

Poor Cousin Louis

By Ella D'Arcy

THERE stands in the Islands a house known as "Les Calais." It has stood there already some three hundred years, and do judge from its stout walls and weather-tight appearance, promises to stand some three hundred more. Built of brown home-quarried stone, with solid stone chimney-stacks and roof of red tiles, its door is set in the centre beneath a semi-circular arch of dressed granite, on the keystone of which is deeply cut the date of construction :

J V N I
1 6 0 3

Above the date straggle the letters, L G M M, initials of the forgotten names of the builder of the house and of the woman he married. In the summer weather of 1603 that inscription was cut, and the man and woman doubtless read it with pride and pleasure as they stood looking up at their fine new homestead. They believed it would carry their names down to posterity when they themselves should be gone ; yet there stand the initials to-day, while the personalities they represent are as lost to memory as are the builders' graves.

At the moment when this little sketch opens, Les Calais had
belonged

belonged for three generations to the family of Renouf (pronounced Rennuf), and it is with the closing days of Mr. Louis Renouf that it purposes to deal. But first to complete the description of the house, which is typical of the Islands: hundreds of such homesteads placed singly, or in groups—then sharing in one common name—may be found there in a day's walk, although it must be added that a day's walk almost suffices to explore any one of the Islands from end to end.

Les Calais shares its name with none. It stands alone, completely hidden, save at one point only, by its ancient elms. On either side of the doorway are two windows, each of twelve small panes, and there is a row of five similar windows above. Around the back and sides of the house cluster all sorts of outbuildings, necessary dependencies of a time when men made their own cider and candles, baked their own bread, cut and stacked their own wood, and dried the dung of their herds for extra winter fuel. Beyond these lie its vegetable and fruit gardens, which again are surrounded on every side by its many rich vergées of pasture land.

Would you find Les Calais, take the high road from Jacques-le-Port to the village of St. Gilles, then keep to the left of the schools along a narrow lane cut between high hedges. It is a cart track only, as the deep sun-baked ruts testify, leading direct from St. Gilles to Vauvert, and, likely enough, during the whole of that distance you will not meet with a solitary person. You will see nothing but the green running hedgerows on either hand, the blue-domed sky above, from whence the lark, a black pin-point in the blue, flings down a gush of song; while the thrush you have disturbed lurching off that succulent snail, takes short ground flights before you, at every pause turning back an ireful eye to judge how much farther you intend to pursue him. He is happy

if you branch off midway to the left down the lane leading straight to Les Calais.

A gable end of the house faces this lane, and its one window in the days of Louis Renouf looked down upon a dilapidated farm-and stable-yard, the gate of which, turned back upon its hinges, stood wide open to the world. Within might be seen granaries empty of grain, stables where no horses fed, a long cow-house crumbling into ruin, and the broken stone sections of a cider trough dismantled more than half a century back. Cushions of emerald moss studded the thatches, and liliputian forests of grass-blades sprang thick between the cobble stones. The place might have been mistaken for some deserted grange, but for the contradiction conveyed in a bright pewter full-bellied water-can standing near the well, in a pile of firewood, with chopper still stuck in the topmost billet, and in a tatterdemalion troop of barn-door fowl lagging meditatively across the yard.

On a certain day, when summer warmth and unbroken silence brooded over all, and the broad sunshine blent the yellows, reds, and greys of tile and stone, the greens of grass and foliage, into one harmonious whole, a visitor entered the open gate. This was a tall, large young woman, with a fair, smooth, thirty-year-old face. Dressed in what was obviously her Sunday best, although it was neither Sunday nor even market-day, she wore a bonnet diademed with gas-green lilies of the valley, a netted black mantilla, and a velvet-trimmed violet silk gown, which she carefully lifted out of dust's way, thus displaying a stiffly starched petticoat and kid spring-side boots.

Such attire, unbeautiful in itself and incongruous with its surroundings, jarred harshly with the picturesque note of the scene. From being a subject to perpetuate on canvas, it shrunk, as it were, to the background of a cheap photograph, or the stage adjuncts

to the heroine of a farce. The silence too was shattered as the new comer's foot fell upon the stones. An unseen dog began to mouth a joyous welcome, and the fowls, lifting their thin, apprehensive faces towards her, flopped into a clumsy run as though their last hour were visible.

The visitor meanwhile turned familiar steps to a door in the wall on the left, and raising the latch, entered the flower garden of Les Calais. This garden, lying to the south, consisted then, and perhaps does still, of two square grass-plots with a broad gravel path running round them and up to the centre of the house.

In marked contrast with the neglect of the farmyard was this exquisitely kept garden, brilliant and fragrant with flowers. From a raised bed in the centre of each plot standard rose-trees shed out gorgeous perfume from chalices of every shade of loveliness, and thousands of white pinks justled shoulder to shoulder in narrow bands cut within the borders of the grass.

Busy over these, his back towards her, was an elderly man, braces hanging, in coloured cotton shirt. "Good afternoon, Tourtel," cried the lady, advancing. Thus addressed, he straightened himself slowly and turned round. Leaning on his hoe, he shaded his eyes with his hand. "Eh den! it's you, Missis Pedvinn," said he; "but we didn't expect you till to-morrow?"

"No, it's true," said Mrs. Poidevin, "that I wrote I would come Saturday, but Pedvinn expects some friends by the English boat, and wants me to receive them. Yet as they may be staying the week, I did not like to put poor Cousin Louis off so long without a visit, so thought I had better come up to-day."

Almost unconsciously, her phrases assumed apologetic form. She had an uneasy feeling Tourtel's wife might resent her unexpected advent; although why Mrs. Tourtel should object, or why she herself should stand in any awe of the Tourtels, she could

could not have explained. Tourtel was but gardener, the wife housekeeper and nurse, to her cousin Louis Renouf, master of Les Calais. "I sha'n't inconvenience Mrs. Tourtel, I hope? Of course I shouldn't think of staying tea if she is busy; I'll just sit an hour with Cousin Louis, and catch the six o'clock omnibus home from Vauvert."

Tourtel stood looking at her with wooden countenance, in which two small shifting eyes alone gave signs of life. "Eh, but you won't be no inconvenience to de ole woman, ma'am," said he suddenly, in so loud a voice that Mrs. Poidevin jumped; "only de apple-gôche, dat she was goin' to bake agen your visit, won't be ready, dat's all."

He turned, and stared up at the front of the house; Mrs. Poidevin, for no reason at all, did so too. Door and windows were open wide. In the upper storey, the white roller-blinds were let down against the sun, and on the broad sills of the parlour windows were nosegays placed in blue china jars. A white trellis-work criss-crossed over the façade, for the support of climbing rose and purple clematis which hung out a curtain of blossom almost concealing the masonry behind. The whole place breathed of peace and beauty, and Louisa Poidevin was lapped round with that pleasant sense of well-being which it was her chief desire in life never to lose. Though poor Cousin Louis—feeble, childish, solitary—was so much to be pitied, at least in his comfortable home and his worthy Tourtels he found compensation.

An instant after Tourtel had spoken, a woman passed across the wide hall. She had on a blue linen skirt, white stockings, and shoes of grey list. The strings of a large, bibbed, lilac apron drew the folds of a flowered bed-jacket about her ample waist; and her thick yellow-grey hair, worn without a cap, was arranged smoothly

smoothly on either side of a narrow head. She just glanced out, and Mrs. Poidevin was on the point of calling to her, when Tourtel fell into a torrent of words about his flowers. He had so much to say on the subject of horticulture; was so anxious for her to examine the freesia bulbs lying in the tool-house, just separated from the spring plants; he denounced so fiercely the grinding policy of Brehault the middleman, who purchased his garden stuff to resell it at Covent Garden—"my good! on dem freesias I didn't make not two doubles a bunch!"—that for a long quarter of an hour all memory of her cousin was driven from Mrs. Poidevin's brain. Then a voice said at her elbow, "Mr. Rennuf is quite ready to see you, ma'am," and there stood Tourtel's wife, with pale composed face, square shoulders and hips, and feet that moved noiselessly in her list slippers.

"Ah, Mrs. Tourtel, how do you do?" said the visitor; a question which in the Islands is no mere formula, but demands and obtains a detailed answer, after which the questioner's own health is politely inquired into. Not until this ceremony had been scrupulously accomplished, and the two women were on their way to the house, did Mrs. Poidevin beg to know how things were going with her "poor cousin."

There lay something at variance between the ruthless, calculating spirit which looked forth from the housekeeper's cold eye, and the extreme suavity of her manner of speech.

"Eh, my good! but much de same, ma'am, in his health, an' more fancies dan ever in his head. First one ting an' den anudder, an' always tinkin dat everybody is robbin' him. You rem-ember de larse time you was here, an' Mister Rennuf was abed? Well, den, after you was gone, if he didn't deekclare you had taken some of de fedders of his bed away wid you. Yes, my good! he tought you had cut a hole in de
tick

tick, as you sat dere beside him an' emptied de feeders away into your pocket."

Mrs. Poidevin was much interested. "Dear me, is it possible? . . . But it's quite a mania with him. I remember now, on that very day he complained to me Tourtel was wearing his shirts, and wanted me to go in with him to Lepage's to order some new ones."

"Eh! but what would Tourtel want wid fine white shirts like dem?" said the wife placidly. "But Mr. Louis have such dozens an' dozens of 'em dat dey gets hidden away in de presses, an' he tinks dem stolen."

They reached the house. The interior is quite as characteristic of the Islands as is the outside. Two steps take you down into the hall, crossing the further end of which is the staircase with its balustrade of carved black oak. Instead of the mean painted sticks, known technically as "raisers," and connected together at the top by a vulgar mahogany hand-rail—a fundamental article of faith with the modern builder—these old Island balustrades are formed of wooden panels, fretted out into scrolls, representing flower, or leaf, or curious beaked and winged creatures, which go curving, creeping, and ramping along in the direction of the stairs. In every house you will find the detail different, while each resembles all as a whole. For in the old days the workman, were he never so humble, recognised the possession of an individual mind, as well as of two eyes and two hands, and he translated fearlessly this individuality of his into his work. Every house built in those days and existing down to these, is not only a confession, in some sort, of the tastes, the habits, the character, of the man who planned it, but preserves a record likewise of every one of the subordinate minds employed in the various parts.

Off the hall of Les Calais are two rooms on the left and one on the right. The solidity of early seventeenth-century walls is shown in the embrasure depth (measuring fully three feet) of windows and doors. Up to fifty years ago all the windows had leaded casements, as had every similar Island dwelling-house. To-day, to the artist's regret, you will hardly find one. The showy taste of the Second Empire spread from Paris even to these remote parts, and plate-glass, or at least oblong panes, everywhere replaced the mediæval style. In 1854, Louis Renouf, just three and thirty, was about to bring his bride, Miss Marie Mauger, home to the old house. In her honour it was done up throughout, and the diamonded casements were replaced by guillotine windows, six panes to each sash.

The best parlour then became a "drawing-room"; its raftered ceiling was whitewashed, and its great centre-beam of oak infamously papered to match the walls. The newly married couple were not in a position to refurnish in approved Second Empire fashion. The gilt and marble, the console tables and mirrors, the impossibly curved sofas and chairs, were for the moment beyond them; the wife promised herself to acquire these later on. But later on came a brood of sickly children (only one of whom reached manhood); to the consequent expenses Les Calais owed the preservation of its inlaid wardrobes, its four-post bedsteads with slender fluted columns, and its Chippendale parlour chairs, the backs of which simulate a delicious intricacy of twisted ribbons. As a little girl, Louisa Poidevin had often amused herself studying these convolutions, and seeking to puzzle out among the rippling ribbons some beginning or some end; but as she grew up, even the simplest problem lost interest for her, and the sight of the old Chippendale chairs standing along the walls of the large parlour scarcely stirred her bovine mind now to so much as reminiscence.

It

It was the door of this large parlour that the housekeeper opened as she announced, "Here is Mrs. Pedvinn come to see you, sir," and followed the visitor in.

Sitting in a capacious "berceuse," stuffed and chintz-covered, was the shrunken figure of a more than seventy-year-old man. He was wrapped in a worn grey dressing-gown, with a black velvet skull-cap, napless at the seams, covering his spiritless hair, and he looked out upon his narrow world from dim eyes set in cavernous orbits. In their expression was something of the questioning timidity of a child, contrasting curiously with the querulousness of old age, shown in the thin sucked-in lips, now and again twitched by a movement in unison with the twitching of the withered hands spread out upon his knees.

The sunshine, slanting through the low windows, bathed hands and knees, lean shanks and slippered feet, in mote-flecked streams of gold. It bathed anew rafters and ceiling-beam, as it had done at the same hour and season these last three hundred years; it played over the worm-eaten furniture, and lent transitory colour to the faded samplers on the walls, bringing into prominence one particular sampler, which depicted in silks Adam and Eve seated beneath the fatal tree, and recorded the fact that Marie Hochedé was seventeen in 1808 and put her "trust in God"; and the same ray kissed the cheek of that very Marie's son, who at the time her girlish fingers pricked the canvas belonged to the enviable myriads of the unthought-of and the unborn.

"Why, how cold you are, Cousin Louis," said Mrs. Poidevin, taking his passive hand between her two warm ones, and feeling a chill strike from it through the violet kid gloves; "and in spite of all this sunshine too!"

"Ah, I'm not always in the sunshine," said the old man; "not always, not always in the sunshine." She was not sure that
that

that he recognised her, yet he kept hold of her hand and would not let it go.

"No ; you are not always in de sunshine, because de sunshine is not always here," observed Mrs. Tourtel in a reasonable voice, and with a side glance for the visitor.

"And I am not always here either," he murmured, half to himself. He took a firmer hold of his cousin's hand, and seemed to gain courage from the comfortable touch, for his thin voice changed from complaint to command. "You can go, Mrs. Tourtel," he said ; "we don't require you here. We want to talk. You can go and set the tea-things in the next room. My cousin will stay and drink tea with me."

"Why, my cert'nly ! of course Mrs. Pedvinn will stay tea. P'r'aps you'd like to put your bonnet off in the bedroom, first, ma'am ?"

"No, no," he interposed testily, "she can lay it off here. No need for you to take her upstairs."

Servant and master exchanged a mute look ; for the moment his old eyes were lighted up with the unforeseeing, unveiled triumph of a child ; then they fell before hers. She turned, leaving the room with noiseless tread ; although a large-built, ponderous woman, she walked with the softness of a cat.

"Sit down here close beside me," said Louis Renouf to his cousin, "I've something to tell you, something very important to tell you." He lowered his voice mysteriously, and glanced with apprehension at window and door, squeezing tight her hand. "I'm being robbed, my dear, robbed of everything I possess."

Mrs. Poidevin, already prepared for such a statement, answered complacently, "Oh, it must be your fancy, Cousin Louis. Mrs. Tourtel takes too good care of you for that."

"My dear," he whispered, "silver, linen, everything is going ;
even

even my fine white shirts from the shelves of the wardrobe. Yet everything belongs to poor John, who is in Australia, and who never writes to his father now. His last letter is ten years old—ten years old, my dear, and I don't need to read it over, for I know it by heart."

Tears of weakness gathered in his eyes, and began to trickle over on to his cheek.

"Oh, Cousin John will write soon, I'm sure," said Mrs. Poidevin, with easy optimism; "I shouldn't wonder if he has made a fortune, and is on his way home to you at this moment."

"Ah, he will never make a fortune, my dear, he was always too fond of change. He had excellent capabilities, Louisa, but he was too fond of change. . . . And yet I often sit and pretend to myself he has made money, and is as proud to be with his poor old father as he used to be when quite a little lad. I plan out all we should do, and all he would say, and just how he would look . . . but that's only my make-believe; John will never make money, never. But I'd be glad if he would come back to the old home, though it were without a penny. For if he don't come soon, he'll find no home, and no welcome. . . . I raised all the money I could when he went away, and now, as you know, my dear, the house and land go to you and Pedvinn. . . . But I'd like my poor boy to have the silver and linen, and his mother's furniture and needlework to remember us by."

"Yes, cousin, and he will have them some day, but not for a great while yet, I hope."

Louis Renouf shook his head, with the immovable obstinacy of the very old or the very young.

"Louisa, mark my words, he will get nothing, nothing. Everything is going. They'll make away with the chairs and the tables next, with the very bed I lie on."

"Oh,

"Oh, Cousin Louis, you mustn't think such things," said Mrs. Poidevin serenely; had not the poor old man accused her to the Tourtels of filching his mattress feathers?

"Ah, you don't believe me, my dear," said he, with a resignation which was pathetic; "but you'll remember my words when I am gone. Six dozen rat-tailed silver forks, with silver candlesticks, and tray, and snuffers. Besides odd pieces, and piles and piles of linen. Your cousin Marie was a notable housekeeper, and everything she bought was of the very best. The large table-cloths were five guineas apiece, my dear, British money—five guineas apiece."

Louisa listened with perfect calmness and scant attention. Circumstances too comfortable, and a too abundant diet, had gradually undermined with her all perceptive and reflective powers. Though, of course, had the household effects been coming to her as well as the land, she would have felt more interest in them; but it is only human nature to contemplate the possible losses of others with equanimity.

"They must be handsome cloths, cousin," she said pleasantly; "I'm sure Pedvinn would never allow me half so much for mine."

At this moment there appeared, framed in the open window, the hideous vision of an animated gargoyle, with elf-locks of flaming red, and an intense malignancy of expression. With a finger dragging down the under eyelid of either eye, so that the eyeball seemed to bulge out—with a finger pulling back either corner of the wide mouth, so that it seemed to touch the ear—this repulsive apparition leered at the old man in blood-curdling fashion. Then catching sight of Mrs. Poidevin, who sat dumfounded, and with her "heart in her mouth," as she afterwards expressed it, the fingers dropped from the face, the features sprang back into position, and the gargoyle resolved itself into a buxom red-haired

red-haired girl, who, bursting into a laugh, impudently stuck her tongue out at them before skipping away.

The old man had cowered down in his chair with his hands over his eyes; now he looked up. "I thought it was the old Judy," he said, "the old Judy she is always telling me about. But it's only Margot."

"And who is Margot, cousin?" inquired Louisa, still shaken from the surprise.

"She helps in the kitchen. But I don't like her. She pulls faces at me, and jumps out upon me from behind doors. And when the wind blows and the windows rattle she tells me about the old Judy from Jethou, who is sailing over the sea on a broomstick, to come and beat me to death. Do you know, my dear," he said piteously, "you'll think I'm very silly, but I'm afraid up here by myself all alone? Do not leave me, Louisa; stay with me, or take me back to town with you. Pedvinn would let me have a room in your house, I'm sure? And you wouldn't find me much trouble, and of course I would bring my own bed linen, you know."

"You had best take your tea first, sir," said Mrs. Tourtel from outside the window; she held scissors in her hand, and was busy trimming the roses. She offered no excuse for eaves-dropping.

The meal was set out, Island fashion, with abundant cakes and sweets. Louisa saw in the silver tea-set another proof, if need be, of her cousin's unfounded suspicions. Mrs. Tourtel stood in the background, waiting. Renouf desired her to pack his things; he was going into town. "To be sure, sir," she said civilly, and remained where she stood. He brought a clenched hand down upon the table, so that the china rattled. "Are you master here, or am I?" he cried; "I am going down to my cousin

Pedvinn's

Pedvinn's. To-morrow I shall send my notary to put seals on everything, and to take an inventory. For the future I shall live in town."

His senility had suddenly left him; he spoke with firmness; it was a flash-up of almost extinct fires. Louisa was astounded. Mrs. Tourtel looked at him steadily. Through the partition wall, Tourtel in the kitchen heard the raised voice, and followed his curiosity into the parlour. Margot followed him. Seen near, and with her features at rest, she appeared a plump touzle-headed girl, in whose low forehead and loose-lipped mouth, crassness, cruelty, and sensuality were unmistakably expressed. Yet freckled cheek, rounded chin, and bare red mottled arms, presented the beautiful curves of youth, and there was a certain sort of attractiveness about her not to be gainsaid.

"Since my servants refuse to pack what I require," said Renouf with dignity, "I will do it myself. Come with me, Louisa."

At a sign from the housekeeper, Tourtel and Margot made way. Mrs. Poidevin would have followed her cousin, as the easiest thing to do—although she was confused by the old man's outbreak, and incapable of deciding what course she should take—when the deep vindictive baying of the dog ushered a new personage upon the scene.

This was an individual who made his appearance from the kitchen regions—a tall thin man of about thirty years of age, with a pallid skin, a dark eye and a heavy moustache. His shabby black coat and tie, with the cords and gaiters that clothed his legs, suggested a combination of sportsman and family practitioner. He wore a bowler hat, and was pulling off tan driving gloves as he advanced.

"Ah my good! Doctor Owen, but dat's you?" said Mrs. Tourtel. "But we wants you here badly. Your patient is in one
of

of his tantrums, and no one can't do nuddin wid him. He says he shall go right away into town. Wants to make up again wid Doctor Lelever for sure."

The new comer and Mrs. Poidevin were examining each other with the curiosity one feels on first meeting a person long known by reputation or by sight. But now she turned to the house-keeper in surprise.

"Has my cousin quarrelled with his old friend Doctor Lelever?" she asked. "I've heard nothing of that."

"Ah, dis long time. He tought Doctor Lelever made too little of his megrims. He won't have nobody but Dr. Owen now. P'r'aps you know Doctor Owen, ma'am? Mrs. Pedvinn, Doctor; de master's cousin, come up to visit him."

Renouf was heard moving about overhead; opening presses, dragging boxes.

Owen hung up his hat, putting his gloves inside it. He rubbed his lean discoloured hands lightly together, as a fly cleans its forelegs.

"Shall I just step up to him?" he said. "It may calm him, and distract his thoughts."

With soft nimbleness, in a moment he was upstairs. "So that's Doctor Owen?" observed Mrs. Poidevin with interest. "A splendid-looking gentleman! He must be very clever, I'm sure. Is he beginning to get a good practice yet?"

"Ah, bah, our people, as you know, ma'am, dey don't like no strangers, specially no Englishmen. He was very glad when Mr. Rennuf sent for him. . . . 'Twas through Margot there. She got took bad one Saturday coming back from market from de heat or de squidge" (crowd), "and Doctor Owen he overtook her on the road in his gig, and druv her home. Den de master, he must have a talk with him, and so de next time he fancy hisself

hissell ill, he send for Doctor Owen, and since den he don't care for Dr. Lelever no more at all."

"I ought to be getting off," emarked Mrs. Poidevin, remembering the hour at which the omnibus left Vauvert; "had I better go up and bid cousin Louis good-bye?"

Mrs. Tourtel thought Margot should go and ask the Doctor's opinion first, but as Margot had already vanished, she went herself.

There was a longish pause, during which Mrs. Poidevin looked uneasily at Tourtel; he with restless furtive eyes at her. Then the housekeeper reappeared, noiseless, cool, determined as ever.

"Mr. Rennuf is quiet now," she said; "de Doctor have given him a soothing draught, and will stay to see how it acts. He tinks you'd better slip quietly away."

On this, Louisa Poidevin left Les Calais; but in spite of her easy superficiality, her unreasoning optimism, she took with her a sense of oppression. Cousin Louis's appeal rang in her ears: "Do not leave me; stay with me, or take me back with you. I am afraid up here, quite alone." And after all, though his fears were but the folly of old age, why, she asked herself, should he not come and stay with them in town if he wished to do so? She resolved to talk it over with Pedvinn; she thought she would arrange for him the little west room, being the furthest from the nurseries; and in planning out such vastly important trifles as to which easy-chair and which bedroom candlestick she would devote to his use, she forgot the old man himself and recovered her usual stolid jocundity.

When Owen had entered the bedroom, he had found Renouf standing over an open portmanteau, into which he was placing hurriedly whatever caught his eye or took his fancy, from the surrounding tables. His hand trembled from eagerness, his pale old

old face was flushed with excitement and hope. Owen, going straight up to him, put his two hands on his shoulders, and without uttering a word, gently forced him backwards into a chair. Then he sat down in front of him, so close that their knees touched, and fixing his strong eyes on Renouf's wavering ones, and stroking with his finger-tips the muscles behind the ears, he threw him immediately into an hypnotic trance.

"You want to stay here, don't you?" said Owen emphatically. "I want to stay here," repeated the old man through grey lips. His face was become the colour of ashes, his hands were cold to the sight. "You want your cousin to go away and not disturb you any more? Answer—answer me." "I want my cousin to go away," Renouf murmured, but in his staring, fading eye were traces of the struggle tearing him within.

Owen pressed down the eyelids, made another pass before the face, and rose on his long legs with a sardonic grin. Margot, leaning across a corner of the bed, had watched him with breathless interest.

"I b'lieve you're de Evil One himself," she said admiringly.

Owen pinched her smooth chin between his tobacco-stained thumb and fingers.

"Pooh! nothing but a trick I learned in Paris," said he; "it's very convenient to be able to put a person to sleep now and again."

"Could you put any one to sleep?"

"Any one I wanted to."

"Do it to me then," she begged him.

"What use, my girl? Don't you do all I wish without?"

She grimaced, and picked at the bed-quilt laughing, then rose and stood in front of him, her round red arms clasped behind her head. But he only glanced at her with professional interest.

"You

"You should get married, my dear, without delay. Pierre would be ready enough, no doubt?"—"Bah! Pierre or annuder—if I brought a weddin' portion. You don't tink to provide me wid one, I s'pose?"—"You know that I can't. But why don't you get it from the Tourtels? You've earned it before this, I dare swear."

It was now that the housekeeper came up, and took down to Louisa Poidevin the message given above. But first she was detained by Owen, to assist him in getting his patient into bed.

The old man woke up during the process, very peevisish, very determined to get to town. "Well, you can't go till to-morrow den," said Mrs. Tourtel; "your cousin has gone home, an' now you've got to go to sleep, so be quiet." She dropped all semblance of respect in her tones. "Come, lie down!" she said sharply, "or I'll send Margot to tickle your feet." He shivered and whimpered into silence beneath the clothes.

"Margot tells him 'bout witches, an ogres, an scrapels her figures 'long de wall, till he tink dere goin' to fly 'way wid him," she explained to Owen in an aside. "Oh, I know Margot," he answered laconically, and thought, "May I never lie helpless within reach of such fingers as hers."

He took a step and stumbled over a portmanteau lying open at his feet. "Put your mischievous paws to some use," he told the girl, "and clear these things away from the floor;" then remembering his rival Le Lièvre; "if the old fool had really got away to town, it would have been a nice day's work for us all," he added.

Downstairs he joined the Tourtels in the kitchen, a room situated behind the living-room on the left, with low green glass windows, rafters and woodwork smoke-browned with the fires of a dozen generations. In the wooden racks over by the chimney

hung fitches of home-cured bacon, and the kettle was suspended by three chains over the centre of the wide hearth, where glowed and crackled an armful of sticks. So dark was the room, in spite of the daylight outside, that two candles were set in the centre of the table, enclosing in their circles of yellow light the pale face and silver hair of the housekeeper, and Tourtel's rugged head and weather-beaten countenance.

He had glasses ready, and a bottle of the cheap brandy for which the Island is famous. "You'll take a drop of something, eh, Doctor?" he said as Owen seated himself on the joncière, a padded settle—green baize covered, to replace the primitive rushes—fitted on one side of the hearth. He stretched his long legs into the light, and for a moment considered moodily the old gaiters and cobbled boots. "You've seen to the horse?" he asked Tourtel.

"My cert'nly; he's in de stable dis hour back, an' I've given him a feed. I tought maybe you'd make a night of it?"

"I may as well for all the work I have to do," said Owen with sourness; "a damned little Island this for doctors. Nothing ever the matter with any one except the 'creeps,' and those who have it spend their last penny in making it worse."

"Dere's as much illness here as anywhere," said Tourtel, defending the reputation of his native soil, "if once you gets among de right class, among de people as has de time an' de money to make dereselves ill. But if you go foolin' roun' wid de paysans, what can you expect? We workin' folks can't afford to lay up an' buy ourselves doctors' stuff."

"And how am I to get among the right class?" retorted Owen, sucking the ends of his moustache into his mouth and chewing them savagely. "A more confounded set of stuck-up, beggarly
aristocrat_s

aristocrats I never met than your people here." His discontented eye rested on Mrs. Tourtel. "That Mrs. Pedvinn is the wife of Pedvinn the Jurat, I suppose?"—"Yes, de Pedvinns of Rohais." "Good people," said Owen thoughtfully; in with the de Cäterelles, and the Dadderney (d'Aldenois) set. Are there children?"—"Tree."

He took a drink of the spirit and water; his bad temper passed. Margot came in from upstairs.

"De marster sleeps as dough he'd never wake again," she announced, flinging herself into the chair nearest Owen.

"It's 'bout time he did," Tourtel growled.

"I should have thought it more to your interest to keep him alive?" Owen inquired. "A good place, surely?"

"A good place if you like to call it so," the wife answered him; "but what, if he go to town, as he say to-night? and what, if he send de notary, to put de scellés here?—den he take up again wid Dr. Lelever, dat's certain." And Tourtel added in his surly key, "Anyway, I've been workin' here dese tirty years now, an' dat's 'bout enough."

"In fact, when the orange is sucked, you throw away the peel? But are you quite sure it is sucked dry?"

"De house an' de lan' go to de Pedvinns, an' all de money die too, for de little he had left when young John went 'cros't de seas, he sunk in a 'nuity. Dere's nuddin' but de lining, an' plate, an' such like, as goes to de son."

"And what he finds of that, I expect, will scarcely add to his impedimenta?" said Owen grinning. He thought, "The old man is well known in the island, the name of his medical attendant would get mentioned in the papers at least; just as well Le Lièvre should not have the advertisement." Besides, there were the Poidevins.

"You

“You might say a good word for me to Mrs. Pedvinn,” he said aloud, “I live nearer to Rohais than Lelever does, and with young children she might be glad to have some one at hand.”

“You may be sure you won’t never find me ungrateful, sir,” answered the housekeeper; and Owen, shading his eyes with his hand, sat pondering over the use of this word “ungrateful,” with its faint yet perceptible emphasis.

Margot, meanwhile, laid the supper; the remains of a rabbit-pie, a big “pinclos” or spider crab, with thin, red knotted legs, spreading far over the edges of the dish, the apple-gôche, hot from the oven, cider, and the now half-empty bottle of brandy. The four sat down and fell to. Margot was in boisterous spirits; everything she said or did was meant to attract Owen’s attention. Her cheeks flamed with excitement; she wanted his eyes to be perpetually upon her. But Owen’s interest in her had long ceased. To-night, while eating heartily, he was absorbed in his ruling passion: to get on in the world, to make money, to be admitted into Island society. Behind the pallid, impenetrable mask, which always enraged yet intimidated Margot, he plotted incessantly, schemed, combined, weighed this and that, studied his prospects from every point of view.

Supper over, he lighted his meerschaum; Tourtel produced a short clay, and the bottle was passed between them. The women left them together, and for ten, twenty minutes, there was complete silence in the room. Tourtel let his pipe go out, and rapped it down brusquely upon the table.

“It must come to an end,” he said, with suppressed ferocity; “are we eider to spen’ de whole of our lives here, or else be turned off at de eleventh hour after sufferin’ all de heat an’ burden of de day? Its onreasonable. An’ dere’s de cottage at Cottu standin’ empty,

empty, an' me havin' to pay a man to look after de tomato houses, when I could get fifty per cent. more by lookin' after dem myself. . . . An' what profit is such a sickly, shiftless life as dat? My good! dere's not a man, woman, or chile in de Islan's as will shed a tear when he goes, an' dere's some, I tells you, as have suffered from his whimsies dese tirty years, as will rejoice. Why, his wife was dead already when we come here, an' his on'y son, a dirty, drunken, lazy vaurien too, has never been near him for fifteen years, nor written neider. Dead most likely, in foreign parts. . . . An' what's he want to stay for, contraryin' an' thwartin' dem as have sweated an' laboured, an' now, please de good God, wan's to sit 'neath de shadow of dere own fig-tree for de short time dat remains to dem? . . . An' what do we get for stayin'? Forty pound, Island money, between de two of us, an' de little I makes from de flowers, an' poultry, an' such like. An' what do we do for it? Bake, an' wash, an' clean, an' cook, an' keep de garden in order, an' nuss him in all his tantrums. . . . If we was even on his testament, I'd say nuddin. But everything goes to Pedvinns, an' de son John, and de little bit of income dies wid him. I tell you 'tis 'bout time dis came to an end.

Owen recognised that Destiny asked no sin more heinous from him than silence, perhaps concealment; the chestnuts would reach him without risk of burning his hand. "It's time," said he, "I thought of going home. Get your lantern, and I'll help you with the trap. But first, I'll just run up and have another look at Mr. Rennuf."

For the last time the five personages of this obscure little tragedy found themselves together in the bedroom, now lighted by a small lamp which stood on the wash-hand-stand. Owen, who had to stoop to enter the door, could have touched the low-pitched ceiling with his hand. The bed, with its slender pillars, support-
ing

ing a canopy of faded damask, took up the greater part of the room. There was a fluted headpiece of the damask, and long curtains of the same material, looped up, on either side of the pillows. Sunken in these lay the head of the old man, crowned with a cotton nightcap, the eyes closed, the skin drawn tight over the skull, the outline of the attenuated form indistinguishable beneath the clothes. The arms lay outside the counterpane, straight down on either side; and the mechanical playing movement of the fingers showed he was not asleep. Margot and Mrs. Tourtel watched him from the bed's foot. Their gigantic shadows thrown forward by the lamp, stretched up the opposite wall, and covered half the ceiling. The old-fashioned mahogany furniture, with its fillets of paler wood, drawn in ovals, upon the doors of the presses, their centrepieces of fruit and flowers, shone out here and there with reflected light; and the looking-glass, swung on corkscrew mahogany pillars between the damask window curtains, gleamed lake-like amidst the gloom.

Owen and Tourtel joined the women at the bedfoot; though each was absorbed entirely in his own egotisms, all were animated by the same secret desire. Yet, to the feeling heart, there was something unspeakably pleading in the sight of the old man lying there, in his helplessness, in the very room, on the very bed, which had seen his wedding-night fifty years before; where as a much-wished-for and welcomed infant, he had opened his eyes to the light more than seventy years since. He had been helpless then as now, but then the child had been held to loving hearts, loving fingers had tended him, a young and loving mother lay beside him, the circumference of all his tiny world, as he was the core and centre of all of hers. And from being that exquisite, well-beloved little child, he had passed thoughtlessly, hopefully, despairfully, wearily, through all the stages of life, until he had
come

come to this—a poor, old, feeble, helpless, worn-out man, lying there where he had been born, but with all those who had loved him carried long ago to the grave : with the few who might have protected him still, his son, his cousin, his old friend Le Lièvre, as powerless to save him as the silent dead.

Renouf opened his eyes, looked in turn at the four faces before him, and read as much pity in them as in masks of stone. He turned himself to the pillow again and to his miserable thoughts.

Owen took out his watch, went round to count the pulse, and in the hush the tick of the big silver timepiece could be heard.

“There is extreme weakness,” came his quiet verdict.

“Sinking?” whispered Tourtel loudly.

“No ; care and constant nourishment are all that are required ; strong beef-tea, port wine jelly, cream beaten up with a little brandy at short intervals, every hour say. And of course no excitement ; nothing to irritate, or alarm him” (Owen’s eye met Margot’s) ; “absolute quiet and rest.” He came back to the foot of the bed and spoke in a lower tone. “It’s just one of the usual cases of senile decay,” said he, “which I observe every one comes to here in the Islands (unless he has previously killed himself by drink), the results of breeding in. But Mr. Rennuf may last months, years longer. In fact, if you follow out my directions there is every probability that he will.”

Tourtel and his wife shifted their gaze from Owen to look into each other’s eyes ; Margot’s loose mouth lapsed into a smile. Owen felt cold water running down his back. The atmosphere of the room seemed to stifle him ; reminiscences of his student days crowded on him : the horror of an unperverted mind, at its first spectacle of cruelty, again seized hold of him, as though no twelve callous years were wedged in between. At all costs he must get out into the open air.

He

He turned to go. Louis Renouf opened his eyes, followed the form making its way to the door, and understood. "You won't leave me, doctor? surely you won't leave me?" came the last words of piercing entreaty.

The man felt his nerve going all to pieces.

"Come, come, my good sir, do you think I am going to stay here all night?" he answered brutally. . . . Outside the door, Tourtel touched his sleeve. "And suppose your directions are not carried out?" said he in his thick whisper.

Owen gave no spoken answer, but Tourtel was satisfied. "I'll come an' put the horse in," he said, leading the way through the kitchen to the stables. Owen drove off with a parting curse and cut with the whip because the horse slipped upon the stones. A long ray of light from Tourtel's lantern followed him down the lane. When he turned out on to the high road to St. Gilles, he reined in a moment, to look back at Les Calais. This is the one point from which a portion of the house is visible, and he could see the lighted window of the old man's bedroom plainly through the trees.

What was happening there? he asked himself; and the Tourtel's cupidity and callousness, Margot's coarse cruel tricks, rose before him with appalling distinctness. Yet the price was in his hand, the first step of the ladder gained; he saw himself to-morrow, perhaps in the drawing-room of Rohais, paying the necessary visit of intimation and condolence. He felt he had already won Mrs. Poidevin's favour. Among women, always poor physiognomists, he knew he passed for a handsome man; among the Islanders, the assurance of his address would pass for good breeding; all he had lacked hitherto was the opportunity to shine. This his acquaintance with Mrs. Poidevin would secure him. And he had trampled on his conscience so often before, it
had

had now little elasticity left. Just an extra glass of brandy to-morrow, and to-day would be as securely laid as those other episodes of his past.

While he watched, some one shifted the lamp a woman's shadow was thrown upon the white blind it wavered, grew monstrous, and spread, until the whole window was shrouded in gloom. . . . Owen put the horse into a gallop and from up at Les Calais, the long-drawn melancholy howling of the dog filled with forebodings the silent night.