

napkin drenched in blood. It held no wine, but water from that well where he had hidden the evidence of his guilt.

As the hideous rite proceeded, the priest became aware of great need of firmness. His knees shook under him; again and again he looked round as though to see some presence that he felt. No: there was nobody there but his clerk, whose flaming red hair shone like fire itself in the night, curling out like serpents from under the biretta, and whose tigerish green eyes were blazing with intense excitement. Neither noticed that the stars no longer shone above the chapel; neither realized that the atmosphere had become suddenly hot and suffocating.

It is impossible to tell the details of the final consecration of the accursed elements, with what defilements and curses the consummation of the mass took place, or with what hideous gestures the apostates abandoned themselves to the adoration. But this must be told, that with the consecrated water the priest baptized the toad in the name of Pierre Larue, saying: "As this creature of toads shall wither and die upon the cross, so let it be with Pierre Larue!"

The great clock of Arques-le-Roi boomed midnight. The ceremony ended. The hysteria of the abominable celebrants died down; suddenly the woman took the priest's arm. "Look!" she cried. The priest came to himself. The whole chapel was ablaze with globes of fire, and the storm shook the walls of the chapel with whirling rage. A rotten beam came crashing from the roof. "Come away!" said the priest, unshaken, "there is danger here." But at that instant the storm died down; the electricity of the air discharged itself finally to earth; the stars shone out again. But the horror of real loneliness enveloped the celebrants as they stood without the chapel. From their sanctuary they had come back into the world; and they were no longer of the world. They had cut themselves off irrevocably from their fellow-creatures. The realization came to them simultaneously; for a moment they stood aghast. Then the woman's passion turned loneliness to exaltation; she clung wildly to her accomplice, and their mouths met in solemn resignation to, and acceptance of, their ineffable and appalling doom.

V.

It was six months later. Pierre Larue and his bride had returned from a long honeymoon, beginning at St. Moritz, and continuing through Pallanza and Florence, Rome and Naples, whence they had gone to Seville for Easter, and returned through Spain.

The village heard that they were well, and Dufour was in despair. But the priest had bethought him to pretend that the devil had given him a certain "Wine of the Sabbath," and plied him with a decoction of strange-sounding but quite innocent herbs which they gathered in mysterious ways at moonwane; in this brew the cunning priest had infused solutions of morphine and cocaine. The sot soon took the habit, and thought less of Felise every day; he spent most of his time running to the priest's house for a draught of the Devil's Wine. De Choisy naturally refused to supply it for home consumption; unless it were kept under a priest's roof (it appeared) it would lose its virtue.

It was early in June when Madame Larue came to the priest's house. She was a slight pretty girl with dark brown hair, a quiet and pleasing manner of real delicacy and elegance. Marriage had apparently not changed her; she was still looking out upon the world with the child-eyes of innocence. One could see that she feared no evil; she had never known it. Her manner towards the priest was as simple and reverent as if she had been at first

communion. She told him her trouble very childishly, as if he had indeed been her father in the flesh. "Pierre is changed," she said; "he is not the same man that I married. I think he is ill, but he will not admit it. He does not seem to care about any thing. He is always drowsy, and I think he has lost flesh." De Choisy gave her the obvious counsel, to tell her trouble to the doctor, ask him to dinner, and get him to make a quiet examination of her husband. She promised to do so, and went away smiling. Only a few minutes later Dufour arrived for a dose of the Devil's Wine. "Courage, my son!" cried the excited priest, "the Mass of Saint Sécaire is working at last. Pierre Larue is sick of a mysterious malady. Courage, and a little more patience; the goal is in sight."

Two months later the illness of Larue was the common talk. Occasionally he would sally forth as of old to drink his wine on the terrace of the inn; but he hardly spoke to any one, and would fall asleep in the sun, his Pomard barely tasted. He had grown strangely thin and haggard; his weak leg seemed to give him trouble, and he walked leaning heavily on a stout cane. The doctor had no idea what was the matter with him; his treatment had no effect whatever. One day the patron of the inn asked him point-blank if he knew, and if he hoped; the doctor shrugged his shoulders. The innkeeper bent down and whispered in his ear. "Everybody says that he is dying of the Mass of St. Sécaire." "Bah, my friend, God is stronger than the devil. I am a good Catholic, I hope, but this is superstition, not religion. Trust me; I'll get to the bottom of it. It's more like poison than anything I know; but I don't know what poison could produce the symptoms; besides, his wife's devoted to him, and the servants have been with him for twenty years." However, he wrote a letter that night to a Paris doctor, one Arouet, who had been with Larue on his travels. "Your old friend is sick," he wrote, "beyond either my diagnosis or my treatment. You know his constitution, and you are up-to-date in medical knowledge as I, alas! cannot afford to be. Will you come and see him?"

A fortnight later the great doctor was with his friend. He made a thorough examination, and took back to the local doctor samples of blood and so on for analysis. Arouet was working at the microscope that evening in the doctor's study. "You know," said the local man, "this is one of the mysterious cases which make men superstitious. The village folk all say that a bad priest has bewitched him with the Mass of St. Sécaire." "What in the devil's name is that?" cried the man at the microscope. "Look here!" and the other took down a copy of Bladé's "Quatorze superstitions populaires de la Gascogne," and pointed out a passage in its early pages.

The great man read it in astonishment; it was as follows.

"Gascon peasants believe that to revenge themselves on their enemies bad men will sometimes induce a priest to say a Mass called the Mass of Saint Sécaire. Very few priests know this mass, and three-fourths of those who do know it would not say it for love or money. None but wicked priests dare to perform the gruesome ceremony, and you may be quite sure that they will have a very heavy account to render for it at the last day. No curate or bishop, not even the archbishop of Auch, can pardon them; that right belongs to the Pope of Rome alone. The Mass of Saint Sécaire may be said only in a ruined or deserted church, where owls mope and hoot, where bats flit in the gloaming, where gypsies lodge of nights, and where toads squat under the desecrated altar. Thither the bad priest comes by night with his