the last hour, turned round. She started slightly as she noticed him and only cast a glance at him; then she resumed her former attitude. Whether that glance

expressed surprise, anxiety, pleasure or love; whether it meant "What, not dead!" or "God be praised! There you are, living!"--I do not pretend to explain. Be that as it may; at that glance, Croisilles inwardly swore to himself to die or gain her love.

IV

Of all the obstacles which hinder the smooth course of love, the greatest is, without doubt, what is called false shame, which is indeed a very potent obstacle.

Croisilles was not troubled with this unhappy failing, which both pride and timidity combine to produce; he was not one of those who, for whole months, hover round the woman they love, like a cat round a caged bird. As soon as he had given up the idea of drowning himself, he thought only of letting his dear Julie know that he lived solely for her. But how could he tell her so? Should he present himself a second time at the mansion of the fermier-général, it was but too certain that M. Godeau would have him ejected.

Julie, when she happened to take a walk, never went without her maid; it was therefore useless to undertake to follow her. To pass the nights under the windows of one's beloved is a folly dear to lovers, but, in the present case, it would certainly prove vain. I said before that Croisilles was very religious; it therefore never entered his mind to seek to meet his lady-love at church. As the best way, though the most dangerous, is to write to people when one cannot speak to them in person, he decided on the very next day to write to the young lady.

His letter possessed, naturally, neither order nor reason. It read somewhat as follows:

"Mademoiselle,--Tell me exactly, I beg of you, what fortune one must possess to be able to pretend to your hand. I am asking you a strange question; but I love you so desperately, that it is impossible for me not

to ask it, and you are the only person in the world to whom I can address it. It seemed to me, last evening, that you looked at me at the play. I had wished to die; would to God I were indeed dead, if I am mistaken, and if that look was not meant for me. Tell me if Fate can be so cruel as to let a man deceive himself in a manner at once so sad and so sweet. I believe that you commanded me to live. You are rich, beautiful. I know it. Your father is arrogant and miserly, and you have a right to be proud; but I love you, and the rest is a dream. Fix your charming eyes on me; think of what love can do, when I who suffer so cruelly, who must stand in fear of every thing, feel, nevertheless, an inexpressible joy in writing you this mad letter, which will perhaps bring down your anger upon me. But think also, mademoiselle that you are a little to blame for this, my folly. Why did you drop that bouquet? Put yourself for an instant, if possible, in my place; I dare think that you love me, and I dare ask you to tell me so. Forgive me, I beseech you. I would give my life's blood to be sure of not offending you, and to see you listening to my love with that angel smile which belongs only to you.

"Whatever you may do, your image remains mine; you can remove it only by tearing out my heart. As long as your look lives in my remembrance, as long as the bouquet keeps a trace of its perfume, as long as a word will tell of love, I will cherish hope."

Having sealed his letter, Croisilles went out and walked up and down the street opposite the Godeau mansion, waiting for a servant to come out. Chance, which always serves mysterious loves, when it can do so without compromising itself, willed it that Mademoiselle Julie's maid should have arranged to purchase a cap on that day. She was going to the milliner's when Croisilles accosted her, slipped a louis into her hand, and asked her to take charge of his letter.

The bargain was soon struck; the servant took the money to pay for her cap and promised to do the errand out of gratitude. Croisilles, full of joy, went home and sat at his door awaiting an answer.

Before speaking of this answer, a word must be said about Mademoiselle Godeau. She was not quite free from the vanity of her father, but her good nature was ever uppermost. She was, in the full meaning of the term, a spoilt child. She habitually spoke very little, and never was she seen with a needle in her hand; she spent her days at her toilet, and her evenings on the sofa, not seeming to hear the conversation going on around her. As regards her dress, she was prodigiously coquettish, and her own face was surely what she thought most of on earth. A wrinkle in her collarette, an ink-spot on her finger, would have distressed her; and, when her dress pleased her, nothing can describe the last look which she cast at her mirror before leaving the room. She showed neither taste nor aversion for the pleasures in which young ladies usually delight. She went to balls willingly enough, and renounced going to them without a show of temper, sometimes without motive.

The play wearied her, and she was in the constant habit of falling asleep there. When her father, who worshipped her, proposed to make her some present of her own choice, she took an hour to decide, not being able to think of anything she cared for. When M. Godeau gave a reception or a dinner, it often happened that Julie would not appear in the drawing-room, and at such times she passed the evening alone in her own room, in full dress, walking up and down, her fan in her hand. If a compliment was addressed to her, she turned away her head, and if any one attempted to pay court to her, she responded only by a look at once so dazzling and so serious as to disconcert even the boldest. Never had a sally made her laugh; never had an air in an opera, a flight of tragedy, moved her; indeed, never had her heart given a sign of life; and, on seeing her pass in all the splendor of her nonchalant loveliness one might have taken her for a beautiful somnambulist, walking through the world as in a trance.

So much indifference and coquetry did not seem easy to understand. Some said she loved nothing, others that she loved nothing but

herself. A single word, however, suffices to explain her character,-- she was waiting. From the age of fourteen she had heard it ceaselessly repeated that nothing was so charming as she. She was convinced of this, and that was why she paid so much attention to dress. In failing to do honor to her own person, she would have thought herself guilty of sacrilege. She walked, in her beauty, so to speak, like a child in its holiday dress; but she was very far from thinking that her beauty was to remain useless.

Beneath her apparent unconcern she had a will, secret, inflexible, and the more potent the better it was concealed. The coquetry of ordinary women, which spends itself in ogling, in simpering, and in smiling, seemed to her a childish, vain, almost contemptible way of fighting with shadows. She felt herself in possession of a treasure, and she disdained to stake it piece by piece; she needed an adversary worthy of herself; but, too accustomed to see her wishes anticipated, she did not seek that adversary; it may even be said that she felt astonished at his failing to present himself.

For the four or five years that she had been out in society and had conscientiously displayed her flowers, her furbelows, and her beautiful shoulders, it seemed to her inconceivable that she had not yet inspired some great passion.

Had she said what was really behind her thoughts, she certainly would have replied to her many flatterers: "Well! if it is true that I am so beautiful, why do you not blow your brains out for me?" An answer which many other young girls might make, and which more than one who says nothing hides away in a corner of her heart, not far perhaps from the tip of her tongue.

What is there, indeed, in the world, more tantalizing for a woman than to be young, rich, beautiful, to look at herself in her mirror and see herself charmingly dressed, worthy in every way to please, fully disposed to allow herself to be loved, and to have to say to herself: "I

am admired, I am praised, all the world thinks me charming, but nobody loves me. My gown is by the best maker, my laces are superb, my coiffure is irreproachable, my face the most beautiful on earth, my figure slender, my foot prettily turned, and all this helps me to nothing but to go and yawn in the corner of some drawing-room! If a young man speaks to me he treats me as a child; if I am asked in marriage, it is for my dowry; if somebody presses my hand in a dance, it is sure to be some provincial fop; as soon as I appear anywhere, I excite a murmur of admiration; but nobody speaks low, in my ear, a word that makes my heart beat. I hear impertinent men praising me in loud tones, a couple of feet away, and never a look of humbly sincere adoration meets mine. Still I have an ardent soul full of life, and I am not, by any means, only a pretty doll to be shown about, to be made to dance at a ball, to be dressed by a maid in the morning and undressed at night--beginning the whole thing over again the next day."

That is what Mademoiselle Godeau had many times said to herself; and there were hours when that thought inspired her with so gloomy a feeling that she remained mute and almost motionless for a whole day. When Croisilles wrote her, she was in just such a fit of ill-humor. She had just been taking her chocolate and was deep in meditation, stretched upon a lounge, when her maid entered and handed her the letter with a mysterious air. She looked at the address, and not recognizing the handwriting, fell again to musing.

The maid then saw herself forced to explain what it was, which she did with a rather disconcerted air, not being at all sure how the young lady would take the matter. Mademoiselle Godeau listened without moving, then opened the letter, and cast only a glance at it; she at once asked for a sheet of paper, and nonchalantly wrote these few words:

"No, sir, I assure you I am not proud. If you had only a hundred thousand crowns, I would willingly marry you."

Such was the reply which the maid at once took to Croisilles, who gave her another louis for her trouble.

V

A hundred thousand crowns are not found "in a donkey's hoof-print," and if Croisilles had been suspicious he might have thought in reading Mademoiselle Godeau's letter that she was either crazy or laughing at him. He thought neither, for he only saw in it that his darling Julie loved him, and that he must have a hundred thousand crowns, and he dreamed from that moment of nothing but trying to secure them.

He possessed two hundred louis in cash, plus a house which, as I have said, might be worth about thirty thousand francs. What was to be done? How was he to go about transfiguring these thirty-four thousand francs, at a jump, into three hundred thousand. The first idea which came into the mind of the young man was to find some way of staking his whole fortune on the toss-up of a coin, but for that he must sell the house. Croisilles therefore began by putting a notice upon the door, stating that his house was for sale; then, while dreaming what he would do with the money that he would get for it, he awaited a purchaser.

A week went by, then another; not a single purchaser applied. More and more distressed, Croisilles spent these days with Jean, and despair was taking possession of him once more, when a Jewish broker rang at the door.

"This house is for sale, sir, is it not? Are you the owner of it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And how much is it worth?"

"Thirty thousand francs, I believe; at least I have heard my father say so."

The Jew visited all the rooms, went upstairs and down into the cellar, knocking on the walls, counting the steps of the staircase, turning the doors on their hinges and the keys in their locks, opening and closing the windows; then, at last, after having thoroughly examined everything, without saying a word and without making the slightest proposal, he bowed to Croisilles and retired.

Croisilles, who for a whole hour had followed him with a palpitating heart, as may be imagined, was not a little disappointed at this silent retreat. He thought that perhaps the Jew had wished to give himself time to reflect and that he would return presently. He waited a week for him, not daring to go out for fear of missing his visit, and looking out of the windows from morning till night. But it was in vain; the Jew did not reappear. Jean, true to his unpleasant rôle of adviser, brought moral pressure to bear to dissuade his master from selling his house in so hasty a manner and for so extravagant a purpose. Dying of impatience, ennui, and love, Croisilles one morning took his two hundred louis and went out, determined to tempt fortune with this sum, since he could not have more.

The gaming-houses at that time were not public, and that refinement of civilization which enables the first comer to ruin himself at all hours, as soon as the wish enters his mind, had not yet been invented.

Scarcely was Croisilles in the street before he stopped, not knowing where to go to stake his money. He looked at the houses of the neighborhood, and eyed them, one after the other, striving to discover suspicious appearances that might point out to him the object of his search. A good-looking young man, splendidly dressed, happened to pass. Judging from his mien, he was certainly a young man of gentle blood and ample leisure, so Croisilles politely accosted him.

"Sir," he said, "I beg your pardon for the liberty I take. I have two hundred louis in my pocket and I am dying either to lose them or win more. Could you not point out to me some respectable place where such things are done?"

At this rather strange speech the young man burst out laughing.

"Upon my word, sir!" answered he, "if you are seeking any such wicked place you have but to follow me, for that is just where I am going."

Croisilles followed him, and a few steps farther they both entered a house of very attractive appearance, where they were received hospitably by an old gentleman of the highest breeding.

Several young men were already seated round a green cloth. Croisilles modestly took a place there, and in less than an hour his two hundred louis were gone.

He came out as sad as a lover can be who thinks himself beloved. He had not enough to dine with, but that did not cause him any anxiety.

"What can I do now," he asked himself, "to get money? To whom shall I address myself in this town? Who will lend me even a hundred louis on this house that I can not sell?"

While he was in this quandary, he met his Jewish broker. He did not hesitate to address him, and, featherhead as he was, did not fail to tell him the plight he was in.

The Jew did not much want to buy the house; he had come to see it only through curiosity, or, to speak more exactly, for the satisfaction of his own conscience, as a passing dog goes into a kitchen, the door of which stands open, to see if there is anything to steal. But when he saw Croisilles so despondent, so sad, so bereft of all resources, he

could not resist the temptation to put himself to some inconvenience, even, in order to pay for the house. He therefore offered him about one-fourth of its value. Croisilles fell upon his neck, called him his friend and saviour, blindly signed a bargain that would have made one's hair stand on end, and, on the very next day, the possessor of four hundred new louis, he once more turned his steps toward the gambling-house where he had been so politely and speedily ruined the night before.

On his way, he passed by the wharf. A vessel was about leaving; the wind was gentle, the ocean tranquil. On all sides, merchants, sailors, officers in uniform were coming and going. Porters were carrying enormous bales of merchandise. Passengers and their friends were exchanging farewells, small boats were rowing about in all directions; on every face could be read fear, impatience, or hope; and, amidst all the agitation which surrounded it, the majestic vessel swayed gently to and fro under the wind that swelled her proud sails.

"What a grand thing it is," thought Croisilles, "to risk all one possesses and go beyond the sea, in perilous search of fortune! How it fills me with emotion to look at this vessel setting out on her voyage, loaded with so much wealth, with the welfare of so many families! What joy to see her come back again, bringing twice as much as was intrusted to her, returning so much prouder and richer than she went away! Why am I not one of those merchants? Why could I not stake my four hundred louis in this way? This immense sea! What a green cloth, on which to boldly tempt fortune! Why should I not myself buy a few bales of cloth or silk? What is to prevent my doing so, since I have gold? Why should this captain refuse to take charge of my merchandise? And who knows? Instead of going and throwing away this--my little all--in a gambling-house, I might double it, I might triple it, perhaps, by honest industry. If Julie truly loves me, she will wait a few years, she will remain true to me until I am able to marry her. Commerce sometimes yields greater profits than one thinks; examples are wanting in this world of wealth gained with astonishing

rapidity in this way on the changing waves--why should Providence not bless an endeavor made for a purpose so laudable, so worthy of His assistance? Among these merchants who have accumulated so much and who send their vessels to the ends of the world, more than one has begun with a smaller sum than I have now. They have prospered with the help of God; why should I not prosper in my turn? It seems to me as though a good wind were filling these sails, and this vessel inspires confidence. Come! the die is cast; I will speak to the captain, who seems to be a good fellow; I will then write to Julie, and set out to become a clever and successful trader."

The greatest danger incurred by those who are habitually but half crazy, is that of becoming, at times, altogether so.

The poor fellow, without further deliberation, put his whim into execution. To find goods to buy, when one has money and knows nothing about the goods, is the easiest thing in the world.

The captain, to oblige Croisilles, took him to one of his friends, a manufacturer, who sold him as much cloth and silk as he could pay for. The whole of it, loaded upon a cart, was promptly taken on board. Croisilles, delighted and full of hope, had himself written in large letters his name upon the bales. He watched them being put on board with inexpressible joy; the hour of departure soon came, and the vessel weighed anchor.

VI

I need not say that in this transaction, Croisilles had kept no money in hand. His house was sold; and there remained to him, for his sole fortune, the clothes he had on his back;--no home, and not a son. With the best will possible, Jean could not suppose that his master was reduced to such an extremity; Croisilles was not too proud, but too thoughtless to tell him of it. So he determined to sleep under the starry vault, and as for his meals, he made the following calculation; he

presumed that the vessel which bore his fortune would be six months before coming back to Havre; Croisilles, therefore, not without regret, sold a gold watch his father had given him, and which he had fortunately kept; he got thirty-six livres for it. That was sufficient to live on for about six months, at the rate of four sous a day. He did not doubt that it would be enough, and, reassured for the present, he wrote to Mademoiselle Godeau to inform her of what he had done. He was very careful in his letter not to speak of his distress; he announced to her, on the contrary, that he had undertaken a magnificent commercial enterprise, of the speedy and fortunate issue of which there could be no doubt; he explained to her that La Fleurette, a merchant-vessel of one hundred and fifty tons, was carrying to the Baltic his cloths and his silks, and implored her to remain faithful to him for a year, reserving to himself the right of asking, later on, for a further delay, while, for his part, he swore eternal love to her.

When Mademoiselle Godeau received this letter she was sitting before the fire, and had in her hand, using it as a screen, one of those bulletins which are printed in seaports, announcing the arrival and departure of vessels, and which also report disasters at sea. It had never occurred to her, as one can well imagine, to take an interest in this sort of thing; she had in fact never glanced at any of these sheets.

The perusal of Croisilles' letter prompted her to read the bulletin she had been holding in her hand; the first word that caught her eye was no other than the name of La Fleurette.

The vessel had been wrecked on the coast of France, on the very night following its departure. The crew had barely escaped, but all the cargo was lost.

Mademoiselle Godeau, at this news, no longer remembered that Croisilles had made to her an avowal of his poverty; she was as heartbroken as though a million had been at stake.

In an instant, the horrors of the tempest, the fury of the winds, the cries of the drowning, the ruin of the man who loved her, presented themselves to her mind like a scene in a romance. The bulletin and the letter fell from her hands. She rose in great agitation, and, with heaving breast and eyes brimming with tears, paced up and down, determined to act, and asking herself how she should act.

There is one thing that must be said in justice to love; it is that the stronger, the clearer, the simpler the considerations opposed to it, in a word, the less common sense there is in the matter, the wilder does the passion become and the more does the lover love. It is one of the most beautiful things under heaven, this irrationality of the heart. We should not be worth much without it. After having walked about the room (without forgetting either her dear fan or the passing glance at the mirror), Julie allowed herself to sink once more upon her lounge. Whoever had seen her at this moment would have looked upon a lovely sight; her eyes sparkled, her cheeks were on fire; she sighed deeply, and murmured in a delicious transport of joy and pain:

"Poor fellow! He has ruined himself for me!"

Independently of the fortune which she could expect from her father, Mademoiselle Godeau had in her own right the property her mother had left her. She had never thought of it.

At this moment, for the first time in her life, she remembered that she could dispose of five hundred thousand francs. This thought brought a smile to her lips; a project, strange, bold, wholly feminine, almost as mad as Croisilles himself, entered her head;--she weighed the idea in her mind for some time, then decided to act upon it at once.

She began by inquiring whether Croisilles had any relatives or friends; the maid was sent out in all directions to find out.

Having made minute inquiries in all quarters, she discovered, on the fourth floor of an old rickety house, a half-crippled aunt, who never stirred from her arm-chair, and had not been out for four or five years. This poor woman, very old, seemed to have been left in the world expressly as a specimen of hungry misery. Blind, gouty, almost deaf, she lived alone in a garret; but a gayety, stronger than misfortune and illness, sustained her at eighty years of age, and made her still love life. Her neighbors never passed her door without going in to see her, and the antiquated tunes she hummed enlivened all the girls of the neighborhood. She possessed a little annuity which sufficed to maintain her; as long as day lasted, she knitted. She did not know what had happened since the death of Louis XIV.

It was to this worthy person that Julie had herself privately conducted. She donned for the occasion all her finery; feathers, laces, ribbons, diamonds, nothing was spared. She wanted to be fascinating; but the real secret of her beauty, in this case, was the whim that was carrying her away. She went up the steep, dark staircase which led to the good lady's chamber, and, after the most graceful bow, spoke somewhat as follows:

"You have, madame, a nephew, called Croisilles, who loves me and has asked for my hand; I love him too and wish to marry him; but my father, Monsieur Godeau, fermier-général of this town, refuses his consent, because your nephew is not rich. I would not, for the world, give occasion to scandal, nor cause trouble to anybody; I would therefore never think of disposing of myself without the consent of my family. I come to ask you a favor, which I beseech you to grant me. You must come yourself and propose this marriage to my father. I have, thank God, a little fortune which is quite at your disposal; you may take possession, whenever you see fit, of five hundred thousand francs at my notary's. You will say that this sum belongs to your nephew, which in fact it does. It is not a present that I am making him, it is a debt which I am paying, for I am the cause of the ruin of Croisilles, and it is but just that I should repair it. My father will not

easily give in; you will be obliged to insist and you must have a little courage; I, for my part, will not fail. As nobody on earth excepting myself has any right to the sum of which I am speaking to you, nobody will ever know in what way this amount will have passed into your hands. You are not very rich yourself, I know, and you may fear that people will be astonished to see you thus endowing your nephew; but remember that my father does not know you, that you show yourself very little in town, and that, consequently it will be easy for you to pretend that you have just arrived from some journey. This step will doubtless be some exertion to you; you will have to leave your arm-chair and take a little trouble; but you will make two people happy, madame, and if you have ever known love, I hope you will not refuse me."

The old lady, during this discourse, had been in turn surprised, anxious, touched, and delighted. The last words persuaded her.

"Yes, my child," she repeated several times, "I know what it is,--I know what it is."

As she said this she made an effort to rise; her feeble limbs could barely support her; Julie quickly advanced and put out her hand to help her; by an almost involuntary movement they found themselves, in an instant, in each other's arms.

A treaty was at once concluded; a warm kiss sealed it in advance, and the necessary and confidential consultation followed without further trouble.

All the explanations having been made, the good lady drew from her wardrobe a venerable gown of taffeta, which had been her wedding-dress. This antique piece of property was not less than fifty years old; but not a spot, not a grain of dust had disfigured it; Julie was in ecstasies over it. A coach was sent for, the handsomest in the town. The good lady prepared the speech she was going to make to

Monsieur Godeau; Julie tried to teach her how she was to touch the heart of her father, and did not hesitate to confess that love of rank was his vulnerable point.

"If you could imagine," said she, "a means of flattering this weakness, you will have won our cause."

The good lady pondered deeply, finished her toilet without another word, clasped the hands of her future niece, and entered the carriage.

She soon arrived at the Godeau mansion; there, she braced herself up so gallantly for her entrance that she seemed ten years younger. She majestically crossed the drawing-room where Julie's bouquet had fallen, and when the door of the boudoir opened, said in a firm voice to the lackey who preceded her:

"Announce the dowager Baroness de Croisilles."

These words settled the happiness of the two lovers. Monsieur Godeau was bewildered by them. Although five hundred thousand francs seemed little to him, he consented to everything, in order to make his daughter a baroness, and such she became;--who would dare contest her title? For my part, I think she had thoroughly earned it.