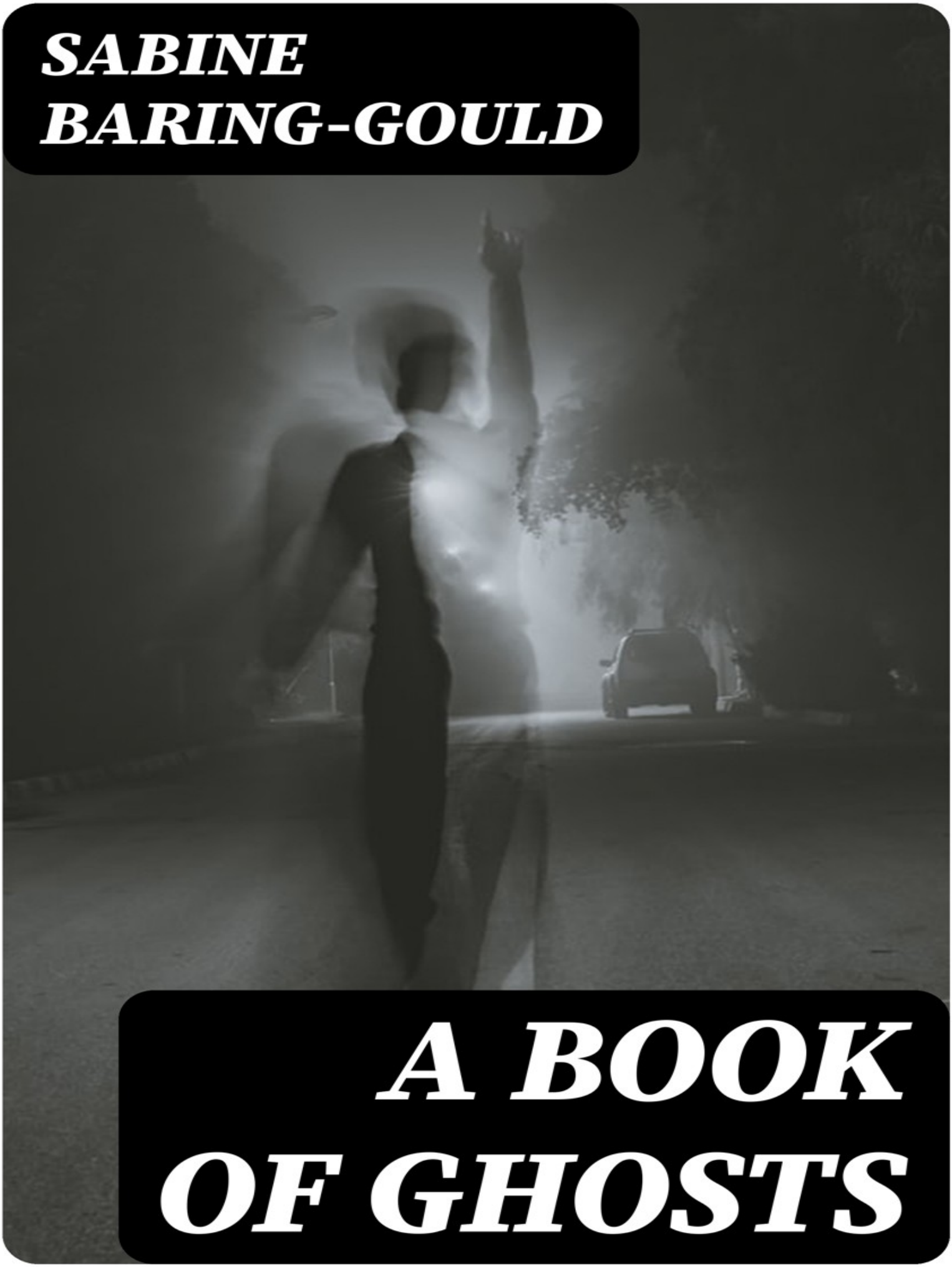
SABINE BARING-GOULD



A BOOK OF GHOSTS

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JEAN BOUCHON

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I was in Orléans a good many years ago. At the time it was my purpose to write a life of Joan of Arc, and I considered it advisable to visit the scenes of her exploits, so as to be able to give to my narrative some local colour.

But I did not find Orléans answer to my expectations. It is a dull town, very modern in appearance, but with that measly and decrepit look which is so general in French towns. There was a Place Jeanne d'Arc, with an equestrian statue of her in the midst, flourishing a banner. There was the house that the Maid had occupied after the taking of the city, but, with the exception of the walls and rafters, it had undergone so much alteration and modernisation as to have lost its interest. A museum of memorials of la Pucelle had been formed, but possessed no genuine relics, only arms and tapestries of a later date.

The city walls she had besieged, the gate through which she had burst, had been levelled, and their places taken by boulevards. The very cathedral in which she had knelt to return thanks for her victory was not the same. That had been blown up by the Huguenots, and the cathedral that now stands was erected on its ruins in 1601.

There was an ormolu figure of Jeanne on the clock—never wound up—upon the mantelshelf in my room at the hotel, and there were chocolate figures of her in the confectioners' shop-windows for children to suck. When I sat down at 7 p.m. to table d'hôte, at my inn, I was out of heart. The result of my exploration of sites had been unsatisfactory; but I trusted on the morrow to be able to find material to serve my purpose in the municipal archives of the town library.

My dinner ended, I sauntered to a café.

That I selected opened on to the Place, but there was a back entrance near to my hotel, leading through a long, stone-paved passage at the back of the houses in the street, and by ascending three or four stone steps one entered the long, well-lighted café. I came into it from the back by this means, and not from the front.

I took my place and called for a café-cognac. Then I picked up a French paper and proceeded to read it—all but the feuilleton. In my experience I have never yet come across anyone who reads the feuilletons in a French paper; and my impression is that these snippets of novel are printed solely for the purpose of filling up space and disguising the lack of news at the disposal of the editors. The French papers borrow their information relative to foreign affairs largely from the English journals, so that they are a day behind ours in the foreign news that they publish.

Whilst I was engaged in reading, something caused me to look up, and I noticed standing by the white marble-topped table, on which was my coffee, a waiter, with a pale face and black whiskers, in an expectant attitude.

I was a little nettled at his precipitancy in applying for payment, but I put it down to my being a total stranger there; and without a word I set down half a franc and a ten centimes coin, the latter as his *pourboire*. Then I proceeded with my reading.

I think a quarter of an hour had elapsed, when I rose to depart, and then, to my surprise, I noticed the half-franc still on the table, but the sous piece was gone.

I beckoned to a waiter, and said: "One of you came to me a little while ago demanding payment. I think he was somewhat hasty in pressing for it; however, I set the money down, and the fellow has taken the tip, and has neglected the charge for the coffee."

"*Sapristi!*" exclaimed the *garçon*; "Jean Bouchon has been at his tricks again."

I said nothing further; asked no questions. The matter did not concern me, or indeed interest me in the smallest degree; and I left.

Next day I worked hard in the town library. I cannot say that I lighted on any unpublished documents that might serve my purpose.

I had to go through the controversial literature relative to whether Jeanne d'Arc was burnt or not, for it has been maintained that a person of the same name, and also of Arques, died a natural death some time later, and who postured as the original warrior-maid. I read a good many monographs on the Pucelle, of various values; some real contributions to history, others mere second-hand cookings-up of well-known and often-used material. The sauce in these latter was all that was new.

In the evening, after dinner, I went back to the same café and called for black coffee with a nip of brandy. I drank it leisurely, and then retreated to the desk where I could write some letters.

I had finished one, and was folding it, when I saw the same pale-visaged waiter standing by with his hand extended for payment. I put my hand into my pocket, pulled out a fifty centimes piece and a coin of two sous, and placed both beside me, near the man, and proceeded to put my letter in an envelope, which I then directed.

Next I wrote a second letter, and that concluded, I rose to go to one of the tables and to call for stamps, when I noticed that again the silver coin had been left untouched, but the copper piece had been taken away.

I tapped for a waiter.

"*Tiens*," said I, "that fellow of yours has been bungling again. He has taken the tip and has left the half-franc."

"Ah! Jean Bouchon once more!"

"But who is Jean Bouchon?"

The man shrugged his shoulders, and, instead of answering my query, said: "I should recommend monsieur

to refuse to pay Jean Bouchon again—that is, supposing monsieur intends revisiting this café."

"I most assuredly will not pay such a noodle," I said; "and it passes my comprehension how you can keep such a fellow on your staff."

I revisited the library next day, and then walked by the Loire, that rolls in winter such a full and turbid stream, and in summer, with a reduced flood, exposes gravel and sand-banks. I wandered around the town, and endeavoured vainly to picture it, enclosed by walls and drums of towers, when on April 29th, 1429, Jeanne threw herself into the town and forced the English to retire, discomfited and perplexed.

In the evening I revisited the café and made my wants known as before. Then I looked at my notes, and began to arrange them.

Whilst thus engaged I observed the waiter, named Jean Bouchon, standing near the table in an expectant attitude as before. I now looked him full in the face and observed his countenance. He had puffy white cheeks, small black eyes, thick dark mutton-chop whiskers, and a broken nose. He was decidedly an ugly man, but not a man with a repulsive expression of face.

"No," said I, "I will give you nothing. I will not pay you. Send another *garçon* to me."

As I looked at him to see how he took this refusal, he seemed to fall back out of my range, or, to be more exact, the lines of his form and features became confused. It was much as though I had been gazing on a reflection in still water; that something had ruffled the surface, and all was broken up and obliterated. I could see him no more. I was puzzled and a bit startled, and I rapped my coffee-cup with the spoon to call the attention of a waiter. One sprang to me immediately.

"See!" said I, "Jean Bouchon has been here again; I told him that I would not pay him one sou, and he has vanished in a most perplexing manner. I do not see him in the room."

"No, he is not in the room."

"When he comes in again, send him to me. I want to have a word with him."

The waiter looked confused, and replied: "I do not think that Jean will return."

"How long has he been on your staff?"

"Oh! he has not been on our staff for some years."

"Then why does he come here and ask for payment for coffee and what else one may order?"

"He never takes payment for anything that has been consumed. He takes only the tips."

"But why do you permit him to do that?"

"We cannot help ourselves."

"He should not be allowed to enter the café."

"No one can keep him out."

"This is surpassing strange. He has no right to the tips. You should communicate with the police."

The waiter shook his head. "They can do nothing. Jean Bouchon died in 1869."

"Died in 1869!" I repeated.

"It is so. But he still comes here. He never pesters the old customers, the inhabitants of the town—only visitors, strangers."

"Tell me all about him."

"Monsieur must pardon me now. We have many in the place, and I have my duties."

"In that case I will drop in here to-morrow morning when you are disengaged, and I will ask you to inform me about him. What is your name?"

"At monsieur's pleasure—Alphonse."

Next morning, in place of pursuing the traces of the Maid of Orléans, I went to the café to hunt up Jean Bouchon. I found Alphonse with a duster wiping down the tables. I invited him to a table and made him sit down opposite me. I will give his story in substance, only where advisable recording his exact words.

Jean Bouchon had been a waiter at this particular café. Now in some of these establishments the attendants are wont to have a box, into which they drop all the tips that are received; and at the end of the week it is opened, and the sum found in it is divided *pro rata* among the waiters, the head waiter receiving a larger portion than the others. This is not customary in all such places of refreshment, but it is in some, and it was so in this café. The average is pretty constant, except on special occasions, as when a fête occurs; and the waiters know within a few francs what their perquisites will be.

But in the café where served Jean Bouchon the sum did not reach the weekly total that might have been anticipated; and after this deficit had been noted for a couple of months the waiters were convinced that there was something wrong, somewhere or somehow. Either the common box was tampered with, or one of them did not put in his tips received. A watch was set, and it was discovered that Jean Bouchon was the defaulter. When he had received a gratuity, he went to the box, and pretended to put in the coin, but no sound followed, as would have been the case had one been dropped in.

There ensued, of course, a great commotion among the waiters when this was discovered. Jean Bouchon endeavoured to brave it out, but the *patron* was appealed to, the case stated, and he was dismissed. As he left by the back entrance, one of the younger *garçons* put out his leg and tripped Bouchon up, so that he stumbled and fell headlong down the steps with a crash on the stone floor of the passage. He fell with such violence on his forehead that he was taken up insensible. His bones were fractured, there was concussion of the brain, and he died within a few hours without recovering consciousness.

"We were all very sorry and greatly shocked," said Alphonse; "we did not like the man, he had dealt dishonourably by us, but we wished him no ill, and our

resentment was at an end when he was dead. The waiter who had tripped him up was arrested, and was sent to prison for some months, but the accident was due to *une mauvaise plaisanterie* and no malice was in it, so that the young fellow got off with a light sentence. He afterwards married a widow with a café at Vierzon, and is there, I believe, doing well.

"Jean Bouchon was buried," continued Alphonse; "and we waiters attended the funeral and held white kerchiefs to our eyes. Our head waiter even put a lemon into his, that by squeezing it he might draw tears from his eyes. We all subscribed for the interment, that it should be dignified—majestic as becomes a waiter."

"And do you mean to tell me that Jean Bouchon has haunted this café ever since?"

"Ever since 1869," replied Alphonse.

"And there is no way of getting rid of him?"

"None at all, monsieur. One of the Canons of Bourges came in here one evening. We did suppose that Jean Bouchon would not approach, molest an ecclesiastic, but he did. He took his *pourboire* and left the rest, just as he treated monsieur. Ah! monsieur! but Jean Bouchon did well in 1870 and 1871 when those pigs of Prussians were here in occupation. The officers came nightly to our café, and Jean Bouchon was greatly on the alert. He must have carried away half of the gratuities they offered. It was a sad loss to us."

"This is a very extraordinary story," said I.

"But it is true," replied Alphonse.

Next day I left Orléans. I gave up the notion of writing the life of Joan of Arc, as I found that there was absolutely no new material to be gleaned on her history—in fact, she had been thrashed out.

Years passed, and I had almost forgotten about Jean Bouchon, when, the other day, I was in Orléans once more,

on my way south, and at once the whole story recurred to me.

I went that evening to the same café. It had been smartened up since I was there before. There was more plate glass, more gilding; electric light had been introduced, there were more mirrors, and there were also ornaments that had not been in the café before.

I called for café-cognac and looked at a journal, but turned my eyes on one side occasionally, on the look-out for Jean Bouchon. But he did not put in an appearance. I waited for a quarter of an hour in expectation, but saw no sign of him.

Presently I summoned a waiter, and when he came up I inquired: "But where is Jean Bouchon?"

"Monsieur asks after Jean Bouchon?" The man looked surprised.

"Yes, I have seen him here previously. Where is he at present?"

"Monsieur has seen Jean Bouchon? Monsieur perhaps knew him. He died in 1869."

"I know that he died in 1869, but I made his acquaintance in 1874. I saw him then thrice, and he accepted some small gratuities of me."

"Monsieur tipped Jean Bouchon?"

"Yes, and Jean Bouchon accepted my tips."

"*Tiens*, and Jean Bouchon died five years before."

"Yes, and what I want to know is how you have rid yourselves of Jean Bouchon, for that you have cleared the place of him is evident, or he would have been pestering me this evening." The man looked disconcerted and irresolute.

"Hold," said I; "is Alphonse here?"

"No, monsieur, Alphonse has left two or three years ago. And monsieur saw Jean Bouchon in 1874. I was not then here. I have been here only six years."

"But you can in all probability inform me of the manner of getting quit of Jean."

"Monsieur! I am very busy this evening, there are so many gentlemen come in."

"I will give you five francs if you will tell me all—all—succinctly about Jean Bouchon."

"Will monsieur be so good as to come here to-morrow during the morning? and then I place myself at the disposition of monsieur."

"I shall be here at eleven o'clock."

At the appointed time I was at the café. If there is an institution that looks ragged and dejected and dissipated, it is a café in the morning, when the chairs are turned upside-down, the waiters are in aprons and shirt-sleeves, and a smell of stale tobacco lurks about the air, mixed with various other unpleasant odours.

The waiter I had spoken to on the previous evening was looking out for me. I made him seat himself at a table with me. No one else was in the saloon except another *garçon*, who was dusting with a long feather-brush.

"Monsieur," began the waiter, "I will tell you the whole truth. The story is curious, and perhaps everyone would not believe it, but it is well *documentée*. Jean Bouchon was at one time in service here. We had a box. When I say we, I do not mean myself included, for I was not here at the time."

"I know about the common box. I know the story down to my visit to Orléans in 1874, when I saw the man."

"Monsieur has perhaps been informed that he was buried in the cemetery?"

"I do know that, at the cost of his fellow-waiters."

"Well, monsieur, he was poor, and his fellow-waiters, though well-disposed, were not rich. So he did not have a grave *en perpétuité*. Accordingly, after many years, when the term of consignment was expired, and it might well be supposed that Jean Bouchon had mouldered away, his grave was cleared out to make room for a fresh occupant. Then a very remarkable discovery was made. It was found that his corroded coffin was crammed—literally stuffed—with five

and ten centimes pieces, and with them were also some German coins, no doubt received from those pigs of Prussians during the occupation of Orléans. This discovery was much talked about. Our proprietor of the café and the head waiter went to the mayor and represented to him how matters stood—that all this money had been filched during a series of years since 1869 from the waiters. And our *patron* represented to him that it should in all propriety and justice be restored to us. The mayor was a man of intelligence and heart, and he quite accepted this view of the matter, and ordered the surrender of the whole coffin-load of coins to us, the waiters of the café."

"So you divided it amongst you."

"Pardon, monsieur; we did not. It is true that the money might legitimately be regarded as belonging to us. But then those defrauded, or most of them, had left long ago, and there were among us some who had not been in service in the café more than a year or eighteen months. We could not trace the old waiters. Some were dead, some had married and left this part of the country. We were not a corporation. So we held a meeting to discuss what was to be done with the money. We feared, moreover, that unless the spirit of Jean Bouchon were satisfied, he might continue revisiting the café and go on sweeping away the tips. It was of paramount importance to please Jean Bouchon, to lay out the money in such a manner as would commend itself to his feelings. One suggested one thing, one another. One proposed that the sum should be expended on masses for the repose of Jean's soul. But the head waiter objected to that. He said that he thought he knew the mind of Jean Bouchon, and that this would not commend itself to it. He said, did our head waiter, that he knew Jean Bouchon from head to heels. And he proposed that all the coins should be melted up, and that out of them should be cast a statue of Jean Bouchon in bronze, to be set up here in the café, as there were not enough coins to make one large enough to

be erected in a Place. If monsieur will step with me he will see the statue; it is a superb work of art."

He led the way, and I followed.

In the midst of the café stood a pedestal, and on this basis a bronze figure about four feet high. It represented a man reeling backward, with a banner in his left hand, and the right raised towards his brow, as though he had been struck there by a bullet. A sabre, apparently fallen from his grasp, lay at his feet. I studied the face, and it most assuredly was utterly unlike Jean Bouchon with his puffy cheeks, mutton-chop whiskers, and broken nose, as I recalled him.

"But," said I, "the features do not—pardon me—at all resemble those of Jean Bouchon. This might be the young Augustus, or Napoleon I. The profile is quite Greek."

"It may be so," replied the waiter. "But we had no photograph to go by. We had to allow the artist to exercise his genius, and, above all, we had to gratify the spirit of Jean Bouchon."

"I see. But the attitude is inexact. Jean Bouchon fell down the steps headlong, and this represents a man staggering backwards."

"It would have been inartistic to have shown him precipitated forwards; besides, the spirit of Jean might not have liked it."

"Quite so. I understand. But the flag?"

"That was an idea of the artist. Jean could not be made holding a coffee-cup. You will see the whole makes a superb subject. Art has its exigencies. Monsieur will see underneath is an inscription on the pedestal."

I stooped, and with some astonishment read—

"JEAN BOUCHON
MORT SUR LE CHAMP DE GLOIRE
1870
DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI."

"Why!" objected I, "he died from falling a cropper in the back passage, not on the field of glory."

"Monsieur! all Orléans is a field of glory. Under S. Aignan did we not repel Attila and his Huns in 451? Under Jeanne d'Arc did we not repulse the English—monsieur will excuse the allusion—in 1429. Did we not recapture Orléans from the Germans in November, 1870?"

"That is all very true," I broke in. "But Jean Bouchon neither fought against Attila nor with la Pucelle, nor against the Prussians. Then '*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*' is rather strong, considering the facts."

"How? Does not monsieur see that the sentiment is patriotic and magnificent?"

"I admit that, but dispute the application."

"Then why apply it? The sentiment is all right."

"But by implication it refers to Jean Bouchon, who died, not for his country, but in a sordid coffee-house brawl. Then, again, the date is wrong. Jean Bouchon died in 1869, not in 1870."

"That is only out by a year."

"Yes, but with this mistake of a year, and with the quotation from Horace, and with the attitude given to the figure, anyone would suppose that Jean Bouchon had fallen in the retaking of Orléans from the Prussians."

"Ah! monsieur, who looks on a monument and expects to find thereon the literal truth relative to the deceased?"

"This is something of a sacrifice to truth," I demurred.

"Sacrifice is superb!" said the waiter. "There is nothing more noble, more heroic than sacrifice."

"But not the sacrifice of truth."

"Sacrifice is always sacrifice."

"Well," said I, unwilling further to dispute, "this is certainly a great creation out of nothing."

"Not out of nothing; out of the coppers that Jean Bouchon had filched from us, and which choked up his coffin."

"Jean Bouchon has been seen no more?"

"No, monsieur. And yet—yes, once, when the statue was unveiled. Our *patron* did that. The café was crowded. All our *habitués* were there. The *patron* made a magnificent oration; he drew a superb picture of the moral, intellectual, social, and political merits of Jean Bouchon. There was not a dry eye among the audience, and the speaker choked with emotion. Then, as we stood in a ring, not too near, we saw—I was there and I distinctly saw, so did the others—Jean Bouchon standing with his back to us, looking intently at the statue of himself. Monsieur, as he thus stood I could discern his black mutton-chop whiskers projecting upon each side of his head. Well, sir, not one word was spoken. A dead silence fell upon all. Our *patron* ceased to speak, and wiped his eyes and blew his nose. A sort of holy awe possessed us all. Then, after the lapse of some minutes, Jean Bouchon turned himself about, and we all saw his puffy pale cheeks, his thick sensual lips, his broken nose, his little pig's eyes. He was very unlike his idealised portrait in the statue; but what matters that? It gratified the deceased, and it injured no one. Well, monsieur, Jean Bouchon stood facing us, and he turned his head from one side to another, and gave us all what I may term a greasy smile. Then he lifted up his hands as though invoking a blessing on us all, and vanished. Since then he has not been seen."

POMPS AND VANITIES

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Colonel Mountjoy had an appointment in India that kept him there permanently. Consequently he was constrained to send his two daughters to England when they were quite children. His wife had died of cholera at Madras. The girls were Letice and Betty. There was a year's difference in their ages, but they were extraordinarily alike, so much so that they might have been supposed to be twins.

Letice was given up to the charge of Miss Mountjoy, her father's sister, and Betty to that of Lady Lacy, her maternal aunt. Their father would have preferred that his daughters should have been together, but there were difficulties in the way; neither of the ladies was inclined to be burdened with both, and if both had been placed with one the other might have regarded and resented this as a slight.

As the children grew up their likeness in feature became more close, but they diverged exceedingly in expression. A sullenness, an unhappy look, a towering fire of resentment characterised that of Letice, whereas the face of Betty was open and gay.

This difference was due to the difference in their bringing up.

Lady Lacy, who had a small house in North Devon, was a kindly, intellectual, and broad-minded old lady, of sweet disposition but a decided will. She saw a good deal of society, and did her best to train Betty to be an educated and liberal-minded woman of culture and graceful manners. She did not send her to school, but had her taught at home; and on the excuse that her eyes were weak by artificial light she made the girl read to her in the evenings, and always read books that were standard and calculated to increase her knowledge and to develop her understanding. Lady Lacy

detested all shams, and under her influence Betty grew up to be thoroughly straightforward, healthy-minded, and true.

On the other hand, Miss Mountjoy was, as Letice called her, a Killjoy. She had herself been reared in the midst of the Clapham sect; had become rigid in all her ideas, narrow in all her sympathies, and a bundle of prejudices.

The present generation of young people know nothing of the system of repression that was exercised in that of their fathers and mothers. Now the tendency is wholly in the other direction, and too greatly so. It is possibly due to a revulsion of feeling against a training that is looked back upon with a shudder.

To that narrow school there existed but two categories of men and women, the Christians and the Worldlings, and those who pertained to it arrogated to themselves the former title. The Judgment had already begun with the severance of the sheep from the goats, and the saints who judged the world had their Jerusalem at Clapham.

In that school the works of the great masters of English literature, Shakespeare, Pope, Scott, Byron, were taboo; no work of imagination was tolerated save the Apocalypse, and that was degraded into a polemic by such scribblers as Elliot and Cumming.

No entertainments, not even the oratorios of Handel, were tolerated; they savoured of the world. The nearest approach to excitement was found in a missionary meeting. The Chinese contract the feet of their daughters, but those English Claphamites cramped the minds of their children. The Venetians made use of an iron prison, with gradually contracting walls, that finally crushed the life out of the captive. But these elect Christians put their sons and daughters into a school that squeezed their energies and their intelligences to death.

Dickens caricatured such people in Mrs. Jellyby and Mr. Chadband; but he sketched them only in their external aspect, and left untouched their private action in distorting

young minds, maiming their wills, damping down all youthful buoyancy.

But the result did not answer the expectations of those who adopted this system with the young. Some daughters, indeed, of weaker wills were permanently stunted and shaped on the approved model, but nearly all the sons, and most of the daughters, on obtaining their freedom, broke away into utter frivolity and dissipation, or, if they retained any religious impressions, galloped through the Church of England, performing strange antics on the way, and plunged into the arms of Rome.

Such was the system to which the high-spirited, strong-willed Letice was subjected, and from which was no escape. The consequence was that Letice tossed and bit at her chains, and that there ensued frequent outbreaks of resentment against her aunt.

"Oh, Aunt Hannah! I want something to read."

After some demur, and disdainful rejection of more serious works, she was allowed Milton.

Then she said, "Oh! I do love *Comus*."

"*Comus!*" gasped Miss Mountjoy.

"And *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, they are not bad."

"My child. These were the compositions of the immortal bard before his eyes were opened."

"I thought, aunt, that he had dictated the *Paradise Lost and Regained* after he was blind."

"I refer to the eyes of his soul," said the old lady sternly.

"I want a story-book."

"There is the *Dairyman's Daughter*."

"I have read it, and hate it."

"I fear, Leticia, that you are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity."

Unhappily the sisters very rarely met one another. It was but occasionally that Lady Lacy and Betty came to town, and when they did, Miss Mountjoy put as many difficulties as she could in the way of their associating together.

On one such visit to London, Lady Lacy called and asked if she might take Letice with herself to the theatre. Miss Mountjoy shivered with horror, reared herself, and expressed her opinion of stage-plays and those who went to see them in strong and uncomplimentary terms. As she had the custody of Letice, she would by no persuasion be induced to allow her to imperil her soul by going to such a wicked place. Lady Lacy was fain to withdraw in some dismay and much regret.

Poor Letice, who had heard this offer made, had flashed into sudden brightness and a tremor of joy; when it was refused, she burst into a flood of tears and an ecstasy of rage. She ran up to her room, and took and tore to pieces a volume of *Clayton's Sermons*, scattered the leaves over the floor, and stamped upon them.

"Letice," said Miss Mountjoy, when she saw the devastation, "you are a child of wrath."

"Why mayn't I go where there is something pretty to see? Why may I not hear good music? Why must I be kept forever in the Doleful Dumps?"

"Because all these things are of the world, worldly."

"If God hates all that is fair and beautiful, why did He create the peacock, the humming-bird, and the bird of paradise, instead of filling the world with barn-door fowls?"

"You have a carnal mind. You will never go to heaven."

"Lucky I—if the saints there do nothing but hold missionary meetings to convert one another. Pray what else can they do?"

"They are engaged in the worship of God."

"I don't know what that means. All I am acquainted with is the worship of the congregation. At Salem Chapel the minister faces it, mouths at it, gesticulates to it, harangues, flatters, fawns at it, and, indeed, prays at it. If that be all, heaven must be a deadly dull hole."

Miss Mountjoy reared herself, she became livid with wrath. "You wicked girl."

"Aunt," said Letice, intent on further incensing her, "I do wish you would let me go—just for once—to a Catholic church to see what the worship of God is."

"I would rather see you dead at my feet!" exclaimed the incensed lady, and stalked, rigid as a poker, out of the room.

Thus the unhappy girl grew up to woman's estate, her heart seething with rebellion.

And then a terrible thing occurred. She caught scarlet fever, which took an unfavourable turn, and her life was despaired of. Miss Mountjoy was not one to conceal from the girl that her days were few, and her future condition hopeless.

Letice fought against the idea of dying so young.

"Oh, aunt! I won't die! I can't die! I have seen nothing of the pomps and vanities. I want to just taste them, and know what they are like. Oh! save me, make the doctor give me something to revive me. I want the pomps and vanities, oh! so much. I will not, I cannot die!" But her will, her struggle, availed nothing, and she passed away into the Great Unseen.

Miss Mountjoy wrote a formal letter to her brother, who had now become a general, to inform him of the lamented decease of his eldest daughter. It was not a comforting letter. It dwelt unnecessarily on the faults of Letice, it expressed no hopes as to her happiness in the world to which she had passed. There had been no signs of resignation at the last; no turning from the world with its pomps and vanities to better things, only a vain longing after what she could not have; a bitter resentment against Providence for having denied them to her; and a steeling of her heart against good and pious influences.

A year had passed.

Lady Lacy had come to town along with her niece. A dear friend had placed her house at her disposal. She had herself gone to Dresden with her daughters to finish them off in music and German. Lady Lacy was very glad of the

occasion, for Betty was now of an age to be brought out. There was to be a great ball at the house of the Countess of Belgrove, unto whom Lady Lacy was related, and at the ball Betty was to make her début.

The girl was in a condition of boundless excitement. A beautiful ball-dress of white satin, trimmed with rich Valenciennes lace, was laid over her chair for her to wear. Neat little white satin shoes stood on the floor, quite new, for her feet. In a flower-glass stood a red camellia that was destined to adorn her hair, and on the dressing-table, in a morocco case, was a pearl necklace that had belonged to her mother.

The maid did her hair, but the camellia, which was to be the only point of colour about her, except her rosy lips and flushed cheeks—that camellia was not to be put into her hair till the last minute.

The maid offered to help her to dress.

"No, thank you, Martha; I can do that perfectly well myself. I am accustomed to use my own hands, and I can take my own time about it."

"But really, miss, I think you should allow me."

"Indeed, indeed, no. There is plenty of time, and I shall go leisurely to work. When the carriage comes just tap at the door and tell me, and I will rejoin my aunt."

When the maid was gone, Betty locked her door. She lighted the candles beside the cheval-glass, and looked at herself in the mirror and laughed. For the first time, with glad surprise and innocent pleasure, she realised how pretty she was. And pretty she was indeed, with her pleasant face, honest eyes, finely arched brows, and twinkling smile that produced dimples in her cheeks.

"There is plenty of time," she said. "I shan't take a hundred years in dressing now that my hair is done."

She yawned. A great heaviness had come over her.

"I really think I shall have a nap first. I am dead sleepy now, and forty winks will set me up for the night."

Then she laid herself upon the bed. A numbing, over-powering lethargy weighed on her, and almost at once she sank into a dreamless sleep. So unconscious was she that she did not hear Martha's tap at the door nor the roll of the carriage as it took her aunt away.

She woke with a start. It was full day.

For some moments she did not realise this fact, nor that she was still dressed in the gown in which she had lain down the previous evening.

She rose in dismay. She had slept so soundly that she had missed the ball.

She rang her bell and unlocked the door.

"What, miss, up already?" asked the maid, coming in with a tray on which were tea and bread and butter.

"Yes, Martha. Oh! what will aunt say? I have slept so long and like a log, and never went to the ball. Why did you not call me?"

"Please, miss, you have forgotten. You went to the ball last night."

"No; I did not. I overslept myself."

The maid smiled. "If I may be so bold as to say so, I think, Miss Betty, you are dreaming still."

"No; I did not go."

The maid took up the satin dress. It was crumpled, the lace was a little torn, and the train showed unmistakable signs of having been drawn over a floor.

She then held up the shoes. They had been worn, and well worn, as if danced in all night.

"Look here, miss; here is your programme! Why, deary me! you must have had a lot of dancing. It is quite full."

Betty looked at the programme with dazed eyes; then at the camellia. It had lost some of its petals, and these had not fallen on the toilet-cover. Where were they? What was the meaning of this?

"Martha, bring me my hot water, and leave me alone."

Betty was sorely perplexed. There were evidences that her dress had been worn. The pearl necklace was in the case, but not as she had left it—outside. She bathed her head in cold water. She racked her brain. She could not recall the smallest particular of the ball. She perused the programme. A light colour came into her cheek as she recognised the initials "C. F.," those of Captain Charles Fontanel, of whom of late she had seen a good deal. Other characters expressed nothing to her mind.

"How very strange!" she said; "and I was lying on the bed in the dress I had on yesterday evening. I cannot explain it."

Twenty minutes later, Betty went downstairs and entered the breakfast-room. Lady Lacy was there. She went up to her aunt and kissed her.

"I am so sorry that I overslept myself," she said. "I was like one of the Seven Sleepers."

"My dear, I should not have minded if you had not come down till midday. After a first ball you must be tired."

"I meant—last night."

"How, last night?"

"I mean when I went to dress."

"Oh, you were punctual enough. When I was ready you were already in the hall."

The bewilderment of the girl grew apace.

"I am sure," said her aunt, "you enjoyed yourself. But you gave the lion's share of the dances to Captain Fontanel. If this had been at Exeter, it would have caused talk; but here you are known only to a few; however, Lady Belgrove observed it."

"I hope you are not very tired, auntie darling," said Betty, to change slightly the theme that perplexed her.

"Nothing to speak of. I like to go to a ball; it recalls my old dancing days. But I thought you looked white and fagged all the evening. Perhaps it was excitement."

As soon as breakfast was concluded, Betty escaped to her room. A fear was oppressing her. The only explanation

of the mystery was that she had been to the dance in her sleep. She was a somnambulist. What had she said and done when unconscious? What a dreadful thing it would have been had she woke up in the middle of a dance! She must have dressed herself, gone to Lady Belgrove's, danced all night, returned, taken off her dress, put on her afternoon tea-gown, lain down and concluded her sleep—all in one long tract of unconsciousness.

"By the way," said her aunt next day, "I have taken tickets for *Carmen*, at Her Majesty's. You would like to go?"

"Oh, delighted, aunt. I know some of the music—of course, the Toreador song; but I have never heard the whole opera. It will be delightful."

"And you are not too tired to go?"

"No—ten thousand times, no—I shall love to see it."

"What dress will you go in?"

"I think my black, and put a rose in my hair."

"That will do very well. The black becomes you. I think you could not do better."

Betty was highly delighted. She had been to plays, never to a real opera.

In the evening, dinner was early, unnecessarily early, and Betty knew that it would not take her long to dress, so she went into the little conservatory and seated herself there. The scent of the heliotropes was strong. Betty called them cherry-pie. She had got the libretto, and she looked it over; but as she looked, her eyes closed, and without being aware that she was going to sleep, in a moment she was completely unconscious.

She woke, feeling stiff and cold.

"Goodness!" said she, "I hope I am not late. Why—what is that light?"

The glimmer of dawn shone in at the conservatory windows.

Much astonished, she left it. The hall, the staircase were dark. She groped her way to her room, and switched on the

electric light.

Before her lay her black-and-white muslin dress on the bed; on the table were her white twelve-button gloves folded about her fan. She took them up, and below them, somewhat crumpled, lay the play-bill, scented.

"How very unaccountable this is," she said; and removing the dress, seated herself on the bed and thought.

"Why did they turn out the lights?" she asked herself, then sprang to her feet, switched off the electric current, and saw that actually the morning light was entering the room. She resumed her seat; put her hands to her brow.

"It cannot—it cannot be that this dreadful thing has happened again."

Presently she heard the servants stirring. She hastily undressed and retired between the sheets, but not to sleep. Her mind worked. She was seriously alarmed.

At the usual time Martha arrived with tea.

"Awake, Miss Betty!" she said. "I hope you had a nice evening. I dare say it was beautiful."

"But," began the girl, then checked herself, and said—

"Is my aunt getting up? Is she very tired?"

"Oh, miss, my lady is a wonderful person; she never seems to tire. She is always down at the same time."

Betty dressed, but her mind was in a turmoil. On one thing she was resolved. She must see a doctor. But she would not frighten her aunt, she would keep the matter close from her.

When she came into the breakfast-room, Lady Lacy said —

"I thought Maas's voice was superb, but I did not so much care for the Carmen. What did you think, dear?"

"Aunt," said Betty, anxious to change the topic, "would you mind my seeing a doctor? I don't think I am quite well."

"Not well! Why what is the matter with you?"

"I have such dead fits of drowsiness."

"My dearest, is that to be wondered at with this racketing about; balls and theatres—very other than the quiet life at home? But I will admit that you struck me as looking very pale last night. You shall certainly see Dr. Groves."

When the medical man arrived, Betty intimated that she wished to speak with him alone, and he was shown with her into the morning-room.

"Oh, Dr. Groves," she said nervously, "it is such a strange thing I have to say. I believe I walk in my sleep."

"You have eaten something that disagreed with you."

"But it lasted so long."

"How do you mean? Have you long been subject to it?"

"Dear, no. I never had any signs of it before I came to London this season."

"And how were you roused? How did you become aware of it?"

"I was not roused at all; the fact is I went asleep to Lady Belgrove's ball, and danced there and came back, and woke up in the morning without knowing I had been."

"What!"

"And then, last night, I went in my sleep to Her Majesty's and heard *Carmen*; but I woke up in the conservatory here at early dawn, and I remember nothing about it."

"This is a very extraordinary story. Are you sure you went to the ball and to the opera?"

"Quite sure. My dress had been used on both occasions, and my shoes and fan and gloves as well."

"Did you go with Lady Lacy?"

"Oh, yes. I was with her all the time. But I remember nothing about it."

"I must speak to her ladyship."

"Please, please do not. It would frighten her; and I do not wish her to suspect anything, except that I am a little out of sorts. She gets nervous about me."

Dr. Groves mused for some while, then he said: "I cannot see that this is at all a case of somnambulism."

"What is it, then?"

"Lapse of memory. Have you ever suffered from that previously?"

"Nothing to speak of. Of course I do not always remember everything. I do not always recollect commissions given to me, unless I write them down. And I cannot say that I remember all the novels I have read, or what was the menu at dinner yesterday."

"That is quite a different matter. What I refer to is spaces of blank in your memory. How often has this occurred?"

"Twice."

"And quite recently?"

"Yes, I never knew anything of the kind before."

"I think that the sooner you return to the country the better. It is possible that the strain of coming out and the change of entering into gay life in town has been too much for you. Take care and economise your pleasures. Do not attempt too much; and if anything of the sort happens again, send for me."

"Then you won't mention this to my aunt?"

"No, not this time. I will say that you have been a little over-wrought and must be spared too much excitement."

"Thank you so much, Dr. Groves."

Now it was that a new mystery came to confound Betty. She rang her bell.

"Martha," said she, when her maid appeared, "where is that novel I had yesterday from the circulating library? I put it on the boudoir table."

"I have not noticed it, miss."

"Please look for it. I have hunted everywhere for it, and it cannot be found."

"I will look in the parlour, miss, and the schoolroom."

"I have not been into the schoolroom at all, and I know that it is not in the drawing-room."

A search was instituted, but the book could not be found. On the morrow it was in the boudoir, where Betty had

placed it on her return from Mudie's.

"One of the maids took it," was her explanation. She did not much care for the book; perhaps that was due to her preoccupation, and not to any lack of stirring incident in the story. She sent it back and took out another. Next morning that also had disappeared.

It now became customary, as surely as she drew a novel from the library, that it vanished clean away. Betty was greatly amazed. She could not read a novel she had brought home till a day or two later. She took to putting the book, so soon as it was in the house, into one of her drawers, or into a cupboard. But the result was the same. Finally, when she had locked the newly acquired volume in her desk, and it had disappeared thence also, her patience gave way. There must be one of the domestics with a ravenous appetite for fiction, which drove her to carry off a book of the sort whenever it came into the house, and even to tamper with a lock to obtain it. Betty had been most reluctant to speak of the matter to her aunt, but now she made to her a formal complaint.

The servants were all questioned, and strongly protested their innocence. Not one of them had ventured to do such a thing as that with which they were charged.

However, from this time forward the annoyance ceased, and Betty and Lady Lacy naturally concluded that this was the result of the stir that had been made.

"Betty," said Lady Lacy, "what do you say to going to the new play at the Gaiety? I hear it very highly spoken of. Mrs. Fontanel has a box and has asked if we will join her."

"I should love it," replied the girl; "we have been rather quiet of late." But her heart was oppressed with fear.

She said to her maid: "Martha, will you dress me this evening—and—pray stay with me till my aunt is ready and calls for me?"

"Yes, miss, I shall be pleased to do so." But the girl looked somewhat surprised at the latter part of the request.