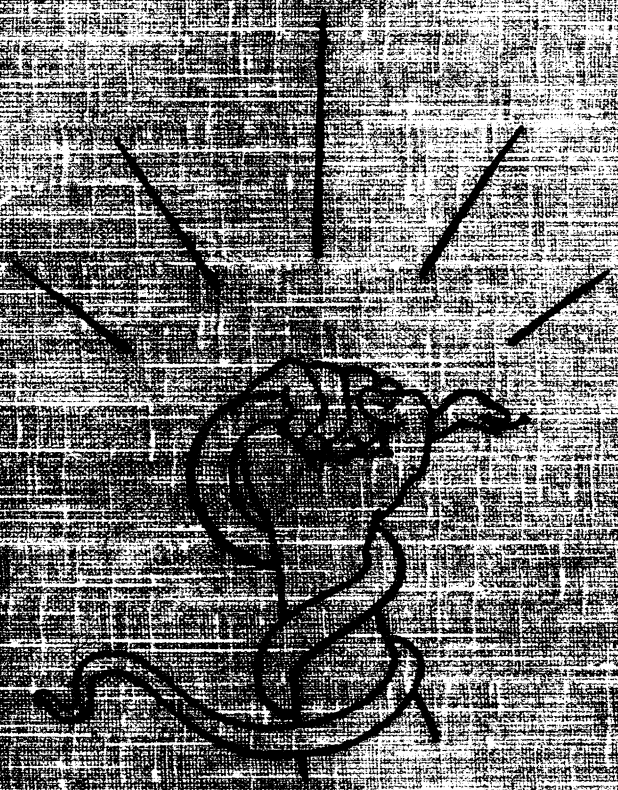
BRUGES-LA-MORTE



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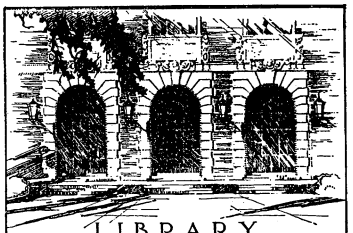

BRUGES-LA-MORTE

Georges Rodenbach.

[*Frontispiece.*]

BRUGES-LA-MORTE

A Romance

BY

GEORGES RODENBACH

Translated from the French, with a Critical Introduction, by

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WITH THREE ILLUSTRATIONS

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

In days when the reputation-monger vigilantly ransacks the most obscure by-paths of literary Europe in quest of new idols whom he may exploit and adore, it may fairly be regarded as amazing that the works of a writer possessing so unique a charm of individuality as those of Georges Rodenbach should have so long remained practically unknown to English lovers of Continental literature.

Of Maeterlinck enough, and

perhaps more than enough has been written and said. A vivid and faithful translation of selections from the poetical works of Verhaeren by Miss Alma Strettel was published in 1879, while in the preceding year his *Les Aubes* had been issued in an English dress through the instrumentality of the pen of Mr. Arthur Symons. But among the group of writers who constitute what has been described as the Belgian Renaissance, the claims of Rodenbach to any form of recognition have almost alone been regarded as entirely negligible.

To anticipate a widespread popularity for either the poems or the

novels of the author of *Bruges-la-Morte*, is possibly enough a vain imagination. Fastidious and aristocratic by temperament, he himself held in but light esteem the suffrages of the mob. In a recent masterly study of Rodenbach by M. Huysmans, that most distinguished of contemporary Catholic writers characterizes him felicitously as the "most extraordinary virtuoso of our time," and it is not altogether unlikely that his passion for recondite similes and analogies may render his works, in a measure, caviare to the general. A consummate artist, all that savoured of flamboyance or turgidity was

instinctively repugnant to his soul. Only the things appealed to him which were calm and old. Mission of any description he had assuredly none.

It was from the dead towns of Flanders—these strange survivals of mediævalism, that his inspiration came. The

> "Villes aux noms si doux, Audenarde, Malines"

of his own tender if unimpassioned verse.

The pathetic ineffectuality of aspect which broods over them, combined with their elusive quality of æsthetic charm to hold in

captivity his imagination. In the grace of a tranquillity which lulled to rest involuntarily all vehemence of emotion, he beheld the mirror of what was most congenial to his own moods.

It was Bruges, of course, with which his name is now inseparably linked, that became to him an object of paramount literary consecration.

> "Toujours l'obsession d'un ciel gris de province."

It held him almost unintermittently within its grasp, even in the heyday of his hectic Parisian later life.

It is generally assumed by those

who possess only an imperfect acquaintanceship with the biographical details of Rodenbach's career, that Bruges claimed him for its own; but it was the city only of his artistic adoption, and not of his nativity.

Born in 1855, under the shadow of the great cathedral of the barrier town of Tournai, he was educated at the University of Ghent, where his career was one of almost unbroken distinction. His selection, in the first instance, of a profession so aridly distasteful to the contemplative imagination as that of law, seems to partake somewhat of the nature of an irony of circumstance.

Yet within what was undeniably the uncongenial arena of the law-courts, his forensic eloquence proved more than sufficiently convincing.

Attracted to Brussels by the enhancement of possibilities which a capital ever affords, Rodenbach there flung himself, with all the ardour of youth, into the advocacy of the literary crusade that had for its object the emancipation of the intellect of young Belgium from the domination of the Philistinism, under the yoke of which it had so long groaned. It was in course of the controversies engendered by this uprising against decorated

dulness, that his true vocation was finally discovered.

Brussels was to him, however, no abiding city. The irresistible magnetism of Paris ere long drew him within the vortex of that febrile existence, whose blandishments have ever been so fraught with fascination for his countrymen. Here he associated upon terms of Bohemian intimacy with the members of the literary remnant, who strove to preserve the flickering tradition of the *Quartier Latin.* The charm of the "beautiful city of Prague" would seem to have held him in its thrall in these days. With Emile Gaudeau, Maurice Rollinat, Paul

Arène, Bastien Lepage, Paul Bourget, Sarah Bernhardt, and other celebrities whose names still serve to invest even *décadence* with a certain distinction, he interchanged ideas, declaimed verses, and developed the genius which was to find its expression only in the worship of a sad, gray city.

A voluminous writer, his biography exists merely in his works. The external record of his life is eventless and meagre. His domestic concerns appear to have remained unillumined by the fierce light which, in these days, beats upon the household of the author. To the literary youths

of Belguim he was, however, invariably almost effusively sympathetic. The closest revelation of his somewhat enigmatic personality seems to be a portrait by Lévy-Dhurmer, exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1896.

The tragic death of Georges Rodenbach, while yet an inheritor of unfulfilled renown, at the close of December, 1898—bringing with it to the too limited circle of his admirers a thrill of passionate regret, amounting almost to a sense of personal bereavement—extinguished a career the possibilities of which it is difficult adequately to gauge.

The refrain of the last and perhaps the most exquisite of his shorter lyrics, written to greet the advent of the New Year which he was destined never to behold,

> "Always the same dream unachieved,"

reveals possibly the dissatisfaction of a temperament essentially introspective with the comparative failure of the imagination to realize the ideals that the heart cherished.

Of the six novels that Rodenbach has bequeathed to us, no less than five deal directly with the Bruges-la-Morte, which his genius has invested with so ineffable a charm.

So also do, though in a less tangible fashion, his solitary drama and the two best known and least artificial of his volumes of verse. Even in the sketches which he was wont to contribute with such frequency to the Parisian literary journals, the haze of his obsession interposed itself with an allurement of expression that beguiled many of his readers into setting-forth upon a sentimental pilgrimage from which, in the great majority of instances, they returned only the poorer by the loss of an illusion.

Though shrinking with a characteristic dread of disenchantment from the deadening potentialities

of familiarity with what was to him a city of dream, there is conclusive enough internal evidence to demonstrate that Rodenbach never ceased to keep a vigilant eye upon the vandalism of a municipal administration, which was seemingly ever bent upon the vulgarization of his sanctuary. In the *Carillonneur*, for example—which indisputably falls to be reckoned, so far as local colour is concerned, as the most realistic of his works—he reveals a fulness of knowledge in regard to the manœuvres of the civic fathers, who hold in their custody the city of Van Eyck and Memling, that renders their refusal

to sanction the erection of a statue to his memory the reverse of an enigma.

That the Bruges of Rodenbach, however, is not in great measure an idealism, can scarcely be denied. It is not so much Bruges as an abstraction of Bruges, that his horror of prosaic realism presents to the imagination. All the unlovely features which are likely to jar upon romantic sensibilities, are rigorously excluded from the sphere of his perspective. The existence of an egregious English colony—tawdry, flaunting, brawling, and ubiquitous — the pinchbeck nature of many of the

house restorations; the bi-weekly turmoil of a vast and unsightly market; the monthly saturnalia of a fair of unsurpassable vulgarity, are ignored with sublimity of indifference. Nothing that is common or unclean is permitted to derange the harmony of his artistic conception.

To Rodenbach the significance of Bruges lay only in the superb vista of its *Lac d'Amour;* in the sombre tranquillity that reigns within the court of its *Béguinage;* in the picturesque richness of the gables which embellish the inert waters of its canals; in the majestic beauty of its delicately gliding

swans; in the towering sublimity of its inscrutable beffroi—perhaps above all in that odour of the sacristan which still everywhere pervades the tangled skein of its streets. With a delicate sensitiveness of perception, he seizes upon every detail that enhances the æsthetic value of the phenomena which constitute his material. The drowsy melody of the bells, the tender fogs, the melancholy poplars, the pale *Béguines*, the water-lilies, which symbolized ever to his imagination the hearts of the first communicants.

In the preface to the best known of his works, Rodenbach

avows, with characteristic definiteness, the nature of the Neo-Pagan conception which underlies his romance. It is that of the evocation by a literary process evolved by himself of his beloved town, as "an essential personage associated with different conditions of the soul, counselling, prompting, and determining its action." That the execution is absolutely flawless, not even the most perfervid admirer of Rodenbach can venture to maintain. Unhappily for the perfection of the work, the author was afflicted with a duality of being which renders it the centre of two conflicting tendencies. A Fleming

by birth, Rodenbach was more than half a Parisian by temperament, and the severe spiritual simplicity, which is the birthright of the former, was curiously blended in him with the passion for the *bizarre* that is the most prominent characteristic of the latter. While the book regarded from one side is mystic, devotional, and pessimistically tranquil, upon the other it is weird, erotic, and melodramatic. It has to be borne in mind in connection with the development of the plot that, in mediæval times, Bruges was a reputed centre of Satanism, and it is evidently to a latent instigation of this diabolism

that Rodenbach attributes the crime for which his hero is apparently responsible.

Unrivalled in power of description, it must be confessed that Rodenbach is not impeccable in matters of taste. In the faculty of extracting the immaterial from the material, he stands in the kingdom of letters without a peer. In his hands the inanimate ever becomes instinct with a gracefully fragile life. But while unapproachable as a delineator of petrifaction, his modernity is frequently peculiarly vulnerable to criticism. As an arena for the allurements of the *demi-mondaine*, Bruges is the

climax of artistic incongruity. Yet so deeply has the lubricity of the Parisian entered into the soul of the novelist, that he of all men fails to perceive the inappositeness of such a presence in a romance, the scene of which is laid in so sternly ecclesiastical an atmosphere.

None the less, after all deductions have been made, *Bruges-la-Morte* remains of its kind the most exquisite study in modern literature. Of the much abused phrase, local colour, we hear enough and to spare, but the trail of the itinerary is over it all. In its ordinary form, local colour means nothing more than the sentimentalization of

topography. Vitality or romance it has none. The term is a mere subterfuge for the veneering of an intolerable aridity.

The achievement of Rodenbach is something differing widely from all this. For him the merely external is devoid of all meaning. It was his supreme literary ambition to make the dry-bones live. In his eyes the artist is the reverse in every respect of the photographer, and of all unincarnated things the most repugnant to his imagination must have been the soullessness of a Baedeker. Yet unlike Pater, the only English writer—with the exception of

Hardy—to whom he bears any resemblance, his word-painting is as precise as it is poetical. With all its imperfections his idealization of Bruges will continue to make an enduring appeal, upon the one hand, to that order of imagination which finds an anodyne in the depiction of a despondent tranquillity; and upon the other, to the type that succumbs to the fascination of the mediævalism that bequeathed to us the cathedrals we are now impotent even to restore.

With the novels of Thomas Hardy and those of the author of *Bruges-la-Morte*, a certain parallel is easily established. The

promptings to action of a sombre environment, are portrayed in the *Return of the Native* and the *Woodlanders* in a manner which is essentially that adopted by Rodenbach. The gloom that broods over Egdon Heath is practically identical with that which overhangs Bruges, though in the latter instance its ascendency is greatly intensified.

In the *Carillonneur*, which embodies precisely the same method of literary treatment, we encounter at least an incomparably more robust piece of handiwork. No longer the refuge of a sentimental misanthropy,

Bruges is depicted in its pages as undergoing the preliminary throes of an impending æsthetic dissolution. The old order of things is menaced by the machinations of an intriguing coterie bent upon the carrying out of a scheme of iconoclastic utilitarianism. Hating the *bourgeois* with a hatred which rivals in its intensity that of a Flaubert, a Maupassant, or a Gautier, Rodenbach here pillories, in a manner which displays more power of touch with actuality than many of his own admirers would have credited him with possessing, the chicane; the insensibility to all which is

not material; the vandalism that cannot recognize in beauty even a form of revenue which characterizes the administration of a provincial town harassed by the custody of an artistic heritage, the loveliness of which it cannot comprehend, and the value of which it cannot appraise.

That his soul should in this volume have been stirred to a red heat of indignation was in no way astonishing. The handwriting was upon the wall. The shadow of the destroyer, in the shape of a maritime canal, was hovering around the effeteness which he had enshrined. Bruges was to be

Bruges-la-Morte no more. The relentless commercialism, which like the grave spares and gives back nothing, now threatened the existence of what to him was almost a religion.

The novel, therefore, inevitably becomes a species of Hellenic tragedy, moving softly and sternly to the appointed end. The victim of an implacable destiny, Joris Borlutt, the *Carillonneur*, an uncompromising embodiment of all the traits of the artistic reactionary, is depicted throughout in Prometheus fashion, as a mere target for the buffets of adversity. An object-lesson to all belated enough to run

the hazard of excommunication at the hands of modern progress, almost no particle of alleviation enters into the final tragedy of his career. In the culmination of the doom of the fate-stricken hero of his novel by a sufficiently dramatic suicide within the tower of the Beffroi, it would almost seem as if Rodenbach thus meant, in his emblematic fashion, to symbolize the impending annihilation of the beauty of Bruges.

"*Au-dessus de la vie, Au-dessus de la vie*" (Above the life, Above the life), in this ever-recurrent phrase, which seems almost to dominate the book, can be

discovered the solution of the enigma presented by the ineffectuality of Rodenbach's protagonists. Striving ever after the unattainable, they fail utterly to adjust themselves to the actual conditions of their existence. The imagination holds them for its own. In the dominion of art, they can be ranked only as consecrations of futility.

The lot of Jean Rembrandt, the hero of *L'Art en Exile*, is no whit less tragic than that of his compatriots. Like them, his career may be epitomized in the word frustration. A poet torn from the Paris his heart loved, and recalled by pressure of family conditions to the

stagnation of a provincial town, where only Mammon is held in reverence, his life is rendered a martyrdom by the enmity of the rancorous mediocrity that surrounds him. The isolation which awaits him in his own household proves, however, tenfold more disheartening. Suffocated by the influences of his environment, he relapses into complete apathy and inertia. Verily the Pagan of Mr. Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine" stands here justified.

"Yea, is not even Apollo, with hair and harp-string of gold,
A bitter God to follow, a beautiful God to behold?"

In *Le Musée de Béguines*, we discover Rodenbach in a lighter mood. Endowed with that peculiar magic of style which renders the commonplace attractive and the uninteresting interesting, he analyses in this volume of sketches, with marvellous delicacy of insight, the traits that lie hidden within the hearts of that picturesque sisterhood—the members of which reappear with so remarkable a persistency throughout the whole course of his works. In a type of character that approaches subtlety upon one hand, as closely as it does simplicity upon another, he found a congenial outlet for that

love of psychological dissection which was always dear to him. Here no element of violence obtrudes itself. All trace of Rodenbach the Parisian has vanished. The literary atmosphere is one of perfect stillness. The recluses with minds as spotless as the snowy purity of their cornettes, are as vividly realized as the virgins in Memling's world-renowned *châsse* of Saint Ursula.

La Vocation, which is the least pleasing of all Rodenbach's studies, deals with scruples of conscience that are well-nigh incomprehensible to the Protestant mind. Yet in the intensity of its Catholicism,

there subsists a harmony with the austere religious background in which no sin would seem to be held as venial. For as in Spain, from whence Flanders derived its faith, the way of contrition is hard and life-long repentance bears with it no security of expiation. The descriptions of Bruges are here characterized by even more than the writer's ordinary power of artistic extraction, but the lack of relief to the picture of hopeless self-condemnation leaves a painful impression upon the mind of the reader.

The destruction of all that is primitive and Arcadian by the

intrusion of a railway into a remote district of the island of Zealand, is the subject of Rodenbach's last novel, *L'Arbre.* Virtually an arraignment of modern progress, it portrays graphically the introduction into a pastoral Eden of all that which debases the residuum of a large manufacturing town. The trampling down of an idyllic life, which is, however, more than a trifle too reminiscent of the Golden Age for acceptance at the hands of modern scepticism, by the execrated "*étrangers,*" affords the writer ample room for a more than sufficiently harrowing delineation.

Convincing enough from an anti-utilitarian standpoint, the book fails to make the impression upon the imagination which the nature of the subject demands. Verisimilitude is lacking, and the over-refining of the Dutch peasant carried to a pitch of excess.

The poetry of Rodenbach is permeated by the same qualities as those which will serve to attract or repel the reader in his prose works. The process of dematerialization, however, of which he was so deeply enamoured, is naturally carried in his verse to a far greater degree of elusiveness than was possible in the more circum-

scribed region of the novel. With a Memlingesque minuteness of observation, he endeavours in his stanzas to infuse a soul into even the most insignificant of the objects with which his imagination dallies. The pathos hid in inanimate things always appealed to him, especially when they were humanized by neglect and misuse. Even the poetry of domestic belongings invisible to others was recognizable by him. Strenuousness of any description finds no place in his world of lassitude. The keynote of his verse, indeed, is not infrequently that of a Paganism which has waxed valetudinarian,

and is content to shadow forth only the things that are plaintive and frail.

It is again from Bruges that Rodenbach derives the inspiration upon which the durability of his reputation as a poet must chiefly lodge. The shackles of a Parisian artificiality, which at intervals held him in the bondage of a worship of strange gods, are rent asunder as he approaches that "October of stones," which had ever been to him as a Mecca in the wilderness.

It is consequently upon the two volumes of his verse—*Le Règne du Silence* and *Le Miroir du Ciel*

Natal, which treat almost exclusively of Bruges, that critical attention will in a great measure be disposed to concentrate itself.

Intensely subjective in his adoption of a method, no allurement can induce Rodenbach to deviate an iota from it. Even the faded historical glories of Bruges are included in the rigour of his eliminations. Such emotions as those which thrilled Rossetti—

"John Memmeling and John van Eyck
Hold state at Bruges. In sore shame
I scanned the works that keep their name;
The carillon, which then did strike
Mine ears, was heard of theirs alike:
It set me closer unto them."

are to him as the commonplaces of the tourist.

Wordsworth, it is true, in his two unforgettable sonnets, has in an imperfect fashion foreshadowed Rodenbach's interpretation of the sad Northern Venice, but the halo of its mediævalism has, of the two influences, left an impression upon the mind of the English poet deeper than the pathos of its decrepitude.

To Rodenbach, Bruges presented itself under a guise akin to that of Tennyson's

> "island-valley of Avillon,
> Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
> Nor ever wind blows loudly."

From it, as a fastness of pensive tranquillity, all note of discord is banished. Clamour is unknown, and the spell of its indolent sweetness is unbroken by the harshness of voices from beyond.

A straining after remote analogies, which are fatiguing to unravel and too far-fetched for felicity, detract largely from the enjoyment of Rodenbach's verse. Yet in the identification of his emotions with his surroundings, there is ever a thinly-hidden significance which contains the indefinable essence of poetry. The esoteric is not without its magic, and there is witchery in the

refinements of a melancholy which would have ravished the heart of a Jacques and led him forth a captive even from the forest of Arden.

For over-subtilized and lacking in simplicity as the Muse of Rodenbach may be, her inspiration serves at least to render justice with a lulling completeness to the languid captivation of a city "from whose towers"—to borrow the language of Matthew Arnold—"still breathe the enchantments of the Middle Ages." The inner spirit lying at the heart of its waters; the eloquence of the silence emanating from its streets;

the floating melody issuing from its bells; the melancholy air of ancient distinction attached to its houses; the "*repos dominical*" of its Sundays—all indeed that makes Bruges a city of the soul—are revealed by him in these volumes with an infinitude alike of tenderness and subtlety of insight. Ever poignantly sensitive to the transitoriness of all things, the ineptitudes of age repeatedly find expression with exquisite felicity in his verse:

> "La cloche ne sonne
> Pour personne."
> (The old bell sounds for no one.)

Upon what may be described

as the purely Parisian verse of Rodenbach, those of his admirers who appreciate best the secret of his complexity will be little inclined to linger. The elegant sensuality, which is its most salient feature, should make little appeal to the tastes of those for whom the meretricious exercises no blandishments. Rodenbach dwelling with "damnable iteration" upon a *mièvre*, which seems to afford him a fatuous self-satisfaction, is simply to them not Rodenbach at all, but a pinchbeck imitator who has for the time being usurped his rightful position. In *L'Hiver Mondain* (a singularly infelicitous title), we

find the poet's weakest tendencies displaying themselves in their most undisguised form. Illustrated by Jan Van Beers and steeped throughout in an atmosphere of studied frivolity, it is infected by the aroma of the music-hall and will be felt as something of an imaginative shock by the lovers of *Le Règne du Silence* and *Le Miroir du Ciel Natal.*

Couched in the same vein of lusciousness, though published three years earlier, *La Mer Elégante* may be regarded as a species of precursor to *L'Hiver Mondain.* The affectations here, however, are less exasperating,

and the atmosphere of insincerity hardly so cloying.

In *Les Tristesses* (1879), Rodenbach's earliest literary venture, we have an experiment in simplicity of manner which was never repeated. Sooth to say, the promise held out in it is not very considerable! The Wordsworthian manner was one peculiarly ill-suited to the allusive character of his genius, and in the pursuit of it his descriptions frequently degenerate into the baldness of mere enumerations. From the outset, exclusion bulked largely in Rodenbach's conception of art, and in his first publication, as always, the

redundant meets with scant mercy at his hands.

It is with the appearance of *La Jeunesse Blanche* (1886) that Rodenbach's real personality first definitely unfolds itself. The germs of the mysticism which subsequently expanded into such masterpieces of their kind, as the *Carillonneur* and *Bruges-la-Morte*, are here obvious to even the most obtuse of literary critics. The æsthetic charm of common things to which he ever showed so delicate a susceptibility, receives expression in these pages with a grace that adumbrates the charm of his more mature work.

Bruges-la-Morte.

The series of poems brought together ultimately under the title of *Les Vies Encloses* are characterized by a common unity of treatment, though, superficially considered, the detachment of their subjects is absolute. The perfume which disengages itself from them is that of the conservatory and the *boudoir*. If weighed in the critical balances and not found wanting, an anæmic elegance must be accepted as an indemnification for the absence of all virility. Satiety, however, lurks in the air of the hot-house and the chamber of the convalescent, and ere long the reader becomes desirous of effecting his

escape into a more invigorating atmosphere. In spirit, *Les Vies Encloses* falls into the circle of Rodenbach's works which are indebted for their existence to the influence of Bruges, though no direct allusion is introduced to the city of his inspiration.

A triumph over the intangible, Rodenbach's solitary play, *Le Voile* (1894), enjoys the distinction of being the first work by a Belgian performed upon the boards of the Théâtre Français. Shadowy and elusive with Bruges in the background, the fact that it was accorded even the measure of recognition which attaches to a *success d'estime*

was achievement enough when the sensation-loving temper of the Parisian public is considered. By himself it seems to have been regarded as little more than an experiment, and the intervention of death has since blasted the hope of the revelation of the greater dramatic possibilities which, it is understood, were contained in the play that he had undertaken to furnish M. Jules Claretie shortly before his demise.

Briefly unfolded, the story is that of an affection which germinates only to wither at the first approach of the light of common day. The hero, if such he can be called,

conceives a romantic *tendresse* for an enigmatic Béguine, ministering at the pillow of his dying aunt, whose unseen presence imparts throughout to the play an undefinable Maeterlinckesque sense of mystery. Plot, strictly speaking, there is none. A study rather than a drama, the only moral gleanable from *Le Voile* consists apparently in the discovery that the solution of the riddle of fascination lies only in the region of the inscrutable. With the appearance upon the scene of *Sœur Gudule*, arrayed only in vulgar *déshabille*, when unexpectedly summoned to the bedside of the expiring invalid,

the hero becomes disenchanted, and the curtain falls. It was the Béguine, not the woman, that he had loved. All is over.

> "C'est fini. Tout amour brusquement s'étoile
> De trop savoir. L'amour a besoin d'un secret."

is his own unriddling of the problem.

A marvel of reticence, in which all is suggested and little is said, the play—though entirely outside the range of ordinary sympathies—is, artistically considered, perhaps the writer's finest and most subtle achievement.

The mere bibliography of

Rodenbach is almost entirely without intellectual significance. In his career there is little of continuous development. After his emancipation from the experimental stages illustrated by *Les Tristesses*, published as already stated in 1879, and *La Mer Élégante* launched in 1881, his manner undergoes little alteration and his mind but slight modifications. The spell of the de Goncourts evidently fell heavily upon him about this period, as the formation of his style bears unmistakable evidence. *Bruges-la-Morte* saw the light in 1890, and was closely followed by *Le Carillonneur* in 1891. His last novel,

L'Arbre, was published in 1898, almost simultaneously with *Le Miroir du Ciel Natal.*

Ostensibly a faithful son of the Roman Catholic Church, the "painful riddle of the earth" remained to Rodenbach a problem to which the human mind was incapable of furnishing an answer. The mysticism, ever inherent in Catholicism, only attracted him. In its dogmas his spirit found no anchorage. Destiny throughout the whole course of his works appears only as a force inscrutable and malignant. The wealth of his ecclesiastical vocabulary often merely disguises the Hamletism with which his mind is

saturated. The memorable paradox, by means of which Thiers elucidated his theological position in describing himself as a Papist although not a Christian, may serve to define Rodenbach's attitude, at least, so far as exact doctrine is concerned.

Exhausting the literary possibilities of his own vein, he has escaped the vulgarization which inevitably pursues the footsteps of the founder of a cult. The dead towns of Flanders are transformed into literary soil upon which it would be a species of profanity to trespass. They live now imperishably enshrined in that inimitable style, which reflects with such fidelity the

delicate intricacies of the lace work that he loved.

That into much of Rodenbach's work is interwoven the taint of the *décadent*, it would be hardihood to deny. Engulfed in the whirlpool of Parisian literary life, his assimilative temperament was not proof against the influences which upon all sides encompassed him. Yet when he returns to the Flanders which at heart he loved, the neurotic elements that have been interwoven into his works undergo a drastic process of attenuation.

To the superficial analyst of Flemish character, the development of so baffling a personality as that of

Rodenbach among the phlegmatic countrymen of Teniers may seem something of a psychological puzzle; but for its solution it is necessary only to bear in mind that Flanders, alike in a literary and artistic sense, is, and has ever been, a land of antithesis. To take as entirely representative, the type of Fleming whose national qualities display themselves only in boisterous vigour, in kinship with the lower animals, in breadth and expansiveness, is to ignore an intensity of spiritual and imaginative feeling which nowhere receives a more profound expression than in the literature and art of Flanders.

The land which reckons among its sons a Rubens and a Jordaens, can also present the wealth of contrast afforded by the production of a Memling and a Van Eyck.

To-day the distinction remains as palpable as in the bygone centuries, when the atmosphere of mediævalism pervaded the Low Countries. The two opposing currents are represented, upon the one side, by the novels of a Georges Eekhoud and a Camille Lemonnier, in which the mirror is held unflinchingly up to nature, and upon the other, by the works of a Rodenbach and a Maeterlinck, where modernity is transfigured

by the infusion of an ethereal quality which banishes all taint of the commonplace.

What appears to be the most besetting weakness of Rodenbach is a trick of repetition, which occasionally cannot prove otherwise than exasperating to the reader. The re-employment of pet phrases is doubtless a literary vice, but it is none the less a deliberate part of his method, and is often not without a certain impressiveness. A sufficient refutation of the implied charge of a deficiency in the faculty of manipulating words, is to be found in the copiousness of his vocabulary.

In France, the country in which he died and where the most fertile years of his literary career were spent, his reputation has remained unshaken by that most severe test of the ephemeral, which is death. The circulation of his writings still extends far beyond the circles of those who are fain to make a cult of exclusiveness. Among his brother men of letters, the eulogies of an Anatole France, a Jules Lemaitre, a Bernard Lazarre, a Lucian Muhlfeld, an Achille Segard, a Gaston Deschamps, and a Huysman, speak for themselves. So far as his own countrymen are concerned, the most adequate

critical tribute to his genius has come from the pen of M. Emile Verhaeren. Throughout Belgium it may be said without fear of exaggeration, that his writings are regarded as a national possession.

A unique personality in the world of letters, Rodenbach's "wooing of sorrow as a bride" was a primary distinction of his literary individuality. His material was fraught with despondency, and the intrusion of a note of comedy would have signified the destruction of his idealism. A high-priest in the temple of melancholy, his place is among the immortals, whilst the sadness that does not cry out or strive beats in the heart of humanity.

BRUGES-LA-MORTE

PREFACE

In this impassioned study it has been my primary ambition to evoke in the form of an intangible personality the spirit of a town, endowing it not merely with the power of entering into all the fluctuating conditions of the soul, but causing it further to be an agency in guiding, counselling and determining the whole scope of human action.

Regarded from such a standpoint—Bruges—which I have chosen for this experiment, appears in a light almost

human. An indefinable spiritual ascendency establishes itself over the souls of all those who dwell within its walls.

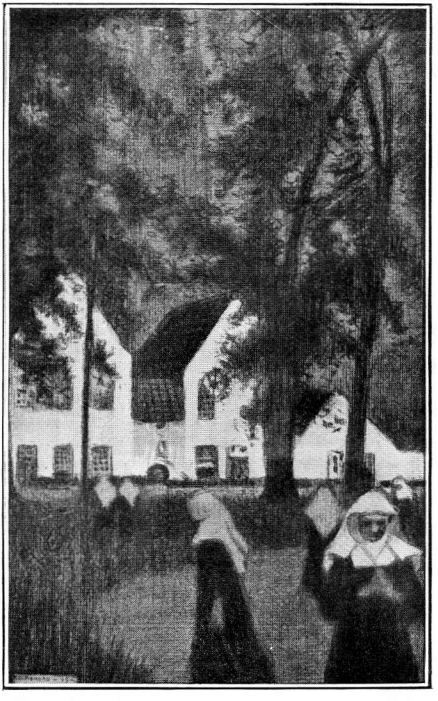
Unconsciously they become assimilated into a harmony with the languors of its waters and its bells.

The conception to which I have striven to give a certain embodiment is that of the influence exerted by a town in the whole character of its details, which are therefore indefinably linked to all the incidents contained in the narrative.

This is what constitutes the importance of the illustrations of Bruges, introduced at intervals and corresponding to the sequence of events set forth in the study. From these reproductions of its quays,

deserted streets, venerable dwellings, canals, "béguinage," churches, and belfry, it is alone possible that the imagination of the reader may be brought into sympathy with the ethos *of the town; experience the spell exercised by its air of brooding mysticism, and realise the impression conveyed by the high towers which are elongated in the text.*

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.—*The illustrations referred to in the foregoing preface have been, for the most part, omitted in this translation, as they do not appear to succeed in conveying the imaginative impression intended by M. Rodenbach.*



The Béguinage.

[*To face p.* 211.]

BRUGES-LA-MORTE

I

THE declining day had darkened the corridors of the great, silent dwelling, and demanded that the windows should be protected by the sombre, crape screens.

Hughes Viane made his preparations for the desultory ramble with which it was his wont to close the afternoon. Solitary and unoccupied, it was his custom to kill the ennui of his existence by reading a little among the old volumes that

lined the walls of the vast apartment overlooking the romantic waters of the *Quai du Rosaire* which he rarely quitted; smoking a great deal, and dreaming much at the open window of a bygone happiness.

For five years he had led this life of seclusion. Upon the day following the funeral of the wife in whom was bound up all his possibilities of happiness, he had retired to Bruges as a fastness of melancholy and there succumbed to its fascination. "Five years already!" He repeated the words aloud to himself. "I am a widower" (veuf). Brief and irremediable

word of one syllable and without an echo,—a word replete with mournful significance and giving fulness of expression to the agony of bereavement.

To him the separation had been terrible. He had experienced all the felicities of love, not merely in domesticity, but in the luxury of travel through countries whose romance had ever meant a fresh reconstruction of his idyll. The delicious tranquillity of an exemplary conjugal life had been his, while at the same time the fervours of passion had been retained undiminished by familiarity. Yet in this perfection of concord the

essential individuality of both husband and wife had been preserved like parallel quays of a canal which mingle in their reflections.

Ten years of this happiness had flown away with such rapidity, that they had remained scarcely realised.

Then upon one unforgettable morning the young wife lay dead, after an illness of but a few weeks' duration. Faded and white, like delicately polished wax, she reclined upon her last resting-place, still only on the verge of thirty years. Her husband was left alone to gaze for the last time upon the remains of the consummate beauty of her complexion and the tender-

ness of the dark eyes which now contrasted so strangely with the richness of the soft, yellow hair that in life had descended to her waist undeviatingly. It was of the same hue as that with which the Primitives endowed the Virgins they painted, and fell in the same calm and unruffled fashion.

Bending across the bier, Hughes had cut away the long tresses upon the day which was to be the witness of her interment. It seemed only an act of homage to the woman he had so passionately adored. All of her that was mortal was about to vanish, and nothing was left in his power to

preserve save the hair that in life had been so fondly cherished. All else was dust and ashes! Throughout the course of the tedious, leaden-footed years, the hair had retained its pristine freshness untainted by the lapse of time. It was now the solitary relic of her which had survived the seasons that ever craved for oblivion, and even the salt of the tears which had been shed around it had caused it to pale but little.

The widower reviewed his past in a sunless light which was intensified by the greyness of the November twilight, whilst the bells subtly impregnated the

surrounding atmosphere with the melody of sounds that faded like the ashes of dead years.

There was a blackness in the cloud of dejection which rested upon him of exceptional heaviness, and an impulse to disperse it quickened his departure. At the approach of the evenings, he derived a melancholy solace from the analogies which he devised between the mournfulness of his own destiny and that of the forsaken canals and decaying churches that instinctively attracted his footsteps.

In descending to the ground-floor of his dwelling he observed that the doors, which seemed to

multiply themselves along the corridors, rigidly closed under ordinary conditions, were flung wide open.

Through the silence, he called to his old servant, "Barbara, Barbara!"

The woman appeared almost immediately, and divining the cause of her master's summons volunteered a brief explanation.

"Monsieur," she said, "I have attended to the *salons* to-day because to-morrow is the *fête*."

"What *fête?*" demanded Hughes impatiently.

"What! does Monsieur not know that it is the *fête* of the presentation of the Virgin? I must go

to the Mass and to the benediction at the *Béguinage.* It is a day like a Sunday, and as I cannot work to-morrow I have arranged the *salons* to-day."

Hughes made no attempt to conceal his dissatisfaction. The old servant knew well that he longed to supervise the work she had so prematurely undertaken. In order to allow Barbara an unrestricted freedom of movement, all that was reminiscent of the woman whose memory had become a consecration had been consigned to these two apartments, where her presence was almost felt as a reality. When necessity compelled her to invade

this sanctuary of bereavement, Hughes's uneasiness was extreme. He wished to superintend every step of her encroachment; watch over the most trivial of her movements, and spy upon her sense of reverence for all that encompassed her. His desire was to act as guardian of the beloved objects whilst they were undergoing the, to him, vandal process of purification from the dust that had accumulated upon them. It seemed to Hughes that the fingers of his domestic were prying ruthlessly among the souvenirs transfigured by his imagination. The *fauteuils* on which she had

reclined recalled the memory of her perfect figure; the curtains kept undisturbed the folds which she had bestowed upon them; the mirrors retained in their depths the slumbering image of her beauty. Among the memorials which more vividly disinterred to Hughes the loveliness that now mouldered in the grave, were the portraits of his wife taken at different ages and scattered at various points throughout the chamber. But treasured above all other keepsakes was the hair he had snatched from the clutches of the tomb, and ever since conserved with unceasing devotion. Loved better perhaps

than in life, any injury to it would have plunged him in the uttermost depths of despair. In certain moods when apprehension obtained a sway over him, he longed to conceal it in some obscure hiding-place into which no vulgar eyes could penetrate. But the love of beholding always what was to him a visible symbol of the immortality of his love ever returned to him.

To ensure unforgetfulness he had placed upon the now silent piano of his principal *salon* the locks which still remained an incarnation of her, rescued like salvage from the shipwreck of an argosy. In his dread of their

defilement by the slightest contamination and to avert all danger of their discolouration by the humid air of the town, he had hit upon the idea of protecting them through the medium of a crystal reliquary, and upon no morning did he fail to kneel in reverence at this shrine.

To Hughes this relic had assumed almost the form of a divinity to which not merely his own fate, but even that of the inanimate objects he had grouped around it were inseparably linked.

Barbara, the old Flemish servant, austere of aspect but keenly observant of the idiosyncrasies of her master, knew well the nature of

the precautions she was expected to exercise in approaching the emblem which, in his eyes, represented the soul of the house. Holding almost no communication with her neighbours, she presented the appearance, when arrayed in her black dress and bonnet of tulle, of an elderly and ascetic nun. The only recreation in which she indulged consisted in making frequent pilgrimages to the *Béguinage*, where her only surviving relative, Sister Rosalie, presided over one of the convents.

In the course of her untiring devotions, she had acquired that noiselessness of movement which

characterizes only those whose feet tread in the ways of the sanctuary. Among the causes which had induced Hughes Viane to protract for so lengthened a period his sojourn in Bruges, his possession of a domestic endowed with so great a measure of taciturn calm was not the least. All dissonances of sound that marred the atmosphere of stillness which he loved were distasteful to him. He kept no other servant, and Barbara had gradually rendered herself a necessity to him, notwithstanding her innocent tyrannies, old-maid angularities, and occasional unwarrantable assumptions of authority, as

upon this day, when provided with no better justification than that of a *fête*, she had deranged the *salons* unknown to him and in defiance of his formal orders.

Hughes waited until he had assured himself that all the contents of the *salons* were restored to their ordinary positions. Tranquillized by this re-establishment, he then set out upon his twilight promenade although the autumnal drizzle was still descending remorselessly, penetrating like needles into the dull waters of the canals, and capturing the soul like a bird entrapped in the meshes of a snare that renders resistance a futility!

II

EVERY afternoon at the descent of dusk, Hughes's footsteps followed a prescribed itinerary. He strolled along the line of the quays with an indeterminate gait that reflected the measure of his self-absorption. Though only upon the verge of forty, the sorrow of his bereavement had expressed itself externally in unmistakable characters. His hair, already plentifully streaked with gray, had almost receded from the temples, whilst in walking he stooped heavily. As he threaded

his way through the sinuous streets, his dull eyes gazed abstractedly into a perspective which had no relation to this material existence.

Bruges itself became to Hughes the embodiment of an elegy in the pensive decline of these afternoons. The poetry of its stagnation appealed irresistibly to his imagination. The spell that had induced him to select as a home the sad Northern Venice, after the great disaster of his life had befallen him, was the charm of its poetic effeteness. In the bygone years of wedded happiness, when his existence was spent in the gratification of every fantasy that presented

itself to his mind, no shadow of despondency had obtruded itself into the sunshine of his days. But afterwards, when calamity had overtaken him, Bruges revealed itself to his mind by a sympathetic intuition as an oasis in the desert. A mysterious equation established itself between his own spirit and that of the place. In the eternal fitness of things a dead town furnished the corresponding analogy to that of a dead wife. The bitterness of his desolation demanded an environment that harmonized with its poignancy. Life in any centre of activity would have been insupportable to him.

Instinct had guided him to Bruges as the wounded animal to his lair. Elsewhere the world was an arena of strife in which nothing prevailed but discord, agitation, and turbulence. His longing was for an infinite silence into which no disturbing note ever penetrated, and an existence so exempt from feverishness that it should resemble a species of Nirvana.

In the treatment of physical suffering, the exclusion of all noise from the chamber of the invalid is recognized as the greatest of alleviators. Why, then, when the anguish of the heart is concerned, should the re-opening of rankling

wounds and the introduction of rancorous voices be permitted?

Dissonance is as fatal in ailments of the mind as it is in those of the body.

In the stillness of the calm waters and the inanimate streets. Hughes had discovered a certain nepenthe for the sorrow of his heart, and an increased assurance of the serenity of death. His surroundings yielded him an almost unlimited scope for indulgence in the reveries with which he beguiled the tedium of the hours. In the vistas of the canals he discerned the face of Ophelia rising resurgent from the waters, in all the

forlornness of her beauty, and in the frail and distant music of the carillon there was wafted to him the sweetness of her voice. The town, so glorious of old and still so lovely in its decay, became to him the incarnation of his regrets. Bruges was his dead wife. His dead wife was Bruges. Both unified themselves in a parallel destiny. It was indeed *Bruges-la-Morte*, with its abandoned stone quays woven into an idealization of melancholy by the cold arteries of the canals which had long ceased to feel the pulsation of the sea.

Yet upon this evening, as

The Death of Bruges.

[*To face p.* 88.]

engrossed in his musings he mechanically wended his way among paths which his imagination had peopled with sombre images, a sense of the isolation of his existence weighed heavily upon him. From the windows of the funereal dwellings that stretched in spectral fashion along the margins of the canals, with their gable-ends reflected like skeletons of crape in the waters, a mortuary impression was conveyed that seemed like the foreshadowing of a speedy dissolution.

Hughes lounged along the respective lines of the *Quai Vert* and the *Quai du Miroir*, and then

turned his steps to the bleak outskirts where the *Pont du Moulin* lay fringed with its avenue of poplars. The black spires of the churches everywhere projected themselves above his head like holy water sprinklers after a general absolution.

As he walked, the sad faded leaves were driven pitilessly around him by the wind, and under the mingling influences of autumn and evening a craving for the quietude of the grave and a sense of rebellion at the ineffectuality of his own life overtook him with unwonted intensity. The shadow from the overhanging towers

appeared to fall upon his soul, and a voice from the crumbling walls seemed to whisper in his ears—the water stretches before thee as it stretched in front of Ophelia in the most heart-rending of all tragedies.

Hitherto a mysterious force had rendered abortive all his longings to escape from the dreary oppression of his existence. The slow persuasion of the stones had murmured to him of a lethe into which the malignity of destiny had no power to intrude. He had realized the appropriateness of an order of things which left him without the right to survive

the death that everywhere reigned around him.

Hughes had many times seriously pondered the problem of suicide. Ah! this woman, how he had adored her! Her eyes still haunted him in the most trivial moments of his life. The melody of her voice still lingered in his ears as if descending from some aërial region into which it would be fatuity for him to hope to enter. Of what unforgiveable offence had he been guilty that after having transfigured her into an object of idolatry, he should be precipitated among those who sorrow without hope? Such a devotion as his fell

only to be included among the Dead Sea fruits, which leave in the mouth only the ashes of disillusionment.

The resistance he had offered to the temptation of self-destruction was another expression of his reverence for her memory. The religious training of his infancy had combined with this consecration to hinder him from the adoption of such a solution of the enigma of his existence. A mystic by temperament, he trusted that annihilation was not the doom of humanity, and that in a hereafter there might be even for him a renewal of happiness. The church

had placed its ban upon a voluntary death. To him suicide now signified the abandonment of all hope of reconciliation with God and the renunciation of any faint possibility of reunion with the woman he had so passionately loved.

He continued, therefore, to cling to the frail thread of his life, and even find in prayer a paradoxical balm for the wounds of his spirit. But of all consolatory influences the greatest remained the dim interiors of the churches, pervaded by the calm that is inherent in Catholicism, and from which all jarring and prosaic elements were excluded.

Continuing his devious ramble, Hughes entered the precincts of the church of Notre-Dame. It was at all times one of his most favourite resorts, owing to its sternly mortuary character. Alike upon the ground and upon the walls were ranged tumulary slabs half defaced by time, whose scratched and wrinkled inscriptions still bore a blurred testimony to the achievements of the dead. Death itself was here effaced by death!

Yet in this sepulchral atmosphere, the harrowing impression of the nothingness of life was relieved by the beatific vision of

love perpetuating itself through death. It was the transcending consolation of this reflection that brought Hughes to meditate so frequently at this shrine. Lodged at the foot of a lateral chapel were the celebrated tombs of Charles the Bold and his daughter, Mary of Burgundy. Ah! how exquisite they were!—the sweet princess especially, with her hands delicately joined, her head resting upon a cushion, and the feet supported by a dog—symbolizing fidelity. Attired in a copper robe, the figure was extended as in the rigidity of death along the surface of a massive block. In a similar

fashion, the effigy of her father was stretched in a recumbent attitude at her side, impressive in its blackness, and as Hughes gazed at the stately figures, the soothing reflection entered his mind that the day could not be far distant when his body would be mouldering in the dust beside theirs, and that the surcease from sorrow for which his heart craved would then be also his portion. Slumber side by side was the most befitting of refuges, if Christian hope was powerless to realize for wedded lovers a spiritual immortality.

Hughes quitted Notre-Dame in

a mood more oppressed by melancholy than that which had weighed upon him on entering it. The hour at which he was accustomed to take his evening meal had arrived, and he found himself almost unconsciously at the side of his own dwelling. Absorbed in the effort of endeavouring to revive within his memory the design of a tomb that his imagination had vividly constructed only a short time ago, his material surroundings had become non-existent to him. In the slow passage of the years the physiognomy of his dead wife, which at first had been retained in all the freshness of its beauty,

had little by little become so elusive, that now it was in danger of evaporating like an exposed pastel rendered almost unrecognizable by dust. Thus within the depths of our own souls the dead die a second time.

Suddenly, whilst engaged in the re-composition of the lineaments which the perfidy of recollection had half-obliterated, Hughes, to whom passers-by were no more than walking shadows, experienced a violent thrill of emotion on observing the features of a girl who was making her way towards him. During the course of her progress from the end of the

street, she had escaped Hughes's attention, and it was only upon her arrival in close proximity that the roots of his being were stirred as if by a convulsion.

Upon a closer inspection bewilderment took possession of him. It seemed as if an apparition from the grave had returned to benumb his faculties. Standing as if riveted to the spot, all else faded into nothingness. Mechanically he put his hands up to his eyes as if to chase away a dream. Then recovering a measure of self-control, he proceeded to retrace his footsteps, and abandoning the quay he was engaged in traversing,

set forth in pursuit of the being whose existence was the most startling of enigmas. He walked quickly in order to overtake her, and upon approaching stared at the baffling object of his quest with an intentness that seemed to compel recognition. Outwardly unembarrassed, the young woman continued to march impassively onwards, walking with a slow, rhythmical grace of movement and making no effort to elude the observation of her pursuer. Hughes appeared to become more and more haggard and distracted with every stage of her advance. He had followed this visitant from

another sphere for several minutes through the network of the Bruges streets, but invariably retreating when the moment for a decisive discovery offered itself. He resembled a man who on nearing a well shrinks from the contemplation of a visage reflected in its waters.

An accidental lighting up of the obscurity left him, however, without power of incredulity. The exquisite delicacy of complexion, rivalling the most perfectly executed of pastels, and the intensity of the dark eyes that gleamed, sombre and dilated, from the background of a complexion of ivory, were the

same. Whilst he walked furtively behind her, conviction was rendered more absolute by the identity of the strangely characteristic amber-coloured hair. There was the same disaccord between the unfathomable black eyes and the noontide flamboyance of the tresses.

In his bewilderment, Hughes ruminated upon the possibility that his long existence as a recluse might have impaired his sanity. Living always alone with a memory, it was not unlikely that a delusion of identification had betrayed him. The varying traits of the face which now often evaded his recollection, were suddenly thrust upon

him in a frightful conformity. All his senses reeled with the shock produced by the apparition. So complete was the resemblance, that it caused him to question the reality of his own existence.

The similarity was perfect in every detail. Not merely were there reproduced the counterparts of all the features, but the more intangible reflections of her idiosyncrasy were presented in their integrity. All the subtleties of movement that in life had given expression to the more elusive shades of the individuality of the dead woman, were here counterfeited with an exactitude that left

no apparent room for doubt as to a veritable resurrection from the grave having taken place.

With the gait of a somnambulist, Hughes continued unreflectingly to pursue this unearthly visitant through the dank labyrinth of the streets whose melancholy rendered them so dear to his soul.

Upon arriving, however, at a square from which a congeries of tortuous lanes branched off in various directions, the woman vanished phantom-like from his side.

Hughes stopped, endeavouring to inventory the emptiness, and

realizing once more the loneliness of his destiny.

The tears rose involuntarily to his eyes. Ah! how closely she had resembled the wife with whom his own heart was entombed!

III

THE plan of Hughes's existence was entirely deranged by the inexplicable nature of his encounter. Now when he endeavoured to recall the image of his dead wife, it was anticipated by that of the stranger whom he had beheld for the first time only a few days ago. Instead of being a suggestion of his beloved, she supplanted her almost wholly in his imagination.

When engaged in the ritual of his silent devotions, it was no longer the image of the dead

woman that confronted him, but that of the living who resembled her. How phenomenal was the identity of those two countenances! It was like a renewal of summer, bringing with it a resurrection of memories that had been dulled by the long frost of winter. Yet there emerged from it a likeness upon which a fresh stamp had been impressed, and that ignored the mists created by the tedious, unending days.

Hughes had now obtained a clear and unobstructed portrait of his beloved. Since the unforgettable evening upon the old quay, when there had advanced to him through

the shadows a figure in the guise of his dead wife, he had been spared all fatigue of reconstruction. Retrospect had ceased to be a struggle. The haze had vanished from his dreams. His memory required to turn itself back no farther than the twilight of only a few days ago when his eye had re-captured the dear face in all the fulness of its charm. The recent impression had fused itself into the old with a vividness that now conveyed the illusion of a real presence.

Throughout the ensuing days, Hughes felt himself weighed down by a nightmare. A woman

apparently existed who was undistinguishable from the one he had lost. Was the catastrophe that had made a shipwreck of his life only a cruel delusion, and could this be interpreted as a return from a phantom-land where, as in the old-time legends, souls are held as hostages for a season? Conjecture was only maddening. Yet there remained the same eyes, the same complexion, the same hair—exact and adequate in every particular. How *bizarre* were the caprices of Nature and of Destiny!

He longed for an opportunity of verifying this twin-like resemblance. Probably, however, he was fated

never to see her again, and the problem was one foredoomed to evade solution. The woman had apparently vanished into an impenetrable darkness. None the less, even the fleeting glimpse which he had obtained of her served to diminish the acuteness of his sense of isolation. The influence of the gleam had been to render him alike less solitary and less of a widower. Could he indeed be regarded as a widower at all, if still linked to a woman who continued to visit the earth at brief and ghostly intervals?

The hope of alighting upon this counterpart developed into a con-

stant preoccupation. He lingered wistfully around the old quay upon which he had originally encountered her, and from thence investigated the various quarters which it might be supposed she would be most likely to frequent—running the gauntlet in his journeys of discovery of the comments of all the unoccupied women who, ambushed behind muslin curtains, speculated on the cause of his explorations. Occasionally he loitered in the vicinity of the forbidding lanes among which she had been swallowed up, indulging always in an expectation of her reappearance.

A week glided away in this fashion, leaving Hughes a prey to the feverishness of frustration. Upon one Monday afternoon, however—precisely at the same day and hour of the week as that which had witnessed the first meeting—just as he had begun to recover something of his former serenity, she reappeared in front of him, walking with that balanced rhythm of movement that apparently invariably characterized her. The whole being of Hughes was filled with an even deeper sense of consternation than that which had overwhelmed him on the preceding occasion. The resemblance

appeared more appalling in the direness of its significance.

The heart of the widower stood still, as if confronted by a revelation of the supernatural. All his surroundings dissolved into nothingness. Every atom of blood in his body appeared to surge to his brain. A procession of first communicants that chanced to pass at the moment, arrayed in their white muslins and wedding veils, swam before his eyes like a mirage. He retained consciousness only of the black silhouette so clearly outlined at his side.

The woman had remarked his agitation, and gazed at him with an

air of astonishment. Ah! that gaze so strangely retrieved from the dead years. The gaze which he had believed it impossible could ever be bent upon him again and that he imagined had long vanished into the meaninglessness of the grave, was turned upon him again in all its sweetness and tenderness of devotion. To Hughes the look seemed one such as that which Lazarus after his recall from death might have bestowed upon Jesus.

Deprived of all vestige of energy, he now found himself dragged irresistibly in the wake of the apparition. Hopelessly magnetized for the moment, he understood

only that a re-incarnation of his dead wife was walking in front of him, and that it was absolutely imperative that he should not allow it to escape. It was, therefore, a necessity of the direst magnitude that he should follow in the rear, inhaling the perfume that seemed to emanate from her personality and endeavouring to rekindle the flickering taper of his life at the sunlight of her hair. The solitary task that was now left to him to discharge was to pursue her at all sacrifices, alike to the ends of the town or to the ends of the earth.

He made no effort to reason with himself, but followed in the

track of her footsteps, haunted by a breathless fear that he might again lose her amid the meandering lanes of the old town.

In the intensity of his pre-occupation, it never occurred to him to consider that there was anything reprehensible in the nature of his chase—to follow a woman: but the mind of Hughes had become firmly convinced that it was his wife that he accompanied in this sorrowful promenade, charged with the melancholy duty of escorting her to her tomb.

Wrapped up in his hallucination, the widower walked on in close

proximity to the unknown without perceiving that they had left behind them the deserted quays, and had now reached the Market-place where the black and inscrutable Beffroi defied the rapidly encroaching darkness with its dial and gold-buckler.

The demeanour of the young woman made it apparent that she was wishful to detach herself from her pursuer. She plunged swiftly into the *Rue Flamande*—so distinguished by its picturesque and lavishly decorated façades—where the black silhouette of her figure defined itself more sharply on every occasion that

she passed before the lighted windows of the shops, whose glare projected itself beyond the dim illumination afforded by the street-lamps.

Finally he saw her cross with equal briskness the intervening space, and then mount the steps leading into the theatre, whose doors opened to receive her.

Her disappearance arrested the footsteps of Hughes, who then remained standing in an attitude of abject helplessness. During the whole course of the girl's progress, he had been converted into a satellite incapable of independent action. The movements

of the soul possess, however, an impulsion of their own, and obeying one of these, he in his turn entered the vestibule into which the crowd was already thronging. The face of the woman he sought had, however, disappeared like a vision. He ransacked the office of the check-taker, hunted throughout the staircases, and peered into every outlying portion of the building. In no quarter could any vestige of his quarry be discovered. "In what mysterious fashion," he asked himself, "had she contrived to disappear?" Could it be by means of one

of the corridors, or had she fled through a side door? By virtue of the testimony of his own eyes, he was at least certain of her entrance into the theatre. In all probability she would be by this time established in front of the curtain. Doubtless she would be occupying one of the *fauteuils*, if not installed in the obscurity of one of the antiquated boxes. At all events, he must see her again. The mere possibility of being allowed to contemplate her face for an entire evening overpowered him. With this thought—containing as it did so vast an admixture of good and evil—a sensation

of vertigo swept over him. Utterly unable to resist the temptation, he dismissed all other considerations from his mind. The anomaly which must be created by his appearance at a theatrical representation attired in the mourning—of which he had habitually refused to divest himself—did not even suggest itself to his disordered mind. All sense of the befitting was lost in the vehemence of his infatuation. Returning unhesitatingly to the *bureau*, he secured a *fauteuil* and descended into the heart of the theatre.

His eyes roved quickly around in all directions, surveying successively

the various ranges of stalls; the private and then the more public rows of boxes; the galleries into which the public streamed in an ever-augmenting torrent. Nowhere was there to be discovered any trace of the woman that he sought.

Foiled, disconcerted and melancholy, the soul of Hughes rose in rebellion against the perversity of circumstance. How cruelly Destiny had jested with him. What a frightful hallucination was this face which appeared and vanished in so phantom-like a fashion. It was nothing more than a bewildering and intermittent apparition, which could be compared

only to the course of the moon as it pursued its way through alternating masses of clouds. The disturbance created by the late-comers among the audience hastening to their places amid a corresponding clashing of doors and grating of feet, jarred upon his over-wrought nerves. Yet, hoping against hope, he lacked the resolution to fly from the arena of his mortifications.

She only failed to arrive.

He now began to bitterly regret the rashness of his unreflecting intrusion into such incongruous surroundings. Many among the audience had obviously commenced

to remark his presence, and were manifesting their astonishment through the medium of an insistence of levelled opera-glasses. Throughout his sojourn of five years in Bruges, Hughes had shrunk from forming relations with any family resident in the town. His seclusion had been absolute. None the less everyone knew him by sight and was aware of the nature of the idealism to which he had professed to dedicate the remainder of his days. In this moribund city, with its sparse and unoccupied population, where each member of the community possessed a closer acquaintanceship

with the affairs of his neighbours than with those of his own, all new-comers were the objects of a sinister solicitude which strove to discover their antecedents and scatter broadcast the fruits of its researches.

The appearance of Hughes amid the garish lights of the theatre acted as the dissipation of a legend. To many among the audience it seemed nothing less than a veritable triumph of the prosaic. The portion of the audience who had invariably dismissed with a sneer the theme of the inconsolable widower, were wreathed in smiles.

Hughes, who was incapable of

diagnosing the impressions of a crowd until the arrival of the moment when they unify themselves into a collected thought, none the less felt an intuitive consciousness of degradation overpower him. There came to him the experience of a sensation as if a vase which he had striven to maintain in a condition of unsullied purity had been besmirched and shattered.

The orchestra meantime came to his rescue with the prelude to the work which was to furnish the evening's entertainment. He saw the title inscribed in large letters upon the programme of his

neighbour, *Robert the Devil*, one of those antiquated operas which still continues to maintain its hold upon the affections of provincial audiences. The opening chords were struck by the violins.

Hughes still felt himself extremely ill at ease. Since the day of his wife's death, he had excluded music from his life. The sounds of all instruments terrified him. Even the tinkle of the accordion, so pathetic in its feebleness, wrung tears from his eyes. When upon Sundays the organs of Notre-Dame and St. Walburga moaned to the roof their sense of the sorrow of the world,

his own became too deep for expression.

The music of the opera now intervened and drowned for the moment his perturbations. His deranged nerves had been exasperated by the scraping of the violins. A paroxysm of grief took possession of him, and under its empire he rose with the intention of quitting the theatre. As he did so, however, the idea occurred to his mind like a flash of inspiration that the woman he had pursued in so besotted a fashion had not yet necessarily eluded him. She had entered the building under his very eyes, and yet notwithstanding

it had been impossible to perceive a solitary evidence of her presence in any region of the theatre. The explanation was extremely simple. As she existed neither in front of the curtain or behind it, the conclusion was inevitable that her appearance upon the boards must ere long be made.

The very presentiment of such a profanation was revolting to his soul. All the fastidiousness of his temperament arose in horror at the conception of the beloved face, which had been ever to him little less than an object of adoration, being exposed to the glare of the foot-lights and the

criticism of the mob. Yet this woman had manifestly effected her disappearance by some service-door, and must, in consequence, be an actress. No other way of escape from the situation was possible. He was, therefore, doomed to behold her singing and gesticulating for the entertainment of this vulgar and motley audience. The thought of her voice flashed into his brain with an augmentation of panic. Was the completeness of this diabolical resemblance to be demonstrated even in the reproduction of the exquisitely silvery accents for the music of which he had yearned throughout

the expanse of the gray monotonous years?

A species of stupor crept over Hughes, and it was only a premonition that enabled him to sustain the tediousness of the performance. The bitterness of the end seemed looming upon the near horizon.

The acts, however, succeeded each other in the most eventless of fashions. No vestige of *her* could be detected either among the singers or amid the ranks of the bedaubed chorus-girls. Wholly uninterested in the opera, he resolved to take his final departure from the theatre at the close of

the scene with the Nuns, in which the decorative effects attached to the burying-ground caused his mind to recur into something approaching its ordinary groove. At the moment, however, of the recitative of the evocation, when the ballet-dancers impersonate the sisters of the cloister recalled from the tomb and marching in full procession, Hughes experienced a shock resembling that of a man who awakens from a trance within the precincts of a dancing-hall.

Yes! It was she; and after all this ordeal of torture only a dancer! But the thought instantaneously effaced itself from his mind. This

was his dead wife ascended from the dreariness of the sepulchre who advanced towards him, smiling and holding forth her arms.

In its very gruesomeness the environment helped to enhance the resemblance, as the *lustre* served to accentuate the dilation of the eyes, and the lights descended like a kind of nimbus around the glowing hair.

In the imagination of the widower, the dancer was transformed into the shape of a frightful apparition from the grave, upon which the curtain was speedily to descend.

Hughes, with his brain on fire,

paced wildly along the expanses of the quays—which, through the blackness of the night, the ghostly lights caused ever to stretch in front of him—haunted without remission by the miracle which he had just beheld.

. . . It was in a fashion such as this that Doctor Faustus hungered after the magic mirror in which the celestial image of his beloved disclosed itself.

IV

HUGHES had no difficulty in discovering the identity of the woman who had played such havoc with the serenity of his days. The name under which she appeared upon the play-bill was that of Jane Scott. She lived at Lille, and came twice a week with the company in which she had been allotted a part, to give performances at Bruges.

Dancers are not a class renowned for the austerity of their manners, and one evening, therefore,

impelled by the fascination of the resemblance, he ventured to accost her.

She replied without the faintest indication of surprise in a tone that revived for Hughes all the hallowed memories of the days of his wedlock. Her voice possessed exactly the same thrill and subtlety of intonation that had erstwhile endowed it with a magic which ten years of unbroken familiarity had been powerless to dispel. The demon of analogy pursued him persistently with its ironies; yet it was part of the natural law which governed the world that there should exist a pre-established

harmony of mind that corresponded in its quality with hair of such a texture and a voice so perfect in its modulation.

No evidence of oneness could be more conclusive than the dark and dilated eyeballs in their setting of ivory and the gold hair without a vestige of alloy that was matchless throughout the world. Under the microscope of a scrutiny that never relaxed, not even the most minute discrepancies could be detected between the dead woman and the living. Notwithstanding the coarsening influences ordinarily exercised by paint, powder, and the glare of the foot-lights, the

natural delicacy of Jane's complexion had been retained unimpaired. Throughout her whole bearing there existed nothing of the *insouciance* that betrays the actress. The sobriety of her toilette appeared to be the expression of a character that combined sweetness with reserve.

In his anxiety to elucidate the mystery of the resemblance, Hughes visited her several times. The witchcraft of the duality then magnetized him. He was careful, however, to refrain from returning to the theatre. Yet he none the less viewed the evening when he had been drawn by chance within

its walls as a relentance of Destiny which had brought sunlight into the bleakness of his days. At that encounter, Jane had been to him merely an illusion into which no element of flesh or blood entered—a transitory resuscitation vanishing through a fairyland of decoration into the unknown.

But acquaintanceship rendered it impossible for him to regard her from such a standpoint, and it became his desire that she should assume the place of his dead wife, dwelling with him in the shadow and attiring herself only in the most sombre raiment. What most endangered his illusion was the

theatrical garishness of Jane's apparel. A flamboyant costume was altogether incompatible with the evocation for which his heart craved.

Upon every occasion that the company in which she played arrived in Bruges, Hughes formed the habit of waiting for her at the hotel upon which she was quartered. At first the consoling mendacity of her face contented him. In the countenance of the living woman he saw that of the dead. For long periods he scrutinized her features with a melancholy joy—pondering over the lips, the hair, the complexion.

The liquid radiance of the eyes that he had believed closed for ever filled him with ecstasy. The waters were no longer stagnant—the mirror lived!

To the words that fell from her lips he listened intently, drinking in the sound of the voice which was identical with that of the one of whom he had been bereft, with the exception only of a certain dulness in some of the tones. It seemed upon certain occasions, as if the melody of the old accents came from behind thick hangings of tapestry.

With the increasing frequency of the widower's visits, another

memory obtruded itself persistently upon him. Such revelations as those of her alabaster throat; of the voluptuousness of her limbs; of the supple contours of her back, rekindled the extinct fires of his youth.

A passion of sensuality took possession of him.

His mind became more and more filled with the conviction that his wife had never really died. She had merely absented herself for a time, and had now returned in all the completeness of her personality.

When he looked at Jane, Hughes thought of the caresses

that he had been wont to lavish in a past that no longer appeared remote. In possessing her, he repossessed his wife. His life which had seemed ended with her consignment to the grave was now about to begin. In his eyes, Jane was without an existence. It was not her lips that he kissed, but those of his beloved. So complete was his hallucination that it banished all consciousness of treachery to the memory of the woman that he had adored. No fleeting shadow of scepticism disturbed the blissfulness of his illusion.

The passion to which he had

abandoned himself was consequently no sacrilege, because for him the two women had no separate existence. It was she whom he had lost and had at length regained; loved in the present as in the past; possessing the same eyes, the identical resplendence of hair, an indivisible flesh and a community of body to which he dwelt ever faithful.

The afternoons that preceded the evening performances were the hours which Hughes was in the habit of spending with Jane. But it was in the unruffled silence of midnight that he most fully realized the beatitude that had

come with this yielding up by the grave of its dead. Despite the evidences of mourning that upon all sides surrounded him, he contrived by slow degrees to persuade himself that the malignity of fate had exhausted itself, and that there now dawned in front of him the prospect of a tranquil future of domesticity into which no harsh note should intrude itself.

The memory of the delicious evenings spent in a companionship which caused the exterior world to recede into nothingness, returned to Hughes with a vivid intensity. All else effaced itself from his

mind. He became oblivious of the drizzling rain, the forsaken streets, the desolate canals, the pervasion of winter—even of the carillon announcing the death of the hours.

During these nights, he appeared to have partaken a draught of poppy and mandragora, which brought with it the balm of forgetfulness. Ten years of his life had glided imperceptibly away, and now there came before him the vision of a possible Eternity.

V

HUGHES installed Jane into the position of tenant of a smiling little house situated upon the confines of the town, which he had acquired for her. It adjoined the old windmills that still invest that portion of the outskirts with so Arcadian a charm.

At the same time, he had decided to remove her from the theatre. In this way, he could retain her always by his side at Bruges. The depth of his hallucination rendered him insensible

to the ridicule which inevitably attaches itself to the amour of a man who, after having been deserted by youth, had ultimately adopted the attitude of a disconsolate widower. For the dancer herself he entertained no affection. All that he desired was the conversion of his mirage into a reality. In his approaches to Jane, he was allured only by a craving to re-discover something which he had beheld in another—a nuance, a reflection, an attribute the origin of which was contained in the soul.

In other moods he unfastened her hair which descended like an

inundation around her shoulders, and rearranged it mentally in an imaginary skein which made a reality of absence.

Jane was utterly unable to comprehend alike the extraordinary vagaries and the prolonged reveries of Hughes. She had been struck, however, at the very commencement of their relations by the extreme consternation which he exhibited on learning for the first time that her hair was dyed, and the eager anxiety which he had displayed ever since in regard to the exact retention of the shade.

"I do not want to continue

dyeing my hair," she had observed to him one day suddenly.

He became instantly panic-stricken, and insisted that there should be no interference with its existing golden tint. In his excitement he began to fondle the beloved tresses, plunging his fingers into their depths like a miser gloating over the recovery of a treasure which he had believed irretrievably lost.

The incoherence of his explanations only added to the bewilderment of Jane's mind. "Do not alter anything!" he had implored. "It is owing to the colour of your hair that I love you.

Ah! you do not understand, you will never understand, what this hair signifies to me!"

He seemed to be upon the point of saying something more, but silenced himself in the manner of one who is on the brink of a revelation of which he dreads the results.

Since his settlement of Jane at Bruges, Hughes never permitted a day to pass without visiting her. He spent all his evenings at her house, and often supped there, notwithstanding the anger of Barbara, who complained bitterly of the repasts which she prepared only to be ignored. The old

woman feigned to believe that her master had taken his meals at a restaurant, but was in reality thrown into a condition of complete perplexity and failed entirely to understand the revolution in the habits of one who had formerly been so punctual and home-keeping.

Hughes now went out a great deal, dividing his time between his own house and that of Jane.

He altered, however, the period of his excursions from the afternoon to the evening. The change was prompted by his wish to escape from the observation of any inhabitants of the town he

might chance to encounter, who, however, were not numerous on the route that led to the secluded quarter where the dwelling of Jane was situated. No thought of self-reproach in regard to what he knew the world would view only in the light of a common *liaison*, suggested itself to his mind. Impregnably entrenched in his illusion of identity, he believed with absolute sincerity that Jane was his wife in the sight of God. It was impossible, however, at the same time to disregard the prudishness that was rampant in a provincial town, whose denizens were always ready to judge with

inexorable severity any alien who had the hardihood to defy their conventions.

In Bruges—though the most catholic of towns—the ethical standard which prevails is uncompromisingly puritanical. Even the high towers in the austerity of their outline cast the shadow of their reprobation upon the Magdalen. From the innumerable convents there seemed distilled into the atmosphere, a disdain for the weaknesses of the flesh and an involuntary glorification of chastity. At the corners of all the streets, protected by their wood and glass coverings, stood

figures of the Virgin clothed in mantles of black velvet, bearing in their hands a little flag with the inscription — "I am the immaculate!"

The sexual relations which have never received the sanctification of the Church have ever incurred its denunciation, as the most insidious of all the paths that lead to hell and the most subtle of all the evils in the armoury of the devil. Of all sins, that interdicted by the sixth and ninth commandments, bringing as they do the blush to the cheek of the penitent and causing the broken accents in the confessional,

is the one which the priest is most reluctant to condone.

Hughes knew well the Pharisaical character of Bruges, and he wished as far as possible to avoid coming into conflict with it. But in this town where all is stagnant save inquisitiveness, curiosity waxes riotous and renders the most elaborate precautions unavailing. Soon, entirely unknown to himself, he became throughout the town the target for an outbreak of virtuous reprobation. The scandal of his relations drew down upon itself from all quarters the ironies of the faithful. Even the authorities of the chapter within the cathedral

laughed, and the very gargoyles of the building seemed to jeer at the culprit as he passed, impervious alike to ridicule and condemnation.

The intrigue of the widower and the dancer provided Bruges with a sensation unparalleled in its social history. Invective speedily dissolved into ridicule. Hughes developed into the laughing-stock of the town. Raillery of every description was manufactured at his expense. No one affected ignorance of this side-splitting amour. A credulity of evil manifested itself from door to door. No story was too preposterous for acceptance. All the malignant

curiosity which in the dead towns flourishes like the grass in the forsaken streets was let loose upon him.

The grim entertainment which the population of Bruges derived from the contemplation of the *liaison*, was enhanced by the history of his long despair. Verily bathos had now claimed him for its own! This was the termination to a life dedicated to sorrow and to thoughts woven together in such a pattern as to constitute the analogy to a bouquet laid upon a tomb. To-day the mourning in which he still persisted in rendering himself ridiculous, was the most

sardonic of all mockeries upon a love that had been proclaimed to the town as eternal.

"How melancholy," exclaimed a few of the less censorious, "was the infatuation of this poor widower!" "How mysterious it was that he should be bewitched in such a fashion by a strumpet!" All her history was well-known to them. She had long been a dancer at the theatre. Upon the street the matrons of the town waxed indignant over her tranquil air, flaunting carriage, and moth-coloured hair. Every one knew where she lived and that she was visited every evening by

this parody of a disconsolate widower. A few days more and gossip would be enabled to retail the exact moments of his arrivals and departures.

As a relief to the lethargy of their existence, the prying *bourgeoises* exercised the most lynx-eyed surveillance over all the movements of Hughes. Merely by sitting at the window they were enabled through the medium of the little mirrors—which are described as the *espions* and can be discerned at the lattices of every dwelling, fixed into the exterior support—to capture all the varying expressions of the

passers-by. Into these oblique-looking glasses all the profiles from the streets instantaneously frame themselves. Smiles, thoughts, gestures, are alike reproduced in the interiors of the houses, and furnish material for discussion to the inmates.

All the comings and goings of Hughes were rendered by the treachery of the mirrors the property of every inhabitant of Bruges, and no detail of the concubinage in which he lived with Jane was allowed to pass uncommented upon by them. The *naïve* precautions with which, in his ignorance of the fury of the

tempest of inquisitiveness raging around him, he endeavoured to safeguard himself against exposure only served to cover with an increase of absurdity the *liaison* that was, however, again passing from a subject of comedy into one of denunciation.

Profoundly unconscious of the virtuous indignation of which he was the victim, Hughes continued at the decline of every afternoon to pursue his way by means of elaborate *détours* to where Jane's house slept upon the fringe of the town.

His perambulations had now become less lugubrious than of

old. He traversed the different windings of the town, pausing to brood upon the parapets of the ancient bridges, and again losing himself in reveries upon the mortuary quays, from whose waters there returned to him a sympathy of despondency. In these Jacques-like moods, the evening bells ever sounded to him an obit of lamentation. Ah! these bells so lulling in their melody, and yet distancing themselves from him into a remoteness as if in their essence belonging to another sphere in which he had been allotted no portion.

After the overflowing of the

water-ways, the tunnels of the bridges seemed saturated in cold tears, and the poplars at the edge of the waters quivered plaintively like frail spirits threatened by calamity. Hughes felt no longer the sorrow which lay at the heart of all the objects that environed him. He perceived no more the town rigid as if in death and swathed in the countless intersections of its canals.

This town of old time—this Bruges-la-Morte — whose destiny in its utter bereavement had seemed always to furnish a parallel to his own, transfigured itself in his eyes as a veritable temple in

which melancholy sat enshrined. As his footsteps conducted him slowly homewards, he consoled himself with the reflection that Bruges had also reascended from the tomb, and was in reality a new town that had arisen upon the relics of its predecessor.

It was the cherishing of this delusion that rendered him throughout the whole course of his visits to Jane absolutely impervious to any sentiment of remorse. No suspicion of the travesty he was enacting disturbed him. The closest approach to a true consciousness was a sensation akin to that experienced by a widower,

when upon the attire of a fellow-mourner there gleams the incongruity of a red rose.

VI

HUGHES pondered frequently upon the mystery of the resuscitation which had revolutionized his existence. Jane corresponded to the two contradictory necessities inherent in human nature—habit and the love of novelty. Habit is the primary law which regulates human existence, and Hughes had been so enslaved by it that his destiny had been fixed irremediably. After ten years of constant companionship with a woman to whom he

had been absolutely devoted, he had been rendered utterly unable to accommodate himself to her absence. His only resource was the attempt to discover suggestions of her in other countenances.

As a counterbalancing force, the love of novelty is equally instinctive. Even a monotonous happiness waxes fatiguing. One of the paradoxes of human nature is its passion for the irreconcilable. In the recklessness of our dealings both with health and happiness, this craving for mutability exemplifies itself frequently in our destruction of both. Love, also, is subject to these oscillations of feeling, and

gains strength in the intermittence of itself.

Resemblance, however, is the link which harmonizes these conflicting tendencies, and reduces them to their just level of equality. Likeness may thus be described as the force which assimilates habit and the love of novelty. In the region of love this subtle amalgam operates with especial power. No fascination is more irresistible than that of a new woman, who arrives clothed in a beauty which formerly had belonged to another.

To Hughes, such reflections had been rendered a source of enjoyment by virtue of the long solitude which

had made him a connoisseur in all nuances of the soul. Was it not for the underlying sentiment of analogy that he had chosen this Niobe of cities as the most befitting of all refuges in which to live out the term of his abandonment?

He was endowed with what might be described as the sense of resemblance, which attaches together by a series of subtle associations material with invisible things—interweaving the boughs of the trees into his conception of Paradise, and creating an immaterial telegraphy between his own soul and that of the inconsolable towers.

The sea, likewise, had withdrawn

itself from Bruges, and in that desertion he perceived another confirmation of the identity of his own fate with that of the town.

It was nothing less than a phenomenon of resemblance this merging of his destiny into that of the grayest of gray towns.

An ineffable charm of melancholy rests always upon the gray Bruges streets, over which there broods always the sentiment of an All Saints' day. The gray blends and contrasts with the snowy caps of the nuns and the black cassocks of the priests, who pass and repass almost unintermittingly. The paramountcy of the colour invested

Bruges with the mystery of a half-eternal mourning.

At the ends of the streets, the façades merged themselves into the infinite—some of these had acquired a pale green shade where the faded bricks had been painted with white, but all around others were black, which relieved in their severity of character the garish tones of those they adjoined. The effect of the combination was another manifestation of the gray which stretched in a soft, almost imperceptible haze to where the old walls reveal the shrunken dimensions and faded glories of the city.

The very sound of the bells conveyed an impression of blackness to the imagination—descending into space they finally dissolved in a crash which died slowly along the vistas of the canals.

Notwithstanding the multitude of reflections which were mirrored in the waters—corners of blue skies, red tiles of roofs, snow of swans, green of poplar trees—all were unified into tracks leaving the effect of an uncoloured silence.

In Bruges, by virtue of a climatic miracle, there exists a reciprocal penetration due to some unknown chemistry of atmosphere which neutralizes colours that are too

accentuated in hue, and subdues them into an overhanging unity of a nocturne in gray.

It seems as if by the intermingling in an occult alliance of the ever-recurring fogs; the dull light that descends from the northern skies; the humidity that ensues from the excessive rains; the granite of the quays; the sheddings of the bells; that there is evolved the colour of the air. Slumbering together also within this ancient town, united by the sympathy of a common abandonment, repose the ashes accumulated by the centuries and the legacy of the dust of the sands

bequeathed by the retreat of the sea.

It was the influence of this inarticulate pathos that had been mainly instrumental in prompting Hughes to plant his hermitage within these crumbling walls. Sheltered here against the hostility of fate, he had been content that his energies should dwindle imperceptibly away under the dominion of the decay that everywhere held empire around him, until his final dissolution as a wan soul undistinguishable in colour from that of the town.

Now a chance encounter had turned the current of his thoughts

into an inverse channel. By what manœuvre of Destiny had there emerged, in this Bruges which he had entered as a shipwrecked widower void of aspiration, so miraculous a resuscitation, renewing a past which he had long deemed to be resting in the grave?

Occasionally he speculated as to what awaited him in the future, living as he did under the shadow of the supernatural, but the intoxication of the resemblance of Jane to his dead wife again recurred to divert his reflections, strengthened by the influence of the passion for analogy which led him to identify himself with the dead town.

VII

DURING the flight of the months that had elapsed since Hughes's first encounter with Jane, nothing had occurred to dispel the fiction which then sprang into being. His attitude towards life had, in consequence, become entirely altered. Despondency weighed upon him no longer. The conception he had formed of existence as a solitude in an unpeopled immensity was entirely dissipated. His beloved, whom he had deemed eternally separated

from him, had returned in all the refulgence of her beauty. He discovered in Jane what is revealed to the poet by the depths of the waters or the lustre of the moon: as yet no foreboding of evil, resembling the shivering of the leaves before the chill autumn blast, had cast a shadow upon this revival of his happiness.

Yet it was still the dead that he continued to honour in the shape of this simulacrum of herself. Never for an instant had he wavered in his fidelity to his cult. Upon the morning of every anniversary of his wife's death he tendered his devotions—as if along

stations on the way of the cross of love—before the relics that he had so sedulously conserved. In the hushed silence of the *salons*, with the blinds only partially open and the furniture rigid as statuary, he passed in a species of adoration before the different representations of his dead wife. A photograph depicting her in the bloom of early girlhood before the advent of their betrothal; a large pastel inserted into the centre of a panel which the light alternately hid and exhibited in an intermitting silhouette; another photograph contained in an emerald setting and placed within an alcove

pourtraying her drooping—with the languor of the lily in its decline—under the etiolated aspect imparted by illness in later years: served to comprise the collection. Hughes stooped down and kissed them reverently, like a worshipper before a table on which are deposited the most sacred reliquaries.

At the commencement of every morning, he wrapped himself up in contemplation before the crystal coffer in which the hair of his dead wife was preserved. It was only upon extremely rare occasions that he ventured even to remove the lid. Merely to expose it had assumed in his eyes the character

of a profanity. This hair was the only memorial from her person which had escaped the hunger of the tomb, and he derived a melancholy gratification from the thought that it enjoyed a more perfect repose in this coffer of glass. To handle it appeared to him an act of sacrilege. Regarding it as he did, as the guardian-angel of the house, the thought that it was present and intact fully sufficed for him.

Profoundly indifferent to the passage of time, Hughes beguiled the tedious hours by the revivifying of memories which contrasted luridly with the sombre

texture into which the decline of his existence had been woven: whilst above his head there emanated from the holy-water sprinkler attached to the chandelier the germ of a little plaint.

Afterwards he went forth to the house of Jane, which now constituted the last station in the embodiment of his cult. The hair of Jane was abundant and living in the fulness of the resplendence which had enthralled him in the distant years. In her he saw the portrait whose features most closely corresponded to that of his dead wife. Ever hankering after devices that might contribute towards

rendering the illusion more complete, a *bizarre* conception one afternoon took possession of the mind of Hughes. Not merely had he preserved in all their integrity the various portraits, trinkets, and objects of every description belonging to his wife, but in compliance with his orders they had been distributed throughout the house in the fashion best calculated to create the illusion that she was on the point of returning after a brief absence. Nothing whatever connected with her had been disposed of. A chamber was kept scrupulously in readiness for a possible return, with the sprigs of boxwood

blessed by the priest upon Palm Sunday annually renewed. The linen, which in life had formed a portion of her wardrobe, was stored away in the drawers, and so effectually safeguarded against mustiness by the perfume-bags that it had remained only a little yellowed by the lapse of years. In the cupboards were suspended the dresses — now faded and immobile—that in life had served to enhance the beauty of their owner.

Only at rare intervals did Hughes disturb their repose. Yet bent always on the eternalization of his sorrow, no relic was ever wholly neglected by him.

Like faith, love nourishes itself in the fulfilment of small observances. The longing to see Jane attired in one of his wife's old dresses, which had taken such deep root in his mind, made rest an impossibility to him. By the effect of the imposition of his wife's costume to that of her person, the identification would be rendered complete. The resuscitation in its perfection would then represent a parallel to the Grecian legend of Alcestis rescued by Hercules from the grasp of the King of Terrors.

It would be the transcendent moment of his life if he were

permitted to behold Jane advancing towards him apparelled in this fashion, annihilating alike time and reality, and bestowing upon him the beatitude of forgetfulness.

The picture developed itself into an obsession within his mind which he found himself powerless to uproot.

Unable any longer to struggle with the temptation, he one morning requested his servant to bring down from the attic a trunk in which he proposed to convey the dresses from his own house to that of Jane.

"Is Monsieur going away from home?" demanded Barbara, who

was utterly unable to comprehend the new mode of existence into which her master had drifted. After the secluded life which he had led for so many years, the only conclusion that she was able to arrive at was that he was afflicted with some form of temporary derangement.

She assisted him, however, to unhang the dresses and clean from off them the dust which accumulated so rapidly in the cupboards, where they had remained unmolested for so many years.

He ultimately selected the two dresses which had been the last purchases made by the dead

woman, and, after carefully smoothing out the creases, deposited them in the trunk.

Barbara, to whom his entire proceedings were an unfathomable mystery, was none the less shocked to see such handling of garments which she had never been allowed even to touch. Was he intending to sell them? Unable to suppress her feelings, she resolved upon hazarding an observation.

"What would the poor lady have said!"

Hughes stared at her, and then grew pale with a momentary feeling of apprehension. Had she divined the truth? What

was the exact extent of her knowledge?

"What was that you said?" he inquired in a manner that betrayed his trepidation.

"I remember," replied old Barbara, "that in the Flemish village from where I come, there was a tradition that if the clothes of anyone who had died were not sold during the following week, it became incumbent upon the relations to keep them during their own lifetime under the penalty of having to maintain the soul of the defunct in purgatory until the arrival of their own day of departure."

"Do not be alarmed," said Hughes reassuringly. "I have not the slightest intention of selling anything whatever. I approve very much of your legend."

Barbara was overwhelmed with consternation when a little while afterwards, notwithstanding all that her master had said, she heard him summon a *fiacre*, and drive off on his incomprehensible errand.

Hughes was reduced to a condition of perplexity as to the best means of broaching his extravagant conception to Jane. Restrained by the reverence which he entertained for the memory of his dead wife, he had never spoken to her of his

past, or made the most distant allusion to the resemblance which constituted the problem of his existence.

Upon the depositing of the trunk, Jane danced around it, breaking out at the same time into a series of ecstatic little exclamations. "What a surprise! Filled, of course! Surely presents! Perhaps a dress!"

"Yes, dresses," Hughes answered mechanically.

"Ah! this is kind of you. Then there are more than one?"

"Two."

"What are the colours? Quick! Let me see!" continued Jane,

rushing up to him with her hands extended for the key.

Hughes was entirely at a loss to know what to say. He did not dare to speak from the apprehension that he might betray the cause of the madness of the impulse to which he had yielded.

Jane proceeded to open the trunk and extract the dresses. She appraised them with a comprehensive glance, and then turned to Hughes brimful of disappointment.

"Why have you brought such ugly patterns?—and they are old, old! Are the things that correspond to them here also—the petticoat and draperies?

Why, it must be ten years since anyone has worn them; I think that all you can intend is to turn me into a laughing-stock."

The reception accorded to his experiment intensified Hughes's sense of discontent. He sought vainly within himself for an explanation that might serve to disguise the real motives that prompted his gift. The preposterousness of his idea began to dawn upon him; yet none the less he clung obstinately to it.

The mere possibility of her consenting to don one of the dresses filled him with rapture. To behold her in the attire of his

dead wife, creating a resemblance so perfect that all sense of incredulity should be banished, would be to him nothing less than a foretaste of Paradise.

He endeavoured in cajoling accents to persuade her. Yes; they were old dresses that had been handed down to him along with his inheritance . . . originally they had belonged to his mother. He had thought perhaps that it might give her pleasure to have them. The idea that they would become her had occurred to him, and he wished to see her arrayed in one of them, if only for a minute. Of course

it was ridiculous, but the whim had taken possession of him.

Jane had no suspicion of the real nature of the object that had induced his phantasy—only the absurdity of it appealed to her. Amid intermitting outbursts of laughter, she kept turning and re-turning the different articles that composed the amazing presentation which had just been made to her. The quality of the stuffs in their faded richness compelled her admiration, but she was plunged into ecstasies of merriment by the obsoleteness of their appearance, which, however, reflected what was regarded as the most elegant

of modes only ten years previously.

Hughes meanwhile continued to persist in his importunities.

"It will only lead you to make the discovery that I am ugly," was Jane's reply.

At first she had been bewildered by the singularity of the caprice, but at last entered into what appeared to her the spirit of the jest. Amid continued paroxysms of merriment, she consented to disrobe and re-attire herself in one of the two dresses, which were *décolletés* in their shape. Frolicking in front of the mirror, Jane laughed again at the figure she cut.

"I look," she said, "as if I had just walked out of an old portrait."

Then a freak of strutting mincingly around the room, contorting her body at the same time into a variety of lascivious attitudes took possession of her. From this, in an augmenting effervescence of animal spirits, she proceeded to mount upon the table in order to have a more conspicuous view of herself; to elevate her petticoats and shake her throat violently, whilst maintaining at the same time throughout the whole course of the pantomime an unceasing giggle.

Hughes contemplated her antics unflinchingly. The moments which he had pictured to himself as certain to be fraught with rapture, were rapidly dissolving themselves into anti-climax and contamination. Jane's enjoyment from the masquerade in which she had been persuaded to indulge began perceptibly to increase. She now resolved upon experimenting with the other dress, and in a fresh ebullition of gaiety commenced to dance frantically, multiplying the number of her Bacchante-like movements and renewing her gambols after short recurrent intervals of breathlessness.

The anguish of soul which the widower had experienced at the beginning of the performance, was effaced by an impression of assistance at some sardonic burlesque. For the first time in the history of his relations with Jane the physical conformity had failed to suffice. The fascination dominated him still, but there had been imprinted upon it a foreshadowing of disillusion. Wrapped up in his conception of identity, the vulgarity of Jane had never been apparent to him. Now, however, there had been engraved indelibly upon his mind a hideous caricature in which all that he held most sacred was

dragged down to the lowest abyss of debasement, and that in defiance of the retention of the same countenance and the same dress. It was a similar impression to that which is experienced after days of pious processions when we encounter in the course of the evenings the bearers of the Saints and the Virgin still apparelled in their costume of the morning, but fallen from the heights of spiritual impersonation into an anti-climax of debauchery under the light of the street-lamps, whose wounds bleed in the shadow.

VIII

UPON Easter Sunday old Barbara was informed by her master that he intended neither to dine or sup at his own house upon that day, and that, consequently, she was at liberty to dispose of it in whatever way best suited her. The intelligence caused the heart of Barbara to rejoice within her, as this unexpected holiday coincided with the celebration of the *grand fête*, and she would thus be enabled to go to the *Béguinage* and be present at the different

offices that appertain to the festival —the grand mass, the vespers, and the benediction. Afterwards she could spend what remained of her time in the domicile of her kinswoman, Sister Rosalie, who presided over one of the largest of the convents that abound in this most romantic of enclosures.

It was from these visits to the *Béguinage* that Barbara derived the chief happiness of her existence. Every one knew her there. All the friends that she possessed in the world were *béguines*, and it was her supreme ambition—towards the realization of which she made strenuous economies in order to

amass the requisite sum demanded by the order—to take the veil and terminate her days in the placid felicity enjoyed by those whom she saw around her attired in the cap that accorded so perfectly with the ivory hair of age.

The exhilarating crispness of March was in the air as Barbara pursued her way exultingly towards her beloved *Béguinage*, apparelled in her black mantle and a hood that oscillated upwards and downwards as she walked.

From the distance arrived the tollings of the bells that seemed in an indefinable manner to harmonize with her gait, and among

them, at intervals of a quarter of an hour, the tremulous melody of the carillon suggesting an air extracted from a keyboard of glass.

The advent of spring had invested the environs of Bruges with a pastoral aspect that appealed passionately to the heart of the old woman. Although Barbara had been for more than thirty years the inhabitant of a town, she retained in her heart like all Flemish rustics the memory of her native village—a peasant soul whom the sight of meadow or leaf touched to its inmost depths.

The morning was unsurpassable in its beauty. With a glad step

she advanced, buoyed up by all the pervading influences around her—the unflecked clearness of the sky; the joyous warbling of the birds; the fragrance issuing from the young shoots which were already clothing in a unity of soft greenery alike this *faubourg* and the banks of the romantic expanse of the Minne-water (usually translated as the lake of love—*le lac d'amour*—though more accurately it ought to be rendered the lake upon which all love). Fringed by the water-lilies that seem to symbolize the hearts of young communicants, the mere stretched before the eyes of Barbara like a vision of enchant-

ment. Alike from the banks garlanded with flowers; the tender foliage of the trees; the windmills that gesticulated upon the horizon; there radiated an influence that dispelled the mist of years, and in imagination the feet of the old woman were once more traversing the meadows that she had trod in her childhood.

In the bosom of this pious soul there burned that type of religious zeal peculiar to Flanders, where there still lingers a remnant of the morose Spanish Catholicism that has always based the maintenance of its spiritual ascendency upon the awakening of a dread of hell

rather than upon the arousing of an aspiration towards Heaven. This element has never, however, been sufficiently powerful to eradicate such attributes as the love of sumptuous ritual, the passion for flowers, the delight in incense, the revelling in gorgeous costume, which are inborn in the Flemish race. The imagination of the inarticulate old domestic—coloured as it was by the innate possession of these qualities—was stirred into ecstasy by the closeness of her approach to a temple in which they received such refinement of expression. Her heart beat high within her as she crossed

the arched bridge of the *Béguinage* and penetrated into the mystic enclosure.

Within the silence of a cathedral prevailed. From the outer world came only stifled murmurs dispersing themselves in the lake, and arriving within the court only as the mutter of monks that pray. The walls that encircle the retreat are low, in the fashion that prevails in regard to the architecture of convents, and white as the cloth upon which the Sacrament of the Lord is dispensed. The centre of the enclosure is occupied by a vast plot reflecting the charm that disengages itself from a meadow

imbedded in a canvas painted by Jean Van Eyck, in which there browses a sheep wearing the aspect of a Paschal Lamb.

The streets—upon every one of which has been bestowed the title of a Saint—entangle and elongate themselves into the form of a reconstruction of a hamlet of the Middle Ages—a little dead town within the confines of a dead town, but more trance-like still. So perfect was the sovereignty of the stillness that the intruder unconsciously spoke low, and trod softly as if in the chamber of an invalid.

So incongruous was the introduction of even a vociferous note

within the precints, that it conveyed an impression akin to that of profanity. From a standpoint of absolute harmony, only *béguines* ought logically to be permitted the right of movement in this sanctuary. To them only has been imparted the art of gliding instead of walking, which causes them to be the embodiments of the analogy to the clusters of swans that glide along the dark waters of the canals. A few sisters, uncharacteristically tardy in their devotions, were hurrying along a little avenue of elms as Barbara neared the church, from which was already emerging the music of the organ and the

chant of the mass. She entered at the same time that the *béguines* took their accustomed places in the stalls set apart for their use—a double range carved in wood and situated at the side of the choir. As the sun traversed the windows, the caps of the sisters seemed fused together in a snowy unity by the counter-drawing red and blue reflections which streamed through the windows. Barbara gazed with envious eyes at the kneeling groups of the community, brides of Jesus and servants of God, in the hope that at no distant day she might be privileged to share in their orisons.

The old servant seated herself in

one of the lower aisles of the church amid a cluster of the laity, formed by devout and impoverished families who had found a shelter within the walls of the *Béguinage*, from which the inhabitants had begun to withdraw themselves. Barbara, who did not know how to read, employed herself in telling her beads upon a large rosary, praying with extreme unction, and regarding admiringly her relative, Sister Rosalie, who occupied the second place in the stalls next to the Reverend-Mother.

The church was beautifully illuminated throughout with wax tapers. At the moment preceding the arrival of the offertory, Barbara

purchased one of the little wax candles from the Sœur Sacristine, who placed them in the neighbourhood of one of the votive candlesticks, where soon the offering of the old servant burned in its turn.

From time to time she observed the progress of the consumption of her taper, which she had carefully individualized at the outset from those kindled at the suggestion of the others.

Her happiness was without alloy. How true was the lesson that she had learned from the priests that the church was in reality the house of God, and of all churches of none was it so true as of this *Béguinage*,

where the sisters in the organ-loft sang with voices of such angelic purity.

Barbara denied herself the gratification of hearkening to the strains of the harmonium which unfolded themselves in tones of a purity that corresponded to the snowiest of linen.

The mass, however, was quickly concluded, and the lights extinguished.

Then with a rustling of their caps the *béguines* took their departure in one general movement, like that of a flock of gulls in search of another resting-place. Barbara followed at a respectful distance

in order to render manifest her sense of regard for her relative, Sister Rosalie; but after having seen that the swarm had re-entered the convent, she quickened her steps, and a moment after passed through the portals in her own turn.

The *béguines* are dispersed in groups of varying number among the different dwellings, which are the property of the community. In one of these habitations only three or four may be stationed, and in another the numbers can range from fourteen to twenty. The convent to which Sister Rosalie was attached was one of the largest

in the enclosure, and as Barbara made her appearance all the sisters were engaged in laughing, talking, and interrogating one another in the workroom of the building. In honour of the *fête* every quarter of the apartment was embellished with designs in needlework and lace. A few had strayed into the little garden attached to the workroom, and were examining the growth of the tender spring flowers. Several of the younger sisters were occupied in discussing the presents, and rejoicing in the Easter-eggs with their coating of sugar that gave an illusion of hoar-frost. Barbara, who felt a little overawed

and dreaded to appear intrusive, went in search of her kinswoman from chamber to chamber. She was in the habit upon occasions such as this of receiving an invitation to the dinner, and feared that it might not be extended to her. A number of relatives often visited the convent upon Easter Sunday, and it was possible that no place might be left for her.

Her apprehension was, however, speedily removed by Sister Rosalie, who came at the request of the Superior to ask her to remain as usual. She apologized for having been unable to attend to her previously, in explaining that it was

her week of house-keeping—it being the practice among the *béguines* to perform this duty in a regular weekly rotation.

"At dinner we shall be able to talk," Sister Rosalie added. "I have something to tell you which is of very great importance."

"Of great importance?" queried Barbara, in accents of dismay. "Why cannot you tell me now?"

"I have no time. It must wait till afterwards."

She then glided away, leaving the old servant struck with consternation. Something of very great importance! What meaning could underlie such words? It

must be some calamity! But she was rendered proof against calamity by the fact that there was no one in the world to whom she was attached with the exception of her relative, Sister Rosalie.

Of what had she been guilty if retribution was descending upon her? What could she accuse herself of? She had never defrauded anyone of a farthing. In the confessional, she was frequently at a loss to know what sins to impute to herself.

Barbara's perturbation increased with her reflections. Sister Rosalie had spoken to her with a severe and sombre expression of countenance.

All joy had vanished from the beautiful day to which she had looked forward so eagerly. She had no longer any heart to laugh or wish to share in the gaiety of the groups that laughed, chattered, and debated whilst regarding the novelty of a lace pattern displayed in front of them.

Seated apart and solitary, she meditated over the nature of the revelation that Sister Rosalie was about to make to her.

The arrival of dinner did nothing to alleviate the agonies of Barbara's suspense. It was served in the long refectory, but after grace had been said in a sonorous voice, she

found herself able to eat little, and that without enjoyment. In this again she was altogether exceptional, as both the relatives who had been invited in honour of the festival and the rosy-cheeked *béguines* did ample justice to all that was placed in front of them. In the hope of mitigating her anxiety, Barbara drank off a glass of the luscious Tours wine which had been poured out at her elbow, but a headache was the only result of the experiment.

The repast appeared interminable. At the moment of its conclusion, she hurried to Sister Rosalie with a look that was an

interrogation. The *béguine* at once remarked her agitation and endeavoured to calm her.

"It is nothing, Barbara. Do not alarm yourself so."

"What is it?"

"Oh! nothing very much; only a warning that I cannot avoid giving you."

"You have frightened me terribly."

"I may say that the matter is not one of great importance at the present moment, but it may easily become so. It is this. It is possible that you may require to leave your present situation."

"Leave my present situation!

Why should I do that? I have been M. Viane's housekeeper for five years. Through his unhappiness I have become attached to him, and he leans upon me. There is not a more honourable man in the whole world."

"Ah! my poor girl. How simple you are. Well—he is not the most honourable man in the whole world."

All trace of colour had vanished from Barbara's face before she put the fatal inquiries.

"What is it that you mean to say? What wickedness has my master done?"

Sister Rosalie then proceeded

to narrate the history of the *liaison*, which after becoming the scandal of the town had ultimately found its way even into the chaste enclosure of the *Béguinage*. All the world had admired the devotion to a memory of a man who for its sake had rejected all forms of consolation. Ah, well! he had ended by consoling himself in a most abominable fashion. He was now maintaining openly a mistress—an old opera dancer and a wicked woman.

Barbara shook from head to foot. Every sentence awakened an internal revulsion within her; but she reverenced her kinswoman,

and these revelations, otherwise so incredible, became authoritative in issuing from her mouth. Here, then, was to be found the explanation of the revolution in her master's habits which she had so completely failed to comprehend. This was the solution of the riddle created by his mysterious departures and returns; his untasted meals, and nocturnal absences.

After a pause, the *béguine* continued:

"Have you reflected, Barbara, that it is impossible for you, as a respectable servant and a Christian woman, to remain any

longer in the service of a man who has degenerated into a libertine?"

At that word, Barbara broke out in protestations. It was preposterous. Her relative was the dupe of a tissue of calumny. Her master still idolized the memory of his wife! Every morning with her own eyes she saw him weeping alike before her portraits and the reliquary that contained her hair.

"I have told you no more than the truth," answered Sister Rosalie calmly. "I know everything. I know the house in which the woman lives. It is situated

on my way into town, and I have seen M. Viane both entering and leaving it several times."

This was conclusive. Barbara was overwhelmed. She made no attempt to reply, and remained standing with a puckered forehead, weighed down with the magnitude of the revelation.

"I shall reflect," were the only words she was able to command. Meanwhile her relative, harassed by the occupations of office, bade her good afternoon and quitted the apartment without further exhortation. The old servant sat on alone, prostrated by disclosure to which she had just

listened. To her it was little less than a catastrophe, deranging her plans for the present and extinguishing her hopes for the future.

In the course of her long service, she had learned to feel a certain affection for her master, and the idea of leaving him was altogether distasteful to her.

She could not hope to find any other situation which would be at once so easy and so lucrative. In her present position of housekeeper, she had been enabled by means of economies to set aside a substantial proportion of the sum that was indispensable before she could hope to end her days in

the *Béguinage.* None the less, Sister Rosalie was indisputably right. It was a form of complicity with sin to continue any longer in the service of a man whose life was a scandal to the town.

She knew well that it was forbidden to serve in the households of the impious who repudiated the doctrines of the Church. The prohibition must apply also to the adulterers. They committed an even grosser sin, and one that she had heard more frequently anathematized from the pulpit. The gates of Hell—thundered the preachers—yawned for such evil-doers. Barbara

blushed scarlet at the thought of even tacitly sanctioning such flagrant licentiousness.

The old servant found it impossible to arrive at any definite decision. Her perplexity throughout the whole course of the vespers and the solemn benediction — for the sake of participating in which she had returned to the church along with the *béguines* — was complete. She prayed to the Holy Ghost for guidance, and upon taking her way homewards an answer was vouchsafed to her supplication.

Finding that the problem with which she was called upon to deal

was altogether beyond her own powers of judgment, she resolved to submit it to her father-confessor in the Church of Notre-Dame, and abide by whatever solution he arrived at in regard to it.

The priest, to whom she confided every particular, understood thoroughly by virtue of an experience of many years, the rugged and self-torturing nature of the poor servant who loved to hedge herself around with scruples and to whom the crown of thorns was the most living of Christian symbols. Anxious to soothe her agitation, he urged her to do nothing rashly. Even if the rumours bruited abroad

in regard to the guilty relations maintained by her master were true, she was not necessarily called upon to be cognizant of them. But if, upon the other hand, such a source of contamination as this abandoned woman was introduced into the house upon any pretext whatever—even to dine or sup—she must immediately repudiate a service ministering to depravity, and shake the dust of the house from off her feet.

Barbara asked him to repeat the distinction which he had drawn over to her twice, and then feeling satisfied that she fully comprehended it, left the confessional, and, after

offering up a short prayer within the church, returned to the dwelling in the *Quai Rosaire* from which she had set forth in the morning so full of joyous anticipation, and that now she knew well it was inevitable that she must abandon sooner or later.

Ah! how transitory are our moments of happiness! As the old servant retraced her footsteps along the disconsolate streets, sorrowing over the recollection of the green meadows, the mass, the white canticles — every incident of the day upon which the night fell appeared replete with melancholy. Now all that survived from it was

the prospect of new faces; an apprehension of the nearness of death; the picture of her master living in a condition of moral sin. She saw herself dispossessed of all hope of entering the *Béguinage* and dying upon an evening such as this in an hospital whose windows overlook the stagnant waters of a canal.

IX

THE shadow of disillusionment had rested upon Hughes since the day that he had indulged in the *bizarre* caprice of attiring Jane in one of the dresses that had been worn by his dead wife. He had defeated his own aim. Instead of creating a unity of the two women, the result had been merely a diminution of resemblance. Whilst the distance of years had intervened between them, delusion was possible, but fused together it became an impossibility. The effect of

combination was only to constitute difference.

At the commencement of his hallucination, he had been overcome by the re-discovery of the beloved face, but as time wore on the desire of completing the parallel by the establishment of the nuances tormented him.

The resemblances apparent in faces never extend to the lines or the minutiæ of the countenance. An analysis of the details demonstrates the underlying treachery of the similarity. But Hughes, who was unable to perceive that any alteration had been effected in his own standpoint, insisted upon

regarding Jane as responsible for all the flaws in the likeness, and held that a transformation of her being had taken place.

The chief among the consolations that survived was the ownership of the same eyes. But if it be true, as is reputed, that the eyes are the windows of the soul, then assuredly another soul has ousted that which belonged to the dead woman whose memory was a canonization. Jane, who at first had been vigilantly sweet and reserved, began to find the strain of the attitude extremely irksome. The habits acquired during the course of her theatrical training began to reassert them-

selves. She was no longer at any pains to repress her love of boisterous gaiety and reckless badinage. Her discontinued habits of spending the day in dishevelled attire with hair flowing around the shoulders were resumed. To Hughes the slovenliness of her ways were extremely repugnant. None the less he was so enslaved by his infatuation that he returned ever to the house, endeavouring to re-establish the resuscitation out of the mirage into which it had betaken itself. The hours otherwise appeared interminable to him. During the tedium of the evenings her voice became a

necessity to him. Yet all the words which it uttered filled him only with suffering.

Jane, to whom life presented itself under so diametrically opposed an aspect, was profoundly bored by the prolonged silences and sullen moods of Hughes. Confinement was irksome to her, and the whole attitude of her lover an insoluble enigma. Her absences from home began to increase in frequency. Often now Hughes found upon his arrival that she had not returned from the town, where she was engaged ostensibly in making purchases, gazing into shop-windows, and fitting on dresses.

He varied the hours at which he had been accustomed to make his appearance, but the house remained as silent and unresponsive as before. The question—where did she go?—became ever present to his mind. Hughes knew no one to whom he could confide the mystery that baffled him. Harrowed by misgivings of her fidelity, he found it impossible to remain in the house alone, and preferred to wander disconsolately through the maze of the Bruges streets, while there lingered any hope of her return. Dreading the unfriendly nature of the glances that were now bestowed upon him, he chose as the destina-

tions of his rambles the most remote quays, from whence, after musing under the boughs of the sad trees that fringe the margins of the canals, he lost himself once again in the tangled skein with which his steps were so familiar.

To him there was nothing more exquisite in its eeriness than the charm of the gray streets of the dead town.

Hughes felt that the subjection of his soul under this gray influence was growing more complete. The torpor of the streets added to the force of its ascendency. Often nothing more was to be seen than a few old women attired in black

mantles returning from the chapel of the Holy-Blood, where they had performed their errand of burning a taper. One of the most curious of coincidences is the number of old women who are ever to be encountered in the streets of the dead towns. With faces wearing the colour of earth, they walk so bowed down under the burden of years that apparently even the love of speech has withered within them. Absorbed in his old regrets and his new sorrows, Hughes pursued his way unconscious of their existence. Mechanically he returned to Jane's house. Still it remained without an occupant.

He recommenced his lugubrious promenade through the dirgeful streets, and from sheer lack of definiteness of intention found himself at the *Quai Rosaire* in front of his own house. Resolving to defer his visit to Jane until a later hour in the evening, he seated himself in an arm-chair and attempted to read. Finding himself, however, incapable of concentration, and experiencing a feeling of oppression from the silence of the long corridors, he discarded the volume and went out again once more.

Evening had descended, and the fog, aided by a little gentle rain, sprinkled moisture upon him as he

walked. Hughes felt drawn as if magnetized towards the dwelling of Jane; but on approaching he shrank from entering, feeling now a necessity of isolation, and dreading lest she might perchance have returned and be anticipating his arrival.

With a quick step he set off in the opposite direction, returning instinctively to the old quarters without knowing why he did so. The volume of the rain increased steadily, saturating his clothes, and drawing more closely together the network of the town. By degrees Hughes felt himself relaxing in the enervating atmosphere. His thoughts

returned to the reality of things. The image of Jane again presented itself before him. What description of refuge had she found when away from her own house in the midst of this desolation? The thought of his own death then recurred to him. This surely could not be long delayed. How desolate his tomb would be—yet what was the desolation of the tomb compared to that of his own life.

The sound of the bells were wafted towards him, muffled and thin. The town itself appeared to have receded into the distance. It, too, seemed dissolving in the rain which threatened the

submergence of all things. It was *Bruges-la-Morte* with its high towers, only surviving, and sorrowing like himself over the irretrievable.

X

In proportion to the extent that Hughes felt his illusion escaping him, his mind returned to the parallel of his own life with that of the town. He strove to bring his soul into a more perfect harmony with that of Bruges, evolving new analogies in the manner in which he had occupied the days during the earlier period of his widowhood. Now that Jane had ceased to be the counterpart of his dead wife, the identification of himself with the town became

more of a preoccupation. Much of his time was consumed in monotonous rambles through its inert streets.

The solitude of his own house now oppressed him like a nightmare. All the memories which multiplied themselves before his eyes were fraught with distemper. The very wailing of the wind in the chimneys suggested calamity. Distrustful of Jane and of his own sentiment towards her, his only avenue of escape from himself lay in distracted wanderings.

Often throughout the blank days, he asked himself the question — did he really love her? —

Meanwhile, what was the nature of the treachery she was engaged in dissimulating? Duplicity appeared to be a second nature to her? Amid the dolorous ends of the abridging winter afternoons, the incertitude racked his inmost being. The contagion of the fog entered into his soul, benumbing his faculties and rendering his life almost a gray lethargy.

The influence of the town recovered its sway over him. From all portions of it, lessons of endurance suggested themselves. The gospel of silence was urged by the immobile canals that were ennobled by the presence of the

stately swans; an example of resignation was offered by the taciturn quays in their calm acquiescence with the inevitability of decay; from the soaring towers of Notre-Dame and Saint-Sauveur descended a homily of asceticism which poured reprobation upon the libertine. Obscuring the perspective in their massiveness, Hughes instinctively lifted up his eyes to their heights as a refuge from despair, but there returned to him only a disdain for his miserable amour. "Behold us!" the towers appeared to exclaim in terms of majestic scorn. "We are guardians of the true faith!

Beauty is not ours! Yet we are citadels in the air defending the ascent to Heaven! We are the military spires, and against us the powers of evil contend in vain!"

Ardently did Hughes long to be as they were, entrenched in righteousness and dwelling in an ethereal atmosphere from which were banished all the miseries of life. But unlike the towers of Bruges, he lacked the fortitude to defy the blandishments of evil. In his impotency of will, he was frequently tempted to regard himself as the victim of a diabolical prepossession that rendered all struggle unavailing.

From past researches in the history of Satanism, he was enabled to recall many such instances of perversion of this nature. These records appeared to him to furnish an incontestable basis for a belief in the existence of occult powers, and also of certain kinds of necromancy.

There was nothing, however, in the character of his helplessness which implied a compact with the powers of darkness and a subsequent path to a retributive drama. Rather with increasing frequency, there rested upon Hughes a presentiment that death was not far from him.

He had endeavoured to baffle and mock at Death through the device of this fiction of a resemblance, and now it was but fitting that the King of Terrors should be hastening to avenge himself.

Meantime there remained the necessity of beguiling the slow oppression of the days. As he retraversed the streets that led to the different quarters of the mystic town, he discovered anodynes in the commiserative music of the bells; in the aspiration of the towers; and in the pitying welcome accorded to him by the images of the Blessed Virgin that stand at the corners of the streets in a niche surrounded by

tapers and artificial roses, and holding forth their arms in an attitude of forgiveness and absolution.

Hughes pondered daily over the problem of his infatuation. A consciousness of self-abasement rarely quitted him. He had *unfrocked* himself of his *sorrow*; but through penitence he would seek redemption. He would become again in the future what he had been in the past. Already he had succeeded in re-establishing the parallel of his destiny to that of the town. Ere long he would reinstate himself as the brother in silence and in melancholy of this elegiac Bruges, *soror dolorosa.*

What an inspiration it had been to make his dwelling-place here in the early days of his mourning. Everywhere the mute analogies suggested themselves. A reciprocal penetration existed between the soul and the inanimate things that surrounded it. Part of our being enters into them, whilst theirs unconsciously passes within us.

Towns in particular have a distinctive personality of their own, and an exterior character which corresponds to the cravings experienced by our souls for such needs — as joy, love, sorrow, or renunciation. Each town represents a condition of the soul that

unconsciously enters into our own life, like a fluid which emanates imperceptibly into the atmosphere.

Hughes had succumbed to the pallid and softening influence of Bruges from the very day of his arrival in the town. Through its operation he had become resigned to the extinction of all hope, and the necessity of living only in the past. The merciful release of death was the expectation that his imagination most fondly cherished.

Yet when the twilight fell in the depths of its sombre poetry along the vistas of the canals, he strove once more to reincarnate the spirit of the dead town.

XI

THE mediæval sentiment of faith enveloped the town as with a garment. From the roofs of the convents, the monasteries, and the hospitals, there disengaged itself a gospel of renunciation. Hughes urged upon himself the necessity of bringing his life into conformity with the behests that were everywhere issued around him. Bruges became again to him an intangible personality, guiding, counselling, and determining all his actions.

In his re-conquest of the town,

Hughes found that he had escaped in a measure from the thought of sex and the lie of the resemblance. Their ascendency over him had perceptibly weakened, and in proportion he was able to interpret the music of the bells.

As he pursued his way along the line of the quays, it descended upon his spirit in recurrent falls of melancholy. The permanence of the bells—the obit knell, the requiem, the trentaines, the announcements of mass and vespers, those denoting the passing of the hours—all combined to intensify the despondency which had become ingrained within his being.

Uninterruptedly the bells of Bruges fulfilled their function of mourners, pouring, without respite, psalmody into the air. With their music was transmitted an augmented sense of the vanity of all things; of the futility of struggle; of the imminence of death.

In the dirgeful streets where the wan lights appeared only at straggling intervals, there could be descried at scattered distances the figures of a few women of the humbler orders wearing long mantles as black as the bronze bells above them, and oscillating as they walked in exactly the same manner. The mantles moved

steadily in the direction of the churches, as if drawn together by an irresistible sympathy.

Hughes felt impelled to follow in the track of this furrow. His surroundings exercised an unconscious ascendency over him. The force of example and the will that is latent in inanimate things dragged him involuntarily towards the portals of the old churches.

Until the advent of Jane it had been his custom to meditate daily during the fall of the afternoons in the naves of these resting-places.

That of Saint-Sauveur had always possessed an especial fascination for him, with its black marble

decorations and emphasized organ-loft, from which descended the music in strains alternately appealing and majestic.

Throughout the vastness of the building, the music rolled in all its sublimity, over-flowing the flagstones and effacing the dust that had accumulated upon the inscriptions engraven upon the mortuary slabs which are scattered everywhere throughout the expanse of the cathedral. Of this edifice it may truly be said, that within its precincts our feet tread upon the ashes of the dead!

The gloom that over-shadowed every portion of the structure

remained unabated even by the wealth and variety of its possessions. The combined effect, brilliant as it would have appeared in any other building, of such marvellous pictures as those of Pourbus, Van Orley, Erasmus Quillyn, Crayer, and Seghers; of the lustre of the illuminations upon the windows; of the richness imparted by the garlands of tulips lavishly distributed at every coign of vantage, failed to detract from the stern impressiveness of its aspect. In contemplating the triptychs and altar-screens, Hughes dislodged from his mind the opulence of their colouring and the

glow of their romance for the sake of realizing more vividly the pathos that emanated from the figures of the donators standing with folded hands, and the donatresses with their cornelian eyes, of whom no memory survived save that of these portraits. All recollection of the defiling image of Jane had been banished from his mind since his entrance into the church. A picture of himself kneeling before God by the side of his beloved, like the pious donators and donatresses of old time, fired his imagination.

At the recurrence of these mystical crises, Hughes loved to retire within the walls of the

little Jerusalem chapel. It was to this diminutive sanctuary that the women in the black mantles now directed their footsteps, and he followed them unthinkingly. The nave was so low that the interior conveyed exactly the impression of a crypt. In a recess at the foot of the weird little building was contained a recumbent figure of Christ, modelled upon that enshrined in the Holy Sepulchre, resting under a shroud woven from the most delicate lace material. Around it the women in the black mantles lighted little tapers and then retired noiselessly from the building. As the shadow

fell heavily upon these wan offerings, they represented to the imagination of Hughes the stigmata of Jesus cleansing away the sins of all those who came to visit at this shrine.

Among all his resorts, however, that which he loved most was the Hospital of Saint-John, where have been garnered together a collection of the master-pieces of Memling.

Throughout the march of the centuries these exquisite canvases have retained their freshness undimmed by time. It was at the portals of this hospital that—according to tradition—the painter first presented himself in the

character of a convalescent. All feverishness of spirit seemed to evaporate instantaneously upon entering the sanctuary. The profound calm that is inherent in Catholicism emanated from its white walls.

The gardens, trimmed with boxwood, that encompassed the building, were bathed in the atmosphere of the chamber of the valetudinarian. The perfection of the repose was disturbed only by the occasional passing and repassing of nuns, whose movements were comparable only to that of the swans when they create a ripple of water in the course of

their graceful progress along the expanses of the canals. From within the outlying portions of the building, there was wafted an odour of humid linen; of caps whose freshness had been tarnished by rain, and of altar-cloths newly extracted from musty cupboards.

Hughes at length found himself within the apartment in which the world-renowned *châsse* of St. Ursula is preserved. Designed in the shape of a little gold Gothic chapel, it unfolds in three exquisite panels the history of the sacrifice of the eleven thousand virgins. Into the enamelled metal of the roofing are inserted medallions, which

rival in beauty the finest miniatures, portraying angelic musicians with their violins coloured like their hair, and their harps transmogrified into the guise of wings.

It is in a manner void of all harshness of realism that the martyrs are depicted as encountering their doom. In an attitude of infinite sweetness, the virgins are grouped together like a mass of azaleas in the anchored galley which is destined to be their last resting-place. The soldiers are drawn up along the line of the beach. Ursula and her companions have disembarked from the vessel. Though the blood

flows, it is in the colour of the rose. The wounds are merely petals. The blood does not trickle, but only adheres rigidly to the bosom.

The happy and tranquil countenances of the virgins are reflected in the armour of the soldiers, which shines with the brightness of mirrors. Even the arrows that are the messengers of death, appear to cleave the air as sweetly as the glide of the moon through the heavens.

By the adoption of these complexities, the artist has given expression to the mystic conception that the joyousness of the virgins

is only a species of transubstantiation and a harbinger of the bliss which in Paradise awaits the redeemed. The tranquillity which distinguishes the faces communicates itself to the landscape and constitutes a perfection of harmony.

The picture is in truth not a massacre but an apotheosis. The drops of blood crystallize themselves into the shape of rubies worthy of a place in an eternal diadem, whilst the heavens opening from above shed upon the scene the light of a celestial radiance.

The picture is the most sublime of all depictions of martyrdom.

It is a vision of Paradise from the brush of a painter whose genius is rivalled only by his piety.

The soul of Hughes was animated to its depths as he contemplated this most ethereal of canvases. With the whole force of his national instincts, he longed after the recovery of the faith that had inspired these great Flemish artists, who have bequeathed to us pictures which might be described with an equal degree of appositeness either as votive-offerings or incarnations of prayer.

From the catalogue of the possessions that invest the town with so unique an interest — the

works of art, the goldsmith's wares, the architecture, the houses wearing an aspect akin to that of cloisters, the mitre-shaped gables, the Madonna-decked streets, the winds upon which were transported the melody of the bells — Hughes extracted teachings that enjoined lessons of self-abnegation, and experienced the subtle magic of an influence which appeared to instil into the atmosphere the spirit of a mediæval Catholicism that indurated itself into the very stones.

A craving for the innocence of his childhood overcame him. The thought of the nearness of death

brought with it a consciousness of his guilt before God. There loomed before his imagination with an increase of vividness, the nature of the penalties that attach themselves to sin.

Accidentally entering the cathedral one Sunday evening, prompted by no other motive than a desire to relieve the vacancy of the hours, he found himself placed in the unexpected position of listener to the conclusion of a sermon.

The theme upon which the priest expatiated was that of death. It would have been impossible in the midst of the dead town to select a subject more perfectly apposite.

The thought of the grave overshadowed the very surroundings of the pulpit, where the hand of the preacher had only to stretch itself forth to grasp a cluster of the black grapes that at his side gave substance to the text of his discourse. In such an atmosphere the mind was deprived of the power to turn in any other direction. There existed no problem more transcendently worthy of investigation than that of human salvation, embracing as it does the goal upon which is concentrated the entire operations of conscience.

The phase upon which the priest more especially dwelt was that of

death in the arms of the Redeemer, when it signifies no more than a joyous passage and a return to the fold of the Heavenly Father. From that standpoint, however, he diverged with all the fervour of conviction to the peril of mortal sin—by which was implied all that converts death into a damnation and excludes any hope of deliverance from the retribution that awaits the offender in the world to come.

Ensconced behind a massive pillar, Hughes listened in a condition of profound inward emotion to the words that fell from the preacher. Dimly lighted by a few

lamps and tapers, darkness almost prevailed throughout the enormous church. The congregation had drawn itself together into a sombre mass, that was almost incorporated with the shadow. It seemed to Hughes that he was the only soul in the building to whom the words of the priest possessed any personal application. To his morbidly sensitive conscience it became luridly apparent that this terrible phrase—mortal sin—was a proclamation of his own condemnation. It would be mere idle sophistry to attempt a denial of the truth of the charge that he was living under this ban. He had deluded

himself into the toils of a guilty amour by the mendacity of a resemblance. The doom that was in store for the sensualist rested upon him. He had violated the commandment which the Church holds to be the most sacred. His life was spent in a species of concubinage.

It was clear, therefore, that if the Christian religion was the repository of divine truth, further indulgence in spiritual hope was only a mockery. Death would now render eternal the separation which he had hitherto regarded as only temporary.

The dream of spiritual reunion

had been with him the only hope that survived hopelessness. Now that, too, was vanishing away among the futilities of aspiration which constitutes the chief irony of human existence.

Hughes departed from the church overweighed with a sense of spiritual trepidation. From that momentous evening, a consciousness of the oppression of sin rested upon him like an incubus. He longed for absolution, but could perceive no way of obtaining it. The thought of his confessor thrust itself into his mind as a potential ladder of escape from the perdition into which his soul

was sinking. The adoption of this course, however, would involve repentance and the amendment of his life. Before such desperate remedies his heart failed. Notwithstanding the grief which Jane daily heaped upon him, he was unable to break asunder the ties that bound him to her, and recommence his old life of solitude.

The town, however, clothed in its aspect of belief, insisted and reproached him with his infirmity of purpose. It opposed to his feebleness the model of its own chastity and uncompromising severity of belief. During the course of his perambulations, his mind was

profoundly agitated by the blackness of the shadows that rested upon it. To the perturbations of his infatuation for Jane; his apprehension of the closeness of death; his dread of sin and ultimate damnation, the bells added to the sum of his inward torture by the persistency of their appeals to the dormancy of his conscience. At first their accents were persuasive and reproachful, but as the days wore on they became pitiless in their wrath—denouncing his vacillation; incarnating themselves above his head like rooks in high towers; deranging the tenor of his thoughts, and commanding him in an ever-

augmenting fury of behest to withdraw from the meshes of the degrading amour which was steadily dragging his soul downwards to Gehenna.

XII

THE dissimilarities between the two women daily accentuated themselves, to the infinite suffering of Hughes. Notwithstanding the closeness of the physical resemblance, illusion was being rapidly rendered an impossibility. Jane's face had acquired a certain harshness of expression, which resulted in the formation of a furrow under the eye, that cast itself like a shadow upon the perfect correspondence of the ivory which encased the jet pupils. The tastes

implanted by her theatrical life began to reassert themselves with all the force that is derived from long suppression, and she now began to powder her cheeks, darken her eyebrows, and adorn her mouth with carmine.

Hughes vainly endeavoured to dissuade her from the adoption of these artifices, which created a violent disaccord with the natural and chaste face that lived in the depths of his memory. Indignant at his interference, Jane waxed ironical, then derisive, and ultimately became furious. To him these outbreaks brought back the unvarying sweetness, the perfect

balance of temper, the graces of expression that had so distinguished his dead wife. Into an experience of ten years of wedlock, there had never been obtruded even the shadow of a misunderstanding, and no estranging word which rankles in the mind like a dark stain imprinted upon a crystal vase had ever been permitted utterance.

The contrasts presented by the temperaments of the two women were emphasized by Jane's steady return to her true self. In no respect did the dead woman resemble the living. The overflowing evidences of this lowered

him still further in his own estimation by denuding him of all pretext for indulgence in a *liaison*, of which he commenced now to realize only the degradation. A sense of the impossibility of extenuation rarely quitted him.

When visiting the *salons* in which he still diurnally strove to reanimate the recollection of his beloved, a sentiment of reproach appeared to emanate from the different relics. Standing before the portraits, a consciousness of infidelity rested upon him. The hair was allowed to repose in its glass coffer almost uncared for, while the dust accumulated

around in heaps of little gray ashes.

Never before had his tergiversation caused him such disquietude. The perpetual oscillations of feeling to which he was a victim were rapidly converting his life into a prolonged emotional agony. Drawn by an irresistible longing to the house of Jane, he was overwhelmed by a revulsion of regret, remorse, and self-contempt upon arriving at its portals.

Irregularity now took the place of regularity in all that related to his household. Punctuality was entirely cast to the winds. He issued orders apparently only for

the sake of countermanding them, and everything was subordinated to his infatuation. Driven to distraction by his vagaries and finding any routine an impossibility, Barbara ended by abandoning any serious attempt at housekeeping. Sorrowful and disquieted, she found her only solace in praying to God on behalf of her master, knowing as she did the cause of the shipwreck which had overtaken him.

Constantly there were handed in to the house invoices soliciting payment of enormous sums, representing the costly purchases incurred by a harpy. Barbara,

who opened them in the absence of her master, was dumfounded at the rapacity which they exhibited. Unending toilettes, costly jewels, dainty knick-knacks were obtained on credit by this Phryne, who appeared to spend the greater part of her time in using and abusing the credit of Hughes in all the different shops of the town.

Hughes submitted to all her caprices without even venturing upon a remonstrance. His indulgence, however, failed to elicit the faintest sentiment of gratitude. She continued to multiply her departures—absenting herself not

merely for entire days, but failing to return even at nightfall. The appointments that she was compelled to make with Hughes were frequently postponed, in the curtest and most unaffectionate of epistles.

She now began not only to form friendships, but to discover relations. "Was it to be expected," became the truculent daily demand, "that she was to be buried alive in a town such as this?" One morning she abruptly announced to him that a sister, of whose existence no previous mention had ever been made, was ill at Lille. It was absolutely necessary, none the less, that she should go at once

to attend to her. She remained away for several days, and returned only to recommence the same description of manœuvres. In the flux and reflux of these arrivals and departures, the existence of Hughes found itself suspended.

Suspicion at length began to germinate in his mind. The spirit of espionage entered into him. In the evenings, he roamed around her dwelling like a nocturnal phantom escaped from the tomb. Among the dolorous experiences that fate had reserved for him, was to be enumerated that of the detective dissimulating his vigilance. The ignominy of furtive stoppages and

midnight ambuscades were added to the list of his humiliations. Every peal of the little bells that died quickly along the long corridors thrilled him with misgiving. The protracted vigils of the night, spent before a brilliantly lighted window, along the blind of which flitted in *ombres chinoises* a silhouette that seemed ever to his imagination to be on the point of doubling itself, became an excruciating series of agonies.

The memory of his dead wife now began to recede into the background. It was Jane, whose courtesan charm had bewitched him by imperceptible degrees that

he dreaded to lose. The elusive fascination of the countenance had relaxed its spell, but the voluptuousness of the flesh continued to hold him in thrall. Yet as he gazed upwards towards the folds of the white curtains in which the possibility of a shadow concealed in their depths yet lurked, a consciousness of degradation impenetrated his being. It was love degenerating into jealousy that had sent him forth upon this deplorable task of surveillance. As he contemplated the miseries of the evening, lashed by the constantly recurring showers of rain—which in the bleak north are ever

ready to descend from the clouds that are never distant from the horizon—and the ever interjected wail of the carillon, a sense of the forlornness of his destiny overpowered him.

Throughout the rigours of the night, he remained spying from the vantage-ground of a large court that in extent resembled a meadow—walking restlessly around in an unceasing circuit and soliloquizing to himself in the inarticulate tones of the somnambulist; regardless of the rain now swollen into a deluge; the melting snow; the scowling blackness of the heavens; the desolation that distilled itself

from even the most minute of the objects that composed his surroundings.

The elucidation of the mystery that so completely baffled him served to absorb the whole energies of his mind. Into what an extreme depth of frivolous callousness, he bitterly reflected, must be sunk the entire being of this woman who had made such havoc of his existence—whilst at the same time, as if to render more glaring the contrast, the spirit of antithesis presented through the enveloping bleakness the face of his dead wife in all its mild benignity regarding him with compassionate eyes.

Hughes had ceased to be the dupe of this daughter of the horse-leech. He had been unable from the outset to shut his eyes to the incredibility of many of Jane's explanations, and subsequently there had been showered upon him — in accordance with a usage prevalent in small provincial towns — a profusion of letters describing all her movements in the pettiest of their details, and confirming the worst of the suspicions that he had harboured in the very blackest of his moods. In these epistles were furnished names, accompanied by proofs of so circumstantial a character that

any lingering hope of her fidelity had perforce to be relinquished. A supplement of anonymous cards packed with insults and ironies at the expense of his besotment were, in like manner, rained in upon him. This, then, was the culmination of an intrigue into which he had been betrayed through the medium of a casual encounter that the demon of coincidence had prompted. The repudiation of Jane was a simple matter enough, but the problem of self-retrieval remained. The very mourning which he wore had become a target for street ridicule. The cult of his despair had been

vulgarized beyond remedy, and was only an object of public derision.

As Hughes meditated in the depths of his contrition, it seemed obvious that Jane must go out of his life. Yet this signified the endurance of the agonies of a second separation. His heart revolted within him, as he meditated upon the quagmire of wretchedness into which he had been dragged by the wantonness and duplicity of this woman.

In his indignation, he resolved upon holding only one more interview with her. Accordingly he betook himself to her house, bent upon

upbraiding her with all the unhappiness she had inflicted upon him before a final severance could be effected.

It was, however, without a trace of anger, and only in tones of infinite sorrow, that he detailed to her the particulars of the revelations which had been thrust upon him. Assuming an air of bravado, Jane contemptuously demanded the nature of his proofs. In reply, Hughes merely handed to her the communications which had been so abundantly lavished upon him.

"You are then enough of an idiot to believe in the infallibility of anonymous letters," was the

only observation which she vouchsafed to make after reading them, bursting at the same time into a cruel and discordant fit of laughter that served to display her strong ivory teeth which exactly resembled those of a beast of prey.

"The whole history of your proceedings is certainly a very edifying chapter," answered Hughes.

Jane's only reply was a transport of fury in which she rushed backwards and forwards, slamming the doors vehemently and beating the air with her petticoats.

"Very well then, what if all this be true?" she suddenly inquired, pausing in her gyrations;

"I am bored to death with living in this place, and want nothing better than to leave it."

The interval had been occupied by Hughes in making an elaborate scrutiny of her entire person.

In the radiance diffused by the strong light of the lamp, he beheld the black pupils of her eyes, the sham complexion, the false hair—both alike as unreal as her heart and her love. No shadow of affinity of character had ever existed between this woman and that of his beloved, who now perhaps looked down upon him from Paradise. Yet despite the distended throat and figure quivering

with vulgar rage, there still remained the woman whom he had embraced, and when he heard her exclaim "I want nothing better than to go away," a panic of the soul overwhelmed him, leaving only darkness around.

At this crisis, he realized that underneath this illusion of identity there had been masked the lust of the senses—a tardy survival of passion rendered charmless and repellent by the lack of the roses of youth.

The confusion of his ideas was so absolute that even consciousness nearly deserted him. He knew only that he suffered and that

his suffering would be intensified if Jane executed her threat of leaving him. Notwithstanding all that she was, his heart still clung to her. Despite the bitterness of his self-contempt, he was powerless to break the Circean fetters which bound him to her. After all—he asked himself the question—what did it matter? The world was steeped in wickedness! Why should he—one among so many—endeavour to justify himself? The woman at his side had scorned to make to him even the most paltry of excuses.

With the recognition of the dissipation of his dream, Hughes

felt another wave of agony sweep over him—for the ruptures of love resemble a little death in as much that they are departures without an adieu. But it was neither the thought of separation from Jane or that of the destruction of his illusion which at the moment so completely shattered him. His imagination was appalled by the apprehension that he might never again find himself face to face with the spirit of the town, whose implied prohibitions he had violated. The gray melancholy of Bruges still held him in its thrall, but the weight of its towers lay too heavily upon his spirit. The very frivolity of Jane

had dissipated the density of the shadows which rested upon his soul. Now he longed to subject his spirit to them, in all the crushing force of their severity. He resolved that he would seek to recover his old self, and become again a victim to the magic of the bells. In this reconciliation he would forget all, and enter intrepidly upon a second widowership. The town appeared to his imagination more dead even than formerly.

Suddenly, however, impelled by an irresistible impulse, he darted towards Jane, possessed himself of her hand, and exclaimed in

supplicating accents, "Remain! Remain! I was mad." His eyes became filled with tears and his voice thrilled passionately in an ecstasy of entreaty.

Yet as he once again retook his homeward way along the line of the old quays, the dread of an unknown peril accompanied him. He became a victim to the direst forebodings. A vision of death haunted him. It appeared floating in a remote perspective swathed in a shroud, but approaching steadily through the fog. Hughes deemed that its intentions towards him were more sinister than ever. At this stage of his

reverie, however, the wind suddenly uplifted itself. The quivering boughs of the poplars that lined the canal began to pour forth a complaint. A feverishness appeared to be widespread among the swans, ordinarily so distinguished by their tranquillity—these beautiful swans whose presence in the waters commemorates an expiation through which the town received absolution for the perpetration of the perfidious murder of a *Seigneur*, who had been placed as a hostage in the custody of its guardians.

Upon this evening, however, they exhibited every symptom of

agitation, swimming wildly around in a condition of phenomenal perturbation. One of the birds lifted itself out of the water and beat its wings plaintively like an invalid who strives to quit the couch upon which he has been reposing.

The swan was clearly in the throes of a profound agony. At intervals it cried piteously. In its flight, however, the wail sweetened itself as it penetrated into the distance. There survived then only an almost human strain, which softly modulated itself into a death-song.

Hughes listened spell-bound.

The poetic legend that the swan sang at the hour of its departure returned to his mind. An impalpable suggestion of the presence of the Angel of Death diffused itself throughout the atmosphere.

Hughes shuddered involuntarily. The presage appeared designed as a warning to himself. Jane's threat of deserting him and the violence of the scene through which he had just passed, had flung him into a condition of nervous disturbance that easily rendered his mind a prey to the blackest misgivings. As he continued his way homewards, conjectures as to the possibilities

of calamity that awaited him in the near future tortured his brain. It was in vain that he endeavoured to disembarrass himself of the nocturnal phantoms that had imprinted themselves upon his imagination. The portents of a second widowership were rapidly multiplying themselves around him.

XIII

JANE profited to the full from the profession of weakness which Hughes had made at the conclusion of their last interview. With the keen scent of the adventuress, she at once recognized that her power of domination over the man was absolute, and that so for as the future was concerned he was as clay in the hands of the potter.

It had been an easy matter to regain her former ascendency. A few caressing words had sufficed.

She had arrived at the conclusion that Hughes's life was not one likely to be of long duration. Already prematurely old, and with his vitality sapped by disappointment, his health had declined rapidly under the tribulations of the last few months. Throughout the town, he was reputed to be wealthy. He had taken up his residence in Bruges as a relationless stranger, and during the whole term of his sojourn had held himself rigidly aloof from all denizens of the town. She reproached herself bitterly upon not having realized earlier the possibilities of exploitation that lay so close to her, and the ease

with which by dint of only a little manipulation she might have acquired a fortune.

With this design ever uppermost in her mind, Jane altered, in a great measure, her line of conduct. She checked the recklessness of her expenditure; provided herself with plausible excuses for such disappearances as she made, and adopted conciliatory tactics in so far as these did not conflict materially with her own amusement.

What most excited her cupidity was the contents of the vast and ancient mansion situated upon the *Quai du Rosaire*, in which Hughes

had so long dwelt. Screened by the impenetrability of the lace curtains and the elaborate tattooings in the shape of hoar-frost upon the windows, it was impossible to arrive at any impression of the character of the interior.

By means of a device of any description whatever, Jane determined to penetrate within its walls, trusting that in this way she would be enabled to arrive at some estimate of the wealth of its owner. Coveting ardently all that belonged to him, she wished to satisfy herself fully regarding the value of the furniture, the silver ware, the jewels, and all minor accessories. Provided

with such a mental inventory, it would be easier to safeguard her interests in the future.

Hughes, however, continued obstinately to refuse to receive her.

Jane tried the expedient of blandishments. Superficially their intercourse seemed a renewal of love which resembled that of a bouquet of artificial roses. With the advent of May, an opportunity that favoured the execution of Jane's project presented itself. Upon the Monday following was to take place the procession of the Holy-Blood—an annual ceremonial that commemorates the arrival in

Bruges of a drop of the blood of the Saviour pierced on Calvary by the fatal lance, and since reverently preserved within a reliquary in the chapel that bears its name.

The route of the procession lay along the *Quai du Rosaire*, and defiled exactly under the windows of Hughes's house. Jane, who had never seen the ceremonial before, now set her heart upon witnessing it. Her own dwelling, however, lay remote in the outskirts, and she absolutely refused to view it from the streets, which would be packed by crowds hailing from all the different towns in Flanders.

"I long so much to see your house," she implored in the most wheedling tones at her command, "and afterwards we can dine together. Do say that you wish it!"

Hughes vainly urged objections on the ground of the gossip to which it would give rise.

"But I shall arrive early before the world is out of bed," was the invariable counter-argument.

The thought of the prudish and devout Barbara, who would be certain to take her for an emissary of the devil, plunged him into a quandary.

Jane, however, continued to ply him with her importunities.

Her voice possessed that indefinably cajoling quality, which at certain decisive moments women can ever summon to their assistance. It is the expression of the attribute of the temptress in which, since the age of Eve and Delilah, their power of persuasion has mainly resided. Alternately cooing and passionate, the man is swept by the subtlety of the intonations into an eddy which leaves him abandoned to the fatality of his allurement.

XIV

Upon the morning of the Monday that was to be distinguished by the passing of the procession, Barbara rose betimes in order to have the house adorned in the manner best calculated to do honour to the magnitude of the occasion.

After communicating with fervour at the first mass, she commenced her preparations vigorously on her return. All the paraphernalia that could be utilized for the purpose of reflecting distinction upon the dwelling, was extracted from the

cupboards. Barbara rubbed every object with an energy that rendered them as polished as mirrors. She brought down from their repositories the finest table-cloths wherewith to decorate the little tables, which she then placed in front of the windows. Around them she dispersed little altars symbolizing the month of Mary; a crucifix lighted with candles, and a statuette of the Virgin.

Upon the occasion so distinctive in its character, when the pious zeal of the inhabitants expressed itself in a rivalry of embellishment, the external ornamentation of the house became a matter demanding

from Barbara grave consideration. Along the line of the façades there had already been attached, according to an established custom, a decoration of firs relieved by branches of the green bronze that peasants carry from door to door. Together they formed a species of hedge along the line of the street.

Upon the balcony, Barbara had arranged to her own satisfaction purple-coloured draperies against a stainless white background. From the foot there descended an appropriate row of streamers in chaste folds. The old woman hurried backwards and forwards upon her respective missions, full of unction

and solicitude. Every object was handled by her with the reverence due to the sanctity demanded by the solemnity of the day. Through the constancy of her devotions, her fingers had acquired a touch identical in its nature with that of the priests. So absolute was her participation in the celebration that her whole being appeared to pass into it like a distillation of the Holy Oil used in the course of the ceremonies. In appearance she was perfectly congruous only with the surroundings of a *sacristie*.

All that eventually remained for the completion of her labour of love, was to store the baskets with

their complements of herbs and cut flowers—a fleeting mosaic of which, however, every fragment lent its aid in imparting a colour to the street at the moment the procession passed. Barbara, to whom the incense of the flowers—composed as they were of roses, lilies, daisies, rosemary, sages, and reeds cut into the shape of ribbons—was a species of intoxication, hastened in the conclusion of her preparations. As she plunged her hands into the overflowing baskets, the heart of the old woman was refreshed by the befitting character of this floral massacre.

Through the open windows

arrived the prelude of the bells attached to the parish churches, which followed each other rapidly in a seeming ardour of emulation.

Notwithstanding the gray indecisiveness that is so frequently a characteristic of early May weather, there was a buoyancy in the air which served to diffuse a feeling of exhilaration throughout the multitude. The clamour of the bells resounded from every quarter of the venerable city—bells of convents, monasteries, and those suspended in old towers. Superannuated bells which remain motionless all the year, and break their taciturnity only when the procession of the

Holy-Blood defiles through the densely lined streets. The gladdening influences that universally pervaded the scene appeared to extend even to the atmosphere, where they softened the grimness of the bronze colouring of the bells, and seemed to introduce above their heads a canopy of joyous white surplices bedecked with fan-like folds. Eclipsing all other strains, Barbara heard the great *bourdon* of the cathedral that never tolled save upon such occasions as those of the grand *fêtes*. She could even behold it in the distance—slow and black—cutting the air like a crozier.

The minor bells from within the adjoining turrets aided in swelling the silvery chorus, whilst organizing themselves at the same time in the heavens like a suggestion of a rival procession.

The piety of Barbara exalted itself with the stimulus that issued from her surroundings. To her imagination it appeared that upon this memorable morning the air was surcharged with fervour and that an heavenly ecstasy was animating the peals of the bells. The rustle of invisible wings suggesting the flight of angels was audible in her ears.

In the intensity of her spiritual

longing, a living consciousness of the presence of Jesus rested upon her. Disentangling itself from the mists of a divine obscurity, His image appeared to shine radiantly before her, bringing with it a conviction as absolute as that of her belief in his presence in the mass of the morning.

With her mind still dwelling upon the mercy of Jesus, the old servant, after having crossed herself reverently, began afresh to pray, inspired by the memory and retaining in her mouth the taste of the Blessed Sacrament.

Meantime, however, her master had sounded his bell for *déjeuner*.

Upon her appearance he took advantage of the opportunity to announce that he had invited an acquaintance to dine with him and ordered her to make preparations accordingly.

Barbara was thunderstruck. During the term of her five years of service, no one had ever been requested to cross the threshold of the dwelling. Suddenly, however, a frightful explanation of the enigma flashed into her mind. The moment which she had so long dreaded had arrived. She divined intuitively that the woman in regard to whom she had received so imperative a warning from Sister Rosalie

was to pollute the house by her presence upon this sacred morning.

A sensation of horror at the mere thought of such turpitude, thrilled to the inmost fibres of the being of the old devotee. In the event of the truth of her presentiment, no dubiety could exist in regard to her course of action. The prohibition of her father-confessor leaped back into her mind. That towards the end of her own long and blameless life, she should be called upon to throw open a door at the summons of so profligate a creature; serve her at table; obey her orders; and associate herself with such lewdness

was revolting to Barbara's moral sense. The coincidence of such a demand with the day upon which the blessed blood of Jesus was to be carried before the house further affrighted her, whilst the recollection that she had just returned from participation in the Holy Sacrament rendered her loathing of this act of profanity, if possible, more complete. It was clear that the moment for final separation was rapidly approaching.

With the familiarity which, in provincial towns, is frequently assumed by domestics in their relations with old bachelors and widowers, she boldly inquired:

"Who is the gentleman that has been invited to dinner?"

Hughes replied that the question was an impertinence, and that it was sufficient for her to learn when the guest should make his appearance.

But Barbara, feeling more and more convinced of the truth of her supposition, determined to risk everything sooner than the jeopardizing of her immortal soul, and again demanded:

"Is it then a lady that is expected here to-day?"

"Barbara!" exclaimed Hughes, in an accent of angry astonishment.

But the old woman stood her ground undauntedly.

"I require to know beforehand," she continued, "because if it is a lady that is to be brought within the house, I am obliged to say that it will be impossible for me to serve the dinner."

Hughes sat overwhelmed with consternation, and unable to arrive at any more adequate explanation of his housekeeper's conduct than that a sudden outbreak of lunacy had overtaken her.

But Barbara's long-pent-up feelings now found vent in energetic expression. She assured her master that the advent of this day had long been foreseen by her, and that her confessor had strictly forewarned

her to quit the house the moment that its threshold was crossed by a woman who was little better than a harlot. It was impossible for her to disobey him, and thereby plunge herself into a condition of mortal sin, with its possibilities of sudden death and damnation.

At first Hughes was unable to comprehend the significance of her words, but by degrees he succeeded in linking together the different stages of the progress of the scandal to which he had given rise, with its variegated embroideries and ultimate development within the walls of his own house. It had reached the ears of Barbara sooner than he

had anticipated! The first result of Jane's proposal to invade his dwelling had been the withdrawal from it of the servant who, during the period of a service of five years' duration, had become attached to him alike by ties of interest and by the thousand links that every day weaves between two existences dwelling side by side. Now, seemingly without a regret, she abandoned him!

Crushed by this thunderbolt which entirely extinguished the prospect of any happiness during the day, Hughes merely said in a tone of resignation.

"Very well, Barbara. You can

go away immediately if you wish."

The old servant gazed at him pityingly, comprehending in her heart the bitterness of his suffering, and in that chanting voice with which Nature has endowed women for the lullabies of the cradle, exclaimed in shaking her head:

"Oh, Jesus! my poor master! And for the sake of a wicked woman who deceives him!"

In defiance of the deadening influence of years, the maternal instinct, ennobled by an element of divine pity, welled up within her, and a cry broke forth as if issuing

from a fountain whose waters retain a healing virtue.

Hughes, however, was only exasperated at her interference and at her referring to Jane in such terms. She had been dismissed by him upon the very spot. To-morrow she could return and remove all that belonged to her, but to-day she must leave without a moment's delay.

The irritation which her master so openly displayed removed any lingering scruples that remained in Barbara's mind regarding the abruptness of her departure. She reattired herself in her beautiful black cap and mantle, supported by

the reflection that she was a sacrifice for righteousness, as centuries ago had been her great Master, Jesus.

Then calmly and with no trace of emotion, she quitted the dwelling which had been her home for five years. Before doing so, however, she strewed the middle of the street with the flowers contained in the baskets, as that portion alone offered no tribute in honour of the procession.

XV

THE day had commenced in a manner ominous of calamity. There exists in the nature of things a certain inscrutable malignity which delights in shattering our prospects of happiness. Exposed as our anticipations are to the driftings of time, the malevolence of Destiny avails itself of the opportunity to change the eggs in the nest of assumption, and we are left to realize only the bitterness which the world condemns us to conceal.

Upon hearing the clanging of the door that served as the announcement of Barbara's departure, Hughes experienced an impression of the most profound gloom. During the course of his solitary life, the old servant had grown gradually into the position of a necessity to him. This was an additional augmentation to the catalogue of sufferings which he had endured at the hands of this cruel and inconstant creature who was so supremely indifferent to the misery that she caused.

He began now to hope that something had occurred to prevent her from coming. In his

distracted condition of mind, he realized that her society would prove only an infliction. His mind again unconsciously reverted to the subject of death. Once more he examined himself as to the nature of the process of deception, by means of which he had given evidence to this veneer of a likeness. What, too, must she whose soul now dwelt in Paradise think of him, beholding from afar this debasement of her outward self reposing in the *fauteuils* in which she had reposed, and introducing her impure face into the depths of the mirrors in which the purity of her own still lingered?

Upon the sounding of the bell, however, Hughes was none the less compelled to open the door. Jane entered the house brusquely and imperiously, surveying all that it contained with the eye of the auctioneer. Her face, which had become violently flushed by the exertion of walking quickly, awakened in Hughes a thrill of antipathy. The distant strains of the music were already announcing the approach of the procession, which was advancing uninterruptedly.

Hughes had already lit the candles which Barbara, prior to her departure, had placed upon

the little tables in front of the windows. He conducted Jane to the first landing, on which was situated his own chamber. The blinds were closed, and Jane advanced evidently with the intention of opening one of them.

"Leave it alone!" exclaimed Hughes.

"Why?"

He endeavoured to explain to her the impropriety of showing themselves together so publicly upon such an occasion as the passage of the procession. In a town so subject to priestly influences as Bruges, little served to create a scandal.

Jane, meantime, divested herself of her hat before the looking-glass, and rubbed a little powder upon her face from an ivory box which never quitted her possession.

She then returned obtrusively to the window, displaying as conspicuously as she could her copper-coloured hair upon which the light played.

The crowd that thronged the street gazed up with astonished eyes at this flaunting woman, who resembled in no respect anything that existed in the town.

Hughes now began to protest impatiently. Vainly he urged upon her that the procession could be

seen quite as well from behind the curtain as in front of it. At length, losing all mastery of his temper, he closed the window violently.

Becoming infuriated in her turn, Jane flung herself down upon a sofa, where she remained, an embodiment of hardness and impenetrability.

The procession chanted as it advanced. From the increasing volume of the canticles it was evidently close at hand. Profoundly depressed by his encounter with Jane, Hughes now turned his back upon her and supported his burning forehead against the windows. The breeze that entered

from off the waters of the canal alleviated the fever in his brain.

The *premiers enfants de chœur* who heralded the procession now passed with bare heads, holding candles in their hands, and reciting monotonously.

From his vantage-ground in front of the window, Hughes discerned clearly the more outstanding figures in the *cortège* as they detached themselves from their surroundings like painted robes in the religious pictures of Flemish artists.

The lay-brotherhoods next defiled in pre-arranged order, carrying pedestals with statues representing the Sacred Heart, displaying gold

banners as indurated as the painted glass in church windows. Opening up as it progressed, the procession next disclosed what appeared to the more distant onlookers to be an orchard of white robes or an archipelago of muslins, from which incense unfolded itself in the shape of little blue clouds. The impression conveyed was akin to that created by an assemblage of children around a Paschal Lamb as white as themselves, and apparently formed out of curled snow.

Hughes turned for an instant in the direction of Jane, who still remained sulking obstinately and wearing an aspect which suggested

the hatching of some sinister project.

The music from the serpents and the ophicleides now ascended into the sky, almost drowning the frail, intermittent strains of the soprano.

At his elevation in the corner of the window there next appeared before Hughes, in fixed order of precedence, the knights of the Holy Land; the Crusaders attired in armour and cloth of gold; the princesses renowned in the annals of Burgundy; and in varying stages all that associated itself with the name of Thierry of Alsace, who originally conveyed from Jerusalem

this priceless relic of the Holy-Blood. In their respective *rôles* also appeared the daughters of the Flemish aristocracy, arrayed in hereditary costumes, which were embellished with lace and jewels. In its vividness, the procession appeared for the moment to annihilate the present. The obscuring mists of the centuries were rolled away, and by a miracle of resuscitation saints, warriors, and elders, reincarnating the figures that dwell immortal in the pictures of the Van Eycks and of Memling, visualized themselves before the eyes of the spectator.

Hughes, however, lost all power

of appreciating the spectacle. Illusion was rendered an impossibility to him. All that he now realized was the obduracy of Jane. He made an attempt to pacify her, but at the first word that fell from his lips her smouldering rancour found vent in vituperation, whilst her eyes gleamed simultaneously with an animosity that suggested hands loaded with missiles that they were upon the point of hurling at a detested adversary.

Striving to find a means of escape from the increased burden of the dejection which now weighed upon him, Hughes returned to the window and listened intently to the

surge of the music that still eddied through the streets.

At this point appeared representatives of all the various orders of clergy—Dominicans, Redemptorists, Franciscans, Carmelites. In their train followed the Seminarists, apparelled in folded surplices; the priests of each parish in the same scarlet costume as that worn by the *enfants de chœur*, and finally a miscellaneous succession of vicars, curés, and canons, attired in their chasubles and embroidered dalmatiques that sparkled like gardens of precious stones.

The clankings of the censers

now rendered themselves audible in dispersing upwards towards the arches clouds of blue smoke that only failed to reach them, whilst all the little bells united in a sonorous acclamation that resounded through the air.

The final stage of the procession was arrived at by the appearance of the bishop with his mitre upon his head, carrying the *châsse*—a little cathedral fashioned in gold and surmounted with a cupola in the midst of which, encircled by a thousand cameos, diamonds, emeralds, amethysts, topazes, pearls, and enamels, rested the unique treasure which had for so many

centuries reflected its lustre upon the chapel of the Holy-Blood.

The imagination of Hughes was profoundly stirred as he beheld the fervour imprinted upon all the upturned faces. He realized in descrying the magnitude of the throng which diffused itself, not merely through the streets, but extended to the boundaries of the town, the depth of the faith contained within the Flemish heart. As the people knelt in prayer at the approach of the reliquary, his heart unified itself with theirs in an attitude of adoration.

The dismal actuality of Hughes's existence had been obliterated from

his mind by his spiritual exaltations, when Jane, remarking the completeness of his absorption, broke into a shrill outbreak of laughter.

He affected unconsciousness of her presence, suppressing by a violent exercise of will any outward manifestation of the repugnance which the woman was rapidly awakening within him.

With an Arctic frigidity of demeanour she replaced her hat, bent, apparently, upon immediately quitting the house. Hughes lacked the courage to break the hard silence in which the room was enveloped, now that the procession

had passed on to its destination. The street was already almost deserted, and the quietude that reigned throughout it was enhanced by the melancholy survival of a departed gladness.

Jane glacially descended the staircase without uttering a word. Upon reaching the ground-floor, however, she was devoured by a fever of curiosity upon obtaining glimpses of the *salons* through their open doors. After peering in, she retreated as if repelled by the austerity of aspect which distinguished the two apartments that communicated with one another. For rooms, like individuals, possess

a physiognomy that is exclusively their own. They arouse within us the same instinctive sympathies and antipathies. Jane had a consciousness that the reception accorded her by the *salons* was one of silent hostility. Void of all æsthetic sensitiveness, everything that they contained appeared to her to be distasteful and abnormal. Jane felt dimly that there subsisted a disaccord between the mirrors and her own personality, whilst the immutable attitude of the old furniture disconcerted and irritated her.

Making, however, a tour of investigation through the apartments,

she glanced indifferently at the portraits of the dead wife stationed at different points along her line of inspection.

"Ah! after all you keep portraits of women!" she remarked, with a bitterly ironical laugh.

As she spoke, her eye rested upon the mantelpiece.

"Why, here is one which is very like me!" she exclaimed in astonishment, taking possession at the same time of one of the portraits.

Hughes, to whom all her movements constituted a growing source of exasperation, experienced a

feeling of intense suffering at the atrocious badinage and jeering *insouciance* that vulgarized the memory of his dead wife.

"Put that down!" he said with sudden imperiousness.

Jane, who was utterly unable to comprehend his standpoint, merely continued to laugh extravagantly.

Angered beyond endurance, Hughes stepped forward and took roughly from her hands the portrait that the mere touch of her fingers seemed to profane. To him all these objects of his cult were as sacred as the monstrance and the chalice are to the priest. His sorrow had been transformed

into a religion. Yet at this very moment of desecration, the unextinguished candles which still continued to burn at the window supports where they had been placed in honour of the procession, blazed up with a final effect that illuminated the *salons* as if they had been chapels.

Jane, whose vindictiveness had taken the form of entertaining itself at the expense of the manifest irritation of Hughes, now becoming set upon further exasperation passed into the other apartment, touching everything, displacing the relics, and ruffling the costumes. Every stage in her orgie of

defilement was signalized by a provocative outbreak of merriment.

At length she arrived in front of the piano, upon which was placed the precious glass coffer, and recognizing another possibility of venting her spleen, removed the lid, extracted the adored hair, and shook it wildly backwards and forwards with the delight of a *gamin.*

Hughes became livid with fury. This was blasphemy. An impression of being compelled to witness an hideous act of sacrilege took hold of him. Throughout the long years of his widowership, he had never ventured to unidealize

even by touch this symbol which represented in his eyes a fragment of divinity. After all the tears that had daily been shed around the reliquary in which these locks were enshrined, the thought that they should be degraded into the toy of a courtesan, whose chief happiness in life was apparently derived from his own befoolment, transported him with fury. For what a length of time had he tamely permitted her to inflict suffering and indignity upon him. All the mortifications which had been rankling within his bosom welled up fiercely within him. He recollected the ignominy of the

midnight prowlings spent in tramping the mire underneath her windows. The memories of her treacheries, mendacities, insults, prodigalities, and infidelities, rushed together like a cataract into his mind. He determined to spurn her from the house.

Jane, however, when he advanced towards her, darted round the table, regarding the movement merely as an introduction to some species of frolic, and after flourishing the tresses in the air while assuming at the same time the attitude of a serpent-charmer, she entwined them firmly around her own neck, where they were transformed

into an exact suggestion of a boa made from the plumes of a gold-bird.

"Return that to me! Return that to me!" cried Hughes, in accents vibrating with passion.

Regardless of his indignation, Jane merely whirled backwards and forwards around the table.

Infuriated by the stream of gibes and flouts which were levelled at him by his tormentor during the course of her evolutions, Hughes lost every vestige of self-control. At length he overtook her. With the hair still coiled around her neck she struggled convulsively, unwilling to surrender it, and enraged

by the ferocity expressed in the grasp that clutched her.

"Will you?"

"No," she replied with a nervous laugh, writhing at the same time in his hold.

A paroxysm of fury swept over Hughes, extinguishing all power of reflection. The blood rushed to his eyes, and his head swam as if with a vertigo. In his frenzy, a craving for the destruction of something became an over-mastering impulse. He experienced a sensation that caused a crispation of the fingers, endowing them at the same time with the irresistible force of a vice. In his delirium he seized

the hair that Jane still retained entwined around her neck, and frightful in his abandonment, drew the tresses together until they were as stiff as a cable.

Jane laughed no more. She only lifted up a little cry followed by a sigh like that of a bubble expiring within a water-flower. Then she fell prone upon the floor—strangled.

. . . . .

She was dead—having failed to divine the mystery that within the chamber there was preserved an object that could not be touched without sacrilege. In her hand she had carried vindictively the hair

which had symbolized—to those whose purity of soul permits them to commune with the unseen—a sanctity that, violated, made the violator the instrument of her own death.

Thus all the inmates of the house had perished. Barbara had departed; Jane lay extended at his feet a corpse—the dead wife was more dead than ever.

Hughes alone was left, and he had become oblivious to all that surrounded him.

The two women identified themselves into a perfect unity. Resembling each other in life, they did so to an infinitely greater

degree in death. The pallor which effaces even the most marked distinctions, rendered it impossible to distinguish the one face from the other—for his wife there existed but one countenance. Into the corpse of Jane was incarnated the phantom of his dead wife, though she was visible to him alone.

Hughes, whose soul was in all directions retrogressive, now recalled only memories from a distant past. His mind reverted to the epoch of his early widowership, to which period he believed himself transported. . . Tranquilly he reposed in a *fauteuil*, unconscious of all element of tragedy.

The windows continued open as they had been left by Barbara.

Through them again floated the clamour of the bells, all resounding in unison to celebrate the return of the procession from the chapel of the Holy-Blood. The resurrection of a morning had run its course and faded into nothingness. All that had made a brief summer had fled, leaving only apathy and silence. The streets were desolate once more. Solitude again brooded over the town.

Isolated in the midst of an isolation, Hughes remained alone, repeating mechanically, *Morte . . . morte . . . Bruges-la-Morte. . .*

Instinctively he endeavoured to attune his voice to the level of a harmony with the rhythm of the bells. *Morte* . . . *morte* . . . *Bruges-la-Morte*. . . . But it was only with the music of the little, old superannuated bells, which symbolized to the ear of the listener iron flowers languidly shedding their leaves that there was produced any adjustment of concord.

THE END

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