



"GABRIELLE JOINED HER PRAYERS TO HER LOVER'S."

(An Eighteenth Century Juliet.)

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BY JAMES MORTIMER.

I.



FRENCH judicial annals are rich in strange and romantic

episodes, but there are few narratives so replete with pathetic interest as the story of Gabrielle de Launay, a lady whose cause was tried

before the High Court of Paris about the middle of the eighteenth century, and created a profound sensation throughout France at that epoch.

Mademoiselle de Launay was the only child of an eminent judge of Toulouse, where Gabrielle was born about the year 1730. M. de Launay, as the President of the Civil Tribunal of Toulouse, occupied a position of distinction, to which he was additionally entitled as a member of one of the leading families of the province. Between himself and the son of the late General de Serres, a deceased friend of the President de Launay, there existed an intimacy which gave colour to the belief entertained in the most exclusive social circles of Toulouse that young Captain Maurice de Serres was selected to be the future husband of the judge's beautiful daughter, then in her eighteenth year, whilst Maurice was nine years her senior. The birth and fortune of the two young people were equally in harmony, and the match thus appeared in every way suitable.

The surmises of the gossips were shortly confirmed by the formal announcement of the betrothal, and Maurice was on the point of asking the approval of his widowed mother, who resided in Paris, when an incident occurred which threatened to dash the cup of happiness from his lips. An official letter from the Minister of War reached Captain de Serres, instructing him,

with all despatch, to rejoin his regiment, suddenly ordered abroad on active service in the far East.

The next morning, at an early hour, the young officer presented himself at the residence of President de Launay, greatly to the surprise of the worthy judge and his daughter, to whom he despairingly imparted the untoward tidings. The grief of Maurice and Gabrielle at the prospect of their sudden separation, for a long and uncertain period, was poignant in the extreme, and M. de Launay was himself profoundly distressed by this unexpected blow to his projects for his only child's happiness. After the first outburst, Maurice entreated the President to hasten the marriage and permit Gabrielle to accompany her husband to the Indies, if she would consent to undertake the voyage. Gabrielle joined her prayers to her lover's, but her father refused absolutely to listen to the proposal. Apart from his reluctance to part from his child for an indefinite term, the good President pointed out to the young man the hardships of a voyage to the most distant quarter of the globe, and the danger of exposure to a climate then regarded as fatal to many Europeans.

"Suppose Gabrielle, young as she is, were to sicken and die thousands of miles from her native land," said the President; "could you ever recover from the consequences of your rash imprudence, or could I forgive myself for my own weakness and folly?"

"Then, sir," exclaimed Maurice, passionately, "I only know of one alternative. I will at once resign my commission, and adopt a new profession—I care not what, so that it shall not separate me from the woman I love."

M. de Launay shook his head, and, with a grave smile, replied that such an act would be unworthy of a French soldier and a scion of the noble house of de Serres. As a last resort, Maurice implored the President to sanction the immediate celebration of the marriage, with the understanding that Gabrielle should remain under her father's protection until her husband's return from foreign service, which, he anticipated, would be in about two years. To

this request, also, M. de Launay returned an inflexible negative, without vouchsafing any reason, except that such was his decision.

Finding all his efforts vain, Maurice resigned himself to the inevitable, whilst Gabrielle sadly prepared to obey the command of one to whose behests she had ever yielded a dutiful submission, comforting herself, perchance, with the secret hope that her love and fidelity to Maurice would be more cherished, and invested with a greater heroism in his eyes, after two long, weary years of trial and separation.

In maintaining an attitude of firmness throughout the dilemma in which he had been placed by the inconsiderate passion of the young officer, M. de Launay manifested the possession of all the wisdom requisite in dealing with a difficult problem; but in adhering strictly to the French custom of decorously assisting at all interviews between unmarried young people of opposite sexes, and in failing to leave the lovers together alone for a short time, the President showed a deplorable want of knowledge of the human heart. The thought did not occur to him that a few tears, kisses, and vows of constancy would go far towards reconciling Maurice and Gabrielle to the sweet sorrow of parting, and that with these innocent crumbs of

comfort the parental presence is totally uncongenial. Never in the history of love has it been deemed admissible that there should be witnesses to the tender words of farewell, the fond look in each other's eyes, the soft pressure of each other's

hands, the whispered oath of eternal fidelity, and the many mysterious nothings which at such times are held sacred. Oblivious of these delicate considerations, the worthy President gave the young people no opportunity for a leave-taking which would have been to them a relief and a precious souvenir. Their parting was one of silence and dejection, but at the last moment Maurice found means to murmur in Gabrielle's ear, "I will be in the garden at midnight, under your window; meet me there to say good-bye." She spoke no word of reply, but a glance at her face assured him that his prayer had been heard and granted. With a tranquil smile, he bade farewell to the President, who again betrayed a sad lack of penetration in

accompanying him to the gate, without the remotest suspicion that a clandestine midnight meeting of the lovers had been planned under his own eyes, and that the young officer's sudden composure arose from a joy he found it difficult to conceal.

II.

To both the lovers the hours seemed leaden indeed, until night came. At last, the church clock of Toulouse chimed three-quarters past eleven, and Gabrielle stole tremblingly down to the garden. The night was dark, and not a sound could the

young girl hear but the tumultuous beating of her own heart, as she gently withdrew the bolts from the outer door and stepped lightly upon the soft green sward. Filled with dread of the consequences which might ensue if her secret meeting with Maurice should be



"FAREWELL."

discovered by her father, the poor child's remorse for her act of disobedience, as she regarded it, caused her to pause more than once, undecided whether to keep her tacit promise, or to creep back swiftly to her chamber. Before she could adopt the course dictated by prudence and submission to her father's will, she heard a light step behind her, and in another instant she was clasped in her lover's arms. Gently releasing herself, she placed her hand in his, and led him to a low bench close by, under the shadow of a tree. Seated side by side, they spoke in low whispers of their approaching separation and of their mutual sorrow during Maurice's long absence from France. They talked of their occupations, and of the expedients each would adopt to make the time seem less wearisome. They arranged the employment of every day, and fixed the hours when each should breathe the other's name, and thus know that they were in communion of thought, though thousands of miles of ocean rolled between them, forgetting that in widely different climes the day to one would be night to the other. Then, perhaps, this geographical obstacle occurred to them, and they triumphantly vanquished it by promising to think of each other always, awake by day and in dreams by night, which would be the surest method of never being absent for an instant from each other's meditations.

In these lover-like communings the night sped quickly, and over the tree-tops came the silver streaks in the clouds which herald the approach of dawn. They knew that their remaining time must now be short, and for a while they spoke no words. Still they sat side by side upon the bench, Maurice holding Gabrielle's hand folded within his own. Motionless, and with her head leaning forward, she wept in silence, tears of mingled joy and anguish. Maurice felt a strange thrill of rapture in his heart as he gazed in the sweet face of his beautiful betrothed, illumined by the soft rays of the moon, and as if seized with a sudden impulse, he fell upon his knees before her.

"Do you love me, dearest?" he murmured in trembling accents.

"God is my witness," she answered gently, "that I love you better than aught else on earth."

As if startled by the danger of discovery to which they were becoming every instant more and more exposed, the young man sprang hastily to his feet, clasped her in his arms, and kissed her passionately.

"Farewell, my own true love," he said softly. "Farewell until we meet again."

"Must you then leave me?"

"Alas, yes!"

She feared that her own gentleness and calmness at the supreme moment of parting would seem cold and tame in contrast with his exaltation, and, throwing her arms around his neck, she cried—

"Kiss me once more, Maurice; once more!"

Again he pressed his burning lips to hers in one long, last embrace.

"Farewell, Maurice," she sighed. "I feel that, if I were in my shroud, your kiss would recall me back to life!"

And with these prophetic words ringing strangely in his ears, he turned, and fled from her presence.

III.

FOUR long and eventful years had passed since the lovers' clandestine parting, when Captain de Serres again set foot on the soil of his native land. The transport which brought a portion of his regiment home entered the harbour of Brest early one bright morning in June, and Maurice the same day set out for Paris, his first thought being to embrace his widowed mother, whom he idolised. He had taken the precaution to send her previous intelligence of his return to France, and of his safety, for the poor lady, during nearly two years, had mourned her only son as dead. Of his betrothal to Mademoiselle de Launay she had never known, though she knew of the President by name as one of her late husband's early friends.

When Maurice arrived in Paris, on the second morning after his departure from Brest, and it was vouchsafed to his mother to clasp in her arms the son she had thought gone from her for ever, her joy can only be pictured by those to whom it has been given to taste an unhopèd-for happiness. Maurice, too, was happy; but still, after the first emotions of such a meeting, Madame de Serres' keenly observant glance detected in her son's face a strange expression of melancholy, and an air of abstraction in his replies to her anxious questions, which at once aroused all her solicitude. Alarmed at his singular demeanour, she tenderly pressed him to confide to her the cause of his sadness, that she might at least attempt to soothe and console him.

"It is nothing, mother," he said, with an effort to smile, "merely a childish folly, of which a man should be ashamed; but since you imagine that there is some serious cause for my ill-timed depression, I must do my best to reassure you, though I fear you will only laugh at me."

"No, no, my son, I shall not laugh, whatever it may be," replied Madame de Serres. "Explain yourself fully, Maurice, and trust my good sense to make all due allowances."

"Very well, mother," was the answer, "you shall know the exact truth. On my way home this morning, I passed before the church of St. Roch, the entire front of which was heavily hung with black, and decorated for the funeral of some person of note. Such a circumstance, I am aware, is of every-day occurrence in Paris, and would not likely attract the attention of an indifferent passer-by. But upon me the sight of those mournful preparations had a strange and mystic effect, which seemed to chill my blood, and imbued me with a presentiment of evil. I feared—ah! you are smiling at my superstitious weakness, and you are right. But three years of captivity and horrible sufferings have so unstrung me that my restoration to liberty and home seems a miraculous dream, and I tremble to awake lest I should indeed find it to be only a vision after all."

"My dear Maurice," said his mother, imprinting a kiss on his brow, "let this convince you that it is no dream. The feelings you have described to me I can well understand, and they prove that you cling

strongly to your recovered happiness, since you tremble lest it may again be snatched from you by relentless destiny. You must try to forget the trials of the past, and accustom yourself to the present, as if you had never known what it is to suffer. As for your mournful impression at the sight of a church hung with black, you have been so long absent from France that a very ordinary occurrence seems invested with a significance it really does not possess, except for those who have sustained the loss of a dear relative or friend. The funeral decorations you saw this morning were no doubt in honour of the young and beautiful Madame du Bourg, wife of the President du Bourg, chief judge of the Civil Tribunal of Paris."

"The beautiful Madame du Bourg?" repeated the young officer, inquiringly. "Was the fame of her beauty, then, so universal as to become proverbial?"

"Yes, poor young creature," replied Madame de Serres, "though she had only resided in Paris since her union with the President du Bourg, about eighteen months ago. Her husband was nearly thirty years her senior, and the unhappy lady died after an illness of only two days, so I was informed yesterday, leaving an infant six months old. The unfor-

fortunate lady herself was scarcely more than a child, and, before her marriage, was the belle of Toulouse, Mademoiselle Gabrielle de Launay."

This disclosure, so simple and so brusque, of a terrible calamity to him, did not at once penetrate sharply and clearly the



DISASTROUS NEWS.

mind of Maurice de Serres. He was so utterly unprepared for the blow that for a moment he was unable to realise the disastrous news thus unconsciously imparted to him by his mother. He gazed at her with the air of a man who had not fully grasped the meaning of the words she had spoken, and asked her to repeat them. Then Madame de Serres, remembering that her son had been stationed at Toulouse a few years previously, and might consequently have met the President de Launay and his daughter, framed an evasive reply; but the instant she again named Mademoiselle de Launay, and reverted to the story of her sudden death, Maurice fell, with a cry of anguish, at his mother's feet, as though struck by a mortal wound—a livid pallor overspread his features, his breathing was that of a man struggling against suffocation, and he might have died, had not a flood of tears come to his relief.

In this critical emergency Madame de Serres fortunately retained her presence of mind, and with the ingenuity of maternal instinct, she found means to alleviate the violent grief of her son. With his head pillowed upon her bosom, she talked to him of his lost bride, divining all that had occurred without a word of explanation from Maurice, and gently reproaching him for having failed to tell her, his mother, the story of his love. She found means to reconcile him to the death of Gabrielle—that, he said, was the will of God—but how could he ever forget the broken vow, or forgive the perfidy of her who had called Heaven to witness her promise of fidelity? Then, with admirable tact and delicacy, his mother recalled to his mind his capture by the enemy, and the official report of his death, which, no doubt, had reached Toulouse, and had left Mademoiselle de Launay no resource but resignation to the decree of Providence. Probably, she said, after a long resistance and many tears, the unhappy girl had at last yielded an unwilling obedience to her father's commands, and had consented to a marriage of convenience, in which her affections had borne no part. And so natural and plausible was this theory, that in devising these simple motives in mitigation of Gabrielle's conduct, Madame de Serres told her son the exact truth. Finally, she poured balm into his heart by asking him to consider whether the real cause of Mademoiselle de Launay's early death might not have been sorrow for Maurice's loss, and the bitter wretchedness

of her forced marriage with a husband whom she could never love?

These wise arguments were, indeed, not without soothing effect. At all events, after listening to his mother's words for some time, he became more calm, though a keen observer would have divined that his silence was not that of resignation, but the refuge of a mind which conceives a desperate project, weighs its possibility, and resolves upon carrying it into immediate execution. Madame de Serres watched with deep anxiety the expression of her son's face, and, had he once raised his eyes despairingly to hers, she might have read in them a determination to put an end to his life. But she never suspected him of harbouring any design so terrible, and when he entreated that he might be left alone, she acquiesced without hesitation.

Towards nightfall she had the satisfaction of seeing him rejoin her, apparently almost restored to tranquillity. In her presence, and without disguise or concealment, he provided himself with a considerable sum in gold, kissed her, and left the house without uttering a word, nor did Madame de Serres ask for an explanation, or seek to detain him. It was quite dark when Maurice sallied forth into the street, and walked rapidly in the direction of the Rue St. Honoré. On reaching the church of St. Roch, he lost no time in finding the sacristan, and inquired the name of the place where Madame du Bourg had been buried that morning. The information was supplied to him without hesitation, and he set off immediately for the designated cemetery. On arriving at the gates, he found them closed for the night, and experienced some difficulty in rousing the janitor, who was asleep in his lodge. After some demur, the man opened the door to his nocturnal visitor, and inquired his business.

"Let me come in," said Captain de Serres, "and I will tell you."

Seeing before him a young man of aristocratic mien and appearance, the gravedigger, whose curiosity was now fairly aroused, offered no further objection, and showed the way to a little room on the ground floor of the lodge.

"Be seated, sir," he said, civilly, placing a chair. "You are, perhaps, fatigued with your walk."

"No," replied the young officer; "there is no time to be lost."

Then, to the terror and amazement of



MAURICE AND THE GRAVE-DIGGER.

the grave-digger, Maurice, placing in his trembling hands more gold than he had ever before seen in his whole life, implored him to accept it as a reward for committing an act of sacrilege—a crime then punishable with death. Maurice entreated him to remove the earth from the grave he had filled that day, to exhume the corpse of Madame du Bourg, and to break open the coffin which covered the remains of that most unhappy lady, that he, Maurice de Serres, her affianced husband, might look once again upon the woman he had so passionately loved.

Then ensued a long and painful discussion, for the glittering heap of gold, pressed upon the poor man by his tempter, did not succeed in overcoming either the fears or the scruples of the honest grave-digger. To the distracted young officer it was a maddening blow to find that the cupidity upon which he had counted to vanquish the obstacles in his way had no existence, or if it had, was less powerful than the grave-digger's dread of the consequences. Maurice gave full vent to his despair and his tears so moved the heart of the poor man, at whose feet he grovelled in agony, that out of the commiseration he succeeded in inspiring came a consent which neither gold nor entreaties had been able to obtain.

"Come!" said the grave-digger; "if it must be so, follow me!"

He led the way to the dark and silent cemetery, armed with a spade, a coil of rope, and a thick chisel, Maurice carrying his companion's lantern. Stumbling over many a mound of earth, they at last reached the grave in which the dead woman had been buried only a few hours previously. Taking off his jacket, the grave-digger set to work, without uttering a single syllable. In an hour, which to Maurice seemed years of torture, the hollow sound of the spade striking the top of the coffin told them that their sacrilegious task was nearly accomplished. A few moments more, and the united efforts of the two men had succeeded in raising the coffin to the surface. Maurice whispered to the man to remove the lid without noise, but as may well be imagined, such an injunction was needless. Proceeding with the utmost silence and precaution, the grave-digger was not long in loosening the fastenings of the coffin. Then, having now recovered his customary coolness and self-command, he sat down quietly upon a neighbouring tombstone, and mutely motioned to Maurice, who stood gazing at the corpse, as if petrified by the horrible sight. Finding the young man still remained immovable, the grave-digger pointed with his long, bony finger, to the still, white object, and muttered, "Look, 'tis she!"

But Maurice made no response, and

appeared no longer to remember why he was there, nor the crime he had instigated. He heard not the words of his companion, his gaze was fixed upon vacancy, the breath seemed to leave him, and he would have fallen to the ground, had not the other, alarmed at this strange lethargy, seized the young man's arm, and again whispered "Look!" Then slowly lifting the shroud from the face of the corpse, he added, "Convince yourself. Is it this lady?"

At this instant the moon burst forth from behind the clouds, and its pale, mysterious light fell full upon the lineaments of her whom Maurice had idolised, and for whose sake he had committed this horrible deed. Her features bore still the sad, sweet expression he knew so well; the colour of her cheeks had lost little of its rosy tint, and, though her eyes were closed, her lips were half parted, as if about to speak.

Flinging himself upon his knees beside the body, Maurice wept tears which brought his anguish some relief. With passionate sobs he recalled the story of their love, of their young hopes, of their betrothal, and of their sudden and piteous separation, and he bitterly reproached himself for having yielded obedience to her father's commands, and left her to be sacrificed a victim to that father's unbending will.

As he spoke he gently raised her in his arms and looked closely in her face. At that instant memory brought back to him her parting words, years before, when, as they said farewell, he had pressed his lips to hers. The scene flashed across his brain with the rapidity of lightning, and, as if urged by some sudden inspiration, he stooped and kissed her, as he

had kissed her on that too well remembered night.

No sooner had his lips touched hers than he uttered a terrible cry, and rose to his feet, trembling convulsively. Then, with a wild laugh, he seized the body, and before the astonished grave-digger could interpose, the young officer fled from the spot with his burden in his arms, springing over the



"WITH A WILD LAUGH HE SEIZED THE BODY."

graves, and threading his rapid course among the tombs, as if the weight he bore were no more encumbrance to his flight than a flake of falling snow. With almost supernatural force and rapidity the madman, as the amazed and bewildered grave-digger now felt assured he was, made good his escape, like a tiger carrying off his prey.

Seeing that pursuit was useless—even if

he had contemplated such a course—the poor man hastened to remove the evidence of the sacrilege in which he had played so prominent a part. Lowering the empty coffin into the open grave, he rapidly threw in the earth, and in a short time the spot showed no trace of having been disturbed since the interment of the preceding morning. Then the grave-digger gathered together the implements of his trade and stole back to his lodge, muttering imprecations upon his mad visitor, and upon himself for having assisted in committing a crime fraught with such formidable danger to its perpetrators, should the horrible deed ever be brought to light.

IV.

NEARLY five years had passed away since that eventful night, and, during that long period, nothing had occurred to revive the fears of the conscience-stricken grave-digger, or to give rise to his misgivings that the theft of Madame du Bourg's corpse might by some means be discovered. In fact, after carefully weighing all the circumstances, he had finally come to the conclusion that he had been the victim of a conspiracy hatched by medical students, one having played the principal part in the abominable transaction, and the other or others waiting outside the cemetery to assist in making off with the "subject," should the nefarious plot succeed. The students (if this hypothesis were correct) would never betray the secret, for obvious reasons; and so long a time having now elapsed since the burial of the unhappy lady, the contingency of an authorised exhumation for any cause whatever became daily more and more remote.

On All Souls' Day the bereaved husband came regularly each year to pray at his dead wife's tomb, and each year the grave-digger observed him with feelings of remorse, as if it were adding to his weight of guilt in standing near while the worthy President du Bourg knelt reverently beside the mound beneath which was buried only an empty coffin. The sight of this futile annual pilgrimage possessed for the repentant grave-digger a fascination impossible to resist, and amongst all the mourners who visited the cemetery on that solemn day, he took note of none save M. du Bourg, before whom he more than once felt tempted to throw himself and confess all.

When the anniversary came round again,

the grave-digger stationed himself at his usual post of observation, and saw the President draw near to his wife's tomb, over which he immediately bent in prayer. Both he and the contrite grave-digger were so deeply absorbed in thought that they did not notice the approach of a woman, who uttered a suppressed cry as she caught sight of the recumbent figure. Turning involuntarily and looking quickly up, M. du Bourg instantly recognised, in the person who had interrupted his meditations, no other than the wife whose death he had mourned so long. The grave-digger also remembered well the pale, beautiful face, from which he had removed the shroud five years before, and he instantly fell to the ground, insensible. But before the startled husband could recover from his amazement, Gabrielle, for it was she, swept past him like the wind and was gone. Following her retreating form in the distance, the President reached the cemetery gates in time to see her leap into a carriage with emblazoned panels, which, before he could reach the spot, was driven rapidly away towards the centre of Paris. M. du Bourg then returned to the place where he had seen the grave-digger fall in a swoon, hoping to derive some information from the stranger who had been thus terror-struck at sight of the unexpected apparition, but the man had been already carried to his lodge, and died an hour afterwards without recovering consciousness.

Losing no time, the President addressed himself to the Lieutenant-General of Police, by whom inquiries were set on foot without delay, and it was speedily established that the carriage, which many persons had observed in waiting at the cemetery gates, bore the arms of the noble house of de Serres. As M. du Bourg was aware of his late wife's early attachment to the young officer whose death abroad had been officially reported a few months previous to her marriage, the motive of her disappearance, if she were still alive, was clearly explained. But the mystery of her existence five years after her supposed death and burial must now be immediately unravelled.

By order of the authorities, the grave in which Madame du Bourg had been interred was opened, and the empty, broken coffin was found. This discovery fully confirmed the suspicions of the President du Bourg, and prompted him in the course he now resolved to pursue.

V.

MEANWHILE Madame Julie de Serres, the young and lovely wife whom Captain Maurice de Serres had married abroad five years previously, and now brought to Paris for the first time, returned that day to her husband's house in a state of the utmost alarm and agitation. Pale and trembling, she begged to be conducted to Maurice, and the pair remained closeted together for several hours. At last, in outward semblance perfectly calm, she rejoined the Countess, her husband's mother, and from that day resumed the ordinary current of life as though nothing had arisen to mar its serenity.

About a fortnight had elapsed since the occurrences above related, and the incident in the cemetery appeared to have been forgotten, or if remembered by the chance witnesses of the scene, it was generally supposed that the mysterious lady who had been seen by M. du Bourg merely bore a fortuitous resemblance to the President's deceased wife. But dur-

ing these few days, aided by all the power in the hands of the Lieutenant-General of Police, M. du Bourg instituted a searching and systematic investigation, firmly resolved as he was to know the truth. Without in the least suspecting that their every movement was watched, Captain de Serres and his wife were surrounded with spies, who rendered a daily report of their minutest actions. Maurice having come to the conclusion that it would be imprudent to leave Paris, there was no difficulty in keeping him under constant observation. Setting to work like an experienced lawyer, M. du Bourg rapidly collected evidence of the greatest importance. Through the Minister of War, he ascertained the exact date of Captain de Serres' return to France, after his captivity and supposed death in the Indies. At the passport office he found out the day of the

young officer's departure shortly after his arrival in Paris. The postillions whom he had employed on his journey to Havre were discovered and interrogated. From them it was elicited that the traveller had



"SHE BEGGED TO BE CONDUCTED TO MAURICE."

been accompanied to the coast by a lady closely veiled, who never left the carriage until the pair reached their destination. The name of the vessel in which M. de Serres and a lady inscribed as his cousin had taken passage to South America was ferreted out, and the ship's journal was brought to Paris.

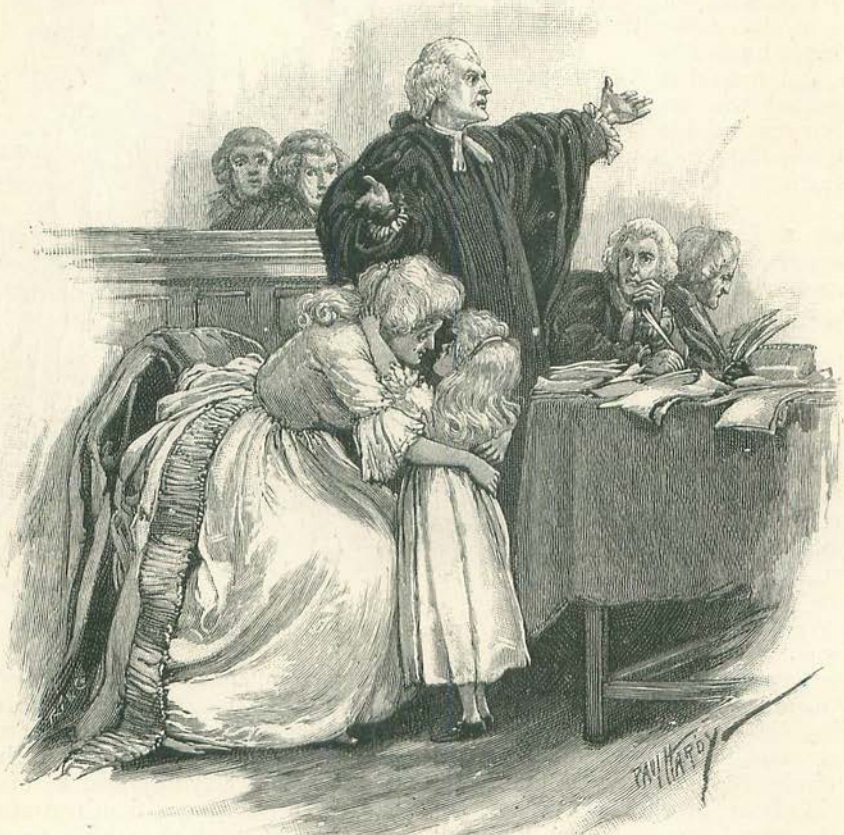
Armed with these formidable proofs, the President du Bourg demanded from the High Court of Paris the dissolution of the illegal marriage between Captain Maurice de Serres and the pretended Julie de Serres, who, as M. du Bourg solemnly declared, was Gabrielle du Bourg, his lawful wife.

The extraordinary novelty of this cause created an immense sensation throughout Europe, and pamphlets were exchanged by the faculty, some maintaining that a prolonged trance had given rise to the belief

in the apparent death of Madame du Bourg, whilst others as stoutly affirmed that resuscitation under such circumstances was an absolute impossibility. This latter theory secured the majority of partisans amongst medical men, and after calculating the number of hours which it was stated that Madame du Bourg had continued to exist in her grave, the fact was conclusively established that no case of a similar lethargy had ever previously been recorded.

VI.

IN due course the hearing of this extraordinary suit came before the high tribunal of Paris, and Madame Julie de Serres was summoned to appear in court, and answer the questions of the judges. She was confronted with M. du Bourg, and was surprised and indignant at his pretensions. The father of Gabrielle de Launay came from Toulouse, and burst



"MAMMA, WON'T YOU KISS ME?"

M. de Serres himself expressed the most profound and unaffected pity for his adversary, and acknowledged that when he had first met the lady who now bore his name, her marvellous likeness to Gabrielle de Launay had struck him with awe and amazement. This declaration was made with such evident sincerity that it carried conviction to the minds of all who heard it, and few doubted but that the President du Bourg had either lost his reason or was the instigator of a corrupt and knavish conspiracy.

into tears at the sight of one who bore so wondrous a resemblance to his dead daughter; nor could he find words in which to address the lady who seemed the living image of his only child, and who calmly denied all knowledge of him. The judges, in much perplexity, looked at each other in troubled silence and indecision. Madame de Serres, in simple language, told the story of her entire life. She was an orphan, she said, born in South America, of a French father and a Spanish mother, and had never

left her native country until her marriage. The legal certificate was produced, attesting the marriage of Maurice de Serres and Julie de Nerval, and, with other formal documents, was laid before the court. After hearing the pleas of the distinguished advocates engaged on both sides, the judges consulted together for a short time, and announced that their decision would be given at the next sitting of the tribunal.

On the following day the court was crowded to excess, and it was rumoured amongst the many ladies and gentlemen of position who were present that a majority of the judges were so thoroughly convinced of the preposterous character of the President du Bourg's claim as to render certain a decree in favour of Captain de Serres and his wife. Amidst a sympathetic silence—for popular opinion was almost unanimously enlisted on the side of the defendants in this unprecedented case—the President of the High Court commenced in a grave voice the delivery of the judgment, when suddenly M. du Bourg, who had not been present at the commencement of that day's proceedings, entered the court, leading by the hand a little girl of five or six summers. At this moment Madame de Serres, her face lighted up with a smile of exultation, was seated by the side of her advocate, directly in front of the Bench, and in full view of the public. Conversing in animated tones with her counsel, she did not observe the entrance of M. du Bourg; but in a moment a tiny hand was placed in her own, and a child's soft voice said timidly—

"Mamma, won't you kiss me?"

Madame de Serres turned quickly, uttered a sharp cry, and, clasping the child in her arms, covered it with tears and caresses. The daughter and wife had complete control over the emotions of Nature, but the mother's heart had not the strength to resist the sudden strain.

From that moment the case before the court, and still undecided, assumed a totally different aspect. Springing to his feet in an instant, the advocate of the unhappy lady unhesitatingly proclaimed the identity of his client, and now called upon the judges to annul her marriage with M. du Bourg, which had been dissolved, he declared solemnly, by the hand of death. Turning towards M. du Bourg, he exclaimed with fiery eloquence—

"Sir, you have no right to demand from the earth the body you have consigned to the grave. Leave this woman to him by whose act, and by whose act alone, she lives. Her existence belongs to him, and you can only claim a corpse."

Had the brilliant advocate been pleading the cause of a beautiful woman before a modern Parisian jury, he might have indulged some hope of success, but a hundred and fifty years ago the law of France was not swayed by sentiment. The judges were unmoved by this vehement outburst, and prepared to alter their decree in conformity with the facts elicited through the presence of the child. The wretched wife and mother then entreated permission to spend the remainder of her days in the seclusion of a convent. This, too, was refused, and she was formally condemned to return to the house of her first husband.

Two days after this judgment had been rendered, she obeyed. The gates swung wide open before her, and, dressed in white, pale and weeping, she entered the great hall, where the President du Bourg, surrounded by his entire household, stood awaiting her arrival.

Approaching him, and pressing a phial to her lips, she gasped forth the words, "I restore to you what you lost"—and fell dead at his feet, poisoned.

The same night, despite his devoted mother's efforts to save him, Captain du Serres died by his own hand.

