

Wladislaw's Advent

By M^énie Muriel Dowie

I

WHEN I first saw Wladislaw he was sitting on a high tabouret near a hot iron sheet that partially surrounded the tall coke stove ; the arches of his feet were curved over the top bar, toes and heels both bent down, suggestive of a bird clasping its perch. This position brought the shiny knees of his old blue serge trousers close up to his chest—for he was bending far forward towards his easel—and the charcoal dust on the knee over which he occasionally sharpened his *fusain* was making a dull smear upon the grey flannel shirt which his half-opened waistcoat exposed.

He wore no coat : it was hanging on the edge of the iron screen, and his right shirt-sleeve, rolled up for freedom in his work, left a strong, rather smooth arm bare.

He always chose a corner near the stove ; the coke fumes never gave him a headache, it seemed. It was supposed that he felt the cold of Paris severely ; but this can hardly have been the case, considering the toughening winters of his youth away in Poland there. My observation led me to believe that the proximity was courted on account of the facilities it afforded for lighting his cigarette

cigarette. When he rolled a new one and had returned the flat, shabby, red leather case to a pocket, he would get up, open the stove door and pick up a piece of coke—one whose lower half was scarlet and its upper still black—between his finger and thumb, and, holding it calmly to the cigarette, suck in a light with a single inhalation, tossing the coke to its place and re-seating himself upon his tabouret, completely unaware of the amused pairs of eyes that watched quizzically to see his brow pucker if he burnt himself.

Wladislaw was his first name; naturally he had another by which he was generally known, but it is useless to record a second set of Polish syllables for the reader to struggle with, so I leave it alone. His first name is pronounced Vladislav as nearly as one may write it; and this is to be remembered, for I prefer to retain the correct spelling. He had been working quite a fortnight in the studio before the day when I strolled in and noticed him, and I do not think that up till then any one had the excitement of his acquaintance.

One or two sketch-books contained hasty and furtive pencil splashes which essayed the picturesqueness of his features; but he was notably shy, and if he observed any one to be regarding him with the unmistakable measuring eye of the sketcher, he would frown and dip behind the canvas on his easel with the silly sensitiveness of a dabchick. At the dingy *crém^érie* where he ate herrings *marinés*—chiefly with a knife—the curious glances of other *déjeuneurs* annoyed him extremely; which was absurd, of course, for as a rule no artist objects to being made the victim of a brother's brush. He would colour—I was going to write, like a girl, but why not like the boy that he was?—when the lively Louise, who changed the plates, or swept the knife and fork of such as did not know the habits of the place back on the crumby

marble table with a "V'lá M'sieu," sent a smile accurately darted into his long eyes. He didn't know how to respond to Louise, or any other glances of the same sort in those days ; but if I am encouraged to tell further of him, I can give the history of his initiation, for I am bold to say none knows it better—unless it be Louise herself.

What puzzled me about his face, which was a beautiful one, of the pure and refined Hebrew type so rarely met with—the type that was a little commoner, let us hope, in the days when God singled out His People—what puzzled me about it was that it should seem so familiar to me, for, as I say, the type is seldom found. When I came upon Wladislaw, hurrying down the street to the studio with the swiftness of a polecat—no sort of joke intended—it would flash upon me that surely I knew the face, yet not as one feels when one has met some one in a train or sat near him in a tramcar.

The mystery of this was explained before ever I had analysed to myself exactly how the face affected me and where I could have seen it before. It was at the eleven o'clock rest one morning, when the strife of tongues was let loose and I was moving among the easels and stools, talking to the various students that I knew. One of them, her book open, her eyes gleaming and her pencil avid of sketches, was lending a vague ear to the model, who had once been in England, and was describing his experiences with a Royal Academician. They were standing near the stove, the model, careless of the rapid alteration which the grateful heat was effecting in his skin tones, steadily veering from the transparent purple which had gratified an ardent impressionist all the morning, to a dull, hot scarlet upon the fronts of his thighs. While she was talking to the model, my friend was sketching Wladislaw, who ranged remotely at the cold end of the room. The impressionist

sionist joined the group to remonstrate in ineffectual French with the model, and glanced into the sketch-book in passing.

"Just the church-window type, isn't he?" said this flippant person, alluding to the Pole; "and I have seen him behind the altar too, painted on the wall with a symmetrical arrangement of stars in the background, and his feet on a blue air-balloon."

The sketcher nodded, and swept in a curved line for the coat collar just as a controlling voice announced that the rest was up.

And I wondered how I had been so dull as never to think of it; for it was perfectly true, and oh, so obvious now that I knew it! Wladislaw's beautiful head, with the young light-brown beard, the pure forehead, and the long sorrowful eyes, was an ideal presentment of the Nazarene; without the alteration of either feature or expression, he stood up a gloriously simple realisation of the Christ as all pictures have tried to show Him.

I was so amazed by this illumination, that I sat down beside the disconsolate impressionist, who "couldn't do a thing till that idiot cooled down," and was "losing half the morning—the Professor's morning, too," and talked it over.

"H'm yes—he is. Hadn't you noticed it? I said it the very day he came in. I wonder if he sees it himself? Do you know, I think I could get rather a good thing of him from here? Yes, you wait; I've nothing to do till that beastly hectic colour fades off the model. I'm not going to bother about the background; I've painted that old green curtain till I'm tired. Get a tabouret and sit down while I design a really good window."

She sketched away rapidly, and I watched her as she worked.

"Funny," she remarked, as she blocked in the figure with admirable freedom; "I've never seen the Christ treated in profile, have you? It's rather new—you watch."

It is my regret that I did not disregard every rule and every
courtesy

courtesy and snatch that sketch from her, half-finished though it was ; but of a sudden the door opened and the Professor came in. The impressionist, with a sour look at the model's thighs and a despairing consciousness that she would have to hear that her colour was too cold, shut her book with a snap and resumed her brushes.

I had to manœuvre cautiously a retreat to the stairway—for idlers were publicly discouraged during the Professor's visits—and people who would leave off work at any minute when I dropped in to hear the news on ordinary mornings, looked up and frowned studiously over the creaking of my retreating boots.

It may have been about a week later that my acquaintance with Wladislaw commenced, and again the detailing of that circumstance is to serve another purpose one of these days ; at any rate, we came across one another in a manner which is to a friendship what a glass frame is to a cucumber, and soon studio friends came to me for news of him, and my protection of him was an openly admitted fact. At first I had been somewhat burdened by a consciousness of his curious beauty ; one is not often in the way of talking to a beautiful man of any kind, but I can imagine that classical beauty or historic beauty might be more easily supported. No particular deep would be touched by a meeting with Apollo or Antinous ; neither awe, nor reverence, however discredited and worn-out its tradition, has ever attached to them. The counterpart of Montrose or the bonnie Earl o' Murray, much as one would like to meet either, would arouse only picturesque sentimental reflection ; but to walk through the Jardin du Luxembourg on a sunny day eating *gaufres*, with—and I say it without the faintest intention of irreverence—with a figure of the Saviour of mankind beside you, is—is arresting. When the eye reposes unintentionally upon it in the silent
moments

moments of conversation, it gives pause. Distinctly, it gives pause. I have never held it an excuse for anything in art or literature that one should turn upon a public about to scoff, to be offended, to be frightened, and announce that "it is true": that the incident in either a picture or a story should be "true" is not a sufficient excuse for the painting or the telling of it. But when I insist courteously to readers of certain religious convictions that I am not "making up" either my scenes, my characters, or what, for want of a better name, shall be called my story, I am only desirous that they shall absolve me from any desire to be irreverent and to shock their feelings. They might remember that what is reverent to them may not be so to me; but I do not hope to secure so great a concession by any means. What I would finally point out is that the irreverence goes back further than the mere writing down of the story; they must accuse a greater than I if they object to the facts of the case—they must state their quarrel to the controlling power which designed poor Wladislaw's physiognomy: to use some of the phrases beloved of the very class I am entreating, I would suggest that the boy did not "make himself"; he was "sent into the world" like that.

I daresay—considering what I am going to relate—I daresay he wished he had not been; he was so very shy a fellow, and it led to his being a great deal observed and commented upon. What encouraged me to feel at home with him in spite of his appearance was the real youngness of his nature. He was extraordinarily simple and—well, fluffy. For he really suggested a newly-hatched chicken to me; bits of the eggshell were still clinging to his yellow down, if I may hint at the metaphor.

His cleverness was tremendously in advance of his training and his executive powers. Some day, one could see, he was *going* to paint marvellously, if he would wait and survive his failures and
forbear

forbear to cut his throat by the way. His mind was utterly and entirely on his work ; I never heard him speak of much else ; work and the difficulty of producing oneself, no matter with the help of what medium, was our everyday topic. And when desperate fits overtook us we bewailed the necessity of producing ourselves at all. Why was it in us ? We didn't think anything good that we did ; we didn't suppose we were ever going to compass anything decent, and work was a trouble, a fever of disappointment and stress, which we did not enjoy in the least. The pleasure of work, we assured one another again and again, was a pleasure we had never felt. By nature, inclination and habit we were incorrigibly idle ; yet inside us was this silly, useless, hammering beast that impelled us to the handling of pen and pencil, and made us sick and irritable and unhappy, and prevented us taking any pleasure in our dinner.

That was how we used to talk together when we were striding through the woods round Versailles or idling among storied tombs in the cemetery at Montmorency ; and, dear me ! what a lot of enjoyment we got out of it, and how good the sandwiches were when we rested for our luncheon ! Sometimes Wladislaw talked of his mother, whom I apprehended to be a teak-grained Calvinistic lady with a certain resemblance to the hen who had reared a duckling by mistake. I wish now that I had heard more stories of that rigorous household of his youth, where the fires in winter were let out at four in the afternoon because his mother had the idea that one did not feel the cold so much in bed if inured to it by a sustained chill of some eight hours' duration. She was probably quite right : one only wonders why she did not pursue the principle further and light no fires in the day, because proportionately, of course—— But no matter. And, indeed, there are no proportions in the case. Once reach the superlative
frozen,

frozen, and there is nothing left to feel. His third subject was the frivolity of Paris, of which we knew everything by hearsay and nothing by experience, so were able to discuss with a "wet sheet and a flowing sea," so to speak. He hated Paris, and he hated frivolity, even as he hated French. Our conversations, I ought to say, were carried on in German, which we spoke with almost a common measure of inaccuracy; and I think that he probably knew as little of the French language as he knew of the frivolity of Paris.

I tried to encourage him to take long walks and long tours on tramways—it should never be forgotten that you can go all over Paris for threepence—and when his work at the studio was sufficiently discouraging he would do so, sometimes coming with me, sometimes going alone. We explored Montmartre together, both by day and gas light; we fared forth to the Abattoirs, to the Place de la Roquette, to the Boulevard Beaumarchais and the Boulevard Port Royal, the Temple and "les Halles."

But Wladislaw was alone the day he set out to inspect the Bois de Boulogne, the Parc Monceau, the Madeleine, and the *grands Boulevards*.

I remember seeing him start. If he had been coming with me he would have had on a tie and collar (borrowed from another student) and his other coat; he would, in fact, have done his best to look ordinary, to rob himself, in his youthful pride and ignorant vanity, of his picturesque appearance. I am sorry to say it, since he was an artist; but it is true—he would.

As it was, he sallied out in the grey woollen shirt, with its low collar, the half-buttoned waistcoat, the old, blue, sloppily-hanging coat, with one sleeve obstinately burst at the back, and the close astrakhan cap on one side of his smooth straight hazel hair. When I ran across him next day in the neighbourhood of
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the oleander tubs that surrounded with much decorative ability the doors of the Café Amadou, he agreed to come to my rooms and have a cup of coffee, in order to narrate the exciting and mysterious incident of the day before.

Sitting on each side of my stove, which was red-hot and threatening to crack at any minute, Wladislaw, with cautions to me "not to judge too soon: I should see if it had not been strange, this that had happened to him," told me this ridiculous story.

He had started up the Bois; he had found the Parc Monceau; he had come down a big street to the Madeleine; he had looked in; it had reminded him of a concert-hall, and was not at all impressive (*gar nicht imponirend*); he had walked along the left-hand side of the Boulevard des Capucines. It was as poor a street as he could have imagined in a big town, the shops wretched; he supposed in London our shops were better? I assured him that in London the shops were much better; that it was a standing mystery to me, as to all the other English women I knew, where the pretty things for which Paris is celebrated were to be bought. And I implored him to tell me his adventure.

Ah! Well—now the point was reached; now I was to hear! One minute!—Well, he had come opposite the Café de la Paix, and he had paused an instant to contemplate the unrelieved commonplace ugliness of the average Frenchman as there to be observed—and then he had pursued his way.

It was getting dusk in the winter afternoon, and when he came through the Place de l'Opéra all the lights were lit, and he was delighted, as who must not be, by the effect of that particular bit of Paris? He was just crossing the Place to go down the left-hand side of the Avenue, when it occurred to him that he was being followed.

It

It here struck me that the beginning of Wladislaw's first adventure in Paris was highly unoriginal ; but I waited with a tempered interest to hear how he had dealt with it. Here are his own words, but losing much of their quaintness by being rendered in an English which even I cannot make quite ungrammatical.

"I went on very quickly a little way, then I walked slowly, slowly—very slow, and turned suddenly sharp round. Yes, I was being followed : there he was, a man in a black frock coat, and——"

"A man?" I blurted out, having been somehow unprepared for this development.

"What else?" said Wladislaw. "Did you think it was going to be a cat?"

Well, more or less, I *had* fancied but I wouldn't interrupt him.

"Black coat and grey trousers, black bow tie and one of those hats, you know?" With his cigarette hand he made a rapid pantomime about his head that outlined sufficiently the flat-brimmed top hat of the artistic Frenchman, so often distinguished, but more usually a little ridiculous.

"I went on at an ordinary pace till I came to the Rue de Rivoli, then at that Café where the omnibus for St. Sulpice stops I waited"—Wladislaw's eyes were gleaming with an unwonted mischief, and he had quite lost his Judaic majesty—"to get a good look. There he was. A man not yet forty ; dark, interesting, powerful face ; a red ribbon in his button-hole."

"A red ribbon?" But then I remembered that every second Frenchman has a red ribbon.

"I thought, 'Shall I take him a nice walk this cold evening? Shall I go down and cross the river to Notre Dame, then home up the Boulevard St. Michel?' But no, it was late. I had had
nothing

nothing to eat ; I wanted to get to the Bouillon Robert before dinner would be over. I ran into the Bureau and got a number ; then I watched, and the first omnibus that had room I climbed up on the *impériale* and watched him try for a seat inside ! Ah, I knew he was after me. I felt as if I had stolen something ! Then the omnibus started. He had not got a seat. When it is already six you cannot get a seat inside, you know ? ”

I knew. “ He came up with you ? ” I said.

“ On the *impériale* also there was no room. I lost sight of him, but on the Pont du Carrousel I saw a *fiacre* ! ”

In spite of my earlier feeling I was a little interested ; more so when Wladislaw told of his walking into a certain restaurant near the Gare Montparnasse—a restaurant where you dine with *hors d'œuvres* and dessert at a scoured wood table for 80 centimes, sitting down beside several *ouvriers*—and seeing the stranger saunter in and take a seat at a corner table.

I feel quite incapable of rendering in English the cat-and-mouse description of the dinner which Wladislaw gave me ; so I come to the time when he paid his *addition*, and turning up his coat collar, made his way out and up the Boulevard Montparnasse in the ill-lighted winter night, the stranger appearing inevitably in his wake at each gas-lamp, till the side street was reached in which Wladislaw lived on the fourth floor of a certain number thirteen. At his door Wladislaw, of course, paused, and looked the street up and down without seeing his pursuer.

“ But no doubt,” said my sly Pole, “ he was hiding inside a courtyard door. And now, what do you make of that ? ”

I had to own that I made nothing of it ; and we sat and speculated foolishly for fully half an hour, till we tired of the effort and returned to our equally vapid haverings about “ work ” and our common difficulties.

Four days later—I had meantime confided the story to no one—four days later Wladislaw approached me mysteriously from behind as I was returning one morning from a visit to the Rue de la Gaieté, with a bunch of onions, half a loaf of black bread, and two turkey-thighs in a string bag.

I knew from the set of his cap that something unusual had happened; and besides, it was the *hour* at which he should have been scraping at his *fusain* in the men's studio. He put a letter in my hand.

“You will say nothing to anybody? I want you to translate it. I can't understand it all. But you will tell no one?”

I responded with an eager denial and the question as to who there could be for me to tell.

He seemed to overlook the half-hundred of students we both knew, as readily as I did; and we opened the letter.

This was it:

“Monsieur,—My name may perhaps be a sufficient assurance to you that my unusual conduct of the other evening in discovering for myself your residence and profession had no unworthy motive. The explanation is simple. I am painting a large canvas, to be called ‘The Temptation.’ I cannot proceed for want of a model for my Christ. When my eyes fell upon you, I realised instantly that yours was the only face in the world that could satisfy my aspiration. It was impossible for me not to follow you, at the risk of any and every misunderstanding. I beg you to receive my complete apologies. Will you sit to me? I appeal to you as a brother of the brush—permit me to leave behind me the most perfect Christ-face that has ever been conceived. Times and terms shall be as you will.

“Accept, Monsieur and colleague, the assurance of my most distinguished sentiments.

“DUFOUR.”

I looked

I looked at it, laughing and gasping. I repeated some of the sounding phrases. So this artist—well I knew his name at the Mirlitons—this genius of the small red fleck had pursued Wladislaw for miles on foot and in fiacre, had submitted himself and his digestion to an 80-centime dinner of blatant horse-flesh, had tracked the student to his lodgings, got his style and title from Madame in the *rez-de-chaussée*, and finally written him this letter to ask—to implore, rather, that Wladislaw should be the model for his contemplated picture of the Redeemer! It was really interesting enough; but what struck me as curious was that Dufour of the tulle skirt and tarlatan celebrity—the portraitist of the *filles de joie*—should conceive it possible to add to his reputation by painting the Man of Sorrows.

II

It will have been gathered that Wladislaw was poor; just how poor, I think no one among us ever knew. He would sit all the evening long without a fire, and his habit of keeping a large piece of bread in a coat pocket and breaking bits off to nibble during the morning or afternoon's work very naturally gave rise to a legend that he lived upon bread alone.

I, for one, would sooner believe that to have been the case than have credited for a moment the story of the student who claimed to have noticed a heap of fish heads and tails in a corner of his room, the disagreeable residue of a small barrel of raw dried herring which he had kept by him.

I suppose that he paid his classes and boarding charges out of money sent at intervals from home, like any other student; but the final outward evidence of any shortness in cash was the colour
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of the packet in which he bought his tobacco. A careful observer might have accurately dated the arrival of his funds by noting the orange paper which inclosed his "Levant Supérieur." Then, as it behoved him to be careful, the canary yellow of the cheaper "Levant"; and finally the sign manual of approaching destitution in the common brown wrapper of his "Caporal." I am inclined to say that I noticed his leisurely but inevitable descent of these pecuniary steps every month.

Further, if moderately affluent, he would indulge in five sous' worth of roasted chestnuts whenever we went out together, and only on one occasion did it occur to me to provide him with a tram fare. Despite this poverty, I am very sure that when he arranged ultimately, at my instance, to sit to Monsieur Dufour for his picture of "Christ led up into the Wilderness to be tempted of the Devil," Wladislaw was very far from thinking of the remuneration.

The fact was, he had differed rather pointedly with a big Russian at the evening class, a man preternaturally irritable because eternally afflicted by the toothache; there had been words, the Russian had announced his intention of throwing the Pole from the top of the stairs, and being a taller, more muscular fellow, had picked him up and carried him to the door, when Wladislaw wriggled dexterously from his grasp, and jerked him down no fewer than eleven steps upon his spine. He described to me afterwards with less truth than artistic sympathy the neat bobbing sound as each individual vertebra knocked upon the wooden stairs.

This incident, and the fact that the Russian had taken an oath in public to pay his defeat a round dozen of times, served to cool Wladislaw's interest in the evening class. He told me also that the light tried his eyes; and he would come up in the morning
with

with a fine vermilion point in their corners, the result, as I insisted, of his dipping locks of hair.

With a choice of reasons for his coming, I was yet surprised when he came, late one evening, and having whistled the opening bars of Chopin's "Dirge of Poland" below my seventh-floor window, decoyed me to the roadway, and described his first visit to the studio of Dufour in the Rue de Vaugirard.

Out of mere curiosity we had wandered to the number, one afternoon after the reception of the letter ; and I well remembered the living stench of the *impasse*, the dead trails of an enterprising Virginia creeper, the broken mass of plaster casts which sufficiently located a young sculptor near at hand, and the cracked Moorish lamp which lay upon its side in the half-choked drain. All we had seen of the studio's furnishings was the silk-threaded back of a magnificent curtain which blocked an upper square of lights ; but I knew that inside all must be on a much greater scale of artistic beauty than the queer, draughty barns of art-student friends, where I often juggled with a cup of tea—tea produced from a corner shrouded modestly in the green canvas covering of a French waggon and the dusty, belying folds of a brown fishing-net. I was now to hear from Wladislaw what the interior was really like ; how the great Dufour appeared when seen from the front instead of the rear, so to say, and upon what terms the negotiations were begun.

A certain indecisiveness in Wladislaw's painting was reflected in his conversation : he never could describe anything. Perhaps this is to do him an injustice ; I would rather say that he had no idea of giving a detailed description. By whiles you might get a flash equivalent to one of his illuminative brush-strokes, which was very certain to be an unsurpassable appreciation of the fact or the circumstances ; but bid him begin at the beginning and go coolly

coolly to the end, and you had him useless, flurried, monosyllabic and distraught.

I had early learned this ; so I stood pretty patiently, although in thin slippers, on our half-made road, a red clay slough by reason of much carting, and listened to half-intelligible fragments of bad German, from which I gleaned quite a good deal that I wanted to know. First of all, it seemed the studio had another door ; one we had never seen : you made your way round the back of the sculptor's white powdery habitation, and discovered yourself opposite a little annexe where the artist kept his untidier properties, and the glass and china which served for any little refreshment he might be disposed to take in working hours. The door here had been opened by an untidy, half-dressed French-woman, with her boots unbuttoned and a good deal of cigarette ash upon her high-braced bust ; she appeared unaware of Wladislaw's arrival, for she came to the door to empty something, and he nearly received the contents of a small enamelled tin thing in his face.

A moment later, much shaken by the off-hand insolence of her remarks, he penetrated to the presence of Dufour himself, and was agreeably soothed by the painter's reception of him. Of Dufour's manner and remarks, or the appearance of his workshop, I could get no idea. He had a canvas, twelve feet by nine, upon an easel, and it seems he made a rapid *croquis* of his picture upon a smaller upright, and had a few masterly skirmishes with the *fusain* for the position of his Christ's head, begging the model to walk naturally up and down the studio, so as to expose unconsciously various attitudes of face.

During these saunterings Wladislaw should have come by some idea of his surroundings ; but he was continually harassed and distracted by the movements of the woman in the unbuttoned boots, and seemed to have observed very little.

Upon

Upon a high point of an easel was hung a crown of thorns, and beside this leaned a reed ; but Dufour explained that he had abandoned that more conventional incident in favour of the Temptation in the Wilderness, and explained at some length the treatment that he contemplated of the said Temptation. Nothing, of course, was to be as it had ever been before ; the searching light of modern thought, of modern realism, was to be let in upon this old illustration, from which time had worn the sharpness long ago.

“ They must feel it ; it must come right down to them—to their lives ; they must find it in their path as they walk—irrefutable, terrible—and the experience of any one of them ! ” Dufour had said. “ And for that, contrast ! You have here the simplicity of the figure ; the man, white, assured, tense, unassailable. Then, here and there, around and above, the thousand soft presentments of temptation. And these, though imaginatively treated, are to be real—real. He was a man ; they say He had a man's temptations ; but where do we really hear of them ? You will see them in my picture ; all that has ever come to you or me is to be there. Etherealised, lofty, deified, but . . . our temptations.”

“ And you see what a subject ? The advantages, the opportunities ? The melting of the two methods ? The *plein air* for the figure, and all that Art has ever known or imagined outside this world—everything a painter's brain has ever seen in dreams—for the surroundings. Is it to be great ? Is it to be final ? Ah, you shall see ! And yours is the face of all the world for it. You are a re-incarnation. One moment so. I must have the head *trois quarts* with the chin raised.”

Dufour talked himself to perspiration, so Wladislaw said, and even I at third hand was warmed and elated.

Surely

Surely it was a striking achievement. I don't think it occurred to me then to reflect how large a practice Dufour had had with the "temptations" realistically treated; certainly he had a name for the painting of them which no one could outdo; and if his new departure from the direction of gas and limelight to *plein air* went well, there was everything to hope.

"And when are you to go again?" I asked, as I scraped the clay from my slippers on the wide door mat in our draughty *entresol*.

"Not for three days; he goes out of town, to Nancy. On Sunday night I go again, and am to pose in costume. He is to have me after, every night for a week, while he draws only, to choose his exact position; after that, I have to give up some daylight; but it won't matter, for I can join the evening class again for black and white. I have often thought of it, and meant to."

"And you don't think it is going to tire you horribly—standing and not saying anything?"

"Tire? Nothing could tire me. I could pose on one leg for him like a stork, for hours at a time, and never complain."

"I don't think it likely that a position of that kind——" I began; but he struck in:

"But not if that woman is about. She makes me nervous. You should see her hands: they are all white and swollen. When I ran a thorn in my thumb and it swelled, it went like that—all dead and cooked-looking."

"Don't!" I shouted. "Of course she won't be there. It isn't likely he would have a servant about when he worked."

"She isn't a servant; she called him 'Toni,' and she took hold——"

"She was a *model*," I said; and Wladislaw, who was so head-
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long because so very young, heard the note of finality in my voice, and looking puzzled but complaisant, reserved further comment on the woman in the unbuttoned boots.

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All that follows this, I am unable to tell in Wladislaw's own words; the facts were not given me at one, nor yet at two recitals—they were piled heterogeneously in my mind, just as he told them at odd moments in the months that followed; and that they have arranged themselves with some sort of order is to be accounted for first of all by their dramatic nature, and secondly by the inherent habit of my memory, which often straightens and adjusts, although unbidden, all that is thrown into it, so that I may take things out neatly as I would have them: thus one may pick articles, ordered in one's absence, from the top left-hand drawer in a dressing table.

At half-past eight upon the Sunday it was a very black night indeed in the Rue de Vaugirard. Wladislaw had well-nigh fallen prone over the broken Moorish lamp, now frozen firmly in the gutter which was the centre of the *impasse*; he had made his way round by the sculptor's studio, found the door unlocked, and being of a simple, unquestioning temperament, had strolled into the untidy, remote little annexe which communicated by a boarded passage with the handsome *atelier*.

A small tin lamp of the kind a concierge usually carries, glassless, flaming at a cotton wick with *alcool à brûler*, was withstanding an intermittent buffeting by a wind which knew the best hole in the window to come in at. Wladislaw nearly lost half of his long light-brown moustache by lighting his cigarette at it in a draught.

It was cold, and he had to undress to his skin; the comfort of
a cigarette

a cigarette was not to be denied. Also he was late for his appointment, and this annoyed him. He picked up the lamp when he had taken coat and cap off, and searched for the costume he was to wear.

A row of pegs upon the wall offered encouragement. With a certain awkwardness, which was the result of his shyness of touching unfamiliar garments, he knocked down two hats—women's hats: one a great scooped thing with red roses below the rim; the other like a dish, with green locusts, horribly lifelike (and no wonder, since they were the real insects), crawling over it. He hastily replaced these, and took up a white thing on another nail, which might have been the scant robe he was to wear.

It was a fine and soft to his hand; it exhaled an ineffable perfume of a sort of sweetness which belonged to no three-franc bottle, and had loose lace upon it and ribbons. He dropped this upon the ground, thinking shudderingly of the woman in the unbuttoned boots. At last he came upon the garment he was to wear; it seemed to him that he knew it at once when he touched it; it was of a thick, coarse, resistant woollen fabric, perhaps mohair, with a dull shine in the rather unwilling folds; there was very little stuff in it—just a narrow, poor garment, and of course white; wool-white. Wladislaw wondered vaguely where Dufour could have come by this wonderfully archaic material, ascetic even to the touch. Then he sat down upon a small disused stove and took off his boots and socks. Still hanging upon the nail was a rope cord, frayed rather, and of hemp, hand-twisted. That was the whole costume: the robe and the cord.

He was out of his shirt and ready to put on the Hebrew dress, when he was arrested again by some half-thought in his mind, and stood looking at it as it lay thrown across a heap of dusty *toiles*. It seemed so supremely real a thing—just what The Man

must

must have worn ; he could imagine the old story more nearly than ever he had done before.

He could see Him, His robes of red or purple laid aside, clothed only in the white under-garment ; the beautiful purity, the unimpeachable holiness of Him only the greater to see ; young, perfect, without sin or soil ; the veritable "Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil."

And he himself, Wladislaw, was the true image of that grand figure as He has come down through all the histories to the eyes of an indifferent world.

When he lifted his hand to his head, bewildered and held by it, the old blue trousers fell to the ground, and he stood there naked in the cold, taking his mind back along the familiar lines of the wonderful story, entering into the feelings of that Jew-Man who was persecuted ; who, whether man or God, lived the noblest life, left the finest example—who walks to-day, as He did then, beside the few who may be called His disciples.

A blast that caught the little lamp full in its foul, yellow flame-tongue, left Wladislaw in the dark. He felt about for matches ; perhaps no act could have so certainly restored him to this world, from which his thoughts had wandered. He found none anywhere. His straying hand came upon the garment ; he caught it up and slipped it over his head, half horrified to feel that it came below his collar-bone in the neck, and left his arms with only half-a-dozen inches of sleeve.

Matches were lurking in his trousers pocket, and he had the sulphury splutter going in a moment and the lamp re-lit.

Turning to place it in a quieter corner, he faced a dusty square of looking-glass, unframed, such as painters usually have, its edges sunk into the dusty wall ; he had quite a surprise to see himself.

More than half fascinated, he made a swift arrangement of his
hair,

hair, smoothed the soft flow of his moustache and beard, knotted the rope cord round his waist, and stood there only a second or two longer. Then, nerved by the startling simplicity, the convincing faithfulness of his whole appearance, he opened the door and went down the passage to the studio, frowning and stepping gingerly on the cold boards.

* * * * *

The curious murmur of sounds that struck his ear ; voices, the music of glasses and silver, the slap, as it might have been a hand upon a cheek, and the vagrant notes of some untuned musical instrument—these all he barely noticed, or supposed they came from the sculptor's adjacent studio.

He opened the door and brushed aside the dark *portière* that screened out draughts ; he stepped into the studio, into a hot, overcharged air, thick with the flat smell of poured wines and fruit rind, coloured with smoke, poisoned with scent, ringing harshly to voices—an air that of itself, and if he had seen nothing, would have nauseated him.

He saw dimly, confusedly ; orange and yellow blobs of light seemed to be swinging behind grey-blue mists that rolled and eddied round the heads of people so wild, he did not know if he looked at a dream-picture, a picture in a bad dream. If he made another step or two and stood, his arms straight at his sides, his head up, his long eyes glaring beneath drawn perplexed brows, he did not know it. There was a sudden pause, as though by a chemical process the air had been purged of sounds. Then a confused yell burst from among the smoke clouds, mixed with the harsh scrape of chairs shot back upon the floor ; that, too, ceased, and out of the frozen horror of those halted people, some incoherent, hysteric whimpering broke out, and a few faint interrupted exclamations.

At a table heaped with the *débris* of a careless feast he saw
Dufour,

Dufour, his coat off, his waistcoat and shirt unbuttoned, his head rolled weakly back upon the gilded wood-scroll of his Louis Quinze chair: his face flushed and swollen, strangely broadened, coarsened and undone, with sick, loose expressions rolling over it as shallow water rolls above a stone; he had in his hands an old lute, a studio property, from which he had been picking poor detached, discordant notes.

There were other men, with wild arrested merriment in their faces, the merriment of licence. Mixed among them, tangling like the serpents and reptiles in an allegorical picture, were women of whom the drapery or the bareness seemed indifferently lewd.

One had fainted with a glass at her lips, and the splash of spilled liquor was on her neck and dripping from her chin. No one heeded her.

Another had dashed her head upon the table, her hands were clutched in her hair, shaking with a palsy of terror; and from her arose the sobs which were no more than the dull moaning of a beast in labour.

One other, in a dress all Paris would have recognised as being the orange ballet-muslins in which Dufour had painted his celebrated "Coquelicot," was lying with long white arms spread on the back of a chair; above her low black satin bodice the waves of her dead-white breast were heaving convulsively; her red hair blazed from under the live fantastic orange-poppy horns that spread out from her head; her clever, common little face was twitching to recover a vinous courage, the black eyes were blinking, the crooked lines of her mouth—more fascinating than any fancied bow-curve—were moving in irresponsible striving to open on one side, as they had a habit of doing, and let out some daring phrase.

All that they saw, these miserable revellers, was the white figure

figure of the Christ standing in the chastened light at the far end of the studio. There had been a slight rattling sound—a curtain had been drawn, and then the beautiful form had stepped out and stood before them—the very type of manhood Christ had chosen, if pictures may be trusted, when He came to this earth: the pure forehead, the patient sorrowful eyes, reproach in the expression of the eyebrows and the mouth, the young beard and brown soft hair—in a word, the Nazarene.

When Dufour raised a wavering arm, and with a smile of drunken intelligence exclaimed, “Ah, c’est mon Jésus-Christ! Bonsoir, monsieur!” a renewed shiver of apprehension went round among the madly frightened people. Then he rose, throwing off a cowering woman, staggering a little, holding to his chair, and turned to address to his guests a mock speech of introduction:

“Mesdames et Messieurs, je vous présente mon modèle, l’excellent Ladislas!”

When he had declaimed thus, rising superior to a thickened stammer, “La Coquelicotte,” as the orange lady had at once been named, bounded from her chair with a scream. It was the signal for a lightning change of emotion: the hysterics rose to an abandoned shout of uncontrollable laughter; the moaning woman raised her head; the men banged the table and exclaimed according to their mood. One caught a handful of green stuff from a vase that had already been knocked over, and dashed them to the ground in front of the rock-still white figure. The dark-haired woman—Wladislaw had not recognised her, and she wore shoes this time—laid her swollen hand upon Dufour’s shoulder and cried harshly, “Va, Toni! Monsieur a besoin d’un âne!”

More screams greeted this pleasantry, and “La Coquelicotte” flew

flew towards the figure with a *pas de cancan* ; one arm tightened round his neck like a lasso.

Then his frozen quiet left him ; there was a sort of fight between them.

An oath in his own tongue burst from him, but she twisted her fingers below his arms and dragged him towards the table, meeting every effort at resistance with a kiss. His head swam as he saw her face come close to him, its crooked mouth open, and the blank in her line of even teeth which was supposed to be a charm ; her coarse hair seemed to singe his neck as it brushed upon him, and in a moment he was pushed into a chair at the table and received a handful of red rose-petals in his face from a woman opposite.

Dufour was murmuring some apologies about forgetting the appointment. He had been away ; had come back in time for this supper, long arranged—a farewell to his old manner and his old loves ; but Wladislaw barely listened. When “*La Coquelicotte*” sat upon his knee, he threatened to strike her, and then bethought him with shame that she was a woman.

He took a glass that was pushed to him, and drank to steady himself. It was Chartreuse they had given him—Chartreuse, more deadly and more insidious than pure spirit—and in a very little while his head failed him, and he remembered nothing after. Perhaps it was as well. The wild laughter and indecent jokes surged up hotter than before ; every one strove to forget the stun of that terrible moment, when, at the jarring scrape of the curtain-rings upon their rod, the white figure of the Christ had interrupted them ; when it had seemed, indeed, that the last day had come, that judgment and retribution, harsher than all hell to those taken in their sinning, had fallen on them as they shrieked and howled like human swine amid the refuse of their feast.

That

That was a moment they never forgot. It carried no lesson, it gave no warning, it altered nothing, and was of no use ; but it frightened them, and they were not strong enough to wipe out its cold memory.

There is perhaps a moral in Wladislaw's story ; if so, I have has no thought to write it. Certainly the world has turned and made mock, like those men and women, at the Christ-figure ; and as I write I find myself wondering about the great promise which is still the Hope of some.

When He comes, if He is to come, will it be upon some such scene that He will choose to enter ?

Castle Campbell,

September, 1891.