PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

ABBÉ AUBAIN AND MOSAICS

Prosper Mérimée

Abbé Aubain and Mosaics

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DJOUMANE

ARTHUR SYMONS

LONDON

GRANT RICHARDS

1903

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INTRODUCTION

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Mérimée's temperament was really that of the scholar, not of the artist, and even his art came to him as a kind of scholarship. He did one thing after another, as if challenging himself to accomplish a certain end, and then, that end accomplished, he no longer cared to repeat it. That is the scholar's way, not the artist's; and the scholar's instinct is seen, too, in that too purely critical attitude which he adopted, towards others and towards himself, working in almost a hostile fashion upon every impulse, so as to destroy his interest in any part of his work but the way in which it was done. He began his career by two very serious mystifications, *Le Théâtre de Clara Gazul*, a collection of short plays supposed to be translated from the Spanish, and *La Guzla*, a collection of ballads in prose supposed to be translated from the Illyrian. Later on he was, perhaps, a little too anxious to represent himself as having intended from the first to parody the fierceness and the "local colour" of the Romantics. "Vers l'an de grâce 1827 j'étais *romantique*," he says ironically, in the preface of 1840, as he reprints his work of thirteen years ago. "Nous disions aux *classiques*: 'Vos Grecs ne sont point des Grecs; vos Romains ne sont point des Romains; vous ne savez pas donner à vos compositions la *couleur locale*. Point de salut sans *couleur locale*.'" But no doubt he wished from the first to show that he also, by a mere disinterested effort of intelligence, could be as exotic as the Romantics; that Romanticism, like everything else, was a thing that could be done deliberately, done and then dropped. The invention of history and

archaeology leads to history and archaeology themselves. Mérimée next produced a piece in dialogue on *La Jacquerie*, in which there is more and better history than drama; then followed his historical novel, the *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX.*, in which he set himself, as deliberately as usual, to do more carefully what Walter Scott, then a fashion in France, had done with genius. He produced the most perfect of historical novels, and looked about for some new difficulty to conquer.

He found it in the short story, of which he was to make something firmer, more architectural, than anything yet made in this form of fiction. It was then that he wrote the best of his short stories, from the *Mateo Falcone* of 1829 to the *Carmen* of 1845. Here, anyone else would have said, he had found himself; here was the moment to pause, to "settle down" to the task of doing what he could do best, better than anyone else. But Mérimée had no sooner perfected his method than he began to tire of it. His imagination perhaps tired; he turned to history, and wrote books on the history of Spain and Russia; he became Inspector of Ancient Monuments, and wrote minute descriptions of churches; he translated from the Russian, from Poushkin, Gogol, and Tourguenieff; he travelled, and wrote somewhat dry accounts of his travels; he wrote *Lokis, La Chambre Bleue*, and *Djoumane*, the only stories which he had written for twenty-five years; and he seems to have written them in order to prove to himself that he could still write them. He died at Cannes in 1870, "claquemuré entre deux vieilles *governess*," notes Goncourt in his *Journal*: "une des plus tristes fins du monde."

Mérimée is perhaps the only writer in whom form is equivalent to what is called in slang "good form." He did his best to assimilate his mind to what seemed to him, the English pattern, as others of his compatriots have had their clothes made by English tailors. The English pattern of mind seemed to him, not that mind as it has expressed itself heroically in poetry, and with something of loose splendour in prose, but the typical middle-class mind, severe, precise, doing things by rule, stiffly proud, a mask for emotion. It was not English literature which he cared for and wished to rival, but those sides which he saw most clearly of the English temperament. As the greatest English writers have not put those sides of the national character, to any considerable extent, into their books (perhaps because, being men of genius, they were exceptions to a rule), Mérimée's work, with its cold, exact, polite record of warm and savage things, has no resemblance with English literature, and becomes, in French literature, a new thing, the personal expression of a new, singular temperament.

"Ce comédien de l'insensibilité," Goncourt calls him; and it is Goncourt who relates the famous story of his childish resolve to keep his emotions to himself, after the discovery that even his parents could turn them into ridicule. "Il était né avec un cœur tendre et aimant," says Mérimée of the hero of his *Vase Etrusque*, "mais, à un age où l'on prend trop facilement des impressions qui durent toute la vie, sa sensibilité trop expansive lui avait attiré les railleries de ses camarades." In the exterior which Mérimée so carefully made for himself, it is not necessary to decide how much was genuine at the beginning and how much became

genuine through force of habit. It made, at all events, the art of his stories; and we have only to turn to another page of the Goncourts' *Journal* to see how precisely that art corresponds with what struck those acute observers in the manner of his conversation. "Il cause en s'écoutant avec de mortels silences, lentement, mot par mot, goutte à goutte, comme s'il distillait ses effects, faisant tomber autour de ce qu'il dit une froideur glaciale." It is such an icy coldness that disengages itself from the finest of his stories; from *Mateo Falcone*, for instance, perhaps his masterpiece, in its intensity of effect and in its economy of means. It amused him to tell moving and pitiful things so relentlessly, getting the same pleasure in the anticipation of what his readers would feel that he got from the actual looks and words of the people to whom he talked in the drawing-rooms. He counted on a certain repugnance in those who most admired him, as men of his disposition count on the help of a certain instinctive dislike in those of whom they are most anxious to make themselves masters.

In his stories, with their force, clearness, concise energy, Mérimée is without charm; "as if," says Walter Pater, in his remarkable and closely packed essay, "in theological language, he were incapable of grace." "Gifted as he was with pure *mind*," with a style "the perfection of nobody's style," he is a kind of hard taskmaster, who is at least sure of getting his own way, sure of never loosening his hold. He has, above all things, a mastery over effect; and he has none of those preoccupations of the poet, of the thinker, or of the "inspired" writer, which so often come to shake the equilibrium of that to which they add a heavy and toppling

burden of splendour. Each of his stories is a story, nothing more or less, and in each he does exactly what he set out to do, even the dry, scholarly digressions, as they may sometimes seem, being only a part of the plan, of the building up of the illusion. He is interested in his characters only as they come into the light of a crisis; they live for him only in that moment; all the rest is so much detail, so much psychology in the abstract, with which he has nothing to do. Maupassant was to follow him, while thinking that he followed Flaubert, in this rigorous art of cutting your coat to your cloth. It was Mérimée, really, who perfected the short story in France, who left it a model for the writers of every nation.

Towards the end of his life Mérimée became deeply interested in Russia, and it was through his translations and studies that Tourguenieff became almost a French writer. In Tourguenieff he had partly a follower, but one who gave a new, more profound, more essentially human character to the short story, which has since been developed so fruitfully in Russia. To the Russian, to Tourguenieff, to Tolstoi, to Gorki, the soul is interesting in itself, for its own sake. Mérimée only pays heed to it when it does something interesting, when it precipitates itself into action. That is why so many Russian stories, with all their charm and meaning, remain nebulous, and why Mérimée's are always hard, firm, each complete as a drama. Look at Gorki, and how easily he loses the thread of his narrative or how often he forgets to have a thread to follow, so significant to him is the mere existence of these people, among whose actions he is embarrassed to choose. Take the first act of his play, *Les Petits Bourgeois*,

and see how little selection or composition there is, with what an assemblage of little intimate details, each closely observed, but each observed without relation to any other or to the movement of the whole. Mérimée gives us no detail which has not its almost mathematical significance, but in this orderly arrangement of life it sometimes happens that we are left with a sense of something out of which life has been trimmed dead.

"In history," says Mérimée, in the preface to his *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX.*, "I care only for anecdotes." It was the anecdote which he cared for also in fiction, and with him, as with Stendhal, from whom he got the word and perhaps some of his taste for the thing, the anecdote was a somewhat more formal variety of what was afterwards to be called the document. Mérimée as a writer stands somewhere between Choderlos de Laclos or Crébillon fils, and the generation of "Realists" which was to follow him. He has the naïve immorality, the deliberate frivolity of the eighteenth century; but he is frivolous with the gravity of a scholar. Genuinely interested in those questions which women discuss among themselves, he knew how to work artistically upon his own interest, giving it an ironical turn, which saves it from the criticism of his intelligence. And in those anecdotes, to which he reduces history, and out of which he makes the more living history of his fiction, he finds as much of the soul of great passions and profound emotions as he cares to consider. The document is not yet crude fact, as with the Realists; it is fact chosen carefully for its significance, and arranged just so much as it needs in order to seem as well as be significant. "Dans chaque

anecdote pouvant servir à porter la lumière dans quelque coin du cœur," says Mérimée, speaking of Stendhal (he might be speaking for himself), "il retenait toujours ce qu'il appelait le *trait*, c'est à dire le mot ou l'action qui révèle la passion." It was for this word or action in which passion reveals itself that Mérimée was always a seeker: how often and how absolutely he found it, the tales which follow may be left to prove for themselves.

ARTHUR SYMONS.

"THE ABBÉ AUBAIN" was published in *Le Constitutionnel*, February 24, 1846; "Mateo Falcone" and "The Vision of Charles XI" in the *Revue de Paris*, May and July, 1829; "How we Stormed the Fort" in the *Revue française*, September-October, 1829; "Tamango" in the *Revue de Paris*, October, 1829; "The Game of Backgammon" and "The Etruscan Vase" in the *Revue de Paris*, June and January, 1830, respectively; "The Venus of Ille" in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, May 15, 1837; "Lokis" in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, September 15, 1869; "The Blue Chamber," dated Biarritz, September, 1866, in *L'Indépendance belge*, September 6-7, 1871; "The 'Viccolo' of Madam Lucrezia," dated April 27, 1846, in *Dernières Nouvelles*, 1873; and "Djoumane" in *Le Moniteur Universel*, July 9-12, 1873.

A.R.W.

PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

Born at Paris, September 28th, 1803

Died at Cannes, September 23rd, 1870

THE ABBÉ AUBAIN

It were idle to say how the following letters came into our possession. They seem to us curious, moral and instructive. We publish them without any change other than the suppression of certain proper names, and a few passages which have no connection with the incident in the life of the Abbé Aubain.

THE ABBÉ AUBAIN

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From Madame de P—— to Madame de G——

NOIRMOUTIERS,... *November*, 1844.

I promised to write to you, my dear Sophie, and I keep my word; besides, I have nothing better to do these long evenings.

My last letter informed you that I had made the simultaneous discovery that I was thirty and ruined. For the first of these misfortunes, alas! there is no remedy; as for the second, we have resigned ourselves to it badly enough, but, after all, we are resigned. We must pass at least two years, to repair our fortune, in the dreary manor-house, from whence I write this to you. I have been simply heroic. Directly I knew of the state of our finances I proposed to

Henry that he should economise in the country, and eight days later we were at Noirmoutiers.

I will not tell you anything of the journey. It was many years since I had found myself alone with my husband for such a length of time. Of course, we were both in a bad temper; but, as I was thoroughly determined to put on a good face, all went off well.

You were acquainted with my good resolutions, and you shall see if I am keeping to them. Behold us, then, installed. By the way, Noirmoutiers, from a picturesque point of view, leaves nothing to be desired. There are woods, and cliffs, and the sea within a quarter of a league. We have four great towers, the walls of which are fifteen feet thick. I have fitted a workroom in the recess of the window. My drawing-room, which is sixty feet long, is decorated with figured tapestry; it is truly magnificent when lighted up by eight candles: quite a Sunday illumination. I die of fright every time I pass it after sunset. We are very badly furnished, as you may well believe. The doors do not fit closely, the wainscoting cracks, the wind whistles, and the sea roars in the most lugubrious fashion imaginable. Nevertheless I am beginning to grow accustomed to it.

I arrange and mend things, and I plant; before the hard frosts set in I shall have made a tolerable habitation. You may be certain that your tower will be ready by the spring. If I could but have you here now! The advantage of Noirmoutiers is that we have no neighbours: we are completely isolated. I am thankful to say I have no other callers but my priest, the Abbé Aubain. He is a well-mannered young man, although he has arched and bushy

eyebrows and great dark eyes like those of a stage villain. Last Sunday he did not give us so bad a sermon for the country. It sounded very appropriate. "Misfortune was a benefit from Providence to purify our souls." Be it so. At that rate we ought to give thanks to that honest stockbroker who desired to purify our souls by running off with our money.

Good-bye, dear friend.

My piano has just come, and some big packing-cases. I must go and unpack them all.

P.S.—I reopen this letter to thank you for your present. It is most beautiful, far too beautiful for Noirmoutiers. The grey hood is charming. I recognise your taste there. I shall put it on for Mass on Sunday; perhaps a commercial traveller will be there to admire it. But for whom do you take me, with your novels? I wish to be, I *am*, a serious-minded person. Have I not sufficiently good reasons? I am going to educate myself. On my return to Paris, in three years from now (good heavens! I shall be thirty-three), I mean to be a Philaminte. But really, I do not know what books to ask you to send me. What do you advise me to learn? German or Latin? It would be very nice to read *Wilhelm Meister* in the original, or the tales of Hoffmann. Noirmoutiers is the right place for whimsical stories. But how am I to learn German at Noirmoutiers? Latin would suit me well, for I think it so unfair that men should keep it all to themselves. I should like to have lessons given me by my priest.

LETTER II.

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The same to the same.

NOIRMOUTIERS,... *December*, 1844.

You may well be astonished. The time passes more quickly than you would believe, more quickly than I should have believed myself. The weakness of my lord and master supports my courage through everything. Really, men are very inferior to us. He is depressed beyond measure. He gets up as late as he can, rides his horse or goes hunting, or else pays calls on the dullest people imaginable—lawyers and magistrates who live in town, that is to say, six leagues from here. He goes to see them when it is wet! He began to read *Mauprat* eight days ago, and he is still in the first volume. "It is much better to be pleased with oneself than to slander one's neighbours." This is one of your proverbs. But I will leave him in order to talk of myself.

The country air does me incalculable good. I am magnificently well, and when I see myself in the glass (such a glass!) I do not look thirty; but then I walk a good deal. Yesterday I managed to get Henry to come with me to the seashore. While he shot gulls I read the pirate's song in the *Giaour*. On the beach, facing a rough sea, the fine verses seemed finer than ever. Our sea cannot rival that of Greece, but it has its poetry, as the sea everywhere has. Do you know what strikes me in Lord Byron? —his insight and understanding of nature. He does not talk of the sea from only having eaten turbot and oysters. He has sailed on it; he has seen storms. All his descriptions are from life. Our poets put rhyme first, then common sense—if there is any in verse. While I walk up and down, reading, watching and admiring, the Abbé Aubain—I do not know whether I have

mentioned my Abbé to you; he is the village priest—came up and joined me. He is a young priest who often comes to me. He is well educated, and knows "how to talk with well-bred people." Besides, from his large dark eyes and pale, melancholy look, I can very well see that he has an interesting story, and I try to make it up for myself. We talked of the sea, of poetry; and, what will surprise you much in a priest of Noirmoutiers, he talked well. Then he took me to the ruins of an old abbey upon a cliff and pointed out to me a great gateway carved with delightful goblins. Oh! if only I had the money to restore it all! After this, in spite of Henry's remonstrances, who wanted his dinner, I insisted upon going to the priest's house to see a curious relic which the curé had found in a peasant's house. It was indeed very beautiful: a small box of Limoges enamel which would make a lovely jewel-case. But, good gracious! what a dwelling! And we, who believe ourselves poor! Imagine a tiny room on the ground floor, badly paved, whitewashed, furnished with a table and four chairs, and an armchair padded with straw, with a little flat cake of a cushion in it, stuffed, I should think, with peachstones, and covered with small pieces of white and red cotton. On the table were three or four large Greek and Latin folios. These were the Fathers of the Church, and below, as though hidden, I came upon *Jocelin*. He blushed. He was very attentive, however, in doing the honours of his wretched lodgings without pride or false modesty. I suspected he had had a romantic story. I soon had a proof of it. In the Byzantine casket which he showed us there was a faded bouquet five or six years old at least. "Is that a relic?" I asked him. "No," he replied, with

some agitation. "I do not know how it came there." Then he took the bouquet and slipped it carefully in his table drawer. Is that clear enough? I went back to the château saddened to have seen such poverty, but encouraged to bear my own, which, beside his, seemed of oriental opulence. You should have seen his surprise when Henry gave him twenty francs for a woman whom he had introduced to our notice! I really must make him a present. That straw armchair in which I sat is far too hard. I will give him one of those folding iron chairs like that which I took to Italy. You must choose me one, and send it to me as soon as possible.

LETTER III.

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The same to the same.

NOIRMOUTIERS,... *February*, 1845.

I certainly am not bored at Noirmoutiers. Besides, I have found an interesting occupation, and I owe it to my Abbé. He really knows everything, botany included. It reminds me of Rousseau's *Letters* to hear the Latin name for a nasty onion I laid on the chimney-piece for want of a better place. "You know botany, then?" "Not very well," he replied; "just enough to teach the country folk the herbs which might be useful to them; just enough, I might say, to give a little interest to my solitary walks." I thought at once that it would be very amusing to gather pretty flowers in my walks, to dry them, and to arrange them in order in "my old Plutarch tied up with ribbons." "Do teach me botany," I said to him. He

wished to wait until the spring, for there are no flowers at this bad time of the year. "But you have some dried flowers," I said; "I saw them at your house." I meant to refer to his tenderly preserved old bouquet. If you could have seen his face!... Poor wretched man! I pretty quickly repented of my indiscreet allusion. To make him forget it I hastened to tell him that one ought to have a collection of dried plants. This is called a *herbarium*. He agreed at once, and the very next day he brought me in a grey paper parcel several pretty plants, each with its own label. The course of botany had begun, and I made astonishing progress from the very first. But I had no idea botany was so immoral, or of the difficulty of the first explanations, above all from a priest. You know, my dear, plants marry just as we do, but most of them have many husbands. One set is called phanerogams, if I have remembered the barbarous name properly. It is Greek, and means to marry openly at the townhall. Then there are the cryptogams—those who marry secretly. The mushrooms that you eat marry in secret. All this is very shocking, but he did not come out of it so badly —better than I did, who had the silliness to shout with laughter, once or twice, at the most delicate passages. But I have become cautious now and I do not put any more questions.

LETTER IV.

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The same to the same.

NOIRMOUTIERS,... *February*, 1845.

You must be burning to hear the story of that preciously preserved bouquet; but, the fact is, I dare not ask him about it. In the first place it is more than probable that there is no story underneath; then, if there is one, perhaps it would be a story which he did not like to talk about. As for me, I am quite convinced that ... but come, don't let us tell fibs! You know that I cannot keep any secrets from you. I know this story, and I will tell it you in a few words; nothing easier. "How did it come about, Monsieur l'abbé," I said to him one day, "that with your brains and education you resigned yourself to the care of a little village?" He replied, with a sad smile: "It is easier to be the pastor of poor peasants than of townspeople. Everyone must cut his coat according to his cloth." "That is why," said I, "you ought to be in a better position." "I was once told," he went on, "that your uncle, the Bishop of N——, had deigned to notice me in order to offer me the cure of Sainte-Marie; it is the best in the diocese. My old aunt, who is my only surviving relative, and who lives at N——, said that it was a very desirable position for me. But I am all right here, and I learnt with pleasure that the bishop had made another choice. What does it matter to me? Am I not happy at Noirmoutiers? If I can do a little good here it is my place; I ought not to leave it. Besides, town life reminds me...." He stopped, his eyes became sad and dreamy, then, recovering himself suddenly, he said, "We are not working at our botany...." I could not think any longer of the litter of old hay on the table, and I continued my questions. "When did you take orders?" "Nine years ago." "Nine years ... but surely you were then old

enough to be established in a profession? I do not know, but I have always imagined it was not a youthful call which led you to the priesthood." "Alas! no," he said, in an ashamed manner; "but if my vocation came late, it was determined by causes ... by a cause...." He became embarrassed and could not finish. As for me, I plucked up courage. "I will wager," I said, "that a certain bouquet which I have seen had some part in that determination." Hardly had the impertinent question escaped me than I could have bitten out my tongue rather than have uttered such a thing, but it was too late. "Why, yes, Madam, that is true; I will tell you all about it, but not to-day—another time. The Angelus is about to ring." And he had left before the first stroke of the bell. I expected some terrible story. He came again the next day, and he himself took up the conversation of the previous day. He confessed to me that he had loved a young person of N——, but she had little fortune, and he, a student, had no other resources besides his wits. He said to her: "I am going to Paris, where I hope to obtain an opening; you will not forget me while I am working day and night to make myself worthy of you?" The young lady was sixteen or seventeen years old, and was very sentimental. She gave him her bouquet as a token of faith. A year after he heard of her marriage with the lawyer of N—— just when he had obtained a professorship in a college. He was overwhelmed by the blow, and renounced the chair. He told me that during these years he could not think of anything else, and he seemed as much moved whilst reciting this simple love story as though it had only just happened. Then he took the bouquet out of his pocket. "It was childish of me to keep it,"

he said, "perhaps even it was wrong," and he threw it on the fire. When the poor flowers had finished crackling and blazing, he went on in a calmer voice: "I am grateful to you for having asked me to tell this story. I have to thank you for making me part with a souvenir which it is scarcely suitable I should keep." But his heart was full, and it was easy to see how much the sacrifice had cost him. Poor priests! what a life is theirs! They must forbid themselves the most innocent thoughts, and must banish from their hearts every feeling which makes the happiness of other men ... even those recollections which are a part of life itself. Priests remind us of ourselves, of all unfortunate women to whom every living feeling is forbidden as criminal. We are allowed to suffer, but even in that we must hide our pain. Good-bye, I reproach myself for my ill-advised curiosity, but it was indulged in on your behalf.

(We omit here several letters which do not contain any reference to the Abbé Aubain.)

LETTER V.

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The same to the same.

NOIRMOUTIERS,... *May*, 1845.

I have meant to write to you for a long time, my dear Sophie, but have always been kept back by a feeling of shame. What I want to tell you is so strange, so ridiculous and, withal, so sad, that I scarcely know whether you will be moved to tears or to laughter. I am still at a loss to

understand it myself. But I will come to the facts without more beating about the bush. I have mentioned the Abbé Aubain to you several times in my previous letters: he is the curé of our village, Noirmoutiers. I also told you the story which led to his entering into the priesthood. Living away from everybody, and my mind full of those melancholy thoughts which you know trouble me, the companionship of a clever, cultivated and agreeable man was extremely congenial to me. Very likely I let him see that he interested me, for, in a very short time, he came to our house as though he were an old friend. I admit it was quite a novel pleasure to me to talk with a man of cultured mind. The ignorance of the world did but enhance his intellectual distinction. Perhaps, too—for I must tell you everything; I do not wish to hide from you any little failings of my character—perhaps, too, the naïvete of my coquetry (to use your own expression), for which you have often scolded me, has been at work unconsciously. I love to be pleasant to people who please me, and I want to be liked by those whom I like.... I see you open your eyes wide at this discourse, and I think I can hear you exclaim "Julie!" Don't be anxious; I am too old to be silly. But to continue. A degree of intimacy has sprung up between us without—let me hasten to say—anything either having been said or done inconsistent with his sacred calling. He is very happy in my society. We often talk of his earlier days, and more than once my evil genius has prompted me to bring up the subject of that romantic attachment which cost him a bouquet (now lying in ashes on my hearth) and the gloomy cassock he wears. It was not difficult to see that he thought of his faithless mistress less

often. One day he met her in the town, and even spoke to her. He told me all about it on his return, and added quite calmly that she was happy and had several charming children. He saw, by chance, some of Henry's fits of temper; hence ensued almost unavoidable confidences from my side, and on his increased sympathy. He understood my husband as though he had known him for a matter of ten years. Furthermore, his advice was as wise as yours, and more impartial, for you always hold that both sides are in the wrong. He always thinks I am in the right, but at the same time recommends prudence and tact. In short, he proves himself a devoted friend. There is something almost feminine about him which captivates me. His disposition reminds me of yours: it is great-minded and strong, sensitive and reserved, with an exaggerated sense of duty.... I jostle my words together one on top of the other in order to delay what I want to tell you. I cannot speak openly; this paper frightens me. If only I had you in the fireside corner, with a little frame between us, embroidering the same piece of work! But at length, at length, Sophie, I must tell you the real truth. The poor fellow is in love with me. You may laugh, or perhaps you are shocked? I wish I could see you just now. He has not of course said a word to me, but those large dark eyes of his cannot lie.... At these words I believe you will laugh. What wonderful eyes those are which speak unconsciously! I have seen any number of men try to make theirs expressive who only managed to look idiotic. I must confess that my bad angel almost rejoiced at first over this unlucky state of things. To make a conquest—such a harmless conquest as this one—at my

age! It is something to be able to excite such a feeling, such an impossible passion!... But shame on me! This vile feeling soon passed away. I said to myself I have done wrong to a worthy man by my thoughtless conduct. It is dreadful; I must put a stop to it immediately. I racked my brains to think how I could send him away. One day we were walking together on the beach at low tide; he did not dare to utter one word, and I was equally embarrassed. Five moments of deadly silence followed, during which I picked up shells to cover my confusion. At last I said to him, "My dear Abbé, you must certainly have a better living than this. I shall write to my uncle the bishop; I will go to see him if necessary." "Leave Noirmoutiers!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands. "But I am so happy here! What more can I desire while you are here? You have overwhelmed me with good things, and my little house has become a palace." "No," I replied, "my uncle is very old; if I had the misfortune to lose him I should not know whom to address to obtain a suitable post." "Alas! Madam, I should be very sorry to leave this village!... The curé de Sainte-Marie is dead,... but I am not troubled, because I believe he will be replaced by l'abbé Raton, who is a most excellent priest. I am delighted with his appointment, for if Monseigneur had thought of me——"

"The curé de Sainte-Marie is dead!" I cried.

"I will go to my uncle at N—— to-day."

"Ah, Madam, do nothing in the matter. The Abbé Raton is much better fitted for it than I; and, then, to leave Noirmoutiers!..."

"Monsieur l'abbé," I said resolutely, "you must!" At these words he lowered his head and did not venture to oppose. I

nearly ran back to the château. He followed me a couple of paces behind, poor man, too much upset to open his mouth. He was quite crushed. I did not lose a minute. By eight o'clock I was at my uncle's house. I found him very much prejudiced in favour of his Raton; but he is fond of me, and I know my power. At length, after a long discussion, I got my way. Raton is cast aside, and l'abbé Aubain is curé of Sainte-Marie. He has been at the town for two days. The poor fellow understood my "You must." He thanked me seriously, but spoke of nothing beyond his gratitude. I am grateful to him for leaving Noirmoutiers so soon, and for telling me even that he was in haste to go and thank Monseigneur. He sent me at parting his pretty Byzantine casket, and asked permission to write to me sometimes. Ah, well, my dear. *Are you satisfied, Coucy?* This is a lesson which I shall not forget when I get back into the world. But then I shall be thirty-three, and shall hardly expect to be admired ... and with such devotion as his!... Truly, that would be out of the question. Never mind, from the ruins of all this folly I save a pretty casket and a true friend. When I am forty, and a grandmother, I will plot to obtain the Abbé Aubain a living in Paris. Some day you will see this come to pass, my dear, and he will give your daughter her first communion.

LETTER VI.

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The Abbé Aubain to the Abbé Bruneau. Professor of Theology at Saint-A——.

N——, *May*, 1845.

My Dear Professor,—It is the curé of Sainte-Marie who is writing to you, not any longer the humble, officiating priest of Noirmoutiers. I have left my solitary marshes and behold me a citizen, installed in a fine living, in the best street in N——; curé of a large, well-built church, well kept up, of splendid architecture, depicted in every album in France. The first time that I said Mass before a marble altar, which glittered with gilding, I had to ask myself if I really were myself. But it is true enough, and one of my delights is the hope that at the next vacation you will come and pay me a visit. I shall have a comfortable room to offer you, and a good bed, not to mention some bordeaux, which I call my bordeaux of Noirmoutiers; and I venture to say it is worth your acceptance. But, you ask me, how did you get from Noirmoutiers to Sainte-Marie? You left me at the entrance to the nave, you find me now at the steeple.

O Melibœe deus nobis hæc otia fecit.

Providence, my dear Professor, sent a grand lady from Paris to Noirmoutiers. Misfortunes of a kind we shall never know had temporarily reduced them to an income of 10,000 crowns per annum. She is an agreeable and good woman, unfortunately a bit jaded by frivolous reading, and by association with the dandies of the capital. Bored to death by a husband with whom she has little in common, she did me the honour of becoming interested in me. There were endless presents and continual invitations, then every day some fresh scheme in which I was wanted. "M. l'abbé, I want to learn Latin.... M. l'abbé, I want to be taught botany." *Horresco referens*, did she not also desire that I should

expound theology to her? What would you have, my dear Professor? In fact, to quench such thirst for knowledge would have required all the professors of Saint-A——. Fortunately, such whims never last long: the course of studies rarely lasted beyond the third lesson. When I told her that the Latin for rose was *rosa*, she exclaimed, "What a well of learning you are, M. l'abbé! How could you allow yourself to be buried at Noirmoutiers?" To tell you the truth, my dear Professor, the good lady, through reading the silly books that are produced nowadays, got all sorts of queer ideas into her head. One day she lent me a book which she had just received from Paris, and which enraptured her. *Abélard*, by M. de Rémusat. Doubtless you have read it, and admired the learned research made by the author, unfortunately in so wrong a spirit. At first I skipped to the second volume, containing the "Philosophy of Abélard," and, after reading that with the greatest interest, I returned to the first, to the life of the great heresiarch. This, of course, was all Madam had deigned to read. That, my dear Professor, opened my eyes. I realised that there was danger in the society of fine ladies enamoured of learning. This one of Noirmoutiers could give points to Héloïse in the matter of infatuation. This, to me, extremely novel situation was troubling me much, when, suddenly, she said to me, "M. l'abbé, the incumbent of Sainte-Marie is dead, and I want you to have the living. *You must*." Immediately she drove off in her carriage to see Monseigneur; and, a few days later, I was curé of Sainte-Marie, somewhat ashamed of having obtained the living by favour, but in other respects delighted to be far away from the toils of a *lioness* of the

capital. A lioness, my dear Professor, is the Parisian expression for a woman of fashion.

Ω Ζεῦ, γυναικῶν οἷον ὦπάσας γένος.[1]

Ought I to have rejected this good fortune in order to defy the temptation? What nonsense! Did not St. Thomas of Canterbury accept castles from Henry II.? Good-bye, my dear Professor, I look forward to discussing philosophy with you in a few months' time, each of us in a comfortable armchair, before a plump chicken and a bottle of bordeaux, *more philosophorum. Vac let me ama*.

[1] A line taken, I believe, from the *Seven Against Thebes*, of Æschylus, "O Jupiter! women!... what a race thou hast given us!" The Abbé Aubain and his Professor, the Abbé Bruneau, are good classical scholars.

MATEO FALCONE

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Coming out of Porto-Vecchio, and turning north-west towards the centre of the island, the ground is seen to rise very rapidly, and, after three hours' walk by tortuous paths, blocked by large boulders of rocks, and sometimes cut by ravines, the traveller finds himself on the edge of a very broad *mâquis*, or open plateau. These plateaus are the home of the Corsican shepherds, and the resort of those who have come in conflict with the law. The Corsican peasant sets fire to a certain stretch of forest to spare himself the trouble of manuring his lands: so much the worse if the flames spread further than is needed. Whatever happens, he is sure to have a good harvest by sowing upon this ground, fertilised by the ashes of the trees which grew

on it. When the corn is gathered, they leave the straw because it is too much trouble to gather. The roots, which remain in the earth without being consumed, sprout, in the following spring, into very thick shoots, which, in a few years, reach to a height of seven or eight feet. It is this kind of underwood which is called *mâquis*. It is composed of different kinds of trees and shrubs mixed up and entangled as in a wild state of nature. It is only with hatchet in hand that man can open a way through, and there are *mâquis* so dense and so thick that not even the wild sheep can penetrate them.

If you have killed a man, go into the *mâquis* of Porto-Vecchio, with a good gun and powder and shot, and you will live there in safety. Do not forget to take a brown cloak, furnished with a hood, which will serve as a coverlet and mattress. The shepherds will give you milk, cheese, chestnuts, and you will have nothing to fear from the hand of the law, nor from the relatives of the dead, except when you go down into the town to renew your stock of ammunition.

When I was in Corsica in 18— Mateo Falcone's house was half a league from this *mâquis*. He was a comparatively rich man for that country, living handsomely, that is to say, without doing anything, from the produce of his herds, which the shepherds, a sort of nomadic people, led to pasture here and there over the mountains. When I saw him, two years after the event that I am about to tell, he seemed about fifty years of age at the most. Imagine a small, but robust man, with jet-black, curly hair, an aquiline nose, thin lips, large and piercing eyes, and a deeply tanned