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Author: Lewis, Percy Wyndham (1882-1957)

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BEAU SEJOUR

by Wyndham Lewis

ON arrival at *Beau Séjour*, in the country between Roznoën and the littoral, I was taken by the proprietress, Mademoiselle Péronnette, for a 'Pole.'^[1] She received my first payment with a smile. At the time I did not understand it. I believe that she was preparing to make a great favourite of me.

The 'Poles,' who in this case were mostly Little Russians, Finns and Germans, sat at the table d'hôte, at the head of the table. They smoked large pipes and were served first. They took the lion's share. If it was a chicken they stripped it, and left only the legs and bones for the rest of the company. This was a turbulent community. The quarrels of the permanent boarders with Mademoiselle Péronnette affected the quality of the food that came to the table.

The master-spirit was a man named Zoborov. This is probably not the way to spell it. I never saw it written. That is what I called him, and he answered to it when I said it. So the sound must have been true enough, though as I have written it down possibly no Russian eye would recognize it.

This man was a discontented 'Pole.' He always spoke against the 'Polonais,' I noticed, I could not make out why. Especially to me he would speak with great contempt of all people of that sort. But he also spoke harshly of Mademoiselle Péronnette and her less important partner, Mademoiselle Maraude. He was constantly stirring up his fellow pensionnaires against them.

Zoborov at first sight was a perfect 'Pole.' He was exceedingly quiet. He wandered stealthily about and yawned as a cat does. Sometimes he would get up with an abrupt intensity, like a cat, and walk steadily, strongly and rhythmically away out of sight. He may have had a date with another 'Pole,' of course, or have wanted exercise. But he certainly did succeed in conveying in a truly polesque manner that it was a more mysterious thing that had disturbed him. Every one has experienced those attractive calls that lead people to make impulsive visits, which result in some occurrence or meeting that, looking back on it, seems to have lain behind the impulse. Scenes and places, at least other things than men, an empty seashore, an old horse tethered in a field, some cavernous armorican lane, under some special aspect and mood, had perhaps the power of drawing these strange creatures towards it, as though it had something to impart. Yet as far as Zoborov was concerned, although certainly he succeeded in conveying the correct sensation at the time, when you thought about it afterwards you felt you had been deceived. The date or exercise seemed more likely in retrospect than the mysterious messages from arrangements of objects, or the attractive electrical dreaming of landscapes. In the truth-telling mind of after-the-event this crafty and turbulent personage was more readily associated with man-traps and human interests than with natural magic.

Zoborov was touchy, and he affected to be more so and in a different sense than actually he was. He wished you to receive a very powerful impression of his *independence*. To effect this he put himself to some pains. First he attempted to hypnotize you with his isolation. Yet everything about him proved 'the need of a world of men' for him. Are not people more apt to bestow things on a person who is likely to spurn them? you suspected him of reflecting: his gesture of spurning imaginary things recurred very often. So you gradually would get a notion of the sort of advantageous position he coveted in your mind.

After dinner in conversing with you he always spoke in a hoarse whisper, or muttered in an affected bass. He scarcely parted his lips, often whistling his words through his teeth inside them. Whether he were telling you what a hypocrite Mademoiselle Péronnette was, or, to give you a bit of romance and savagery, were describing how the Caucasians ride standing on their horses, and become so exultant that they fling their knives up in the air and catch them—he never became audible to any one but you. He had a shock of dark hair, was dark-skinned, his eyes seemed to indicate drugs and advertised a profound exhaustion. He had the smell of a tropical plant; the vegetation of his body was probably strong and rank. Through affecting not to notice people, to be absorbed in his own very important thoughts, or the paper or the book he was reading, the contraction of his eyebrows had become permanent. He squinted slightly. He had bow-legs and protruding ears and informed me that he suffered from haemorrhoids. His breath stank; but as he never opened his mouth more than he could help, this concerned only himself.

He was a great raconteur. He had a strongly marked habit of imitating his own imitations. In telling a story in which he figured (his stories were all designed to prove his independence) he had a colourless formula for his interlocutor. A gruff, half-blustering tone was always used to represent himself. Gradually these two voices had coalesced and had become his normal conversational voice. He was short, thick-set and muscular. His physical strength must have been considerable. He exploited it in various ways. It was a confirmation of his independence. His 'inferiority complex' brought forward his tremendous chest, when threatened, with above it his cat-like face seeming to quizz, threaten and go to sleep all at once, with his mouth drawn to a point, in a purring position. His opponent would be in doubt as to whether he was going to hit him, laugh or sneeze.

French visitors he always made up to. Seeing him with the friend of the moment, talking confidentially apart, making signs to him at table, you would have supposed him an exclusive, solitary man, who 'did not make friends easily.' Aloofness towards the rest of the company was always maintained. You would not guess that he knew them except to nod to. When about to take up with a new-comer, his manner became more severe than ever, his aloofness deepened. As he passed the salt to him, he scarcely showed any sign of realizing what he was doing, or that he had a neighbour at all. His voice became gruffer. As though forcing himself to come out of himself and behave with decent neighbourliness, he would show the new guest a stiff politeness.

He was from twenty-five to thirty years old. In women he took no interest, I think, and disliked exceedingly Mademoiselle Péronnette and Mademoiselle Maraude. I thought he was a eunuch. No homosexuality was evident. He often spoke of a friend of his, a Russian like himself. This man was exceedingly independent; he was also prodigiously strong; far stronger than Zoborov. This person's qualities he regarded as his own, however, and he used them as such. The shadowy figure of this gigantic friend seemed indeed superimposed upon Zoborov's own form and spirit. You divined an eighth of an inch on all sides of the contour of his biceps and pectorals, another contour—the visionary contour of this friend's even larger muscles. And beyond even the sublime and frowning pinnacles of his own independence, the still loftier summits of his friend's pride, of a piece with his.

His friend was in the Foreign Legion. In recent fighting with the Moors he had displayed unusual powers of resistance. Because of his extraordinary strength he was compelled on the march to carry several of his comrades' rifles in addition to his own. Zoborov would read his african letters apart, with an air of absorbed and tender communion, seeking to awaken one's jealousy. He repeated long dialogues between his friend and himself. When it came to his friend's turn to speak, he would puff his chest out, and draw himself up, until the penumbra of visionary and supernatural flesh that always accompanied him was almost filled by his own dilated person. He would assume a debonair recklessness of manner, his moustaches would flaunt upwards over his laughing mouth, and even the sombre character of his teeth and his strong breath would be momentarily forgotten. His gestures would be those of an open-handed and condescending prince. He would ostentatiously make use of the personal pronoun 'thou' (in his french it had a finicky lisping sound), to make one eager to get on such terms with him oneself.

I never got on those terms with him. One day he remained at table after the others had left. He was waiting to be asked to go for a walk. Off my guard, I betrayed the fact that I had noticed this. Several such incidents occurred, and he became less friendly.

Many of Zoborov's tales had to do with Jews. The word 'juif' with him appeared as a long, juicy sound, 'jouiiive,' into which, sleepily blinking his eyes, he injected much indolent contempt. When he used it he made a particular face—sleepy, far-away, heavy-lidded, allowing his almost immobile mouth to flower rather dirtily, drawn down to a peculiarly feline point. He mentioned Jews so often that I wondered if he were perhaps a Jew. On this point I never came to any definite conclusion.

My second night at *Beau Séjour* there was a scene outside my room, which I witnessed. My bedroom was opposite that of Mademoiselle Péronnette. Hearing the shattering report of a door and sounds of heavy breathing, I got up and looked out.

'Va-t'en! Tu n'es-qu'un vaurien! Va-t'en! Tu m'entends? Tu m'agaçes! Va-t'en!'

The voice of the proprietress clattered behind her locked door. A long white black-topped lathe was contorted against it. It was the most spoilt of all our 'Poles,' a german giant, now quite naked. With his bare arms and shoulders he strained

against the wood. As I appeared he turned round enquiring breathlessly with farcical fierceness:

'Faurien! Faurien! Elle m'abelle faurien!'

His eyes blazed above a black-bearded grin, with clownesque incandescence. He was black and white, dazzling skin and black patches of hair alternating. His thin knees were unsteady, his hands were hanging in limp expostulation, his grin of protest wandered in an aimless circle, with me for centre.

'Faurien,' he repeated.

'Veux-tu t'en aller? Je te défends de faire un scandale, tu entends, Charles? Va-t'en!' The voice of the proprietress energetically rattled on the other side of the door.

'Sgantal?' he asked helplessly and incredulously, passing one hand slowly in front of his body, with heavy facetious prudery. The floor boards groaned to the right, a stumpy figure in stocking feet, but otherwise clothed, emerged in assyrian profile, in a wrestling attitude, flat hands extended, rolling with professional hesitation, with factitious rudeness seized the emaciated nudity of the german giant beneath the waist, then disappeared with him bodily down the passage to the left. It was Zoborov in action. The word 'faurien' came escaping out of the dark in a muzzy whistle, while the thump thump of the stocking feet receded. I closed the door.

This gave me an insight at once into the inner social workings of the Pension. Carl had slept with the proprietress from the start, but that was not among Zoborov's accomplishments. He intrigued in complete detachment. Carl and he never clashed, they both sucked up to each other.

Next morning I had a look at Carl. He was about six foot two, with a high, narrow, baldish black head and long black beard. His clothes hung like a sack on his thin body. He gave me an acid grin. Zoborov frowned, blinked stupidly in front of him, and swallowed his coffee with loud, deep-chested relish. He then wiped his moustache slowly, rose, and stamped heavily out into the garden in his sabots, rolling, husky peasant fashion, from side to side. Carl's lank black hair curled in a ridge low on his neck: a deep smooth brow surmounted the settled unintelligent mockery of the rest of his face. The general effect was that of an exotic, oily, south-german Royal Academician. He had an italian name. Essaying a little conversation, I found him surly.

A week later Zoborov, sitting in the orchard with his back against a tree, whittling a stick, obliged me with his views of Carl.

'Where did you take him?' I said, referring to the night scene.

Zoborov knitted his brows and muttered in his most rough and blustering voice:

'Oh, he was drunk. I just threw him on his bed, and told him to shut his head and go to sleep. He bores me, Carl does.'

'He's on good terms with Mademoiselle Péronnette?'

'Is he? I don't know if he is now. He was. She was angry with him that night because she'd found him with the bonne, in the bonne's room. That's why Maria left—the little bonne that waited at table when you came. He sleeps with all the bonnes.'

'I slept with the new one last night,' I said.

He looked up quickly, wrinkling his eyes and puffed out in his sturdiest, heartiest bass, puffed through his closed teeth, that is, in his spluttering buzz:

'Did you? With Antoinette? She's rather a pretty girl. But all bonnes are dirty!' He expressed distaste with his lips. 'A girl who works as a bonne never has time to wash. Maria *stank*. There's no harm in his sleeping with the bonnes. But truly he gets so drunk, too drunk—all the time. He's engaged to Mademoiselle Péronnette, you know.' He laughed softly, gently fluttering his moustaches, heaving up his square protruding chest, and making a gruff rumble in it.

'Engaged—what is that?'

'Why, engaged to be married.' He laughed, throwing his eyes coquettishly up. 'He *was*. I don't know if they're still supposed to be. *He* says she's always trying to marry him. Last year she lent him some money and they became engaged.' He never raised his eyes, except to laugh, and went on whittling the stick.

'She paid him for the engagement?' I said at last.

'Ye-es!' he drawled, with soft shaking chuckles. 'And that's all she'll ever get out of old Carl!—But I don't think she wants to marry him now. I think she wants the money back. I wish he'd take himself off!' He frowned and became gruff. 'He's a good fellow all right, but he's always making scandals. I *think*—he wants her to lend him more money. That's what I think he wants. All these scandals—they disgust me, both of them. I'd leave here tomorrow if I had any money to get out with.'

He hooked his eyebrows down in a calm and formal frown, and surveyed his finger nails. They were short and thick. Putting down the stick he turned his attention to them. He chipped indolently at their edges, then bit the corners off.

I was frequently the witness of quarrels between Carl and Mademoiselle Péronnette. A few days after my conversation in the orchard I entered the kitchen of the Pension, but noticing that Carl was holding Mademoiselle Péronnette by the throat, and was banging her head on the kitchen table, I withdrew. As I closed the door I heard Mademoiselle Péronnette, as I supposed, crash upon the kitchen floor. Dull sounds that were probably kicks followed, and I could hear Carl roaring, 'Gourte! Zale gourte!' When enraged he always made use of the word *gourte*. It was, I think, a corruption of the french word *gourde*, which means a calabash.

As I was leaving Antoinette's bedroom one night I thought I noticed something pale moving in the shadow of the staircase. Five minutes afterwards I returned to her room to remind her to wake me early, and as I got outside I heard voices. She was saying, 'Allez-vous-en, Charles! Non, je ne *veux* pas! J'ai sommeil! Laisse-moi tranquille. Non!' There was a scuffling and creaking of the bed, accompanied by a persuasive and wheedling rumble that I recognized as belonging to Carl.

Then suddenly there was a violent commotion, Antoinette's voice exploded in harsh breton-french:

'Sacré *gars*, fiche-moi donc la paix, veux-tu! *Laisse-moi* tranquille, nom de dieu de dieu——'

The door flew open and Carl, quite naked again, came hotly flopping into my arms, his usual grin opening his beard and suffusing his eyes. He lay in my arms a moment grinning, then stood up.

'Nothing doing tonight?' I said. I was going back to my room when a furious form brushed past me, and I heard a violent slap, followed by the screaming voice of our proprietress:

'Ah, satyr, tu couches avec les bonnes? Tu ne peux pas laisser les femmes tranquilles la nuit, sale bête? C'est ainsi que tu crois toujours débaucher les bonnes après avoir trahi la patronne, espèce de salopris! Prends ça pour ton rhume—et ça. Fumier! Oui, sauve-toi, sale bête!'

The doors began opening along the passage: a few timid little slav pensionnaires and a couple of Parisians began appearing in their openings; I could see the unsteady nudity of Carl staggering beneath slaps that resounded in him, as though she had been striking a hollow column. I hastened to my room. A moment later the precipitate tread of Zoborov passed my door *en route* for the scene of the encounter. The screaming voice of Antoinette then made itself heard amongst the others. I went to my door: I was glad to hear that Antoinette was giving Mademoiselle Péronnette more than she was receiving, delivering herself of some trenchant reflections on the standard of the *moeurs* obtaining in the *Beau Séjour*, on employers that it was impossible to respect, seeing that they were not respectable, and I then once more closed my door. A few moments later Mademoiselle Péronnette's door crashed, the other doors quietly closed, the returning tread of Zoborov passed my wall. So that night's events terminated.

The two Parisians on our landing left next morning to seek more respectable quarters, and Antoinette the same. Carl was at breakfast as usual. He grinned at me when I sat down. Zoborov frowned at the table, drank his coffee loudly, rose, pushing his chair back and standing for a moment in a twisted overbalanced posture, then, his sabots falling heavily on the parquet floor, his body rolling with the movement of a husky peasant, he went out of the window into the garden. The

food grew worse. Two days later I told the proprietress that I was leaving.

Next night I was sitting in the kitchen reading *l'Eclair de l'Ouest*. Mademoiselle Péronnette and Mademoiselle Maraude were sitting near the lamp on the kitchen table and mending the socks of several pensionnaires, when Carl came in at the door, shouted:

'Gourte! Brend za bour don rhume!' . . . and fired three shots from a large revolver at Mademoiselle Péronnette. Two prolonged screams rose from the women, rising and falling through a diapason at each fresh shot. Mademoiselle Péronnette fell to the floor. Carl withdrew. Mademoiselle Péronnette slowly rose from the floor, her hands trembling, and burst into tears. A little Pole who had been curled up asleep on the bench by the fire, and who no doubt had escaped Carl's notice, got up, and limped towards the table. He had been hit in the calf by a bullet. The women had not been hit, and they rolled up his trousers with execrations of the 'bandit,' Carl, and washed and dressed the wound, which was superficial. I went to look for Zoborov, whose presence I thought was probably required. I found him at the bottom of the orchard with two other 'Poles,' in the moonlight, playing a flute. As he lifted his little finger from a stop and released a shrill squeak, he raised one eyebrow, which he lowered again when, raising another finger, he produced a lower note. I sat down beside them. Zoborov finished the tune he was playing. His companions lay at right angles to each other, their heads propped on their bent forearms.

'Carl has broken out,' I said.

'Ah. He is always doing that,' Zoborov said.

'He's been firing a pistol at the proprietress.'

Zoborov lifted one eyebrow, as he had when he released the squeak on the flute.

'That doesn't surprise me,' he said.

'No one was hurt except a pensionnaire, who was asleep at the time. He hit him in the calf.'

'Who was it?'

'I don't know his name.'

Zoborov turned in my direction, and falling down on his side, propped his head like the other two 'Poles,' on his bent forearm, while he puffed out his heavy chest. His voice became rough and deep.

'Ecoutez!' he began, with the sound like a voice blowing in a comb covered with tissue paper. 'Ecoutez, mon ami.—This Pension will never be quiet until that imbecile Carl leaves. He's not a bad fellow (il n'est pas mauvais camarade), he's a bad hat (il est mauvais sujet). You understand, he's not straight about money. He's a chap with money, his father's a rich brewer. A brewer, yes, my friend, you may laugh! It's not without its humour. He'd have to brew a lot to satisfy old Carl! He is an inveterate boozier. Why? Why does a man drink so much as that? Why?' His voice assumed the russian sing-song of pathetic enquiry, the fine gnat-like voice rapidly ascending and dropping again in an exhausted complaint. 'Because he is a german brute! That is the reason. He thinks because his father is a rich brewer that people should give him drink for nothing—it is a strange form of reasoning! He is always dissatisfied.—Now he has shot a pensionnaire. It is not the first time that he has fired at Mademoiselle Péronnette. But he never hits her! He doesn't want to hit her. He just fires off his revolver to make her excited! Then he tries to borrow more money!'

The three of them now remained quite immobile, stretched out on the dewy grass in different directions. I got up. With a gruff and blustering sign, Zoborov exclaimed:

'Ah yes, my friend, that is how it is!'

I walked back to the house. As I passed the kitchen, I heard a great deal of noise, and went in.

The little shot pensionnaire was once more back on the bench, by the fire, with his bare leg, bandaged, stretched out horizontally in front of him, his two hands behind his head. At the table sat Carl, his face buried in a large handkerchief, which he held against his forehead, his shoulders heaving. A great volume of sound rose from him, a rhythmical

bellowing of grief.

Mademoiselle Péronnette was standing a few yards away from him, a denunciatory forefinger stabbing the air in the direction of his convulsions.

'There he sits, the wretch. Mon dieu, he is a pretty sight! And to reflect that that is a fellow of good family, who comes from a home cracking with every luxury! Ça fait pitié!—Is there anything I haven't done for you, Charles? Say, Charles, can you deny I have done all a woman can?' she vociferated. 'I have given you my youth' (tremblingly and tenderly), 'my beauty!—I have shamed myself. I have offered myself to the saucy scorn of mere bonnes, I have made every sacrifice a woman can make! With what result I should like to know? Ah yes, you may well hide your face! You outrage me at every moment, you take my last halfpenny, and when you have soaked yourself in a neighbouring saloon, you come back here and debauch my bonnes! Any dirty peasant girl serves your turn. Is not that true, Charles? Answer! Deny it if you dare! That is what you do! That is how you repay all my kindness!'

Observing my presence, she turned expansively towards me.

'Tenez, ce monsieur-là peut te le dire, il a été le témoin de tes indignes caprices.—Had you not, sir, occasion to observe this ruffian, as naked as he came into the world, issuing from the bedroom of the good-for-nothing harlot, Antoinette? Is not that the case, sir? Without a stitch of clothing, this incontinent ruffian——'

The french tongue, with its prolix dignity for such occasions, clamoured on. As I was drawn into the discussion, a section of Carl's face appeared from behind the handkerchief, enough to free the tail of his eye for an examination of that part of the kitchen that was behind him. Our boche exhibitionist ascertained who it was had witnessed his last nocturnal contretemps. He thrust his head back deeper into the handkerchief. A roar of mingled disapproval and grief broke from him.

'Ah yes, now you suffer! But you never consider how you have made me suffer!'

But her discourse now took a new direction.

'I don't say, Charles, that you are alone—there are others who are even more guilty than you. I could name them if I wished! There is that dirty sneaking individual Zoborov, for instance. Ah, how he irritates me, that man! He is an extremely treacherous personage, that! *I* have heard the things he says about me. He thinks I don't know. I know very well. I am informed of all his manoeuvres. *That* is the guilty party in this affair. He is the person who poisons the air of this establishment! I would get rid of him tomorrow if I could! Yes, Charles, I know that you, in comparison with such a crapulous individual as that Zoborov, are at least frank. At least you are a gentleman, a man of good family, accustomed to live in ease—what do I say, in luxury: and your faults are the faults of your station. *Tu es un fils à papa*, mon pauvre garçon—you are a spoiled darling. You are not a *dirty moujik*, like that Zoborov!'

I noticed at this point, the face of Zoborov peering in at the window with his gascon frown, his one hooked-down and angrily-anchored eyebrow, and fluffy cavalier moustache, above his steady inscrutable feline pout. Mademoiselle Péronnette observed him at the same moment.

'Yes, I see you, sir! *Toujours aux écoutes!* Always eavesdropping! What eavesdroppers hear of themselves they deserve to hear. I hope you are satisfied, that's all I can say!'

'La ferme! La ferme!' Zoborov's gruff railing voice puffed in at the window. He made his hand into a duck's bill, and worked it up and down to make it quack, as he turned away.

'He insults me, you know, that dirty *type*, he treats me as though I were the last of creatures! Yet what is he? He is nothing but a dirty moujik! He actually boasts of it. He's not a credit to the house—you should see the Parisians looking at him. He has driven pensionnaires away with his rudeness—and his dirt! He doesn't mind what he says. Then he abuses me to *everybody*, from morning till night. C'est une mauvaise langue!'

'En effet!' Mademoiselle Maraude agreed. 'He has a bad tongue. He does this house no good.'

The 'Pole' with the bandaged leg began giggling. The two women turned to him.

'What is it, mon petit? Is your leg hurting you?'

Carl's head had sunk upon the table. The heat inside the handkerchief, the effects of the brandy he had been drinking, and the constant music of Mademoiselle Péronnette's voice, had overcome him. Now prolonged and congested snores rose from him, one especially vicious and intense crescendo making Mademoiselle Péronnette, who was examining the bandage on the leg of the pensionnaire, jump.

'Mon dieu!' she said. 'I wondered whatever it was.' The door opened, and Zoborov entered, advancing down the kitchen with as much noise as he could extract from his weight, his clumsiness, and the size of his sabots.

As he came, expanding his chest and speaking in his deepest voice, he said, bluff and 'proletarian':

'Ecoutez, Mademoiselle Péronnette! I don't like the way you talk about me. You are absurd! What have I done to cause you to speak about me like that? I spend half my time keeping the peace between you and Carl; and when anything happens you turn on me! You are not reasonable!'

He spoke in an indolent sing-song, his eyes half closed, scarcely moving his lips, and talking through his teeth. He knelt down beside his wounded compatriot and put his hand gently upon his bandaged leg, speaking to him in russian.

'I only say what I know, sir!' Mademoiselle Péronnette hotly replied.

Zoborov continued speaking in russian to the injured pensionnaire, who replied in accents of mild musical protest.

'Your intrigues are notorious! You are always making mischief. I detest you, and wish you had never entered this house!'

Zoborov had unwound the bandage. He rose with a face of frowning indignation.

'Ecoutez, Mademoiselle! If instead of amusing yourself by blowing off steam in that way, you did something for this poor chap who has just been injured through no fault of his own, you would be showing yourself more humane, yes, more humane! Why have you not at once put him to bed? He should see a doctor. His wound is in a dangerous condition! If it is not attended to blood-poisoning will set in.'

Mademoiselle Péronnette faced him, eye flashing; Mademoiselle Maraude had risen and moved towards the injured figure.

'It isn't true!' Mademoiselle Maraude said. 'He is not seriously hurt——'

'No, you are lying, Zoborov! He has been attended to,' Mademoiselle Péronnette said. 'It doesn't hurt, does it, mon petit?' she appealed coaxingly. 'It was nothing but a scratch, was it?—No. It was nothing but a scratch.'

'For a scratch there's a good deal of blood,' Zoborov said. 'Fetch a basin and some hot water. I will go for a doctor.'

The women looked at each other.

'A doctor? Why? You must be off your head! There's no occasion for a doctor! Do you wish for a doctor, mon petit?'

The injured pensionnaire smiled indulgently, with an amused expression, as though an elder taking part in a children's game, and shook his head.

'No. He does not wish for a doctor. Of course he doesn't! He ought to know best himself.'

'Ecoutez!' said Zoborov sleepily. 'It's for your sake, Mademoiselle Péronnette, as much as his—— You don't want anything to happen to him? No. These wounds are dangerous. You should get a doctor.'

Mademoiselle Péronnette stared at him in impotent hatred. She turned quickly to Mademoiselle Maraude, and said:

'Run quickly, Marie, and get some ice—down at Cornic's.'

Zoborov started rolling with ungainly speed towards the door, saying over his shoulder, 'I will go. I shall be back in a few minutes. Bathe his leg.'

As the door closed Mademoiselle Péronnette stared glassily at Mademoiselle Maraude.

'Quel homme! Quel homme! Mon dieu, quel malhonnête individu que celui-là! You saw how he put the blame on us? Any one would think that we had neglected this poor boy here. My god, what a man!'

An obscene and penetrating trumpeting rose from the prostrate Carl—it rose shrieking and strong, sank to a purr, then rose again louder and stronger, sank to a gurgling purr again, then rose to a brazen crow, higher and higher.

Mademoiselle Péronnette put her fingers in her ears. 'My god, my god! As though it were not enough to have caused all this trouble——'

She sprang over, and seizing Carl by the shoulders shook him nervously.

'Go and sleep off your booze somewhere else—do you hear? Be off! Get out! Allez—vite! Marchez! Assez, assez! Fiche-moi la paix! *Enfin!*'

Carl rose unsteadily, a malevolent eye fixed on Mademoiselle Péronnette, and staggered out of the room. Mademoiselle Péronnette drew Mademoiselle Maraude aside, and began whispering energetically to her. I withdrew.

That night the bedroom door of the proprietress opened and shut it seemed incessantly. Between four and five, as it was getting light, I woke and heard a scuffle in the passage. The voice of Mademoiselle Péronnette insisted in a juicy whisper:

'Dis, Charles, tu m'aimes? M'aimes-tu, chéri? Dis!'

A sickly rumble came in response. Then more scuffling. Sucking and patting sounds and the signs of disordered respiration, with occasional rumbles, continued for some time. I got down to the bottom of the bed and turned the key in the door. I expected our german exhibitionist to enter my room at any moment with the nude form of Mademoiselle Péronnette in his arms, and perhaps edify me with the final phases of his heavy adieus. The sound of the key in the lock cut short whatever it was, and gradually the sounds ceased.

Next evening, at the request of Carl, we all collected in the kitchen for a little celebration. Whether it was to mark the rupture of the engagement, an approaching marriage, or what, was not made clear to us. Carl, with the courtliness of the South of Germany, his thin academic black locks and lengthy beard conferring the air of a function upon the scene, was very attentive to Mademoiselle Péronnette.

Zoborov was the gallant moujik. He toasted, with rough plebeian humour, the happy couple.

'Aux deux tourtereaux!' he rolled bluffly out, lifting his glass, and rolling the r's of 'tourtereau' with a rich russian intensity. Placing his heavy sinewy brown hand before his mouth he whispered to me:

'Old Carl has relieved her of a bit more of her dough!' He shook his shoulders and gurgled in the bass.

'Do you think that's it?'

'*Zurement!*' he lisped. 'He's got the secret of the safe! He knows the combination!' He chuckled, bawdy and bluff. 'Old Carl will clean her out, you see.'

'He's an exceedingly noisy burglar. He woke me up last night in the course of his operations.'

Zoborov chuckled contentedly.

'He's mad!' he said. 'Still, he gets what he goes for. Good luck to him, I say.'

'Is Mademoiselle Péronnette rich?' I asked him. He squinted and hooked his left eyebrow down, then burst out laughing and looked in my face.

'I don't know,' he said. 'I shouldn't think so. Have you seen the safe?' he laughed again.

'No.'

'She has the safe in her bedroom. Carl rattles it when he's very screwed. Once he tried to carry it out of the room.' Zoborov laughed with his sly shaking of his big diaphragm. The recollection of this event tickled him. Then he said to me: 'If you ask me, all she's got is in that safe, that's what I think.'

A piano had been brought in. A pensionnaire was playing the 'Blue Danube.'

Carl and Mademoiselle Péronnette danced. She was a big woman, about thirty. Her empty energetic face was pretty, but rather dully and evenly laid out. Her back when *en fête* was a long serpentine blank with an embroidered spine. When she got up to dance she held herself forward, bare arms hanging on either side, two big meaty handles, and she undulated her *nuque* and back while she drew her mouth down into the tense bow of an affected kiss. While she held her croupe out stiffly in the rear, in muscular prominence, her eyes burnt at you with traditional gallic gallantry, her eyebrows arched in bland acceptance (a static '*Mais oui, si vous voulez!*') of french sex-convention, the general effect intended to be 'witty' and suggestive, without vulgarity. I was very much disgusted by her for my part: what she suggested to me was something like a mad butcher, who had put a piece of bright material over a carcase of pork or mutton, and then started to ogle his customers, owing to a sudden shuffling in his mind of the respective appetites. Carl on this occasion behaved like the hallucinated customer of such a pantomime, who, come into the shop, had entered into the spirit of the demented butcher, and proceeded to waltz with his sex-promoted food. The stupid madness, or commonplace wildness, that always shone in his eyes was at full blast as he jolted uncouthly hither and thither, while the proprietress undulated and crackled in complete independence, held roughly in place merely by his two tentacles.

With the exception of Mademoiselle Maraude and the *bonne amie* of a parisian schoolmaster on his vacation, all the guests were men. They danced together timidly and clumsily; Zoborov, frowning and squinting, stamped over to the schoolmaster's girl, and with a cross gruff hauteur invited her to dance. He rolled his painful proletarian weight once or twice round the room. The 'Blue Danube' rolled on; Carl poured appreciative oily light into Mademoiselle Péronnette's eyes, she redoubled her lascivious fluxions, until Carl, having exhausted all the superlatives of the language of the eyes, cut short their rhythmical advance and, becoming immobile in the middle of the room, clasped her in his arms, where she hung like a dying wasp, Carl devouring with much movement the lower part of her face, canted up with abandon. The pensionnaire at the piano broke into a cossack dance. Zoborov, who had handed the lady back to her schoolmaster again, with ceremony, and had returned to sit at my side, now rose and performed a series of gargantuan movements up and down the kitchen (flinging the less weighty couples to left and right) studiously devoid of any element of grace or skill. At regular intervals he stamped in his sabots and uttered a few gruff cries, while the pianist trumped upon the piano. Then, head back and his little moustache waving above his mouth, he trundled down the room, with a knees-up gymnastic movement. Satisfied that he had betrayed nothing but the completest barbaric uncouthness, he resumed his seat, grinning gravely at me.

His compatriots applauded, the piano stopped.

'That is a *typical* dance, mon ami, of the Don Cossacks!' he said, puffing a little. '*Typical*' (Tee-peek!), in his slow mincing french. In using this word his attitude was that I had a well-known curiosity about everything cossack, and that now, by the purest chance, I had heard a characteristic Don dance, and seen it interpreted with a racy savagery that only a Cossack could convey: and that, at the same time, he, Zoborov, had been astonished, he was bound to admit, at this happening in such an informative way as it had. In fine, I was lucky.

'Typical!' he said again. 'But I am out of practice.' Then he dropped the subject. The piano struck up again, with a contemporary Berlin dance-tune, and the floor was soon full of bobbing shapes, attempting to time their feet to the music. Long before the end the forms of Carl and Mademoiselle Péronnette, head and shoulders above the rest of the company, were transfixed in the centre of the room, Carl like a lanky black spider, always devouring but never making an end of his meal provided by the palpitating wasp in his arms while the others bobbed on gently around them.

Zoborov fixed his frown of quizzical reproof upon them, and stuttered thickly in the beard that was not there:

'Les deux tourterreaux!'

The cider was of good quality, and it was plentiful, being drawn from a large cask. Carl and Mademoiselle Péronnette in the intervals of the music remained in a deep embrace by the side of the fire. At length, when the *fête* had been in

progress for perhaps half an hour, they withdrew, so coiled about one another that they experienced some difficulty in getting out of the door.

Zoborov drew my attention to their departure.

'The two doves are going to their nest to lie down for a little while!' he remarked, with the bluff rolling jocosity of Zoborov celebrating.

Zoborov now took charge, and the party became all-russian. He fetched his flute and another pensionnaire had an accordion: a concert of russian popular music began. The Volga Boat Song was chorally rendered, with Zoborov beating time.

At the end of a quarter of an hour Mademoiselle Péronnette and Carl reappeared. Carl was pale and Mademoiselle Péronnette very red. She affected to fan herself. Carl's monotonous grin attached itself to the faces of the company with its unfailing brutal confession, hang-dog to stress its obscene message, while his sleek and shining black hair curled venerably behind, where a hasty brush and comb had arranged it.

'Qu'il fait *chaud*!' exclaimed Mademoiselle Péronnette, and drew down a window.

Zoborov took no notice of the reappearance of the turtle doves, but continued his concert. After a while Mademoiselle Péronnette showed signs of impatience. She got up, and advancing towards her choir of pensionnaires, who were gathered round the fire in a half-circle, she exclaimed:

'What do you say to another dance, now, my friends? Let somebody play the piano. Your russian music is very pretty but it is so sad. It always makes me sad. Let us have something more cheerful.'

A pensionnaire got up and went to the piano. Zoborov remained near the fire. The dance began half-heartedly. Zoborov went on playing the flute to himself, his little peaked mouth drawn down to the mouthpiece, his little finger remaining erect while he sampled the feeble sound.

The 'Poles' of the Pension sat and gazed, like a group of monks bowed down with many vows, at their proprietress and her german lover, while one of their number made music for this voluptuous couple, so strangely different from them. Their leader, Zoborov, continued to draw a few notes out of his flute, the skeleton of a melancholy air. Then two or three rose and embraced each other awkwardly, and began to move round the room, shuffling their feet, out of consideration for their worldly hostess. The parisian schoolmaster and his bonne amie also accommodated.

The kitchen door opened and a group of eleven Russians entered, friends of Zoborov, whom he had invited. They had come over from a neighbouring Pension. He rose and greeted them in impressive gutturals, lurching huskily about. They moved to the bottom of the kitchen, were provided with cups, and drew cider from the barrel. There were now about thirty Russians in the room. A few were dancing languidly. Mademoiselle Péronnette and Carl were indulging in a deep kiss midway in their career. Zoborov, when his visitors had refreshed themselves, crossed the kitchen with them and they left. He was going to show them over the establishment.

'I ask you!' said Mademoiselle Péronnette to Mademoiselle Maraude. 'Quel toupet, quand même!'

Mademoiselle Maraude, to whom I had been talking, gazed after Zoborov.

'En effet!' she said.

'One would think that the house belonged to him!' exclaimed Mademoiselle Péronnette. 'He brings a band of strangers in here—— I might not exist at all, for all I am consulted! What an ill-mannered individual!'

'C'est un paysan, quoi!' Mademoiselle Maraude folded her hands in her lap with dignified deliberation. Carl grinned at both of them in turn. Zoborov returned with his friends. Mademoiselle Péronnette burst out:

'Monsieur! One would say that you have forgotten to whom this house belongs! You bring your friends in here and take no more notice of me than if I were the bonne. I am the proprietress of this establishment, gentlemen, and this,' turning to Carl, 'my fiancé, is now my partner.'

Zoborov advanced sleepily towards Mademoiselle Péronnette, a blustering complaint blowing from his mouth as he came, rolling and blowing lazily before him.

'But, Mademoiselle Péronnette, I don't understand you, really. You asked us to invite anybody we liked.—These are good friends of mine. I have just shown them over the house out of kindness to *you*. I was advertising your Pension!'

'I'm quite capable of doing that myself, Monsieur Zoborov!'

'You can't have too much advertisement!' said Zoborov genially.

Carl, who had stood with his dark sheepish grin on his face, gave a loud and unexpected laugh. Quickly raising his arm, he brought his hand down on Zoborov's back. He then kneaded with his long white fingers Zoborov's muscular shoulder.

'Zagré Zoborov!' he exclaimed, shaking with guttural mirth, 'that's capital! I and my partner appoint you as our agent!'

Rolling gently in contact with the hearty mannerisms of his german friend, glancing up quickly with shrewd conciliation, Zoborov blustered out pleasantly:

'Good! I'll be your factor. That's fixed.—Congratulations, old fellow, on your promotion!—What is my salary?'

'We pay by results!' grinned Carl.

'Well, here is one gentleman already who wishes to come round and reside here.'

He pointed to a ragged figure lurking absent-mindedly in the rear of the group. 'I shall expect my commission when he moves in.'

Mademoiselle did not like this conversation, and now said:

'I've got quite enough Russians here already. I should be more obliged to you if you found a few Parisians or Americans. That's what I should like.'

'En effet!' said Mademoiselle Maraude distinctly, under her breath.

The tactful pensionnaire at the piano began playing a viennese waltz. Mademoiselle Péronnette, still boiling, drew Carl away, saying:

'C'est trop fort! How that man irritates me, how he irritates me! He's *malin*, also, he is treacherous! He always has an answer, have you noticed? He's never without an answer. He's as *rusé* as a peasant—but, anyhow, he *is* a peasant, so that's to be expected. How he irritates me!'

Carl rumbled along incoherently beside her, bending down, his arms dangling, his stoop accentuated.

'Oh, he means no harm!' he said.

'Not so. He's a treacherous individual, I tell you!'

Carl put his arm around her waist, and kicking his large flat feet about for a few moments, jerked her into a brisk dance, which with reluctant and angry undulations she followed. As they flew round, in angular sweeps, describing a series of rough squares, a discontented clamour still escaped from her.

A little later the Russians began singing the Volga Boat Song, at the bottom of the room, Zoborov again acting as conductor. Mademoiselle Péronnette put her fingers in her ears.

'Mon dieu, quelle vilaine musique que celle-là!' she exclaimed.

'En effet!' said Mademoiselle Maraude, 'elle n'est pas bien belle!'

'En effet!' said Mademoiselle Péronnette.

Carl was pouring himself out a cognac, and in a blunt and booming bass was intoning the air with the others.

Mademoiselle Péronnette left the room. After an interval Carl followed her.

I went over and talked by the fire to the pensionnaire who usually played the piano. Zoborov came up, his chest protruding, and his eyes almost closed, and sat down heavily beside us.

'Well, my friend, what do you think of Mademoiselle Péronnette's new *partner*?' he laughed with a gruff gentle rattle.

'Carl, do you mean?'

'Why yes, Carl!' he again gave way to soft rumbling laughter. 'I wish them luck of their partnership. They are a likely pair, I am bound to say!'

The pianist gazed into the fire.

'What time do you leave in the morning?' he asked.

'At ten.' We talked about Vannes, to which I was going first. He seemed to know Brittany very well. He gave several yawns, gazing over towards his animated crowd of compatriots.

'It's time we went to bed. I shall get rid of this lot,' he said, getting up. 'Come along, my children,' he exclaimed. 'To bed! We're going to bed!'

Several hurried up to him excitedly. They talked for some minutes in Russian. Again he raised his voice.

'Let's go to bed, my friends! It's late.'

Mademoiselle Péronnette entered the kitchen. Zoborov, without looking in her direction, put out his hand and switched off the lights. A roar of surprise, laughter and scuffling ensued. The fire lighted up the faces of those sitting near us, and a restless mass beyond.

'Will you be so kind, Monsieur Zoborov, as to put on the lights at once!' the voice of Mademoiselle Péronnette clamoured. 'Monsieur Zoborov, do you hear me? Put on the lights immediately!' Suddenly the lights were switched on again. Mademoiselle Péronnette had done it herself.

'Will you allow me, Monsieur Zoborov, to manage my own house? At last I have had enough of your ways! You are an insolent personage. You are an ill-conditioned individual!'

Zoborov's eyes were now completely closed, apparently with sleep that could not be put off. He blustered plaintively back without opening them:

'But, Mademoiselle! I thought you'd gone to bed! Some one had to get all these people out! I don't understand you. Truly I don't understand you at all! Still, now that you're here I can go to bed! I'm dropping with sleep! Good-night! Good-night!' he sang gruffly as he rolled out, raising his brawny paw several times in farewell.

'Quel homme que celui-là! Quel homme!' said Mademoiselle Péronnette, gazing into the eyes of Mademoiselle Maraude, who had come up.

'En effet!' said Mademoiselle Maraude. 'For a pensionnaire who never pays his "pension," he is a cool hand!'

That night the new partners had their first business disagreement in the bedroom of the proprietress. I heard their voices booming and rattling for a long time before the door opened. It burst open at last. Mademoiselle Péronnette shouted:

'Bring me the fifteen thousand francs you have stolen from me, you indelicate personage, and I will then return you your papers. If your father knew of your conduct what would he think? Do you suppose he would like to think that he had a son who was nothing but a crook? Yes, crook! Our partnership begins from the moment of the first *versement* that you have promised, do you understand? And I require the money at once, you hear? At once!'

A furious rumble came from outside my door.

'No, I have heard that before! Enough! I will hear no more.'

A second rumble answered.

'What, you accuse me of that? You ungrateful individual, you have the face to——'

A long explanatory muted rumble followed.

'Never!' she screamed. 'Never, while I live! I will sign nothing! That's flat! I would never have believed it possible——'

A rumble came from a certain distance down the passage.

'Yes, you had better go! You do well to slink away! But I'll see you don't get far, my bird. You will be held for *escroquerie*, yes, *escroquerie*! at the nearest commissariat! Don't make any mistake!'

A distant note sounded, like the brief flatulence of an elephant. I took it to be 'Gourte!'

'Ah yes, my pretty bird!' vociferated Mademoiselle Péronnette. 'Wait a bit! You may vilify me now. That is the sort of person you are! That I should have expected! But we shall see! We shall see!'

There was no answer. There was a short silence. Mademoiselle Péronnette's door crashed to.

The next morning I left at ten.

A year later I went to the Pardon at Rot. I was sitting amongst the masses of black-clothed figures at a minor wedding, when I saw a figure approaching that appeared familiar. Five peasants were rolling along in their best sabots and finest flat black hats, one in the middle holding the rest with some story he was telling, with heavy dare-devil gestures, as they closed in deferentially upon him as they walked. In the middle one I recognized Zoborov. He was now dressed completely as a breton peasant, in black cloth a half-inch thick, of the costliest manufacture. He rocked from side to side, stumbling at any largish cobble, chest up and out, a double chin descending spoon-shaped and hard beneath upon his short neck, formed as a consequence of the muscular arrangements for the production of his deep bass. His mouth protruded like the mouths of stone masks used for fountains.

As he shouldered his way impressively forward, he made gestures of condescending recognition to left and right, as he caught sight of somebody he knew. His fellow peasants responded with eager salutes or flattering obeisances.

As he caught sight of me he stumbled heartily towards me, his mouth belled out, as though mildly roaring, one large rough hand held back in readiness to grasp mine.

'Why, so you are back again in this part of the country, are you? I am glad to see you! How are you?' he said. 'Come inside, I know the patronne here. I'll get her to give us some good cider.'

We all went in. The patronne saw us and made her way through the crowd at once to Zoborov. Her malignant white face, bald at the sides, as usual with the breton woman, shone with sweat; she came up whining deferentially. With his smiling frown, and the gruff caress of his artificial roar, Zoborov greeted her, and went with her into a parlour next to the kitchen. We followed.

'Bring us three bottles of the best cider, Madame Mordouan,' he said.

'Why yes, Monsieur Zoborov, certainly, immediately,' she said, and obsequiously withdrew.

Zoborov was fatter. The great thickness of the new suiting made him appear very big indeed. The newness and stiffness of the breton fancy dress, the shining broadcloth and velvet, combined with the noticeable filling out of his face, resulted in a disagreeable impression of an obese doll or gigantic barber's block.

'You look prosperous,' I said.

'Do you think so? I'm *en breton* now, you see! When are you coming over to see us at *Beau Séjour*? This gentleman was at *Beau Séjour*,' he said, turning to his friends. 'Are you stopping in the neighbourhood? I'll send the trap over for you.'

'The trap? Have they a trap now?'

'A trap? Why yes, my friend. There have been great changes since you were at *Beau Séjour*!'

'Indeed. Of what kind?'

'Of *every* kind, my friend!'

'How is Mademoiselle Péronnette?'

'Oh, she's gone, long ago!'

'Indeed!'

'Why yes, she and old Carl left soon after you.' He paused a moment. 'I am the proprietor now!'

'You!'

'Why yes, my friend, me! Mademoiselle Péronnette went bust. *Beau Séjour* was sold at auction as it stood. It was not expensive. I took the place on.—Mais oui, mon ami, je suis maintenant le propriétaire!' He seized me by the shoulder, then lightly tapped me there. 'C'est drôle, n'est-ce pas?'

I seemed to hear the voice of Mademoiselle Maraude replying, 'En effet.'

'En effet!' I said.

He offered himself banteringly as the comic proprietor. Fancy Zoborov being the proprietor of a french hotel! He turned, frowning menacingly, however, towards the peasants, and raised his glass with solemn eye. I raised mine. They raised their glasses like a peasant chorus.

'What has become of Carl?' I asked.

'Carl? Oh I don't know what's become of Carl! He's gone to the devil, I should think!'

I saw that I was obtruding other histories upon the same footing with his, into a new world where they had no place. They were a part of the old bad days.

'How are the Russians, "les Polonais"?'

He looked at me for a moment, his eyes closing in his peculiar withdrawal or sleep.

'Oh, I've cleared all that rubbish out! I've got a chic hotel now! It is really quite comfortable. You should come over. I have several Americans, there's an Englishman, Kenyon, do you know him? His father is a celebrated architect.—I only have three Russians there now. I kept them on, poor devils. They help me with the work. Two act as valets.—I know what Russians are, being one myself, you see! I have no wish to go bankrupt like Mademoiselle Péronnette.'

I was rather richly dressed at the time, and I was glad. I ordered for the great 'peasant' and his satellites another bottle of the ceremonious cider.

THE POLE

In pre-war Europe, which was also even more the Europe of before the Russian Revolution, a curious sect was established in the watering-places of Brittany. Its members were generally known by the peasants as 'Poles.' The so-called 'Pole' was a russian exile or wandering student, often coming from Poland. The sort that collected in such great numbers in Brittany were probably not politicians, except in the sentimental manner in which all educated Russians before the Revolution were 'radical' and revolutionary. They had banished themselves, for purely literary political reasons, it is likely, rather than been banished. Brittany became a heavenly Siberia for masses of middle-class russian men and women who made 'art' the excuse for a never-ending holiday. They insensibly became a gentle and delightful parasite upon the French. Since the Revolution (it being obvious that they cannot have vast and lucrative estates, which before the Revolution it was easy for them to claim) they have mostly been compelled to work. The Paris taxi-driver of

today, lolling on the seat of his vehicle, cigarette in mouth, who, without turning round, swiftly moves away when a fare enters his cab, is what in the ancien régime would have been a 'Pole.' If there is a communist revolution in France, this sort of new nomad will move down into Spain perhaps. He provides for the countries of Europe on a very insignificant scale a new version, today, of the 'jewish problem.' His indolence, not his activity, of course, makes him a 'problem.'

The pre-war method of migration was this. A 'Pole' in his home in Russia would save up or borrow about ten pounds. He then left his native land for ever, taking a third-class ticket to Brest. This must have become an almost instinctive proceeding. At Brest he was in the heart of the promised land. He would then make the best of his way to a Pension de Famille, already occupied by a phalanstery of 'Poles.' There he would have happily remained until the crack of doom, but for the Bolshevik Revolution. He had reckoned without Lenin, so to speak.

He was usually a 'noble,' very soberly but tactfully dressed. He wore suède gloves: his manners were graceful. The proprietress had probably been warned of his arrival and he was welcome. His first action would be to pay three months' board and lodging in advance; that would also be his last action of that sort. With a simple dignity that was the secret of the 'Pole,' at the end of the trimestre, he remained as the guest of the proprietress. His hostess took this as a matter of course. He henceforth became the regular, unobtrusive, respected inhabitant of the house.

If the proprietress of a Pension de Famille removed her establishment from one part of the country to another, took a larger house, perhaps (to make room for more 'Poles'), her 'Poles' went with her without comment or change in their habits. Just before the war, Mademoiselle T. still sheltered in her magnificent hotel, frequented by wealthy Americans, some of these quiet 'Poles,' who had been with her since the day when she first began hotel-keeping in a small wayside inn. Lunching there you could observe at the foot of the table a group of men of a monastic simplicity of dress and manner, all middle-aged by that time, indeed even venerable in several instances, talking among themselves in a strange and attractive tongue. Mademoiselle T. was an amiable old lady, and these were her domestic gods. Any one treating them with disrespect would have seen the rough side of Mademoiselle T.'s tongue.

Their hosts, I believe, so practical in other ways, became superstitious about these pensive inhabitants of their houses. Some I know would no more have turned out an old and ailing 'Pole' who owed them thirty years' board and lodging, than many people would get rid of an aged and feeble cat.

For the breton peasant, 'Polonais' or 'Pole' sufficed to describe the member of any nation whom he observed leading anything that resembled the unaccountable life of the true slav parasite with which he had originally familiarized himself under the name of 'Pole.'

Few 'Poles,' I think, ever saw the colour of money once this initial pin-money that they brought from Russia was spent. One 'Pole' of my acquaintance did get hold of three pounds by some means, and went to spend a month in Paris. After this outing, his prestige considerably enhanced, he came back and resumed his regular life, glad to be again away from the *siècle* and its metropolitan degradation. In pre-war Paris, 'Poles' were to be met, very much *de passage*, seeing some old friends (*en route* for Brest) for the last time.

A woman opened a smart hotel of about thirty beds not far from *Beau Séjour*. I was going over to see it. She advertised that any artist who would at once take up his quarters there would receive his first six months gratis. Referring to this interesting event in the hearing of a 'Pole,' he told me he had been over there the previous day. He had found no less than twelve 'Poles' already installed, and there was a considerable waiting list. 'If you like to pay you can go there all right,' he said, laughing.

The general explanation given by the 'Pole' of the position in which he found himself, was that his hosts, after six or nine months, were afraid to let him go, for fear of losing their money. He would add that he could confidently rely on more and more deference the longer he stopped, and the larger the amount that he represented in consequence. Ordinary boarders, he would tell you, could count on nothing like so much attention as he could.

That such a state of affairs should ever have occurred, was partly due perhaps to the patriarchal circumstances of the breton agricultural life. This new domestic animal was able to insinuate himself into its midst because of the existence of so many there already. Rich peasants, and this applied to the proprietors of country inns, were accustomed in their households to suffer the presence of a number of poor familiars, cousinly paupers, supernumeraries doing odd jobs on

the farm or in the stables. The people not precisely servants who found a place at their hearth were not all members of the immediate family of the master.

But there was another factor favouring the development of the 'Pole.' This was that many of them were described as painters. They seldom of course were able to practise that expensive art, for they could not buy colours or canvases: in their visitors' bulletins, however, they generally figured as that. But after the death of Gauguin, the dealer, Vollard, and others, came down from Paris. They ransacked the country for forgotten canvases: when they found one they paid to the astonished peasants, in the heat of competition, very considerable sums. Past hosts of the great french romantic had confiscated paintings in lieu of rent. The least sketch had its price. The sight of these breathless collectors, and the rumours of the sums paid, made a deep impression on the local people. The 'Poles' on their side were very persuasive. They assured their hosts that Gauguin was a mere cipher compared to them.—These circumstances told in favour of the 'Pole.'

But no such explanations can really account for the founding of this charming and whimsical order. Whether there are still a few 'Poles' surviving in Brittany or not, I have no means of knowing. In the larger centres of *villégiature* the *siècle* was already paramount before the war.

The Russian with whom translations of the russian books of tsarist Russia familiarized the West was an excited and unstable child. We have seen this society massacred in millions without astonishment. The russian books prepared every Western European for that consummation. All the cast of the *Cherry Orchard* could be massacred easily by a single determined gunman. This defencelessness of the essential Slav can, under certain circumstances, become an asset. Especially perhaps the French would find themselves victims of such a harmless parasite, so different in his nature to themselves. A more energetic parasite would always fail with the gallic nature, unless very resolute.

Footnote

[1] An account of the 'Pole' will be found at the end of this story. The 'Pole' is a national variety of Pension-sponger, confined as far as I know to France, and to the period preceding the Russian Revolution.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Minor variations in spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

[End of *Beau Séjour*, by Wyndham Lewis]