



The Guermantes Way

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CHAPTER ONE. NAMES OF PEOPLE

The twittering of the birds at daybreak sounded insipid to Françoise. Every word uttered by the maids upstairs made her jump; disturbed by all their running about, she kept asking herself what they could be doing. In other words, we had moved. Certainly the servants had made no less noise in the attics of our old home; but she knew them, she had made of their comings and goings familiar events. Now she faced even silence with a strained attention. And as our new neighbourhood appeared to be as quiet as the boulevard on to which we had hitherto looked had been noisy, the song (distinct at a distance, when it was still quite faint, like an orchestral *motif*) of a passer-by brought tears to the eyes of a Françoise in exile. And so if I had been tempted to laugh at her in her misery at having to leave a house in which she was 'so well respected on all sides' and had packed her trunks with tears, according to the Use of Combray, declaring superior to all possible houses that which had been ours, on the other hand I, who found it as hard to assimilate new as I found it easy to abandon old conditions, I felt myself drawn towards our old servant when I saw that this installation of herself in a building where she had not received from the hall-porter, who did not yet know us, the marks of respect necessary to her moral wellbeing, had brought her positively to the verge of dissolution. She alone could understand what I was feeling; certainly her young footman was not the person to do so; for him, who was as unlike the Combray type as it was possible to conceive, packing up, moving, living in another district, were all like taking a holiday in which the novelty of one's surroundings gave one the same sense of refreshment as if one had actually travelled; he thought he was in the country; and a cold in the head afforded him, as though he had been sitting in a draughty railway carriage, the delicious sensation of having seen the world; at each fresh sneeze he rejoiced that he had found so smart a place, having always longed to be with people who travelled a lot. And so, without giving him a thought, I went straight to Françoise, who, in return for my having laughed at her tears over a removal which had left me cold, now shewed an icy indifference to my sorrow, but because she shared it. The 'sensibility' claimed by neurotic people is matched by their egotism; they cannot abide the flaunting by others of the sufferings to which they pay an ever increasing attention in themselves. Françoise, who would not allow the least of her own ailments to pass unnoticed, if I were in pain would turn her head from me so that I should not have the satisfaction of seeing my sufferings pitied, or so much as observed. It was the same as soon as I tried to speak to her about our new house. Moreover, having been obliged, a day or two later, to return to the

house we had just left, to retrieve some clothes which had been overlooked in our removal, while I, as a result of it, had still a 'temperature,' and like a boa constrictor that has just swallowed an ox felt myself painfully distended by the sight of a long trunk which my eyes had still to digest, Françoise, with true feminine inconstancy, came back saying that she had really thought she would stifle on our old boulevard, it was so stuffy, that she had found it quite a day's journey to get there, that never had she seen such stairs, that she would not go back to live there for a king's ransom, not if you were to offer her millions — a pure hypothesis — and that everything (everything, that is to say, to do with the kitchen and 'usual offices') was much better fitted up in the new house. Which, it is high time now that the reader should be told — and told also that we had moved into it because my grandmother, not having been at all well (though we took care to keep this reason from her), was in need of better air — was a flat forming part of the Hôtel de Guermantes.

At the age when a Name, offering us an image of the unknowable which we have poured into its mould, while at the same moment it connotes for us also an existing place, forces us accordingly to identify one with the other to such a point that we set out to seek in a city for a soul which it cannot embody but which we have no longer the power to expel from the sound of its name, it is not only to towns and rivers that names give an individuality, as do allegorical paintings, it is not only the physical universe which they pattern with differences, people with marvels, there is the social universe also; and so every historic house, in town or country, has its lady or its fairy, as every forest has its spirit, as there is a nymph for every stream. Sometimes, hidden in the heart of its name, the fairy is transformed to suit the life of our imagination by which she lives; thus it was that the atmosphere in which Mme. de Guermantes existed in me, after having been for years no more than the shadow cast by a magic lantern slide or the light falling through a painted window, began to let its colours fade when quite other dreams impregnated it with the bubbling coolness of her flowing streams.

And yet the fairy must perish if we come in contact with the real person to whom her name corresponds, for that person the name then begins to reflect, and she has in her nothing of the fairy; the fairy may revive if we remove ourself from the person, but if we remain in her presence the fairy definitely dies and with her the name, as happened to the family of Lusignan, which was fated to become extinct on the day when the fairy Mélusine should disappear. Then the Name, beneath our successive 'restorations' of which we may end by finding, as their original, the beautiful portrait of a strange lady whom we are never to meet, is nothing more than the mere photograph, for identification, to which we refer in order to decide whether we know, whether or not we ought to bow to a person who passes us in the street. But let a sensation from a

bygone year — like those recording instruments which preserve the sound and the manner of the various artists who have sung or played into them — enable our memory to make us hear that name with the particular ring with which it then sounded in our ears, then, while the name itself has apparently not changed, we feel the distance that separates the dreams which at different times its same syllables have meant to us. For a moment, from the clear echo of its warbling in some distant spring, we can extract, as from the little tubes which we use in painting, the exact, forgotten, mysterious, fresh tint of the days which we had believed ourself to be recalling, when, like a bad painter, we were giving to the whole of our past, spread out on the same canvas, the tones, conventional and all alike, of our unprompted memory. Whereas on the contrary, each of the moments that composed it employed, for an original creation, in a matchless harmony, the colour of those days which we no longer know, and which, for that matter, will still suddenly enrapture me if by any chance the name ‘Guermantes,’ resuming for a moment, after all these years, the sound, so different from its sound to-day, which it had for me on the day of Mile. Percepied’s marriage, brings back to me that mauve — so delicate, almost too bright, too new — with which the billowy scarf of the young Duchess glowed, and, like two periwinkle flowers, growing beyond reach and blossoming now again, her two eyes, sunlit with an azure smile. And the name Guermantes of those days is also like one of those little balloons which have been filled with oxygen, or some such gas; when I come to explode it, to make it emit what it contains, I breathe the air of the Combray of that year, of that day, mingled with a fragrance of hawthorn blossom blown by the wind from the corner of the square, harbinger of rain, which now sent the sun packing, now let him spread himself over the red woollen carpet to the sacristy, steeping it in a bright geranium scarlet, with that, so to speak, Wagnerian harmony in its gaiety which makes the wedding service always impressive. But even apart from rare moments such as these, in which suddenly we feel the original entity quiver and resume its form, carve itself out of the syllables now soundless, dead; if, in the giddy rush of daily life, in which they serve only the most practical purposes, names have lost all their colour, like a prismatic top that spins too quickly and seems only grey, when, on the other hand, in our musings we reflect, we seek, so as to return to the past, to slacken, to suspend the perpetual motion by which we are borne along, gradually we see once more appear, side by side, but entirely distinct from one another, the tints which in the course of our existence have been successively presented to us by a single name.

What form was assumed in my mind by this name Guermantes when my first nurse — knowing no more, probably, than I know to-day in whose honour it had been composed — sang me to sleep with that old ditty, *Gloire à la Marquise de Guermantes*, or when, some years later, the veteran

Maréchal de Guermantes, making my nursery-maid's bosom swell with pride, stopped in the Champs-Élysées to remark: "A fine child that!" and gave me a chocolate drop from his comfit-box, I cannot, of course, now say. Those years of my earliest childhood are no longer a part of myself; they are external to me; I can learn nothing of them save as we learn things that happened before we were born — from the accounts given me by other people. But more recently I find in the period of that name's occupation of me seven or eight different shapes which it has successively assumed; the earliest were the most beautiful; gradually my musings, forced by reality to abandon a position that was no longer tenable, established themselves anew in one slightly less advanced until they were obliged to retire still farther. And, with Mme. de Guermantes, was transformed simultaneously her dwelling, itself also the offspring of that name, fertilised from year to year by some word or other that came to my ears and modulated the tone of my musings; that dwelling of hers reflected them in its very stones, which had turned to mirrors, like the surface of a cloud or of a lake. A dungeon keep without mass, no more indeed than a band of orange light from the summit of which the lord and his lady dealt out life and death to their vassals, had given place — right at the end of that 'Guermantes way' along which, on so many summer afternoons, I retraced with my parents the course of the Vivonne — to that land of bubbling streams where the Duchess taught me to fish for trout and to know the names of the flowers whose red and purple clusters adorned the walls of the neighbouring gardens; then it had been the ancient heritage, famous in song and story, from which the proud race of Guermantes, like a carved and mellow tower that traverses the ages, had risen already over France when the sky was still empty at those points where, later, were to rise Notre Dame of Paris and Notre Dame of Chartres, when on the summit of the hill of Laon the nave of its cathedral had not yet been poised, like the Ark of the Deluge on the summit of Mount Ararat, crowded with Patriarchs and Judges anxiously leaning from its windows to see whether the wrath of God were yet appeased, carrying with it the types of the vegetation that was to multiply on the earth, brimming over with animals which have escaped even by the towers, where oxen grazing calmly upon the roof look down over the plains of Champagne; when the traveller who left Beauvais at the close of day did not yet see, following him and turning with his road, outspread against the gilded screen of the western sky, the black, ribbed wings of the cathedral. It was, this 'Guermantes,' like the scene of a novel, an imaginary landscape which I could with difficulty picture to myself and longed all the more to discover, set in the midst of real lands and roads which all of a sudden would become alive with heraldic details, within a few miles of a railway station; I recalled the names of the places round it as if they had been situated at the foot of Parnassus or of Helicon, and they seemed precious to me, as

the physical conditions — in the realm of topographical science — required for the production of an unaccountable phenomenon. I saw again the escutcheons blazoned beneath the windows of Combray church; their quarters filled, century after century, with all the lordships which, by marriage or conquest, this illustrious house had brought flying to it from all the corners of Germany, Italy and France; vast territories in the North, strong cities in the South, assembled there to group themselves in Guermantes, and, losing their material quality, to inscribe allegorically their dungeon vert, or castle triple-towered argent upon its azure field. I had heard of the famous tapestries of Guermantes, I could see them, mediaeval and blue, a trifle coarse, detach themselves like a floating cloud from the legendary, amaranthine name at the foot of the ancient forest in which Childebert went so often hunting; and this delicate, mysterious background of their lands, this vista of the ages, it seemed to me that, as effectively as by journeying to see them, I might penetrate all their secrets simply by coming in contact for a moment in Paris with Mme. de Guermantes, the princess paramount of the place and lady of the lake, as if her face, her speech must possess the local charm of forest groves and streams, and the same secular peculiarities as the old customs recorded in her archives. But then I had met Saint-Loup; he had told me that the castle had borne the name of Guermantes only since the seventeenth century, when that family had acquired it. They had lived, until then, in the neighbourhood, but their title was not taken from those parts. The village of Guermantes had received its name from the castle round which it had been built, and so that it should not destroy the view from the castle, a servitude, still in force, traced the line of its streets and limited the height of its houses. As for the tapestries, they were by Boucher, bought in the nineteenth century by a Guermantes with a taste for the arts, and hung, interspersed with a number of sporting pictures of no merit which he himself had painted, in a hideous drawing-room upholstered in ‘adrianople’ and plush. By these revelations Saint-Loup had introduced into the castle elements foreign to the name of Guermantes which made it impossible for me to continue to extract solely from the resonance of the syllables the stone and mortar of its walls. And so, in the heart of the name, was effaced the castle mirrored in its lake, and what now became apparent to me, surrounding Mme. de Guermantes as her dwelling, had been her house in Paris, the Hôtel de Guermantes, limpid like its name, for no material and opaque element intervened to interrupt and blind its transparency. As the word church signifies not only the temple but the assembly of the faithful also, this Hôtel de Guermantes comprised all those who shared the life of the Duchess, but these intimates on whom I had never set eyes were for me only famous and poetic names, and knowing exclusively persons who themselves also were names only, did but enhance and protect the mystery of the Duchess by extending all

round her a vast halo which at the most declined in brilliance as its circumference increased.

In the parties which she gave, since I could not imagine the guests as having any bodies, any moustaches, any boots, as making any utterances that were commonplace, or even original in a human and rational way, this whirlpool of names, introducing less material substance than would a phantom banquet or a spectral ball, round that statuette in Dresden china which was Madame de Guermantes, kept for her palace of glass the transparence of a showcase. Then, after Saint-Loup had told me various anecdotes about his cousin's chaplain, her gardener, and the rest, the Hôtel de Guermantes had become — as the Louvre might have been in days gone by — a kind of castle, surrounded, in the very heart of Paris, by its own domains, acquired by inheritance, by virtue of an ancient right that had quaintly survived, over which she still enjoyed feudal privileges. But this last dwelling itself vanished when we had come to live beside Mme. de Villeparisis in one of the flats adjoining that occupied by Mme. de Guermantes in a wing of the Hôtel. It was one of those old town houses, a few of which are perhaps still to be found, in which the court of honour — whether they were alluvial deposits washed there by the rising tide of democracy, or a legacy from a more primitive time when the different trades were clustered round the overlord — is flanked by little shops and workrooms, a shoemaker's, for instance, or a tailor's, such as we see nestling between the buttresses of those cathedrals which the aesthetic zeal of the restorer has not swept clear of such accretions; a porter who also does cobbling, keeps hens, grows flowers, and, at the far end, in the main building, a 'Comtesse' who, when she drives out in her old carriage and pair, flaunting on her hat a few nasturtiums which seem to have escaped from the plot by the porter's lodge (with, by the coachman's side on the box, a footman who gets down to leave cards at every aristocratic mansion in the neighbourhood), scatters vague little smiles and waves her hand in greeting to the porter's children and to such of her respectable fellow-tenants as may happen to be passing, who, to her contemptuous affability and levelling pride, seem all the same.

In the house in which we had now come to live, the great lady at the end of the courtyard was a Duchess, smart and still quite young. She was, in fact, Mme. de Guermantes and, thanks to Françoise, I soon came to know all about her household. For the Guermantes (to whom Françoise regularly alluded as the people 'below,' or 'downstairs') were her constant preoccupation from the first thing in the morning when, as she did Mamma's hair, casting a forbidden, irresistible, furtive glance down into the courtyard, she would say: "Look at that, now; a pair of holy Sisters; that'll be for downstairs, surely;" or, "Oh! just look at the fine pheasants in the kitchen window; no need to ask where they came from, the Duke will have been out with his gun!" — until the last thing at night

when, if her ear, while she was putting out my night-things, caught a few notes of a song, she would conclude: "They're having company down below; gay doings, I'll be bound;" whereupon, in her symmetrical face, beneath the arch of her now snow-white hair, a smile from her young days, sprightly but proper, would for a moment set each of her features in its place, arranging them in an intricate and special order, as though for a country-dance.

But the moment in the life of the Guermantes which excited the keenest interest in Françoise, gave her the most complete satisfaction and at the same time the sharpest annoyance was that at which, the two halves of the great gate having been thrust apart, the Duchess stepped into her carriage. It was generally a little while after our servants had finished the celebration of that sort of solemn passover which none might disturb, called their midday dinner, during which they were so far taboo that my father himself was not allowed to ring for them, knowing moreover that none of them would have paid any more attention to the fifth peal than to the first, and that the discourtesy would therefore have been a pure waste of time and trouble, though not without trouble in store for himself. For Françoise (who, in her old age, lost no opportunity of standing upon her dignity) would without fail have presented him, for the rest of the day, with a face covered with the tiny red cuneiform hieroglyphs by which she made visible — though by no means legible — to the outer world the long tale of her griefs and the profound reasons for her dissatisfactions. She would enlarge upon them, too, in a running 'aside,' but not so that we could catch her words. She called this practice — which, she imagined, must be infuriating, 'mortifying' as she herself put it, 'vexing' to us — 'saying low masses all the blessed day.'

The last rites accomplished, Françoise, who was at one and the same time, as in the primitive church, the celebrant and one of the faithful, helped herself to a final glass, undid the napkin from her throat, folded it after wiping from her lips a stain of watered wine and coffee, slipped it into its ring, turned a doleful eye to thank 'her' young footman who, to shew his zeal in her service, was saying: "Come, ma'am, a drop more of the grape; it's d'licious to-day," and went straight across to the window, which she flung open, protesting that it was too hot to breathe in 'this wretched kitchen.' Dexterously casting, as she turned the latch and let in the fresh air, a glance of studied indifference into the courtyard below, she furtively elicited the conclusion that the Duchess was not ready yet to start, brooded for a moment with contemptuous, impassioned eyes over the waiting carriage, and, this meed of attention once paid to the things of the earth, raised them towards the heavens, whose purity she had already divined from the sweetness of the air and the warmth of the sun; and let them rest on a corner of the roof, at the place where, every spring, there came and built, immediately over the

chimney of my bedroom, a pair of pigeons like those she used to hear cooing from her kitchen at Combray.

“Ah! Combray, Combray!” she cried. And the almost singing tone in which she declaimed this invocation might, taken with the Arlesian purity of her features, have made the onlooker suspect her of a Southern origin and that the lost land which she was lamenting was no more, really, than a land of adoption. If so, he would have been wrong, for it seems that there is no province that has not its own South-country; do we not indeed constantly meet Savoyards and Bretons in whose speech we find all those pleasing transpositions of longs and shorts that are characteristic of the Southerner? “Ah, Combray, when shall I look on thee again, poor land! When shall I pass the blessed day among thy hawthorns, under our own poor lily-oaks, hearing the grasshoppers sing, and the Vivonne making a little noise like someone whispering, instead of that wretched bell from our young master, who can never stay still for half an hour on end without having me run the length of that wicked corridor. And even then he makes out I don’t come quick enough; you’d need to hear the bell ring before he has pulled it, and if you’re a minute late, away he flies into the most towering rage. Alas, poor Combray; maybe I shall see thee only in death, when they drop me like a stone into the hollow of the tomb. And so, nevermore shall I smell thy lovely hawthorns, so white and all. But in the sleep of death I dare say I shall still hear those three peals of the bell which will have driven me to damnation in this world.”

Her soliloquy was interrupted by the voice of the waistcoat-maker downstairs, the same who had so delighted my grandmother once, long ago, when she had gone to pay a call on Mme. de Villeparisis, and now occupied no less exalted a place in Franchise’s affections. Having raised his head when he heard our window open, he had already been trying for some time to attract his neighbour’s attention, in order to bid her good day. The coquetry of the young girl that Françoise had once been softened and refined for M. Jupien the querulous face of our old cook, dulled by age, ill-temper and the heat of the kitchen fire, and it was with a charming blend of reserve, familiarity and modesty that she bestowed a gracious salutation on the waistcoat-maker, but without making any audible response, for if she did infringe Mamma’s orders by looking into the courtyard, she would never have dared to go the length of talking from the window, which would have been quite enough (according to her) to bring down on her ‘a whole chapter’ from the Mistress. She pointed to the waiting carriage, as who should say: “A fine pair, eh!” though what she actually muttered was: “What an old rattle-trap!” but principally because she knew that he would be bound to answer, putting his hand to his lips so as to be audible without having to shout:

“You could have one too if you liked, as good as they have and better, I dare say, only you don’t care for that sort of thing.”

And Franoise, after a modest, evasive signal of delight, the meaning of which was, more or less: "Tastes differ, you know; simplicity's the rule in this house," shut the window again in case Mamma should come in. These 'you' who might have had more horses than the Guermantes were ourselves, but Jupien was right in saying 'you' since, except for a few purely personal gratifications, such as, when she coughed all day long without ceasing and everyone in the house was afraid of catching her cold, that of pretending, with an irritating little titter, that she had not got a cold, like those plants that an animal to which they are wholly attached keeps alive with food which it catches, eats and digests for them and of which it offers them the ultimate and easily assimilable residue, Françoise lived with us in full community; it was we who, with our virtues, our wealth, our style of living, must take on ourselves the task of concocting those little sops to her vanity out of which was formed — with the addition of the recognised rights of freely practising the cult of the midday dinner according to the traditional custom, which included a mouthful of air at the window when the meal was finished, a certain amount of loitering in the street when she went out to do her marketing, and a holiday on Sundays when she paid a visit to her niece — the portion of happiness indispensable to her existence. And so it can be understood that Françoise might well have succumbed in those first days of our migration, a victim, in a house where my father's claims to distinction were not yet known, to a malady which she herself called 'wearying,' wearying in the active sense in which the word *ennui* is employed by Corneille, or in the last letters of soldiers who end by taking their own lives because they are wearying for their girls or for their native villages. Françoise's wearying had soon been cured by none other than Jupien, for he at once procured her a pleasure no less keen, indeed more refined than she would have felt if we had decided to keep a carriage. "Very good class, those Juliens," (for Françoise readily assimilated new names to those with which she was already familiar) "very worthy people; you can see it written on their faces." Jupien was in fact able to understand, and to inform the world that if we did not keep a carriage it was because we had no wish for one. This new friend of Françoise was very little at home, having obtained a post in one of the Government offices. A waistcoat-maker first of all, with the 'chit of a girl' whom my grandmother had taken for his daughter, he had lost all interest in the exercise of that calling after his assistant (who, when still little more than a child, had shewn great skill in darning a torn skirt, that day when my grandmother had gone to call on Mme. de Villeparisis) had turned to ladies' fashions and become a seamstress. A prentice hand, to begin with, in a dressmaker's workroom, set to stitch a seam, to fasten a flounce, to sew on a button or to press a crease, to fix a waistband with hooks and eyes, she had quickly risen to be second and then chief assistant, and having formed a connexion of her own among

ladies of fashion now worked at home, that is to say in our courtyard, generally with one or two of her young friends from the workroom, whom she had taken on as apprentices. After this, Jupien's presence in the place had ceased to matter. No doubt the little girl (a big girl by this time) had often to cut out waistcoats still. But with her friends to assist her she needed no one besides. And so Jupien, her uncle, had sought employment outside. He was free at first to return home at midday, then, when he had definitely succeeded the man whose substitute only he had begun by being, not before dinner-time. His appointment to the 'regular establishment' was, fortunately, not announced until some weeks after our arrival, so that his courtesy could be brought to bear on her long enough to help Françoise to pass through the first, most difficult phase without undue suffering. At the same time, and without underrating his value to Françoise as, so to speak, a sedative during the period of transition, I am bound to say that my first impression of Jupien had been far from favourable. At a little distance, entirely ruining the effect that his plump cheeks and vivid colouring would otherwise have produced, his eyes, brimming with a compassionate, mournful, dreamy gaze, led one to suppose that he was seriously ill or had just suffered a great bereavement. Not only was he nothing of the sort, but as soon as he opened his mouth (and his speech, by the way, was perfect) he was quite markedly cynical and cold. There resulted from this discord between eyes and lips a certain falsity which was not attractive, and by which he had himself the air of being made as uncomfortable as a guest who arrives in morning dress at a party where everyone else is in evening dress, or as a commoner who having to speak to a Royal Personage does not know exactly how he ought to address him and gets round the difficulty by cutting down his remarks to almost nothing. Jupien's (here the comparison ends) were, on the contrary, charming. Indeed, corresponding possibly to this overflowing of his face by his eyes (which one ceased to notice when one came to know him), I soon discerned in him a rare intellect, and one of the most spontaneously literary that it has been my privilege to come across, in the sense that, probably without education, he possessed or had assimilated, with the help only of a few books skimmed in early life, the most ingenious turns of speech. The most gifted people that I had known had died young. And so I was convinced that Jupien's life would soon be cut short. Kindness was among his qualities, and pity, the most delicate and the most generous feelings for others. But his part in the life of Françoise had soon ceased to be indispensable. She had learned to put up with understudies.

Indeed, when a tradesman or servant came to our door with a parcel or message, while seeming to pay no attention and merely pointing vaguely to an empty chair, Françoise so skilfully put to the best advantage the few seconds that he spent in the kitchen, while he waited

for Mamma's answer, that it was very seldom that the stranger went away without having ineradicably engraved upon his memory the conviction that, if we 'did not have' any particular thing, it was because we had 'no wish' for it. If she made such a point of other people's knowing that we 'had money' (for she knew nothing of what Saint-Loup used to call partitive articles, and said simply 'have money,' 'fetch water'), of their realising that we were rich, it was not because riches with nothing else besides, riches without virtue, were in her eyes the supreme good in life; but virtue without riches was not her ideal either. Riches were for her, so to speak, a necessary condition of virtue, failing which virtue itself would lack both merit and charm. She distinguished so little between them that she had come in time to invest each with the other's attributes, to expect some material comfort from virtue, to discover something edifying in riches.

As soon as she had shut the window again, which she did quickly — otherwise Mamma would, it appeared, have heaped on her 'every conceivable insult' — Françoise began with many groans and sighs to put straight the kitchen table.

"There are some Guermantes who stay in the Rue de la Chaise," began my father's valet; "I had a friend who used to be with them; he was their second coachman. And I know a fellow, not my old pal, but his brother-in-law, who did his time in the Army with one of the Baron de Guermantes's stud grooms. Does your mother know you're out?" added the valet, who was in the habit, just as he used to hum the popular airs of the season, of peppering his conversation with all the latest witticisms.

Françoise, with the tired eyes of an ageing woman, eyes which moreover saw everything from Combray, in a hazy distance, made out not the witticism that underlay the words, but that there must be something witty in them since they bore no relation to the rest of his speech and had been uttered with considerable emphasis by one whom she knew to be a joker. She smiled at him, therefore, with an air of benevolent bewilderment, as who should say: "Always the same, that Victor!" And she was genuinely pleased, knowing that listening to smart sayings of this sort was akin — if remotely — to those reputable social pleasures for which, in every class of society, people make haste to dress themselves in their best and run the risk of catching cold. Furthermore, she believed the valet to be a friend after her own heart, for he never left off denouncing, with fierce indignation, the appalling measures which the Republic was about to enforce against the clergy. Françoise had not yet learned that our cruellest adversaries are not those who contradict and try to convince us, but those who magnify or invent reports which may make us unhappy, taking care not to include any appearance of justification, which might lessen our discomfort, and perhaps give us

some slight regard for a party which they make a point of displaying to us, to complete our torment, as being at once terrible and triumphant. "The Duchess must be connected with all that lot," said Françoise, bringing the conversation back to the Guermantes of the Rue de la Chaise, as one plays a piece over again from the andante. "I can't recall who it was told me that one of them had married a cousin of the Duke. It's the same kindred, anyway. Ay, they're a great family, the Guermantes!" she added, in a tone of respect founding the greatness of the family at once on the number of its branches and the brilliance of its connexions, as Pascal founds the truth of Religion on Reason and on the Authority of the Scriptures. For since there was but the single word 'great' to express both meanings, it seemed to her that they formed a single idea, her vocabulary, like cut stones sometimes, shewing thus on certain of its facets a flaw which projected a ray of darkness into the recesses of her mind. "I wonder now if it wouldn't be them that have their castle at Guermantes, not a score of miles from Combray; then they must be kin to their cousin at Algiers, too." My mother and I long asked ourselves who this cousin at Algiers could be until finally we discovered that Françoise meant by the name 'Algiers' the town of Angers. What is far off may be more familiar to us than what is quite near. Françoise, who knew the name 'Algiers' from some particularly unpleasant dates that used to be given us at the New Year, had never heard of Angers. Her language, like the French language itself, and especially that of place-names, was thickly strewn with errors. "I meant to talk to their butler about it. What is it again you call him?" she interrupted herself as though putting a formal question as to the correct procedure, which she went on to answer with: "Oh, of course, it's Antoine you call him!" as though Antoine had been a title. "He's the one who could tell me, but he's quite the gentleman, he is, a great scholar, you'd say they'd cut his tongue out, or that he'd forgotten to learn to speak. He makes no response when you talk to him," went on Françoise, who used 'make response' in the same sense as Mme. de Sévigné. "But," she added, quite untruthfully, "so long as I know what's boiling in my pot, I don't bother my head about what's in other people's. Whatever he is, he's not a Catholic. Besides, he's not a courageous man." (This criticism might have led one to suppose that Françoise had changed her mind about physical bravery which, according to her, in Combray days, lowered men to the level of wild beasts. But it was not so. 'Courageous' meant simply a hard worker.) "They do say, too, that he's thievish as a magpie, but it doesn't do to believe all one hears. The servants never stay long there because of the lodge; the porters are jealous and set the Duchess against them. But it's safe to say that he's a real twister, that Antoine, and his Antoinette is no better," concluded Françoise, who, in furnishing the name 'Antoine' with a feminine ending that would designate the butler's wife, was inspired, no doubt, in her act of word-

formation by an unconscious memory of the words *chanoine* and *chanoinesse*. If so, she was not far wrong. There is still a street near Notre-Dame called Rue Chanoinesse, a name which must have been given to it (since it was never inhabited by any but male Canons) by those Frenchmen of olden days of whom Françoise was, properly speaking, the contemporary. She proceeded, moreover, at once to furnish another example of this way of forming feminine endings, for she went on: "But one thing sure and certain is that it's the Duchess that has Guermantes Castle. And it's she that is the Lady Mayoress down in those parts. That's always something."

"I can well believe that it is something," came with conviction from the footman, who had not detected the irony.

"You think so, do you, my boy, you think it's something? Why, for folk like them to be Mayor and Mayoress, it's just thank you for nothing. Ah, if it was mine, that Guermantes Castle, you wouldn't see me setting foot in Paris, I can tell you. I'm sure a family who've got something to go on with, like Monsieur and Madame here, must have queer ideas to stay on in this wretched town rather than get away down to Combray the moment they're free to start, and no one hindering them. Why do they put off retiring? They've got everything they want. Why wait till they're dead? Ah, if I had only a crust of dry bread to eat and a faggot to keep me warm in winter, a fine time I'd have of it at home in my brother's poor old house at Combray. Down there you do feel you're alive; you haven't all these houses stuck up in front of you, there is so little noise at night-time, you can hear the frogs singing five miles off and more."

"That must indeed be fine!" exclaimed the young footman with enthusiasm, as though this last attraction had been as peculiar to Combray as the gondola is to Venice. A more recent arrival in the household than my father's valet, he used to talk to Françoise about things which might interest not himself so much as her. And Françoise, whose face wrinkled up in disgust when she was treated as a mere cook, had for the young footman, who referred to her always as the 'housekeeper,' that peculiar tenderness which Princes not of the blood royal feel towards the well-meaning young men who dignify them with a 'Highness.'

"At any rate one knows what one's about, there, and what time of year it is. It isn't like here where you won't find one wretched buttercup flowering at holy Easter any more than you would at Christmas, and I can't hear so much as the tiniest *angélus* ring when I lift my old bones out of bed in the morning. Down there, you can hear every hour; there's only the one poor bell, but you say to yourself: 'My brother will be coming in from the field now,' and you watch the daylight fade, and the bell rings to bless the fruits of the earth, and you have time to take a turn before you light the lamp. But here it's daytime and it's nighttime,

and you go to bed, and you can't say any more than the dumb beasts what you've been about all day."

"I gather Méséglise is a fine place, too, Madame," broke in the young footman, who found that the conversation was becoming a little too abstract for his liking, and happened to remember having heard us, at table, mention Méséglise.

"Oh! Méséglise, is it?" said Françoise with the broad smile which one could always bring to her lips by uttering any of those names — Méséglise, Combray, Tansonville. They were so intimate a part of her life that she felt, on meeting them outside it, on hearing them used in conversation, a hilarity more or less akin to that which a professor excites in his class by making an allusion to some contemporary personage whose name the students had never supposed could possibly greet their ears from the height of the academic chair. Her pleasure arose also from the feeling that these places were something to her which they were not for the rest of the world, old companions with whom one has shared many delights; and she smiled at them as if she found in them something witty, because she did find there a great part of herself.

"Yes, you may well say so, son, it is a pretty enough place is Méséglise;" she went on with a tinkling laugh, "but how did you ever come to hear tell of Méséglise?"

"How did I hear of Méséglise? But it's a well-known place; people have told me about it — yes, over and over again," he assured her with that criminal inexactitude of the informer who, whenever we attempt to form an impartial estimate of the importance that a thing which matters to us may have for other people, makes it impossible for us to succeed.

"I can tell you, it's better down there, under the cherry trees, than standing before the fire all day."

She spoke to them even of Eulalie as a good person. For since Eulalie's death Françoise had completely forgotten that she had loved her as little in her lifetime as she loved every one whose cupboard was bare, who was dying of hunger, and after that came, like a good for nothing, thanks to the bounty of the rich, to 'put on airs.' It no longer pained her that Eulalie had so skilfully managed, Sunday after Sunday, to secure her 'trifle' from my aunt. As for the latter, Françoise never left off singing her praises.

"But it was at Combray, surely, that you used to be, with a cousin of Madame?" asked the young footman.

"Yes, with Mme. Octave — oh, a dear, good, holy woman, my poor friends, and a house where there was always enough and to spare, and all of the very best, a good woman, you may well say, who had no pity on the partridges, or the pheasants, or anything; you might turn up five to dinner or six, it was never the meat that was lacking, and of the first quality too, and white wine, and red wine, and everything you could

wish.” (Françoise used the word ‘pity’ in the sense given it by Labruyère.) “It was she that paid the damages, always, even if the family stayed for months and years.” (This reflection was not really a slur upon us, for Françoise belonged to an epoch when the words ‘damages’ was not restricted to a legal use and meant simply expense.) “Ah, I can tell you, people didn’t go empty away from that house. As his reverence the Curé has told us, many’s the time, if there ever was a woman who could count on going straight before the Throne of God, it was she. Poor Madame, I can hear her saying now, in the little voice she had: ‘You know, Françoise, I can eat nothing myself, but I want it all to be just as nice for the others as if I could.’ They weren’t for her, the victuals, you may be quite sure. If you’d only seen her, she weighed no more than a bag of cherries; there wasn’t that much of her. She would never listen to a word I said, she would never send for the doctor. Ah, it wasn’t in that house that you’d have to gobble down your dinner. She liked her servants to be fed properly. Here, it’s been just the same again to-day; we haven’t had time for so much as to break a crust of bread; everything goes like ducks and drakes.”

What annoyed her more than anything were the rusks of pulled bread that my father used to eat. She was convinced that he had them simply to give himself airs and to keep her ‘dancing.’ “I can tell you frankly,” the young footman assured her, “that I never saw the like.” He said it as if he had seen everything, and as if in him the range of a millennial experience extended over all countries and their customs, among which was not anywhere to be found a custom of eating pulled bread. “Yes, yes,” the butler muttered, “but that will all be changed; the men are going on strike in Canada, and the Minister told Monsieur the other evening that he’s clearing two hundred thousand francs out of it.” There was no note of censure in his tone, not that he was not himself entirely honest, but since he regarded all politicians as unsound the crime of speculation seemed to him less serious than the pettiest larceny. He did not even stop to ask himself whether he had heard this historic utterance aright, and was not struck by the improbability that such a thing would have been admitted by the guilty party himself to my father without my father’s immediately turning him out of the house. But the philosophy of Combray made it impossible for Françoise to expect that the strikes in Canada could have any repercussion on the use of pulled bread. “So long as the world goes round, look, there’ll be masters to keep us on the trot, and servants to do their bidding.” In disproof of this theory of perpetual motion, for the last quarter of an hour my mother (who probably did not employ the same measures of time as Françoise in reckoning the duration of the latter’s dinner) had been saying: “What on earth can they be doing? They’ve been at least two hours at their dinner.”

And she rang timidly three or four times. Françoise, 'her' footman, the butler, heard the bell ring, not as a summons to themselves, and with no thought of answering it, but rather like the first sounds of the instruments being tuned when the next part of a concert is just going to begin, and one knows that there will be only a few minutes more of interval. And so, when the peals were repeated and became more urgent, our servants began to pay attention, and, judging that they had not much time left and that the resumption of work was at hand, at a peal somewhat louder than the rest gave a collective sigh and went their several ways, the footman slipping downstairs to smoke a cigarette outside the door, Françoise, after a string of reflexions on ourselves, such as: "They've got the jumps to-day, surely," going up to put her things tidy in her attic, while the butler, having supplied himself first with note-paper from my bedroom, polished off the arrears of his private correspondence.

Despite the apparent stiffness of their butler, Françoise had been in a position, from the first, to inform me that the Guermites occupied their mansion by virtue not of an immemorial right but of a quite recent tenancy, and that the garden over which it looked on the side that I did not know was quite small and just like all the gardens along the street; and I realised at length that there were not to be seen there pit and gallows or fortified mill, secret chamber, pillared dovecot, manorial bakehouse or tithe-barn, dungeon or drawbridge, or fixed bridge either for that matter, any more than toll-houses or pinnacles, charters, muniments, ramparts or commemorative mounds. But just as Elstir, when the bay of Balbec, losing its mystery, had become for me simply a portion, interchangeable with any other, of the total quantity of salt water distributed over the earth's surface, had suddenly restored to it a personality of its own by telling me that it was the gulf of opal, painted by Whistler in his 'Harmonies in Blue and Silver,' so the name Guermites had seen perish under the strokes of Françoise's hammer the last of the dwellings that had issued from its syllables when one day an old friend of my father said to us, speaking of the Duchess: "She is the first lady in the Faubourg Saint-Germain; hers is the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain." No doubt the most exclusive drawing-room, the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain was little or nothing after all those other mansions of which in turn I had dreamed. And yet in this one too (and it was to be the last of the series), there was something, however humble, quite apart from its material components, a secret differentiation.

And it became all the more essential that I should be able to explore in the drawing-room of Mme. de Guermites, among her friends, the mystery of her name, since I did not find it in her person when I saw her leave the house in the morning on foot, or in the afternoon in her carriage. Once before, indeed, in the church at Combray, she had

appeared to me in the blinding flash of a transfiguration, with cheeks irreducible to, impenetrable by, the colour of the name Guermantes and of afternoons on the banks of the Vivonne, taking the place of my shattered dream like a swan or willow into which has been changed a god or nymph, and which henceforward, subjected to natural laws, will glide over the water or be shaken by the wind. And yet, when that radiance had vanished, hardly had I lost sight of it before it formed itself again, like the green and rosy afterglow of sunset after the sweep of the oar has broken it, and in the solitude of my thoughts the name had quickly appropriated to itself my impression of the face. But now, frequently, I saw her at her window, in the courtyard, in the street, and for myself at least if I did not succeed in integrating in her the name Guermantes, I cast the blame on the impotence of my mind to accomplish the whole act that I demanded of it; but she, our neighbour, she seemed to make the same error, nay more to make it without discomfiture, without any of my scruples, without even suspecting that it was an error. Thus Mme. de Guermantes shewed in her dresses the same anxiety to follow the fashions as if, believing herself to have become simply a woman like all the rest, she had aspired to that elegance in her attire in which other ordinary women might equal and perhaps surpass her; I had seen her in the street gaze admiringly at a well-dressed actress; and in the morning, before she sallied forth on foot, as if the opinion of the passers-by, whose vulgarity she accentuated by parading familiarly through their midst her inaccessible life, could be a tribunal competent to judge her, I would see her before the glass playing, with a conviction free from all pretence or irony, with passion, with ill-humour, with conceit, like a queen who has consented to appear as a servant-girl in theatricals at court, this part, so unworthy of her, of a fashionable woman; and in this mythological oblivion of her natural grandeur, she looked to see whether her veil was hanging properly, smoothed her cuffs, straightened her cloak, as the celestial swan performs all the movements natural to his animal species, keeps his eyes painted on either side of his beak without putting into them any glint of life, and darts suddenly after a bud or an umbrella, as a swan would, without remembering that he is a god. But as the traveller, disappointed by the first appearance of a strange town, reminds himself that he will doubtless succeed in penetrating its charm if he visits its museums and galleries, so I assured myself that, had I been given the right of entry into Mme. de Guermantes's house, were I one of her friends, were I to penetrate into her life, I should then know what, within its glowing orange-tawny envelope, her name did really, objectively enclose for other people, since, after all, my father's friend had said that the Guermantes set was something quite by itself in the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

The life which I supposed them to lead there flowed from a source so different from anything in my experience, and must, I felt, be so indissolubly associated with that particular house that I could not have imagined the presence, at the Duchess's parties, of people in whose company I myself had already been, of people who really existed. For not being able suddenly to change their nature, they would have carried on conversations there of the sort that I knew; their partners would perhaps have stooped to reply to them in the same human speech; and, in the course of an evening spent in the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, there would have been moments identical with moments that I had already lived. Which was impossible. It was thus that my mind was embarrassed by certain difficulties, and the Presence of Our Lord's Body in the Host seemed to me no more obscure a mystery than this leading house in the Faubourg, situated here, on the right bank of the river, and so near that from my bed, in the morning, I could hear its carpets being beaten. But the line of demarcation that separated me from the Faubourg Saint-Germain seemed to me all the more real because it was purely ideal. I felt clearly that it was already part of the Faubourg, when I saw the Guermantes doormat, spread out beyond that intangible Equator, of which my mother had made bold to say, having like myself caught a glimpse of it one day when their door stood open, that it was a shocking state. For the rest, how could their dining-room, their dim gallery upholstered in red plush, into which I could see sometimes from our kitchen window, have failed to possess in my eyes the mysterious charm of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to form part of it in an essential fashion, to be geographically situated within it, since to have been entertained to dinner in that room was to have gone into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to have breathed its atmosphere, since the people who, before going to table, sat down by the side of Mme. de Guermantes on the leather-covered sofa in that gallery were all of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. No doubt elsewhere than in the Faubourg, at certain parties, one might see now and then, majestically enthroned amid the vulgar herd of fashion, one of those men who were mere names and varyingly assumed, when one tried to form a picture of them, the aspect of a tournament or of a royal forest. But here, in the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, in the drawing-room, in the dim gallery, there were only they. They were wrought of precious materials, the columns that upheld the temple. Indeed for quiet family parties it was from among them only that Mme. de Guermantes might select her guests, and in the dinners for twelve, gathered around the dazzling napery and plate, they were like the golden statues of the Apostles in the Sainte-Chapelle, symbolic, consecrative pillars before the Holy Table. As for the tiny strip of garden that stretched between high walls at the back of the house, where on summer evenings Mme. de Guermantes had liqueurs and orangeade brought out after dinner, how

could I not have felt that to sit there of an evening, between nine and eleven, on its iron chairs — endowed with a magic as potent as the leathern sofa — without inhaling the breezes peculiar to the Faubourg Saint-Germain was as impossible as to take a siesta in the oasis of Figuig without thereby being necessarily in Africa. Only imagination and belief can differentiate from the rest certain objects, certain people, and can create an atmosphere. Alas, those picturesque sites, those natural accidents, those local curiosities, those works of art of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, never probably should I be permitted to set my feet among them. And I must content myself with a shiver of excitement as I sighted, from the deep sea (and without the least hope of ever landing there) like an outstanding minaret, like the first palm, like the first signs of some exotic industry or vegetation, the well-trodden doormat of its shore.

But if the Hôtel de Guermantes began for me at its hall-door, its dependencies must be regarded as extending a long way farther, according to the Duke, who, looking on all the other tenants as farmers, peasants, purchasers of forfeited estates, whose opinion was of no account, shaved himself every morning in his nightshirt at the window, came down into the courtyard, according to the warmth or coldness of the day, in his shirtsleeves, in pyjamas, in a plaid coat of startling colours, with a shaggy nap, in little light-coloured coats shorter than the jackets beneath, and made one of his grooms lead past him at a trot some horse that he had just been buying. More than once, indeed, the horse broke the window of Jupien's shop, whereupon Jupien, to the Duke's indignation, demanded compensation. "If it were only in consideration of all the good that Madame la Duchesse does in the house, here, and in the parish," said M. de Guermantes, "it is an outrage on this fellow's part to claim a penny from us." But Jupien had stuck to his point, apparently not having the faintest idea what 'good' the Duchess had ever done. And yet she did do good, but — since one cannot do good to everybody at once — the memory of the benefits that we have heaped on one person is a valid reason for our abstaining from helping another, whose discontent we thereby make all the stronger. From other points of view than that of charity the quarter appeared to the Duke — and this over a considerable area — to be only an extension of his courtyard, a longer track for his horses. After seeing how a new acquisition trotted by itself he would have it harnessed and taken through all the neighbouring streets, the groom running beside the carriage holding the reins, making it pass to and fro before the Duke who stood on the pavement, erect, gigantic, enormous in his vivid clothes, a cigar between his teeth, his head in the air, his eyeglass scrutinous, until the moment when he sprang on the box, drove the horse up and down for a little to try it, then set off with his new turnout to pick up his mistress in the Champs-Élysées. M. de Guermantes

bade good day, before leaving the courtyard, to two couples who belonged more or less to his world; the first, some cousins of his who, like working-class parents, were never at home to look after their children, since every morning the wife went off to the Schola to study counterpoint and fugue, and the husband to his studio to carve wood and beat leather; and after them the Baron and Baronne de Norpois, always dressed in black, she like a pew-opener and he like a mute at a funeral, who emerged several times daily on their way to church. They were the nephew and niece of the old Ambassador who was our friend, and whom my father had, in fact, met at the foot of the staircase without realising from where he came; for my father supposed that so important a personage, one who had come in contact with the most eminent men in Europe and was probably quite indifferent to the empty distinctions of rank, was hardly likely to frequent the society of these obscure, clerical and narrow-minded nobles. They had not been long in the place; Jupien, who had come out into the courtyard to say a word to the husband just as he was greeting M. de Guermantes, called him 'M. Norpois,' not being certain of his name.

"Monsieur Norpois, indeed! Oh, that really is good! Just wait a little! This individual will be calling you Comrade Norpois next!" exclaimed M. de Guermantes, turning to the Baron. He was at last able to vent his spleen against Jupien who addressed him as 'Monsieur,' instead of 'Monsieur le Duc.'

One day when M. de Guermantes required some information upon a matter of which my father had professional knowledge, he had introduced himself to him with great courtesy. After that, he had often some neighbourly service to ask of my father and, as soon as he saw him begin to come downstairs, his mind occupied with his work and anxious to avoid any interruption, the Duke, leaving his stable-boys, would come up to him in the courtyard, straighten the collar of his great-coat, with the serviceable deftness inherited from a line of royal body-servants in days gone by, take him by the hand, and, holding it in his own, patting it even to prove to my father, with a courtesan's or courtier's shamelessness, that he, the Duc de Guermantes, made no bargain about my father's right to the privilege of contact with the ducal flesh, lead him, so to speak, on leash, extremely annoyed and thinking only how he might escape, through the carriage entrance out into the street. He had given us a sweeping bow one day when we had come in just as he was going out in the carriage with his wife; he was bound to have told her my name; but what likelihood was there of her remembering it, or my face either? And besides, what a feeble recommendation to be pointed out simply as being one of her tenants! Another, more valuable, would have been my meeting the Duchess in the drawing-room of Mme. de Villeparisis, who, as it happened, had just sent word by my grandmother that I was to go and see her, and, remembering that I had been

intending to go in for literature, had added that I should meet several authors there. But my father felt that I was still a little young to go into society, and as the state of my health continued to give him uneasiness he did not see the use of establishing precedents that would do me no good.

As one of Mme. de Guermantes's footmen was in the habit of talking to Françoise, I picked up the names of several of the houses which she frequented, but formed no impression of any of them; from the moment in which they were a part of her life, of that life which I saw only through the veil of her name, were they not inconceivable?

"To-night there's a big party with a Chinese shadow show at the Princesse de Parme's," said the footman, "but we shan't be going, because at five o'clock Madame is taking the train to Chantilly, to spend a few days with the Due d'Aumale; but it'll be the lady's maid and valet that are going with her. I'm to stay here. She won't be at all pleased, the Princesse de Parme won't, that's four times already she's written to Madame la Duchesse."

"Then you won't be going down to Guermantes Castle this year?"

"It's the first time we shan't be going there: it's because of the Duke's rheumatics, the doctor says he's not to go there till the hot pipes are in, but we've been there every year till now, right on to January. If the hot pipes aren't ready, perhaps Madame will go for a few days to Cannes, to the Duchesse de Guise, but nothing's settled yet."

"And to the theatre, do you go, sometimes?"

"We go now and then to the Opéra, usually on the evenings when the Princesse de Parme has her box, that's once a week; it seems it's a fine show they give there, plays, operas, everything. Madame refused to subscribe to it herself, but we go all the same to the boxes Madame's friends take, one one night, another another, often with the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duke's cousin's lady. She's sister to the Duke of Bavaria. And so you've got to run upstairs again now, have you?" went on the footman, who, albeit identified with the Guermantes, looked upon masters in general as a political estate, a view which allowed him to treat Françoise with as much respect as if she too were in service with a duchess. "You enjoy good health, ma'am."

"Oh, if it wasn't for these cursed legs of mine! On the plain I can still get along" ('on the plain' meant in the courtyard or in the streets, where Françoise had no objection to walking, in other words 'on a plane surface') "but it's these stairs that do me in, devil take them. Good day to you, sir, see you again, perhaps, this evening."

She was all the more anxious to continue her conversations with the footman after he mentioned to her that the sons of dukes often bore a princely title which they retained until their fathers were dead.

Evidently the cult of the nobility, blended with and accommodating itself to a certain spirit of revolt against it, must, springing hereditarily

from the soil of France, be very strongly implanted still in her people. For Françoise, to whom you might speak of the genius of Napoleon or of wireless telegraphy without succeeding in attracting her attention, and without her slackening for an instant the movements with which she was scraping the ashes from the grate or laying the table, if she were simply to be told these idiosyncrasies of nomenclature, and that the younger son of the Duc de Guermantes was generally called Prince d'Oléron, would at once exclaim: "That's fine, that is!" and stand there dazed, as though in contemplation of a stained window in church. Françoise learned also from the Prince d'Agrigente's valet, who had become friends with her by coming often to the house with notes for the Duchess, that he had been hearing a great deal of talk in society about the marriage of the Marquis de Saint-Loup to Mlle. d'Ambresac, and that it was practically settled.

That villa, that opera-box, into which Mme. de Guermantes transfused the current of her life, must, it seemed to me, be places no less fairylike than her home. The names of Guise, of Parme, of Guermantes-Baviere, differentiated from all possible others the holiday places to which the Duchess resorted, the daily festivities which the track of her bowling wheels bound, as with ribbons, to her mansion. If they told me that in those holidays, in those festivities, consisted serially the life of Mme. de Guermantes, they brought no further light to bear on it. Each of them gave to the life of the Duchess a different determination, but succeeded only in changing the mystery of it, without allowing to escape any of its own mystery which simply floated, protected by a covering, enclosed in a bell, through the tide of the life of all the world. The Duchess might take her luncheon on the shore of the Mediterranean at Carnival time, but, in the villa of Mme. de Guise, where the queen of Parisian society was nothing more, in her white linen dress, among numberless princesses, than a guest like any of the rest, and on that account more moving still to me, more herself by being thus made new, like a star of the ballet who in the fantastic course of a figure takes the place of each of her humbler sisters in succession; she might look at Chinese shadow shows, but at a party given by the Princesse de Parme, listen to tragedy or opera, but from the box of the Princesse de Guermantes.

As we localise in the body of a person all the potentialities of that person's life, our recollections of the people he knows and has just left or is on his way to meet, if, having learned from Françoise that Mme. de Guermantes was going on foot to luncheon with the Princesse de Parme, I saw her, about midday, emerge from her house in a gown of flesh-coloured satin over which her face was of the same shade, like a cloud that rises above the setting sun, it was all the pleasures of the Faubourg Saint-Germain that I saw before me, contained in that small compass, as in a shell, between its twin valves that glowed with roseate nacre.

My father had a friend at the Ministry, one A. J. Moreau, who, to distinguish him from the other Moreaus, took care always to prefix both initials to his name, with the result that people called him, for short, 'A.J.' Well, somehow or other, this A. J. found himself entitled to a stall at the Opéra-Comique on a gala night, he sent the ticket to my father, and as Berma, whom I had not been again to see since my first disappointment, was to give an act of *Phèdre*, my grandmother persuaded my father to pass it on to me.

To tell the truth, I attached no importance to this possibility of hearing Berma which, a few years earlier, had plunged me in such a state of agitation. And it was not without a sense of melancholy that I realized the fact of my indifference to what at one time I had put before health, comfort, everything. It was not that there had been any slackening of my desire for an opportunity to contemplate close at hand the precious particles of reality of which my imagination caught a broken glimpse. But my imagination no longer placed these in the diction of a great actress; since my visits to Elstir, it was on certain tapestries, certain modern paintings that I had brought to bear the inner faith I had once had in this acting, in this tragic art of Berma; my faith, my desire, no longer coming forward to pay incessant worship to the diction, the attitudes of Berma, the counterpart that I possessed of them in my heart had gradually perished, like those other counterparts of the dead in ancient Egypt which had to be fed continually in order to maintain their originals in eternal life. This art had become a feeble, tawdry thing. No deep-lying soul inhabited it any more.

That evening, as, armed with the ticket my father had received from his friend, I was climbing the grand staircase of the Opera, I saw in front of me a man whom I took at first for M. de Charlus, whose bearing he had; when he turned his head to ask some question of one of the staff I saw that I had been mistaken, but I had no hesitation in placing the stranger in the same class of society, from the way not only in which he was dressed but in which he spoke to the man who took the tickets and to the box-openers who were keeping him waiting. For, apart from personal details of similarity, there was still at this period between any smart and wealthy man of that section of the nobility and any smart and wealthy man of the world of finance or 'big business' a strongly marked difference. Where one of the latter would have thought he was giving proof of his exclusiveness by adopting a sharp, haughty tone in speaking to an inferior, the great gentleman, affable, pleasant, smiling, had the air of considering, practising an affectation of humility and patience, a pretence of being just one of the audience, as a privilege of his good breeding. It is quite likely that, on seeing him thus dissemble behind a smile overflowing with good nature the barred threshold of the little world apart which he carried in his person, more than one wealthy banker's son, entering the theatre at that moment, would have taken

this great gentleman for a person of no importance if he had not remarked in him an astonishing resemblance to the portrait that had recently appeared in the illustrated papers of a nephew of the Austrian Emperor, the Prince of Saxony, who happened to be in Paris at the time. I knew him to be a great friend of the Guermantes. As I reached the attendant I heard the Prince of Saxony (or his double) say with a smile: "I don't know the number; it was my cousin who told me I had only to ask for her box."

He may well have been the Prince of Saxony; it was perhaps of the Duchesse de Guermantes (whom, in that event, I should be able to watch in the process of living one of those moments of her unimaginable life in her cousin's box) that his eyes formed a mental picture when he referred to 'my cousin who told me I had only to ask for her box,' so much so that that smiling gaze peculiar to himself, those so simple words caressed my heart (far more gently than would any abstract meditation) with the alternative feelers of a possible happiness and a vague distinction. Whatever he was, in uttering this sentence to the attendant he grafted upon a commonplace evening in my everyday life a potential outlet into a new world; the passage to which he was directed after mentioning the word 'box' and along which he now proceeded was moist and mildewed and seemed to lead to subaqueous grottoes, to the mythical kingdom of the water-nymphs. I had before me a gentleman in evening dress who was walking away from me, but I kept playing upon and round him, as with a badly fitting reflector on a lamp, and without ever succeeding in making it actually coincide with him, the idea that he was the Prince of Saxony and was on his way to join the Duchesse de Guermantes. And, for all that he was alone, that idea, external to himself, impalpable, immense, unstable as the shadow projected by a magic lantern, seemed to precede and guide him like that deity, invisible to the rest of mankind, who stands beside the Greek warrior in the hour of battle.

I took my seat, striving all the time to recapture a line from Phèdre which I could not quite remember. In the form in which I repeated it to myself it had not the right number of feet, but as I made no attempt to count them, between its unwieldiness and a classical line of poetry it seemed as though no common measure could exist. It would not have surprised me to learn that I must subtract at least half a dozen syllables from that portentous phrase to reduce it to alexandrine dimensions. But suddenly I remembered it, the irremediable asperities of an inhuman world vanished as if by magic; the syllables of the line at once filled up the requisite measure, what there was in excess floated off with the ease, the dexterity of a bubble of air that rises to burst on the water's brink. And, after all, this excrescence with which I had been struggling consisted of but a single foot.

A certain number of orchestra stalls had been offered for sale at the box office and bought, out of snobbishness or curiosity, by such as wished to study the appearance of people whom they might not have another opportunity of seeing at close quarters. And it was indeed a fragment of their true social life, ordinarily kept secret, that one could examine here in public, for, the Princesse de Parme having herself distributed among her friends the seats in stalls, balconies and boxes, the house was like a drawing-room in which everyone changed his place, went to sit here or there wherever he caught sight of a woman whom he knew.

Next to me were some common people who, not knowing the regular subscribers, were anxious to shew that they were capable of identifying them and named them aloud. They went on to remark that these subscribers behaved there as though they were in their own drawing-rooms, meaning that they paid no attention to what was being played. Which was the exact opposite of what did happen. A budding genius who had taken a stall in order to hear Berma thinks only of not soiling his gloves, of not disturbing, of making friends with the neighbour whom chance has put beside him, of pursuing with an intermittent smile the fugitive — avoiding with apparent want of politeness the intercepted gaze of a person of his acquaintance whom he has discovered in the audience and to whom, after a thousand indecisions, he makes up his mind to go and talk just as the three hammer-blows from the stage, sounding before he has had time to reach his friend, force him to take flight, like the Hebrews in the Red Sea, through a heaving tide of spectators and spectatresses whom he has obliged to rise and whose dresses he tears as he passes, or tramples on their boots. On the other hand it was because the society people sat in their boxes (behind the general terrace of the balcony, as in so many little drawing-rooms, the fourth walls of which had been removed, or in so many little cafés, to which one might go for refreshment, without letting oneself be intimidated by the mirrors in gilt frames or the red plush seats, in the Neapolitan style, of the establishment), it was because they rested an indifferent hand on the gilded shafts of the columns which upheld this temple of the lyric art, it was because they remained unmoved by the extravagant honours which seemed to be being paid them by a pair of carved figures which held out towards the boxes branches of palm and laurel, that they and they only would have had minds free to listen to the play, if only they had had minds.

At first there was nothing visible but vague shadows, in which one suddenly struck — like the gleam of a precious stone which one cannot see — the phosphorescence of a pair of famous eyes, or, like a medallion of Henri IV on a dark background, the bent profile of the Due d'Aumale, to whom an invisible lady was exclaiming "Monseigneur must allow me to take his coat," to which the Prince replied, "Oh, come, come! Really,

Madame d'Ambresac." She took it, in spite of this vague prohibition, and was envied by all the rest her being thus honoured.

But in the other boxes, everywhere almost, the white deities who inhabited those sombre abodes had flown for shelter against their shadowy walls and remained invisible. Gradually, however, as the performance went on, their vaguely human forms detached themselves, one by one, from the shades of night which they patterned, and, raising themselves towards the light, allowed their semi-nude bodies to emerge, and rose, and stopped at the limit of their course, at the luminous, shaded surface on which their brilliant faces appeared behind the gaily breaking foam of the feather fans they unfurled and lightly waved, beneath their hyacinthine locks begemmed with pearls, which the flow of the tide seemed to have caught and drawn with it; this side of them, began the orchestra stalls, abode of mortals for ever separated from the transparent, shadowy realm to which, at points here and there, served as boundaries, on its brimming surface, the limpid, mirroring eyes of the water-nymphs. For the folding seats on its shore, the forms of the monsters in the stalls were painted upon the surface of those eyes in simple obedience to the laws of optics and according to their angle of incidence, as happens with those two sections of external reality to which, knowing that they do not possess any soul, however rudimentary, that can be considered as analogous to our own, we should think ourselves mad if we addressed a smile or a glance of recognition: namely, minerals and people to whom we have not been introduced. Beyond this boundary, withdrawing from the limit of their domain, the radiant daughters of the sea kept turning at every moment to smile up at the bearded tritons who clung to the anfractuosités of the cliff, or towards some aquatic demi-god, whose head was a polished stone to which the tides had borne a smooth covering of seaweed, and his gaze a disc of rock crystal. They leaned towards these creatures, offering them sweetmeats; sometimes the flood parted to admit a fresh Nereid who, belated, smiling, apologetic, had just floated into blossom out of the shadowy depths; then, the act ended, having no further hope of hearing the melodious sounds of earth which had drawn them to the surface, plunging back all in a moment the several sisters vanished into the night. But of all these retreats, to the thresholds of which their mild desire to behold the works of man brought the curious goddesses who let none approach them, the most famous was the cube of semi-darkness known to the world as the stage box of the *Princesse de Guermantes*. Like a mighty goddess who presides from far aloft over the sports of lesser deities, the Princess had deliberately remained a little way back on a sofa placed sideways in the box, red as a reef of coral, beside a big, glassy splash of reflexion which was probably a mirror and made one think of the section cut by a ray of sunlight, vertical, clear, liquid, through the flashing crystal of the sea. At once plume and blossom, like

certain subaqueous growths, a great white flower, downy as the wing of a bird, fell from the brow of the Princess along one of her cheeks, the curve of which it followed with a pliancy, coquettish, amorous, alive, and seemed almost to enfold it like a rosy egg in the softness of a halcyon's nest. Over her hair, reaching in front to her eyebrows and caught back lower down at the level of her throat, was spread a net upon which those little white shells which are gathered on some shore of the South Seas alternated with pearls, a marine mosaic barely emerging from the waves and at every moment plunged back again into a darkness in the depths of which even then a human presence was revealed by the ubiquitous flashing of the Princess's eyes. The beauty which set her far above all the other fabulous daughters of the dusk was not altogether materially and comprehensively inscribed on her neck, her shoulders, her arms, her figure. But the exquisite, unfinished line of the last was the exact starting point, the inevitable focus of invisible lines which the eye could not help prolonging, marvellous lines, springing into life round the woman like the spectrum of an ideal form projected upon the screen of darkness.

"That's the Princesse de Guermantes," said my neighbour to the gentleman beside her, taking care to begin the word 'Princesse' with a string of P's, to shew that a title like that was absurd. "She hasn't been sparing with her pearls. I'm sure, if I had as many as that, I wouldn't make such a display of them; it doesn't look at all well, not to my mind." And yet, when they caught sight of the Princess, all those who were looking round to see who was in the audience felt springing up for her in their hearts the rightful throne of beauty. Indeed, with the Duchesse de Luxembourg, with Mme. de Morienvall, with Mme. de Saint-Euverte, and any number of others, what enabled one to identify their faces would be the juxtaposition of a big red nose to a hare-lip, or of a pair of wrinkled cheeks to a faint moustache. These features were nevertheless sufficient in themselves to attract the eye, since having merely the conventional value of a written document they gave one to read a famous and impressive name; but also they gave one, cumulatively, the idea that ugliness had about it something aristocratic, and that it was unnecessary that the face of a great lady, provided it was distinguished, should be beautiful as well. But like certain artists who, instead of the letters of their names, set at the foot of their canvas a form that is beautiful in itself, a butterfly, a lizard, a flower, so it was the form of a delicious face and figure that the Princess had put in the corner of her box, thereby shewing that beauty can be the noblest of signatures; for the presence there of Mme. de Guermantes-Bavière, who brought to the theatre only such persons as at other times formed part of her intimate circle, was in the eyes of specialists in aristocracy the best possible certificate of the authenticity of the picture which her box presented, a