CLASSICS TO GO

PETER IBBETSON

GEORGE DU MAURIER

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George Du Maurier

Part One

INTRODUCTION

The writer of this singular autobiography was my cousin, who died at the ——- Criminal Lunatic Asylum, of which he had been an inmate three years.

He had been removed thither after a sudden and violent attack of homicidal mania (which fortunately led to no serious consequences), from ——- Jail, where he had spent twenty-five years, having been condemned to penal servitude for life, for the murder of —— ——, his relative.

He had been originally sentenced to death.

It was at —— Lunatic Asylum that he wrote these memoirs, and I received the MS. soon after his decease, with the most touching letter, appealing to our early friendship, and appointing me his literary executrix.

It was his wish that the story of his life should be published just as he had written it.

I have found it unadvisable to do this. It would revive, to no useful purpose, an old scandal, long buried and forgotten, and thereby give pain or annoyance to people who are still alive.

Nor does his memory require rehabilitation among those who knew him, or knew anything of him—the only people really concerned. His dreadful deed has long been condoned by all (and they are many) who knew the provocation he

had received and the character of the man who had provoked him.

On mature consideration, and with advice, I resolved (in order that his dying wishes should not be frustrated altogether) to publish the memoir with certain alterations and emendations.

I have nearly everywhere changed the names of people and places; suppressed certain details, and omitted some passages of his life (most of the story of his school-days, for instance, and that of his brief career as a private in the Horse Guards) lest they should too easily lead to the identification and annoyance of people still alive, for he is strongly personal at times, and perhaps not always just; and some other events I have carefully paraphrased (notably his trial at the Old Bailey), and given for them as careful an equivalent as I could manage without too great a loss of verisimilitude.

I may as well state at once that, allowing for these alterations, every incident of his *natural* life as described by himself is absolutely true, to the minutest detail, as I have been able to ascertain.

For the early part of it—the life at Passy he describes with such affection—I can vouch personally; I am the Cousin "Madge" to whom he once or twice refers.

I well remember the genial abode where he lived with his parents (my dear uncle and aunt); and the lovely "Madame Seraskier," and her husband and daughter, and their house, "Parva sed Apta," and "Major Duquesnois," and the rest.

And although I have never seen him since he was twelve years old, when his parents died and he went to London (as

most of my life has been spent abroad), I received occasional letters from him.

I have also been able to obtain much information about him from others, especially from a relative of the late "Mr. and Mrs. Lintot," who knew him well, and from several officers in his regiment who remembered him; also from the "Vicar's daughter," whom he met at "Lady Cray's" and who perfectly recollects the conversation she had with him at dinner, his sudden indisposition, and his long interview with the "Duchess of Towers," under the ash-tree next morning; she was one of the croquet-players.

He was the most beautiful boy I ever saw, and so charming, lively, and amiable that everybody was fond of him. He had a horror of cruelty, especially to animals (quite singular in a boy of his age), and was very truthful and brave.

According to all accounts (and from a photograph in my possession), he grew up to be as handsome as a man can well be, a personal gift which he seems to have held of no account whatever, though he thought so much of it in others. But he also became singularly shy and reserved in manner, over-diffident and self-distrustful; of a melancholy disposition, loving solitude, living much alone, and taking nobody into his confidence; and yet inspiring both affection and respect. For he seems to have always been thoroughly gentlemanlike in speech, bearing, manner, and aspect.

It is possible, although he does not say so, that having first enlisted, and then entered upon a professional career under somewhat inauspicious conditions, he felt himself to have fallen away from the social rank (such as it was) that belonged to him by birth; and he may have found his associates uncongenial.

His old letters to me are charmingly open and effusive.

Of the lady whom (keeping her title and altering her name) I have called the "Duchess of Towers," I find it difficult to speak. That they only met twice, and in the way he describes, is a fact about which there can be no doubt.

It is also indubitable that he received in Newgate, on the morning after his sentence to death, an envelope containing violets, and the strange message he mentions. Both letter and violets are in my possession, and the words are in her handwriting; about that there can be no mistake.

It is certain, moreover, that she separated from her husband almost immediately after my cousin's trial and condemnation, and lived in comparative retirement from the world, as it is certain that he went suddenly mad, twenty-five years later, in —— Jail, a few hours after her tragic death, and before he could possibly have heard of it by the ordinary channels; and that he was sent to —— Asylum, where, after his frenzy had subsided, he remained for many days in a state of suicidal melancholia, until, to the surprise of all, he rose one morning in high spirits, and apparently cured of all serious symptoms of insanity; so he remained until his death. It was during the last year of his life that he wrote his autobiography, in French and English.

There is nothing to be surprised at, taking all the circumstances into consideration, that even so great a lady, the friend of queens and empresses, the bearer of a high title and an illustrious name, justly celebrated for her beauty and charm (and her endless charities), of blameless repute, and one of the most popular women in English society, should yet have conceived a very warm regard for my poor cousin; indeed, it was an open secret in the family of "Lord

Cray" that she had done so. But for them she would have taken the whole world into her confidence.

After her death she left him what money had come to her from her father, which he disposed of for charitable ends, and an immense quantity of MS. in cipher—a cipher which is evidently identical with that he used himself in the annotations he put under innumerable sketches he was allowed to make during his long period of confinement, which (through her interest, and no doubt through his own good conduct) was rendered as bearable to him as possible. These sketches (which are very extraordinary) and her Grace's MS. are now in my possession.

They constitute a mystery into which I have not dared to pry.

From papers belonging to both I have been able to establish beyond doubt the fact (so strangely discovered) of their descent from a common French ancestress, whose name I have but slightly modified and the tradition of whom still lingers in the "Departement de la Sarthe," where she was a famous person a century ago; and her violin, a valuable Amati, now belongs to me.

Of the non-natural part of his story I will not say much.

It is, of course, a fact that he had been absolutely and, to all appearance, incurably insane before he wrote his life.

There seems to have been a difference of opinion, or rather a doubt, among the authorities of the asylum as to whether he was mad after the acute but very violent period of his brief attack had ended.

Whichever may have been the case, I am at least convinced of this: that he was no romancer, and thoroughly believed in

the extraordinary mental experience he has revealed.

At the risk of being thought to share his madness—if he *was* mad—I will conclude by saying that I, for one, believe him to have been sane, and to have told the truth all through.

MADGE PLUNKET

I am but a poor scribe; ill-versed in the craft of wielding words and phrases, as the cultivated reader (if I should ever happen to have one) will no doubt very soon find out for himself.

I have been for many years an object of pity and contempt to all who ever gave me a thought—to all but *one*! Yet of all that ever lived on this earth I have been, perhaps, the happiest and most privileged, as that reader will discover if he perseveres to the end.

My outer and my inner life have been as the very poles—asunder; and if, at the eleventh hour, I have made up my mind to give my story to the world, it is not in order to rehabilitate myself in the eyes of my fellow-men, deeply as I value their good opinion; for I have always loved them and wished them well, and would fain express my goodwill and win theirs, if that were possible.

It is because the regions where I have found my felicity are accessible to all, and that many, better trained and better gifted, will explore them to far better purpose than I, and to the greater glory and benefit of mankind, when once I have given them the clew. Before I can do this, and in order to show how I came by this clew myself, I must tell, as well as I may, the tale of my checkered career—in telling which, moreover, I am obeying the last behest of one whose lightest wish was my law.

If I am more prolix than I need be, it must be set down to my want of experience in the art of literary composition—to a natural wish I have to show myself neither better nor worse than I believe myself to be; to the charm, the unspeakable charm, that personal reminiscences have for the person principally concerned, and which he cannot hope to impart, however keenly he may feel it, without gifts and advantages that have been denied to me.

And this leads me to apologize for the egotism of this Memoir, which is but an introduction to another and longer one that I hope to publish later. To write a story of paramount importance to mankind, it is true, but all about one's outer and one's inner self, to do this without seeming somewhat egotistical, requires something akin to genius—and I am but a poor scribe.

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> "*Combien j'ai douce souvenance Du joli lieu de ma naissance*!"

These quaint lines have been running in my head at intervals through nearly all my outer life, like an oft-recurring burden in an endless ballad—sadly monotonous, alas! the ballad, which is mine; sweetly monotonous the burden, which is by Châteaubriand.

I sometimes think that to feel the full significance of this refrain one must have passed one's childhood in sunny France, where it was written, and the remainder of one's existence in mere London—or worse than mere London—as has been the case with me. If I had spent all my life from infancy upward in Bloomsbury, or Clerkenwell, or Whitechapel, my early days would be shorn of much of their

retrospective glamour as I look back on them in these my after-years.

"Combien j'ai douce souvenance!"

It was on a beautiful June morning in a charming French garden, where the warm, sweet atmosphere was laden with the scent of lilac and syringa, and gay with butterflies and dragon-flies and humblebees, that I began my conscious existence with the happiest day of all my outer life.

It is true that I had vague memories (with many a blank between) of a dingy house in the heart of London, in a long street of desolating straightness, that led to a dreary square and back again, and nowhere else for me; and then of a troubled and exciting journey that seemed of jumbled days and nights. I could recall the blue stage-coach with the four tall, thin, brown horses, so quiet and modest and well-behaved; the red-coated guard and his horn; the red-faced driver and his husky voice and many capes.

Then the steamer with its glistening deck, so beautiful and white it seemed quite a desecration to walk upon it—this spotlessness did not last very long; and then two wooden piers with a light-house on each, and a quay, and blue-bloused workmen and red-legged little soldiers with mustaches, and bare-legged fisher-women, all speaking a language that I knew as well as the other commoner language I had left behind; but which I had always looked upon as an exclusive possession of my father's and mother's and mine for the exchange of sweet confidence and the bewilderment of outsiders; and here were little boys and girls in the street, quite common children, who spoke it as well and better than I did myself.

After this came the dream of a strange, huge, top-heavy vehicle, that seemed like three yellow carriages stuck together, and a mountain of luggage at the top under an immense black tarpaulin, which ended in a hood; and beneath the hood sat a blue-bloused man with a singular cap, like a concertina, and mustaches, who cracked a loud whip over five squealing, fussy, pugnacious white and gray horses, with bells on their necks and bushy fox-tails on their foreheads, and their own tails carefully tucked up behind.

From the *coupé* where I sat with my father and mother I could watch them well as they led us through dusty roads with endless apple-trees or poplars on either side. Little barefooted urchins (whose papas and mammas wore wooden shoes and funny white nightcaps) ran after us for French half-pennies, which were larger than English ones, and pleasanter to have and to hold! Up hill and down we went; over sounding wooden bridges, through roughly paved streets in pretty towns to large court-yards, where five other quarrelsome steeds, gray and white, were waiting to take the place of the old ones—worn out, but quarreling still!

And through the night I could hear the gay music of the bells and hoofs, the rumbling of the wheels the cracking of the eternal whip, as I fidgeted from one familiar lap to the other in search of sleep; and waking out of a doze I could see the glare of the red lamps on the five straining white and gray backs that dragged us so gallantly through the dark summer night.

Then it all became rather tiresome and intermittent and confused, till we reached at dusk next day a quay by a broad river; and as we drove along it, under thick trees, we met other red and blue and green lamped five-horsed

diligences starting on their long journey just as ours was coming to an end.

Then I knew (because I was a well-educated little boy, and heard my father exclaim, "Here's Paris at last!") that we had entered the capital of France—a fact that impressed me very much—so much, it seems, that I went to sleep for thirty-six hours at a stretch, and woke up to find myself in the garden I have mentioned, and to retain possession of that self without break or solution of continuity (except when I went to sleep again) until now.

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The happiest day in all my outer life!

For in an old shed full of tools and lumber at the end of the garden, and half-way between an empty fowl-house and a disused stable (each an Eden in itself) I found a small toy-wheelbarrow—quite the most extraordinary, the most unheard of and undreamed of, humorously, daintily, exquisitely fascinating object I had ever come across in all my brief existence.

I spent hours—enchanted hours—in wheeling brick-bats from the stable to the fowl-house, and more enchanted hours in wheeling them all back again, while genial French workmen, who were busy in and out of the house where we were to live, stopped every now and then to ask good-natured questions of the "p'tit Anglais," and commend his knowledge of their tongue, and his remarkable skill in the management of a wheelbarrow. Well I remember wondering, with newly-aroused self-consciousness, at the intensity, the poignancy, the extremity of my bliss, and looking forward with happy confidence to an endless succession of such hours in the future.

But next morning, though the weather was as fine, and the wheelbarrow and the brick-bats and the genial workmen were there, and all the scents and sights and sounds were the same, the first fine careless rapture was not to be caught again, and the glory and the freshness had departed.

Thus did I, on the very dawning of life, reach at a single tide the high-water-mark of my earthly bliss—never to be reached again by me on this side of the ivory gate—and discover that to make the perfection of human happiness endure there must be something more than a sweet French garden, a small French wheelbarrow, and a nice little English boy who spoke French and had the love of approbation—a fourth dimension is required.

I found it in due time.

But if there were no more enchanted hours like the first, there were to be seven happy years that have the quality of enchantment as I look back on them.

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Oh, the beautiful garden! Roses, nasturtiums and convolvulus, wallflowers, sweet-pease and carnations, marigolds and sunflowers, dahlias and pansies and hollyhocks and poppies, and Heaven knows what besides! In my fond recollection they all bloom at once, irrespective of time and season.

To see and smell and pick all these for the first time at the susceptible age of five! To inherit such a kingdom after five years of Gower Street and Bedford Square! For all things are relative, and everything depends upon the point of view. To the owner of Chatsworth (and to his gardeners) my beautiful French Garden would have seemed a small affair.

And what a world of insects—Chatsworth could not beat *these* (indeed, is no doubt sadly lacking in them)—beautiful, interesting, comic, grotesque, and terrible; from the proud humble-bee to the earwig and his cousin, the devil's coach-horse; and all those rampant, many footed things that pullulate in damp and darkness under big flat stones. To think that I have been friends with all these—roses and centipedes and all—and then to think that most of my outer life has been spent between bare whitewashed walls, with never even a flea or a spider to be friends with again!

Our house (where, by-the-way, I had been born five years before), an old yellow house with green shutters and Mansard-roofs of slate, stood between this garden and the street—a long winding street, roughly flagged, with oil-lamps suspended across at long intervals; these lamps were let down with pulleys at dusk, replenished and lit, and then hauled up again to make darkness visible for a few hours on nights when the moon was away.

Opposite to us was a boys' school—"Maison d'Éducation, Dirigée par M. Jules Saindou, Bachelier et Maître ès Lettres et ès Sciences," and author of a treatise on geology, with such hauntingly terrific pictures of antediluvian reptiles battling in the primeval slime that I have never been able to forget them. My father, who was fond of science, made me a present of it on my sixth birthday. It cost me many a nightmare.

From our windows we could see and hear the boys at play—at a proper distance French boys sound just like English ones, though they do not look so, on account of their blue blouses and dusky, cropped heads—and we could see the gymnastic fixtures in the play-ground, M. Saindou's pride. "Le portique! la poutre! le cheval! et les barres parallèles!" Thus they were described in M. Saindou's prospectus.

On either side of the street (which was called "the Street of the Pump"), as far as eye could reach looking west, were dwelling-houses just like our own, only agreeably different; and garden walls overtopped with the foliage of horse-chestnut, sycamore, acacia, and lime; and here and there huge portals and iron gates defended by posts of stone gave ingress to mysterious abodes of brick and plaster and granite, many-shuttered, and embosomed in sun-shot greenery.

Looking east one could see in the near distance unsophisticated shops with old-fashioned windows of many panes—Liard, the grocer; Corbin, the poulterer; the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker.

And this delightful street, as it went on its winding way, led not to Bedford Square or the new University College Hospital, but to Paris through the Arc de Triomphe at one end, and to the river Seine at the other; or else, turning to the right, to St. Cloud through the Bois de Boulogne of Louis Philippe Premier, Roi des Français—as different from the Paris and the Bois de Boulogne of to-day as a diligence from an express train.

On one side of the beautiful garden was another beautiful garden, separated from ours by a high wall covered with peach and pear and plum and apricot trees; on the other, accessible to us through a small door in another lower wall clothed with jasmine, clematis, convolvulus, and nasturtium, was a long, straight avenue of almond-trees, acacia, laburnum, lilac, and may, so closely planted that the ivy-grown walls on either side could scarcely be seen. What lovely patches they made on the ground when the sun shone! One end of this abutted on "the Street of the Pump," from which it was fenced by tall, elaborately-carved iron gates between stone portals, and at the side was a "porte

bâtarde," guarded by le Père et la Mère François, the old concierge and his old wife. Peace to their ashes, and Heaven rest their kindly, genial souls!

The other end of the avenue, where there was also an iron gate, admitted to a large private park that seemed to belong to nobody, and of which we were free—a very wilderness of delight, a heaven, a terror of tangled thickets and not too dangerous chalk cliffs, disused old quarries and dark caverns, prairies of lush grass, sedgy pools, turnip fields, forests of pine, groves and avenues of horse-chestnut, dank valleys of walnut-trees and hawthorn, which summer made dark at noon; bare, wind-swept mountainous regions whence one could reconnoitre afar; all sorts of wild and fearsome places for savages and wild beasts to hide and small boys to roam quite safely in quest of perilous adventure.

All this vast enclosure (full of strange singing, humming, whistling, buzzing, twittering, cooing, booming, croaking, flying, creeping, crawling, jumping, climbing, burrowing, splashing, diving things) had been neglected for ages—an Eden where one might gather and eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge without fear, and learn lovingly the ways of life without losing one's innocence; a forest that had remade for itself a new virginity, and become primeval once more; where beautiful Nature had reasserted her own sweet will, and massed and tangled everything together as though a Beauty had been sleeping there undisturbed for close on a hundred years, and was only waiting for the charming Prince—or, as it turned out a few years later, alas! the speculative builder and the railway engineer—those princes of our day.

My fond remembrance would tell me that this region was almost boundless, well as I remember its boundaries. My knowledge of physical geography, as applied to this

particular suburb of Paris, bids me assign more modest limits to this earthly paradise, which again was separated by an easily surmounted fence from Louis Philippe's Bois de Boulogne; and to this I cannot find it in my heart to assign any limits whatever, except the pretty old town from which it takes its name, and whose principal street leads to that magical combination of river, bridge, palace, gardens, mountain, and forest, St. Cloud.

What more could be wanted for a small boy fresh (if such be freshness) from the very heart of Bloomsbury?

That not a single drop should be lacking to the full cup of that small boy's felicity, there was a pond on the way from Passy to St. Cloud—a memorable pond, called "La Mare d'Auteuil," the sole aquatic treasure that Louis Philippe's Bois de Boulogne could boast. For in those ingenuous days there existed no artificial lake fed by an artificial stream, no pré-Catelan, no Jardin d'Acclimatation. The wood was just a wood, and nothing more—a dense, wild wood, that covered many hundreds of acres, and sheltered many thousands of wild live things. Though mysteriously deep in the middle, this famous pond (which may have been centuries old, and still exists) was not large; you might almost fling a stone across it anywhere.

Bounded on three sides by the forest (now shorn away), it was just hidden from the dusty road by a fringe of trees; and one could have it all to one's self, except on Sunday and Thursday afternoons, when a few love-sick Parisians remembered its existence, and in its loveliness forgot their own.

To be there at all was to be happy; for not only was it quite the most secluded, picturesque, and beautiful pond in all the habitable globe—that pond of ponds, the *only* pond—but

it teemed with a far greater number and variety of wonderful insects and reptiles than any other pond in the world. Such, at least, I believed must be the case, for they were endless.

To watch these creatures, to learn their ways, to catch them (which we sometimes did), to take them home and be kind to them, and try to tame them, and teach them our ways (with never varying non-success, it is true, but in, oh, such jolly company!) became a hobby that lasted me, on and off, for seven years.

La Mare d'Auteuil! The very name has a magic, from all the associations that gathered round it during that time, to cling forever.

How I loved it! At night, snoozing in my warm bed, I would awesomely think of it, and how solemn it looked when I had reluctantly left it at dusk, an hour or two before; then I would picture it to myself, later, lying deep and cold and still under the stars, in the dark thicket, with all that weird, uncanny lite seething beneath its stagnant surface.

Then gradually the water would sink, and the reeds, left naked, begin to move and rustle ominously, and from among their roots in the uncovered slush everything alive would make for the middle—hopping, gliding, writhing frantically….

Down shrank the water; and soon in the slimy bottom, yards below, huge fat salamanders, long-lost and forgotten tadpoles as large as rats, gigantic toads, enormous flat beetles, all kinds of hairy, scaly, spiny, blear-eyed, bulbous, shapeless monsters without name, mud-colored offspring of the mire that had been sleeping there for hundreds of years, woke up, and crawled in and out, and wallowed and

interwriggled, and devoured each other, like the great saurians and batrachians in my *Manuel de Géologie Élémentaire*. Édition illustrée à l'usage des enfants. Par Jules Saindou, Bachelier et Maître ès Lettres et ès Sciences.

Then would I wake up with a start, in a cold perspiration, an icy chill shooting through me that roughed my skin and stirred the roots of my hair, and ardently wish for to-morrow morning.

In after-years, and far away among the cold fogs of Clerkenwell, when the frequent longing would come over me to revisit "the pretty place of my birth," it was for the Mare d'Auteuil I longed the most; *that* was the loadstar, the very pole of my home-sick desires; always thither the wings of my hopeless fancy bore me first of all; it was, oh! to tread that sunlit grassy brink once more, and to watch the merry tadpoles swarm, and the green frog takes its header like a little man, and the water-rat swim to his hole among the roots of the willow, and the horse-leech thread his undulating way between the water-lily stems; and to dream fondly of the delightful, irrevocable past, on the very spot of all where I and mine were always happiest!

"…Qu'ils étaient beaux, les jours De France!"

In the avenue I have mentioned (*the* avenue, as it is still to me, and as I will always call it) there was on the right hand, half the way up, a *maison de santé*, or boarding-house, kept by one Madame Pelé; and there among others came to board and lodge, a short while after our advent, four or five gentlemen who had tried to invade France, with a certain grim Pretender at their head, and a tame eagle as a symbol of empire to rally round.

The expedition had failed; the Pretender had been consigned to a fortress; the eagle had found a home in the public slaughter-house of Boulogne-sur-Mer, which it adorned for many years, and where it fed as it had never probably fed before; and these, the faithful followers, le Colonel Voisil, le Major Duquesnois, le Capitaine Audenis, le Docteur Lombal (and one or two others whose names I have forgotten), were prisoners on parole at Madame Pelé's, and did not seem to find their durance very vile.

I grew to know and love them all, especially the Major Duquesnois, an almost literal translation into French of Colonel Newcome. He took to me at once, in spite of my Englishness, and drilled me, and taught me the exercise as it was performed in the Vieille Garden and told me a new fairy-tale, I verily believe, every afternoon for seven years. Scheherezade could do no more for a Sultan, and to save her own neck from the bowstring!

Cher et bien amé "Vieux de la Vieille!" with his big iron-gray mustache, his black satin stock, his spotless linen, his long green frock-coat so baggy about the skirts, and the smart red ribbon in his button-hole! He little foresaw with what warm and affectionate regard his memory would be kept forever sweet and green in the heart of his hereditary foe and small English tyrant and companion!

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Opposite Madame Pelé's, and the only other dwelling besides hers and ours in the avenue, was a charming little white villa with a Grecian portico, on which were inscribed in letters of gold the words "Parva sed Apta"; but it was not tenanted till two or three years after our arrival.

In the genial French fashion of those times we soon got on terms of intimacy with these and other neighbors, and saw much of each other at all times of the day.

My tall and beautiful young mother (la belle Madame Pasquier, as she was gallantly called) was an Englishwoman who had been born and partly brought up in Paris.

My gay and jovial father (le beau Pasquier, for he was also tall and comely to the eye) was a Frenchman, although an English subject, who had been born and partly brought up in London; for he was the child of emigres from France during the Reign of Terror.

"When in death I shall calm recline,
Oh take my heart to my mistress dear!
Tell her it lived upon smiles and wine
Of the brightest hue while it lingered here!"

He was gifted with a magnificent, a phenomenal voice—a barytone and tenor rolled into one; a marvel of richness, sweetness, flexibility, and power—and had intended to sing at the opera; indeed, he had studied for three years at the Paris Conservatoire to that end; and there he had carried all before him, and given rise to the highest hopes. But his family, who were Catholics of the blackest and Legitimists of the whitest dye—and as poor as church rats had objected to such a godless and derogatory career; so the world lost a great singer, and the great singer a mine of wealth and fame.

However, he had just enough to live upon, and had married a wife (a heretic!) who had just about as much, or as little; and he spent his time, and both his money and hers, in scientific inventions—to little purpose, for well as he had

learned how to sing, he had not been to any conservatoire where they teach one how to invent.

So that, as he waited "for his ship to come home," he sang only to amuse his wife, as they say the nightingale does; and to ease himself of superfluous energy, and to charm the servants, and le Père et la Mère François, and the five followers of Napoleon, and all and everybody who cared to listen, and last and least (and most!), myself.

For this great neglected gift of his, on which he set so little store, was already to me the most beautiful and mysterious thing in the world; and next to this, my mother's sweet playing on the harp and piano, for she was an admirable musician.

It was her custom to play at night, leaving the door of my bedroom ajar, and also the drawing-room door, so that I could hear her till I fell asleep.

Sometimes, when my father was at home, the spirit would move him to hum or sing the airs she played, as he paced up and down the room on the track of a new invention.

And though he sang and hummed "pian-piano," the sweet, searching, manly tones seemed to fill all space.

The hushed house became a sounding-board, the harp a mere subservient tinkle, and my small, excitable frame would thrill and vibrate under the waves of my unconscious father's voice; and oh, the charming airs he sang!

His stock was inexhaustible, and so was hers; and thus an endless succession of lovely melodies went ringing through that happy period.

And just as when a man is drowning, or falling from a height, his whole past life is said to be mapped out before his mental vision as in a single flash, so seven years of sweet, priceless home love—seven times four changing seasons of simple, genial, prae-imperial Frenchness; an ideal house, with all its pretty furniture, and shape, and color; a garden full of trees and flowers; a large park, and all the wild live things therein; a town and its inhabitants; a mile or two of historic river; a wood big enough to reach from the Arc de Triomphe to St. Cloud (and in it the pond of ponds); and every wind and weather that the changing seasons can bring—all lie embedded and embalmed for me in every single bar of at least a hundred different tunes, to be evoked at will for the small trouble and cost of just whistling or humming the same, or even playing it with one finger on the piano—when I had a piano within reach.

Enough to last me for a lifetime—with proper economy, of course—it will not do to exhaust, by too frequent experiment, the strange capacity of a melodic bar for preserving the essence of by-gone things, and days that are no more.

Oh, Nightingale! whether thou singest thyself or, better still, if thy voice by not in thy throat, but in thy fiery heart and subtle brain, and thou makest songs for the singing of many others, blessed be thy name! The very sound of it is sweet in every clime and tongue: Nightingale, Rossignol, Usignuolo, Bulbul! Even Nachtigall does not sound amiss in the mouth of a fair English girl who has had a Hanoverian for a governess! and, indeed, it is in the Nachtigall's country that the best music is made!

And oh, Nightingale! never, never grudge thy song to those who love it—nor waste it upon those who do not....

Thus serenaded, I would close my eyes, and lapped in darkness and warmth and heavenly sound, be lulled asleep—perchance to dream!

For my early childhood was often haunted by a dream, which at first I took for a reality—a transcendant dream of some interest and importance to mankind, as the patient reader will admit in time. But many years of my life passed away before I was able to explain and account for it.

I had but to turn my face to the wall, and soon I found myself in company with a lady who had white hair and a young face—a very beautiful young face.

Sometimes I walked with her, hand in hand—I being quite a small child—and together we fed innumerable pigeons who lived in a tower by a winding stream that ended in a water-mill. It was too lovely, and I would wake.

Sometimes we went into a dark place, where there was a fiery furnace with many holes, and many people working and moving about—among them a man with white hair and a young face, like the lady, and beautiful red heels to his shoes. And under his guidance I would contrive to make in the furnace a charming little cocked hat of colored glass—a treasure! And the sheer joy thereof would wake me.

Sometimes the white-haired lady and I would sit together at a square box from which she made lovely music, and she would sing my favorite song—a song that I adored. But I always woke before this song came to an end, on account of the too insupportably intense bliss I felt on hearing it; and all I could remember when awake were the words "triste—comment—sale." The air, which I knew so well in my dream, I could not recall.

It seemed as though some innermost core of my being, some childish holy of holies, secreted a source of supersubtle reminiscence, which, under some stimulus that now and again became active during sleep, exhaled itself in this singular dream—shadowy and slight, but invariably accompanied by a sense of felicity so measureless and so penetrating that I would always wake in a mystic flutter of ecstasy, the bare remembrance of which was enough to bless and make happy many a succeeding hour.

* * * * *

Besides this happy family of three, close by (in the Street of the Tower) lived my grandmother Mrs. Biddulph, and my Aunt Plunket, a widow, with her two sons, Alfred and Charlie, and her daughter Madge. They also were fair to look at—extremely so—of the gold-haired, white-skinned, well-grown Anglo-Saxon type, with frank, open, jolly manners, and no beastly British pride.

So that physically, at least, we reflected much credit on the English name, which was not in good odor just then at Passy-lès-Paris, where Waterloo was unforgotten. In time, however, our nationality was condoned on account of our good looks—"non Angli sed angeli!" as M. Saindou was gallantly pleased to exclaim when he called (with a prospectus of his school) and found us all gathered together under the big apple-tree on our lawn.

But English beauty in Passy was soon to receive a memorable addition to its ranks in the person of a certain Madame Seraskier, who came with an invalid little daughter to live in the house so modestly described in gold as "Parva sed Apta."

She was the English, or rather the Irish, wife of a Hungarian patriot and man of science, Dr. Seraskier (son of the famous violinist); an extremely tall, thin man, almost gigantic, with a grave, benevolent face, and a head like a prophet's; who was, like my father, very much away from his family—conspiring perhaps—or perhaps only inventing (like my father), and looking out "for his ship to come home!"

This fair lady's advent was a sensation—to me a sensation that never palled or wore itself away; it was no longer now "la belle Madame Pasquier," but "la divine Madame Seraskier"—beauty-blind as the French are apt to be.

She topped my tall mother by more than half a head; as was remarked by Madame Pelé, whose similes were all of the kitchen and dining-room, "elle lui mangerait des petits pâtés sur la tête!" And height, that lends dignity to ugliness, magnifies beauty on a scale of geometrical progression—2, 4, 8, 16, 32—for every consecutive inch, between five feet five, let us say, and five feet ten or eleven (or thereabouts), which I take to have been Madame Seraskier's measurement.

She had black hair and blue eyes—of the kind that turns violet in a novel—and a beautiful white skin, lovely hands and feet, a perfect figure, and features chiselled and finished and polished and turned out with such singular felicitousness that one gazed and gazed till the heart was full of a strange jealous resentment at any one else having the right to gaze on something so rare, so divinely, so sacredly fair—any one in the world but one's self!

But a woman can be all this without being Madame Seraskier—she was much more.

For the warmth and genial kindness of her nature shone through her eyes and rang in her voice. All was of a piece with her—her simplicity, her grace, her naturalness and absence of vanity; her courtesy, her sympathy, her mirthfulness.

I do not know which was the most irresistible: she had a slight Irish accent when she spoke English, a less slight English accent when she spoke French!

I made it my business to acquire both.

Indeed, she was in heart and mind and body what we should *all* be but for the lack of a little public spirit and self-denial (under proper guidance) during the last few hundred years on the part of a few thousand millions of our improvident fellow-creatures.

There should be no available ugly frames for beautiful souls to be hurried into by carelessness or mistake, and no ugly souls should be suffered to creep, like hermit-crabs, into beautiful shells never intended for them. The outward and visible form should mark the inward and spiritual grace; that it seldom does so is a fact there is no gainsaying. Alas! such beauty is such an exception that its possessor, like a prince of the blood royal, is pampered and spoiled from the very cradle, and every good and generous and unselfish impulse is corroded by adulation—that spontaneous tribute so lightly won, so quickly paid, and accepted so royally as a due.

So that only when by Heaven's grace the very beautiful are also very good, is it time for us to go down on our knees, and say our prayers in thankfulness and adoration; for the divine has been permitted to make itself manifest for a while in the perishable likeness of our poor humanity.

A beautiful face! a beautiful tune! Earth holds nothing to beat these, and of such, for want of better materials, we have built for ourselves the kingdom of Heaven.

"Plus oblige, et peut davantage
Un beau visage
Qu'un homme armé—
Et rien n'est meilleur que d'entendre
Air doux et tendre
Jadis aimé!"

My mother soon became the passionately devoted friend of the divine Madame Seraskier; and I, what would I not have done—what danger would I not have faced—what death would I not have died for her!

I did not die; I lived her protestant to be, for nearly fifty years. For nearly fifty years to recollect the rapture and the pain it was to look at her; that inexplicable longing ache, that dumb, delicious, complex, innocent distress, for which none but the greatest poets have ever found expression; and which, perhaps, they have not felt half so acutely, these glib and gifted ones, as *I* did, at the susceptible age of seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, and twelve.

She had other slaves of my sex. The five Napoleonic heroes did homage each after his fashion: the good Major with a kind of sweet fatherly tenderness touching to behold; the others with perhaps less unselfish adoration; notably the brave Capitaine Audenis, of the fair waxed mustache and beautiful brown tail coat, so tightly buttoned with gilt buttons across his enormous chest, and imperceptible little feet so tightly imprisoned in shiny tipped female cloth boots, with buttons of mother-of-pearl; whose hobby was, I believe, to try and compensate himself for the misfortunes of war by more successful attempts in another direction. Anyhow he

betrayed a warmth that made my small bosom a Gehenna, until she laughed and snubbed him into due propriety and shamefaced self-effacement.

It soon became evident that she favored two, at least, out of all this little masculine world—the Major myself; and a strange trio we made.

Her poor little daughter, the object of her passionate solicitude, a very clever and precocious child, was the reverse of beautiful, although she would have had fine eyes but for her red lashless lids. She wore her thick hair cropped short, like a boy, and was pasty and sallow in complexion, hollow-cheeked, thick-featured, and overgrown, with long thin hands and feet, and arms and legs of quite pathetic length and tenuity; a silent and melancholy little girl, who sucked her thumb perpetually, and kept her own counsel. She would have to lie in bed for days together, and when she got well enough to sit up, I (to please her mother) would read to her *Le Robinson Suisse*, *Sandford and Merton*, *Evenings at Home*, *Les Contes de Madame Perrault*, the shipwreck from "Don Juan," of which we never tired, and the "Giaour," the "Corsair," and "Mazeppa"; and last, but not least, *Peter Parleys Natural History*, which we got to know by heart.

And out of this latter volume I would often declaim for her benefit what has always been to me the most beautiful poem in the world, possibly because it was the first I read for myself, or else because it is so intimately associated with those happy days. Under an engraving of a wild duck (after Bewick, I believe) were quoted W.C. Bryant's lines "To a Water-fowl." They charmed me then and charm me now as nothing else has quite charmed me; I become a child again as I think of them, with a child's virgin subtlety of perception

and magical susceptibility to vague suggestions of the Infinite.

Poor little Mimsey Seraskier would listen with distended eyes and quick comprehension. She had a strange fancy that a pair of invisible beings, "La fée Tarapatapoum," and "Le Prince Charmant" (two favorite characters of M. le Major's) were always in attendance upon us—upon her and me—and were equally fond of us both; that is, "La fée Tarapatapoum" of me, and "Le Prince Charmant" of her—and watched over us and would protect us through life.

"O! ils sont joliment bien ensemble, tous les deux—ils sont inséparables!" she would often exclaim, *apropos* of these visionary beings; and *apropos* of the water-fowl she would say—

"Il aime beaucoup cet oiseau-là, le Prince Charmant! dis encore, quand il vole si haut, et qu'il fait froid, et qu'il est fatigué, et que la nuit vient, mais qu'il ne veut pas descendre!"

And I would re-spout—

"'All day thy wings have fanned,
At that far height, the cold, thin atmosphere,
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
Though the dark night be near!'"

And poor, morbid, precocious, overwrought Mimsey's eyes would fill, and she would meditatively suck her thumb and think unutterable things.

And then I would copy Bewick's wood-cuts for her, as she sat on the arm of my chair and patiently watched; and she would say: "La fée Tarapatapoum trouve que tu dessines