



George Sand

MAUPRAT

George Sand

Mauprat

Romance Novel

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PREFACE

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When I wrote my novel *Mauprat* at Nohant—in 1846, if I remember rightly—I had just been suing for a separation. Hitherto I had written much against the abuses of marriage, and perhaps, though insufficiently explaining my views, had induced a belief that I failed to appreciate its essence; but it was at this time that marriage itself stood before me in all the moral beauty of its principle.

Misfortune is not without its uses to the thoughtful mind. The more clearly I had realized the pain and pity of having to break a sacred bond, the more profoundly I felt that where marriage is wanting, is in certain elements of happiness and justice of too lofty a nature to appeal to our actual society. Nay, more; society strives to take from the sanctity of the institution by treating it as a contract of material interests, attacking it on all sides at once, by the spirit of its manners, by its prejudices, by its hypocritical incredulity.

While writing a novel as an occupation and distraction for my mind, I conceived the idea of portraying an exclusive and undying love, before, during, and after marriage. Thus I drew the hero of my book proclaiming, at the age of eighty, his fidelity to the one woman he had ever loved.

The ideal of love is assuredly eternal fidelity. Moral and religious laws have aimed at consecrating this ideal. Material facts obscure it. Civil laws are so framed as to make

it impossible or illusory. Here, however, is not the place to prove this. Nor has *Mauprat* been burdened with a proof of the theory; only, the sentiment by which I was specially penetrated at the time of writing it is embodied in the words of *Mauprat* towards the end of the book: "She was the only woman I loved in all my life; none other ever won a glance from me, or knew the pressure of my hand."

GEORGE SAND.
June 5, 1857.

TO GUSTAVE PAPET

Though fashion may proscribe the patriarchal fashion of dedications, I would ask you, brother and friend, to accept this of a tale which is not new to you. I have drawn my materials in part from the cottages of our Noire valley. May we live and die there, repeating every evening our beloved invocation:

SANCTA SIMPLICITAS! GEORGE SAND.

MAUPRAT

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On the borders of La Marche and Berry, in the district known as Varenne, which is naught but a vast moor studded with forests of oak and chestnut, and in the most thickly wooded and wildest part of the country, may be found, crouching within a ravine, a little ruined chateau. The dilapidated turrets would not catch your eye until you were about a hundred yards from the principal portcullis. The venerable trees around and the scattered rocks above, bury it in everlasting obscurity; and you would experience the greatest difficulty, even in broad daylight, in crossing the deserted path leading to it, without stumbling against the gnarled trunks and rubbish that bar every step. The name given to this dark ravine and gloomy castle is Roche-Mauprat.

It was not so long ago that the last of the Mauprats, the heir to this property, had the roofing taken away and all the woodwork sold. Then, as if to give a kick to the memory of his ancestors, he ordered the entrance gate to be thrown down, the north tower to be gutted, and a breach to be made in the surrounding wall. This done, he departed with his workmen, shaking the dust from off his feet, and abandoning his domain to foxes, and cormorants, and vipers. Since then, whenever the wood-cutters and charcoal-burners from the huts in the neighbourhood pass along the top of the Roche-Mauprat ravine, if it is in daytime they

whistle with a defiant air or hurl a hearty curse at the ruins; but when day falls and the goat-sucker begins to screech from the top of the loopholes, wood-cutter and charcoal-burner pass by silently, with quickened step, and cross themselves from time to time to ward off the evil spirits that hold sway among the ruins.

For myself, I own that I have never skirted the ravine at night without feeling a certain uneasiness; and I would not like to swear that on some stormy nights I have not given my horse a touch of the spur, in order to escape the more quickly from the disagreeable impression this neighbourhood made on me.

The reason is that in childhood I classed the name of Mauprat with those of Cartouche and Bluebeard; and in the course of horrible dreams I often used to mix up the ancient legends of the Ogre and the Bogey with the quite recent events which in our province had given such a sinister lustre to this Mauprat family.

Frequently, out shooting, when my companions and I have left our posts to go and warm ourselves at the charcoal fires which the workmen keep up all night, I have heard this name dying away on their lips at our approach. But when they had recognised us and thoroughly satisfied themselves that the ghosts of none of these robbers were hiding in our midst, they would tell us in a whisper such stories as might make one's hair stand on end, stories which I shall take good care not to pass on to you, grieved as I am that they should ever have darkened and pained my own memory.

Not that the story I am about to tell is altogether pleasant and cheerful. On the contrary, I must ask your

pardon for unfolding so sombre a tale. Yet, in the impression which it has made on myself there is something so consoling and, if I may venture the phrase, so healthful to the soul, that you will excuse me, I hope, for the sake of the result. Besides this is a story which has just been told to me. And now you ask me for one. The opportunity is too good to be missed for one of my laziness or lack of invention.

It was only last week that I met Bernard Mauprat, the last of the line, the man who, having long before severed himself from his infamous connections, determined to demolish his manor as a sign of the horror aroused in him by the recollections of childhood. This Bernard is one of the most respected men in the province. He lives in a pretty house near Chateauroux, in a flat country. Finding myself in the neighbourhood, with a friend of mine who knows him, I expressed a wish to be introduced; and my friend, promising me a hearty welcome, took me to his house then and there.

I already knew in outline the remarkable history of this old man; but I had always felt a keen desire to fill in the details, and above all to receive them from himself. For me, the strange destiny of the man was a philosophical problem to be solved. I therefore noticed his features, his manners, and his home with peculiar interest.

Bernard Mauprat must be fully eighty-four, though his robust health, his upright figure, his firm step, and the absence of any infirmity might indicate some fifteen or twenty years less. His face would have appeared to me extremely handsome, had not a certain harshness of expression brought before my eyes, in spite of myself, the shades of his fathers. I very much fear that, externally at all

events, he must resemble them. This he alone could have told us; for neither my friend nor myself had known any other Mauprat. Naturally, however, we were very careful not to inquire.

It struck us that his servants waited on him with a promptitude and punctuality quite marvellous in Berrichon domestics. Nevertheless, at the least semblance of delay he raised his voice, knitted his eyebrows (which still showed very black under his white hair), and muttered a few expressions of impatience which lent wings even to the slowest. At first I was somewhat shocked at this habit; it appeared to savour rather too strongly of the Mauprats. But the kindly and almost paternal manner in which he spoke to them a moment later, and their zeal, which seemed so distinct from fear, soon reconciled me to him. Towards us, moreover, he showed an exquisite politeness, and expressed himself in the choicest terms. Unfortunately, at the end of dinner, a door which had been left open and through which a cold air found its way to his venerable skull, drew from him such a frightful oath that my friend and I exchanged a look of surprise. He noticed it.

“I beg your pardon, gentlemen,” he said. “I am afraid you find me an odd mixture. Ah, you see but a short distance. I am an old branch, happily torn from a vile trunk and transplanted into good soil, but still knotted and rough like the wild holly of the original stock. I have, believe me, had no little trouble in reaching the state of comparative gentleness and calm in which you behold me. Alas! if I dared, I should reproach Providence with a great injustice—that of having allotted me a life as short as other men’s.

When one has to struggle for forty or fifty years to transform one's self from a wolf into a man, one ought to live a hundred years longer to enjoy one's victory. Yet what good would that do me?" he added in a tone of sadness. "The kind fairy who transformed me is here no more to take pleasure in her work. Bah! it is quite time to have done with it all."

Then he turned towards me, and, looking at me with big dark eyes, still strangely animated, said:

"Come, my dear young man; I know what brings you to see me; you are curious to hear my history. Draw nearer the fire, then. Mauprat though I am, I will not make you do duty for a log. In listening you are giving me the greatest pleasure you could give. Your friend will tell you, however, that I do not willingly talk of myself. I am generally afraid of having to deal with blockheads, but you I have already heard of; I know your character and your profession; you are an observer and narrator—in other words, pardon me, inquisitive and a chatterbox."

He began to laugh, and I made an effort to laugh too, though with a rising suspicion that he was making game of us. Nor could I help thinking of the nasty tricks that his grandfather took a delight in playing on the imprudent busybodies who called upon him. But he put his arm through mine in a friendly way, and making me sit down in front of a good fire, near a table covered with cups—

"Don't be annoyed," he said. "At my age I cannot get rid of hereditary sarcasm; but there is nothing spiteful in mine. To speak seriously, I am delighted to see you and to confide in you the story of my life. A man as unfortunate as I have

been deserves to find a faithful biographer to clear his memory from all stain. Listen, then, and take some coffee.”

I offered him a cup in silence. He refused it with a wave of the arm and a smile which seemed to say, “That is rather for your effeminate generation.”

Then he began his narrative in these words:



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You live not very far from Roche-Mauprat, and must have often passed by the ruins. Thus there is no need for me to describe them. All I can tell you is that the place has never been so attractive as it is now. On the day that I had the roof taken off, the sun for the first time brightened the damp walls within which my childhood was passed; and the lizards to which I have left them are much better housed there than I once was. They can at least behold the light of day and warm their cold limbs in the rays of the sun at noon.

There used to be an elder and a younger branch of the Mauprats. I belong to the elder. My grandfather was that old Tristan de Mauprat who ran through his fortune, dishonoured his name, and was such a blackguard that his memory is already surrounded by a halo of the marvelous. The peasants still believe that his ghost appears, either in the body of a wizard who shows malefactors the way to the dwellings of Varenne, or in that of an old white hare which reveals itself to people meditating some evil deed. When I came into the world the only living member of the younger branch was Monsieur Hubert de Mauprat, known as the chevalier, because he belonged to the Order of the Knights of Malta; a man just as good as his cousin was bad. Being the youngest son of his family, he had taken the vow of celibacy; but, when he found himself the sole survivor of several brothers and sisters, he obtained release from his

vow, and took a wife the year before I was born. Rumour says that before changing his existence in this way he made strenuous efforts to find some descendant of the elder branch worthy to restore the tarnished family name, and preserve the fortune which had accumulated in the hands of the younger branch. He had endeavoured to put his cousin Tristan's affairs in order, and had frequently paid off the latter's creditors. Seeing, however, that the only effect of his kindness was to encourage the vices of the family, and that, instead of respect and gratitude, he received nothing but secret hatred and churlish jealousy, he abandoned all attempts at friendship, broke with his cousins, and in spite of his advanced age (he was over sixty), took a wife in order to have heirs of his own. He had one daughter, and there his hopes of posterity ended; for soon afterward his wife died of a violent illness which the doctors called iliac passion. He then left that part of the country and returned but rarely to his estates. These were situated about six leagues from Roche-Mauprat, on the borders of the Varenne du Fromental. He was a prudent man and a just, because he was cultured, because his father had moved with the spirit of his century, and had had him educated. None the less he had preserved a firm character and an enterprising mind, and, like his ancestors, he was proud of hearing as a sort of surname the knightly title of Headbreaker, hereditary in the original Mauprat stock. As for the elder branch, it had turned out so badly, or rather had preserved from the old feudal days such terrible habits of brigandage, that it had won for itself the distinctive title of Hamstringer. [I hazard "Headbreaker" and "Hamstringer" as poor equivalents for the "Casse-Tete"

and “Coupe-Jarret” of the French.—TR.] Of the sons of Tristan, my father, the eldest, was the only one who married. I was his only child. Here it is necessary to mention a fact of which I was long ignorant. Hubert de Mauprat, on hearing of my birth, begged me of my parents, undertaking to make me his heir if he were allowed absolute control over my education. At a shooting-party about this time my father was killed by an accidental shot, and my grandfather refused the chevalier’s offer, declaring that his children were the sole legitimate heirs of the younger branch, and that consequently he would resist with all his might any substitution in my favour. It was then that Hubert’s daughter was born. But when, seven years later, his wife died leaving him this one child, the desire, so strong in the nobles of that time, to perpetuate their name, urged him to renew his request to my mother. What her answer was I do not know; she fell ill and died. The country doctors again brought in a verdict of iliac passion. My grandfather had spent the last two days she passed in this world with her.

Pour me out a glass of Spanish wine; for I feel a cold shiver running through my body. It is nothing serious—merely the effect that these early recollections have on me when I begin to narrate them. It will soon pass off.

He swallowed a large glass of wine, and we did the same; for a sensation of cold came upon us too as we gazed at his stern face and listened to his brief, abrupt sentences. He continued:

Thus at the age of seven I found myself an orphan. My grandfather searched my mother’s house and seized all the money and valuables he could carry away. Then, leaving the

rest, and declaring he would have nothing to do with lawyers, he did not even wait for the funeral, but took me by the collar and flung me on to the crupper of his horse, saying: "Now, my young ward, come home with me; and try to stop that crying soon, for I haven't much patience with brats." In fact, after a few seconds he gave me such hard cuts with his whip that I stopped crying, and, withdrawing myself like a tortoise into my shell, completed the journey without daring to breathe.

He was a tall old man, bony and cross-eyed. I fancy I see him now as he was then. The impression that evening made on me can never be effaced. It was a sudden realization of all the horrors which my mother had foreshadowed when speaking of her execrable father-in-law and his brigands of sons. The moon, I remember, was shining here and there through the dense foliage of the forest. My grandfather's horse was lean, hardy, and bad-tempered like himself. It kicked at every cut of the whip, and its master gave it plenty. Swift as an arrow it jumped the ravines and little torrents which everywhere intersect Varenne in all directions. At each jump I lost my balance, and clung in terror to the saddle or my grandfather's coat. As for him, he was so little concerned about me that, had I fallen, I doubt whether he would have taken the trouble to pick me up. Sometimes, noticing my terror, he would jeer at me, and, to make me still more afraid, set his horse plunging again. Twenty times, in a frenzy of despair, I was on the point of throwing myself off; but the instinctive love of life prevented me from giving way to the impulse. At last, about midnight, we suddenly stopped before a small pointed gate, and the

drawbridge was soon lifted behind us. My grandfather took me, bathed in a cold sweat as I was, and threw me over to a great fellow, lame and horribly ugly, who carried me into the house. This was my Uncle John, and I was at Roche-Mauprat.

At that time my grandfather, along with his eight sons, formed the last relic in our province of that race of petty feudal tyrants by which France had been overrun and harassed for so many centuries. Civilization, already advancing rapidly towards the great convulsion of the Revolution, was gradually stamping out the systematic extortions of these robbers. The light of education, a species of good taste reflected, however dimly, from a polished court, and perhaps a presentiment of the impending terrible awakening of the people, were spreading through the castles and even through the half-rustic manors of the lordlings. Ever in our midland provinces, the most backward by reason of their situation, the sentiment of social equality was already driving out the customs of a barbarous age. More than one vile scapegrace had been forced to reform, in spite of his privileges; and in certain places where the peasants, driven to desperation, had rid themselves of their overlord, the law had not dreamt of interfering, nor had the relatives dared to demand redress.

In spite of the prevailing tone of mind, my grandfather had long maintained his position in the country without experiencing any opposition. But, having had a large family, endowed like himself with a goodly number of vices, he finally found himself pestered and besieged by creditors who, instead of being frightened by his threats, as of old, were themselves threatening to make him suffer. He was

obliged to devise some means of avoiding the bailiffs on the one hand, and, on the other, the fights which were continually taking place. In these fights the Mauprats no longer shone, despite their numbers, their complete union, and their herculean strength; since the whole population of the district sided with their opponents and took upon itself the duty of stoning them. So, rallying his progeny around him, as the wild boar gathers together its young after a hunt, Tristan withdrew into his castle and ordered the drawbridge to be raised. Shut up with him were ten or twelve peasants, his servants, all of them poachers or refugees, who like himself had some interest in “retiring from the world” (his own expression), and in finding a place of safety behind good stout walls. An enormous pile of hunting weapons, duck-guns, carbines, blunderbusses, spears, and cutlasses, were raised on the platform, and the porter received orders never to let more than two persons at a time approach within range of his gun.

From that day Mauprat and his sons broke with all civil laws as they had already broken with all moral laws. They formed themselves into a band of adventurers. While their well-beloved and trusty poachers supplied the house with game, they levied illegal taxes on the small farms in the neighbourhood. Now, without being cowards (and they are far from that), the peasants of our province, as you know, are meek and timid, partly from listlessness, partly from distrust of the law, which they have never understood, and of which even to this day they have but a scanty knowledge. No province of France has preserved more old traditions or longer endured the abuses of feudalism. Nowhere else,

perhaps, has the title of the lord of the manor been handed down, as hitherto with us, to the owners of certain estates; and nowhere is it so easy to frighten the people with reports of some absurd and impossible political event. At the time of which I speak the Mauprats, being the only powerful family in a district remote from towns and cut off from communication with the outside world, had little difficulty in persuading their vassals that serfdom was about to be re-established, and that it would go hard with all who resisted. The peasants hesitated, listened timorously to the few among themselves who preached independence, then thought the matter over and decided to submit. The Mauprats were clever enough not to demand money of them, for money is what the peasant in such a district obtains with the greatest difficulty, and parts from with the greatest reluctance. "Money is dear," is one of his proverbs, because in his eyes money stands for something different from manual labour. It means traffic with men and things outside his world, an effort of foresight or circumspection, a bargain, a sort of intellectual struggle, which lifts him out of his ordinary heedless habits; it means, in a word, mental labour, and this for him is the most painful and the most wearing.

The Mauprats, knowing how the ground lay, and having no particular need of money any longer, since they had repudiated their debts, demanded payments in kind only. They ruled that one man should contribute capons, another calves, a third corn, a fourth fodder, and so on. They were careful, too, to tax judiciously, to demand from each the commodity he could provide with least inconvenience to

himself. In return they promised help and protection to all; and up to a certain point they kept their word. They cleared the land of wolves and foxes, gave a welcome and a hiding-place to all deserters, and helped to defraud the state by intimidating the excise officers and tax-collectors.

They took advantage of their power to give the poor man a false notion of his real interests, and to corrupt the simple folk by undermining all sense of their dignity and natural liberty. They made the whole district combine in a sort of secession from the law, and they so frightened the functionaries appointed to enforce respect for it, that after a few years it fell into a veritable desuetude. Thus it happened that, while France at a short distance from this region was advancing with rapid strides towards the enfranchisement of the poorer classes, Varenne was executing a retrograde march and returning at full speed to the ancient tyranny of the country squires. It was easy enough for the Mauprats to pervert these poor folk; they feigned a friendly interest in them to mark their difference from the other nobles in the province whose manners still retained some of the haughtiness of their ancient power. Above all, my grandfather lost no opportunity of making the peasants share his own hatred of his own cousin, Hubert de Mauprat. The latter, whenever he interviewed his vassals, would remain seated in his arm-chair, while they stood before him bareheaded; whereas Tristan de Mauprat would make them sit down at his table, and drink some of the wine they had brought him as a sign of voluntary homage. He would then have them led home by his men in the middle of the night, all dead drunk, torches in hand, and making the

forest resound with ribald songs. Libertinism completed the demoralization of the peasantry. In every family the Mauprats soon had their mistresses. This was tolerated, partly because it was profitable, and partly (alas! that it should have to be said) because it gratified vanity. The very isolation of the houses was favourable to the evil. No scandal, no denunciation were to be feared. The tiniest village would have been sufficient for the creation and maintenance of a public opinion. There, however, there were only scattered cottages and isolated farms; wastes and woods so separated the families from one another that the exercise of any mutual control was impossible. Shame is stronger than conscience. I need not tell you of all the bonds of infamy that united masters and slaves. Debauchery, extortion, and fraud were both precept and example for my youth, and life went on merrily. All notions of justice were scoffed at; creditors were defrauded of both interest and capital; any law officer who ventured to serve a summons received a sound thrashing, and the mounted police were fired on if they approached too near the turrets. A plague on parliament; starvation to all imbued with the new philosophy; and death to the younger branch of the Mauprats—such were the watchwords of these men who, to crown all, gave themselves the airs of knights-errant of the twelfth century. My grandfather talked of nothing but his pedigree and the prowess of his ancestors. He regretted the good old days when every lordling had instruments of torture in his manor, and dungeons, and, best, of all cannon. In ours we only had pitchforks and sticks, and a second-rate culverin which my Uncle John used to point—and point very

well, in fact—and which was sufficient to keep at a respectful distance the military force of the district.



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Old Mauprat was a treacherous animal of the carnivorous order, a cross between a lynx and a fox. Along with a copious and easy flow of language, he had a veneer of education which helped his cunning. He made a point of excessive politeness, and had great powers of persuasion, even with the objects of his vengeance. He knew how to entice them to his castle, where he would make them undergo frightful ill-treatment, for which, however, having no witnesses, they were unable to obtain redress by law. All his villainies bore the stamp of such consummate skill that the country came to view them with a sort of awe akin to respect. No one could ever catch him out of his den, though he issued forth often enough, and apparently without taking many precautions. In truth, he was a man with a genius for evil; and his sons, bound to him by no ties of affection, of which, indeed, they were incapable, yet acknowledged the sway of this superior evil genius, and gave him a uniform and ready obedience, in which there was something almost fanatic. He was their deliverer in all desperate cases; and when the weariness of confinement under our chilly vaults began to fill them with *ennui*, his mind, brutal even in jest, would cure them by arranging for their pleasure shows worthy of a den of thieves. Sometimes poor mendicant monks collecting alms would be terrified or tortured for their benefit; their beards would be burned off, or they would be

lowered into a well and kept hanging between life and death until they had sung some foul song or uttered some blasphemy. Everybody knows the story of the notary who was allowed to enter in company with his four clerks, and whom they received with all the assiduity of pompous hospitality. My grandfather pretended to agree with a good grace to the execution of their warrant, and politely helped them to make an inventory of his furniture, of which the sale had been decreed. After this, when dinner was served and the king's men had taken their places at table, he said to the notary:

“Ah, mon Dieu! I was forgetting a poor hack of mine in the stable. It's a small matter. Still, you might be reprimanded for omitting it; and as I see that you are a worthy fellow I should be sorry to mislead you. Come with me and see it; it won't take us a moment.”

The notary followed Mauprat unsuspectingly. Just as they were about to enter the stable together, Mauprat, who was leading the way, told him to put in his head only. The notary, anxious to show great consideration in the performance of his duties, and not to pry into things too closely, did as he was told. Then Mauprat suddenly pushed the door to and squeezed his neck so violently between it and the wall that the wretched man could not breathe. Deeming him sufficiently punished, Tristan opened the door again, and, asking pardon for his carelessness, with great civility offered the man his arm to take him back to dinner. This the notary did not consider it wise to refuse; but as soon as he re-entered the room where his colleagues were, he threw himself into a chair, and pointing to his livid face and

mangled neck, demanded justice for the trap into which he had just been led. It was then that my grandfather, revelling in his rascally wit, went through a comedy scene of sublime audacity. He gravely reproached the notary with accusing him unjustly, and always addressing him kindly and with studied politeness, called the others to bear witness to his conduct, begging them to make allowances if his precarious position had forced him to give them such a poor reception, all the while doing the honours of the table in splendid style. The poor notary did not dare to press the matter and was compelled to dine, although half dead. His companions were so completely duped by Mauprat's assurance that they ate and drank merrily, treating the notary as a lunatic and a boor. They left Roche-Mauprat all drunk, singing the praises of their host, and laughing at the notary, who fell down dead upon the threshold of his house on dismounting from his horse.

The eight sons, the pride and strength of old Mauprat, all resembled him in physical vigour, brutality of manners, and, to some extent, in craftiness and jesting ill-nature. The truth is they were veritable brutes, capable of any evil, and completely dead to any noble thought or generous sentiment. Nevertheless, they were endowed with a sort of reckless, dashing courage which now and then seemed to have in it an element of grandeur. But it is time that I told you about myself, and gave you some idea of the development of my character in the thick of this filthy mire into which it had pleased God to plunge me, on leaving my cradle.

I should be wrong if, in order to gain your sympathy in these early years of my life, I asserted that I was born with a noble nature, a pure and incorruptible soul. As to this, I know nothing. Maybe there are no incorruptible souls. Maybe there are. That is what neither you nor any one will ever know. The great questions awaiting an answer are these: "Are our innate tendencies invincible? If not, can they be modified merely or wholly destroyed by education?" For myself, I would not dare to affirm. I am neither a metaphysician, nor a psychologist, nor a philosopher; but I have had a terrible life, gentlemen, and if I were a legislator, I would order that man to have his tongue torn out, or his head cut off, who dared to preach or write that the nature of individuals is unchangeable, and that it is no more possible to reform the character of a man than the appetite of a tiger. God has preserved me from believing this.

All I can tell you is that my mother instilled into me good principles, though, perhaps, I was not endowed by nature with her good qualities. Even with her I was of a violent disposition, but my violence was sullen and suppressed. I was blind and brutal in anger, nervous even to cowardice at the approach of danger, daring almost to foolhardiness when hand to hand with it—that is to say, at once timid and brave from my love of life. My obstinacy was revolting; yet my mother alone could conquer me; and without attempting to reason, for my mind developed very slowly, I used to obey her as if by a sort of magnetic necessity. This one guiding hand which I remember, and another woman's which I felt later, were and have been sufficient to lead me towards good. But I lost my mother before she had been

able to teach me anything seriously; and when I was transplanted to Roche-Mauprat, my feeling for the evil done there was merely an instinctive aversion, feeble enough, perhaps, if fear had not been mingled with it.

But I thank Heaven from the bottom of my heart for the cruelties heaped upon me there, and above all for the hatred which my Uncle John conceived for me. My ill-fortune preserved me from indifference in the presence of evil, and my sufferings helped me to detest those who wrought it.

This John was certainly the most detestable of his race. Ever since a fall from his horse had maimed him, his evil temper had developed in proportion to his inability to do as much harm as his companions. Compelled to remain at home when the others set out on their expeditions, for he could not bestride a horse, he found his only chance of pleasure in those fruitless little attacks which the mounted police sometimes made on the castle, as if to ease their conscience. Then, intrenched behind a rampart of freestone which he had had built to suit himself, John, calmly seated near his culverin, would pick off a gentleman from time to time, and at once regain, as he said, his sleeping and eating power, which want of exercise had taken from him. And he would even climb up to his beloved platform without waiting for the excuse of an attack, and there, crouching down like a cat ready to spring, as soon as he saw any one appear in the distance without giving the signal, he would try his skill upon the target, and make the man retrace his steps. This he called sweeping the path clean.

As I was too young to accompany my uncles on their hunting and plundering expeditions, John naturally became

my guardian and tutor—that is to say, my jailor and tormentor. I will not give you all the details of that infernal existence. For nearly ten years I endured cold, hunger, insults, the dungeon, and blows, according to the more or less savage caprices of this monster. His fierce hatred of me arose from the fact that he could not succeed in depraving me; my rugged, headstrong, and unsociable nature preserved me from his vile seductions. It is possible that I had not any strong tendencies to virtue; to hatred I luckily had. Rather than do the bidding of my tyrant I would have suffered a thousand deaths. And so I grew up without conceiving any affection for vice. However, my notions about society were so strange that my uncles' mode of life did not in itself cause me any repugnance. Seeing that I was brought up behind the walls of Roche-Mauprat, and that I lived in a state of perpetual siege, you will understand that I had precisely such ideas as any armed retainer in the barbarous ages of feudalism might have had. What, outside our den, was termed by other men assassinating, plundering, and torturing, I was taught to call fighting, conquering, and subduing. My sole knowledge of history consisted of an acquaintance with certain legends and ballads of chivalry which my grandfather used to repeat to me of an evening, when he had time to think of what he was pleased to call my education. Whenever I asked him any question about the present time, he used to answer that times had sadly changed, that all Frenchmen had become traitors and felons, that they had frightened their kings, and that these, like cravens, had deserted the nobles, who in their turn had been cowardly enough to renounce their

privileges and let laws be made for them by clodhoppers. I listened with surprise, almost with indignation, to this account of the age in which I lived, for me an age of shadows and mysteries. My grandfather had but vague ideas of chronology; not a book of any kind was to be found at Roche-Mauprat, except, I should say, the History of the Sons of Aymon, and a few chronicles of the same class brought by our servants from country fairs. Three names, and only three, stood clear in the chaos of my ignorance—Charlemagne, Louis XI, and Louis XIV; because my grandfather would frequently introduce these into dissertations on the unrecognised rights of the nobles. In truth, I was so ignorant that I scarcely knew the difference between a reign and a race; and I was by no means sure that my grandfather had not seen Charlemagne, for he spoke of him more frequently and more gladly than of any other man.

But, while my native energy led me to admire the exploits of my uncles, and filled me with a longing to share in them, the cold-blooded cruelty they perpetrated on returning from their expeditions, and the perfidious artifices by which they lured their dupes to the castle, in order to torture them to extort ransom, roused in me strange and painful emotions, which, now that I am speaking in all sincerity, it would be difficult for me to account for exactly. In the absence of all ordinary moral principles it might have been natural for me to accept the theory which I daily saw carried into practice, that makes it right; but the humiliation and suffering which my Uncle John inflicted on me in virtue of this theory, taught me to be dissatisfied with it. I could

appreciate the right of the bravest, and I genuinely despised those who, with death in their power, yet chose life at the price of such ignominy as they had to bear at Roche-Mauprat. But I could only explain these insults and horrors heaped on prisoners, some of them women and mere children, as manifestations of bloodthirsty appetites. I do not know if I was sufficiently susceptible of a noble sentiment to be inspired with pity for the victim; but certain it is that I experienced that feeling of selfish commiseration which is common to all natures, and which, purified and ennobled, has become charity among civilized peoples. Under my coarse exterior my heart no doubt merely felt passing shocks of fear and disgust at the sight of punishments which I myself might have to endure any day at the caprice of my oppressors; especially as John, when he saw me turn pale at these frightful spectacles, had a habit of saying, in a mocking tone:

“That’s what I’ll do to you when you are disobedient.”

All I know is that in presence of such iniquitous acts I experienced a horrible uneasiness; my blood curdled in my veins, my throat began to close, and I had to rush away, so as not to repeat the cries which pierced my ears. In time, however, I became somewhat hardened to these terrible impressions. The fibres of feeling grew tougher, and habit gave me power to hide what they termed my cowardice. I even felt ashamed of the signs of weakness I showed, and forced my face into the hyena smile which I saw on the faces of my kinsmen. But I could never prevent convulsive shudders from running through my limbs, and the coldness as of death from falling on my heart, at the recollection of