

cine. But God knows what is best for all of us." "He certainly has blessed us with good wine," laughed Larue, and brought out his most ancient bottle.

II.

It was two and a half years later. It was midnight. The great clock of the ancient church of Arques tolled twelve. Arques, by the way, was a place of some ecclesiastical importance. As its name, Arques-le-Roi, implied, it had at one time been a favorite resort of the Kings of France, who had a château there. This château had passed into the hands of the Dufours, enormously wealthy manufacturers of silk, with factories at Lyon employing 20,000 people.

So the church was disproportionate to the village. It contained some extraordinary fine stained glass, and the architecture was superb. It occupied a charming situation against the slope of a green hill, crowned with fantastic rocks about which popular fancy wove many a legend of fays, and druids, and magicians.

It was winter, and the skies were cold — glittering with stars. But when the half hour sounded after midnight, and the vestry door opened suddenly, young Dufour, who came out, was pale and sweating heavily like one in a great fever. He staggered rather than walked; he seemed to grope both for sight and for support. Presently, reaching the white road, he seemed to recover himself a little; but he still shook and trembled as he walked along it.

Presently de Choisy himself came out. He was in perfect possession of all his faculties; but instead of turning into his house, as might have been expected, his long determined stride took him to the old bridge across the river. On this bridge were certain shelters, Gothic in type, which had been shrines before the Revolution. At the sound of his step, the lady who so aroused the antipathy of Captain Larue stepped out of the central niche. "You are late, François!" she cried. "It is a wonder I am here at all, Jeanne; something happened."

"Good!"

"It nearly killed Dufour."

"Oh how splendid! How I wish I had been there. What was it?"

"Probably imagination. But I'm not given that way. Dufour howled, and then fainted. Bringing him round has kept me all this time."

"But what was it?"

"Well, it seemed to both of us that there was something above the altar — something with an ass' head and bat's wings; but enormous — enormous!"

"Oh how I wish I had been there!"

"You shall come next time. But he must never know, of course."

"Of course. These three months have been hell upon earth. How happy I am!" She put a hand upon his arm, and a look of tigerish ecstasy came into her eyes.

"To be the altar!" she cried, "to hold the chalice of the Living One! To outrage God and Christ! I live for nothing else! Here was what hindered me!" She drew a square black case from the folds of her heavy fur.

"The imp of Satan?" laughed the priest.

"You told me; I obeyed."

"No baptism, no burial. But not here. Let us go to the old well behind Père Fauchard's orchard!"

As they walked the conversation turned on other themes. It

appeared that Dufour, an atheist, not by conviction, but by perversity, and very superstitious, was squandering his father's millions on an attempt to learn black magic. He was absolutely crazy about Félice, the betrothed of Larue, and not only used the priest to teach him the Black Art, which he supposed a short cut to all his longings, but to supply him with information, and to use his influence with the girl's parents. The mother, a bigot, was rather in favor of the rich young man; but the father was an old soldier, and counselled Félice to be true to his brother-in-arms. No news had come from Larue in the two years, except one letter, dirty and brief, written in pencil with a hand quaking with high fever, in which he announced that he was well, but was about to plunge into a swamp even deadlier than that he had been through, and heaven only knew when he could write again.

De Choisy then began to speak of his own affairs. He seemed to build great hopes of his bishopric on Dufour's wealth and influence; strings were being pulled in all directions at Rome and elsewhere.

"How good you are!" cried the Marquise, "you never reproach me. I can never forgive myself that it was I who broke your career."

"It was worth it," he replied, with a smile.

"I have sold my soul to the devil," she purred, "to you — and the price is your bishopric. You shall have it! And will you give Dufour his heart's wish, too? I should like him to have that thin little beast of a Félice!"

"I think she would yield but for her father!"

"Well — can we not do as we did for my — for the Marquise?"

"I think we may have to. It is a pity; the doctor here is a great fool, but he is incorruptible, and he suspects me, for all my holy orders."

They came to the well. The priest took the black bag. "In the name of the devil," he cried aloud, "sin to sin, shame to shame, fire to fire, child of Satan, I give thee to thy father!" With that he flung the bag into the well. Then the apostate priest and the wretched victim of his abominable desires embraced with all the ecstasy of long-pent passion.

An hour later they suddenly became aware of the gray world without their self-kindled hell of unlawful lust.

On the hard road a mile away they heard the hoofs of a great horse that thundered through the night. They started up in alarm; who, in the devil's name, rode such a gallop in the small hours before dawn? With quick understanding of the exigencies they parted silently. They had no need of assignments; they would meet again at the first mass of the morning.

III.

Indeed, the morning brought some confirmation of their alarm. One of de Choisy's plans — a plan which would net him half a million francs could he carry it through — had gone exceedingly a-gley. For the horseman of the night was none other than our old friend Larue, back safe and sound from Africa. He had taken horse and ridden like the wind. He could not waste a moment on his way to the girl whose love had helped him to endure the thousand hardships of his journey, and steeled him to be sword and shield to du Chaillu, to bring his expedition to a successful end. The fabled ape-man was no fable after all, but a reality.

The news was all over the village by early mass. The good