

**MADELEINE
ONE OF LOVE'S JANSENISTS**

Table of Contents

PREFACE

PART I

CHAPTER I THE DINNER AT MADAME PILOU'S

CHAPTER II A PARTIAL CONFESSION

CHAPTER III A SUPPLEMENT TO THE CONFESSION

CHAPTER IV THE SIN OF NARCISSUS

CHAPTER V AN INVITATION

CHAPTER VI THE GRECIAN PROTOTYPE

CHAPTER VII THE MERCHANTS OF DAMASCUS AND
DAN

CHAPTER VIII 'RITE DE PASSAGE'

CHAPTER IX AT THE HÔTEL DE RAMBOUILLET

CHAPTER X AFTERWARDS

CHAPTER XI REBUILDING THE HOUSE OF CARDS

PART II

CHAPTER XII THE FÊTE-DIEU

CHAPTER XIII ROBERT PILOU'S SCREEN

CHAPTER XIV A DEMONSTRATION IN FAITH

CHAPTER XV MOLOCH

CHAPTER XVI A VISIT TO THE ABBAYE OF PORT-
ROYAL

CHAPTER XVII 'HYLAS, THE MOCKING SHEPHERD'

CHAPTER XVIII A DISAPPOINTMENT

CHAPTER XIX THE PLEASURES OF DESPAIR

CHAPTER XX FRESH HOPE

PART III

CHAPTER XXI 'WHAT IS CARTESIANISM?'

CHAPTER XXII BEES-WAX

CHAPTER XXIII MADEMOISELLE DE SCUDÉRY'S
SATURDAY

CHAPTER XXIV SELF-IMPOSED SLAVERY

CHAPTER XXV THE SYMMETRY OF THE COMIC MUSE

CHAPTER XXVI BERTHE'S STORY

CHAPTER XXVII THE CHRISTIAN VENUS

CHAPTER XXVIII THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL

CHAPTER XXIX THE BODY OF THE DRAGON

CHAPTER XXX A JAR

CHAPTER XXXI THE END OF THE 'ROMAN'

CHAPTER XXXII 'UN CADEAU'

CHAPTER XXXIII FACE TO FACE WITH FACTS

CHAPTER XXXIV OUT INTO THE VOID

EPILOGUE THE RAPE TO THE LOVE OF INVISIBLE
THINGS

FOOTNOTES

**TO
MY MOTHER**

PREFACE

Fiction—to adapt a famous definition of law—is the meeting-point of Life and Art. Life is like a blind and limitless expanse of sky, for ever dividing into tiny drops of circumstances that rain down, thick and fast, on the just and unjust alike. Art is like the dauntless, plastic force that builds up stubborn, amorphous substance cell by cell, into the frail geometry of a shell. These two things are poles apart—how are they to meet in the same work of fiction?

One way is to fling down, *pêle-mêle*, a handful of separate acts and words, and then to turn on them the constructive force of a human consciousness that will arrange them into the pattern of logic or of drama.

Thus, in this book, Madeleine sees the trivial, disorderly happenings of her life as a momentous battle waged between a kindly Power who had written on tablets of gold before the world began that she should win her heart's desire, and a sterner and mightier Power who had written on tablets of iron that all her hopes should be frustrated, so that, finally, naked and bleeding, she might turn to Him. And having this conception of life all her acquaintances become minor *daimones*, friendly or hostile, according as they seem to serve one power or the other.

The other way is to turn from time to time upon the action the fantastic limelight of eternity, with a sudden effect of unreality and the hint of a world within a world. My plot—that is to say, the building of the shell—takes place in this inner world and is summed up in the words that dog the dreams of Madeleine—*per*

hunc in invisibilium amorem rapiamur. In the outer world there is nothing but the ceaseless, meaningless drip of circumstances, in the inner world—a silent, ineluctable march towards a predestined climax.

I have had the epilogue printed in italics to suggest that the action has now moved completely on to the stage of the inner world. In the outer world Madeleine might with time have jettisoned the perilous stuff of youth and have sailed serenely the rough, fresh sea of facts. In the inner world, there was one thing and one thing only that could happen to her: life is the province of free-will, art the province of fate.

PART I

‘En effet, si on laisse aller le Christianisme sans l’approfondir et le régénérer de temps en temps, il s’y fait comme une infiltration croissants de bon sens humain, de tolérance philosophique, de semi-Pélagianisme à quelque degré que ce soit: la “folie de la Croix” s’atténue.’

SAINTE-BEUVE.

CHAPTER I

THE DINNER AT MADAME PILOU'S

In the middle of the seventeenth century a family called Troqueville came from Lyons to settle in Paris. Many years before, Monsieur Troqueville had been one of the four hundred *procureurs* of the Palais de Justice. There were malicious rumours of disgraceful and Bacchic scenes in Court which had led to his ejection from that respectable body. Whether the rumours were true or not, Monsieur Troqueville had long ceased to be a Paris *procureur*, and after having wandered about from town to town, he had at last settled in Lyons, where by 'devilling' for a lawyer, writing bombastic love-letters for shop apprentices, and playing Lasquinet with country bumpkins, he managed to earn a precarious livelihood. When, a few months before the opening of this story, he had been suddenly seized with a feverish craving to return to Paris 'and once more wear the glove of my lady Jurisprudence in the tourney of the law-courts,' as he put it, his wife had regarded him with a frigid and sceptical surprise, as she had long since given up trying to kindle in him one spark of ambition. However, Madeleine, their only child, a girl of seventeen, expressed such violent despair and disappointment when Madame Troqueville pronounced her husband's scheme to be vain and impracticable, that finally to Paris they came—for to her mother, Madeleine's happiness was the only thing of any moment.

They had taken rooms above a baker's shop in the petite rue du Paon, in the East end of the University quarter—the *Pays Latin*, where, for many centuries, turbulent abstract youth had celebrated with Bacchic orgies the cherub Contemplation, and strutting,

ragged and debonair on the razor's edge of most unprofitable speculation, had demonstrated to the gaping, well-fed burghers, that the intellect had its own heroisms and its own virtues. At that time it was a neighbourhood of dark, winding little streets, punctuated by the noble fabrics of colleges and monasteries, and the open spaces of their fields and gardens—a symbol, as it were, of contemporary learning, where crabbed scholasticism still held its own beside the spacious theories of Descartes and Gassendi.

Madame Troqueville had inherited a small fortune from her father, which made it possible to tide over the period until her husband found regular employment.

She was by birth and upbringing a Parisian, her father having been a *Président de la Chambre des Comptes*. As the daughter of a Judge, she was a member of 'la Noblesse de Robe,' the name given to the class of the high dignitaries of the *Parlement*, who, with their scarlet robes, their ermine, and their lilies, their Latin periods and the portentous solemnity of their manner, were at once ridiculous and awful.

It cannot be wondered at that on her return to Paris she shrank from renewing relations with old friends whose husbands numbered their legal posts by the score and who drove about in fine coaches, ruthlessly bespattering humble pedestrians with the foul mud of Paris. But for Madeleine's sake she put her pride in her pocket, and though some ignored her overtures, others welcomed her back with genial condescension.

The day that this story begins, the Troquevilles were going to dine with the celebrated Madame Pilou, famous in 'la Cour et la Ville' for her homespun wit and remarkably ill-favoured countenance—it

would be difficult to say of which of these two distinctions she was most proud herself. Her career had been a social miracle. Though her husband had been only a small attorney, there was not a Princess or Duchess who did not claim her as an intimate friend, and many a word of counsel had she given to the Regent herself.

None of her mother's old acquaintanceships did Madeleine urge her so eagerly to renew as the one with Madame Pilou. In vain her mother assured her that she was just a coarse, ugly old woman.

'So also are the Three Fates,' said Jacques Tronchet (a nephew of Madame Troqueville, who had come to live with them), and Madeleine had looked at him, surprised and startled.

Madame Pilou dined at midday, so Monsieur Troqueville and Jacques were to go to her house direct from the Palais de Justice independently of Madame Troqueville and Madeleine. Madeleine had been ready a full half-hour before it was time to start. She had sat in the little parlour for a quarter of an hour absolutely motionless. She was dressed in her best clothes, a bodice of crimson serge, and an orange petticoat of *camelot de Hollande*, the slender purse's substitute for silk. A gauze neckerchief threw a transparent veil over the extreme *décolletage* of her bodice. On her head was one of the new-fashioned *ténèbres*, a square of black crape that tied under her chin, and took the place of a hat. She wore a velvet mask and patches, in spite of the Sumptuary Laws, which would reserve them for ladies of rank, and from behind the mask her clear gray eyes, that never smiled and seldom blinked, looked out straight in front of her. Her hands were folded on her lap. She had a remarkable gift for absolute stillness.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, she went to her mother, who was preparing a cress salad in the kitchen, and said in a quiet, tense voice:—

‘Maybe you would liefer not go to Madame Pilou’s this morning. If so, tell me, and I will abandon it,’ then, with a sudden access of fury, ‘You will make me hate you—you are for ever sacrificing matters of moment to trifles. An you were to weigh the matter rightly, my having some pleasure when I was young would seem of greater moment than there being a salad for supper!’

‘Madame Pilou dines at twelve, and it is but a bare half-hour from our house to hers, and it is now eleven,’ Madame Troqueville answered slowly, emphasising each word. ‘But we will start now without fail, if ’tis your wish, and arrive like true Provincials half an hour before we are due;’ irritation now made the words come tumbling out, one on the top of the other. Madeleine began to smile, and her mother went on with some heat, but no longer with irritation.

‘But why in the name of Jesus do you lash yourself into so strange a humour before going to old Madame Pilou’s? One would think you were off to the Palais Cardinal to wait on the Regent! She is but a plain old woman; now if she were very learned, or——’

‘Oh, mother, let her be, and go and make your toilette,’ and Madame Troqueville went off obediently to her room.

Madeleine paced about like a restive horse until her mother was ready, but did not dare to disturb her while she was dressing. It used to surprise Madeleine that she should take such trouble over such unfashionable toilettes.

It was not long before she came in quite ready. She began to put Madeleine's collar straight, which, for some reason, annoyed Madeleine extremely. At last they were out of the house.

Madame Pilou lived on the other side of the river, in the rue Saint Antoine, so there was a good walk before Madeleine and her mother, and judging from Madeleine's gloomy, abstracted expression, it did not promise to be a very cheerful one.

They threaded their way into the rue des Augustins, a narrow, cloistered street flanked on the left by the long flat walls of the Monastery, over which were wafted the sound of bells and the scent of early Spring. It led straight out on to the Seine and the peaceful bustle of its still rustic banks. They crossed it by the Pont-Neuf, that perennial Carnival of all that Paris held of most picturesque and most disreputable. The bombastic eloquence of the quacks extolling their panaceas and rattling their necklaces of teeth; the indescribable foulness of the topical songs in which hungry-looking bards celebrated to sweet ghostly airs of Couperin and Cambert the last practical joke played by the Court on the Town, or the latest extravagance of Mazarin; the whining litany of the beggars; the plangent shrieks of strange shrill birds caught in American forests—all these sounds fell unheard on at least one pair of ears.

On they hurried, past the booths of the jugglers and comedians and the stalls of the money-lenders, past the bronze equestrian statue of Henri IV., watching with saturnine benevolence the gambols of the Gothic vagabonds he had loved so dearly in life, cynically indifferent to the discreet threats of his rival the water-house of the Samaritaine, which, classical and chaste, hinted at a future little to the taste of the *Vert Gallant* and his vagabonds.

From time to time Madame Troqueville glanced timidly at Madeleine but did not like to break the silence. At last, as they walked down the right bank of the Seine, the lovely town at once substantial and aerial, taking the Spring as blithely as a meadow, filled her with such joy that she cried out:—

‘‘Tis a delicate town, Paris! Are not you glad we came, my pretty one?’

‘Time will show if there be cause for gladness,’ Madeline answered gloomily.

‘There goes a fine lady! I wonder what Marquise or Duchesse she may be!’ cried Madame Troqueville, wishing to distract her. Madeleine smiled scornfully.

‘No one of any note. Did you not remark it was a *hired* coach? “*Les honnêtes gens*” do not sacrifice to Saint Fiacre.’

Madame Troqueville gave rather a melancholy little smile, but her own epigram had restored Madeleine, for the time being, to good humour. They talked amicably together for a little, and then again fell into silence, Madeleine wearing a look of intense concentration.

Madame Pilou’s house was on the first floor above the shop of a laundress. They were shown into her bedroom, the usual place of reception in those days. The furniture was of walnut, in the massive style of Henri IV., and covered with mustard-coloured serge. Heavy curtains of moquette kept out the light and air, and enabled the room to preserve what Madeleine called the ‘bourgeois smell.’ On the walls, however, was some fine Belgian tapestry, on which was shown, with macabre Flemish realism, the Seven

Stations of the Cross. It had been chosen by the son Robert, who was fanatically devout.

Madame Pilou, dressed in a black dressing-gown lined with green plush, and wearing a chaperon (a sort of cap worn in the old days by every bourgeoisie, but by that time rarely seen), was lying on the huge carved bed. Her face, with its thick, gray beard, looming huge and weather-beaten from under the tasselled canopy, was certainly very ugly, but its expression was not unpleasing. Monsieur Troqueville and Jacques had already arrived. Monsieur Troqueville was a man of about fifty, with a long beard in the doctor's mode, a very long nose, and small, excited blue eyes, like a child's. Jacques was rather a beautiful young man; he was tall and slight, and had a pale, pointed face and a magnificent chevelure of chestnut curls, and his light eyes slanting slightly up at the corners gave him a Faun-like look. He was a little like Madeleine, but he had a mercurial quality which was absent in her. Robert Pilou was there too, standing before the chimney-piece; he was dressed in a very rusty black garment, made to look as much like a priest's cassock as possible. Jacques said that with his spindly legs and red nose and spectacles, he was exactly like old Gaultier-Garguille, a famous actor of farce at the theatre of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and as the slang name for the Hôtel de Bourgogne was, for some unknown reason, the 'Pois-Pilés,' Jacques, out of compliment to Robert's appearance and Madame Pilou's beard, called their house the 'Poil-Pilou.'

They were all sipping glasses of Hippocras and eating preserved fruit. Jacques caught Madeleine's eyes as she came in. His own slanting green ones were dancing with pleasure, he was always in a state of suppressed amusement at the Pilous, but there was no

answering merriment in Madeleine's eyes. She gave one quick look round the room, and her face fell.

'Well, my friends, you are exceeding welcome!' bellowed Madame Pilou in the voice of a Musketeer. 'I am overjoyed at seeing you, and so is Robert Pilou.' Robert went as red as a turkey-cock, and muttered something about 'any one who comes to the house.' 'You see I have to say his *fleurettes* for him, and he does my praying for me; 'tis a bargain, isn't it, Maître Robert?' Robert looked as if he were going to have a fit with embarrassment, while Monsieur Troqueville bellowed with laughter, and exclaimed, 'Good! good! excellent!' then spat several times to show his approval. (This habit of his disgusted Madeleine: 'He doesn't even spit high up on the wall like a grand seigneur,' she would say peevishly.)

'Robert Pilou, give the ladies some Hippocras—Oh! I insist on your trying it. My apothecary sends me a bottle every New Year; it's all I ever get out of him, though he gets enough out of me with his draughts and clysters!' This sally was also much appreciated by Monsieur Troqueville.

Robert Pilou grudgingly helped each of them to as much Hippocras as would fill a thimble, and then sat down on the chair farthest removed from Madame Troqueville and Madeleine.

When the Hippocras had been drunk, Madame Pilou bellowed across to him: 'Now, Robert Pilou, it would be civil in you to show the young lady your screen. He has covered a screen with sacred woodcuts, and the design is most excellently conceived,' she added in a proud aside to Madame Troqueville. 'No, no, young man, you sit down, I'm not going to have the poor fellow made a fool of,' as

Jacques got up to follow the other two into an adjoining closet. 'But you, Troqueville, I think it might be accordant with your humour—you can go.' Monsieur Troqueville, always ready to think himself flattered, threw a look of triumph at Jacques and went into the closet.

Madeleine was gazing at Robert with a look of rapt attention in her large, grave eyes, while he expounded the mysteries of his design. 'You see,' he said, turning solemnly to Monsieur Troqueville, 'I have so disposed the prints that they make an allegorical history of the Fronde and——'

'An excellent invention!' cried Monsieur Troqueville, all ready to be impressed, and at the same time to show his own cleverness. 'Were you a Frondeur yourself?'

Robert Pilou drew himself up stiffly. 'No, Monsieur, *I—was—not*. I was for the King and the Cardinal. Well, as I was saying, profane history is countenanced if told by means of sacred prints and moreover itself becomes sacred history.' Monsieur Troqueville clapped his hands delightedly.

'In good earnest it does,' he cried, 'and sacred history becomes profane in the same way—'tis but a matter of how you look at it—why, you could turn the life of Jesus into the history of Don Quixote—a picture of the woman who pours the ointment on his feet could pass for the grand lady who waits on Don Quixote in her castle, and the Virgin could be his niece——'

'Here you have a print of Judas Iscariot,' Robert went on, having looked at Monsieur Troqueville suspiciously. 'You observe he is a hunchback, and therefore can be taken for the Prince de Conti!' He looked round triumphantly.

Madeleine said sympathetically, ‘’Tis a most happy comparison!’ but Monsieur Troqueville was smiling and nodding to himself, much too pleased with his own idea to pay any attention to Robert’s.

‘And here we have the Cardinal! By virtue of his holy office I need not find a sacred symbol for him, I just give his own portrait. This, you see, is St Michael fighting with the Dragon——’

‘Why, that would do most excellently for Don Quixote fighting with the windmills!’

‘Father, I beseech you, no more!’ whispered Madeleine severely.

‘But why? My conceit is every whit as good as his!’ said Monsieur Troqueville sulkily. Fortunately Robert Pilou was too muddle-headed and too wrapt up in himself to understand very clearly what other people were talking about, so he went on:—

‘It is a symbol of the King’s party fighting with the Frondeurs. Now here is a picture of a Procession of the Confrérie de la Passion; needless to say, it shadows forth the triumphant entry of the King and Cardinal into Paris—you see the banners and the torches——’tis an excellent symbol. And here you have a picture of the stonemasons busy at the new buildings of Val de Grâce, that is a double symbol—it stands for the work of the King and Cardinal in rebuilding the kingdom; it also stands for the gradual re-establishment of the power of the Church. And this first series ends up with this’—and he pointed gleefully to a horrible picture of Dives in Hell—‘this stands for the Prince de Condé in prison. And now we come to the second series——;’ but just then Madame Pilou called them back to the other room.

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