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## A FLOWER AMONG WEEDS

—  
Story of the Eighteenth  
Century.

By F. A. MITCHEL.

During the reign of Louis XV. France reached a culmination of profligacy which had been growing for years. While the king was in his minority the regent, his uncle, Duke of Orleans, set the example of debauchery to the court and through the court to the kingdom.

Louis himself, on assuming the scepter, by continuing in his uncle's footsteps completed the work of laying the foundation for the French revolution which broke out during the reign of his successor.

During the regency of the Duke of Orleans the wealthiest nobles owned estates in different parts of France. Only the more moral of these lived in their country chateaus, for the profligate could not endure to live elsewhere than in Paris, where the intriguing and debauchery were going on. Among those who preferred the virtue of rural life was the young Marquis Gaston de Roquette, who, though a soldier of acknowledged bravery, had a mind capable of foreseeing the ruin the regent, the princes of the blood and the nobility were bringing upon France.

However, the marquis was obliged

occasionally to go to Paris either at the call of the regent or on account of some duty connected with his station as a peer of the realm. One day on the street on which stands what was then the palace of the Louvre he passed a young lady riding in her "chair," the very sight of whom deeply impressed him. She was not only beautiful, but a natural purity showed itself in every line of her countenance. This was the more noticeable, for at that time the women of the court were as bad as the men, and the lives they led were discernible in their features.

The marquis followed the young lady with his eyes, and when he saw her carried into the palace he heaved a sigh, for he did not believe that any woman could enter that royal abode and be good. Her entrance there, however, proved that she was a lady of rank.

The marquis' duty to the sovereign later called him to the court, and he saw there the lady whom he had met in her "chair." Hanging over her was a famous but notorious duke, the most pronounced and successful beau of that period. He was a very wealthy man, and he was also the most accomplished villain of his day. Three times he had been in the Bastille, the third time for having attempted to betray France.

Another sigh marked the marquis' discovery that the girl who had made such an impression on him was probably falling into the hands of this notorious villain. Leaving the palace without even inquiring the name or rank of the young lady, M. Roquette returned to his estate and, shutting himself up in his chateau, endeavored to banish her image, which had haunted him since the first moment he had seen her.

This was not possible. To the young

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such impressions are very strong. What it was in that pure face that had taken hold of him he did not know. What he did know was that she was a member of a profligate court, that he had seen its most notorious rake hanging over her, and he did not doubt that sooner or later she would go down under the influences which surrounded her.

Gaston de Roquette remained on his estate for a month without returning to Paris. Often was he tempted to go there for another glimpse of the face that had enthralled him, but he believed that in yielding to the temptation he would only bring upon himself greater pain. So he devoted himself to the care of his estate and to his tenants. He endeavored to occupy himself with his books, but this was impossible, for, whatever he did, his mind was upon that pure being, growing like a flower in the midst of poisonous weeds.

Whether it was that the young marquis was a poor sleeper or that Cupid was keeping him awake, he went to bed late and at times when unable to sleep would arise, dress himself and walk about outside. Not far from the chateau was the church where he and his household and his tenants worshiped and about which their forefathers slept. Within the structure were the bones of the De Roquettes incased in sepulchers or under the flags, the sepulchers supporting marble figures of the departed, while here and there were the arms the men had borne in war.

Gaston de Roquette often strolled about during his midnight walks in the churchyard, but had never cared to enter the church at night when it was deserted. One night when troubled with sleeplessness he was strolling in the grounds near the chateau when, glancing toward the church, he saw a light apparently within the structure. Thinking that he had seen a firefly, he was turning away, when he saw the light again, this time shining evidently through a different window than before. Surely some one was moving in the church. Walking toward it, he went to a window and looked in. There was no light except that the moon, which was nearly full, shone in, dimly revealing the recumbent marble figures on the sepulchers.

Thinking again that he had been mistaken, he was about to turn away when it occurred to him to try the knob of the door at the main entrance. To his surprise, the door was not locked. Entering the church, he found no one, but through a crack in a door leading from the chancel to a room used by the priest and acolytes came a ray of light. What could it mean? The pastor of the church was an old man, too feeble to be engaged in any church duty at dead of night. It was no religious matter that was being observed.

The marquis was about to walk toward the door through which the light came when it opened and half a dozen persons came out of the apartment. They bore lights, but so dim were they that De Roquette could not distinguish the faces of the several members of the party. There were a priest who was unknown to him, two men and two women, evidently persons of rank, and the last two to enter the church were a man and a woman. From this woman's dress De Roquette judged that the couple were about to be married. The little party moved toward the chancel, where the priest stationed himself, the couple before him, the two other men on the side of the groom, the two women on the side of the bride.

The marquis walked softly forward, hoping to get a nearer view of the faces, but before he reached a point of vantage their backs were to him. The priest faced him, and he saw at once that he was not the pastor of the church. To the marquis' astonishment he recognized in a priest's garb a worthless fellow of the neighborhood, who had served several terms in prison as a malefactor.

Assured that some piece of villainy was being perpetrated, De Roquette seized an enormous sword resting on the tomb of one of his ancestors and, pushing forward till he stood directly behind the wedding party, cried out: "I forbid the bans!"

The false priest looked up from a book he held in his hand, and the others turned quickly.

Then did the marquis meet with a great surprise. The attendants were men and women of the court. The groom was the profligate duke, while the bride was the lady of whom the

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