A PROFESSOR OF ALCHEMY

(DENIS ZACHAIRE).

BY

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AUTHOR OF "A COMEDY WITHOUT LAUGHTER" AND "A MISGUIDIT LASSIE."

"For there is nothing given of God to man more notable than peace."

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(DENIS ZACHAIRE).

CHAPTER I.

In the year of grace 1510 there was born into this shifting world a man who came afterwards to think himself great, but of whom we, in the nineteenth century, think nothing at all. He was an alchemist. In the Middle Ages, when science was shadowy and folk were decidedly on the look-out for the supernatural, a man who announced himself as a transmuter of iron and steel into gold was as creditable and credible a

lion as any one of our matter-and-atom microscope-plyers is now. Perhaps he was even more highly respected than they, since, as De Quincey says, "No dignity is perfect which does not at some point ally itself with the mysterious." An accepted, Court-approved alchemist in the sixteenth century was a high priest of mystery—a sort of lucrative link with all that is a puzzle to mortals. He wrought with heaven knows what occult powers; but the result was solid cash. (At least, sometimes it was solid, owing to the materials out of which it was transmuted.) A modern scientist, however, has this advantage over the brave dupes of old; he takes his stand upon Matter,

which is a vulgar but incontrovertible premiss. The latter took theirs upon the Unknown, which everybody can make game of. But there were more pressing reasons to make a man think twice before adopting alchemy as a profession. Persecution is but the superlative of ridicule. Supposing the alchemist to fail in his art (which, poor fellow, he often did, when shut up and very closely guarded), then he was not only laughed at, he was racked. Modern manners prescribe a sneer as treatment fashionable for fools. Mediæval earnestness, when baffled, sought to wreak a childish vengeance on the shrinking flesh of him who had deceived it. Truly the honour

paid to success was thrilling to ambitious minds, but, even in the full career of glory, how often had the Emperor, the Palatine, Grand Duke, or Prince, or Potentate possessed himself quite coolly of the person of the alchemist, and, having caused him to essay a transmutation in a prison, without half the ordinary appliances, put him first to tortures which no language can express, then just crushed him under by a shameful death!

In those days it was folly to be wise. If you knew anything, you were supposed by the help of evil spirits to know everything. If you modestly asserted that your science must stop somewhere, it was assumed that you would not tell the

secrets that you held, and, curiosity being to the Mediævals what incredulity is to us now, down must you go to the "chambre de la question," that with fierce pangs you might deliver yourself of the truth. But of course you did not wait for this. Lies well told by smiling lips please often better than the truth groaned out through a distorted mouth. When in danger of the rack, you lied; at least alchemists always did—lied horribly. Martyrs of course persisted in the path of deadly truth, which probably was never any truth at all, if they had but known it; but martyrs—well, no one can understand martyrs. They cannot understand each other; for St. Lawrence doubt-

less had guffawed to hear why Latimer met his death.

To die for a point of honour, easy; to die in defence of one's country, thankless, but frequent; to die in defending a loved one; in place of a friend; to die for the sake of an Arctic expedition, or the discovery of a new explosive; to die because one will rather be an artist than a stockbroker,—with any of these motives it is possible, and sometimes distantly agreeable. But to roast for the sake of everlasting Truth—nay, those may see the use of that who have no imagination and who have never snuffed a candle with their fingers.

Penultimately we were saying that the

votaries of Hermes lied. None of them were very staunch before the rack; some of them, by way of precaution, lied all their life. These were perhaps the greater number. But, though cheating has been, is, and ever shall be rampant in our world, there have always been some chance gems of honesty, mostly hidden in corners, occasionally flashing out into the full light of day. Of these gems some have been found amongst the crucibles; and when an alchemist *was* honest, he was a study of patience, concentration, ardour, and hard work, such as scarcely any other calling has ever shown. Were they all dupes, those weary heroes? Van Helmont thinks not; but, even if they

were, their character was such as to make their failure finer than most conquerors' success.

We are now about to tell a story of one of these—one of the real school of alchemists, one of the precursors of Roscoe—a Mediæval who believed in God and in himself, and in whom we of the later time do most assuredly *not* believe.

CHAPTER II.

"If the mind has nothing actual to grasp, the body, which has, must maintain its superiority."—MAURICE.

DENIS ZACHAIRE sat wearily in the embrasure of his solitary casement, feeling bored. At least, so we of later times and of more trivial aims should call it;

but Denis only knew his feeling by the French for emptiness. There had come a blank in the student-life. Long years had he toiled like any blacksmith, but ever with hope, ambition, and faith to bear him up. Now came the inevitable moment when the past seemed waste; when failure was the only strong fact that he realized; failure, and those few grey hairs in their lurking-places on the really youthful head. From earliest boyhood had Denis plied the fantastic trade of alchemist, and all in vain, as bitterly he thought. "Not that failure up till now means any harm," he, sighing, pondered; "but I feel failure ahead of me. Faith in myself is gone. Faith in

my Art's reality all but escapes me. If—Heaven!—if all my labours have been worse than nothing, child's play, womanish dreamings! This hand, hardened and darkened with the work of half a life, knows that to me the play was all too earnest. Half a life gone! What have I taken by my years of sweat and resolution? Why, a sense of folly, and a stiffness in my limbs. Let's see." Zachaire had risen moodily, and paced his wide and furnace-lighted workshop till he paused before his uphung sword.

"Allons, mon brave!" he cried, and grasped the hilt with a new gladness. "Come, have I forgot my manly exercises whilst calcining and roasting in this hole?

Cut and thrust—how the wrist turns there! I'll warrant I have my man under the left arm yet. Ah! muscle is no dream."

Denis stretched forth his arms—and powerful ones they were—and he laughed aloud at his sword's clang against the iron retort that stood in the dark corner at which he had been fencing.

He was a strong-built, rather animal-natured man, kept by the force of a devouring passion thus hard at work; not so much for the love of pure learning, but the lust for a great secret which toil alone could give him. Whilst he yet hoped, he worked; once the tension relaxed, the hope of a reward withdrawn, the future veiled even to his imagination, Denis fell

all together, forgot his past twenty years' asceticism, and thought of pleasure. Behold him, then, walking out apace into the merry streets of Paris.

A rare night of it made this distinguished alchemist. By the law of compensation, those who have the greatest power of work own too the mightiest bent to folly. A man of no refinement, without many friends of his own rank, and irresponsible to all except himself, may go a marvellous gait in Paris of a summer night in the lawless sixteenth century, when the watchman fears his own shadow.

Towards daybreak Zachaire found himself, in slightly exalted vein, singing along

the rough-stoned roads outside the town. He stopped once for a moment to notice that the stars were fading, and to wonder why he was amidst green trees and daisy buds; then walked on, blithely trolling an old refrain:

"Prince Bacchus, tels sont rayez,
Car avec moi je les expelle.
De mon vin clairet essayez—"

"Who goes there?" a voice met him.

"Moy, homme mieulx que toy!" responded Denis, breaking off in his song but to incorporate these more relevant words, and then at once resuming, da capo, his "Prince Bacchus."

"Can't you take that branch out of my way?" pursued, with surprising gentleness, the same quiet man's voice. For all

answer, Zachaire broke off the branch of lilac he had been holding athwart the path, and smote the stranger vaguely across the face.

A man of moderation was Hilary Sainct Lavin, but this was superabundant provocation. Out flashed a slight line of steel beneath the dying stars, and a peremptory voice called Denis. "Vilein, aux glaivez!"

Zachaire's spirit at once turned easily from causeless mirth to soberer anger. He seized and drew the sword with which he had played overnight, and prepared to slay his fellow-man.

They fought silently, breathlessly, in the dark lane, under the fragrant trees where roughly awakened sparrows straightened

their heads and twittered nervously. No sound but the *froissement* of the two steels grinding vindictively together, followed repeatedly by the averting strike of the opponent. No chance would Sainct Lavin have had, though the better swordsman, had Zachaire been sober, for the latter was by a head the taller, and far away the stronger man. But, as it was, Sainct Lavin's elegant craft baffled all the energy of Zachaire's misplaced and shaky thrusts, until the alchemist began to bleed. Then, as the sharp point stung him, Denis swore and started, made a violent beat against his adversary's sword, then, by a light movement in prime, sent it flying over the low garden wall under which they

fought, and pressed upon the disarmed man. In his blind rage he would have caught him by the arm and run him through the body, had not a strange preserver intervened. Through a small doorway in the wall, immediately before Sainct Lavin, rushed a woman, and threw herself right into Zachaire's arms. She held his sword aside, bending her slender white-robed body over it, and clasping its keen edge even in her shrinking hands. Throw her aside? it was not possible. She seemed to entangle every movement of the swordsman in her great fervent striving. And indeed Zachaire felt no wish for her removal, as he tried gently to take those soft hands from the wounding steel.

"Berengaria, in—in!" exclaimed Sainct Lavin in an agony. But the maiden heard him not. Relaxing her hold upon Denis, and murmuring some vague words of wondrous pleading, she, like a fall of snow loosed from a rugged cliff, sank down in a white soft heap at his feet.

"Now, may the Virgin help me, she is killed!" groaned forth Sainct Lavin. "Touch her not, villain!"

But Denis, really tender-hearted after the manner of passionate men, had already half raised the inanimate damsel, supporting her against his knee, and was anxiously looking at the lacerated hands. Sainct Lavin pushed him aside, and

busied himself about the lady with every mark of the profoundest solicitude.

"One of mine to be endangered by a street-brawler!" he indignantly exclaimed.

Zachaire stood apart, scowling in a sorry and sobered manner, wiping his sword for form's sake, although the gore thereon was not excessive. He was too much humbled at first to make retort, but finally suggested:

"How often have you had to thank your lady-love for your life? There—you have let the head droop again!" he broke out, as Hilary half rose at the insult.

"Thou knave, she is my sister!"

"Thy—sister? Why, sir, by all the saints, what quarrel have I with thee?

Pardon me if I was unduly rash: in truth I—I—we good fellows know how to make allowance for occasional frailties, eh? Let me strike hands with you, sir, and acknowledge that luck aided me against a far superior swordsman. I am Denis Zachaire, of Arloiset, Guyenne. Ah! does the lady move? Shall we not bear her from the night air? So."

With an energy and promptitude which Sainct Lavin could not prevent, Denis had lifted the white-robed, white-cheeked maiden, and without further parley now bore her softly through the little doorway into a quiet villa-garden. Pausing then for instructions, and Hilary preceding him into the small green-painted

house, the alchemist reluctantly laid down what sure was not a burden, but a precious temporary treasure. They stood over her some little while, these two young men. Zachaire gazed reverently and in silence; Hilary bathed his sister's brow with water, and murmured words of gratitude into her unconscious ear.

The maiden was so slight, so fragile, that she seemed one meant for a tenderer world than this. Her delicate, refined mask, her light-blue eyes and palest-golden hair, her white robe, the marble stillness of her tall figure, all combined to give her a strangely ideal look. If she was a mortal, she would be more helpless against violence than any other woman;

a child, whom it were vile to speak to—much less handle—roughly. The motionless soft arms looked only made to ward off hardness—unsuccessfully. This was the rescuer who had thrown herself before the sword of a wild stranger.

"Thou art a happy brother!" remarked Zachaire with a sigh to Hilary.

"And I know it," answered the young and courtly Frenchman, stooping to kiss the forehead of the now reviving damsel. Then with a sudden look of intense inquietude he added, "Sir, you see my sister recovers. We no longer need your help. Let me light you to the door."

Taking up a torch, he then preceded the unwilling Zachaire to the garden-gate,

wished him God-speed, and put a barrier between them.

The next day Zachaire, having come to learn in what health the Damoiselle Sainct Lavin found herself, was thunderstruck to see the villa empty, and Berengaria and her brother gone.

The next few days were weary ones to Zachaire. He was still in the restless, desultory mind that precluded all success in his experiments. Work as he might—but indeed he did not really work—iron remained iron, mercury was still not gold, and only the alchemist's heart was changed. But he meant to find the Sainct Lavins. They had become the tardy romance of a toil-spent life. Denis set his lips; for,

having long wrought with insensate metals, he had himself become stubborn as they, and determined once again to look upon the cavalier and his ethereal sister His resolution was finally rewarded. At the end of one of these transition days, when nothing was done but all hoped for, he, walking in the street at nightfall, suddenly came face to face with Hilary Sainct Lavin.

The rest was easy. Denis Zachaire, a gentleman born, although a rough one, had his bit of charm of manner hidden away somewhere, rusted perhaps by much solitude, but capable of being drawn out and brightened by friction with a polished mind. Thus, unsheathing his wit, he

made Sainct Lavin tell him many things much better kept a secret.

The cavalier's story was simple enough: the usual routine for a young noble of the day; page, horseman, fencer, troubadour and warrior had he been.

Berengaria's story was a stranger one. It was long before Sainct Lavin confided it to Zachaire; but on the latter, one day, giving vent to a heterodox sneer at the priests, his hearer suddenly grew confidential. He wanted a powerful friend, and thought he had found one in this free-thinking gentleman of Guyenne.

This was the past of the maiden:

Berengaria Sainct Lavin's was a singular nature; in soul resolute and self-con-

tained, but physically of an intense timidity. Any touch of pain affected her not only in every nerve of her delicate frame, but thrilling through into her very character, closing up the expanded petals of her serenity and making her life for the time a burden and a fear. She shrank before all roughness, and clouded existence with imaginations. She dreaded pain, both before it came and retrospectively, with a quiver of the nerves as its memory passed over her. The wild world of the sixteenth century had one refuge for a timorous spirit—the cloister. On the death of her parents, Berengaria entered a convent. Hilary was loath to part with the sweet young creature who made the day

seem brighter with "the eternal sunlight of a spotless soul;" but he was alone in the world, and knew no one to whom he could confide his beautiful sister. He thought her safer in the arms of the Church than in those of a husband. He was not wise.

And now what disturbance did Berengaria find in her own small circle of experience? She was here screened from sharp dangers of the outer world; and now another difficulty stood before her. Her purity of mind was outraged. The convent into which she had fled for quiet communion with a happier world was just one of those that would have caused the soul of Luther to seethe volcano-

like, and pour forth execration in a fiery stream. It was a reservoir of duplicity, a hiding-place for worldly-minded, violent-tempered, or frivolous women, who concealed their unfitness for the holy state by a show of bigotry. To Berengaria, healthily brought up in such habits of honesty and truth as the religion of that day could be stretched to allow, to Berengaria, a gentle, sensitive, reverent spirit, all this was hell. With the repulsion of purity she threw contamination from her daily, but she determined to escape from even sight of it. She brooded long on ways and means. She trembled long, thinking of the unspeakable punishments the Church in her severe mercy provides

for erring daughters; she prayed, she was uplifted and entranced; her ardent martyr-mind rose free, though weighted by her shrinking terrors; she saw her brother, told him all, and made him swear to aid her. In man's dress, heavily cloaked, one night she fled with Hilary; and having made her way to the sheltering turmoil of Paris, she had hidden in the same small villa whence she emerged confronting Zachaire. Now she was disguised as a waiting-maid, refuged in a friend's house. But how long that friend would hold out against the subtle pertinacity of the Confessional, Sainct Lavin doubted, and therefore sought the alchemist's good counsel.

CHAPTER III.

"Ah, my Lucilla, would thou wert either lesse faire, or I more fortunate; either I wiser, or thou milder: either I would I were out of this mad moode, either I would we were both of one minde."

"Euphues," LYLY.

AT last Denis had arrived at the secret of his disinclination for work and disgust at his past failures. His mind was no longer serenely bent upon discoveries in soulless metal. The world had definitely forced its way between him and his philosophy. A white image stood out against the lurid fires of his furnaces, and speculation was all turned aside to dwell on Berengaria.

Zachaire was, for the first time, enamoured of a lady—a woman to be

honoured and respected—a woman to whom he dared not speak lightly. That short, innocent story of the delicate, brave-souled nun had founded all sorts of romantic dreamings which hovered, indistinctly enough, but incessantly, in the alchemist's exalted fancy. He saw the maiden in her disguise, and marked for himself how the clear soul kept down the tremors of anxiety. An escaped nun, concealed in the house of a friend, who might at any time quail, and give up her guest to the Inquisition's unnamable horrors; moreover, a loving woman, whose capture would bring down almost equal thunders on her brother: all this was Berengaria,

but something more. There was a peculiar sustainment in her inner nature —a height of purity that seemed to overlook and cast into nothingness the coarse things of this life. She could live down even her own fear, greater though it was than the fear of any less fragile creature. Zachaire saw this and admired. Moreover, he was swayed and enchanted by her personality. A strong, rugged, unrefined man himself, finding his element in musty tomes and charcoal fires and close laboratories, he was brought, unprepared, under the influence of a being ethereal enough to seem like the realization of some splendid, misty dream; beautiful exceedingly, but

not as other women are beautiful—less alluring, more spiritual, more difficult to approach, and yet needing protection like a child. She was vowed to Heaven, and too holy for the cloister; yet here had she come, alone, back to the roughness of the world. Such a face, with the haunting azure eyes, with the firm expression, quivering sometimes into half-suppressed alarm, with the sunny halo of soft hair surrounding the dreamy brows. Then, though tall, how wonderfully slight she was, and what a need of succour spoke that erect but delicate form! Berengaria was not the first whose soul has originated more than the body can support, but to Zachaire

she seemed therefore one of the immortals from another sphere, inadequate to our conditions, but nevertheless above us, and sustained by memories of a life we know not. So he felt for some time; then it came upon him that she was a woman—that he loved her. His first idea was therefore to protect her, and to this end he proffered the shelter of his house to her and to her brother. Oppressed with his terrible responsibility, and believing in the good faith of the alchemist, Sainct Lavin consented to betake himself with Berengaria to the small, quiet lodgings wherein Zachaire at present dwelt alone. The hazard was great, but the Inquisition was a worse

risk to run. Here at least, in the care of a priest-hater, and who was at the same time an acknowledged popular alchemist, Berengaria would be for a time as safe as her dangerous past would allow; while as for the alchemist himself, and the possibility of mischief in that quarter, trust a brother's preventive zeal, thought Hilary.

The intention of Sainct Lavin had been to keep his sister hidden in Paris for some months, until the search for her should be abandoned, and then to take her to the South to dwell securely in some country solitude.

It was a grave care for the young man. No one would have dared to help him in

the charge of his sister, and the idea of taking refuge in some other convent was infinitely distasteful to the maiden, her faith in cloistral purity once shaken. She loathed duplicity so much that she could easier tolerate open sin in its proper place, the world, than covert indiscretion within consecrated walls. But, nevertheless, did her present shelter prove uninhabitable to Berengaria, for this reason. Denis Zachaire meant honourably, and would have acted as a host and as a gentleman had his mind not been in a singularly vacant and disappointed state when first he met Berengaria. She had thrown him into an exalted and restless fervour, thereby

increasing his mental perplexity and still further confusing his ideal of life. Of course, what he wished was to make her his wife; but how, by St. Denis, could that ever be done? Should an alchemist, a professor of science reproved by the Church, marry a nun? Should a priest join their hands? No priest in Paris so devoid of that essentially ecclesiastical trait of curiosity as not to find out what mystery lay in Berengaria's past life. Once expose that lovely, that rare face to the gaze of monk or friar, and he would be able to identify it all over the world under any guise.

One priest there was whom Zachaire could have trusted with any secret,

namely, the Abbé Venceslas, of Cahors. But then priests are priests. Could they keep silence, they would never consent to such a violation of the rules of Mother Church as to pronounce the benediction of earthly nuptials upon a bride of heaven. Denis groaned impotently as he relinquished the thought of his friend, and began to wonder what influence he might have upon Berengaria herself. It was hard to him (for let us be just to the man); it came hardly to him to abuse the confidence of his guest; but he was passionately enamoured of the blue-eyed maid, and he thought—as too many have thought before and after him—that the fact of his yearning to have her by the

correct means denied to him made an excuse for his determination in face of that denial.

He knew the maiden to be, for the outspoken nature of the time, very unsuspecting, and he hoped to persuade her till she should take the baser metal in himself for gold. Moreover, she loved him: he himself could see it. With that curious and apparently ungrateful facility of youth, Perengaria was beginning unconsciously to lean upon Zachaire's counsel and protection rather than upon her brother's. She would follow him to his laboratory and stand some moments dreamily on the threshold, resting her hands against the door-post

—she had a habit of supporting herself with her hand on something strong—and there she would stay wistfully enough, looking on at Zachaire's alchemical processes. She spoke little, but she watched and sometimes smiled, like a presiding goddess. The door of Zachaire's workshop was generally open in those days, and frequently came the beauteous apparition, filling the frame with a picture of light, and seeming to irradiate the dusky fire-shot chamber. Sainct Lavin did not approve, and was wont to appear less light-bringing as he came in hot pursuit; but Berengaria had the rare but terrible misfortune of too much innocence, and dreamed not of

evil in the guardian, who was no guardian at all, but false to her high idea of him.

In one of these fateful moments Zachaire stood, pausing from his work with hammer in hand and the new, tired, restless look upon his face, and declared his love to Berengaria.

Her start when she understood—the involuntary cry of happiness, and the simple gesture of the hands outstretched —Denis long remembered these with love and shame.

"Then my brother will have no more care for my safety, for I shall be with you," she said, with so implicit a trust that Denis groaned aloud. "Are you

not happy as I am?" she asked wonderingly. "You tremble because I was a nun. Will it indeed be wrong to marry you? It *cannot* be; I did not know you lived when I took the vows," she cried, coming up to him and clinging to his arm in that way she had, so modest that it was not caressing, yet so confiding that it was like a child.

"Will you trust me altogether, Berengaria, my one faith? We cannot be married by a priest, formally, because——"

"Of my safety? But I do not fear," said the maiden half perplexedly.

"It cannot be. Would any priest allow it? Can you not see that it must

not be, and never could? Must we therefore part—we who love one the other? Could we not be faithful without a tedious set of antiquated words droned over us? O maiden, you have aroused in me so many pure and glorious aspirations and you will not stay to see your work carried out! Have you not learned to rely on me, that you are ready to see me and hear my voice no more? Whither would you go, without me for evermore? To the convent?"

"Yes," said Berengaria, in a broken voice, and slowly leaving the grim dark room, "yes, I have learned to rely on you. As I trusted the cloister, so I trusted you. What is a sharper pain

than to find faith misplaced? My faith has been twice deceived, and I am very weary of the world. May you be forgiven, sir; you have nearly broken my heart."

And she was gone, but her influence remained in the shame Zachaire felt at the sight of her suffering. For Berengaria seemed so high and holy a thing that treachery or cruelty to her showed like a fiend's malice against an unfriended angel. Zachaire loathed himself until he was ready to never raise his eyes to the maiden's face again. But then he remembered that she loved him; and this thought drove him almost desperate. He thought that the

children of light are an unpractical folk, full of strange scruples, of too highly strung an honour, difficult to be dealt with, but meant to succumb to the children of this world. Yet all the time he knew he dared not press his point with Berengaria. It was very strange, the power she unconsciously exercised. Her evident, wonderful timidity was sufficient in itself to appeal to the compassion of manhood, whilst yet her dreadful innocence, conjoined with an instinctive, foreboding repulsion of evil, surrounded her and seemed to speak the inherent divinity of the soul that was in her.

Meanwhile the Damoiselle Sainct

Lavin, without betraying her lover's meanness to her brother, contrived to make Hilary very anxious to depart at once. Hilary's readiness was augmented by the altered and sullen manner of his host, who, conscious of past ill-intentions, was reserved and nervous. Hence the Chevalier Sainct Lavin made all preparations and fixed on the evening for an unobserved and hurried start. Zachaire assented gloomily, and was resigned to let go Berengaria for ever, and then possibly to hang himself, when his passion flew to arms once more.

But two short hours before departure, Berengaria stole to the alchemist's laboratory, for the last time to look in his absence

upon all she had loved. She had not visited this room since Zachaire's one outbreak, and she trod fearfully, glancing about lest in some corner should stand temptation. The dusky octagonal space was untenanted, however; all was very still, save for the sleepy stirrings of recently ardent fire. Lifting her white skirt and moving softly over the littered floor, Berengaria made her way to the huge chest on which lay all the various powders, pebbles, fluids, chemicals, which Zachaire had once believed in. The mystery, the true philosopher's stone, the "agent," was it lying there as yet unrecognized amongst them? Berengaria gazed and sighed to think how she might never know if her

lover should succeed in his magic quest. How proud she would have been the day when Denis should have come to her, the great possessor of a mystic secret, the changer of created things, the triumpher over Nature's reticence!

She went and stood by the great furnace, in which the red-hot embers remained to tell the tale of one more day's unsuccessful labour. The air was close, and no light was there but that of the sinking fire and a small hanging lamp left burning. There was a hopeless gloom, a silence, a loneliness about the place. The white woman-angel who had lighted it thus long felt all the desolation, and sank down amidst the iron tools to bless the

chamber with a loving prayer. It was here and thus that Denis, wandering aimlessly in his great restlessness, beheld his guest, with one white hand resting on his chest of minerals, with her head thrown back as if to supplicate the gods of this dismal hearth; in her white robe and half covered by her pale gold hair, he saw his love. He saw her, about to leave him, yet keeping back the flood of tenderness close barred by her brave honour; suffering, inflicting a great sorrow on herself.

And this was in an age when purity was held in light esteem, if it interfered with passion.

Zachaire leaned against the door-post

and watched, with eager eyes and an aching heart, until Berengaria rose, turned, and saw him. Her first movement was one of distress and fear, but that passed, and she approached the alchemist with a sad and noble smile.

"I have been praying for thee, Denis. The Virgin have thee in her keeping! Thou shalt be blest; life is not always dreary, my beloved."

"Berengaria! I cannot let thee pass out of my life."

"Remember that I am thy guest."

Berengaria stretched out her small slight hand, fragile and firm; Zachaire, scarcely knowing what he did, receded and bent his head as she went softly,

timorously past him; and from out the gathering darkness he heard the loved voice once more coming to him, sighing back, "Farewell."

CHAPTER IV.

"Die Seele, vor welcher der Morgenthau der Ideale sich zum grauen kalten Landregen entfärbet hat."

"Titan," JEAN PAUL RICHTER.

DENIS ZACHAIRE sat in the study of his oldest and best friend, the learned Venceslas, Abbé of Cahors. The alchemist was asking counsel from a priest; and such a priest, with that firm mouth, with the lines of thought about it, and the thick white eyebrows shadowing, but not able to obscure, the deep-set fiery eyes.

Intellect and command seemed to share that physiognomy between them. And, indeed, many men held that elderly strong-featured abbé in respect: some thought him, for all his courtly manner, hard; but these were not the poor. Denis Zachaire both knew and loved him. For was not Venceslas himself an alchemist? In his youth he had been one of the noblest, most untiring sort—unsuccessful to this day, but ardent still, through others.

Denis and he had toiled for months together, and the abbé was now, with his strong face kindling into passionate energy, inquiring after what the alchemist had lately done.

"Alas! it has been but little," admitted Denis, "and that little of the blindest groping order. I have hit upon no new thoughts. My mind has not been, reverend sir, in that unworldly state of peace that all discovery demands. You would call me traitor did I say to you, 'I have not worked;' yet in sooth I know not how the days went by. I have been much distracted."

"Ah!" the abbé said indulgently, "there are times when the invention lies fallow whilst the intellect absorbs materials."

Zachaire smiled ruefully.

"Of course you have read?"

"Father——"

"Listen, listen, Zacharius, good youth, to whom I trust to make the truth of alchemy apparent. I have great news for thee. Dost know the works of Raymond Lully?"

"But slightly; nor have I studied them."

The abbé rose in silence, took a small silver key from his pouch and made his way to a massive chest of oak and iron. Portentously he took out thence a small worn manuscript, profusely and enigmatically illuminated; this he laid in Zachaire's hands, and then he solemnly blessed the alchemist.

"Son, there are contained matters too deep for me with my old time-worn

head to fathom; but thou—young, strong, alert—read, read. And let me know from time to time how it prospers with thee, young man," the abbé said with half a sigh, sinking into his great arm-chair and regarding Denis as a father would a favourite son. "But that weightier matters keep me here—yes, weightier I say, since they are the affairs of heaven—I myself would fain be with thee, working these old foolish hands of mine from white to brown. Oh, rejoice young man, in thy youth! It is hard to see the shadow of death deepening day by day, and to know the Great Secret is yet undisclosed. *Heu! senibus vitae portio quanta manet!*—how

I could work if I were young!" He stopped, with his strong old hand clenched upon the arm of his chair, his eyes flashing blue fire upon his disciple, and his goodly frame held straight and martially.

Denis fluttered the pages of Lully's manuscript with a restless air, and began to speak with some impatience.

"Sir," he said, "this fire, this ardent zeal of yours, is the enthusiasm of an elder—pardon me—who has but to dream and not to work. How, think you that I feel, tied down to an anvil, suffocated with brain-wearying vapours, doomed to spend each day in the pursuit of a fresh cheat, and to fall asleep each night with disap-

pointment for my bedfellow and the inspiration of my dreams? When you rest from your day's labour, you may have often roused or soothed a human soul. But what have *I* done? Who is the better for my daily failure? Myself not; that I know. Who else?"

"Young fool!" broke out the older man impatiently; "child—that, when he is foiled in his play, goes to bed crying! Is not philosophy, Zacharius, the better for thy strivings, immediately a failure though they be? Wouldst have the wage of each day's labour told out to thee in an ounce of gold? Where were then thy future, my future, philosophy's great revelation? Can you not live on hope, O most material son

of Adam the first day-labourer? Shame on that student who must see his task marked out for him, know where it ends and how long it takes to learn it! Success I begin to fear as a poor thing, if a man does not care to serve apprenticeship to earn it at the last. A man, whom *I* have trained too—O great Hercules!"

Zachaire sat silent after this exordium, watching with appreciative eye his teacher's noble mien of inspiration. When the abbé had somewhat cooled, Denis quietly held out his hand.

"See you that scar, this burn, the discoloration there? Visible results of past experiments, sir. Could you look into my soul, you would find each day's disgust as

plainly burnt in there. Most honoured Venceslas, you do not work from day to day."

A long time the abbé was silent, studying with firm scrutiny the depressed countenance of the alchemist. At last, in his own gentle but sudden manner, he addressed Zachaire:

"You have given me a hint that, perhaps, I needed. I am the enthusiast; my junior does the work. Come, then, my weeping philosopher; come, my cynical goldsmith, you shall account to me for thus stumbling under the weight of philosophy's harness. Confusion has beset your mind, say you? Then, to judge from your years, appearance, and your wisdom, one well may say you are in love."

"These worldly thoughts become you not, noble sir; but so it is," replied Denis, smiling and sighing.

"Zacharius," resumed the abbé, pleased with his own discrimination, "I myself had once the misfortune to be young, and though I chose as my sole bride the Church, it was not, trust me, before the woman I loved had left the world. Not so, by Heaven! I well may be indulgent. Bless thee, my son, I feel my youth indeed renewed in thee. Ah! but, though I had never thy crisp strong locks, I had as broad shoulders in my time, and there was a glance in *my* eye that had no fatigue in it. Worldly fathers, however," pursued Venceslas, "are fools to speak of living

again in their children, for these by their mediocre development do shame us. You young folk are but miniatures of us. Yet *we* are better than our ancestors. Marry, 'tis strange."

"Yes, reverend sir," meekly replied the disciple; "but, such as I am, small as are my gifts, I am in love."

"Then marry, son, and God be with thee."

"Nay, hear my lady's story first," said Zachaire and forthwith told the tale.

"You see well how that I cannot marry her—a nun, a fugitive. Yet must I have her. Alchemy will be the loser else."

"Let alchemy lose all you have to

give it sooner," was the abbé's quick response.

"Not so. I will not give up my hopes; I will not suffer a harassing trouble that preys upon my life. I will have the maiden and be faithful. Father, can you not see I *must?*"

"Young man, I see a fever in your blood and a fire in your eye. I would warn you. Is the Damoiselle Sainct Lavin a worthy maiden? Have you held her sacred? You turn pale, Zacharius; what am I to understand?"

"Hers is that dreadful innocence that dazzles and withholds, like the fabulous crystal shield of English Arthur. But what can protect from hate or love?

Her strength of soul so far has saved her, but through no virtuous help of mine."

Zachaire had approached the abbé with a passionate supplication in the outstretching of his hands; but Venceslas, with an unutterably scathing gesture, had drawn away his long robes from the young man's touch. He rose and silently walked to the recess of the fireplace, in which he stood, fervently stirring the great logs of wood until they emitted sparkles like his own indignant eyes.

Zachaire stood at a distance and waited to hear something.

"I have always thought," at last began the Abbé of Cahors, "I have always learnt, that a man grows in the love of

wisdom precisely as he declines in the love of pleasure. This may be but a monkish notion, but I tell you, young man, it is an essential element of instruction to coarse minds like yours. You are far gone indeed, Zacharius, when you cannot be trusted with your guest. But it is the spirit of the times. Our poetry all breathes impurity and lightness; our chivalry is fading, our manliness degenerating into violence, our gentleness to enervation. Men like you, Zacharius, headstrong, reckless, sensual, require a curb from the outer world to supply the modesty that their mind lacks. This curb the times do not provide. Will there ever come a century when honour will

be no dream of prowest knights alone, but an all-pervading, irresistible motive power amongst men?"

"Could there ever come a time of infallible safety for women, whilst men are men?" queried Zachaire in melancholy scoffing.

"Not while any male descendant of yours is living, I grant," returned the abbé. "Well, young man, you have disappointed me. An alchemist should be a gentleman, to begin with."

"I do not see that at all," Zachaire was on the point of beginning; but he saw from the abbé's look that a few more words in this strain and he would be ordered from the house.

"Father, my friend and my confessor, what mercy have you for me?"

"As much as I have for myself, nay more. Art thou not my treasured son, the bequeathed gift of thy dead father; the hope of my age; my fellow-worker, my fellow-sinner? Rise up, Zacharius," said the abbé, pressing his hand upon the lowered head of the alchemist; "rise from thy knee, and let us see what help I may give thee. Wilt thou forget this maiden, and step above this turmoil? Keep her in thy memory as a sweet dream of early days, and, until the trouble of thy heart has stilled itself, remember the words of the great old Greek. Nay, he *was* a play-

wright; but how different from our scribblers of morality and farce, or even from Jodelle, of whom we hear so much! Says Æschylus, I do remember, Δίκα δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσιν μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει: and again he says that wisdom is entreated by our sufferings, and that the memories of pain which haunt us through our sleep do bring their recompense in hard-won prudence. Will not this content thee? Wilt thou sacrifice nothing to thy divinity, cold lover of wisdom!"

"I contest your position, father. Troubles distract the mind; and surely, if Wisdom be so coy a goddess as we know her, she will not grant her

favour to the half-hearted worshipper. I say the clear and sunny heights of thought look down for ever unattainable to the strugglers in the abyss of passion. I must be free before I can climb."

"An' you deem the chains of Hymen an essential to the freedom of the soul," commented the abbé with a smile that might almost pass for worldly satire; "wilt thou wed another?"

"Nay, by my patron saint!"

"Then what wilt thou do, thou turbulent youth?"

"I will marry Berengaria Sainct Lavin."

"With the Inquisition looking in at the church-door?"

"I will marry Berengaria Sainct Lavin."

"Thou art bold. And what silent priest shall join your hands?"

"Father, will you confer one great and signal blessing more on me, whom you have honoured with your protection, and who will yet live to be a pride to you? Will you, an abbé, in the face of the Church, marry us?"

"I will, my son," said the abbé composedly.

"Thank God," said Denis, and kneeling he bent his head low over the honoured hand of this daring priest.

CHAPTER V.

"The prize is in the process: knowledge means
Ever-renewed assurance by defeat
That victory be somehow still to reach."
"Ferishtah's Fancies," BROWNING.

It was five months since Zachaire's marriage. In closest secrecy, Venceslas and Hilary Sainct Lavin alone present, Denis Zachaire, the alchemist, took to wife Berengaria Sainct Lavin, the fugitive nun. A more dangerous proceeding could hardly have been conceived, and would never have been carried out. Dangerous to all parties concerned; worst for the bride herself, but fatal to her brother and her husband also were it known, or to the brave old man who had dared the censure of an unenlightened

world to make two lovers insecurely happy. But no fear of the future troubled Denis or his wife. It may now seem strange that the pure-minded Berengaria could deign to link herself to a man whom formerly she could not trust, of whose dangerous spirit she had already had experience; but such considerations were but lightly dwelt on then. In the frank Middle Ages, when subtlety lurked in the schools alone, and equality in rank was the one desideratum in a husband, a maiden would marry the man she loved, let his vices be what they might. So Berengaria had no definite thoughts of turning rake-reformer, like some incautious modern maids; all she

knew or cared for was, that the opportunity had come to wed the man she loved.

Denis took his wife down to his birth-place in Toulouse, and settled quietly down in the old family manor to pursue his long-interrupted search. He could work now. No violent exterior desires tore his mind away from its intention. His life was fuller than it had ever been before, and yet no more distracting. When he failed—when a carefully worked-out experiment had come, like all the rest, to nothing—Zachaire could find a comfort in his adorable wife. Berengaria was a woman to lift the heart of any man; so loving, so modest and so

reassuring. Peaceful in mind, therefore, Zachaire went back to his metallic dreams. A fine man for work he was; untiring in brain, physically powerful and enduring; devoured with yearning after his aim, yet steady and indomitable in the pursuit of it. All the old-established steady habits of his youth came back; he toiled incessantly as ever, and his work was lightened by a more vivid glory of hope. For at last, in the MS. of Lully's given him by Venceslas, Zachaire was led to the spot where the secret treasure lay; remained only the necessary digging and searching to bring it to light. Just at the time, however, when Denis was in full train of work that was really on the

right tack, arose an awful enemy—the plague.

Toulouse, the bright and bustling, was hushed. Like a flight of birds when the coming thunderstorm is weighing down the air, the inhabitants of the city silently but rapidly took shelter. They left the pestilence-stricken town—those who could leave, for alas! too many in the panic were left themselves, to die of loathly disease, uncared for, agonized, desperate. Zachaire was one of those most scared; but it was not for himself, but Berengaria. A terrible struggle the young wife went through. Whether she should flee, like others, to the sweet, safe country, or remain by her husband's side

to brave Death to his face—this question the devoted woman answers but in one way. She would remain, if Zachaire would allow it. But he would not; neither would he go. His last, most hopeful trial in process, he would not leave his furnaces a day until the result should be known. So for the first time they parted. Hilary Sainct Lavin took his sister away to a quiet uninquiring village without the boundary of pestilence; and Denis stayed alone in his home, intent, undisturbed by any misery of the devastated city—a man with a purpose. One companion he had with him—his cousin Raoul de Foncé. This man was a young rake of Paris,

now in hiding after a duel, having been tracked to this dismal city by the avengers of his slain opponent, and here abandoned by his pursuers and receiving a ghastly sanctuary. Zachaire had drunk and jested with the fellow in lighter days; but now he paid him no more than the due from a host and the solicitude of a protector. For Zacharius the alchemist had time to notice nothing; he had not time to eat, to sleep; he might have forgotten to breathe, so little interest did he take in himself or in anything save his experiment. Sometimes he would stand working in the closeness of his laboratory until even his strong frame collapsed and he was fain to throw himself down

to rest. Sometimes, again, an operation would take time; a period would come when all was done that could be done, and there was left nothing but "to dance into the arms of death," to wish for the morrow, to try to annihilate the moments in between. This Zachaire used to do by writing his "Opusculum of the Natural Philosophy of Metals." Into this journal, as it might be called, did he put all his past experience and each day's new discovery. Seldom did he lay it down without a yearning prayer to be allowed to give the story its right ending, to seal it with the great seal of success, straight from the King's own hand.

One day, as he absently looked up

from this occupation, he beheld the quizzical face of his refugee cousin bending over him to look at what he had written.

"I hope," the words stood there—"I hope, at last, most definitely. It has been weary work threading the maze; but once the clue in my hand, how much shorter the journey! I see the end. Pray Heaven it be no chimera."

"Why, man," cried De Foncé laughing, "wilt be the true prophet still? Who should believe thy ravings? And look! how thy locks are growing grey with intensity of work—grey hairs at thirty-nine! Better have stuck to the good Gascon wine."

Angrily Zachaire pushed his manuscript from under the gaily sneering glances of his cousin, and moved to return to the crucibles.

"Leave this folly, Denis," conjured De Foncé. "You waste all your substance on the melting-pots; and old age will come and find your wife dead of starvation and yourself a half-witted visionary, with a roomful of debased metals, and nought but molten mercury to make you a jerkin withal."

Zachaire's answer was expressed in a snap of his fingers, for he felt the end too near to require justification.

And now came winter, freezing out disease There was again a rattle of

carts on the rough-paved roads, a kindling of fires in the reoccupied houses. Slowly and tentatively came back the exiles: first, those whose business necessitated their return as soon as Toulouse was alive again; after, their wives and children; last, the stranger and the guest, in full security.

It was long before Zachaire sent for his wife back again; and when she came, impatient to see the husband she had pined for—another woman might have felt a chill of disappointment,—so abstracted was the alchemist that when the fair, slight figure stood again within his doorway, greeting him with her own benignant smiles and outstretched hands,

he scarcely gave her half an hour of welcome. But Berengaria was a wife such as there are few in any age. It was content to her to sit dreamily by and note the progress of the great experiment, and sometimes fondly grasp the hand Denis silently held out to her as he passed to and fro. She wanted no demonstration of affection, being too confident, and having the rare gift of respect for another's preoccupation. She had come home: she was happy; she made Zacharius so. The care of this tender creature was never a *moral* burden.

And now the day of Zachaire's life had come; the supreme, culminating moment for which he had alone existed,

and unto which he would henceforward only have to look back—this had come. All the week had been a time of thrilling suspense, increasing day by day until Zachaire thought he could not much longer bear it. He was waiting for the appearance of the "three colours," those mystic heralds of success which, as the philosophers have written, signalize the approaching completion of the great work. It was midnight of Saturday; Zachaire watched by the firelight, noting little the atrocious heat of his furnaces or the lateness of the hour; he watched till his soul felt bound up in the thing—as if, should expectation fail, his life would vanish with it. He stared at the

seething mercury which he had incorporated "with a little of that divine stone," until at the last he feared to trust his credulous eyes. But no, this was fulfilment; here was room for no mistake; the boiling metal hissed as he broke open the crucible in which it had been inclosed, and resolved itself into an apparent haze, tri-coloured, aurora-like: rose, Tyrian purple and a ruddy gold. One instant Denis gazed, petrified; the halcyon colours vanished, after playing like fire-flies over the surface. He looked for the result—into a vessel of "very good gold." This happened in the early morning of Easter Sunday, 1550.*

* Figuier, "Les Alchimistes."

Every most severe test which the goldsmiths could invent did Denis apply to his created metal. He found no doubt: in his mind (a conscientious and enlightened one) and in the minds of his contemporaries, there was no doubt.

If we of later days raise sceptical eyebrow, that belongs not to Zacharius' life, which was over and settled long before the exact science of chemistry had birth. Suffice it that on this day of all days, this Easter-day, when the bells rang gloriously to commemorate a divine victory which for centuries has been celebrated by rescued generations, Denis Zachaire, whom a few of us know now as an obscure enthusiast of olden days,

celebrated also his human victory, won by pain and watching, over the lowest part of little-understood creation.

Men took their life simply and seriously in those days. Greek subtilty, Roman stoicism, Alexandrine indifference, had no part in the sturdy religion of the Middle Ages. Since Denis was a freethinker, he called in no monk to blot out the face of heaven with his intrusive cowl; but, as ever in the great crises of his life, the alchemist knelt and prayed.

And this was the alchemist's prayer:

"God of all genius, who has placed on my efforts, once well and faithfully directed, thy seal of approbation, with my whole life I thank Thee. Thou who

hast nerved me to work and to suffer, day after day, bending under the hard pressure of the means for the sake of the possible end, receive the thankful spirit that cannot breathe its praises into words. If I am glad, Thou, God, knowest. Can a man speak out his happiness when revelation is its source? There is a terror in a joy unknown by others. Illuminate me, lest I fall!

"O first Philosopher! full many of my brothers have tampered with the power Thou hast given them, or feigned to have it unbestowed by Thee. They have been the flatterers of kings, the seekers after pleasure, the dealers with dark spirits, the lovers of money. They have

been worse—the debasers of the pure gold, philosophy, with the alloy, deceit. Let me wield Thy terrible power with unsullied truth. Once gone forth, be the discovery still guarded by Thy hand. Thy rest be on the soul of Raimundus Lullius, from whom I first caught light; and blessing on that other teacher who has ever held the torch in our wanderings together. May Zacharius prove no traitor to the high soul of Venceslas. For his sake—whom, if a God sees men and values them, Thou lovest—protect his disciple, who possesses in his stead a secret held too stern temptation to meet and spoil a spotless soul. It was not to David—the man of enthusiastic praise,

the man after Thine own heart—it was to the worldly cynic, Solomon, that Thou didst confide the charge of all earth's wisdom and the building of the Holy of Holies. Yet to how many gods did Solomon lift up his hands! Alas! an evil omen for my future. Protect my fallibility, O God! or crush me, if Thou wilt, but raise philosophy from the ashes of my dishonour. It may be after-ages will scorn my mission, and, in their brilliant illumination, will mock the long-extinguished meteor I drew down. But it came from Heaven, my star. Thou, the Patron of philosophy, wilt make it valued at its true worth in the true time. Thou wilt care for Thine own."

CHAPTER VI.

O death, that maketh life so sweet,
O fear, with mirth before thy feet,
What have ye yet in store for us,
The conquerors, the glorious ?

"Jason," Morris.

When Berengaria Zachaire returned from mass that Easter morning, and went to try and win a moment's holiday-making from her husband, she found the alchemist lying by the window in a heavy sleep. Why should he not sleep well—he, the toil-stained and victorious? He had accomplished his great purpose; he could now point back to the completion of his life's best chapter; he could rest, sleep, die, if needful. There came now one of those great pauses which we sometimes know in

our existence. The tension of years was relaxed, and Denis fell all together; he became dangerously ill of a brain-fever.

Berengaria's trouble was great, for hitherto she and her husband had lived so solitary a life that fear of her detection had been none. Now it became needful to call in physicians, and at the same time to repel the incursions of priests, several of whom, to do them justice, were animated by the purest desire to reclaim the freethinking alchemist, and to teach him orthodoxy, as he lay senseless and raving on his bed. Berengaria very wisely had never gone within a hundred yards of any monk without the precaution of a long thick veil all over her

pale gold hair and her distinguished face. She was in great straits how to keep them off now, and finally had to take De Foncé into her confidence, with a reservation always of her own history. She dwelt upon Zachaire's dislike to the priests until De Foncé was fully persuaded of the necessity to keep them away, and acted as a sort of watch-dog for her. Even then Berengaria was in perpetual alarm, lest Denis in his delirium should betray secrets.

And this state of things lasted several weeks, during which time, owing to De Foncé's lively gossip, Zachaire's fame and recent triumph spread over all France, whilst the battered victor laboriously,

though languidly, crawled away from death's door. But what an awakening when recovery came!

Zachaire lay in a sort of trance, living over his life again, with the one grand refrain of success ringing through it all. Whatever might come to him hereafter, the laurel-wreath was his, and who should wrest it from him? "What if your discovery should be finally proved a mistake?" he congratulated himself. "For how many centuries might discovery of the truth have been postponed, without the aid of your unthanked but conscious power?"

There was never for Zachaire a spring like this. Did ever the birds sing, the lilacs bloom, the soft wind murmur,

and the sun smile as now they do? —now, when nothing irks the man lying tranquilly there, suffused with happiness, protected by it so that no vexation can penetrate the golden armour, and haunted by no obligation to rise and toil? There is nothing for Zachaire to do or suffer; but why? Because so much has been done and suffered. It is holiday time. What a reposeful indolence, like the Buddhist's conscious sleep, inwoven with memory of hard hours lived through like a man!

Success, success, how worth a struggle!

But then how few, like Zachaire, can own to having found and known their success. Are they not after some goal

they think better, before ever the success of the old hope shall come? They scorn fruition, and look forward; any *fact*, it would seem—even a pleasant fact—ceases to be the supreme point in a man's life. For we are made to despise the moment; and indeed we have done so with such frequency that we have even made this remark before. But, suppose the success attained, and prompt oblivion to seize the victor—to cut him off in the instant of his victory—then let him be conscious again before "other desires and other hopes beset him," and when he wakes with the old war-chant in his brain, strangely mingled with a new pæon of glorious finality—then, for an unspeak-

ably brief moment, compared to the time of service needed to earn it, he may taste his triumph.

This strange experience Zachaire lived through; and it is this, more than all the poor fellow's honest delusions, hard labour, and true genius, that raises his life very far above that of the herd, and ought to make him live for ever in the hearts of those who from time to time have yearned and have attained, have been blest and have known it.

Lying in his peaceful trance, Zachaire saw all his life again; contemplated all his old battle-fields, whence the pain and effort was gone, leaving only the trophy and the spoil. He went back in thought

to the day when his real mental life began—when he found that purpose towards which he had trained his whole existence—to the day when his high-born father first confided him to a preceptor and sent him to the College of Arts at Bordeaux. Little guessed that parent what young Zachaire was actually imbibing, instead of letters and philosophy. The tutor who was to have preceded his pupil in the common route to Parnassus preferred a devious by-path known as alchemy. The preceptor being one of the most laborious, if not the most skilful, followers of Hermes, what does the earnest and impressible pupil but become an alchemist too?

Followed many days of arduous labour and nights of grudging rest. The college made nothing of Zachaire, who was, naturally enough, always asleep when not engaged in working his heart out on the metal question. After college the student returned home to receive some sound paternal views as to his past conduct, and was then sent (still with the same unsuspected preceptor) to Toulouse, where he was enjoined the study of the Law. Grand chance for master and pupil! Precious humbugs, they had their knapsacks filled with manuscript "receipts" of their own invention—receipts for the converting of all metals into gold—which they were now at their

greater leisure about to put to the test. At once they rigged up small furnaces, then large ones, in their not enormous rooms; the fires blazed, the metals melted, the money vanished, and the scholars enjoyed themselves amazingly. For is there not ever a subtle charm in spending money? Does not the pleasure seem keener as the prospect of replacing what is spent grows faint? When two summers of this warm and beneficent occupation had passed, the tutor, that untiring warrior, died on the field, pressing the hardened hand of his impoverished disciple, and leaving him as sole legacy the last ideas of a fever-stricken man as to the uses of eau-de-vie in transmutations.

Behold then Denis, master of himself (for his father had also died, probably of grief for his son's eccentricity) and master of remarkably little else. For of course every angel of money given to the alchemist to prosecute his studies withal, had long since flown up to heaven in smoke. Left without guidance, Maistre Zachaire fell a prey to divers impostors of Italy, who taught him marvellous secrets, and walked off demurely with such moneys as the young alchemist could scrape together to give them. All the operators Denis had met hitherto had been honest enthusiasts like himself; it was a new experience to the young man to be cheated. After undergoing the

process several times, and saying very frequently in his haste, "All men are liars," a happy chance came to him. He met the friend who was to be the guiding-star of his life.

As the thought of Venceslas first crossed Zachaire's mental résumé, it was as if a light had parted black darkness, a fire shot up from the ashes, a flower sprung from a barren soil. But there is no simile to express the power of a fresh mind; only the glow of comfort and reliance felt by those who have come under its influence can serve as its interpreter. Denis Zachaire sighed with the pleasure as he conjured up his friend's image, and a great longing for the first

time since his illness troubled his peace. He must go, as soon as he can mount horse, to recite their mutual triumph to the abbé. Having made that resolve, he settled again to his happy dreaming.

Yes, the Abbé Venceslas, of Cahors, first appears on the scene. Then, much as he is now, erect, fire-eyed, grandiloquent, brilliant. "Ah! full of grace are thy lips, Venceslas, chivalrous spirit! fit to lead thousands if only thou hadst not been too high of thought to touch the masses. Did they say thou wert wanting in true sympathy, in the great grace of tolerance?" Zachaire, the chosen, the adopted son, laughed at the thought. There was never a mother so

merciful to error, never a father so potent to guide to truth; so Denis thought.

The abbé was himself an alchemist. He met Zachaire, and saw in the discouraged, hungered look of him an earnest of good work to be done in happier mental atmosphere. He loved the man with his characteristic thoroughness; took him home, and braved the jeers of the world by making him the adopted son of a priest. Moreover, he gave Zachaire some money. The friends shared their goods, in fact, and entered upon a long and laborious experiment which it took a year to fail in.

When the day came in which the

friends walked up and down the cloisters of the abbey, acknowledging their failure, it was Zachaire who was downcast, not his elder coadjutor. Venceslas had ever the knack of emerging from defeat like a lively dog from a beating, glad to find it had been no worse, glad it was over, glad that it was not yet to come. Venceslas hoped; his eye emitted blue sparkles, and his undaunted crest was lifted to meet the evening breezes with as much unbiassed power of enjoyment as before. Suddenly an idea of more than ordinary lumination coursed through the active brain of the abbé, and was by him, with that ready confidence which made him a living instruction

instead of a dead language to his friends, communicated to Zacharius.

"Go thou to Paris, armed with money and with interest. Learn from men; there is much in men, if only thou canst get at it. Few have the Socratic willingness to share their crust of wisdom with the seeker; but thou hast in thy very sternness of resolve a key to unlock hearts. 'Grand légiste,' as thy relations will have thee, thou shouldst be able to persuade. If any man, Zacharius, hath a secret, make him tell it thee. If not, gather round thee all the alchemists of Paris, and strike fire from the friction of your differing minds. And hark ye, my son, thou art young, and Paris is the sunniest path that leads to hell."

"Fear me not, father," responded the alchemist soberly; "I never was young: from boyhood I was altogether in earnest. I was born on a work-day."

"Be not therefore soured, good son," admonished Venceslas. "When the great secret is found, the divine work accomplished, thou shalt marry a wife, and thou shalt use my estates and wealth as a true son may do. I shall be dead then; but while living I will use thee, son, and thou shalt go where the duties of my ecclesiastical calling prevent my going; thou shalt be my messenger, my Mercury. Go forth!"

Of all the towns in Europe, Paris was then the one most frequented by al-

chemists.* For more than a month the pupil of Venceslas remained obscure and unnoticed amongst the men more celebrated. But he was clearing out a path for himself all that time, and by degrees the stalwart figure and preoccupied countenance of the adept of Guyenne were familiar to the eyes of all Parisian votaries of Hermes.

At that time it was the custom for the alchemists to meet together daily in the quiet and solemn aisles of Notre-Dame, there to discuss in common their hopes, experiences, and fears. A queer sight we can picture to ourselves, that cool seclusion, peopled by an eager group of men,

* Figuier, from whom this sketch of Zachaire's earlier life is mostly taken.

ardent with all the enthusiasm of their occult calling; their end one, though pursued by such various means; their hearts aflame with ambition and craving, their doubtful wisdom generously open to their brethren's service. How the World-soul must have laughed to see them, wearing their hearts out for what we think to be a myth! There is nothing, however, for rearing and bringing out the excellence of men, like your double-dyed fallacy. It is sad for truth, doubtless, that matters should stand so; let us hope this will not be for ever. But give a youth interest in the existence of a chimera, and you have made a man of him at once. Nothing exceeds his

devotion, his perseverance, his certainty. That ideal, that unicorn, will absorb all that he has in his nature of great or lasting worth. He will live for it, die for it, work for it, pray for it. Why? Apparently because it is not true. And yet, perhaps what the man strains after and seems never to attain, may be just a prophetic vision, incompatible indeed with present conditions, but endowed with the power to have existed or to exist some time, somewhere. May not the visionary be a creator in his way? If we strive and yearn our souls sick for some impossible boon, what should hinder us from wresting it out of the very arms of Chaos? Why should not we, who are

made, make in our turn? Our bodies create sons and daughters; our souls, being higher, ought at least to have an equal power. Only, as the more perfect the organization the slower the production, we do not yet so easily realize the children of the spirit. Some there are who base their life-dream on a coarse and palpable superstructure; indeed there are some whose religion, for instance, would fall all together were it once adequately demonstrated to them that this our earth was not made in six days by the dial. This is wanton; but supposing the chimeras of the dreamer to be finer than what lies beneath them, then leave the man delusion till he make it fact.

But all this talk of delusion is an anachronism, for there was no such word in the alchemical dictionaries. Zachaire was a favourite amongst the professional operators, who all recognized in the "Gentilhomme et Philosophe Guiennois," as he loved to style himself, a man of a rare order of merit. Denis called back now with pleasure the confidence they had placed in him, the way in which they instinctively had looked to him to prove the truth of alchemy.

"And I have not deceived them, dear good fellows!" thought the victor, tossing feverously on his couch. One experiment of that time, to which Zachaire looked back with a pitying smile of

newly acquired wisdom, was the renowned one of the cinnabar transmuted into silver. Heavens! what excitement there was within Notre-Dame when Zachaire and a young Greek stranger first propounded their new plan to the eager group of hearers! The money that Zachaire had spent on the emprise (for need it be said that no coin left the hands of his wily coadjutor?)! Well went the preliminary operations, and the day came when all the alchemists arrived by appointment at Zachaire's house, breathless, incredulous, yet hoping against hope, to witness the great work. What was the result? Why, good, and to appearance final. The cinnabar vanished and left a

small quantity of silver. For some time after, Zachaire and his Greek were esteemed the only alchemists worth knowing in Paris; but there came a day of hard discomfiture, when some jealous spirit discovered the reason *why* the cinnabar produced silver. Simply because there was, by accident, a small quantity of silver in the cinnabar to begin with; this remained when the sulphate of mercury, being volatile, had disappeared.

This discovery was altogether too much for Zachaire. It threw him into that state of languid hopelessness in which we first found him and took up his story. He left Paris, too discouraged and disgusted even to seek the ardent abbé, and

went heavily to his home. Even now, from the sunlight of success, Denis looked back with a sigh of self-pity to that time of gloom. For it is the worst of trouble to us mortals, that the impression remains in retrospect as dark and intolerable as it seemed at the time, nay sometimes far more so—when we can view the period of disgust in its entirety instead of living it through blindly, piece by piece, day by day, with its insignificant fluctuations of misty hope to stimulate us.

At this bad time of his life Berengaria had arisen, thought Zachaire, "to lift and nerve me for the final effort." And passing over the time of mental misery that first followed—for he would not

think of Berengaria but as his wife—he remembered that it was the Abbé Venceslas who had married them. With that thought he sprang from his bed, weak as he was, and called to Berengaria. "When am I well?" cried he. "For I must haste to my friend. I have so much to tell him, so much to thank him for, that gratitude lies heavy on my soul, like the sword in the hand of the weary victor. I may not rest until I have fallen at the feet of Venceslas, bringing an offering of fine gold, and blessing him for my wife."

Gratitude gave place, however, to the law which requires compensation for effort, and Zachaire might mount no horse yet awhile. But ah, those days between!

It was the first time Denis had ever truly enjoyed his wife's society. Now as he sat under the trees of his garden, in the delicious languor of regaining health, he came to know the whole worth of his lady. She was so happy, also, to have him thus unfettered, satisfied, and radiant. Zachaire understood now full well, by the joy she felt in his presence and leisure, how remiss he had been, or, rather, how patient and self-contained this fair woman had been during the long months when his heart was indeed in her keeping, but his thoughts ran on far sterner themes. The lovers made up for it now, as they sat under the lilacs and heard the song of birds. In their minds there was a

great peace. Their happiness was for the time complete; it had been hard won, but it had not come too late, nor did the future seem to loom forbiddingly upon its fair enjoyment.

CHAPTER VII.

"And grief saith but one word—irreparable!"
"Wind-voices," PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON.

DE FONCÉ, who had profited thus long by Zachaire's shelter and influence, now departed to his own house, which was on the island, near to the castle of the Count of Toulouse. It was safe for the duellist to return home; pursuit for him had been definitely abandoned during the time of the plague, and now,

although duelling in itself had only just come in as a means of revenge, since swords instead of short daggers had been fashionable wear, yet so ordinary a thing was it for one man to fall into a rage and slay his enemy on the spot, that retaliation was rather lax, and the offender, having hid for some weeks, generally emerged and throve unmolested.

Thus did Raoul de Foncé. Settled again in his small but well-secured fortress, he recommenced his ordinary life, which was that of the wilder nobles of the period. Rumours had reached Zachaire of highway robberies in connection with Raoul's riches and luxury; these reports were not well authenticated,

but they were not incredible, considering the manners of the time.

Berengaria was glad to be free of the gay cousin, for reasons that Zachaire in his rough friendliness did not comprehend. The ex-nun had never taken to Raoul de Foncé. He was most respectful to her; but his light talk, his guitar, his songs of Provence, and his ruffles and roses impressed Berengaria with the same sensation as a heavy sweet perfume might have caused. She felt she ought to like the man and did not. His gallant phrases and the glances he gave her from under drooping eyelids were uncongenial to her serious and rather timid manners, and helped only to

make her relish her husband's taciturn tenderness and full, lingering gaze. The former played at chivalry; the latter strove in vain to give adequate expression to his reverence. Berengaria would have understood De Foncé, and have been firmer friends with him, had Heaven gifted her with any sense of humour; but this quality it had seen fit to withhold from the alchemist's beautiful wife.

As soon as strength had returned to him, Zachaire took horse and hastened away for Cahors. Before he started, he drew Berengaria towards him, giving her some lingering kisses as she stood delicately smoothing his horse's mane, and bade her use discretion more than

wonted till he should come again. For Hilary was gone to serve in the war in Lorraine, under Maurice of Saxony; and De Foncé was safe in his fortress, counting his spoils.

Denis loved not to part from Berengaria; it was ever like awaking from a pleasant dream, or drawing a curtain to shut out a sunrise. The last thing Zachaire saw, as he looked back before turning a bend of the road, was his Berengaria, still standing on the grey stone steps of the old manor, her gleaming white dress covered with the lights and shades thrown on her from the acacia-tree under which she stood, with her face hidden in her two hands and

the fair head bent as if in distress. It might have been the goddess Hestia weeping over a neglected home.

The husband reined in his horse and paused unobserved. He doubted whether he were not best return and comfort her; but at that moment his horse shied rather viciously at a small bird that darted past his eyes, and, starting forward, bore his master swiftly out of reach of hesitation.

There is a little passage in Zachaire's own writings, touching the news that met him when, at the end of his journey (taken, we may be sure, as fast as his health allowed) he reached the Abbey of Cahors. The passage is conceived in the

alchemist's own short, clear style, whereby we may know him capable of having been *bon écrivain* as well as *grand légiste*, but also, as it seems, is inadequate to express the feelings of so energetic a mediæval on an occasion of such importance:

"Je m'en allay pour trouver l'abbé à son abbaye, pour satisfaire à la foy et promesse que nous avions faict ensemble; mais je trouvay qu'il estoit mort six moys paravant; de quoy je fuz grandement marry."

This is all Zachaire commits to paper. He found, on arrival, that the abbé had died six months ago; and for this he was very sorry. Quite enough, too, to

tell the world about an irreparable, but strictly personal, loss.

But what it meant to Zachaire to stand in the old chapel, under whose pavements the body of Venceslas was laid, only those can know who have lost a valued friend, of aims and hopes similar to their own.

"And I had that to tell him which would have brought youth back to him!" cried Zachaire, miserably.

His loss was indeed great. In the first place, spite of their difference in age and principles, the two men had, on one subject at least, thought as one mind. Zachaire had seen the spirit of the ardent Venceslas in every ray of

success, and the consoler Venceslas in every failure. There was now no learned sympathy for Zachaire any more, and it grieved him.

Then Venceslas was such a downright good man. Too brilliant perhaps to be very deep, or why had *he* not made Zachaire's success? Admirable, however, in his warmth of enthusiasm and of heart, venerable in his learning, awful in his purity of life. It was an education to a young man to have known him, reflected his disciple with yearning pride, and little short of salvation to a young man of Zachaire's strong will and unchecked dispositions. The world was the worse for its loss of Venceslas,

as indeed all the monks of the Abbaye de St. Cyprian said.

One saddest blow of all in this sad happening was the dreadful incompleteness of it.

Venceslas was dead, but how? Not grasping the hand and supported by the arm of a grateful laurel-bearing pupil, his dying ears lulled by the sweet pæons of victory, soothed by the hope to find, in that heaven to which he aspired, Raimondus Lullius, and thank him for the light his works had given to alchemy's latest, most distinguished son. No; not thus died Venceslas. His fair life sank away amongst men who reverenced him, true;

but who could not understand his noble type of mind. Amidst them, with their conventional learning of the schools, their illuminated breviaries and unilluminated intellects, he was alone in soul. He must have sighed and pined to see the concentrated face and hard-set figure of his disciple coming towards him, brightening, lighting up, and hastening as their eyes met. Good Venceslas! There was such a large expansive power in him of looking into others' minds with what lay behind those keen and bright blue eyes of his. Zachaire thought how little need there ever had been to *tell* him much; he understood, he went before. There was a sort of acuteness about

the old man, in spite of his lofty ways, before which the not timid Zachaire had often quailed. Ridicule a man to his face the abbé could, too, but it was never a stinging satire; you had only to remember the smile and the sparkle that went with the words, and you blessed yourself for having been worthy to excite the mirth and dialectics of the white-haired enthusiast.

He took you home to his heart, the old abbé, and it was a home to you from which no "home-truths" or homely jests could scare you. That large, noble heart of his, still and cold; and what was left in the world now Venceslas was gone? "Berengaria," thought Zachaire;

but even with that thought grew another sadness. "I never thanked him; I never told him fully what he gave me! I meant to bring my wife to Venceslas that he might bless her."

Zachaire fell full upon the pavement under which his friend was laid, and whispered like a child all his secrets, his triumphs, his regrets to the cold stone. Midnight approached, and the alchemist started up, in the weird shock he experienced as a strong ray of moonlight streamed athwart his prostrate figure. Why have we this terror of our dearest, once they are dead? If they came back, would they not be the same friends? Whatever changes death might have

wrought, if it left them souls to come back, it would leave them their individuality as well. Once out of doors, perhaps Denis felt this; but, for the moment that it took him to cross the chapel and gain the door of exit, he was fleeing from the possible presence of his trusted friend.

Well, home again! Done with one sweet part of life; gone the sole friend; dulled the mirror of manhood. There is yet left a solace—the love of a woman. It was again towards nightfall when Zachaire pressed on his weary steed through the town Toulouse. He was eager to stand on his own hearth-stone and to hear what that angel, his wife, would say when she should hear of her husband's great mis-

fortune. And then it came over Zachaire that he had left her weeping, and that he must at least have a smile of return to give her who was still left to him. With this thought he spurred on, pausing only at his own dilapidated gateway to resolve that his new-found leisure should make improvements and repairs.

The stars came out and looked upon the return of the alchemist. Denis noticed them with a sort of subdued pleasure; but he never loved star-light again.

For how shall we tell all at once what Zachaire only realized gradually? And yet so many of us have lost something precious some time in our lives, that it seems almost cruel to recall how the

alchemist, dismounting in a hurry and receiving no answer to his shout nor to the blast he blew on the horn suspended by the porch-entrance, went swiftly into the house, called, called again, and never a voice to answer him. How Denis then, setting his teeth and repeating to himself, "The hour is late; my darling is asleep," went up into her very chamber and stood upon its threshold, stopped and stunned. For at once, before the senses could corroborate the mind's assertion, he surely knew that human being in that room was not. There was void stillness. Denis entered and looked wildly about him for any sign of confusion, flight, or possible return. There

was everything in its place: the sweet-scented blossoms in the ancient vase, the familiar bits of work and dress that lay about, all was ready for the mistress to return, save only—and here a shudder seized the alchemist's heart. It might be accident, but—the flowers in the vase were quite, quite dead. Alas! the careful hand of Berengaria had never left them so. Slowly and falteringly the alchemist quitted the room of dreams and omens, and then turned back again to close the door behind him. He ranged the house like a wild creature a-hungered, and found no one—no one even to tell him news of his wife. Indeed, who dared have stayed to meet Zachaire, Berengaria

gone? Leaving the desolation of the hearth, the alchemist threw himself on to a seat in the garden and tried to think. Instead of thought, however, would come nothing but a passion of suspicion.

Zachaire mistrusted Raoul de Foncé.

Why Zachaire mistrusted De Foncé was a more complicated problem, which he afterwards strove to work out. Why hit upon the man whom you have overwhelmed with benefits and suspect just him? Ask Menelaus. But then, Zachaire reflected, the man cared not for Berengaria. Light as he was, he was quick enough to discern virtue where he met it, and it acted upon him with a strong repellent force. The transient terror the alchemist

had felt regarding the time when he lay senseless in brain-fever, while his wife was left practically alone with the guest, passed off with the mere memory of De Foncé's accustomed uneasiness under those timid but steady blue eyes. No; he had not carried her off. Why then suspect him? Because of a dread at the bottom of all this—a dread unthinkable, lurking behind the troops of fears that defiled past Zachaire's tormented mind; mere feints so far, these fears, to keep off the greatest, blackest horror of them all—the Inquisition.

Zachaire stood up and stretched his arms towards heaven to deprecate that possibility. Who is the traitor? Danger

was so ever present to Berengaria that it had taught her caution. Her recklessness it never was that had led to this. No; the alchemist had housed a traitor, and that traitor was De Foncé. Fever-stricken men tell tales; could that rascal cousin have caught matter for scandal out of the ravings of his host?

Zachaire, though yet chilled by the grave of his friend, deliberately cursed alchemy, which had brought him to that pass that he could not keep a more than deadly secret.

Feeling the maddening influence of such thoughts as these, the alchemist rushed forth, on the wave of a new impulse, to see De Foncé. He was not

expected home so soon, so he was confident that, if De Foncé was his betrayer, their sudden meeting would drag the fact to light. He would face the informer before the armour of ignorance was polished, and the mask of commiseration endued. And he did so. Softly and swiftly the alchemist entered, through a postern-door which he knew of, into De Foncé's castle-grounds. He saw the nobleman sitting outside, undefended, drinking from a horn of wine. He came and stood before the man, and the moon streamed down upon both. After that, after the first look and the uncontrollable shrinking, and the unmanly horror in De Foncé's evasive

eyes, there was conviction in Zachaire's intelligence, though he still tried to beat it off and listen critically to his cousin's greeting.

"Why, man, you startled me! Assassins come just so. Why home so soon?"

"Where is my wife?" asked Zachaire, and his hand was attracted to his sword-hilt, even whilst his ears were strained for the answer.

"Oh, you don't know?" said De Foncé, backing, in spite of himself, in the direction of the castle. "Come in, come in, Zachaire; it's a sad story."

"There has been some devil's work about it," broke out Zachaire, forgetting

himself. "I suspect you know more than an honest man should."

"Do I understand you to threaten me?" replied De Foncé, pointing coldly to Zachaire's emerging steel. "You see I have no weapon."

Zachaire's sword went home to its sheath again with a grudging grind of impatience. Now he was the less self-controlled of the two.

"You know, I always told you," began De Foncé, "those who are too negligent of domestic matters must expect their hearth to pay toll for their study. Your poor wife vanished suddenly, in the evening, two days ago; and from the mystery surrounding her

disappearance, and the total inability of your servants to give us any hints or clue to the mystery, we can but think that—I have heard tales: was she a nun? We believe that the—the—the Inquisition——" Here De Foncé's utterance was fairly stopped by the convulsive clutch of a hand at his throat.

"*Heard* tales—you devil! *Overheard*, you mean! You have betrayed me—you, my guest."

De Foncé wrestled and struggled until he was sufficiently free to roar for help.

"You lie, base iron-smelter, you lie!" he swore.

Immediately afterwards three or four serving-men, fortunately unarmed, ran

out from the castle, and, at a frantic sign from the half-suffocated De Foncé, seized and pushed the alchemist fairly out into the street.

Thus was Zachaire's home-coming.

CHAPTER VIII.

"J'ai perdu ma tourterelle."

PASSERAT.

UNDER the cruel, calm star-shine wandered Zachaire, half mad with grief and fury. It was more than an hour before he collected his wits sufficiently to do other than think, first of Berengaria and her awful possible fate, then of the base informer, De Foncé, and the punishment he ought to have. But by degrees the alchemist forced himself into a spurious

temporary calm and went straight home again, to make a starting-point, as it were, for his plans. He fixed on the only true way to deal with an overwhelming misfortune—to keep the whole mind set on the thing that has next to be done. Every time he caught his thoughts drifting towards Berengaria, a horror seized him, so oppressive that it taught avoidance of itself. A thousand other causes of misery, however, crowded fast upon him. How he blamed himself for having ever given friendly shelter to a rake like De Foncé, who would be glad enough to gain favour with so tremendous a power as the Inquisition by becoming one of those laymen known

as the "familiars of the Holy Office," which position a noble could readily obtain by the great service of informing against his host's wife. What folly to trust a man merely because you have benefited him! Why, if the man be bad at all—and De Foncé unmistakably was so—your past favours will only be so much dead weight at his back, pressing him onward to your undoing. But why he should choose my innocent wife—that child-like, timid spirit—to bear the burden of his malice, Heaven or the other place knows, thought Denis, little thinking, in his misery for her, of possible treachery against his own person. Yet another cause of bitter self-reproach had

Zachaire. Why had it never occurred to him, in his scientific abstraction, that of all the places in France where the Inquisition had power, Toulouse was the head and chief? Was it not at Toulouse that the great council was held in the year 1229 for the institution of the Holy Office throughout France? Were not the Dominicans, five years afterward, especially intrusted to urge on their horrible Krypteia at Toulouse? And even now, did whispers spread the truth, the convent where the French Inquisition held its secret sittings lay in a quiet suburb of Toulouse. O horror! to have brought a fugitive nun to the very gates of her bloodless but fire-

wielding enemies; to have left her—Heaven!—left a defenceless woman to be surrounded by a swarm of hypocrites, whose life it was to veil their vileness from the cruel Deity they invented, by the very excesses of their brutality to whomsoever served a worthier God than theirs! Is that the way in which a strong man guards his house? "Fool that I was!" thought Zachaire; "and yet, I went but for three days, and that to fulfil the most sacred duties of friendship and gratitude. How should I know that wild beasts would seize the time to steal the hidden honey of my home; would trample out the pure light from my hearth? All these things are against me."

At this moment Zachaire passed the entrance to the ancient church of St. Servin, the great tower of which stands on the site of a far more ancient temple to Apollo. The circumstance crossed Zachaire's mind in the aimless way our thoughts have when we desire everything that can distract us for an instant from a one great grief. With a gesture of despair he raised his arm as if in menace, and exclaimed, "This, then, is the new gospel of peace and love that has superseded the cheerful glory of the worship of the Sun-God!" Urged by his restlessness, Zachaire stepped through the entrance of the church, open to all comers, and stood in the deserted aisle, watching alternately a

woman who knelt on the stone floor at prayer, and the smiling, scoffing star-eyes that looked in through the windows upon shaken faith and rosary-holding grief. For the woman who prayed was also weeping. And after a time Zachaire, whose heart was sore and tender for all women now, went up to her and laid his hand with human sympathy upon the quivering shoulder. The sobs ceased, and the woman arose, drying her eyes to see better what answer the saints had sent her in the person of this haggard, strong-built man.

"Ah! woman, you can weep. Your sorrow is past its height," said Denis. "You have not to snatch with your un-

aided arm an angel from the devils, nor to punish a traitor whose presence alone on the earth would be sufficient to damn the whole of it."

The woman stared at this wild talk, and, thinking her strange friend drunk, drew her wimple more closely round her face and shoulders and moved to go.

"Your trouble," insisted Zachaire with impatience, "what is *your* trouble?"

"Is it nothing that my husband lies crippled at home, and that my young ones starve? Mother, Holy Mary, what shall I do?"

"Take this purse and believe in alchemy," quoth Zachaire with a bitter

smile. "Sometimes men are more useful than saints. Ah! you look up to heaven, do you, instead of at me? Listen, woman: my wife is in the hands of the Holy Inquisition; that's why I am not telling my beads."

"Oh! mercy save her!" ejaculated the woman in a horrified whisper, looking first behind her, then clasping her hands round Zachaire's arm.

"Save her!" cried Denis, his voice ringing in sharp agony through the echoing church. "She is lost. Whoever escaped the Inquisition but to melt in flames and then to be blown in ashes through the air? I am not now fit to judge of these things; but, God

forgive me! I would I were back in the golden days of Greece, singing pæons to the slayer of Jove's thunder-forgers!"

With this he left the church and strode away home, there to make some last arrangements before setting out on as forlorn a hope as ever poor unarmed warrior undertook.

The first idea that occurred to the distracted husband was to go to the Prior of the Dominicans in Toulouse, a sort of Grand Master of the French Inquisition, and, meeting him face to face, man to man, demand his wife. But this was so obviously impracticable that Zachaire gave it up at once. First,

Berengaria's was a real bad case for the Holy Office to have secured—a nun who had run away from her convent, relinquished her veil, renounced her vows, and entered upon a wedlock which of course the Inquisition could not sanction, though the Church had been forced to do so. Secondly, for the husband of this nun—a notable alchemist to boot, and therefore suspected of foul magic arts—to run his head into the veriest ecclesiastical wasp-nest of France, this savoured of madness. They would at once apprehend and torture Zachaire himself; whilst chance of rescue for Berengaria would be further off than ever.

One other resort there was—Henri II. of Navarre. This king, an amateur and patron of alchemy, was the man to whom Zachaire determined to apply. Little indeed monarchs could do to save from the Inquisition; but they have some secular power over men; the Bishop of Toulouse was a man, and the bishop had some shadow of authority even over the mysterious and malign Holy Office.

Hence we find Denis Zachaire, in the full flower of his fame and the nadir of his peace, at court.

Oh, the waiting, the delay, the empty skeleton ceremony ever preceding the passage of a burning heart! Zachaire, at the end of his hurried journey,

having forced himself to await a suitable time to be admitted into the kingly presence, and to be fitly equipped and curled and perfumed for the same, chafed inly as he paced the antechamber and framed hot words that were all too cold to express his heart's anxiety. Other petitioners, biding their time like him, gazed with a sort of half-scornful sympathy upon the man whose purpose was so direfully important to him. Indeed, what were their griefs, compared to those of him who in imagination saw a beautiful, shrinking, innocent woman exposed to eyes that knew no pity and hands that made a science (or an art) of butchery?

At last the summons came, and behind half a dozen ushers and pages resplendent in crimson and lacing, walked the celebrated alchemist, dazzled and dizzy, wishing that what he had to do were over, and conscious of no latent power of persuasion, but thoroughly weary in body and in mind.

There was quite a little group of talent and wit round the person of the art-lover, Henri, as he sat to receive the philosopher of Guyenne. Mardochée de la Delle, the poet, was there, so was the court fool; there were several men thought marvellous *savants* in those days; and as Zachaire looked up to meet this supreme moment and encounter it, his

eyes lighted with genuine philosophic pleasure to see two noted colleagues of his own who had worked and hoped with him in Paris.

"We are prepared to hear M. Zachaire," observed the king. There was indeed small doubt of this; for the agonized alchemist had remained already some two minutes speechless before the amused eyes of the group of courtiers.

"Sire," began Zachaire, moistening his lips and choking—("He has come to petition for a cough mixture, your Majesty," put in the court fool confidentially)—"sire, I am an alchemist," said Denis, looking bravely.

"We rejoice to hear it," replied the

king. "You will have the less need of our gold." At which sally every one laughed with boisterous affectation, save only the fool, who looked unconscious and thoughtful.

"I have not been without success," pursued the harassed Zachaire; "these gentlemen and true philosophers here" (stretching out his hand in warm loyalty to the two court-alchemists)—"these fellow-workers of mine will tell the tale of my industry; and at last, sire, at last I have been thought worthy by the God whom we serve, to show His wonders to the world. I can transmute the baser metals into gold."

Involuntarily Denis looked round for

homage to his power; but this statement had been heard too often in this merry court to be either startling or even credible. The king only looked Zachaire more searchingly in the face, the fool shook his head with a faint complaining jingle of bells, and Mardochée de la Delle struck his boot with his riding-wand and murmured, "Pauvre diable!"

"I have found the universal solvent. I can prove it to the king if he please but command me. And I then pray that of his clemency he will grant relief to my home-trouble. Have I the king's permission to say on?"

"We have heard of you, M. Zachaire," answered Henri of Navarre deliberately.

"Amongst many great names of alchemy, yours has been the most luminous. Tidings of your progress have from time to time been sent us, and we are fain to try your powers. We give you six weeks in which to make a transmutation for our satisfaction. All that you desire shall be procured at our expense, and if you succeed the recompense shall be four thousand crowns." And the king turned lightly to his followers and would have withdrawn. But Zachaire, throwing off the weight of anxiety that oppressed him, spoke out boldly; told the tale of his poor vanished wife and lonely home, and demanded rescue, or, at least, the chance to plead his own cause before his persecutors. The king

looked grave; the courtiers stood hushed and interested; the fool looked down and softly hummed a snatch of an old song.

"Young man," said Henri of Navarre, "the calling of an alchemist is ever in itself a dangerous one. It behoved you to take especial care how you affronted Holy Church. You take a nun to wife; it was foolhardy. The lady has been false to her convent vows; the Inquisition therefore has justice on its side. We cannot help you. Kings are not sacred to the Holy Office, and our life were worth no jot if once we were suspected by it. We can, if you find means to please us, punish the man who informed against the fair offender."

"I thank you, sire, I shall myself see to it," said Denis. "But, I entreat you, let me have speech with some one in authority. Give me the chance of making one effort in the name of manhood, for a woman! I appeal to all of you, O sirs, who live in a chivalric court: you would not see a lady, whose only fault was virtuous love, torn from her husband's hearth by caitiffs, tortured, racked —O Heaven! abused and burnt—without one manly arm stretched out to fight for her? Mardochée, poet, man! write that in a poem, and see how it looks. King, sanction that in your laws, and see how it works. Oh, think of the women ye have loved, of the mother who bore ye,

of the honour ye hold so priceless, of the brave feats of arms ye have undertaken for far less than this! Will you, high spirits, passionate troubadours, renowned warriors, sanction every gross and cruel crime because the Church may choose to work mischief? No! the deadlier, the more authoritative and mysterious the evil, the more your knighthood calls on you to crush it. You are men of truth and honour; how can you love this serpent Inquisition, which is even now eating out the very heart of the Church we serve? Oh, grant me your noble hands and swords and hearts! I am a suppliant worthy of your aid. When Henri of Navarre, king, scholar, statesman, stands before me, how

can I see that he will not help to crush a power that would annihilate rank, learning, and free thought? O mercy, help me, king!"

To the unlimited surprise of the small courtly gathering, Zachaire the alchemist, philosopher and person of quality, fell down before the king, bending his knee as to a god, and broke into a fearful sobbing cry. Even as the stately Pericles lost self-control before the judges and wept for his Aspasia, so Zachaire wept for his purer love. And this was the more appalling to witness, from the utter bodily prostration of the alchemist, whose heart had been on fire, and whose eyes had never closed since he lost his Berengaria.

For some moments Henri and the rest remained aghast and staring at the broken-down, struggling man. Mardochée de la Delle regarded him curiously with a sort of æsthetic compassion. One young knight turned away with his blue Frankish eyes wet with tears. The fool began to make a joke, but forgot the point and stopped abruptly. Henry looked round at his embarrassed courtiers and laughed aloud. "What ho! fair ladies," he exclaimed to them contemptuously, "comfort ye; the fellow wants a cup of Rhenish wine and a new sweetheart. Let us away. I love not weeping when unaccompanied by beauty. Come, Sir Alchemist, up from thy knees and go about thy gold-making.

I will contrive ways and means to keep thy Berengaria from question or from burning for the next six weeks, and then in disguise thou shalt go see her once before she dies. This is the utmost we can do. Come, sirs."

And forth from the room clanked and jingled the royal suite, fresh for a good day's hunting; and Denis Zachaire arose, in no wise benefited, save by the promise of a king to spare Berengaria for six little weeks, during which time her husband would be chained and helpless, the slave to an amateur's art, curiosity.

CHAPTER IX.

"We measure not our cause by our success, but our success by our cause."—MILTON.

FOUR of the six weeks allowed to Zachaire were already past, and the two that remained were all too short a time for success to be likely. The alchemist had worked night and day in preparation for his grand experiment. In the meantime, the king's interest, with ecclesiastical authority, had procured for Berengaria the boon of security from torment or from further questioning. She was alive, a prisoner in one of the dungeons of the Inquisition at Toulouse. This was all Denis knew of her, nor was he able to send the smallest message of

encouragement to tell his wife how he was working for her.

Nor had Zachaire much hope. He managed to confer with priests and lawyers on the extent of power or persuasion that it would be possible for a man to exercise with the Holy Office, and found it amounted absolutely to nothing. There were very few cases of escape on record. The bloodless Inquisition had no fear; it struck, regardless of rank, sex, or age. Even had Berengaria been innocent of the misdeed of breaking convent vows, yet it is highly unlikely that she would have been released without undergoing the slight discipline of rack and terrorism. But unmistakably

and provably guilty as she was (as the ecclesiastic understands guilt), there seemed no hope but that the delicate, flower-like darling of home must suffer things that the hardiest warrior would sicken to hear spoken. Zachaire learned this gradually, and made his arrangements accordingly. And it was in this frame of mind that the alchemist found himself, practically a close prisoner, bound to produce marvels on an appointed day.

Naturally, since the alchemists have thought it wiser to leave us in ignorance of their methods, we do not know how they set to work to perform a *successful* transmutation, though most circum-

stantial are they prone to be in the accounts of their failures. We cannot therefore say what Zachaire had to start with, what composed the reddish powder of the philosopher's stone. We know, however, that he had provided himself with a small stock of this mystic solvent (the rest being carefully concealed in an iron chest at home). The powder, as Zachaire found it, took years to perfect; another great alchemist, Bernard, "le Bon Trévisan," who lived to a great age, boasts of having "four times composed the divine stone:"* we see by the infinite care and cunning used by alchemists to conceal their treasure,

* "De la Philo. Nat. des Métaux."

how almost irreparable they found its loss. When they travelled, their "divine" companion was stowed away in the lining of their carriages; carried by a servant in disguise; sewed inside riding-boots; hidden, in fine, so well that even on the somewhat frequent occasions when the owner was overpowered and murdered for the sake of the treasure, it was generally not to be found! Small wonder that Zachaire had brought only just enough of the stone to make the requisite projection upon a given quantity of mercury.

But something more was wanting, and here lay a terrible stumbling-block. The simples that were needed to commence

the work did not grow in Navarre; Zachaire was not allowed to fetch them from elsewhere, the king having had ample experience of such convenient wants on the part of former operators. Hence it was necessary to send for these precious simples, and, what was worse, to wait until they came. When a fortnight was all that remained to Zachaire, back returned the messenger—and lo! the herbs were not the right ones. How should they be? Who but an alchemist knows what an alchemist wants? To the king, however, the herbs seemed perfect, for the good old joke about the workman and his tools hath many adherents amongst the uninitiate. Thus,

with a shrewd suspicion that he was about to fail utterly, Zachaire toiled on. One night he was discovered descending with airy, agile tread a rope ladder from his turret-window. A sentinel received him at the bottom, and restored him to his bedchamber. Next morning Denis was greeted by the king with polite and smiling excuses for having foiled him in his assignation; but it was noticeable that from that day the alchemist was confined, with true feudal rigour, to his workshop. The royal amateur was at least well up in alchemy's deceptions.

Came the fatal day on which the court was to be gratified by a conspicuous triumph of the hermetic art. Zachaire

was ill in bed on that morning; natural, but too transparent. A mandate was brought to him not to keep the king waiting, and Denis arose heavily and looked about him. He had packed all his small possessions into a manageable knapsack. On his finger he wore a large ring, or talisman, adorned with one amethyst (a stone which, the necromancers say, sharpens the wit). This ring received a great deal of the alchemist's attention on this momentous morn, apparently because he felt a talisman was needed more than usual for his wits. He took it off his finger, where it had been all night; he examined it eagerly and long before replacing it

securely. Round his neck he afterwards hung a cord, attaching a small magnet. These eldest-born of science were but children in their strange faiths and superstitions. This magnet, according to Paracelsus, was to moderate all nervous panic, and restore to the mind its wonted powers of thinking.

Thus equipped, and respectfully, though watchfully, preceded by two men-at-arms, the unfortunate alchemist walked to his ordeal.

It was afterwards remarked by Mardochée de la Delle (who took a great interest in the fortunes of Zachaire, and has written a very indifferent good poem on his death) that the look of the philo-

sopher was prophetically hopeless, and that he made his salutation to the king and the select group of courtiers assembled, rather in the form of a valediction. He was evidently nervous, despite the magnet, and seemed animated by a desire to delay the trial. Everything was ready to make the final projection. Zachaire advanced languidly to the furnace, on which there was placed a small crucible, tempered to endure the strongest heat, and filled with molten mercury. Upon the seething metal he cast the whole of his small store of powder, possibly adding other operations which he has concealed from us, then closed up the crucible hermetically, and busied himself in in-

creasing the already fierce heat of the fire. For a full hour (the worst, so far, in Zachaire's life) the king jested and yawned and lounged about with the courtiers, instituting wagers that Zachaire would fail, and looking with gravely quizzical glances at the downcast and almost desperate face of the alchemist, who sat apart and spoke never a word. At length, and suddenly, still maintaining his stubborn silence, Zachaire got up and broke open the fatal vessel, whilst the king, roused to earnestness for the moment, drew close by him to have the first sight of the promised wonder.

Of this experiment, carried through before the eyes of royalty, we have the

following somewhat vague account from Denis himself:

"But when I had finished, came the reward I had anticipated. Though the king himself wished me well, he was set against me by the grandees of his court, and sent me away with a 'many thanks' for recompense."

This is by way of delicately hinting that the operation had failed. Zachaire does not disclose to us his chagrin and inward perplexity, nor describe the laughing sneers and condolences of the spectators. Naturally the alchemist would fain bury in his own bosom the memory of that ghastly moment's scoffing and high-bred tyranny.

Even the good fool found that "in the misfortunes of others there is much consolation," and was quite indignant with Zachaire when that miserable man endeavoured to dim the radiant humour of his position, by pleading that, if the mercury *was* mercury now, instead of gold, that only proved the failure of one ill-starred attempt, not the falsity of all alchemy's pretensions. Mardochée alone, the poet, took pity. He went up and laid his hand upon Zachaire's, saying quietly: "Courage, man! I myself have often failed more dismally than this, and in my case Art could scarcely be held responsible for her votary's mishap." The consolation was thin and rather

narrow-minded, but the feeling of one friend in this gay circle cheered Zachaire a little. After all, though, Mardochée de la Delle was an indifferent rhymester; yet he had a good heart, which is the source of all true poetry.

The king arose, and looking over his shoulder at Zachaire, in withdrawing, said: "Young sir, we have proved your unquestionable excellence, both as an alchemist and as an honest man. We are perfectly satisfied, and thank you. If there is anything else that we can do for you, either in the way of confiscation, prisons, or other such, we shall willingly oblige you. If you care not to claim our promise, leave the

palace at once, and come not hither again to attempt our clemency."

CHAPTER X.

"This world has been harsh and strange,
Something is wrong: there needeth a change,
But what, or where? at the last or first?
In one point only we sinned, at worst."
"Holy Cross Day," BROWNING.

IT is the Monastery of Dominicans at Toulouse—this great dark Heaven-forsaken pile—before which the weary rider stops his horse, more weary still. Zachaire had mounted steed directly after his misadventure and gone full speed to Toulouse, there to end his household tragedy in a sharp, quick way.

He was armed with an order, signed by the hand of the Toulousain bishop and

sanctioned by the Grand Master of the Inquisition himself, to see for one half-hour a certain prisoner and heretic, by name Berengaria Sainct Lavin. For this visit of his the recaptured nun had been preserved intact; with limbs unrent she was to see him, for the Holy Office is careful to spare outsiders the pain of seeing what its penitents feel. A sort of imitation of the Eleusinian mysteries; religion must have its secrets; and as things that are joyous, high, and lovely are not so easily kept in the darkness, therefore the terror and the agonizing pain, *hinc illæ lachrymæ.*

After all, we improve as the centuries roll on, for what was once done to human

beings in the name of religion is now only done to infra-human animals in the name of science. The old monks used to say they must burn, scourge, tear, and stretch, "pour encourager les autres" in their spiritual life and health; the vivisectionists of a later day say they must immolate the beasts for the bodily life and health of man. As our bodies are of course more immediately important to us than any amount of soul—that vague essence which no fellow can understand, and which it is perhaps easiest to disbelieve in altogether—therefore we say the vivisectionists take a higher stand than the Inquisitors. But where, O where is that perfection of the species which really should be show-

ing itself after these cartloads of men and women have been sacrificed for our souls, and the troughsful of animals that have been offered as scapegoats for our bodies? There is no question but we *ought* to be sanctimonious and robust by this time. Perhaps the fault lies in ourselves; we were ever fonder of destruction than of edification.

But Zachaire waits at the portal of the monastery, damning every stone of it, until a friar has opened to him. Too wroth to speak, Denis responds to the good brother's "Dieu vous garde!" with a withering glower, and mutely shows his mandate. With a start of astonishment the friar turns this over and over, reads

it three times, and then looks up again at the alchemist, whom he believes to be the devil come after one of his own leal subjects. For if ever honest man's face was animated by such hatred, such dire loathing and "rancorous despight" as Zachaire's at that moment, then the said honest man must have gone through most uncanny things.

The friar stood in complete amaze, for turn he dare not with those eyes upon him; they would burn his spine. Zachaire relieved him from a difficulty by pressing past him, and merely saying, "Which way?" preceded the unnerved saint into the seclusion of piety.

It were hard to say whither the alchemist was guided; certainly to no spot

known of the people. Through uncouth cloisters, where grinning dragons fixed malevolent gaze upon them from their mask of stone, through dark and secret passages haunted by the vengeful ghosts of a thousand sufferers, up damp and winding stairs worn by the feet of hypocrisy, past doors that opened under the hand of the friar with a moan that sounded like the low vibrations from a long-past shriek of agony. At last they were in the prison itself, and very quickly stepped Zachaire's conductor, lest any noise from farther cells should penetrate the passage. For the reverend brother really thought he was escorting the devil, and feared that, if by any means this

same should come to think himself in hell, he might begin to be masterful. With an irrepressible sigh of relief, the friar turned the alchemist over to a rough strong man, who was going from cell to cell with food and water, and who proved to be the gaoler. This done, the holy man did cross himself, and straightway fled away with a speed which did great credit to a man in petticoats. Zachaire breathed again when free from the odour of sanctity, which savoured so ill in this fearful place. He followed the gaoler, with the almost brutal hate fading out of his heart, as he took step by step, and giving place to a sense of as complete despair as a strong man may feel and live.

He woke from this state to find himself slowly and painfully, as in a dream, descending deep, damp, shiny steps until he felt as one might feel who should be working in a pit, and suddenly should know that the sides of it were sinking down upon him. Then Zachaire realized that Berengaria was here. Here, she who lived on smiles, sunlight, and kindness. Here, she whose fair body shrank and trembled at a bitter word. Well, thanks to the Church, she has been foully used; but, thanks to her husband, she shall be sent where she will be used better. And grasping his weaponless hands together, Zachaire deliberately calmed himself for the moment he was going to meet.

The gaoler paused at last before a door at the foot of the staircase, and, turning to the alchemist, said respectfully, "Sir, it is customary to search the persons of such as visit the heretics."

"Search then, my friend," said Denis with a grim smile, though it must be owned he looked terribly anxious during the thorough investigation that ensued. The alchemist had to remove his high boots, his jerkin, his *tout-ensemble*, in fact, and to submit to having everything turned inside out, the linings examined and the folds made smooth. There was nothing to be found, except a piece of pasty and some money, at both of which properties the gaoler cast a look of sentiment.

"The pie you may eat, man, and the money will be yours if you will eat the pasty at a distance," quoth the alchemist; and then the gaoler opened the door a little way, let in the visitor, and made all fast behind him—for one half-hour.

The dismal space was so hellish dark that it took some time before Zachaire could see the solitary figure of the cell's inmate. In the further corner he saw at last a white, inert creature, as yet unconscious of his presence.

Berengaria was sitting on the damp stone floor, quite listlessly, looking upwards to the grating whence came the light dimly down to this subterranean vault. Her husband felt a chill of horror

as he looked at her. Six weeks had she been there, starving for food, for warmth, for human kindness. Her pure white dress was here and there stained green with the dampness, her form was emaciated and thrown carelessly together, just as she had sunk on the ground, who knows how many hours ago? But her face! Oh, that poor sweet face! How devilish the malice that could so have harmed it! There was a hopeless, pain-stricken, almost distraught look in those eyes; their colour seemed no longer lovely azure, for they gazed intensely and yet vacantly upwards, strained and dim with past tears. There was no colour on the delicate cheeks,

even the soft pale-gold hair looked dimmed and dusty, and all the while the sad expression never changed. Zachaire first thought she had gone mad with fear and grief, and under the impetus of his horrible uncertainty he rushed towards her, got her in his arms and gazed almost frenziedly into those weary eyes. Ah, what a change! There was a sort of long soft cry, like a child finding its mother, or like the sigh of one in pain or trouble as the arms of sleep close round him. Then there was silence, long enough to be a fresh alarm had it not been for the nestling and clinging to him. "My Denis, my husband!" she whispered, and then just rested in his

arms. Zachaire knew a moment of absolute gladness that swept onward past all his pity and foreknowledge of that next moment—that must come, because it would be so evil. He smoothed the shining waves of hair; he kissed back the faint colour to the cheeks and the light to the heavenly blue eyes; he took her in his arms to the miserable pallet-bed they had given her, and sat down there, inclosing her with a support that was strong and warm, though it was but mortal. What need to tell her yet? It wanted twenty minutes to the half-hour. Berengaria was dazed with her six weeks' solitary imprisonment, and for a while did nothing but fondle her

husband's curls and look into his eyes to read what he would not say and she had not the presence of mind to ask. Finally the wretched alchemist himself began to question her of what she had suffered.

"I came here," said Berengaria, slowly collecting memories from out the general horror of the past—"I came here—let me see, it was evening. I had closed and bolted all the doors, according as you bade me, Denis, and yet—oh, I knew not how, nor even when—I was surrounded by awful, cowl-clad men, and they laid hold upon me and said, 'Art thou Berengaria Sainct Lavin, the nun?' And I said boldly, 'Nay, I

am no nun, but the wife of an honest man.' And then they said things that chilled my blood so that I fell in horror, grasping at the doorposts of our own dear home. They brought me here, I know not how, for I was alone in this terrible spot, lying on this bed here—here! *alone*—when I woke from my trance —just here."

Berengaria shuddered so terribly that Zachaire took her away from the hated couch and held her fast in his arms as, grinding his teeth, he asked again how possibly the Inquisitors had made an entrance.

Berengaria thought in a desultory way, and was forced to surmise that the Holy

Office must have come down through the roof.

"Hell-hounds!" exclaimed Zachaire; "did one not know that the bloodless wretches were fiends, not men, one might suspect them——"

"No," said Berengaria, who, in her wonderful spirit, still preserved her old reverence for the Church, "I have been treated with a show of gentleness and courtesy most strange and very awful; for a man with thin lips and a high-bred face, told me in a low calm voice and with a sort of pitying smile, that I was doomed to torture, and must make up my mind to prayer and penitence, for thus I might escape the faggot and the shame

of burning. O husband, I went mad when I heard of the pain I should endure! I have always been so timid, so terrified of pain. I lay for a day and a night on this wet ground without touching food, hoping that the cold would enter my heart and kill me, for, alas! I dared not kill myself. Three times they dragged me hence to be 'examined' before my judges—'the Qualifiers,' they are called, and these questions, the three 'first audiences.' Ah, Denis, I have known part of the secrets of this mysterious system."

"They did not hurt you, or threaten?"

"No; at least, I think not. I was wild and dreamy with my grief and terror; I know not what I said. They let me go;

I was brought here again, and then—then I heard of you. I was not to fear—I should not be tortured—you were working for me."

"Henri of Navarre sent you that message; God's blessing lie for ever richly upon his soul!" said Zachaire fervently.

"From that day to this I have had no pain to bear; I have seen no one, save my gaoler; I have been frozen colder and colder at heart each day, until I think I only lived to see thee and then die. Art thou indeed come? Then I would live and bless thy home again and thee, dear love, for I *was* blessed to thee, was I not? And I have kept thee true and good and guarded thee in a way that myself

has marvelled at, seeing thou art more powerful than I—in strength, in will, in everything."

And then Denis knew that the moment was come. He put his hands to his head and untwisted a long thick lock of matted hair; twined cunningly within it was his ring, the ring with the large amethyst stone upon it—the stone to sharpen the wits. "Is thy love of life very strong, angel?"

"Nay, I know not," answered Berengaria. "I feel that now, even were I at home again and thy dear arm around me, I should yet be rapt in one great shudder at the past. Yet death hath torment."

"Look thou upon death," said Denis softly, and showed her his ring.

The alchemists, who spent their lives in what is thought one long air-castle building, nevertheless picked up by the way some very powerful secrets, the possession of which it chiefly was that gained them their ill-fame as magicians. They comprehended better than any men of the time the uses of herbs and the healthful or noxious properties of fluids. They studied nature as the Rosicrucians afterwards did, so deeply and so cunningly that they produced many unexplained effects, yet not so patiently as to lay hold of her fundamental truths. One thing these alchemists could do right well, and that was to reduce a man to ashes by a small drink of innocent-seeming liquid,

and this without his knowing very much about the process. The hermetic philosophers say that their great "agent," before it is perfected, is the most mortal, quick and stealthy of all poisons. Of what it is composed, we can but guess; but it is black and has a numbing and yet corrosive quality.

Who knew this fact better than Zachaire, the most celebrated operator of his day? The hollow under the amethyst was filled with the strongest essence of the imperfect philosopher's stone, distilled by Zachaire as soon as he lost hope for Berengaria, and thus skilfully concealed from the eyes even of a professional searcher.

Berengaria glanced doubtfully at the ring, which she knew of old, and then lifted her eyes to her husband's in mute questioning. Oh, it was hard, it was all a man could stand, this fatal necessity to thrust death upon the dearest. Was this all Zachaire's science could do for him? He felt his courage fading, and knew that the moments passed on and that there was only the least time left in which this thing could be done. Hurriedly and hoarsely he began to speak:

"Berengaria, I have no power to save your life. Was it not to-morrow—twelve short hours to it—that you were to be handed over to undergo the torture?

My delicate white snowdrop, how canst thou endure this? Why, I found thee, yet untouched, lying fascinated, colourless with terror, like a soft bird that has fluttered into the very jaws of that great hell-dragon the Holy Inquisition. Think of the pain, the shame, the agony of to-morrow! O Berengaria, my own, thou wast not framed for this fierce world! Is it not better to be put to sleep in a husband's arms? Drink the poison."

In an aimless panic Berengaria had risen and shrunk away even to the further side of the cell. She broke into miserable sobbing, that shook her piteously, so her strength had wasted.

Denis went up to her, fondling and coaxing her, while it was too dark for her to see his drawn, set face. But she still moved from him, evidently torn by two equal terrors.

"You fear the poison?" said Zachaire; "at least it is painless. You have often heard me speak of it; it is the real arch between earth and heaven."

Berengaria with an effort turned and took the ring in her hand, wrenching off the amethyst and lifting the poison to her mouth. She could not drink it.

"Give it to me yourself, Denis, my love; I *dare* not kill myself."

Mastering the revulsion of his heart the alchemist himself approached his

wife, but ere he was near her Berengaria's mood had changed, and she would not let him touch her.

"There can be but ten minutes left before I must leave you," cried Denis in despair. "Oh, do not let me leave you living and defenceless. I must put worlds between you and your persecutors. For mercy's sake, as you value my love, as we have spent happy days together, drink the poison!" And she did; for she was brave, though not as strong-built creatures are. She stood away from Denis, with her head averted, and held the ring against her shuddering lips until she had drained all the dark life-queller from the hollow circle.

It was a dignified and quiet mode of self-destruction, this mediæval one, and the doomed one felt strangely calmed when this was over. She turned back to her husband with a smile, and sat down with him once more.

"Wilt thou stay with me until the end?" she said.

"So help me God, I will."

The time went by, minute followed minute, and each seemed wasted, for these two sufferers did not speak. But they thought of the lilac-scent in their own garden, and of sunny hours of triumph and content; and their minds went along together, as the pressure of their hands testified from time to time.

"I would fain have confessed myself before my death," sighed Berengaria at length in a faint whisper.

"Am I not better to thee than a priest?" was Zachaire's answer. "Yes, for I know thy life and how pure thou wert. Does it hurt thy soul that the convent vows were broken?"

"No; I fled an unnatural state and I kept a man true, high-minded and content thereby. I loved thee, Denis; and my love was one that could not lower thee nor me."

It was wonderful how, through all, Berengaria's first determination had never been shaken. She was of an almost superhuman impartiality, for, much evil

as she had suffered at the hands of the Church, she had never ceased to revere it; and yet no threats or arguments had made her rue the day she left her convent for the stormy world.

"Were thy tidings joy to our friend? How does the Abbé Venceslas?" inquired Berengaria.

"He will receive thee in thy new home, angel."

"And thou?" Berengaria's eyes for the last time filled with tears, and, too faint to speak, she signed the sign of the cross upon her husband's forehead.

"Perchance I shall soon follow you both," said Denis.

And there was again a silence, but this

time a dreadful; for the half-hour was over, Zachaire knew that well; the gaoler must be carelessly allowing the visitor more time. With that thought came a ghastly wish into Zachaire's mind that his wife were dead.

What if she were conscious and they forced him to leave her? He could not leave her. Fancy if she half woke from her deathly trance to find herself again alone, with the rack looming more distinctly before her! She did not know how soon this poison kills. Then, if the gaoler should return and find the alchemist kneeling by the dying body of the captured nun, what future might Zachaire then expect for himself?

These reflections were suddenly cut short; Berengaria sank down at his feet, her power forsaking her. Then Denis knew that she was dying quickly, and a rush of desire come over him to tell her, as he was wont to do, all that chanced to him of late; and to tell her how horrible his life would be when she was gone and nothing left but the indwelling demon of revenge. There was so much, so much to say, and she was slipping, sinking out of the world, as her form out of his arms. He choked back his egoism and bent over the fair faint creature, making a shelter for her, inclosing her so that she might not hear how she panted against his

shoulder, and he began to murmur to her of angels' wings, and God's pity, and everlasting compensation. Once she threw back her lovely head and he received the last smile of her parting spirit. It really was a spiritual smile, for no feature seemed to move; only a rare, strange kindling of the depths of those blue eyes spoke to him.

Well, Swedenborg's earth-inhabiting angel theory may be true, for surely the soul that had animated, and now was escaping from that exquisite prison-house, had been something different from a woman's.

She was in a deep trance now, and Zachaire knew she had spoken and

smiled her last. His anxiety was over, for, come there never so many rude inquirers into that cell, their vengeance would be unheeded by its object, who no longer felt the presence of her own beloved one. Suspense past, pain rushed upon him, and yearning, for a breath, for a sign from her. His brow still seemed to thrill with the touch of her fingers upon it; she had blessed him in his despair—but now, where was she?

The alchemist sat immovably, dreaming and yet watching, as one does by the side of a sleeping child. Then a small, quick shiver passed over his darling, and from that instant Zachaire sat alone with his dead.

CHAPTER XI.

"Life is a cheat, and a uselessly interrupting episode in the blissful repose of nothing."—SCHOPENHAUER.

How long it was before the warder came to summon out the visitor, Zachaire knew as little as any delirious man knows whether it be night or day. He started to his feet at the long-expected grating of the prison-door as though it were a surprise, and hurriedly he lifted up Berengaria's white-clad body, and with a last passionate kiss laid it on the pallet, throwing the pale-gold hair like a sunny shroud over the motionless white face and breast. He left the cell with a rapid step, for, suffer as he might, and fear death as little as he would, there were

details connected with the Inquisition which could make the most desperate man cautious. Only when he was out again in the dismal passage, and the door of his darling's tomb shut fast behind him, did Zachaire's emotions find an instant's vent, "et faut que son respect défère à ses douleurs." Zachaire gave utterance to a solemn veiled cursing; in the very den of the skulking Church-dragon, he denounced the vampire to God.

The gaoler stared, not understanding the hurried long words of the imprecation, and broke into Zachaire's unholy mood by putting forth a hand, with a homely grin, in expectation. Zachaire arrested his direfully secular tongue, and,

while administering promised largess, pointed back to the cell they had left and bade the gaoler, "Be gentle with the heretic; she is a high-born lady, and she has fainted for fear."

Away then to what was home—ay, and is so still, for it is filled with memories. But also with regrets. Ah, the value of the thing that is gone! The alchemist could have cursed himself for the omissions of past days. She had been happy; his love had shielded, rather than endangered her; his protection was as secure as any the fugitive nun could have enjoyed. Yes, she had been as happy as she could have wished, but not perfectly blest, as she might have

been. The whole of her fair, short marriage period might have been a danger-shaded dream of mutual bliss, instead of which—"Well, she never called to me in vain," thought Zachaire. "But did she realize my passion? Could her insight supply words for my unspoken reverence?"

What boots the senseless retrospection? The wife he loved was dead; more, "the child he had died to see, though in a dream," was not for him, who was unworthy. Nevertheless, his hand had saved Berengaria from the torture, and perhaps Heaven would set that signal service against past neglect.

Zachaire steeled himself to forget, since

that was the best the moment could bestow. He fixed his thoughts on the home he was nearing—the home haunted with past triumph and love. There is vigour in the air, years of hard work have hallowed the place. Moreover, though the hearth be torn up and the spirit of possession has been faced and quelled, there is yet one spot worthy of the owner's foot, one rest, one recompense—the alchemist's laboratory, containing the great hidden treasure, the hermetic stone.

To this place the alchemist rode fiercely, marking the ring of his horse's hoofs and counting the sparks they struck from the stones. He was deep in

the ghastly mechanical state that follows any great overturn in a life. When he was at home he would sit and think of the wrongs he sustained. What were the coming hours fit for else? With a groan of present relief he put reflection from him; now he could but suit the rhythm of his gallop to some snatch of an old drinking-song.

He alighted away from the front of the old manor-house, lest he should think he saw Berengaria standing on the stone steps, weeping. It was evening again, just as it had been when he returned to find his wife had vanished. The merciless stars smiled down upon his grief, and there was, too, the maddening moon-

shine resting in a broad stream just over the detached building of his laboratory.

Zachaire, still quiet and mechanical, led his horse slowly towards the stable, and it seemed to him that the animal's tread on the rough pavement gave forth a sullen, stealthy sound, like the footstep of an exiled knight, pacing heavily in his grief and trying to muffle the sound of his spurs, lest a foe discover his stolen visit to brood over the old ancestral vault. Or were they not, the man and the horse, like an autochthonous hero and his charger, returned from the land of ghosts to tramp over a lost battle-field?

Returning without the horse, it was lonelier still, and the loneliness made Zach-

aire avert his eyes from the empty manor. He walked straight to his workshop, holding its cunningly wrought key in his hand.

The door was wide open! Empty it was of all but moonlight, as the alchemist perceived at once. Only, something was wrong. Oh, Raoul de Foncé, ye priests, and all Dominicans soever, look to yourselves! Ye who force men's houses, drag away their wives in the name of religion, rifle men's chests in the name of the Church, and confiscate the treasures of alchemy for your private advantage, see to your safety!

Standing quite still, leaning with his hand against the doorpost, Zachaire could plainly see by that grey-green

moonlight that he had been foully robbed, that the iron chest, which he had almost deemed impregnable, lay open, and that his treasure, his monopoly, his secret, the stone of transmutation, the store of a discoverer's transport, was his no longer. There was nothing to be gained by searching, when every inch of the space was bathed in moonlight. The thing was gone. Denis stood looking in like a beggar, like a stranger, at the place where he had spent most of a laborious life; at the cold, black, unlit furnaces, at the hasty wreck and confusion of all he valued. He despised the place with human ingratitude, which turns from

what it has loved when this is injured. He scorned every step he had achieved from first to last, since the dishonesty of a few sanctimonious robbers could in a moment wrest from him his crowning glory. He hated each day of his life, he swore he had never been happy, and in his blindness he remembered nothing that could be set against his wrongs to prove that the earth is habitable. He wore no sword, and had he done so, he could not slay himself, because he had to live and wreak a memorable vengeance. But he had no brains to think of even this most human consolation. His was the haughtiness of ownership staggering under a shameful blow in the face.

He stood in the baleful moonlight, and it filled him with a delirium of hatred and contempt, running through his fixed despair. Becoming finally conscious of the state he was in, a sort of affright seized the alchemist, and he opened his lips and spoke in prayer. At the same moment a cloud drifted over the moon, a cold night breeze swept past, and exhaustion seized the iron-sinewed man and cast him headlong and oblivious on the twice-desecrated ground.

CHAPTER XII.

"Nobilitie began in thine ancestors and endeth in thee, and the Generositie that they gayned by virtue thou hast blotted by vice."—"Euphues," LYLY.

WHEN he awoke out of his first anguish the man felt he had again a goal before

him, though it originated in the loss of all he had held dear. He must be avenged for Berengaria's death, and he must write to the world how he found the universal solvent. But, the first impulse being by far the stronger, he resolved to meet De Foncé at once and to settle his affairs with that notable informer. Then either De Foncé would die and a great unbearable load of bitterness with him (for how can one bear malice against a man who has fallen by one's own hand ?), or, failing that consummation, Denis himself meant to be left lifeless on the spot where hated and hater had fought.

It was a hard matter to the robbed and outraged man to refrain his hand from

striking instantly, informally and prematurely; but he did refrain. One violent death-wrestle was nothing to the end he meditated for De Foncé; he meant to meet him at a sword's distance and fight him keenly, breathlessly, relentlessly, for long moments, which yet De Foncé should feel too short, since they are part of the end; he would play with him like some feline animal, letting the hate in his eye and hand unnerve and fascinate the victim; wounding him once, twice, several times, exulting in his blood; terrifying him by sudden attacks, bewildering him by feints; advancing upon him in his exhaustion, and standing over him to mock him as he fell. Let Raoul de Foncé know

that there are dangers to be incurred even by crime with the Church at its back. It is not secure to have all honest men against you.

Zachaire subdued himself and sent this challenge to his enemy, to be delivered at the sword's point:

"Raoul de Foncé,—

"Inasmuch as thou, breaking the laws of sacred guesthood, hast most foully, cruelly and cowardly robbed me of my wife and treasure, I do invoke God's curse upon thee, and, as the messenger of His vengeance, I do summon thee to meet me to-morrow, at four of the morning, in the field which is opposite St.

Servin's church, where I shall prove upon thy body that thou art a godless villain.

"DENIS ZACHAIRE,

"*Gentilhomme et Philosophe Guiennois.*"

The bearer of this message soon returned, but it was to advertise the alchemist of his foe's departure. De Foncé was gone; no one knew when, nor whither. De Foncé was just one of those men who never stay long in one place.

When Denis had exhausted every means of tracking the faithless nomad, and was at last forced to see that all was in vain, his brain reeled with what was almost a relapse into despair.

Something he must do to keep his mind

steady, and he resolved that, for a change, that something should be good. He had heavy debts. The alchemist's calling is only to be pursued by those who can spend money on experiment, and this Maistre Zachaire had largely done. To the wild regret of his relatives, Denis now proceeded to sell all his estates in Toulouse—every acre, every building upon it, down to the old manor, where he had dwelt laboriously but happily, with Berengaria. He tells us pathetically enough how he charged a friend to pay his creditors all that was their due, and afterwards "I charged him secretly to distribute the money that remained amongst such of my relatives

as were in want, in order that both they and others should enjoy at least some fruits of the great possessions with which God had endowed me; but they did not see it in this light. On the contrary, they thought of me as of a desperate man, ashamed of past wasteful expenditure, selling my goods that I might retire elsewhere to carry on fresh follies." *

This business over, the weary-hearted man started for Lausanne, for no other reason than because it was the home of De Foncé's parentage, and that he hoped there to gain some clue to his whereabouts.

As valediction Zachaire carried with him the scorn of all his people, who looked

* "De la Philo. Nat. des Métaux," Zachaire.

upon his quiet departure, accompanied by only one manservant, just as his later biographer, Figuier, looks upon it. "I went," says Zachaire, "with a very small escort, so that I might not be recognized" —"which pleads but weakly for his honesty in regard to his asserted discovery of the philosopher's stone," adds Figuier with modern contempt. But we know better; Zachaire told us the truth, though only "a piece of him." He truly went away *en garçon, avec fort petit train*, that he might not be known; but, had he desired to make a display, his treasure, his gold-purveyor, was stolen, and he was as poor a man as any in France.

Arrived at Lausanne, Zachaire sat

down and finished that small volume which is all we have of him. He put his heart into it (for was it not his *raison d'être* for the nonce?), and he has done it well.

The first of the three books into which it is divided has the greatest interest, for it tells of the many experiments and failures and fresh schemes he went through before his final success. It gives a short but entertaining account of his life and adventures up to his discovery, written in a clear, rather humorous style, showing distinct traces of the talent his friends had always attributed to him. But this book was written, for the most part, in happier days.

The second book treats of the works of former alchemists, with great learning, and with an amount of judgment which we ἰδιῶται will not take upon ourselves to impugn. There is always the same good, running style, and the same leaning towards humour; that, at least, we can avouch.

The third part contains one of the typical alchemical allegories, a queer, strained symbol of an undiscovered fact, one of those secret paths by which the Inquisition-haunted scientists of the Middle Ages sought to guide wanderers towards Parnassus; and the whole composition, like each of its parts, is wound up by an invocation to the Trinity.

This done, Zachaire was free; it seemed to him that the climax of his life had been recorded, and that nothing remained but to turn the last blank page and shut the volume of his intellectual life, spending the trivial useless years of his remaining time in retrospection and revenge.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Silva was mazed in doubtful consciousness,
As one who, slumbering in the day, awakes
From striving into freedom, and yet feels
His sense half captive to intangible things."
"The Spanish Gypsey," GEORGE ELIOT.

FOUND! Who may tell the relief to a mind overcharged with hatred when its long-sought aggressor seems about to become its victim? Zachaire was no man to sit still, doing nothing; he had a

genius for action, good or bad. Since his book was finished he had lived in uneasiness, until a new task was shown to be possible. He had tracked De Foncé; now he must kill him.

This way came Denis acquainted with the vicinity of his foe. Having wandered all day amongst the hills, living over again past days, since the present were so hateful to him, wearied he at last arrived at a small châlet, hidden away in a wild and lonely spot which he had hitherto failed to meet in his roaming. Seeing a house with the sunset light glowing upon it, he began to imagine that he was tired and hungry. This opinion was strengthened when a beautiful peasant

woman came out-of-doors to look into the distance, carrying a pail of new milk in her hand. Zachaire was strangely indifferent to women now, even when they were the property of another; and yet he was a Frenchman. But the reason was that in some poor unhonoured grave there lay what had been the fair covering of one of the fairest souls on earth, and that soul had been—and therefore still was—knit to him.

It was not because the peasant woman was beautiful, but because Zachaire was utterly alone, that he stopped to hear his own and another's voice. He begged for a drink of milk and sat down upon a wooden bench at the door, to enjoy

himself peacefully with the innocuous liquid out of a horn-cup. The woman had a slightly bored aspect as she stood there, leaning against the house-wall, with her arms twined in her apron and her big blue eyes discontentedly staring at the visitor; it was because Zachaire had a plenteous voice of his own, but it seemed of so little use to him. And why should a man in his senses look across at an ugly hill instead of aside at a handsome woman?

By-and-by Denis felt the large blue eyes, and turned, with a painful thrill at the heart, to meet them; all blue eyes brought back the two bits of heaven that once had smiled on him for a while.

"Dost live here all alone?" he inquired carelessly.

"No," said the woman, looking down with an odd attempt of bashfulness; "there is the Comte de Foncé."

Instead of springing to his feet with a roar of triumph and an overturn of his horn-cup, Zachaire put his hand to his throat, drew a long breath and smiled radiantly upon his informant. It was no shock of surprise—(had he not lived for this moment?)—but it was a great pleasure.

He rose and said with mock courtesy, "À votre santé, Madame la Comtesse!" and drank off the milk as if it were an elixir.

The woman laughed, and said coaxingly, "No, but *is* there a Madame Comtesse?"

"Nay, the saints preserve our dames of France from such a destiny! He doesn't worship Hymen. Will he be here soon?—when, to-night?"

"Most like he will."

"He is a coward and will bring thee to mischief; have a care!" said Zachaire with the mean idea of making his foe's last hours a penance to him. He pressed some coins into the woman's hand and added, "Tell him nothing of my visit; it would displease him. I am his poor relation; *comprends tu?*"

The woman smiled, and promised easily.

"So De Foncé enjoys himself after

his labours for the Holy Office?" thought Zachaire. "And a woman does not instinctively shun him. Poor creature, she knows little how tender her Raoul can be;" and the alchemist fell to pitying the ignorance of women as regards their lovers, playing with the subject casually, as a variation out of the theme of his great passion.

It was a long way to wander on the small sheep-tracks before Zachaire could find his way home again. The evening closed in; the glorious tints of sunset paled until their gorgeous reflections on the hills dwindled to thin veils of dusky colour, and the sounds of the day were silenced. It was a lone place, and the

rushing of a mountain torrent, hidden from the eye in some rocky defile, sounded strangely. It would be a dark night, too; there were thick clouds overhead. Zachaire, as he strode along in mournful silence, nursing his vengeance, felt more and more lost in that wide, wild place. A man should go leaping and whistling along those craggy steeps, instead of walking heavily with his head down, as Zachaire did, until, looking up, his eyes encountered those of a great black goat, and he started as if he were a coward and no man. This foolish incident made him laugh, and the laugh rang hoarsely through the still air and then subsided, as if awed by the solemn sound of hidden

torrent. There was a fearful, weird way about these mountains. Zachaire caught himself thinking of all the old Troll and sprite and apparition stories he had ever heard; many of them dealt with strangers wandering in the Swiss mountains. "God knows I have no unmanly weakness in such things," muttered Zachaire, 'but, superstition or no superstition, I could find it in my heart to wish my intent less bloody on a night like this."

He was now pacing steadily along a path that wound round the mountain at a great height above the storming torrent, and the still night was turning greyer with rapidity now. There was no wind, but a sudden chilliness, unexpected in this fair summer

eve, made Zachaire hasten his steps. Why, how cold it was! and yet the sun had so recently gone down and there was no wind. And here the alchemist came to a dead stop in his walk and looked hard around him; for two or three paces in front of him the grass was waved and pressed down, as if by an invisible footfall. Moreover, once again came that thrilling cold sensation, and then Denis knew that he was not alone. He looked over his shoulder quietly, as we do when something we cannot see stirs the air around us. The more he failed to behold what troubled him, the surer he was of its presence. Those who aver that they have seen beyond this world, say that it is impos-

sible to mistake the visitation, that there is something that radiates from what they see, that chills you as nothing upon a moist warm sunlit earth can do. Denis knew well that a spirit was with him, freezing the gross fire of rage out of his soul, and leading him to a place wherein there was no abiding. While his soul was away from all things that have substance, he heard the word "Pardon," very low and clear. Still under the restraint of the unseen presence, he uttered dreamily, "Pardon for the murderer? Is *that* God's justice?" "Pardon" was answered him. "I shall die," groaned Zachaire, sinking down and crossing himself; "if I do not see thee, I shall die."

He waited, chained and frozen, until the presence passed away, and he had not seen it. Then, released, he threw up his arms with a wild long laugh and went his way, utterly broken, with his sinful hope all shattered, and nothing on earth to satisfy him now that was gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

Zachaire never knew day so long and tedious as the one subsequent to his mysterious withholding. The whole world seemed void of interest to him as he turned over in his mind what might be done when revenge was forbidden. He was friendless, homeless and aimless; for in the turmoil of his passions the tranquil

love of work had quite forsaken him. The past was now a great pageant of pain; the future was too complicated a puzzle; "the present, where is it?" as some writer says. One thing alone was worth doing and should be done. Zachaire would face his enemy, and still the craving he had to view the object of so intense a hatred. He was sure of himself, for spirits do not need to repeat their monitions; De Foncé was safe, and would have been safe had his throat been under the alchemist's hand at that moment.

So towards nightfall Zachaire lit a pine-wood torch and hastened away to the châlet, where he might expect to find his deadly enemy. He was steady enough in

mind to have no fear of girding on his sword; even its bright possibilities could not shake him—so he thought. And now he has turned the corner of the house, carefully lowering his torch until he faces the window of a little ground-floor room. He looks straight in; De Foncé is there.

Sitting at a table whereon is beer and cheese and goat's flesh, the high-born "familiar" of the Holy Office chats gaily with the handsome peasant-girl. His sword is lying sheathed on the table, and he is bending so far backward to catch the smiles of Ginetta that he does not see the face of danger. A pretty picture by the bright light of the wood fire—Nobility, fresh from the exciting, honourable toils

of camp and court and cloister, solaces its well-won leisure in the modest cottage, by the side of the rustic fair; in the background the graver element appears, the avenger, who knows, what Ginetta does not, Nobility's sins, and who stands motionless, feasting his eyes upon the unconscious pair within. But this is not enough; Denis is not the man to take a merely passive share of this evening's pleasure; he must add a fresh interest to the idyl. With a quick movement he elevates his torch above his head and stands straight under its lurid light, staring at De Foncé with that intense and yet ironical expression which, better than all others, expresses the sentiment of hate.

De Foncé looked out vaguely first, at the flash of the torch, but as he realized that he was, and had unconsciously for moments been, in the presence of the man he had most injured, and whom to avoid he had fled to a wild spot in Switzerland, the cowardice of the man spread like a net over his paralyzed limbs, and the blood rushed from his cheek to hide itself in his traitorous heart. He sat motionless and gave a deep groan, for the very air seemed hostile to him.

"I bring you a reprieve," said Zachaire slowly, "a pardon from Berengaria Zachaire."

Ginetta had gazed speechless upon the visitor, whose features were so wild and

strained that she did not recognize him; but the sound of his studiously steady voice she knew, and gave a sudden shriek of horror. Further than that Zachaire knew not, for he dashed down his torch, extinguishing it, and fled away. Spirit or no spirit, he felt he could remain no longer inactive in sight of that faithless caitiff and his idle sword.

As he went, De Foncé rose and, moistening his lips, muttered hoarsely, "I must track him home, Ginetta, for he must not live another day. I wronged him once, and he is one of those hard, unforgiving natures that keep a memory fed on others' faults. Thank Heaven, I never was resentful. Kiss me, Ginetta—what, no? I have

no friend if thou shouldst turn against me."

CHAPTER XV.

"There can be nothing given of God to man more notable than peace."—"Euphues," LYLY.

DENIS went home and slept. He had seen De Foncé and, for the moment, the hunger of hate was stayed. How life was to be spent after this day he did not know; he could not bear to quit the place where his enemy breathed beside him. The monotony of existence elsewhere would be insupportable; but to-night he would think no more. He slept a profound but uneasy sleep, haunted by dreams of two very different colours, but which were madly intermingled. He

dreamt of his enemy, vile De Foncé, with his reckless smile, leaning back in his chair to taunt Zachaire with his alchemical illusions. He dreamt of Berengaria, standing by his side in a long white garment, weeping and holding in her tender hand a sword. The two dreams repeated themselves and then emerged into one long vision of love and hate, until Zachaire rose up with a start, thinking he saw Berengaria standing out white against the intense blackness of the night. Surely he saw her—there—in front of him, her sunny hair in waves around her, and the wistful blue eyes shining into a smile. Surely it was she; and yet no. It was only the

strong visions of sleep that had enchanted his eyes till they really saw what his heart bade them see. Here was no spirit, only the answer to a very human yearning. And Zachaire threw himself wearily upon his bed again, and longed for the same terrible awe that had seized him and the unearthly breeze that had frozen him, on the slope of the old Swiss mountain.

The night waned and the sun rose, but Zachaire lay still and aimless, for there was nothing for him to do. He had never lived without a purpose and did not know how to begin. He felt the bitterness of having succeeded too soon. If the philosopher's stone were

still to seek, with how grim and intense an earnestness would he now be rising to his work! His work had always satisfied him until his soul had been rent by passion; now he must gather himself up as one wearied, and laboriously wander until his intellect demand no more from him. Berengaria in his dream had held a sword; but he would not take it, for there was too much power still in him, and he would not leave one experience in his life untried. If needs be that he spend the rest of his time in passive memories, he who has worked so hard will be able to do this. Later on an idea occurred to the alchemist's idle mind.

"Bring me a cup of wine, Jehan," he said, "the wine—you know it well—that I used to bring out when the Abbé Venceslas honoured us."

The wine was brought and Zachaire quaffed two rather large cups of it. The splendid draught brought back enthusiasm, and he rose and dressed and went down the narrow stairs to his small bare room with its wooden walls and unstrewn floor. He sat down at the table, carelessly drawing towards him Arnold de la Villeneuve's work on alchemy. But he soon pushed it away, for his eye had lighted on the empty wine-cup. With a movement of desperation Zachaire filled and drank again, again,

and ever again, while the glorious witchery of wine wove its spells ever thicker around his brain. For a while he sat there, with glittering eyes and smiles upon his lips, reviewing his past improved by rosy enchantment, and drinking in ever new fire and sweetness.

Now he found himself walking unsteadily in a scented, umbrageous pine-wood, not far from the châlet. He was surprised and rather pained to have come there without the cognizance of his reason, but he consoled himself by reflecting that he was doing well to walk abroad and shake off the injurious effects that wine is rumoured to produce. But truly he was now engaged in laughing at the theories

current on intoxication. He knew what it was to have drunk too much and to have suffered, but this time it was different, for the elixir had put soul into him—two souls he began to think, instead of one; or why did he thus suddenly own the capacity to enjoy life as he had never done before? The fresh air thrilled and stung him like a pleasant galvanism. It was wearisome to walk, though, so he threw himself under a great pine and was soon lost in a dead undreaming sleep.

And he never saw De Foncé stealing up to him, and smiling vindictively as he stole his sword without noise from its sheath; never heard the rustle as De

Foncé stumbled over a half-hidden stump and drew back, holding his breath, but stirring with his feet the undergrowth.

But the enchantment of wine is broken by sharp pain, and thus it came that Zachaire sprang to his feet with one shout of fury, only to feel bitterly that the greatest alchemist of France had found his death in a stab, given stealthily during a drunken sleep.

O the traitor, should he go scathless? No, no; not if all Heaven appeared to claim his safety. He has first attacked; let him suffer. Zachaire drew his sword and giddily struck out at the assassin, crying, "Stand and fight, or I'll live by magic to proclaim your villainy."

Now, whether De Foncé, like the many in those days, believed most things of an alchemist, or whether this taunt from a dying man stung him also into manhood, sure it is he stood and fought. Denis stood with his back against the tree under which he had lain, reddening the couch of his unblest slumbers with his blood. He strove—spirits of vengeance, how he strove!—to strike his enemy one such blow as should avenge him, but he *could* not reach him. He was so weak; though sober now, he was faint even unto death, and his antagonist's form was misty before him; he only saw the thin sharp steel. He felt he could not conquer, and then another new

sensation flashed all through him, and illumined all his being with a stream of joy; he was going to see the end of all this, and in a few moments would lie quiet in the cool shade here.

What is his enemy to him? He has lived his life.

"Il a vécu." There! one keen stroke more; De Foncé has him under the left arm now, and down towards the heart. Ah! how the grudging flesh rebels at the sting of the withdrawn steel. But it is over, and the traitor has turned and fled.

"Raoul de Foncé," shouted Zachaire with a last effort, "in whose house wilt thou now take refuge, my guest?"

And then the alchemist, biting the dust, and struggling still with the physical regret for the dear light of the sun, crossed himself and breathed out his soul in low sobs of praying:

"God, Thou hast given me the joy that is above all pleasure, the knowledge of high secrets, the possession of wisdom; Thou hast given to my little fragile snowdrop release from torture, succour at the hands of him she most loved on earth; and, to crown all, Thou hast not grudged to give me, at the hands of my fiercest foe, earth's last and greatest blessing, death."

FINIS.

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