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**Honoré de Balzac**  
**LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE**



**The Human Comedy**

**PARISIAN LIFE**

**VOLUME VII**

THIS EDITION OF THE COMPLETE TRANSLATION  
OF "THE HUMAN COMEDY" IS STRICTLY LIMITED TO  
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W. B. Woodbury



## AT HOME

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*She found the perfume-dealer in the centre of the adjoining room, with a yard-stick in his hand measuring space, but having his India-green dressing-gown with chocolate-colored dots hanging so carelessly on him that the cold was making his legs red without his feeling it, so engrossed was he. When César turned around to say to his wife: "Well, Constance, what do you want?" his mien, like that of a man lost in arithmetic, was so extremely ludicrous that Madame Birotteau burst out laughing.*



THE NOVELS  
OF  
HONORÉ DE BALZAC

NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME  
COMPLETELY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

*HISTORY OF THE GRANDEUR AND DOWNFALL OF  
CÉSAR BIROTTEAU*

BY FRANCIS T. FUREY

WITH FIVE ETCHINGS BY HENRI-JOSEPH DUBOUCHET,  
AFTER PAINTINGS BY PIERRE VIDAL

IN ONE VOLUME

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HISTORY  
OF  
THE GRANDEUR AND DOWNFALL OF  
CÉSAR BIROTTEAU

Dealer in Perfumes,  
Deputy to the Mayor of the Second Arrondissement of Paris,  
Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, etc.



TO

*MONSIEUR ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE*

*His Admirer*

DE BALZAC



CÉSAR IN HIS GLORY





## CÉSAR IN HIS GLORY

\*

Of winter nights there is respite from noise in the Rue Saint-Honoré but for an instant; kitchen-gardeners on their way to the market continue the din just as it is left off by carriages returning from theatre or ball. While this hum in the great symphony of the hubbub of Paris, that may be heard about one o'clock in the morning, was going on, the wife of Monsieur César Birotteau, a dealer in perfumes whose shop was near the Place Vendôme, was suddenly startled from her slumbers into a sitting posture by a terrible dream. The perfumer's wife had seen herself double; she appeared in rags, with an emaciated and wrinkled hand turning the knob of her own shop door, and seemed to be at one and the same time standing on the threshold and seated in her arm-chair at her desk; she was asking alms of herself, she heard herself speaking at the door and in her office. She aimed to clutch her husband and only laid her hand on a place that was cold. So intensely frightened did she then become that she could not bend her neck, which seemed as if petrified; the walls of her throat stuck together and voice failed her; she was stuck fast in her sitting posture, with dilated and staring eyes, sadly disheveled hair, ears filled

with strange noises, contracted but palpitating heart, all at once, in short, perspiring and chilled, in the middle of an alcove with both doors open.

Fear is a half morbid feeling which presses so violently on the human organism that its faculties are at once either excited to the highest degree of their power or plunged into the lowest depths of disorganization. Physiologists have long wondered at this phenomenon, which overthrows its systems and upsets its conjectures; yet it is merely an upheaval working from within, but, like all electrical accidents, whimsical and freakish in its ways. Such will be the popular explanation as soon as the learned recognize what a great part electricity plays in human thought.

Madame Birotteau then experienced some of those slightly luminous sufferings produced by those terrible discharges of the will when expanded or concentrated by an unknown mechanism. Thus, during a very brief interval of time if we reckon it only by the clock, but incommensurable by reason of its rapid impressions, this poor woman had the prodigious power of evolving more ideas, of calling up more memories than, in the ordinary condition of her faculties, she would have conceived in a whole day. The very painful story of this soliloquy, absurd, inconsistent and meaningless, as it was, may be summed up in a few words.

“There is no reason why Birotteau should have left my bed! He has eaten so much veal that perhaps he is indisposed? But if he were sick he would

have awakened me. For the nineteen years that we have slept together in this bed, in this same house, never has it occurred to him to leave his place without telling me, the poor simpleton! He has staid out all night only when at the guard house. Has he slept with me to-night? Oh, yes, good heavens, how stupid I am!"

She turned her eyes on the bed, and saw her husband's nightcap, which still preserved the almost conical shape of his head.

"He is dead, then! Has he committed suicide! Why should he?" she continued. "For the past two years, since he has been mayor's deputy, he has been—*I don't know how*. On my word as an honest woman, isn't it a pity they put him in public office? He has been prosperous in business, and has bought me a shawl. Perhaps business is going on badly? Bah! I would know it. Do we ever know what a man has in his noddle? or a woman, either? That is not an evil. But have we not sold five thousand francs' worth to-day! Moreover, a deputy would not take his own life, he is too well acquainted with the law. Where is he, then?"

She could neither turn her neck nor reach out her hand to pull the bell-cord that would have aroused a cook, three clerks and a shop-boy. A prey to the nightmare that continued in her waking state, she was forgetting her daughter peacefully slumbering in an adjoining room, the door of which opened opposite to the foot of her bed. At last she exclaimed: "Birotteau!" and received no answer.

She thought she had called out the name, but she had pronounced it only mentally.

“Could it be that he has a mistress? He is too stupid,” she continued, “and besides, he loves me too much for that. Didn’t he tell Madame Roguin that he has never been unfaithful to me, even in thought? He is honesty itself walking the earth, that man is. If anyone merits heaven, isn’t it he? What sin can he accuse himself of to his confessor? He tells him peccadilloes. Royalist though he is, without knowing why, he, for example, makes scarcely any show of his religion. The poor timid creature, he goes to the eight o’clock Mass on the sly, as if he were going to a bawdy house. He fears God for God’s sake: hell hardly ever costs him a thought. How could he have a mistress? He clings so closely to my skirts that he wearies me. He loves me better than the apple of his eye, he would become blind for my sake. During these nineteen years he has never stormed at me. His daughter he considers only next after me. But Césarine is in that room.—Césarine! Césarine!—Birotteau has never had a thought that he has not told me. He was fully justified in claiming, when he came to see me at the *Petit Matelot*, that I would know him only by living with him! Nay, more than that!—How wonderful!”

She turned her head painfully and furtively glanced across the room, then full of those picturesque night effects that language despairs of describing, and that seem to pertain exclusively to the

brush of artists who depict every-day life. Words fail to describe the frightful zigzags formed by the shadows cast, the fantastic appearances of the wind-bulged curtains, the play of the flickering light emitted by the night-lamp through folds of red calico, the glare shot out from a curtain-holder with beaming centre resembling the lens of a dark-lantern, the apparition of a robed kneeling figure, all the caprices, in fine, that frighten the imagination when it is capable only of feeling pain and intensifying it. Madame Birotteau imagined she saw a strong light in the room in front of her own, and all of a sudden she thought of fire; but, her eye lighting on a red silk handkerchief, which seemed to her to be a pool of spilt blood, robbers monopolized her thoughts, especially as she was disposed to find traces of a struggle in the way in which the furniture lay. Remembering how much money was in the cash-box, a generous fear dispelled the nightmare fever and chill, she bounded quite aghast, in chemise, into the middle of her room to save her husband, who, she supposed, was in a life and death struggle with assassins.

“Birotteau! Birotteau!” she at last exclaimed in a tone of anguish.

She found the perfume-dealer in the centre of the adjoining room, with a yard-stick in his hand measuring space, but having his India-green dressing-gown with chocolate-colored dots hanging so carelessly on him that the cold was making his legs red without his feeling it, so engrossed was

he. When César turned around to say to his wife: "Well, Constance, what do you want?" his mien, like that of a man lost in arithmetic, was so extremely ludicrous that Madame Birotteau burst out laughing.

"Good Heavens, César! what a simpleton you look!" she said. "Why did you leave me alone without telling me? I came near dying of fright, not knowing what to think. But what are you doing there, exposed in the draught as you are? You will get your death of cold. Do you hear, Birotteau?"

"Yes, wife, here I am," replied the perfumer, as he returned to their room.

"Come, then, and get warm, and tell me what whim you have in your head," Madame Birotteau continued as she removed the ashes from the fire, and hurriedly made it up anew. "I am frozen. What a fool I was to get out of bed in my chemise! But I was really afraid that some one was assassinating you."

The dealer put his candlestick on the mantelpiece, fastened his dressing-gown around him, and went mechanically to get a flannel petticoat for his wife.

"Here, puss, put something on you, then," said he. "Twenty-two by eighteen," he went on, continuing his soliloquy, "we can have a superb salon."

"What's that! Birotteau, you are, then, in a fair way of losing your reason? Are you dreaming?"

"No, wife, I am calculating."

"You should by all means wait at least till daylight before indulging in your nonsense," she exclaimed as she fastened her petticoat under her bodice before going to open the door of the room in which her daughter was sleeping.

"Césarine is asleep," said she, "she will not hear us. Well, Birotteau, go on, then. What is the matter with you?"

"We can give the ball."

"Give a ball! we? On my honor as an honest woman, you are dreaming, my dear."

"I am not dreaming, my pretty honest wench. Listen, we should always do as required by the position in which we are placed. The government has made me prominent, I belong to the Government; it is our duty to study its motive and to favor its intentions by developing them. The Duc de Richelieu has just brought the occupation of France to an end. According to Monsieur de la Billardière, the office-holders representing the city of Paris ought to take it upon themselves as a duty, each in the sphere of his influence, to celebrate the liberation of the territory. Let us give evidence of a real patriotism which will shame that of the so-called Liberals, those intriguing villains, eh? Think you that I do not love my country? I want to show the Liberals, my enemies, that to love the King is to love France!"

"You think you have enemies, then, my poor Birotteau?"

"Yes, indeed, wife, we have enemies. And half of our friends in the *quartier* are our enemies. They

all say: Birotteau is in luck, for though Birotteau is a nobody, yet see him made mayor's deputy; everything succeeds with him. Well, they are going to be neatly outwitted once more. Be the first to learn that I am a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor; the King signed the commission yesterday."

"Oh! then," said Madame Birotteau with considerable emotion, "we must give the ball, sweetheart. But how have you so distinguished yourself as to obtain the cross?"

"When Monsieur de la Billardière told me this news yesterday," Birotteau continued with embarrassment, "I also asked myself, as you do, what my claim was; but, on my return, I came to recognize it and approve of the Government's course. In the first place, I am a Royalist, I was wounded at Saint-Roch in Vendémiaire; isn't it something to have borne arms at that time for the good cause? Then, as I have heard from merchants, I gave general satisfaction as a member of the consular judiciary. Lastly, I am deputy mayor, and the King bestows four crosses on the municipal body of the city of Paris. After having investigated as to the persons who ought to be decorated from among the deputies, the Prefect put me first on the list. Moreover, it must be that the King knows of me; thanks to old Ragon, I supply him with the only powder that he deigns to use; we alone have the recipe for that used by the late queen, poor, dear, august victim! The mayor gave me very strong backing. What else would you have me do! If the King gives me



the cross without me asking him for it, it seems to me that I cannot refuse without slighting him, no matter how you look at it. Did I want to be deputy? And so, wife, since we have the wind blowing our way, as your uncle Pillerault says when he is in a jolly mood, I have decided to have everything in our house in accord with the high honor done us. If I can be anything, I will risk becoming whatever it be God's will to make me, sub-prefect, if such be my luck. Wife, you make a great mistake if you think that a citizen<sup>1</sup> has paid his debt to his country by having spent twenty years selling perfumery to those who have come to get it. If the State claims the aid of our ability, we owe it this, as we owe it the tax on furniture, doors, windows, etc. Do you wish, then, to be always in the counting-house? You have, thank God, been there quite long enough. The ball will be our own festival. Farewell to retail, as far as you are concerned. You understand. I will burn our *La Reine des Roses* sign, I will erase from our board CESAR BIROTTEAU, DEALER IN PERFUMES, SUCCESSOR TO RAGON, and substitute PERFUMERY merely, in large gold letters. In the entresol I will put the office, the cash-box, and a pretty private office for your own use. Out of the shop back-room and the present dining-room and kitchen, I will make my warehouse. I will rent the second floor of the adjoining house, and will open a door in the wall. I will turn the staircase around, so as to be able to go on a level from one house to the other. We will then have spacious apartments furnished in fine

style! Yes, and I will remodel your room, will provide a boudoir for you, and have a pretty room for Césarine. The cash-girl whom you will have, our chief clerk and your chamber-maid—yes, madame, you will have one!—will have their lodgings on the third floor. On the fourth will be the kitchen, the cook and the general utility boy. The fifth will be our place of general storage for bottles, crystal and porcelain. The operating-room for our work-girls in the garret! No longer will the public see them pasting labels, making bags, assorting flasks, and corking vials. Good enough for the Rue Saint-Denis; but, as for the Rue Saint-Honoré, oh, fie! bad form. Our warehouse must be finished like a parlor. Tell me, are we the only perfumers who have been honored? Are not vinegar dealers, mustard venders, in command of the National Guard, and are they not in some favor at the Castle? Let us imitate them, let us extend our trade, and, at the same time, let us force our way into higher society.”

“Hold up, Birotteau; do you know what I have been thinking while listening to you? Well, you remind me of a man looking for noonday at two o’clock. Remember the advice I gave you when the question came up of making you mayor: your peace in preference to all else! ‘You are as fit to be prominent,’ I said to you, ‘as my arm is to make a windmill fan. Greatness would prove your ruin.’ You wouldn’t listen to me; now, here is that ruin at hand. To play a part in politics, money is necessary; have we got it? What? You would burn

your sign that cost us six hundred francs, and give up *La Reine des Roses*, your real glory? Leave it to others, then, to be ambitious. Isn't it true that he who thrusts his hand into the fire feels the burning? Politics is now aflame. We have fully a hundred thousand francs in cash, invested outside of our business, of our factory, and of our stock? If you would enhance your fortune, do now as you did in 1793; the funds are selling for seventy-two francs, buy them and you will have ten thousand francs revenue, without this investment hampering our business. Take advantage of this tack to get our daughter married, sell our business and let us go to your country. What! For fifteen years you have been solely bent on buying *Les Trésorières*, that pretty little property near Chinon, where there are ponds, meadows, woods, vineyards, farms, bringing three thousand francs, the dwelling-house on which pleases us both, which we can still have for sixty thousand francs, and now the gentleman wishes to become something under the Government? But remember what we are, mere perfumers. Sixteen years ago, before you had invented the *Sultana Double Paste* and the *Carminative Water*, if any one had come and said to you: 'You are going to have enough money to buy *Les Trésorières*,' wouldn't you have been overcome with joy? Well, you can purchase that property, which you coveted so much that you could speak of nothing else; now you talk of expending on stupid whims money earned by the sweat of our brow, I can say *our*, for I have always

been constant in attendance at that desk at all times as a poor dog in its kennel. Isn't it better to have a foothold with your daughter after she shall have become the wife of a Paris notary, and live eight months of the year at Chinon, than to begin here to put down five sous and draw six blanks, and out of the six blanks make nothing? Wait for a rise in the stock market; you will be able to settle eight thousand francs a year on your daughter, and we will have two thousand for ourselves, and the price of our property will enable us to have Les Trésor-ières. There, in your own country, my dear little pet, by taking our furniture with us, and it is worth something, we can live in princely style, whilst here at least a million would be needed to cut a figure."

"That, wife, is just what I expected you would say," said César Birotteau. "I am not quite so stupid—though you think me very stupid, yes, you!—as not to have reasoned everything over. Pay attention to what I say. Alexandre Crottat fits us like a glove for a son-in-law, and he will have Roguin's office; but do you think he will be satisfied with a hundred thousand francs dowry—supposing that we would settle all the spare cash we have on our daughter, and that is my wish; I would prefer to have only dry bread for the rest of my days, so I should see her happy as a queen, the wife, in fine, of a Paris notary, as you say. Well, a hundred thousand francs or even eight thousand francs in annuities is nothing toward buying Roguin's practice. That little Xandrot, as we call him, thinks, as

does everybody, that we are much richer than we are. If his father, that big farmer who is as avaricious as a snail, does not sell a hundred thousand francs' worth of land, Xandrot will not be notary, for the Roguin office is worth four or five hundred thousand francs. If Crottat does not give half of it in cash, how could he manage it? Césarine ought to have a dowry of two hundred thousand francs; and I mean that we shall retire as respectable citizens of Paris with fifteen thousand francs income. Well! If I were to make it as clear as daylight to you, wouldn't that shut your mouth?"

"Ah! if you own Peru—"

"Yes, I do, my wench. Yes," he said, putting his arm around his wife's waist and patting her, moved by a joy that completely lit up his features. "I did not want to speak to you of this matter before it was matured; but, faith, to-morrow, I will close it, perhaps. Here it is: Roguin has proposed to me a speculation so safe that he has entered into it along with Ragon, your uncle Pillerault and two other clients of his. We are going to purchase, in the neighborhood of the Madeleine, land that, according to Roguin's calculations, we will get for one quarter the price that it must reach three years from now, the time when, the leases having expired, it will come our turn to do as we please with it. All six of us have agreed on our respective shares in it. I put up three hundred thousand francs, so as to have a three-eighths interest. If any one of us needs money, Roguin will furnish it on the mortgage of

his share by way of mortgage. So as to hold the pan-handle and know how the fish is frying, I want to be nominal owner for the half that will be common to Pillerault, honest Ragon and myself. Roguin, using the name of a certain Monsieur Charles Claparon, will be my co-owner, and he, as well as I, will give a counter-deed to his partners. The title is acquired by promise of sale under private seal, so as to make us masters of all the land. Roguin will make searches as to what contracts are to be realized, for he is not sure that we can dispense with recording and throw the burden of it on those to whom we will sell in lots, but it would take me too long to explain this point to you. The land once paid for, we will only have to fold our arms, and in three years hence we will be worth a million. Césarine will be twenty, our business will be sold, and we will then be, with God's help, unostentatiously on the high road to greatness."

"Well, where do you think you will get your three hundred thousand francs?" asked Madame Birotteau.

"You understand nothing about business matters, my darling pet. I will give the hundred thousand francs that are at Roguin's, I will borrow forty thousand francs on the buildings and grounds of my factory in the Faubourg du Temple, and we have twenty thousand francs on hand; in all, a hundred and sixty thousand francs. There remains a hundred and forty thousand more, for which I will make out notes to the order of Monsieur Charles Claparon, banker; and he will give their face value less the

discount. There are our hundred thousand crowns paid: *he who is to pay at a stated time owes nothing.* When the notes fall due we will take them up with our profits. If we cannot meet them when they fall due, Roguin will advance me money at five per cent secured by my interest in the land. But loans will not be needed: I have discovered an essence to make the hair grow, a *Comagenous oil!* Livingston is setting up a hydraulic press for me down there with which to manufacture my oil from hazel nuts that, under this strong pressure, will at once yield all their oil. In a year, according to my calculations, I shall have made a hundred thousand francs, at least. I am thinking out a poster that will begin, *Down with wigs!* the effect of which will be prodigious. And as for you, you seem to have taken no notice of my loss of sleep! For three whole months the success of *Macassar Oil* has kept me awake. I mean to down *Macassar!*”

“These, then, are the fine plans with which your noddle has been filled during the past two months, and you didn’t want to say a word to me about them. I have just seen myself a beggar at my own door, what a warning from Heaven! In a short time we will have nothing but eyes to weep with. Never will you do that, at least while I am alive, understand, César! Behind this are some tricks that you do not observe, you are too honest and too honorable to suspect dishonesty in others. Why do they come to offer you millions? You will dispose of all you are worth, you will go beyond your means,

and if your oil does not take, if no money is to be had, if the land does not realize its price, how will you meet your notes? Is it with the shells of your hazel nuts? To gain a higher place in society, you no longer want your name displayed, you would remove the *la Reine des Roses* sign, and you are furthermore going to bow and scrape in placards and prospectuses that will display César Birotteau on every deadwall and every board fence, at every place where building is going on."

"Oh! you don't see into it. I will have a branch shop under the name of Popinot, in some house in the neighborhood of the Rue des Lombards, where I will put little Anselm. Thus I will pay the debt of gratitude to Monsieur and Madame Ragon, by giving their nephew a start, and he will be put in the way of making a fortune. These poor Ragon folks seem to me to have been hard pressed for some time past."

"Beware! Those folks want your money."

"What folks darling? Is it your uncle Pillerault, who loves us as much as he could his own flesh and blood and dines with us every Sunday? Is it that good old Ragon, our predecessor, with his forty years of probity, with whom we play boston? And last, could it be Roguin, a Paris notary, a man fifty-seven years old, who has served as notary for twenty-five? A Paris notary, he would be the pick of them, were not all honest men to be held in the same esteem. Were it necessary, my partners would assist me! Where, then, is the plot, my fair dame? Well, I



must tell you what I think of you! On my word as an honest man, I have your character by heart. You have always been as distrustful as a cat! Whenever we have had a couple of sous we could call our own on hand, you imagined every customer was a thief. It is necessary to fall on one's knees to entreat you to allow yourself to grow rich! Parisian though you be, yet you have hardly any ambition! Were it not for your everlasting fears, there would be no man happier than I! If I had listened to you I would never have made either the *Sultanas Paste* or the *Carminative Water*. Our shop has given us a living, but these two discoveries and our soaps have brought us the hundred and sixty thousand francs that we now have clear! Without my genius, for I have great ability as a perfumer, we would be but small retailers, we would have to take the Devil by the tail to *make both ends meet*, and I would not have been one of the prominent merchants running for election as judge of the tribunal of commerce, I would have been neither judge nor mayor's deputy. Do you know what I would be? A shop-keeper such as old man Ragon was, and I do not mean to disparage him, for I respect shops, as some of the best people of our set have come from them! After having sold perfumery for forty years, we, like him, would have about three thousand francs income; and, as prices are now, cost being doubled, we would, like them, have scarcely enough to live on.—From day to day that old way we have been living weighs ever more heavily upon my heart. I must see my

way clear out of it, and I will get the cue through Popinot, to-morrow!—If I had followed your advice, you who delight in being uneasy and ask yourself whether you will have to-morrow what you possess to-day, I would have no credit, I would not have the Cross of the Legion of Honor, and I would not be on the way to becoming somebody in politics. Yes, you may well shake your head, if our scheme succeeds, I may become a Deputy for Paris. Ha! my name is not César for nothing, for with me everything has succeeded. Nor is it imagination, for every one I meet away from here acknowledges my ability; but here, the only person whom I wish to please so much, for whom I sweat blood and water to make her happy, is precisely she who takes me for a blockhead!”

These phrases, though interrupted by eloquent pauses, and shot off like balls, as is done by all who pose in an attitude of reproach, expressed an attachment so deep, so sustained, that Madame Birotteau’s heart was touched; but, like all women, she used the love that she inspired to win her case.

“Very well, Birotteau,” she said, “if you love me, let me then be happy in my own way. Neither you nor I received much education; we do not know how to talk, nor to do *your servant* after the manner of people of the world; how do you think we would succeed in Government circles? I would be happy at Les Trésorières, indeed I would! I have always loved animals and little birds, I could very well spend my life in taking care of the chickens, in

playing the farmer's wife. Let us sell our business, marry Césarine, and let you give up your *Imogène*. We will come to spend the winters in Paris, with our son-in-law; we will be happy. Nothing either in politics or in trade will be able to change our nature. Why should we wish to lord it over others? Does not our present fortune suffice for us? When you will be a millionaire, will you dine twice? Do you want another wife than me? See my uncle Pillerault! he is wisely satisfied with his little means, and his life is spent in doing good works. Does he need fine furniture, he? I am sure that you have ordered the new furniture for me: I have seen Braschon here, and it was not to buy perfumery."

"Well, yes, darling, the furniture is ordered, our work is to be begun to-morrow and will be directed by an architect recommended to me by Monsieur de la Billardière."

"O God," she exclaimed, "have pity on us!"

"But, sweet wench, you are not reasonable. Is it at thirty-seven, fresh and pretty as you are, that you could go and bury yourself at Chinon? I, thank God, am only thirty-nine. Chance opens a fine career for me, and I am entering upon it. If I conduct myself prudently, I can establish an honorable house in the Paris middle class, as used to be done formerly, found the Birotteaus, as there are Kellers, Jules Desmarets, Roguins, Cochins, Guillaumes, Lebas, Nucingens, Saillards, Popinots, Matifats, who are making or have made a mark in their own

fields. On, then! If that affair were not as safe as gold bars—”

“Safe!”

“Yes, safe. I have been figuring it out for two months past. Without seeming interested, I have been picking up information about building, at the city office, from architects and contractors. Monsieur Grindot, the young architect who is going to remodel our apartments, is extremely sorry he has no money to invest in our speculation.”

“There will be building to do; he is driving you to it in order to squeeze you.”

“Can one trap people like Pillerault, Charles Claparon, and Roguin? The profit is as sure as that of the *Sultana Paste*, do you see!”

“But, my dear love, why, then, does Roguin need to speculate, if he has his way paid and his fortune made? I see him passing sometimes more anxious-looking than a minister of State, with a downcast look that I do not like: he has some secret trouble. Within the last five years his figure has become that of an old rake. Who tells you that he will not take to his heels when he gets your money? Such a thing is known to have happened. Do we know very much about him? It is all very well for him to have been our friend for the last fifteen years, yet I would not put my hand in the fire for him. Look out, he is tainted and does not live with his wife, he may have mistresses to support who are ruining him; I can think of no other reason for his dejected mien. While making my toilet I look

through the blinds, and I see him coming home on foot, in the morning, returning whence? Nobody knows. He gives me the impression of a man who has an establishment in town who lives as he pleases, and madame the same. Is that the way for a notary to live? If they have fifty thousand francs and spend sixty, in twenty years one sees the end of one's means, one finds one's self as destitute as little foundlings; but as one is accustomed to shine, one pitilessly robs one's friends: well-ordered charity begins at home. He is intimate with that little scamp, Du Tillet, our former clerk, and I do not think well of this friendship. If he has not learned how to judge Du Tillet, he is blind indeed; if he knows him, why does he make so much of him? You will tell me that his wife loves Du Tillet? Well, I do not expect anything good from a man who has no honor in regard to his wife. In fine, the present owners of this land are dunces indeed to give for a hundred sous what is worth a hundred francs. If you met a child who did not know what a louis is worth, wouldn't you tell him its value? This business gives me the impression of being a theft, yes, to my view, and I say it without intending to offend you."

"Lord, how funny women sometimes are, and how they mix up all sorts of ideas! If Roguin counted for nothing in the matter, you would say to me, 'Beware, take care, César, you are doing something that Roguin has no hand in; it isn't worth anything.' On this occasion he is in it as a guarantee, and you tell me—"

“No, it is a Monsieur Claparon.”

“But a notary cannot allow his name to be used in a speculation.”

“Why, then, does he do a thing that the law forbids him to do? What answer will you make me, you who know only the law?”

“Let me continue, then. Roguin has entered into it, and you tell me that the affair does not amount to anything! Is it reasonable? You tell me further: ‘He is doing a thing that is against the law.’ But he will go into it openly, if necessary. You tell me now: ‘He is rich.’ Cannot anyone tell me as much? Would Ragon and Pillerault be welcome to tell me: ‘Why are you doing this thing, you who have as much money as a hog-dealer?’”

“Those in trade are not in the position of notaries,” objected Madame Birotteau.

“At any rate, my conscience is quite clear,” said César, continuing. “Those who are selling are compelled to sell; we are no more robbing them than one robs those of whom he buys funds at seventy-five. To-day we get the land at its present price; two years hence it will be different, just as in the case of the funds. Know, then, Constance-Barbe-Joséphine Pillerault, that you will never catch César Birotteau doing an act that is against the strictest honesty, or against the law, or against conscience, or against delicacy. A man established for eighteen years to be suspected of dishonesty in his own household!”

“Come, now, keep cool, César! A woman who

has lived with you all this time knows you to the very depths of your soul. You are master, after all. It is you who have made this fortune, isn't it? It is yours, you can spend it. Were we reduced to the last extremity of misery, neither I nor your daughter would ever reproach you even once. But listen: When you invented your *Sultana Paste* and your *Carminative Water*, what did you risk? Five or six thousand francs. Now you stake all your fortune on a single shuffle of the cards, you are not alone in the game, you have associates who may prove themselves sharper than you. Give your ball, renovate your apartments, go to an expense of ten thousand francs, that is useless, but it is not ruinous. As regards your Madeleine affair, I give it my formal disapproval. You are a perfumer, be a perfumer, and not a speculator in land. We have an instinct that never deceives us, we women have! I have warned you, now act according to your judgment. You have been judge in the tribunal of commerce, you know the laws, you have steered your bark well, I will follow you, César! But it will be with trepidation until I see our fortune solidly established and Céсарine well married. God grant that my dream be not a prophecy!"

This yielding disconcerted Birotteau, who used the innocent dodge to which he was wont to have recourse on such occasions.

"Listen, Constance, I have not yet given my word, but it is as good as given."

"Oh! César, you have said all there is to say

about it, do not speak of it any more. Honor goes before fortune. Come, go to bed, my dear, we have no more wood. Moreover, we will be better fixed in bed for chatting, if that amuses you—Oh! that vile dream! My God! To see one's self! but it is frightful.—Césarine and I are going in earnest to make novenas for the success of your land scheme.”

“Certainly God's assistance will do no harm,” gravely remarked Birotteau; “but, wife, hazel-nut essence is also a power! I have made this discovery, as formerly that of the *Sultana Double Paste*, by chance: on the former occasion on opening a book, this time while looking at the engraving of *Hero and Leander*. For a woman to pour oil on her lover's head—is it pretty? The safest speculations are those based on vanity, on self-love, the desire to make a good appearance. Those are feelings that never die.”

“Alas! I see it clearly.”

“At a certain age men would try a hundred things to have hair when they have none. For some time past hair-dressers have told me that they are selling not only *Macassar*, but all the drugs that are good for dyeing the hair, or that are supposed to make it grow. Since peace was restored men have been associating a great deal more with women, and the latter do not like the bald-headed, hey! hey! mine own! The demand for that article is explained, then, by the political situation. A compound that would keep the hair in a good healthy condition



would sell like bread, especially if this essence were undoubtedly approved by the Academy of Science. My good Monsieur Vauquelin will perhaps help me out once more. I will go to-morrow and submit my idea to him, offering him the engraving which I have succeeded in finding after a two years' search in Germany. He is giving attention just now to the analysis of the hair. Chiffreville, his partner in the manufacture of chemical products, has told me so. If my discovery agrees with his researches, my essence would be bought by both sexes. My idea, I repeat, is a fortune. My God! I do not sleep on account of it. Eh! fortunately little Popinot has the finest head of hair in the world. With a shop-girl who would have long hair falling to the ground and who would say, if the thing is possible without offending God or one's neighbor, that the *Comagenous Oil*—for it will be decidedly an oil—has had something to do with it, the gray-heads would pounce upon it as does poverty on the world. Tell me, then, my little woman, what of your ball? I am not up to mischief, but I would like to meet that funny little Du Tillet, who *does the grand* with his fortune, and who always shuns me at the Bourse. He knows that I am acquainted with one of his characteristics that is not a thing to boast of. Perhaps I have been too lenient with him. Is not it odd, wife, that one is always punished for his good deeds, here below, understand! I have acted as a father toward him, you do not know all that I have done for him."

"You make my flesh creep, merely speaking of

him. If you had known all that he had wanted to do to you, you wouldn't have kept quiet regarding the theft of the three thousand francs, for I have suspected how the affair was settled. If you had brought him into the police court, perhaps you would have done a service to quite a number of people."

"What advantage, then, did he mean to take of me?"

"Nothing. If you were in a mood to listen to me this evening, I would give you good advice, Birotteau, and that would be to steer clear of your Du Tillet."

"Wouldn't people think it strange to see my house closed against a clerk for whom I went security for the first twenty thousand francs with which he set up in business? Come, let us return good for good. Besides, perhaps Du Tillet has mended his ways."

"Everything will have to be put topsy-turvy here!"

"Why topsy-turvy? On the contrary, everything will be as orderly as a music sheet. You have, then, already, forgotten what I have just told you about the stairway and my renting part of the adjoining house, a matter that I have arranged with the umbrella dealer, Cayron? We are to meet to-morrow at Monsieur Molineux, his landlord's, for to-morrow I have as much to attend to as a minister.—"

"You have turned my head with your plans," said Constance to him, "I am mixing myself up in them. Moreover, Birotteau, I am sleepy."

“Good-day,” her husband replied. “But listen: I bid you good-day because it is morning, sweet. Ah! she is gone, that dear child! Go, you will be very rich, or my name should not be César.”

A few moments later Constance and César were snoring peacefully.



\*

A rapid glance at the previous life of this household will confirm the impression probably made by the amicable discussion between the two chief actors in this Scene. In depicting the life and character of these retail dealers, this sketch will explain, moreover, by what singular chances César Birotteau came to be mayor's deputy as well as perfumer, former officer of the National Guard and Knight of the Legion of Honor. In throwing light on his innermost character and the salient points of his prosperity, we may understand how the commercial accidents that are surmounted by strong temperaments become irreparable catastrophes to minds of small calibre. Events are never absolute, their results depend entirely on the individual: misfortune is a stepping-stone to genius, a cleansing to the Christian, a treasure to the shrewd man, an abyss to the weak.

A gardener in the neighborhood of Chinon, whose name was Jacques Birotteau, married the chambermaid of a lady whose vines he was accustomed to dress; he had three boys, his wife died in giving birth to the last, and the poor man did not long survive her. The mistress had a liking for her chambermaid: along with her own sons she brought up the eldest of her gardener's children, whose name was François, and sent him to a seminary. Ordained to the priesthood, François Birotteau concealed

himself during the Revolution and led the wandering life of the unsworn priests, who were tracked like wild beasts, and guillotined on the slightest pretext. At the time when this story begins he was a curate at the Tours cathedral, and had left this city only once to visit his brother César. The turmoil of Paris so dazed the good priest that he dared not leave his room; he called the cabs *half-hackneys*, and was astonished at everything. After a week's sojourn he returned to Tours, promising never to return to the capital.

The vine-dresser's second son, Jean Birotteau, having been drafted, at once rose to the rank of captain during the early wars of the Revolution. At the battle of Trébia, Macdonald asked for men not afraid to attack a battery; Captain Jean Birotteau advanced with his company, and was killed. The fates of the Birotteaus would no doubt have it that they should be crushed by men or by circumstances wherever they set their feet.

The last child is the hero of this Scene. When fourteen years old César knew how to read, write and figure. He left the country, and came to Paris on foot to seek his fortune with a louis in his pocket. The recommendation of a Tours apothecary got him a position, as shop-boy, with Monsieur and Madame Ragon, dealers in perfumes. César then owned a pair of iron-tipped shoes, a pair of breeches and blue stockings, a flowered vest, a peasant's coat, three coarse shirts of good linen and his traveling cudgel. His hair was cut after the fashion of choir

boys, he had the solid courage of the Tourainer; if he sometimes allowed himself to fall into the idle habits in vogue in the country, he compensated for it by the desire of making his fortune; if he was wanting in wit and education, he was possessed of an instinctive sense of right and of the delicate feelings with which he regarded his mother, a creature who, as the Tourainers express it, had *a heart of gold*. César had his meals, six francs wages a month, and slept on a trundle-bed in the garret, next to the cook; the clerks, who taught him how to put up packages and run errands, to sweep the shop and the sidewalk, poked fun at him while training him to the work, as is the manner in shops, where pleasantry enters into instruction as the chief element; Monsieur and Madame Ragon spoke to him as they would to a dog. No one cared whether the apprentice was tired or not, though in the evening his feet worn out by the pavement made him suffer terribly and his shoulders were sore. This rude application of *every one for himself*, the gospel of all capitals, made César feel life in Paris very severe. In the evening he wept while thinking of Touraine, where the peasant works as he pleases, where the mason lays a stone while he ought to lay twelve, where idleness is discreetly combined with labor; but he fell asleep before he had time to think of fleeing, for he had a routine of work for the morning and was obedient to his duty with the instinct of a watch-dog. If perhaps he complained, the head clerk smiled with a jovial air.

“Ah! my boy,” he said, “everything is not rosy at *la Reine des Roses*, and larks do not fall here already toasted; you must first run after them, then catch them, and finally have the wherewithal to season them.”

The cook, a stout Picardy woman, took the best morsels for herself, and spoke to César only to complain of Monsieur or of Madame Ragon, who gave her no chance to steal anything. Towards the end of the first month this girl, obliged to take care of the house one Sunday, struck up a conversation with César. Ursule with the dirt rubbed off seemed charming to the poor general utility boy, who, unless chance saved him, was going to be wrecked on the first sunken rock in his career. Like all beings devoid of protection, he fell in love with the first woman who cast an amiable look upon him. The cook took César under her shield, and secret love scenes followed, about which the clerks teased him pitilessly. Two years later the cook very fortunately gave up César for a young deserter from her own country who was in hiding at Paris, a Picard of twenty, rich to the extent of owning a few acres of land, who let Ursule marry him.

During these two years the cook had fed her little César well, had explained to him several mysteries of Parisian life by making him examine it from below, and from jealousy had inculcated upon him a profound dread of the places of bad repute, the dangers of which did not seem unknown to her. In 1792, the feet of César betrayed had become



accustomed to the pavement, his shoulders to the boxes, and his mind to what he called THE HUMBUG of Paris. And so, when Ursule jilted him he was soon consoled, for she did not come up to any of his instinctive sentimental ideas. Lascivious and coarse, sly-minded and light-fingered, an egoist and a tippler, she abused Birotteau's candor without holding out any fair prospect to him. Sometimes the poor boy sadly saw himself bound by the knots that press hardest on unwary hearts to a creature with whom he had no sympathy in common. When he became master of his own heart he had grown considerably and had reached the age of sixteen. His mind, developed by Ursule and the pleasantries of the clerks, led him to study the business in a manner in which intelligence was concealed behind an air of simplicity: he watched the customers, asked, at idle moments, explanations about the various articles in stock, remembered the differences between them and where they were located; one fine day he knew all the goods, their prices and marks better than the new-comers knew them; from that time on Monsieur and Madame Ragon were accustomed to make use of him.

The day on which the terrible requisition of the Year II. made a clean sweep at citizen Ragon's, César Birotteau, now promoted to the position of second clerk, took advantage of the circumstances to obtain a salary of fifty francs a month, and sat down at the Ragons' table with a feeling of ineffable joy. The second clerk at *la Reine des Roses*,

who had already saved six hundred francs, had a room in which he could conveniently lock up, in articles of furniture he had long coveted, the garments that he had accumulated. On the Revolution holidays—decadi, every tenth day,—dressed like the young men of the time, submitting to the dictates of fashion, in affecting brutal manners, this mild and modest peasant assumed a mien that made him at least their equal, and he thus removed the barriers that in other times the fact of being a servant had set up between the middle class and him. Towards the end of this year his probity gave him charge of the cash. The imposing citizeness Ragon looked after the clerk's linen, and the two dealers grew intimate with him.

In Vendémiaire, 1794, César, who had a hundred golden louis, exchanged them for six thousand francs in assignats, bought funds at thirty francs, paid for them the day before the scale of depreciation became current at the Bourse, and held on to his investment with unspeakable happiness. From that day he followed the fluctuation of the money market and the course of public affairs with secret anxieties that made his heart beat at the record of the reverses or successes which marked that period of our history. Monsieur Ragon, the former perfumer to Her Majesty Queen Marie-Antoinette, in those critical times confided to César Birotteau his attachment to the fallen tyrants. This confidence was one of the prime incidents in César's life. The evening chats, when the shop was closed, the street quiet and the day's cash

account settled up, made a fanatic of the Tourainer, who, in becoming a Royalist, only obeyed his innate feelings. The recital of Louis XVI.'s noble deeds, the anecdotes with which the husband and wife extolled the queen's merits stimulated César's imagination. The terrible fate of those two crowned heads, cut off only a few steps away from the shop, made his impressionable heart revolt and inspired him with hatred for a system of government that thought nothing of the shedding of innocent blood. Commercial interest made him see the ruin of trade in the forcing-up of prices and in the storms of politics, always hostile to business. True to his calling as a perfumer, he moreover hated a revolution that would make a Titus of everybody and outlawed powder. The tranquillity assured by absolute power being alone able to give life and money, he became fanatical in favor of royalty. When Monsieur Ragon saw him well disposed, he made him first clerk and initiated him into the secrets of the establishment of *la Reine des Roses*, some of whose customers were the most active, the most devoted emissaries of the Bourbons, and through which was carried on the correspondence of the West with Paris. Impelled by the warmth of youth, electrified by his relations with the Georges, the La Billardières, the Montaurans, the Bauvans, the Longuys, the Mandas, the Berniers, the Du Guénics and the Fontaines, César rushed into the conspiracy which the Royalists and the Terrorists combined directed, on the thirteenth Vendémiaire, against the expiring Convention.

César had the honor of fighting against Napoléon on the steps of Saint-Roch, and was wounded early in the fray. Everybody knows the outcome of this effort. If Barras's aide-de-camp emerged from his obscurity, Birotteau was saved by his. Some friends carried the warlike first clerk to the *la Reine des Roses*, where he remained concealed in the garret, nursed by Madame Ragon, and happily forgotten. César Birotteau had but an outburst of military courage. During the month that it took him to get well he made solid reflections on the ridiculous alliance of politics and perfumery. If he remained a Royalist, he resolved to be simply and purely a Royalist perfumer, without ever again compromising himself, and gave himself up body and soul to his business.

On the eighteenth Brumaire, Monsieur and Madame Ragon, despairing of the Royalist cause, decided to give up the perfumery business, to live as good middle class citizens, without mixing any more in politics. In order to get their price for their business, they must find a man who is more honest than ambitious, who has a larger supply of common sense than capacity; Ragon then mentioned the matter to his chief clerk. Birotteau, twenty years old and possessing a thousand francs of income from the public funds, hesitated. His ambition consisted in living near Chinon when he became possessed of an income of fifteen hundred francs, and when the First Consul would have consolidated the public debt by consolidating himself in the Tuileries. Why risk his

honest and simple independence in the chances of trade? he said to himself. He had never dreamt of acquiring so large a fortune, due to those chances which one takes only in youth; he thought then of marrying in Touraine a woman as rich as himself, so that he could buy and cultivate Les Trésorières, a small estate that he had coveted since he had attained the age of reason, to which he dreamed of adding, as soon as he had acquired a thousand crowns income, where he would lead a happily retired life. He was going to refuse when love suddenly changed his resolve by increasing tenfold the figure of his ambition.

Since Ursule's treachery César had remained wise, as much from fear of the danger that one runs at Paris in love affairs as in consequence of his labors. When the passions have nothing to feed on, they change as occasion requires; marriage then becomes, for people of the middle class, a fixed idea, for they have only this way of making conquest of a woman and taking her to themselves. César Birotteau was in that mood. Everything devolved on the head clerk in the shop of *la Reine des Roses*: he hadn't a moment to give to pleasure. In such a mode of life the wants are still more imperious: and so the meeting with a pretty girl, of whom a libertine clerk would hardly have dreamt, was to produce the greatest effect on the wise César. One glorious day in June, entering the Ile Saint-Louis by the Pont Marie, he saw a young girl standing in the doorway of a shop situated at the angle of the Quai

d'Anjou. Constance Pillerault was the head saleswoman in a novelty shop called *le Petit Matelot*, the first of the shops to adopt in Paris more or less painted signs, waving flags, full displays of shawls on swinging frames, cravats piled up like card houses, and a thousand other attractions of trade, one price only, wrappers, labels, illusions and optical effects carried to such a degree of perfection that the shop-fronts have become trade poems. The low price of all the articles called novelties that were to be found at *le Petit Matelot* gave it a vogue unheard of in the part of Paris least favorable to both fashion and trade. This head girl was then quoted for her beauty, as were afterwards the Pretty Lemonade-Girl of the *Mille Colonnes* café and several other poor creatures who have made more young and old men look through the windows of the modistes, lemonade and other shops than there are paving stones in the streets of Paris. The head clerk of *la Reine des Roses* living between Saint-Roch and the Rue la Sourdière, his attention given exclusively to perfumery, had no suspicion of existence of the *le Petit Matelot*; for the minor trades of Paris are somewhat strangers to one another. César was so intensely smitten by Constance's beauty that he excitedly entered *le Petit Matelot* to purchase half a dozen linen shirts, on the price of which he kept up a long debate, causing several rolls of linen to be unfolded, just as would an English woman in the humor of shopping. The head sales-girl took pains to study César, and came to the conclusion, by

certain symptoms known to all women, that he had come in far more on account of the saleswoman than for the merchandise. He dictated his name and address to the girl, who became quite indifferent to the customer's admiration once he had made his purchase. The poor clerk had had but little trouble in gaining Ursule's good graces, he had remained as silly as a sheep; love making him still more so, he dared not say a word, and was moreover too badly smitten to remark the indifference that followed the smile of this saleswoman siren.

For a week he went every evening to show himself in front of *le Petit Matelot*, trying to get a look, as a dog seeks a bone at a kitchen door, regardless of the raillery in which the clerks and the *girls* indulged, humbly making way for purchasers or passers-by, who were giving their attention to the little incidents of the shop. Some days afterwards he again entered the paradise in which his angel was, less to buy handkerchiefs there than to make a bright idea known to her.

"If you need any perfumery, Mademoiselle, I would be very glad to supply you with it," he said as he paid her.

Constance Pillerault was in daily receipt of brilliant proposals in which there was no question of marriage; and, though her heart was as pure as her brow was white, it was only after six months' marching and counter-marching, by which César made known his indefatigable love, that she condescended to receive César's attentions, without,

however, committing herself: a prudence commanded by the infinite number of her suitors, wholesale wine-merchants, rich lemonade-dealers and others, who cast sheep's eyes at her. The lover had called in to his aid Constance's guardian, Monsieur Claude-Joseph Pillerault, then a dealer in iron and copper ware on the Quai de la Ferraille, whom he had succeeded in discovering by having recourse to the underhanded espionage which distinguishes true love. The rapidity with which this tale marches, obliges us to pass in silence over the joys of Parisian love made innocently, and to say nothing of the prodigalities peculiar to clerks: melons gathered in their prime, fine dinners at Vénua's followed by the theatre, country parties in a Sunday hack. Without being a handsome youth, César had nothing in his person that could raise an objection to his being loved. Paris life and his confinement in a dark shop had obliterated the intensity of his peasant tint. His abundant black hair, his neck like that of a Normandy horse, his stout limbs, his simple and honest bearing, all contributed to give a favorable impression of him. Uncle Pillerault, charged with looking after the welfare of his brother's daughter, had made investigations: he gave his sanction to the Tourainer's intentions. In 1800, in the beautiful month of May, Mademoiselle Pillerault consented to marry César Birotteau, who fainted with joy at the very moment when, under a linden, at Sceaux, Constance-Barbe-Joséphine accepted him as her husband.



“My little one,” says Monsieur Pillerault, “you are getting a good husband. He has a warm heart and is the soul of honor: he is pliable as the willow and wise as a child Jesus; in fine, he is a king among men.”

Constance freely gave up the brilliant future of which, like all shop-girls, she had sometimes dreamed: she would be an honest wife, a good mother of a family, and took life according to the religious programme of the middle class. This part, moreover, agreed better with her ideas than the dangerous vanities that seduce so many young Parisian imaginations. Of a limited intelligence, Constance belonged to the type of the lower middle class girl, whose work does not go well without a little temper, which begins by refusing what it desires and is sorry when taken at its word, whose restless activity is directed toward the kitchen and the cash, toward the most serious affairs and the minutest darns of the linen; which loves when grumbling, conceives only the simplest ideas, the small coin of the mind, reasons on everything, is afraid of everything, calculates everything and is always thinking of the future. Her cold but pure loveliness, her attractive bearing, her coolness, kept Birotteau from thinking of her defects, for which, moreover, she compensated by that delicate probity natural to women, by an extreme love for order, by excessive fondness for work and by ability in making sales. Constance was then eighteen years old and was worth eleven thousand francs. César, in whom

love inspired the most excessive ambition, bought the business of *la Reine des Roses* and removed it close to the Place Vendôme, in a fine house. Only twenty-one, married to a pretty woman whom he adored, the owner of an establishment for which he had paid three-quarters of the price, he could but see the future rosy, especially when he looked at the progress he had made since starting out. Roguin, notary to the Rasons, who drew up the marriage contract, gave sound advice to the new perfume dealer by keeping him from completing the payment for the property with his wife's dowry.

"Keep some money, my boy, for making some good investments," he said to him.

Birotteau regarded the notary with admiration, got into the habit of consulting him, and made him one of his friends. Like Ragon and Pillerault, he had such faith in the office of notary that he then gave himself up to Roguin without allowing himself to entertain a suspicion. Thanks to this advice, César, having Constance's eleven thousand francs to begin with, would not then have exchanged his *possessions* for those of the First Consul, grand as Napoléon's *possessions* might seem to be. At first Birotteau kept only a cook, he lived in the entresol over his shop, a paltry sort of lodging rather nicely fitted up by an upholsterer, and in which the newly-married couple spent an everlasting honeymoon. Madame César looked marvelously well in her shop. Her famous beauty had a powerful influence over the sales, and the only topic of discussion among

the elegant folk of the Empire was the pretty Madame Birotteau. If César was accused of royalist leanings everybody did justice to his honesty; if some neighboring dealers envied his good fortune, he was acknowledged to be worthy of it. The gunshot wound that he had received on the steps of Saint-Roch gained for him the reputation of one who had mixed himself up in the secrets of politics and that of a brave man, though he had no military courage in his heart and no political idea in his head. On these qualifications the good people of the arrondissement named him for captain of the National Guard; but the appointment was cancelled by Napoléon, who, according to Birotteau, had a grudge against him on account of their meeting in Vendémiaire. César had then cheaply acquired a varnish of persecution that made him interesting in the eyes of opponents and led to his acquiring a certain importance:

Such was the condition of that household, ever happy by reason of its sentiments, disturbed only by the anxieties of trade.

During the first year César Birotteau initiated his wife into the ways of selling and of retailing perfumery, a trade to which she took most admirably; she seemed to have been created and brought into the world to catch customers. This year ended, the inventory surprised the ambitious perfumer: all expenses defrayed, in less than twenty years he would have saved the modest capital of a hundred thousand francs, which was the figure at which he had placed

his happiness. He then resolved to get rich more rapidly and first thought of adding the manufacturing to the retail business. Against his wife's advice he rented a building and ground in the Faubourg du Temple, and had painted on it in large letters: CESAR BIROTTEAU'S FACTORY. He enticed from Grasse a workman with whom he began on half shares in a small way the manufacture of soaps, essences and eau-de-Cologne. His partnership with this workman lasted only six months and ended in losses which he bore alone. Not discouraged, Birotteau wanted to obtain a result at any price, if only not to be grumbled at by his wife, to whom he acknowledged later that at that time of despondency his head boiled like a pot, and that on several occasions, were it not for his religious feelings, he would have jumped into the Seine.

Distracted by some fruitless experiments, he strolled one day along the boulevards on his way home to dinner, for the Parisian stroller is as often a man in despair as an idler. Among some six-cent books lying in a hamper on the ground his eyes were attracted by this title yellowed by dust: *Abdeker, or the Art of Preserving Beauty*. He picked up this pretended Arabic book, a sort of romance written by a physician of the preceding century, and fell on a page on which there was question of perfumes. Leaning against a tree in the boulevard to turn over the leaves of the book, he read a note in which the author explained the nature of the derm and the epiderm, and showed that such a paste or such a

soap would often produce an effect contrary to that expected of it, if the paste and the soap gave tone to the skin that wanted to be relaxed, or relaxed the skin that required a tonic. Birotteau bought this book, in which he saw a fortune. However, far from having confidence in his lights, he went to a famous chemist, Vauquelin, of whom he artlessly asked how to compound a double cosmetic that would produce effects suitable to the different natures of the human epiderm. True scholars, those men so genuinely great, in the sense that they never obtain during life the renown by which their vast unknown labors should be paid, are nearly all available and smile at those poor in mental resources. Vauquelin accordingly protected the perfumer, allowed himself to be called the inventor of a paste for whitening the hands and told him the ingredients. Birotteau called this cosmetic the *Sultana Double Paste*. In order to complete the work, he applied the process of the paste for the hands to a water for the complexion which he called *Carminative Water*. In his venture he imitated the custom of *le Petit Matelot*, he was the first among perfumers to use that wealth of placards, advertisements and other means of publication which people, perhaps unjustly, call charlatanism.

The *Sultana Paste* and the *Carminative Water* were announced throughout the polite society and commercial world by colored placards, at the head of which were these words: *Approved by the Institute!* This label used, for the first time, had a magical

effect. Not only France, but the Continent, was decked with yellow, red and blue placards, by the sovereign of *la Reine des Roses*, who kept, supplied and manufactured, at moderate prices, all that was in his line. At a time when people spoke only of the Orient, to call any cosmetic whatever by the name of *Sultana Paste*, seeing the magic effect of these words in a country where every man aims to be a sultan as every woman a sultana, was an inspiration that might come to any ordinary man as well as to a man of ability; but, as the public always judges by results, Birotteau passed so much the more for a superior being, commercially speaking, as he himself drew up a prospectus, the ridiculous phraseology of which was an element of success: in France one laughs only at things and men that one is concerned with, and no one bothers about what does not succeed. Though Birotteau did not act his stupidity, he was credited with the ability of knowing how to play the dunce on purpose. A copy of this prospectus has been found after considerable trouble, in the house of Popinot and Company, druggists, Rue des Lombards. This curious document is of a piece with those that, in a higher circle, historians entitle *confirmatory evidence*. Here it is then:

SULTANA DOUBLE PASTE AND CARMINATIVE  
WATER  
OF CESAR BIROTTEAU.  
MARVELLOUS DISCOVERY.

APPROVED BY THE INSTITUTE OF FRANCE.

For a long time past a paste for the hands and a water for the face, giving a result superior to that obtained by Cologne water in toilet work have been generally desired in Europe by both sexes. After having devoted long vigils to the study, in both sexes, of the derm and the epiderm—men and women naturally attach the greatest importance to softness, suppleness, clearness and a velvety feeling of the skin, the Sieur Birotteau, a perfumer favorably known in the capital and abroad, has discovered a paste and a water justly called marvellous, since their appearance, by the elegant of both sexes in Paris. Indeed, this paste and this water possess astonishing properties for acting on the skin, without wrinkling it prematurely, an effect inseparable from the drugs inconsiderately used until this day and invented by greedy and ignorant persons. This discovery rests on the division of temperaments, which group themselves into two great classes indicated by the color of the paste and of the water, which are rose-colored for the derm and epiderm of persons of lymphatic constitution, and white for those of persons who enjoy a sanguine temperament.

This paste is called *Sultana Paste*, because this discovery had already been made for the seraglio by an Arab physician. It has been approved by the Institute on the report of our illustrious chemist, Vauquelin, as well as the water which is based on the principles that have dictated the composition of the paste.

This precious Paste, which exhales the sweetest perfume, makes the most obstinate freckles disappear, whitens the most

recalcitrant epidermis, and stops the sweating of the hands of which women, no less than men, complain.

The *Carminative Water* removes those small pimples that, at certain times, suddenly break out on women and upset their plans in regard to the ball ; it refreshes and revives the colors by opening or closing the pores according to the exigencies of the temperament ; it is already so well known for postponing the ravages of time that many ladies have, out of gratitude, called it BEAUTY'S FRIEND.

Eau-de-Cologne is purely and simply a common perfume without any special efficacy, while the *Sultana Double Paste* and the *Carminative Water* are two active compositions, of a motive power acting without danger on the internal qualities and aiding them ; their odors, essentially balsamic and having a diverting effect, quickens the heart and the brain admirably, brightens the ideas and reawakens them ; they are as astonishing for their merit as for their simplicity ; finally, this is an additional attraction offered to women and a means of seduction that men may acquire.

The daily use of the water relieves any smart resulting from shaving ; it also preserves the lips from chapping and keeps them red ; it naturally effaces in the long run all freckles, and at last gives back its natural tone to the flesh. These effects always tell in man of a perfect equilibrium between the humors, which tends to free persons subject to sick-headache from this horrible malady. In fine, the *Carminative Water*, which may be used by women in all their toilet work, prevents cutaneous affections by not restraining the transpiration of the tissues, while at the same time communicating to them a persistent velvety feeling.

Address, prepaid, MONSIEUR CESAR BIROTTEAU, successor to Ragon, formerly perfumer to Queen Marie-Antoinette, *la Reine des Roses*, Rue Saint-Honoré, Paris, near the Place Vendôme.

*The price of a cake of paste is three francs, and that of a bottle is six francs.*



Monsieur César Birotteau, in order to guard against all imitations, warns the public that the paste is wrapped in paper bearing his signature, and that the bottles have a stamp blown in the glass.

Success was due, without César suspecting it, to Constance, who advised him to send the *Carminative Water* and the *Sultana Paste* in cases to all the perfumers in France and abroad, offering them a reduction of thirty per cent if they would take these two articles by the *gross*. The paste and the water were in reality much better than similar cosmetics and misled the ignorant by the distinction set up between temperament: the five hundred perfumers of France, enticed by gain, annually bought of Birotteau each over three hundred gross of paste and water, a consumption that brought him a limited percentage of profits, but enormous because of the quantity of the articles. César was then able to buy the shanty and the ground in the Faubourg du Temple, and he built an extensive factory there and handsomely decorated his *la Reine des Roses* shop. His dwelling received the small comforts of plenty, and his wife was not so worried after that.

In 1810 Madame César foresaw a rise in rents, and she urged her husband to become the chief tenant of the house in which they had the shop and the entresol, and to remove their living quarters to the second floor. A fortunate circumstance decided Constance to shut her eyes against the follies that Birotteau lavished for her on his apartments. The perfumer had just been elected a judge of the

Tribunal of Commerce. His honesty, his well-known sense of propriety and the consideration in which he was held gained for him this dignity which from that time classed him among the prominent shopkeepers of Paris. To increase his knowledge he got up at five o'clock in the morning, read the collections of jurisprudence, and the books that treated of commercial lawsuits. His idea of justice, his rectitude, his good will, qualities essential in the appreciation of the difficulties submitted to consular judgment, made him one of the most highly esteemed of the judges. His defects contributed equally to his reputation. Feeling his inferiority, César cheerfully made his knowledge subordinate to that of his colleagues; thus flattered at being listened to by him with such curiosity, some sought the silent approbation of a man deemed profound by reason of his quality as a listener; others, charmed by his modesty and mildness, boasted of it. The persons appearing before him praised his benevolence, his spirit of conciliation, and he was often selected as arbitrator in disputes in which his common sense would suggest to him a judgment worthy of a Cadi. During the whole time that he was in office he knew how to use language filled with commonplaces, bristling with axioms and calculations couched in rounded phrases which, pleasantly spoken, sounded like eloquence in the ears of superficial folk. He was thus pleasing to that naturally mediocre majority, forever condemned to work, to keeping their eyes on the ground. César lost so much time in the court that

his wife prevailed upon him to decline re-election to this costly honor. About 1813, thanks to its constantly pulling together and after having plodded through life in the common fashion, this household saw the beginning of an era of prosperity which it seemed as if nothing would interrupt. Monsieur and Madame Ragon, their predecessors; their uncle Pillerault, Roguin the notary, the Matifats, druggists in the Rue des Lombards, who supplied the stock to *la Reine des Roses*; Joseph Lebas, cloth merchant, successor to the Guillaumes, of the *Chat qui pelote*, one of the lights of the Rue Saint-Denis; Judge Popinot, Madame Ragon's brother; Chiffreville, of the firm of Protez & Chiffreville; Monsieur and Madame Cochin, employed in the Treasury and silent partners of the Matifats; the Abbé Loraux, confessor and director of the pious folk of this coterie, and some other persons, made up the circle of their friends. Despite Birotteau's royalist leanings, public opinion was then in his favor; he passed for being very rich, though he was as yet worth only a hundred thousand francs outside of his business. The regularity of his affairs, his exactness, his habit of owing nothing, of never discounting his paper, but of offering, on the contrary, solid assets to those to whom he could be useful, and his obliging disposition, gained him enormous credit. Moreover, he had really made a great deal of money; but his buildings and his factories had absorbed much of it. Then, to keep his house cost him nearly twenty thousand francs a year. Finally, the education of

Césarine, an only daughter, idolized by Constance as well as by him, was a heavy expense. Neither the husband nor the wife had any regard for money when there was question of providing pleasure for their daughter, from whom they would not be separated. Imagine the enjoyment of the poor upstart peasant when he heard his charming Césarine repeating on the piano one of Steibelt's sonatas or singing a romance; when he saw her write the French language correctly, when he admired her reading to him both the Racines, explaining their beauties, drawing a landscape or making a sketch in sepia! What a happiness it was for him to live again in so beautiful a flower, one so pure, that had not yet left its parent stem, an angel, in fine, whose budding graces, whose first developments had been most fondly watched! an only daughter, incapable of having contempt for her father or of making fun of his lack of education, so truly was she a *young girl*. When César came to Paris he knew how to read, write and figure, but his education stopped there, his laborious life had prevented him from acquiring ideas and knowledge foreign to the perfumery trade. Constantly mingling with people to whom the sciences and letters were a matter of indifference, and whose education embraced only specialties; having no time to devote to higher studies, the perfumer became a practical man. Of necessity he adopted the language, the errors, the opinions of middle-class Paris, who admire Molière, Voltaire and Rousseau on hearsay, who buy their

works but do not read them; who hold that one ought to say *ormoire*, because women hid their gold (*or*) in these articles of furniture, as well as their garments, in former times nearly always of *moire*, and that it was a corruption for people to say *armoire*. Potier, Talma, Mademoiselle Mars were ten times millionaires and did not live like other human beings: the great tragedian ate raw meat, Mademoiselle Mars sometimes had stewed pearls, in imitation of a famous Egyptian actress. The Emperor had leather pockets in his vests so that he could take his snuff in handfuls, he galloped on horseback up the steps of the orange grove at Versailles. Writers, artists, died in the hospital in consequence of their eccentricities; they were, moreover, all atheists, one must be careful about receiving them at one's house.

Joseph Lebas referred with horror to the history of the marriage of his sister-in-law Augustine to Sommervieux, the painter. Astronomers lived on spiders. These luminous points of their knowledge of the French language, of the dramatic art, of politics, of literature, of science, explain the scope of this middle-class intelligence. A poet who passes along the Rue des Lombards may, by scenting certain perfumes there, dream of Asia. He admires dancing girls in an Indian caravansary while breathing the vetiver-laden air. Struck by the brilliancy of the cochineal, he finds in it the Brahmanic poems, religions and castes. Running up against crude ivory, he mounts on elephants' backs, in a muslin cage, and there makes love like the king of Lahore.

But the small trader is ignorant of whence come or where grow the products among which he works. Birotteau as a perfumer didn't know an iota of natural history or of chemistry. In regarding Vauquelin as a great man, he considered him as an exception, he was of the character of that retired grocer who thus summed up a discussion on the manner of importing tea: "Tea comes only in two ways, *by caravan* or *by Havre*," he says with a knowing air. According to Birotteau, aloes and opium were to be found only in the Rue des Lombards. The pretended rose water from Constantinople was made, like Cologne water, at Paris. These names of places were lies invented to please the French, who cannot bear the things of their own country. A French dealer would have to say his discovery was English, in order to give it vogue, as in England a druggist attributes his own to France. Nevertheless, César could never be wholly foolish or stupid: honesty and goodness shed on the acts of his life a reflection that rendered them respectable, for a good act leads to the acceptance of all possible shades of ignorance. His constant success gave him assurance. In Paris assurance is accepted as the power of which it is the sign. Having appreciated César during the first three years of their married life, his wife was a prey to continual trances; in this union she represented the sagacious and foreseeing party, doubt, opposition, fear; as César represented in it audacity, ambition, action, the unheard-of happiness of fatality. In spite of appearances, the dealer was fickle, while

his wife in reality had patience and courage. Thus a pusillanimous, mediocre man, without education, without ideas, without knowledge, without character, and who would not be expected to succeed in the most critical position in the world, came, by the spirit of his life, by his sense of justice, by the goodness of a truly Christian soul, by love for the only woman he would have, to pass for a remarkable man, courageous and full of resolve. The public saw only the results. Except Pillerault and Judge Popinot, persons in his circle, seeing César only on the surface, could not judge of him. Moreover, the twenty or thirty friends who were wont to get together talked the same nonsense, repeated the same commonplaces, all regarded one another as superior folk in their sphere. The women vied with each other in the matter of good dinners and toilets; each of them had said her all in expressing contempt for her husband. Madame Birotteau alone had the good sense to treat hers with honor and respect in public; she saw in him the man who, despite his veiled incapacity, had made their fortune; and whose distinction she shared. Only she sometimes asked herself what was the world, if all men pretending to be superior resembled her husband. This conduct contributed not a little to keep up the respectful regard accorded to the tradesman in a country where women are rather prone to disparage their husbands and to complain of them.





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The first days of the year 1814, so fatal to Imperial France, were marked in the Birotteau family by two events that would not be considered of much importance in any other household, but of a nature to make an impression on simple souls like those of César and his wife, who, glancing over their past, found in it only sweet emotions. They had employed as head clerk a young man of twenty-two, whose name was Ferdinand du Tillet. This youth, who came from a perfumery house that had refused to give him an interest in the profits, and who passed for a man of parts, had made strenuous efforts to get into *la Reine des Roses*, whose inmates, strong points and domestic habits were known to him. Birotteau received him and gave him a thousand francs salary, with the intention of making him his successor. Ferdinand had so great an influence over the destinies of this family that it is necessary to speak briefly of him. At first he was simply called Ferdinand, his only name. This anonym seemed to him a great advantage at the time when Napoléon was pressing families in order to find soldiers in them. He was, however, born somewhere, as the result of some cruel and voluptuous fancy. Here is the meagre information gathered regarding his civil status. In 1793 a poor girl of Le Tillet, a hamlet situated near Les Andelys,

gave birth to a child by night in the garden of the officiating clergyman of Le Tillet, and went to drown herself after rapping on the shutters. The good priest took the child, gave it the name of the saint inscribed on the calendar for that day, nourished it and brought it up as his own. The curé died in 1804, without leaving enough money to complete the education that he had commenced. Ferdinand, thrown into Paris, there led a filibustering life, the chances of which might bring him to the scaffold or to fortune, to the bar, into the army, into trade, or to domestic servitude. Ferdinand, obliged to live as a veritable Figaro, became a commercial traveler, then clerk to a perfumer at Paris, to which he returned after having traveled through France, studied the world and determined on succeeding in it at any cost.

In 1813 he deemed it necessary to prove his age and to give himself a civic standing, and so he petitioned the court at Les Andelys for a decree transferring the record of his baptism from the registry of the presbytery to that of the mayor's office, and there he obtained an amendment on asking that they would add to the record the name of Du Tillet, by which he had been making himself known, in virtue of the fact of his situation in the parish. Fatherless and motherless, without any guardian but the imperial procurator, alone in the world, owing nothing to anybody, he treated society as Turk would treat Moor, in finding it but a harsh step-mother; he knew no other guide than self-interest,

and all the means of acquiring fortune seemed good to him. This Norman, endowed with dangerous abilities, added to his desire for success the very serious defects with which, whether wrongly or rightly, the natives of his province are reproached. His wheedling ways made up for his caviling disposition, for he was the roughest kind of wrangler in a dispute; and while he audaciously questioned the rights of others, he yielded none of his own; he kept his adversary to time, he tired him out by an inflexible will. His chief merit was that of the Scapins of the old comedy: he had their fertility of resource, their adroitness in sailing close to the law, their itch for seizing what is worth keeping. Finally, he counted on applying to his penury the expression which the Abbé Terray used in the name of the State, free to become an honest man later on. Gifted with restless activity, with military intrepidity, asking everybody to do a good as well as a bad turn for him, justifying his demand by the theory of personal interest, he had too much contempt for men, believing them all corruptible; he was far from being too delicate regarding the choice of means, if he found them all good; he too persistently regarded success and money as the discharge of the moral mechanism not to succeed sooner or later. Such a man, placed between the chain-gang and millions, was bound to be vindictive, imperious, quick in his resolves, but dissembling like a Cromwell who would cut off Probité's head. His depth was concealed under a spirit of raillery and levity. A mere

perfumer's clerk, he set no bounds to his ambition; he had taken in society with one hateful glance, saying: "Thou shalt be mine!" he had sworn to himself not to marry until he was forty; and he kept his word. Physically Ferdinand was a lank young man, of pleasing mien and of mixed manners that enabled him to assume at need the tone of any rank of society. His sorry figure pleased at first sight; but, later on, on becoming acquainted with him, one detected strange expressions that fix themselves on the surface of people ill at ease with themselves, or whose conscience murmurs at certain times. His complexion, quite pronounced on account of his soft Norman skin, had a sickly hue. The glance of his squinting eyes looking out from silvery rings was furtive, but terrible when he directed it straight at his victim. His voice seemed exhausted like that of a man who has been speaking long. His thin lips were not lacking in gracefulness; but his pointed nose, his slightly arched forehead betrayed a racial defect. Finally, his hair, in color like that of hair dyed black, indicated a social half-breed who derived his intellect from a great libertine lord, his baseness from a seduced peasant girl, his knowledge from an unfinished education and his vices from his devil-may-care disposition. Birotteau learned with the most profound astonishment that his clerk went out quite elegantly attired, came back very late, and went to bankers' or notaries' balls. These doings displeased César: in his opinion, clerks ought to study the books of their business, and think only

of their duties. The perfumer took exception to frivolity, he mildly reprov'd Du Tillet for wearing too fine linen, for having cards on which his name was engraved thus: F. DU TILLET; a style that, in his commercial jurisprudence, belonged exclusively to fashionable people. Ferdinand had come to this Orgon's house with the intentions of a Tartuffe; he paid court to Madame César, tested her conjugal fidelity, and judg'd his mistress as she herself judg'd him, but with terrible promptness. Though discreet, reserved, saying only what he meant, Du Tillet disclosed his opinions on men and life in such a way as to frighten a timid woman who shared her husband's religious views, and regarded it as a crime to do the slightest wrong to one's neighbor. Despite the tact used by Madame Birotteau, Du Tillet guess'd at the contempt which he inspir'd. Constance, to whom Ferdinand had written some love-letters, soon perceiv'd a change in her clerk's manner, and he assum'd toward her airs calculat'd to give the idea of a mutual understanding. Without telling her husband of her secret reasons, she advis'd him to discharge Ferdinand. Birotteau found himself in accord with his wife on this point. The clerk's dismissal was decid'd on. Three days before sending him away, on a Saturday evening, Birotteau took the monthly account of his cash, and found it three thousand francs short. His consternation was terrible, less on account of the loss than of the suspicions that rest'd on three clerks, a cook, a shop-boy, and indentur'd workmen. Who was to be

blamed for it? Madame Birotteau never left her desk. The clerk in charge of the cash was a nephew of Monsieur Ragon, named Popinot, a young man of eighteen, who lodged in the house, and was honesty personified. His figures, disagreeing with the sum in the drawer, showed the deficit and indicated that the money was removed after the balance had been struck. The husband and wife resolved to say nothing and to watch the house.

Next day, Sunday, they received their friends. The families that made up this sort of coterie entertained each other in turn. While playing bouillotte, Roguin the notary placed on the table some old louis that Madame César had received some days before from a newly-married woman, Madame d'Espard.

"You have rifled a poor-box," said the old man laughing.

Roguin said that he had won this money at a banker's from Du Tillet, who unblushingly confirmed the notary's reply. The perfumer turned purple. The day's pleasure ended, just as Ferdinand was going to bed, Birotteau led him into the shop, pretending that he wanted to talk business.

"Du Tillet," said the good man to him, "three thousand francs are missing from my cash, and I am unable to fix suspicion; the circumstance of the old louis seems to be too much against you for me not to speak to you of it: and so we will not go to bed without having found the error, for, after all, it can be only an error. You may indeed have taken some part of your allowance on account."

Du Tillet said in effect that he had taken the louis. The perfumer went and opened his ledger, his clerk's account was found not to have as yet been debited.

"I was in a hurry, I asked Popinot to make a record of the amount," said Ferdinand.

"Just so," said Birotteau, aghast at the Norman's cool carelessness, who well understood the good people to whose house he had come with the intention of making his fortune.

The perfumer and his clerk passed the night in making verifications that the worthy merchant well knew to be useless. While passing up and down, César slipped three thousand-franc bank notes into the drawer, fastening them to the strip of the till, then he pretended to be overcome with fatigue, feigned to sleep and began snoring. Du Tillet woke him up with an air of triumph, and affected a transport of joy at having thrown light on the mistake. Next day Birotteau grumbled publicly at little Popinot and his wife, and assumed an air of anger on account of their negligence. A fortnight later Ferdinand du Tillet got employment in a broker's office. The perfumery business did not suit him, he said, he wanted to study banking. On leaving Birotteau's Du Tillet spoke of Madame César in a way to make believe that his employer had dismissed him on account of jealousy. A few months afterwards Du Tillet came to see his old employer and asked him to go his security for twenty thousand francs, in order to complete the bonds that

were required of him in a transaction that was putting him on the high road to fortune. Remarking the surprise that Birotteau showed at this effrontery, Du Tillet frowned and asked him if he had no confidence in him. Matifat and two merchants talking business with Birotteau remarked the perfumer's indignation, though he suppressed his wrath in their presence. Du Tillet had perhaps become an honest man again, his fall might have been caused by a mistress in despair or by a run of gambling, and to be publicly scorned by an honest man might throw into a life of crime and misfortune one who was still young and perhaps on the way to repent. This angel then took a pen and put his signature to Du Tillet's paper, telling him that he was glad to do this slight service for a youth who had been very useful to him. The blood rushed to his face as he was uttering this white lie. Du Tillet did not brave this man's look, and no doubt at that moment vowed against him that implacable hate which the angels of darkness conceived against the angels of light. Du Tillet so cleverly held the pole while dancing on the tight-rope of financial speculations that he was always elegant and rich in appearance before he became so in reality. From the time that he began to have a carriage he never gave it up; he kept himself in the higher sphere of the gentry who mingle pleasure with business, making the ante-room of the Opera an annex of the Bourse, the Turcaret's of the time. Thanks to Madame Roguin, whose acquaintance he made at Birotteau's, he promptly moved among the



highest of those engaged in financial affairs. At that time Ferdinand du Tillet had reached a degree of prosperity that had nothing unreal about it. In the best standing with the Nucingen house, into which Roguin had gained him admittance, he at once allied himself with the Keller brothers, with the higher banking world. No one knew whence came to this fellow the vast amounts of capital that he kept in circulation, but his good fortune was attributed to his intelligence and his honesty.

The Restoration made a somebody of César, from whose mind naturally the whirlwind of political crises had removed the memory of those two domestic incidents. The unchangeable character of his royalist opinions, to which he had become quite indifferent since he had been wounded, but in which he had persisted for appearance sake, the memory of his devotedness in Vendémiaire, gained protection for him in high places, precisely because he asked for nothing. He was appointed chief of battalion in the National Guard, though he could not repeat the first word of command. In 1815 Napoléon, ever hostile to Birotteau, removed him from office. During the Hundred-Days Birotteau became the *bugbear* of the Liberals in his *quartier*; for only in 1815 began the political divisions between merchants, until then unanimous in their desire for peace, which business needed. On the second Restoration the royal government had to recast the municipal body. The Prefect wanted to name Birotteau for Mayor. Thanks to his wife, the perfumer accepted only the

place of deputy, which made him less prominent. This modesty greatly increased the esteem in which he was generally held, and gained for him the friendship of the Mayor, Monsieur Flamet de la Billardière. Birotteau, who remembered seeing him come to *la Reine des Roses* in the days when the shop served as a meeting place for the royalist conspirators, himself suggested him to the Prefect of the Seine, who consulted him on the choice to be made. Monsieur and Madame Birotteau were never forgotten in the Mayor's invitations. In fine, Madame César often took up collections at Saint-Roch, in pretty and good company. La Billardière warmly supported Birotteau when there was question of distributing the crosses granted to the municipal body, alleging his wound received at Saint-Roch, his attachment to the Bourbons and the consideration in which he was held. The Ministry, which, while lavishing the Cross of the Legion of Honor in order to undo Napoléon's work, wished to make creatures of its own, and to rally to the Bourbons the various branches of trade, the men of art and science, accordingly included Birotteau in the coming promotions. This favor, in harmony with Birotteau's prominence in his arrondissement, put him in a position in which must grow the ideas of a man with whom everything so far had succeeded. The news of his promotion brought to him by the Mayor was the last argument that decided the perfumer to launch into the operation which he had just explained to his wife in order that he might the more speedily

give up the perfumery business, and rise to the region of the higher middle-class of Paris.

César was then forty years old. The work to which he had been devoting himself in his factory had brought him some premature wrinkles, and had slightly silvered the long tufted hair on which the pressure of his hat had made a glossy curve. His brow, on which his locks, by the way they were arranged, formed five tufts, bespoke the simplicity of his life. His heavy eyebrows did not inspire dread, for his blue eyes harmonized, by their ever frank and limpid look, with his honest man's forehead. His nose, broken at birth and thick at the end, gave him the appearance of astonishment peculiar to the Paris quidnuncs. His lips were very thick, and his large chin fell straight down. His face highly colored, of square outline, presented, by the arrangement of the wrinkles, by the ensemble of his physiognomy, the ingenuously shrewd characteristics of the peasant. The general strength of body, stoutness of limbs, square back, broad feet, all denoted, moreover, the villager transplanted in Paris. His big and hairy hands, the fat joints of his wrinkled fingers, his large square finger-nails, would have betrayed his origin, had not vestiges of it remained on every part of his person. He had on his lips the benevolent smile assumed by dealers when you enter their shops; but this commercial smile was the image of his interior contentment and was a picture of the state of his sweet soul. His distrust never went beyond business, his cunning left him on the

threshold of the Bourse or when he shut his ledger. Suspicion was to him what his printed bill-heads were, a very necessity of trade. His figure presented a sort of comic assurance, of foppery mingled with simplicity, which made him odd to look at while saving him from a too complete resemblance to the dull figure of the Parisian middle-class man. Without this air of unaffected self-admiration and of faith in his own personality, he would have impressed one with too much respect; thus he resembled mankind in paying his quota of ridicule. When talking, he habitually crossed his hands behind his back. When he thought he had said something polite or pointed, he rose imperceptibly on tip-toe, twice, and fell heavily on his heels, as if to emphasize his statement. At the height of a discussion he would sometimes be seen turning round abruptly, taking a few steps as if he were going in search of objections and returning brusquely on his adversary. He never interrupted, and often found himself the victim of that observance of propriety, for others would seize the opportunity to talk, and the good man would leave the place without having been able to say a word. His large experience in commercial affairs had given him habits characterized by some people as manias. If a certain bill was not paid, he turned it over to the constable, and took no further concern about it but to receive the money, interest and costs; the constable was to persevere until the merchant had failed; César then abandoned all proceedings, did not appear at any meeting of creditors,

and kept his claims. This system and his implacable contempt for bankrupts he copied from Monsieur Ragon, who, in the course of his commercial life, had experienced such a great loss of time in law-suits that he regarded the small and uncertain dividend given by settlements as amply compensated for by the use of the time that was not lost in going, coming, making propositions and running after the excuses of dishonesty.

“If the insolvent is an honest man and gets on his feet again, he will pay you,” said Monsieur Ragon. “If he remains poor and is simply unfortunate, why torment him? If he is a cheat, you will never get anything. Your known severity makes you pass for being uncompromising, and, as it is impossible to compound with you, as long as a man can pay it is you who will be paid.”

César reached a meeting-place at the time specified; but, ten minutes later, he left with an inflexibility that nothing could bend: and so his punctuality made those punctual who had business with him. The costume he had adopted agreed with his manners and his physiognomy. No power could have made him give up the white muslin cravats, the corners of which, embroidered by his daughter or his wife, hung down from his neck. His white quilted vest, buttoned square, extended very low over his sufficiently prominent paunch, for he was slightly corpulent. He wore blue trousers, black silk stockings and shoes with ribbons, the knots of which often came undone. His olive-green frock-coat,

always too loose, and his broad-brimmed hat gave him the appearance of a Quaker. When he dressed for Sunday evenings he put on silk breeches, gold-buckled shoes and his inevitable square vest, both laps of which he then kept somewhat open, so as to show the upper part of his plaited shirt-frill. His maroon cloth dress-coat had broad lappels and long skirts. He kept until 1819 two watch-chains that hung parallel, but he wore the second only on dress occasions. Such was César Birotteau, a worthy fellow to whom the mysteries that preside over the birth of men had denied the ability to take in the whole range of both politics and life, to rise above the social level in which the middle class lives, who in everything followed the meanderings of routine: all his opinions had been communicated to him, and he applied them without examination. Blind but good, by no means unworldly but deeply religious, he had a pure heart. In that heart shone a single love, the light and strength of his life; for his longing after betterment, the little knowledge that he had acquired, all came from his affection for his wife and daughter.

As regards Madame César, then thirty-seven years old, she so perfectly resembled the Venus of Milo that all those who knew her saw her portrait in this beautiful statue when the Duc de Rivière sent it. In a few months sorrows so readily impressed their yellow tints on her blooming fair complexion, so cruelly hollowed and darkened the bluish circle in which her fine green eyes sparkled, that she had the

appearance of an old Madonna; for she ever retained, amid her ruins, a sweet candor, a pure though sad look, and it was impossible not to consider her always a beautiful woman, of a wise, modest bearing and perfect propriety. At the ball foreshadowed by César, she was, moreover, to enjoy a last splendor of beauty that everybody remarked.

Every life has its zenith, when causes operate and are in exact relation with results. This noon-day of life, when the active forces are in equilibrium and are produced in all their splendor, is not only common to organized beings, but also to cities, nations, ideas, institutions, branches of trade, enterprises that, like noble races and dynasties, begin, rise and fall. Whence comes the strict rule by which this germ of growth and decline is applied to all that is organized here below? for death also has, in times of scourge, its progress, its relaxation, its recrudescence and its sleep. Our globe itself is perhaps a rocket that is a little more durable than the rest. History, repeating the causes of the prosperity and decline of all that has been here below, might warn man of the moment when the play of all his faculties is to stop; but neither conquerors, nor actors, nor women, nor authors listen to the salutary warning. César Birotteau, who might have considered himself as having attained the zenith of his fortune, took this time for stopping as a new starting-point. He knew not, and moreover neither nations, nor kings, have tried to write in ineffaceable characters the cause of those upheavals with which

history is full, of which such striking examples are presented by so many sovereign or commercial houses. Why should not new pyramids incessantly recall this principle, which ought to dominate the policies of nations as well as of individuals: *When the effect produced is no longer in direct relation or in equal proportion to its cause, disorganization begins!* But these monuments exist everywhere, they are the traditions and the stones that speak to us of the past, that commemorate the caprices of indomitable destiny, whose hand effaces our dreams and proves to us that the greatest events are summed up in an idea. Troy and Napoléon are only poems. May this history be the poem of the middle-class vicissitudes of which no voice has thought of singing, so devoid of grandeur do they seem, while for the same reason they are stupendous: it is not a question of any one particular man here, but of a whole people of sorrows.



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While César was going to sleep he feared that on the morrow his wife would raise some peremptory objections, and so he prepared to get up very early in order to settle everything. At break of day, then, he got up noiselessly, left his wife in bed, dressed quickly and went down to the shop just as the boy was taking off the numbered shutters. Birotteau, seeing that he was alone, waited for his clerks to get up, and stood on his doorstep examining how his utility boy, who was named Raguét, was doing his work, and Birotteau knew all about it! Though cold, the weather was superb.

“Popinot, go bring me my hat, put on your shoes, send Monsieur Célestin down, we are going to chat together at the Tuileries,” said he, seeing Anselme coming down.

Popinot, that admirable reverse of Du Tillet, whom one of those lucky accidents that make us believe in a sub-Providence had placed close to César, plays so important a part in this history that it is necessary to outline him briefly here. Madame Ragon was a Mademoiselle Popinot. She had two brothers. One, the youngest of the family, was then associate judge in the committing court of the Seine. The eldest had gone into the raw wool business, had sunk his fortune in it, and died leaving to the charge of the Ragons and his brother the

judge, who had no children, his only son, who had already lost his mother, she having died in childbirth. To give a start to her nephew, Madame Ragon had placed him in the perfumery business, hoping to see him succeed Birotteau. Anselme Popinot was small and club-footed, an infirmity that chance gave to Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott and Talleyrand, so as not to discourage those who are similarly afflicted. He had that bright and freckled complexion for which red-haired people are remarkable; but his clear brow, his gray veined agate-colored eyes, his fine mouth, his clear complexion and the grace of a modest youth, the timidity inspired in him by his physical defect, gave rise to substantial friendly feeling in his favor: people love the weak. Popinot was interesting. Little Popinot, everybody so called him, belonged to an essentially religious family, in which virtue was marked by intelligence, whose life was modest and filled with good deeds. And so the child, reared by his uncle, the judge, had combined in him the qualities that make youth so beautiful: wise and affectionate, a little backward, but full of ardor, mild as a lamb, but not afraid of work, devoted, sober, he was endowed with all the virtues of a Christian of the early ages of the Church. Hearing mention made of a walk to the Tuileries, the most eccentric proposition that his imposing employer could make at that hour, Popinot felt that he wanted to talk with him on business. The clerk suddenly thought of Césarine, the real queen of roses, the living sign of the house, and by

whom he had been smitten the very day on which, two months before Du Tillet, he had entered Birotteau's. While going up stairs he was, then, obliged to stop, his heart was too full, his arteries were beating too violently; he soon came down followed by Célestin, Birotteau's chief clerk. Anselme and his employer walked towards the Tuileries without saying a word. Popinot was then twenty-one, and Birotteau had married at this age. Anselme accordingly saw no bar to his marrying Césarine, though the perfumer's fortune and his daughter's beauty were immense obstacles in the way of such an ambitious wish being carried out; but love proceeds by bounds of hope, and the wilder they are, the more faith is placed in them; and so, the farther his mistress was from him, the keener were his desires. Happy youth who, at a time of universal leveling, when all hats are alike, succeeded in creating distances between a perfumer's daughter and himself, the scion of an old Parisian family! In spite of his doubts and his uneasiness, he was happy: he dined every day with Césarine! Then, applying himself to the affairs of the house, he did so with a zeal, an ardor, that robbed work of all its bitterness; by doing everything in Césarine's name, he was never tired. In a young man of twenty love feeds on devotion.

"He will be a merchant, he will succeed," said César of him to Madame Ragon, boasting of Anselme's activity about the stock of the factory, praising his aptitude in relation to the fine points of the art,

recalling the eagerness of his work at the times when shipments were to be made, and when, his sleeves rolled up, his arms bare, the lame youth boxed and nailed up, by himself alone, more cases than did all the other clerks.

The known and acknowledged pretensions of Alexandre Crottat, Roguin's chief clerk, the fortune owned by his father, a rich farmer of La Brie, were very serious obstacles in the way of the orphan's triumph; but these difficulties were not the hardest to overcome: in the bottom of his heart Popinot buried faded secrets that increased the distance between Césarine and himself. The Ragon's estate, on which he might have counted, had become impaired; it was the orphan's good luck to help them to live by giving them his meagre salary. Yet he believed in success! Several times had he caught glances cast on him with apparent pride by Césarine; in the depths of her blue eyes he had dared to read a secret thought full of caressing hopes. He walked on, then, worked up by his hope of the moment, trembling, silent, moved, as in such circumstances might be all the young folk for whom life is budding.

"Popinot," said the good tradesman to him, "is your aunt well?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yet for some time past she has seemed careworn; can she have any secret trouble? Listen to me, boy, you must not be mysterious with me, I am as it were a member of the family, it is twenty-five years since I first made the acquaintance of your

uncle, Ragon. I entered his house in heavy iron-tipped shoes, on my arrival from my native village. Though the place is called Les Trésorières, all I had was one gold louis given to me by my godmother, the late Marquise d'Uxelles, a relative of the Duc and Duchesse de Lenoncourt, who are regular customers of ours. And so I have prayed every Sunday for her and her whole family; her niece in Touraine, Madame de Mortsauf, I supply with all her perfumery, I am constantly getting customers through them, as for example Monsieur de Vandenesse, who takes twelve hundred francs' worth a year. One should be grateful not merely from kindness of heart, but should purposely be so: and I wish you well unreservedly and for your own sake."

"Oh! sir, you had, if you allow me to say so, a proud head!"

"No, my boy, no, that does not suffice. I do not say that my pate is not as good as the next, but I had probity, *tenacity!* I have had behavior, I have never loved any woman but my wife. Love is a famous *vehicle*, a happy word that Monsieur de Villèle used yesterday in the tribune."

"Love!" said Popinot, "Oh! sir, is it that—?"

"Look, see, there comes old man Roguin on foot at the upper end of the Place Louis XV., at eight o'clock. What, then, is the good man doing there?" César said to himself, regardless of Anselme Popinot and the hazelnut oil.

His wife's suspicions came back to his memory, and, instead of entering the garden of the Tuileries,

Birotteau advanced towards the notary so as to meet him. Anselme followed his employer at a distance, unable to explain the sudden interest that he took in an incident apparently of so little importance, but very happy at the encouragement he found in what César had said about his iron-tipped shoes, his gold louis and love.

Roguin, a tall and stout pimpled man, very bald in front and black haired, must have been rather handsome in early life; he had been energetic when young, for, from being a minor clerk, he had become a notary; but at this moment his countenance presented, in the eyes of a shrewd observer, the marks and fatigues of courted pleasures. When a man plunges into the mire of excesses, it is not easy for him to avoid getting soiled somewhere: and so there was no nobility in Roguin's wrinkles and florid complexion. Instead of that clear hue which lights up the tissues of continent men and makes them look the picture of health, one could see in him that his blood had been tainted by acts at which the body winces. He had an ignobly turned-up nose, like that of people in whom the humors, going the way of this organ, produce a secret infirmity which a virtuous queen of France artlessly thought was a misfortune common to the species, as she had never approached any other man than the king close enough to discover her error. By taking Spanish snuff copiously Roguin imagined he could cover up this shortcoming, but he only intensified its drawbacks, which were the chief cause of his misery.

Is not social flattery rather too long-drawn-out when it is forever painting men in false colors, and does not allow any of the true principles of their vicissitudes, so often due to disease, to be revealed? Physical ill-doing, considered in its moral ravages, examined in its influences on the mechanism of life, has so far perhaps been too much neglected by the historians of morals. Madame César had a clear insight of the family secret.

Ever since the first night of her married life Banker Chevrel's charming only daughter had conceived an insuperable antipathy to the poor notary, and wanted to apply at once for a divorce. Too happy at having a woman worth five hundred thousand francs, without taking account of hopes, Roguin had entreated his wife not to bring a divorce suit, leaving her free and abiding by all the consequences of such a bargain. Madame Roguin, having become sovereign mistress, acted towards her husband as a courtesan towards an old lover. Roguin soon found his wife too costly, and, like many Parisian husbands, he began to consort with another woman. Keeping at first within prudent limits, this outlay was moderate.

In the beginning Roguin found, at little cost, coquettes of low degree who were very glad of his patronage; but for three years past he had been a prey to one of those indomitable passions that seize upon men between the ages of fifty and sixty, and the object of which was one of the most magnificent creatures of that time, known in the annals of

prostitution by the nickname of the Dutch Beauty, for she was destined to fall back into that gulf in which death made her famous. She had formerly been brought from Bruges to Paris by one of Roguin's clients, who, forced to fly in consequence of political events, made him a present of her in 1815. The notary had bought for his mistress a small house in the Champs-Élysées, had furnished it handsomely, and allowed himself to be drawn on to satisfy the costly caprices of this woman, whose lavishness absorbed his fortune.

The gloomy expression imprinted on Roguin's physiognomy, and which was dispelled when he saw his client, was due to mysterious events in which were to be found the secrets of the fortune so rapidly made by Du Tillet. The plan formed by Du Tillet changed from the very first Sunday on which he was enabled to observe, in his employer's household, the respective relations of Monsieur and Madame Roguin. He had come less to test Madame César's conjugal fidelity than to make her offer Césarine's hand as an indemnity for a checked passion, and he had so much the less difficulty in giving up the idea of this marriage as he had thought César rich and found him poor. He played spy on the notary, insinuated himself into his confidence, had himself introduced at the Dutch Beauty's house, there studied on what terms she was with Roguin, and learned that she offered to thank her lover if he were less exuberant to her. The Dutch Beauty was one of those foolish women who are never disturbed about whence



money comes or how it is acquired, and who would give the feast with the crowns furnished by a paricide. On the eve she never thought of the morrow. To her the future was her afternoon, and the end of the month eternity, even when she had bills to pay. Delighted at finding a first lever, Du Tillet began by getting the Dutch Beauty to admit that she loved Roguin for thirty thousand francs a year instead of fifty thousand, a service that rakish old men rarely forget.

At last, after a supper liberal in wine, Roguin opened his mind to Du Tillet on his financial crisis. His real estate having been absorbed by mortgage to his wife, he had been led by his passion to take from his clients' funds a sum that already amounted to more than half of what his office was worth. When the rest should be eaten up, the unfortunate Roguin would blow out his brains, for he thought he could diminish the horror of failure by appealing to public pity. Du Tillet saw an early and safe fortune shining like a flash in the night's drunken bout, he reassured Roguin and paid him for his confidence by making him fire off his pistols in the air.

"In such jeopardy," he said to him, "a man of your ability ought not to behave like a fool and walk haltingly, but act boldly."

He advised him to take a large sum at once, to entrust it to him so that it could be boldly played in some operation or other on the Bourse, or in some speculation chosen from among the thousand and

one that were being undertaken at that time. In case of gain, both of them would together found a banking house in which they would make use of the deposits, and the profits of which would serve him in satisfying his passion. If chance turned against them, Roguin would go and live abroad, instead of killing himself, because *his* Du Tillet would be faithful to him as long as there was a sou left. It was a rope within reach of a man who was drowning, and Roguin did not perceive that the perfumer's clerk was adjusting it around his neck.

Once master of Roguin's secret, Du Tillet made use of it to bring into his power wife, mistress and husband at one and the same time. Forewarned of a disaster that she was far from suspecting, Madame Roguin accepted the attentions of Du Tillet, who then left the perfumer's sure of his future. He had no difficulty in persuading the mistress to risk a certain sum, so as never to be obliged to have recourse to prostitution should any misfortune befall her. The wife put her affairs in order, promptly got together a small amount of capital and gave it to a man in whom her husband trusted, for the notary first gave a hundred thousand francs to his accomplice. Placed close to Madame Roguin so as to change this pretty woman's interest into affection, Du Tillet knew how to inspire her with a most violent passion. His three silent partners were naturally of some account to him; but, not satisfied with this, he had the audacity, while making them gamble on the Bourse, to have an understanding

with an adversary who gave him back the amount of the supposed losses, for he was playing both for his clients and for himself. As soon as he had fifty thousand francs, he was sure of making a great fortune; he turned the eagle glance that was characteristic of him on the vicissitudes that were then rife in France: he played low during the French campaign, and high on the return of the Bourbons. Two months after the restoration of Louis XVIII., Madame Roguin was worth two hundred thousand francs, and Du Tillet a hundred thousand crowns. The notary, in whose estimation this young man was an angel, had restored equilibrium in his affairs. The Dutch Beauty squandered all; she was a prey to a nasty cancer, named Maxime de Trailles, formerly page to the Emperor. Du Tillet found out this woman's real name while engaged with her on one occasion. She was called Sarah Gobseck. Struck by the coincidence of this name with that of a usurer of whom he had heard spoken, he went to this old noteshaver's office, the providence of young spendthrifts of good family, just to find out how far the credit of his female relative could be made to go with him. The Brutus of usurers was implacable towards his grand-niece, but Du Tillet knew how to please him by posing as Sarah's banker, and as having capital to put in circulation. The Norman and the usurer natures agreed with each other. Gobseck found that he needed a shrewd young man to supervise a small operation abroad. An auditor in the Council of State, taken by surprise on the return of the

Bourbons, had conceived the idea, in order to put himself in good standing at court, to go to Germany for the purpose of buying the titles to the debts contracted by the princes during their exile. He offered the profits of this affair, to him purely political, to those who would put up the necessary capital. The usurer did not want to part with the money but just as the purchase of credits took place, and wished to have them examined by an expert representing him. Usurers trust nobody, they want security, with them opportunity is everything: icy cold when they have no need of a man, they are artful and kindly disposed when they want to use him. Du Tillet knew of the important part played on change in Paris by the Werbrusts and the Gigonnets, discounters to the trade of the Rues Saint-Denis and Saint-Martin; by Palma, the banker of the Faubourg Poissonnière, nearly always interested with Gobseck. He accordingly offered cash security bearing interest and required that these gentlemen use in their money-dealings the funds that he placed at their disposal: he thus provided himself something to depend upon. He accompanied Monsieur Clément Chardin des Lupeaulx on a journey to Germany that lasted during the Hundred-Days, and returned at the second Restoration, having increased the elements of his fortune more than his fortune itself amounted to. He had won his way into the secrets of the shrewdest calculators of Paris, he had won the friendship of the man whose agent he was, for this skilful thimble-rigger had revealed to him the ways

and jurisprudence of politics in high places. Du Tillet was one of those spirits to whom a nod is as good as a wink, he completed his education during this journey. On his return he found Madame Roguin faithful. As for the poor notary, he was awaiting Ferdinand with as much impatience as his wife showed, for the Dutch Beauty had ruined him once more. Du Tillet questioned the Dutch Beauty, and did not find an outlay equivalent to the sums squandered. Du Tillet then discovered the secret that Sarah Gobseck had so carefully concealed from him, her unbridled passion for Maxime de Trailles, whose start in his career of vice and debauchery told what he was, one of those political vagabonds necessary to every good government, and rendered insatiable by gambling. In making this discovery, Du Tillet understood Gobseck's obduracy towards his grand-niece. In these circumstances Banker Du Tillet, for he had become a banker, strenuously advised Roguin to provide for a rainy day, to engage his richest clients in a matter in which he could keep large sums to himself if he were doomed to failure on resuming the banking game. After some *rises* and *falls*, profitable only to Du Tillet and Madame Roguin, the notary at last heard the knell of his *discomfiture*. His agony was then turned to advantage by his best friend. Du Tillet invented the speculation in relation to the land situated around the Madeleine. Naturally the hundred thousand francs deposited by Birotteau with Roguin, awaiting an investment, were entrusted to Du Tillet, who, as he

wanted to ruin the perfumer, gave Roguin to understand that he was running less risk by catching his closest friends in his net.

“A friend,” he said to him, “is lenient with you even in his wrath.”

Few persons now know how little a square yard of the land around the Madeleine would bring at that time, but the value of that land was going to advance far beyond what it was at the time, and necessarily so, because of the need of finding investors who would take advantage of the opportunity; now, Du Tillet wanted to be in a position to reap the benefit without the losses of a long-term speculation. In other words, his plan consisted in so handling the affair as to have it regarded as a corpse that he knew he could resuscitate. In such case the Gobsecks, the Palmas, the Werbrusts and the Gigonnets naturally lent a hand to one another; but Du Tillet was not intimate enough with them to ask their aid; moreover, he was so anxious to conceal his hand, while at the same time managing the affair, that he could reap the benefit of the theft without incurring blame for it; accordingly he felt the necessity of making use of one of those living puppets called *straw men* in commercial language. His supposed gambler at the Bourse seemed to him fit to become his scape-goat, and he usurped divine right by creating a man. Out of a former commercial traveler, devoid of both means and capacity, except that of talking indefinitely on all sorts of subjects while saying nothing, entirely without money, but

capable of understanding a part and playing it without spoiling the piece, full of the rarest honor, that is to say, able to keep a secret and to allow himself to be dishonored for the benefit of his employer, Du Tillet made a banker who undertook and directed the greatest enterprises; the head of the Claparon house. Charles Claparon's destiny was to be one day delivered over to the Jews and the Pharisees, if the venture launched by Du Tillet should end in failure, and Claparon knew it. But for a poor devil that in melancholy mood was tramping the boulevards with a future of forty sous in his pocket when his comrade Du Tillet met him, the small share that was to be turned over to him in each transaction was an Eldorado. Thus his friendship, his devotedness to Du Tillet, corroborated by an unreflecting gratitude, stimulated by the needs of a licentious and desultory life, made him say *Amen* to everything. Then, after having sold his honor, he saw him take risks so prudently that he at last became attached to his former comrade as a dog to its master. Claparon was a very ugly poodle, but ever ready to do the Curtius leap. In the present combination he was to represent half of the purchasers of the land, as César Birotteau would represent the other half. The notes that Claparon would receive from Birotteau would be discounted by one of the usurers whose name Du Tillet could use so as to precipitate Birotteau into the abyss of bankruptcy, when Roguin would run away with his money. Those appointed to adjudicate the

bankruptcy would act in accordance with Du Tillet's inspirations, and the latter, in possession of the money given by the perfumer and his creditor under different names, would have the land put up at auction and buy it in for half its value, paying for it with Roguin's capital and the dividend of the bankruptcy. The notary put his finger in the pie, thinking he would get a good part of the perfumer's valuable spoils and those of the people interested with him; but the man to whose discretion he was giving himself up would, and did, take the lion's share. Roguin, not having it in his power to prosecute Du Tillet in any court, was satisfied with the bone given him to gnaw, from month to month, in his retreat in Switzerland, where he found beauties at a discount. Circumstances, and not the meditations of a writer of tragedy inventing an intrigue, had begotten this horrible scheme. Hate without the desire for revenge is a grain fallen on granite; but the vengeance vowed against César by Du Tillet was one of the most natural of developments, or we must deny the quarrel between the accursed angels and the angels of light. Du Tillet could not without great inconvenience assassinate the only man in Paris who knew him to be guilty of a domestic theft, but he could throw him in the mire and annihilate him in a way that would make his testimony impossible. For a long time his vengeance had germinated in his heart without flowering, for the most spiteful people do very little planning at Paris; life is too hurried there, too excited, there



are too many unforeseen accidents; yet these perpetual oscillations, if they do not allow of premeditation, give most timely aid to a thought stowed away at the bottom of the politic heart that is strong enough to lie in wait for favorable circumstances. When Roguin took Du Tillet into his confidence, the clerk derived therefrom a vague idea of the possibility of ruining César, and he made no mistake. On the point of abandoning his idol, the notary drank his love-potion from the broken cup, went every day to the Champs-Élysées and returned home in the early morning. And so the distrustful Madame César was right. As soon as a man has resolved to play the part that Du Tillet had assigned to Roguin, he acquires the talents of the greatest comedian, he has the eye of a lynx and the penetration of a seer, he knows how to mesmerize his dupe; and so the notary had seen Birotteau long before Birotteau saw him, and when the perfumer looked at him he had already reached out his hand from afar.

“I have just been drawing up the will of an important personage who has not a week to live,” he said with the most natural air in the world; “but they treated me like a village doctor, they sent for me with a carriage, and I am returning on foot.”

These words dispelled a slight cloud of distrust that had darkened the perfumer's brow, and which Roguin noticed; and so the notary took good care not to be the first to speak of the matter of the land, for he wanted to give the finishing blow to his victim.

“After wills, marriage-contracts, such is life,” said Birotteau. “And as regards that, when shall we marry the Madeleine, eh! eh! old man Roguin?” he added, tapping him on the stomach.

Among men the most chaste of the middle class pretend to seem wanton.

“Well, if not to-day, never,” replied the notary with a diplomatic air. “We are afraid lest the affair may be noised abroad, I have already been urgently pressed by two of my richest clients, who want to get into this speculation. And so it is a case of take or leave. Immediately after midday I will draw up the deeds, and you will have the privilege of being in it only until one o’clock. Good-by. I am going at once to look over the draft that Xandrot was to have made out for me during the night.”

“All right, so be it, you have my word,” said Birotteau running after the notary and clasping his hand. “Take the hundred thousand francs that were to serve as my daughter’s dowry.”

“Very well,” said Roguin as he moved away.

Whilst Birotteau was returning to little Popinot he experienced a violent warmth in his entrails, his diaphragm became contracted, his ears tingled.

“What ails you, sir?” asked the clerk, seeing his master’s pale countenance.

“Ah! my boy, I have just concluded a great stroke of business with a single word, no one is master of his emotions in such a case. Moreover, you are not a stranger to it. And so I have brought you here to talk of it more at ease, as no one will

hear us. Your aunt is in straitened circumstances; how, then, has she lost her money? tell me."

"My uncle and aunt, sir, have had their money at Monsieur de Nucingen's, they have been compelled to take in repayment stock in the Wortschin mines, which do not yet pay any dividend, and it is hard at their age to live on hope."

"But on what are they living?"

"They have done me the pleasure to accept my salary."

"Good, good, Anselme," said the perfumer, letting a tear steal from his eyes, "you are worthy of the attachment that I have for you. And so you are going to receive a high reward for your application to my business."

While using these words the merchant grew as much bigger in his own estimation as in Popinot's; he gave them that middle-class and unaffected emphasis that was an expression of his sham superiority.

"What? you have seen into my passion for ——?"

"For whom?" asked the perfumer.

"For Mademoiselle Césarine."

"Ah! boy, you are quite bold," exclaimed Birotteau. "But keep your secret very close, I promise you I will forget it, and you will leave my house tomorrow. I do not want you in it; in your place, the deuce! the deuce! I would have done the same. She is so pretty!"

"Ah! sir!" said the clerk, who felt his shirt moist, from his excessive perspiration.

“My boy, this affair is not the matter of a day : Césarine is her own mistress, and her mother has too her ideas. So mind your own business, dry your eyes, keep your heart in check, and let us never speak of it again. I would not be ashamed to have you for a son-in-law: the nephew of Monsieur Popinot, judge in the committing court ; the nephew of the Ragnons, you have the right to go your way quite as much as any one else; but there are *buts, fors, ifs!* What a devil of a dog you let loose on me in a business conversation ! Here, sit down on this chair, and let the lover make way for the clerk. Popinot, are you a brave man ?” he asked, looking at his clerk. “Do you feel you have the courage to contend against some one stronger than yourself, in a hand-to-hand combat—?”

“Yes, sir.”

“To keep up a long, a dangerous fight—?”

“What is it all about ?”

“About freezing out Macassar oil !” said Birotteau, striking the attitude of one of Plutarch’s heroes. “Let us not deceive ourselves, the enemy is strong, well intrenched, quite formidable. Macassar oil has been well managed. The idea is clever. The square vials are original in form. For my project I have thought of making ours triangular; but I would prefer, after mature reflection, small thin glass bottles in a reed casing; they would have a mysterious appearance, and consumers like what puzzles them.”

“That is expensive,” said Popinot. “It would

be necessary to get up everything as cheap as possible, so as to make large shipments to the retailers.”

“Good, my boy, these are the true principles. Think well on it, Macassar oil will defend itself! It is specious; it has an attractive name. It is offered as a foreign importation, and we will have the misfortune of being of our own country. Let us see, Popinot; do you feel yourself strong enough to kill Macassar? In the first place, you will ship it abroad; it seems that Macassar is really in the Indies; it is more natural, then, to send the French product to the Indians than to send them what they think they have been furnishing to us. You take hold of the dealers! But we must make a fight abroad and in the departments! Now, Macassar oil has been well advertised, we must not deceive ourselves as to its power, it is pushed, the public know it.”

“I will freeze it out!” exclaimed Popinot, his eyes lighting up.

“How?” asked Birotteau. “That is only the ardor of youth. Then listen to me until I have done.”

Anselme assumed the attitude of a soldier presenting arms to a Marshal of France.

“Popinot, I have invented an oil to make the hair grow, to restore power to the scalp, to preserve the color of the hair of both men and women. This essence will be no less successful than my Paste and Water; but I do not want to work out this secret by myself, I am thinking of retiring from business. It is you, my boy, who will put on the market my *Comagenous* Oil—from the word *coma*, a Latin

word that means hair, as I have been told by Monsieur Alibert, physician to the king; this word is to be found in the tragedy of Berenice, into which Racine introduces a king of Comagene, the lover of that pretty queen so famous for her hair, which lover, no doubt from flattery, gave this name to his kingdom. What a mind these great geniuses have! they go into the most minute details.”—

Little Popinot kept his serious look while listening to this ridiculous parenthesis, evidently spoken for him, who was fairly well educated.

“Anselme! I have looked to you to found a high-class drug house in the Rue des Lombards,” said Birotteau. “I will be your silent partner, and I will guarantee you the money to start with. After the comagenous oil, we will try vanilla essence and mint spirit. Finally, we will take up the drug business to revolutionize it, selling its concentrated products instead of in the natural state. Ambitious young man, are you satisfied?”

Anselme could not reply, so overcome was he, but his eyes, filled with tears, answered for him. This offer seemed to him to have been dictated by a paternal indulgence that said to him: “Deserve Césarine by becoming rich and well thought of.”

“Sir,” he finally replied, taking Birotteau’s emotion for astonishment, “I also will succeed!”

“Just as I did,” exclaimed the perfumer, “I did not say anything else. If you have not my daughter, you will always have a fortune. Well, boy, what ails you now?”

“Let me hope that in acquiring the one I will obtain the other.”

“I cannot keep you from hoping, my friend,” said Birotteau, touched by Anselme’s tone.

“Well, sir, may I begin to-day to take steps toward finding a shop so that I may start in as soon as possible?”

“Yes, my boy. To-morrow we will go and shut ourselves up together in the factory. Before going into the neighborhood of the Rue des Lombards you will call at Livingston’s and see whether my hydraulic press will be ready for use to-morrow. This evening we will go at dinner-time to the illustrious and good Monsieur Vauquelin’s to consult with him. This chemist has been engaged quite recently on the composition of the hair, he has been investigating as to what its coloring substance is, whence it comes, what is the texture of the hair. There is everything in that, Popinot. You will know my secret, and then there will be question only of using it intelligently. Before going to Livingston’s stop in at Pieri Bénard’s. My boy, Monsieur Vauquelin’s disinterestedness is one of the great griefs of my life: it is impossible to get him to accept anything. Fortunately, I have learned through Chiffreville that he wanted a Dresden *Virgin*, engraved by a certain Muller, and, after two years’ correspondence in Germany, Bénard has discovered it on China-paper, a proof before the letter: it costs, my boy, fifteen hundred francs. To-day our benefactor will see it in his ante-chamber while showing us out, for

it will be framed, you will make sure of that. My wife and I will thus be recalled to his memory, for, as regards gratitude, we have been praying to God for him every day for sixteen years. I will never forget him, not I ; but, Popinot, buried as they are in science, scholars forget everything, wife, friends, those under obligation to them. As for us, our limited intelligence allows us at least to have a warm heart. That is a consolation for not being a great man. These gentlemen of the Institute are all brains, as you will see; you never see them at church. Monsieur Vauquelin is always in his office or in his laboratory; I like to believe that he thinks of God while analyzing His works. Our understanding is, then: I will put up the money, I will let you into my secret, we will go halves, without there being any need of papers. May we succeed! we will tune our pipes. Hurry up, young man; as for me, I am going about my business. Listen, then, Popinot, three weeks from now I will give a great ball; get a dress suit, come to it like a man in trade already well-established—.”

This last touch of kindness so moved Popinot that he took hold of César's big hand and kissed it. The good man had flattered the lover by this confidence, and folk so smitten are capable of anything.

“Poor youth,” said Birotteau on seeing him run across the Tuileries, “if Césarine only loved him! but he is lame, his hair is the color of red brick, and young ladies are so peculiar! I hardly think that Césarine—And then her mother wants to see her a



notary's wife. Alexandre Crottat will make her rich: riches makes everything bearable, while there is no happiness that does not give way before poverty. In fine, I have resolved to let my daughter be her own mistress until she does something foolish."



\*

Birotteau's next-door neighbor was a small dealer in umbrellas, parasols and canes, named Cayron, from Languedoc, who was getting along very poorly and whom Birotteau had already obliged on several occasions. Cayron did not ask more than to be confined to his shop and to give up to the rich perfumer the two rooms on the second floor, and so reducing his rent.

"Well, neighbor," said Birotteau to him in a familiar way, as he entered the umbrella dealer's place, "my wife consents to the enlargement of our quarters! If you wish we will go to Monsieur Molineux's at eleven o'clock."

"My dear Monsieur Birotteau," replied the umbrella dealer, "I have never asked you for anything on account of this concession, but you know that a good business man ought to make money out of everything."

"The deuce! the deuce!" replied the perfumer, "I haven't money by the thousand or even by the hundred. I don't know whether my architect, whom I am expecting, will find the thing practicable. 'Before coming to a conclusion,' he said to me, 'let us find out whether your floors are on the same level. Then Monsieur Molineux must consent to let us make an opening in the wall, and is the wall a party one?' In fine, I must turn the stairway

around in my house so as to change the landing in order to get the floors on the same level. That entails considerable expense, and I do not want to ruin myself."

"Oh! sir," said the Southerner, "when you will be ruined the sun shall have come to sleep with the earth, and they shall have offspring."

Birotteau stroked his chin as he raised himself on tip-toe and then fell back on his heels.

"Moreover," resumed Cayron, "I ask you for nothing else but to take these notes from me—."

And he handed him a little bundle to the value of five thousand francs made up of sixteen notes.

"Ah! said the perfumer while he fingered the notes, "*little dribblets*, two months, three months—."

"Take them from me at six per cent only," said the dealer with an air of humility.

"Am I in the usury business?" remarked the perfumer in a tone of reproach.

"Good Heavens, sir, I have been to see your old clerk, Du Tillet; he did not want them at any price, no doubt to find out what I would consent to lose."

"I do not recognize these signatures," said the perfumer.

"But we have such funny names in the cane and umbrella business, they are hawkers!"

"Very well, I do not say that I will take all, but I will always accommodate you for those of the shorter terms."

"For the thousand francs at four months, do not let me have to run after the blood-suckers that rob

us of the best part of our profits, take them all from me, sir, I have so little recourse to discount, I have no credit, that is what is killing us poor little retailers.”

“Come, then, I accept your *driblets*, Célestine will pay you. Be ready at eleven o'clock. Here comes my architect, Monsieur Grindot,” added the perfumer, noticing the approach of the young man with whom he had been the evening before to Monsieur de la Billardière's. “Contrary to the habit of men of talent, you are punctual, sir,” César said to him, putting on his best commercial airs. “If punctuality, according to an expression of the king, and he is a man of brains as well as a great politician, is the politeness of kings, it is also the fortune of merchants. Time, time is gold, especially to you artists. Architecture is the uniting of all the arts, if I may allow myself to say so. Let us not go in through the shop,” he added, pointing to the imitation gate to his house.

Four years previously Monsieur Grindot had won the *Grand prix* for architecture, and he was now returning from Rome after a sojourn there of three years at the expense of the State. In Italy the young artist thought of art; at Paris he thought of a fortune. The Government can alone furnish the millions that an architect needs to build up his glory. On returning from Rome it is so natural to believe one's self a Fontaine or a Percier that every ambitious architect inclines towards the party in power: the Liberal student, having become a Royalist, was

trying then to win the protection of influential folk. When a *Grand prix* man is behaving thus, his comrades call him an intriguer. The young architect had two courses before him: either to serve the perfumer or to bleed him. But Birotteau, the mayor's deputy, Birotteau, the future owner of half the land around the Madeleine, where he would sooner or later build a handsome section, was a man to be courted, and accordingly Grindot sacrificed present gain for benefits to come. He listened patiently to the plans, the repetitions, the ideas of one of those middle-class men, a constant target for the artist's thrusts and pleasantries, the eternal object of his contempt, and followed the perfumer with nods of his head in approval of his ideas. When the perfumer had fully explained everything, the architect tried to sum up his plan for him.

"You have three windows looking out on the street, and in addition the dark window on the stairway alongside the landing. You add to these four windows the two that are on the same level in the adjoining house and you want the stairway turned round so as to have all the rooms on the same level on the street side."

"You have understood me perfectly," said the astonished perfumer.

"To carry out your plan we must light the new stairway from above, and have a porter's lodge under the supports."

"Supports—?"

"Yes, that is the part on which rests—."

“I understand, sir.”

“As regards your apartments, leave me free to arrange and decorate them. I mean to make them worthy—.”

“Worthy! that is the word, sir.”

“What time do you give me to make this improvement?”

“Twenty days.”

“How much do you want to spend as regards the workmen?” asked Grindot.

“But how much may these repairs amount to?”

“An architect figures on a new building almost to the very centime,” the young man replied; “but as I do not know what it is to deal with a man of the middle-class,—I beg your pardon, sir, it was a slip,—I ought to tell you beforehand that it is impossible to figure on repairs and alterations. It would take me at least a week to make an approximate estimate. Give me your confidence: you will have a charming stairway lighted from above, adorned with a pretty vestibule leading to the street, and under the supports—.”

“Always those supports!”

“Do not worry about that, I will make room there for a small porter’s lodge. Your apartments will be studied and most carefully restored. Yes, sir, I am looking to art, and not fortune! Before all, am I not to have myself spoken about in order to get there? In my opinion, the best way is not to get at loggerheads with the furnishers, to get fine effects cheap.”

“With such ideas, young man,” said Birotteau in a patronizing tone, “you will succeed.”

“Also,” continued Grindot, “treat directly with your masons, painters, locksmiths, carpenters, joiners. For my part, I undertake to adjust their bills. Allow me only two thousand francs as an honorarium, it will be money well spent. Leave me master of the place to-morrow at noon, and tell me who your workmen are.”

“What may the cost be, as near as you can guess?” asked Birotteau.

“From ten to twelve thousand francs,” said Grindot. “But I am not counting on the furniture, for you will no doubt renew it. You will give me your upholsterer’s address, as I must have an understanding with him in order to assort the colors, so as to have the job finished in good taste.”

“Monsieur Braschon, Rue Saint-Antoine, has my orders,” said the perfumer, assuming the air of a duke.

The architect wrote the address on one of those little souvenir cards that always come from a pretty woman.

“Come,” said Birotteau, “I trust to you, sir. Only wait until I have arranged the surrender of the lease of the two adjoining rooms and obtained permission to break through the wall.”

“Send me word by note this evening,” said the architect. “I will have to spend the night drawing up my plans, and we would much rather work for the middle class than for the King of Prussia, that



is, for ourselves. I always go and take the measurements, heights, dimensions of the tableaux, size of the windows—.”

“We will get there on the day appointed,” remarked Birotteau; “if not, nothing.”

“We must, indeed,” replied the architect. “The workmen will spend all night at it, processes for drying the painting will be used; but don’t let the contractors get into you, always ask them the price in advance, and put your agreements on paper!”

“Paris is the only place in the world where one can make such magic strokes,” said Birotteau, as he indulged in an Asiatic gesture worthy of *The Arabian Nights*. “You will do me the honor of coming to my ball, sir. All men of talent do not look with crushing disdain on trade, and you will no doubt see there a scholar of the first order, Monsieur Vauquelin, of the Institute! Then Monsieur de la Billardière, the Comte de Fontaine, Judge Lebas, president of the tribunal of commerce; magistrates: the Comte de Granville, of the royal court; and Judge Popinot, of the committing court; Judge Camusot, of the tribunal of commerce, and Monsieur Cardot, his father-in-law—; finally, perhaps the Duc de Lenoncourt, the king’s first gentleman chamberlain. I am bringing together a few friends as much—to celebrate the deliverance of the territory—as to give a feast in honor of my—promotion to the Order of the Legion of Honor—”

Grindot made a strange gesture.

“Perhaps—I have made myself worthy of this—

distinguished—and—royal—favor by sitting in the consular court and by fighting for the Bourbons on the steps of Saint-Roch on the thirteenth Vendémiaire, where I was wounded by Napoléon. These titles—”

Constance, in her morning costume, came out of Césarine’s bed-room, where she had dressed; her first glance at once cut short her husband’s rhapsody, and he tried to frame an ordinary phrase that would modestly tell his neighbor of his greatness.

“Here, dear, this is Monsieur *de* Grindot, a distinguished young man who is possessed of great talent. The gentleman is the architect recommended to us by Monsieur de la Billardière, to direct our *little* work here.”

The perfumer tried to give a hint to the architect without his wife observing him, by putting his finger to his lips at the word *little*, and the artist took it.

“Constance, the gentleman is going to take the measurements, the altitudes. Let him do it, pet,” said Birotteau, as he shot out into the street.

“Will it be very expensive?” Constance asked of the architect.

“No, madame, six thousand francs, as close as can be guessed—”

“As close as can be guessed!” exclaimed Madame Birotteau. “I entreat you, sir, do not begin without an estimate and contracts signed. I know the ways of those gentlemen, the contractors: six thousand means twenty thousand. We are not in a position to be foolish. I beg of you, sir, though my

husband is master in his own house, give him time to reflect."

"Madame, the deputy has instructed me to have the work finished in twenty days, and, if we delay, you would expose yourself to contracting expense without getting the result."

"There is expense and expense," said the pretty wife of the perfumer.

"Well! madame, do you think it will be any glory to an architect who wants to build monuments to adorn a suite of apartments? I condescend to attend to this job only to oblige Monsieur de la Billardière, and, if I frighten you—"

He made a movement as if to retire.

"All right, all right, sir," said Constance as she went back into her room, where she laid her head on Césarine's shoulder. "Ah! my daughter! your father is ruining himself! He has engaged an architect with mustaches and an imperial, and who speaks of building monuments! He is going to throw the house out of the windows and build us a Louvre. César is never behind in folly; he spoke to me of his plan last night, and he is carrying it out this morning."

"Bah! mamma, let papa do it, God has always protected him," said Césarine, embracing her mother and sitting at the piano to show the architect that the perfumer's daughter was not a stranger to the fine arts.

When the architect entered the bed-room he was surprised at Césarine's beauty, and stood as if

almost forbidden to enter. Having left her little room in morning dishabille, Césarine, fresh and rosy as a young girl is rosy and fresh at eighteen, fair and slender, with blue eyes, presented to the artist's gaze that elasticity, so rare in Paris, which makes the most delicate flesh rebound, and the shade of a color adored by painters, the blue of the veins whose network palpitates in the clearness of the complexion. Though living in the lymphatic atmosphere of a Parisian shop, where the atmosphere is not easily renewed, where the sun seldom penetrates, her habits gave her the advantages of the open-air life of a Roman Transteverina. Abundant hair—growing like her father's and arranged so as to display a well-set neck—flowed in tresses as well cared for as those of all shop-girls who desire in matters of toilet to be remarked for the most English of detail. This pretty girl's beauty was neither the beauty of an English lady, nor that of a French duchess, but the rotund and rosy beauty of Rubens' Flemings. Césarine had her father's turned-up nose, but made significant of sprightliness by the fineness of the modeling, like that of the essentially French noses in which Largillière was successful. Her skin, like a stuff full and strong, told of a virgin's vitality. She had her mother's fine brow, but lit up by the serenity of a girl free from care. Her blue eyes, bathed in a rich fluid, expressed the tender grace of a happy blonde. If good luck had deprived her head of that poesy which painters wish to give absolutely to their compositions in making them a

little too pensive, the vague physical melancholy that marks young girls who have never left the maternal wing imprinted on her then a sort of ideal. Despite the fineness of her lineaments, she was strongly built: her feet betrayed her father's peasant origin, for her weak points consisted in a defect of race and perhaps also in her ruddy hands, the mark of a purely middle-class life. She must sooner or later fall into a state of corpulency. After seeing some fashionable young women, she went so far as to adopt a taste for the toilet, some heady airs, a manner of talking and moving affected by the well-bred woman and turned all the young clerks' heads, to whom she seemed quite an elegant girl. Popinot had sworn never to have any one else for wife, than Césarine. This fluid blonde that a look seemed to penetrate, ready to melt into tears at a word of reproach, could alone give to him the feeling of masculine superiority. This charming girl inspired love without leaving time to examine whether it had enough spirit to render it durable; but of what good is that in Paris called *spirit*, in a class in which the chief element of happiness is common sense and virtue? Morally Césarine was her mother somewhat perfected by the superfluities of education: she loved music, drew in black crayon the *Virgin of the Chair*, read the works of Madame Cotton and Riccoboni, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Fénelon, Racine. She never appeared at her mother's side behind the counter except for a few moments before sitting down at table, or to take her place on

rare occasions. Both her father and her mother, like all those upstarts eager to cultivate their children's ingratitude by putting them above themselves, took pleasure in adoring Césarine, who, fortunately, had the virtues of the middle-class and did not abuse their weakness.

Madame Birotteau followed the architect in a restless and anxious way, regarding with dread and pointing out to her daughter the whimsical movements of the yard-stick, the cane of architects and contractors, with which Grindot was taking his measurements. She found in these wand-like movements a conjuring air of very bad omen, she wished the walls were less high, the rooms not so large, and dared not question the young man on the effects of this sorcery.

"Make your mind easy, Madame, I will not carry off anything," said the artist, smiling.

Césarine could not help laughing.

"Sir," said Constance in a supplicating tone, not noticing the architect's retort, "go economically, and, later on, we will be able to recompense you—"

Before going to Monsieur Molineux's, the owner of the adjoining house, César went to Roguin's to attach his private signature to the document Alexandre Crottat was to have prepared for him for that lease. On leaving, Birotteau saw Du Tillet at the window of Roguin's private office. Though his former clerk's intrigue with the notary's wife made the meeting with Du Tillet rather natural at the

time of making out the papers regarding the land, Birotteau felt ill at ease on account of it, in spite of his extreme confidence. Du Tillet's animated appearance bespoke a discussion.

"Could he be in the business?" he asked himself by reason of his commercial prudence.

The suspicion passed like a flash through his mind. He turned back, saw Madame Roguin, and then the banker's presence no longer seemed to justify his suspicion.

"But, suppose Constance were right?" he asked himself. "Am I so stupid as to listen to women's ideas? I will, moreover, mention it to my uncle this morning. From the Cour Batave, where this Monsieur Molineux lives, to the Rue des Bourdonnais, is only a step."

A distrustful observer, a man of trade who in his career had met some cheats, would have been saved; but Birotteau's antecedents, the incapacity of his mind, ill adapted to tracing the chain of inductions by which a superior man arrives at causes, all led to his destruction. He found the umbrella dealer in full dress, and was going with him to the owner's, when Virginia, his cook, took hold of his arm.

"Sir, Madame does not want you to go any further—"

"Let us go," exclaimed Birotteau, "women's ideas once more!"

"—without taking your cup of coffee that is waiting for you."

"Ah! true. Neighbor," said Birotteau to Cayron,

“I have so many things in my head that I do not listen to my stomach. Do me the favor of going on ahead. We will meet at Monsieur Molineux’s gate, unless you go up to explain the matter to him. In this way we will lose less time.”

Monsieur Molineux was a grotesque little landlord, such as is to be found only in Paris, as a certain lichen grows only in Iceland. This comparison is so much the more correct as that man partook of a mixed nature, of an animo-vegetable kingdom that a new Mercier might make out of the cryptogams that grow, flourish or die on, in or under the plastered walls of various strange and unhealthy houses to which these beings prefer to resort. At first sight this human plant, umbelliferous, with the tubulated blue helmet that crowned it, with a stem involved in greenish pantaloons, and bulbous roots wrapped in fringed pumps, presented a whitish and dull appearance that certainly betrayed nothing poisonous. In this odd product you would have recognized the shareholder above all else, believing all the news that the periodical press baptizes with its ink, and who has said everything in saying: “Read the newspaper!” The middle-class man essentially fond of order, and ever in moral revolt against power, which he nevertheless always obeys, a weak creature in the mass and ferocious in detail, obdurate as a constable when it is a question of his rights, and giving fresh chickweed to the birds or fish-bones to his cat, interrupting a receipt for rent to teach a canary, distrustful as a jailer, but investing his



money in a doubtful venture, and then trying to make up his loss by the grossest avarice. The power for mischief of this hybrid flower was revealed in fact only by dealing with it; to be felt, its nauseating bitterness needed the decoction of some transaction or other in which its interests were found mingled with those of men. Like all Parisians, Molineux felt a need for domination, he craved for that more or less considerable part of sovereignty exercised by each one, and even by a porter, over a larger or smaller number of victims, wife, child, tenant, clerk, horse, dog, or monkey, on which one vents by reflex action the mortifications received in the upper sphere to which one aspires. This tiresome little old man had neither wife, nor child, nor nephew, nor niece; he was too rude to his house-keeper to make a martyr of her, for she shunned all contact by strictly attending to her duties. His tyrannical appetites were accordingly cheated; to satisfy them, he had patiently studied the laws on the contract of renting and on the party wall; he had fathomed the jurisprudence bearing on Paris houses in the infinitesimally small matters of the ins and outs, services, taxes, charges, cleanings, Corpus Christi hangings, drainage pipes, lighting, blocking the public highway and proximity of unhealthy premises. His methods and his activity, all the mind he had went to keep up his condition of landlord to the full war allowance; he had made an amusement of it, and his amusement turned into monomania. He liked to protect citizens against the invasions of

illegality; but as the causes of complaint were few, his passion had then gone to encompassing his tenants. A tenant became his enemy, his inferior, his subject, his serf. He thought he had a right to his respect, and regarded as a boor him who passed close to him on the stairway without speaking to him. He wrote his bills himself, and sent them at noon on the day on which the rent was due. The tenant in arrears received a summons at a fixed hour. Then the levy costs, the whole judicial cavalry were sent out at once with that rapidity which the manager of more exalted work calls *mechanism*. Molineux granted neither terms nor delay, his heart was obdurate against the tenant.

"I will lend you money if you need it," he said to a man who could pay, "but pay me my rent, any delay will entail a loss of interest for which the law does not indemnify us."

After a long examination of the skipping fancies of tenants who did not act in the normal way, who successively overthrew the institutions of their predecessors, no more nor less than dynasties, he drew up a charter for himself, and lived up to it to the letter. Thus, the good man made no repairs; no chimney smoked, his stairs were clean, his ceilings white, his cornices above reproach, the floors solid on their joists, the painting satisfactory; the locks were never over three years old, no glass was wanting, there were no cracks, he saw breaks in the floors only when some one had left the place, and on receiving applicants he had the assistance of a

locksmith and a painter and glazier, very accommodating folk, he said. The new tenant was, moreover, free to make improvements; but if an imprudent one renovated his apartments, little Molineux spent night and day thinking of how to dislodge him in order that he might get a new tenant for the freshly-decorated rooms; he lay in ambush for him, awaited him, and heaped up the series of his misdeeds. All the fine points of Parisian legislation on leases he was acquainted with. Litigious and given to writing much, he made drafts of mild and polite letters to his tenants; but beneath his style, as behind his dull and forbidding countenance, he concealed a Shylock soul. He always insisted on six months in advance, credited on the last term of the lease, and the cortège of thorny conditions that he had invented. He investigated as to whether the place was supplied with enough furniture to answer for the rent. When he got a new tenant he submitted his name to the police for their information, for he would not tolerate certain doings, the slightest hammer stroke annoyed him terribly. Then, when he had to make out a lease, he kept the deed and spelled it for a week, fearing what he called the notary's *et cætera*. Outside of his ideas as landlord, Jean-Baptiste Molineux seemed kind and obliging; he played boston without complaining of his partner's mistakes; he laughed at what makes middle-class people laugh, spoke of what they talk about, of the arbitrary acts of the bakers who were so wicked as to sell by false weight, of the connivance of the police, of the

heroic seventeen Deputies of the Left. He read the Curé Meslier's *Common Sense*, and went to Mass, for want of being able to choose between deism and Christianity; but he made no return for the blessed bread and then pleaded escape from the encroaching pretensions of the clergy. On this subject the indefatigable petitioner wrote letters to the newspapers, which the newspapers did not insert and did not deign to answer. In fine, he resembled an estimable middle-class man who solemnly kindles his yule log, goes shooting on Twelfth Day, invents April-fool tricks, parades all the boulevards when the weather is fine, goes to see the skaters, and at two o'clock betakes himself to the terrace of the Place Louis XV. on fire-work days, with his pocket full of bread, so as to be *in the front row*.

The Cour Batave, where this little old man lived, is the product of one of those odd speculations that can no longer be explained after they have been carried out. This claustral building, with interior arcades and galleries, constructed of cut stone, adorned with a fountain at the lower end, a polluted fountain that opens its lion's mouth less to give water than to ask it of every passer-by, was no doubt invented to endow the Quartier Saint-Denis with a sort of Palais-Royal. This monument, unhealthy, enclosed on its four sides by lofty houses, has no life or movement, but in day time it is the centre of the dark passages that meet there and join the Market Quarter to that of Saint-Martin by means of the famous Rue Quincampoix, damp paths, where

hampered folk catch rheumatism; but, at night, no place in Paris is more deserted, you might call it the catacombs of trade. There are several industrial sewers there, very few Batavians and many grocers. Naturally the tenements of this dealers' palace have no other outlook than that of the common court on which all the windows open, so that the rents are at a very low figure. Monsieur Molineux dwelt in one of the angles, on the seventh floor, on account of his health: the air was pure only at a height of seventy feet above the ground. There this good landlord enjoyed the charming view of the Montmartre mills while walking amid young oaks, where he cultivated flowers, notwithstanding the police regulations relative to hanging gardens in the modern Babylon. His apartments consisted of four rooms, without comprising his valuable *Anglaises* situated a story higher: he had the key to them, they belonged to him, he had founded them, he was in the fashion in this respect. On entering, an unseemly nudity at once revealed this man's avarice: in the ante-chamber, six straw-seated chairs, a faience chafing-dish, and, on the walls, hung with bottle-green paper, four engravings bought at sales; in the dining-room, two buffets, two cages full of birds, a table covered with an oil-cloth, a barometer, a glass door looking out on his hanging gardens and mahogany chairs stuffed with hair; the parlor had small shades of old green silk stuff, a piece of furniture in green Utrecht velvet and white-painted wood. As regards this old bachelor's bed-room, it

had furnishings of the time of Louis XV., disfigured by too long use and on which a woman clad in white would be afraid to soil herself. His mantel-piece was adorned with a clock having two columns between which was a dial that served as a pedestal for a Pallas brandishing her spear: a myth. The hearth was loaded with dishes full of remains intended for the cats, and where one would be afraid to tread. Above a rose-wood commode, a pastel portrait—Molineux in his youth—. Then books, tables on which were seen mean green cartons; on a bracket, his late finches stuffed; finally, a bed so cold that it might have told of a Carmelite.

César Birotteau was delighted with the exquisite politeness of Molineux, whom he found in a gray swan-skin dressing-gown, superintending his milk placed on a sheet-iron chafing-dish in the chimney corner and his eight-ounce allowance of water that was boiling in a small brown earthenware kettle and which he was pouring in small doses into his coffee-pot. So as not to disturb his landlord, the umbrella-dealer had gone to open the door for Birotteau. Molineux held in great veneration the mayors and deputies of the city of Paris, whom he called *his municipal officers*. On the magistrate making his appearance he arose and remained standing, with his hat in his hand, until the great Birotteau was seated.

“No, sir—Yes, sir—Ah! sir, if I had known that I was to have had the honor of having among my modest household goods a member of the municipal

body of Paris, then you may believe that I would have regarded it as a duty to go to your house, though your landlord or—on the point—of—becoming such.”

Birotteau made a signal of entreaty for him to put on his hat.

“I will not do so, I will not cover my head until you are seated and covered too, if you have a cold; my room is somewhat chilly, the moderate amount of my income does not allow me—at your pleasure, Monsieur Deputy.”

Birotteau had sneezed while looking for his papers. He presented them, and in doing so remarked, in order to obviate any delay, that Monsieur Roguin, the notary, had drawn them up at his own expense.

“I do not dispute Monsieur Roguin’s intelligence, he has an old name that is well known in the office of notary in Paris; but I have my little habits, I attend to my business myself, a rather excusable mania, and my notary is—”

“But our affair is so simple,” said the perfumer, accustomed to the ready decisions of people in trade.

“So simple!” exclaimed Molineux. “Nothing is simple in the matter of renting. Ah! you are not a landlord, sir, and you are only so much the happier for it. If you only knew how ungrateful tenants are, and what precautions we are obliged to take! Well, sir, I have a tenant—”

Molineux spent a quarter of an hour telling how Monsieur Gendrin, a designer, had eluded the vigilance of his porter, in the Rue Saint-Honoré.

Monsieur Gendrin was guilty of infamy worthy of a Marat, making obscene sketches that the police tolerated, just see the connivance of the police! This Gendrin, a most immoral artist, was coming in with women of bad repute and blocking the stairway! a pleasantry quite worthy of a man who was drawing caricatures hostile to the Government. And why these misdeeds?—Because he was asked for his rent on the fifteenth! Gendrin and Molineux went to law, for, though he did not pay, the artist had the cheek to remain in his empty apartments. Molineux received anonymous letters in which Gendrin no doubt threatened him with assassination, of an evening, in the alleys leading to the Cour Batave.

“And accordingly, sir,” he said continuing, “the prefect of police, to whom I confided my embarrassment—I took advantage of the circumstances to give him some pointers on the modifications to be introduced into the laws that govern the subject—authorized me to carry pistols for my personal safety.”

The little old man arose to go look for his pistols.

“Here they are, sir!” he exclaimed.

“But, sir, you have nothing like that to fear from me,” said Birotteau, looking at Cayron, to whom he smiled while casting a glance at him expressive of a feeling of pity for such a man.

Molineux caught his look, was hurt at finding such an expression on the countenance of a municipal officer, who ought to protect those under his jurisdiction. He would have pardoned it in any one else, but he did not pardon it in Birotteau.



“Sir,” he continued dryly, “one of the most highly esteemed consular judges, a mayor’s deputy, an honorable man of trade, would not descend to such pettiness, for pettiness it is! But, in this case, there is a breaking-through for which you must get the consent of your landlord, the Comte de Granville, agreements to be stipulated for the restoration of the wall at the expiration of the lease; and then, rents are rather low, they will rise, the Place Vendôme will increase in value, yes, it will improve! the Rue de Castiglione is going to be built up! I bind myself—I bind myself—.”

“Let us come to a conclusion,” said Birotteau, stunned; “what do you want? I am rather too well acquainted with business not to see that your reasons will yield to the higher reason, money! Well, what must you have?”

“Nothing but what is just, Monsieur Deputy. How long has your lease to run yet?”

“Seven years,” replied Birotteau.

“In seven years what may not my second floor be worth!” exclaimed Molineux. “What may not two furnished rooms in that quarter rent for? over two hundred francs a month, perhaps! I bind myself, I bind myself by a lease! We will, then, advance the rent to fifteen hundred francs. At that figure I consent to cancel the lease for those two rooms with Monsieur Cayron, who is here,” he said casting a squinting look at the dealer, “I let you have them for seven consecutive years. The opening of the wall will be at your expense, on condition that you

bring me the Comte de Granville's approval and surrender of all his rights. You will be responsible for consequences of this little opening, you will not be bound to restore the wall as far as I am concerned, and you will give me as indemnity five hundred francs now: we know not who will be living or who will be dead, I do not want to run after any one to restore the wall."

"These conditions seem pretty nearly right," said Birotteau.

"Then," said Molineux, "you will count down to me seven hundred and fifty francs, *hic et nunc*, credited on the last six months of the use, the lease will show a receipt for it. Oh! I will accept small notes, marked *value in rent*, so as not to lose my guarantee, for whatever term suits you. I am fair and square in business. We will stipulate that you will close up the door opening on my stairway, from which you will have no right of entering—at your expense—with masonry. Be assured, I will ask no indemnity for the restoration at the expiration of the lease; I regard it as comprised in the five hundred francs. You will always find me just, sir."

"We men in trade are not so punctilious," said the perfumer, "business would be impossible with such formalities."

"Oh, in trade it is quite different, and especially in the perfumery business, where everything fits like a glove," said the little old man, with a sickly smile. "But, sir, in the matter of renting, in Paris,

nothing must be overlooked. See here, I have had a tenant, in the Rue Montorgueil—”

“I would be very sorry, sir,” said Birotteau, “to delay your breakfast: here are the papers, make your amendments, everything that you ask of me is understood; let us sign to-morrow, let us give each other our word to-day, for to-morrow my architect must be master of the place.”

“Sir,” continued Molineux, looking at the umbrella-dealer, “the rent is due, Monsieur Cayron does not want to pay it, we will add it to the small notes so that the lease may run from January to January. That will be more regular.”

“Be it so,” said Birotteau.

“The dues for the porter—”

“But,” said Birotteau, “you deprive me of the stairway, of the entrance, that is not just—”

“Oh! you are tenant,” said little Molineux in a peremptory voice, astride of principle, “you owe the taxes on doors and windows and your share in the costs. When everything is well understood, sir, there is no further difficulty. You are putting on a great deal of airs, sir; business is doing well?”

“Yes,” said Birotteau. “But the motive is something else. I am going to have a gathering of some friends as much to celebrate the deliverance of the territory as to have a feast in honor of my promotion in the Order of the Legion of Honor—”

“Ah! ah!” said Molineux, “a reward well merited!”

“Yes,” said Birotteau, “perhaps I have made

myself worthy of this distinguished and royal favor by sitting in the consular court and by fighting for the Bourbons on the steps of Saint-Roch, on the thirteenth Vendémiaire, when I was wounded by Napoléon; these titles—”

“Are worth those of our brave soldiers of the old army. The ribbon is red because it was steeped in spilt blood.”

At these words, taken from the *Constitutionnel*, Birotteau could not refrain from inviting little Molineux, who became confused in returning thanks and felt ready to pardon him for his disdain. The old man showed his new tenant to the stair-head, at the same time overwhelming him with politeness. When Birotteau reached the middle of the Cour Batave along with Cayron, he looked at his neighbor with a bantering air.

“I did not think that there could be such weak folks in existence!” he said, scarcely withholding the word *stupid*.

“Ah! sir,” said Cayron, “everybody hasn’t got your talents.”

Birotteau might well think himself a superior man in Monsieur Molineux’s presence; the umbrella-dealer’s reply made him smile pleasantly, and he saluted him in right royal fashion.

“Now for the Market,” Birotteau said to himself, “let us look up the matter of the hazel-nuts.”

After an hour’s search Birotteau, sent by the Market women to the Rue des Lombards, where nuts were used in making sugar-plums, learned from

his friends, the Matifats, that *dry fruit* was to be had wholesale only from a certain Madame Angélique Madou, who lived in the Rue Perrin-Gasselín, the only house where were to be had the real Provence filbert and the real white Alpine hazel-nut.

The Rue Perrin-Gasselín is one of the alleys of the labyrinth forming a square inclosed between the quay, the Rue Saint-Denis, the Rue de la Ferronnerie and the Rue de la Monnaie, and which is as it were the entrails of the city. Swarming there in infinite number are heterogeneous and mixed merchandise, nauseating and attractive, herring and muslin, silk and honey, butter and tulle, especially many small articles of trade regarding which Paris has no more doubt than most men have regarding what is cooked in their *pancreas*, and in which served then as bloodsucker a certain Bidault, called Gigonnet the note-shaver, living in the Rue Grenétat. Here former stables are filled with oil casks, the shipping department contains myriads of cotton stockings. There is carried on *the wholesale* trade in provisions sold at retail in the Market. Madame Madou, a former fish-monger, forced ten years ago into the *dry fruit* by a union with the former owner of her business, which had long furnished food for the gossipings of the Market, was a virile and tantalizing beauty, then hidden in excessive corpulency. She occupied the first floor of a yellow house badly out of repair, but kept together on each floor by iron cross-bars. The deceased had succeeded in getting rid of his competitors and in

converting his trade into a monopoly; in spite of some slight defects of education, his heiress was able then to continue it in a routine way, parading through her stores, which occupied shipping offices, stables and former workshops in which she fought successfully against insects. Without desk, or cash-box, or books, for she could neither read nor write, she answered a letter by pounding with her fist, regarding it as an insult. In other respects, a good woman, with a florid complexion, wearing a silk handkerchief over her bonnet, winning by her ophicleide voice the esteem of the carters who brought her merchandise, and her altercations with whom ended in a bottle of *petit blanc*. She could not have any trouble with the growers who shipped fruit to her, as they corresponded with spot cash, the only way of having an understanding with one another, and old woman Madou went to see them in the fine season. Birotteau noticed this wild dealer amid bags of hazelnuts, chestnuts and other kinds.

“Good-day, my dear lady,” said Birotteau with an air of levity.

“*Your dear!*” she said. “Eh! my son, you knew me then from having had pleasant relations with me? Have we had cards up our sleeves together?”

“I am a perfumer, and, moreover, deputy to the mayor of the second arrondissement of Paris; so both as magistrate and purchaser I am entitled to being spoken to by you in a different tone of voice.”

“I get married when I please,” said the virago,

“I am under no obligation to the mayor’s office and don’t bother the deputies. As for my customers, they adore me, and I speak to ’em as I please. If they are not satisfied they go waste their time somewhere else.”

“That’s monopoly for you!” murmured Birotteau.

“Popole! he’s my god-son: he may have done something foolish; is it for him you are coming, my honorable magistrate?” she said in a milder voice.

“No, I have had the honor of telling you that I have come as a buyer.”

“Very well, what do you call yourself, chappie? I never see you comin’ here before.”

“With that tone of voice, you ought to sell hazelnuts very cheap?” remarked Birotteau, who gave his name and stated his position.

“Ah! you are the famous Birotteau as has a pretty wife. And how much do you want, some of these sugared hazelnuts, sweetheart?”

“Six thousand by weight.”

“That’s all I have of them,” said the dealer, speaking like a flute out of tune. “My dear sir, you are not one of the slow ones in marryin’ girls and scenting them! God bless you, but it’s you that has the nice job. Excuse the small stock! What a fine customer you will be, and you will have a place in the woman’s heart I love best in the world—”

“Who is that?”

“Well, the dear Madame Madou.”

“How much are your hazel-nuts?”

“To you, my good man, twenty-five francs the hundred, if you take them all.”

“Twenty-five francs,” said Birotteau, “fifteen hundred francs! And I will perhaps want them by hundreds of thousands a year!”

“But they are a fine stock, gathered bare-footed!” she said as she plunged her ruddy arm into a bag of filberts. “And not hollow either! my dear sir. When you think that grocers sell them for dessert at twenty-four cents a pound, and that in every four pounds they put over a pound of common hazel-nuts. Must I lose on my stock to please you? You are genteel, but you do not please me enough for that! If you want so much, I will let you have them for twenty francs, for I mustn’t lose the custom of a deputy, that wouldn’t be well for the married men! Feel what fine goods they are, and how heavy! They are scarcely fifty to the pound! they are sound, no worms in them!”

“Come, then, send me six thousand at two thousand francs and at ninety days, to my factory in the Rue du Faubourg du Temple, very early tomorrow morning.”

“That will keep one as busy as a married woman. All right, farewell, Monsieur Mayor, no harm meant. But if it is all the same to you,” she said following Birotteau into the courtyard, “I would prefer your notes at forty days, for I am letting you have them too cheap, and I cannot yet lose the discount! With that, what a tender heart he has,



that old man Gignonnet, he sucks our marrow as a spider sips from a fly.”

“Well, yes, at fifty days. But we will weigh by the hundred pounds, so as not to have any hollow ones. Otherwise no bargain.”

“Ah! the dog, he knows his business,” said Madame Madou; “you can’t shut his eye up. It is those knaves of the Rue des Lombards who have put him up to that! Those big wolves have all an understanding with one another to devour the poor lambs.”

The lamb was five feet high and three feet across, she looked like a big stone dressed in striped cotton stuff without a belt.

The perfumer, engrossed in his schemes, was meditating as he went along the Rue Saint-Honoré on his duel with Macassar oil, he was working out his labels, the shape of his bottles, and was calculating as to the character of the cork and the color of the placards. And yet people will say that there is no poetry in trade! Newton did not make any more calculations for his celebrated binomial theorem than did Birotteau for his *comagenous essence*, for the oil became essence, and he was going from one expression to the other without knowing their meaning. All sorts of combinations were crowding one another in his head, and he took this activity in the vacuum for substantial action of talent. Thus preoccupied, he went past the Rue des Bourdonnais and was obliged to retrace his steps as he bethought himself of his uncle.

\*

Claude-Joseph Pillerault, formerly a dealer in iron and copper-ware at the sign *La Cloche d'or*, was one of those men who are fine-looking because of what they are: get-up and manners, understanding and heart, language and thought, all harmonized in him. Madame Birotteau's sole and only relative, Pillerault had concentrated all his affections on her and Césarine, after having lost, in the course of his commercial career, his wife and son, then an adopted child, the son of his cook. These severe bereavements had cast this good man into a state of Christian stoicism, a specious belief that animated his life and colored his last days with a tint at the same time warm and cold like to that which gilds winter sunsets. His head, spare and hollowed, having a severe expression, in which ochre and bistre were harmoniously blended, presented a striking analogy with that which painters ascribe to Time, but making it look common, for the habits of commercial life had lessened in him the monumental and snappish characteristic exaggerated by painters, sculptors and clock makers. Of medium height, Pillerault was rather thick-set than stout, nature had cut him out for work and longevity, his square build bespoke a strong frame, for he was of a dry temperament, without any outward emotion, but yet not unimpressible. Pillerault, by no means demonstrative, as

was indicated by his calm bearing and his set figure, had a sensibility that was all internal, expressionless and unemphatic. His eye, the pupil of which was green, speckled with black points, was remarkable for its unchanging clearness. His forehead, furrowed by straight lines and yellowed by time, was small, contracted, hard, covered with silvery gray hair cut short, and, as it were, matted. His fine mouth bespoke prudence and not avarice. His sprightly eye revealed a well-spent life. In fine, honesty, the sense of duty, real modesty, were to him as an aureola making his figure the picture of good health. For sixty years he had led the toilsome and frugal life of a hard worker. His history resembled that of César, minus the fortunate circumstances. A clerk until he was thirty, his money was invested in his trade just when César was using his savings to buy funds; in fine, he had put himself to the utmost stretch, all his resources had been put to use. His wise and reserved character, his foresight and mathematical reflection had influenced his *method of working*. Most of his business transactions were concluded by word of mouth, and he had seldom had any trouble. An observer, like all contemplative people, he studied men by letting them talk; he then often refused advantageous offers taken by his neighbors, who later on repented while saying to themselves that Pillerault scented the sharpers. He preferred the smallest profits if they were safe to those bold strokes that put large sums at stake. He kept sheet-iron for fireplaces, gridirons, heavy

andirons, brass and iron cauldrons, hoes and furnishings for the peasantry. This rather thankless business required excessive mechanical work. The profit was not in proportion to the labor, there was little profit on these heavy articles, hard to move and to store. And so he had nailed up many cases, packed many parcels, unpacked, received many loads. No fortune was either more nobly gained, or more legitimate, or more honorable than his. He had never overcharged, he had never run after business. In later days he was to be seen smoking his pipe in front of his door, looking at the transients and watching his clerks at work. In 1814, about the time he retired, his fortune at first consisted of seventy thousand francs, as shown by his ledger, of which he had five thousand and a few hundred francs in the funds; then forty thousand francs payable in five years without interest, the price of his business, sold to one of his clerks. For thirty years, doing annually a business of a hundred thousand francs, he had made seven per cent on this sum, and his living absorbed half his gains. Such was his balance. His neighbors, by no means envious of this moderate business, praised his wisdom without understanding it. At the corner of the Rue de la Monnaie and the Rue Saint-Honoré is the Café David, where some old merchants went, like Pillerault, to have their evening coffee. There, occasionally, the adoption of the cook's son had been the subject of some pleasantries, such as are made with a man who is respected, for the dealer in

iron and copper-ware inspired respectful esteem without having sought it: his own was enough for him. And so, when Pillerault lost this poor young man, there were over two hundred persons at the funeral who went all the way to the cemetery. On that occasion he was heroic. His grief, concealed like that of all men of character without show, increased the sympathy of the section for this *good man*, a term used in regard to Pillerault in a tone that enhanced its meaning and ennobled him. Claude Pillerault's sobriety, having become a habit, could not give way to the pleasures of a life of ease, when, having given up trade, he retired into that rest which weakens so many Parisians of the middle class; he continued his mode of life and animated his old age by his political convictions, which, we may say, were those of the Extreme Left. Pillerault belonged to that working-class party added by the Revolution to the middle-class. The only stain on his character was the importance he added to his conquest: he held to his rights, to liberty, to the fruits of the Revolution; he regarded his ease and his political consistency as compromised by the Jesuits, whose secret power was proclaimed by the Liberals, menaced as they were by the ideas which the *Constitutionnel* attributed to MONSIEUR. He was, moreover, true to his life, to his ideas; there was nothing narrow in his politics, he did not insult his adversaries, he was afraid of the courtiers, he believed in the republican virtues: he imagined Manuel free from every excess, General Foy a great man,

Casimir Périer without ambition, La Fayette a political prophet, Courier a good man. He, in fine, entertained noble chimeras. This fine old man lived the family life, he went to the Ragons' and to his niece's house, to Judge Popinot's, to Joseph Lebas's and the Matifats'. Personally, fifteen hundred francs supplied all his needs. As for the rest of his income, he spent it on good works, on presents to his grand-niece; he gave dinners four times a year to his friends at Roland's, in the Rue du Hasard, and took them to the theatre. He played the part of those old bachelors on whom married women draw bills of exchange at sight as the fancy strikes them: a country party, the Opera, the Montagnes-Beaujon. Pillerault was then happy in the pleasure he gave, he enjoyed himself in the enjoyment of others. Having sold his business, he did not want to leave the section to which he had been habituated, and he had taken, in the Rue des Bourdonnais, a small tenement of three rooms on the fifth floor of an old house. Just as Molineux's manners were reflected in his strange furniture, so Pillerault's pure and simple life was revealed by the interior arrangements of his tenement, made up of an antechamber, a parlor and a bed-room. In its dimensions it was almost like a Carthusian's cell. The antechamber, with its red and rubbed floor, had only one window adorned with curtains of fine calico with red borders, mahogany chairs upholstered with red sheep-leather and gilt nails; the walls were hung with olive-green paper and adorned with the *Americans' Oath*, a

portrait of Bonaparte as First Consul, and the *Battle of Austerlitz*. The parlor, no doubt arranged by the upholsterer, had yellow rosaceous furniture and a rug; the furnishings of the mantel-piece in bronze without gilding, a painted fire-screen, a pier-table with a flower-vase under a glass-case, a round covered table on which stood a decanter. The newness of this room sufficiently bespoke a sacrifice made to worldly custom by the old dealer in iron and copper-ware, who rarely received. In his bed-room, plain as that of a monk or an old soldier, the two men who best appreciate life, a crucifix, with holy water font, placed in its alcove, struck the eye. This profession of faith in a stoical republican was deeply emotional. An old woman came to keep his house in order, but his respect for women was so great that he did not let her polish his shoes, cleaned by contract with a boot-black. His costume was simple and unchangeable. He customarily wore an overcoat and trousers of blue cloth, a printed cotton vest, a white cravat and very low shoes; on week-days he put on a suit with metal buttons. His habits for rising, breakfast, going out, dinner, evening and return to his lodgings were marked by the strictest exactness, for regularity of habits is conducive to long life and health. There was never any question of politics between César, the Ragons, the Abbé Loraux and himself, for the folk of this coterie knew one another too well to make assaults with the view of proselytism. Like his nephew and the Ragons, he had great confidence in Roguin. To

him the Paris notary was always a being to be venerated, a living image of probity. In the matter of the land Pillerault had undertaken a counter-examination which was the reason for the confidence with which César had opposed his wife's forebodings.

The perfumer ascended the seventy-eight steps that led to the little brown door of his uncle's tenement, thinking that this old man must be very fresh to climb them without complaint. He found the overcoat and the trousers spread on the valise placed outside; Madame Vaillant brushed and rubbed them while this genuine philosopher, enveloped in a gray swan's-down overcoat, was breakfasting in his chimney corner, and reading the parliamentary debates in the *Constitutionnel* or the *Journal du Commerce*.

"Uncle," said César, "the affair is concluded, they are going to draw up the deeds. If, however, you have any fears or regrets, it is time enough yet to break off."

"Why should I break off? The matter is good, but not to be realized upon for a long time, like all sure things. My fifty thousand francs are in the Bank, I handled yesterday the last five thousand for my business. As for the Ragnons, they are putting their whole fortune in it."

"Well, what have they to live on?"

"Indeed, don't be uneasy, they are making out."

"Uncle, I understand you," said Birotteau with emotion and clasping the austere old man's hands.



“How will the business be done?” Pillerault asked brusquely.

“I will have a three-eighths interest in it, you and the Ragons one-eighth; I will credit you on my books until a decision has been reached regarding the question of the deeds as passed upon by the notary.”

“Good, my boy, you are very rich, then, to be able to put three hundred thousand francs in it? It seems to me that you take a big risk outside of your business; will it not suffer accordingly? But that is your concern. If you met with a reverse, there are the funds at eighty, I could sell two thousand francs of my consols. Take care, my boy: if you had recourse to me, it would be your daughter’s fortune you would be investing.”

“Uncle, how simply you say the most beautiful things! you touch my heart.”

“General Foy touched mine quite otherwise a while ago! In fine, go and close; the land will not fly away, half of it will be ours; even were it necessary to wait six years, we will always have some interest, there are wood-yards that bring rents, one can therefore lose nothing.—There is only one chance, yet it is impossible, Roguin will not run away with our property—”

“Yet my wife said as much last night, she fears—”

“Roguin run off with our property!” said Pillerault laughing, “and why?”

“He has, she says, too much character in his

nose, and, like all men who cannot have wives, he is madly in love with—”

After having let slip a smile of incredulity, Pillerault went and tore a piece of paper from a little note-book, wrote down the amount and signed.

“Here, there is an order on the Bank for a hundred thousand francs for Ragon and myself. But those poor people have sold to your wicked knave, Du Tillet, their fifteen shares in the Wortschin mines to make up the sum. It touches my heart to see good people in straits. And folk so worthy, so noble, the flower of the old middle-class, indeed! Their brother, Judge Popinot, knows nothing of it, they conceal their circumstances from him so as not to prevent him from devoting himself to his beneficence. People who have worked as I have done for thirty years—”

“God grant, then, that the *Comagenous Oil* may succeed!” exclaimed Birotteau, “I will be doubly glad of it. Adieu, uncle; you will come to dinner on Sunday along with the Ragon, Roguin and Monsieur Claperon, for we will all sign the day after to-morrow, and, to-morrow being Friday, I do not want to attend to bus—”

“You believe, then, in those superstitions?”

“Uncle, I will never believe that the day on which the Son of God was put to death by men is a lucky day. Indeed, all business is stopped on January 21.”

“Until Sunday,” said Pillerault brusquely.

“Without his political opinions,” Birotteau said to

himself as he went down the stairs, "I do not know whether there would be his like here below, the like of that uncle of mine. What does politics do to him? He would be so happy by not thinking of it at all. His having that hobby proves that no man is perfect. Three o'clock already," said César as he reached his own house.

"Sir, you are taking those notes?" Célestine asked of him, showing him the umbrella-dealer's driblets.

"Yes, at six, without commission. Wife, get everything ready for my toilet, I am going to Monsieur Vauquelin's, you know why. A white cravat especially."

Birotteau gave some orders to his clerks: he did not see Popinot, guessed that his future partner was dressing, and at once went up to his room, where he found the Dresden *Virgin* magnificently framed, in accordance with his instructions.

"Well, it is pretty?" he said to his daughter.

"But, papa, say rather that it is beautiful; otherwise people will make fun of you."

"See the girl grumbling at her father!—Well, for my taste, I like *Hero and Leander* just as well. The *Virgin* is a religious subject, that may be put in a chapel; but *Hero and Leander*, ha! I will purchase it, for the oil flask has inspired me with ideas—"

"But, papa, I do not understand you."

"Virginia, a hack!" exclaimed César in a loud voice when he had shaved and when the timid

Popinot appeared dragging his feet after him, because of Césarine.

The lover had not yet observed that his infirmity no longer existed as far as his mistress was concerned. A delightful proof of love that people on whom chance has inflicted any physical defect may alone experience.

“Sir,” he said, “the press can be put to work to-morrow.”

“Well, what ails you, Popinot?” César asked on seeing Anselme blush.

“Sir, it is the happiness of having found a shop, a rear shop, a kitchen and rooms overhead, and stores, for twelve hundred francs a year, in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants.”

“We must get a lease for eighteen years,” said Birotteau. “But let us be off to Monsieur Vauquelin’s, we will chat on the way.”

César and Popinot got into the hack in full view of the clerks astonished at those extraordinary preparations and an abnormal carriage, not knowing what great things were being thought of by the master of *La Reine des Roses*.

“We are, then, going to know the truth about the hazel-nuts!” said the perfumer.

“Hazel-nuts?” interposed Popinot.

“You have my secret, Popinot,” said the perfumer, “I have let the word *hazel-nut* slip, everything is in that. Hazel-nut oil is the only one that produces action on the hair, and no perfumery house has thought of it. On seeing the engraving of *Hero*

*and Leander* I said to myself: 'If the ancients used so much oil for their hair, they had some reason;' for the ancients are the ancients! In spite of modern pretensions, I am of Boileau's opinion about the ancients. I set out from that point to reach the hazel-nut oil, thanks to little Bianchon, the medical student, your relative; he told me that at the College his comrades used hazel-nut oil to stimulate the growth of their mustaches and whiskers. All that is left for us to do now is to get the illustrious Monsieur Vauquelin's sanction. Enlightened by him, we will not deceive the public. Just a little while ago I was at the Market, to see a dealer in hazel-nuts, so as to have the first essential; in a jiffy I will be with one of the greatest scholars in France to know how to get the quintessence out of it. Proverbs are not silly, extremes meet. See, my boy, trade is the intermediary between the vegetable products and science. Angélique Madou gathers, Monsieur Vauquelin extracts, and we sell an essence. Hazel-nuts are worth five sous a pound, Monsieur Vauquelin is going to multiply their value a hundredfold, and we will do a service perhaps to humanity, for, if vanity is the cause of great torment to man, a good cosmetic is then a blessing."

The reverential admiration with which Popinot listened to Césarine's father stimulated Birotteau's eloquence, and he allowed himself to use the wildest phrases that a middle-class man can invent.

"Be respectful, Anselme," he said as they entered the street in which Vauquelin lived, "we

are going to penetrate into the sanctuary of science. Put the *Virgin* in evidence, unaffectedly, on a chair in the dining-room. Provided I do not get mixed up in what I want to say," naively exclaimed Birotteau. "Popinot, this man makes a chemical impression on me, his voice warms my entrails and gives me even a slight colic. He is my benefactor, and in a few moments, Anselme, he will be yours."

These words gave a chill to Popinot, who walked as if he were treading on eggs, and looked at the walls with a restless stare. Monsieur Vauquelin was in his office when Birotteau's arrival was announced. The academician knew the perfumer who was deputy to the mayor and knew him to be in great favor; he received him.

"You do not forget me, then, in your greatness?" said the scholar; "but from chemist to perfumer is only a hand's breadth."

"Alas! sir, from your genius to the simplicity of a poor man like me is immensity itself. I owe to you what you call my greatness, and will not forget it either in this world or in the next."

"Oh! in the next, some say, we will all be equal, kings and cobblers."

"That is, the kings and cobblers who shall have lived a holy life," Birotteau observed.

"This is your son?" Vauquelin asked, looking at little Popinot, who seemed dazed at seeing nothing extraordinary in the office in which he had believed he would find monstrosities, gigantic machines, flying metals, animated substances.

“No, sir, but he is a young man whom I love and who comes to implore a kindness equal to your talent; is it not infinite?” he said with a knowing air. “We have to consult you a second time, after an interval of sixteen years, on an important matter, and on which I am ignorant as a perfumer.”

“Let us see, what is it?”

“I know that hair occupies your vigils, and that you are studying its analysis! Whilst you have been thinking of it for glory, I have been thinking of it for trade.”

“Dear Monsieur Birotteau, what do you want me to do? Analyze the hair?”

He took a small piece of paper.

“I am going to read before the Academy of Science a memoir on this subject. Hair is made up of a large quantity of mucus, a small quantity of white oil, much greenish black oil, iron, some atoms of oxide of manganese, phosphate of lime, a very small quantity of carbonate of lime, silica and a considerable amount of sulphur. The different proportions of these substances cause the different colors of hair. Thus red hair has much more of the greenish black oil than of the others.”

César and Popinot opened their eyes to a size that was laughable.

“Nine things!” exclaimed Birotteau. “What! there are found in a hair metals and oils? Were it not you, a man whom I venerate, who tell me of it, I would not believe it. How extraordinary!—God is great, Monsieur Vauquelin.”

“Hair is produced by a follicular organ,” the great chemist continued, “a sort of pocket open at both ends: by one it is connected with the nerves and the vessels, from the other starts the hair. According to some of our learned brethren, and among them Monsieur de Blainville, hair is a dead part expelled from this pocket or crypt that is filled with a pulpy substance.”

“It is, as it were, perspiration in sticks,” exclaimed Popinot, whom the perfumer kicked on the heel.

Vauquelin smiled at Popinot’s idea.

“It has uses, has it not?” César then said as he looked at Popinot. “But, if hair is dead-born, it is impossible to make it live, we are lost! The prospectus is absurd; you do not know how funny the public is, one could not tell it—”

“That it has a dung-hill on its head,” said Popinot, still wishing to make Vauquelin laugh.

“Aërial catacombs,” replied the chemist, continuing the pleasantry.

“And my hazel-nuts that have been bought!” exclaimed Birotteau, realizing the commercial loss. “But why do they sell—”

“Be reassured,” said Vauquelin, smiling: “I see that it is a question of some secret for keeping the hair from falling out or turning gray. Listen, this is my opinion on the subject, after all my labor.”

Here Popinot set his ears like a frightened hare.

“The discoloration of this dead or living substance is, in my opinion, produced by the interruption of the secretion of the coloring substances, which would



explain how, in cold climates, the hair of fine-furred animals grows pale and whitens in winter."

"Hem! Popinot."

"It is evident," Vauquelin continued, "that the alteration of the hair is due to sudden changes in the ambient temperature—"

"Ambient, Popinot—hold, hold on to it!" exclaimed César.

"Yes," said Vauquelin, "to alterations of heat and cold, or to internal phenomena that produce the same effect. Thus, probably, headaches and cephalalgic affections absorb, dissipate or displace the generating fluids. The internal requires medicine. As for the external, then come your cosmetics."

"Well, sir," said Birotteau, "you revive me. I have thought of selling hazel-nut oil, thinking that the ancients made use of oil for their hair, and the ancients are the ancients, I am of Boileau's opinion. Why did the athletes anoint—?"

"Olive oil is as good as hazel-nut oil," said Vauquelin, who did not heed Birotteau. "Every oil is good to preserve the bulb from impressions injurious to the substances that it holds in working, we might say in solution if it was a question of chemistry. Perhaps you are right: hazel-nut oil contains a stimulant, Dupuytren has told me. I will try to find out the differences that exist between beech, colza, olive, nut, and other oils."

"I have not been deceived, then," said Birotteau, triumphantly, "I have come in contact with a great man. Macassar is done for! Macassar, sir, is a

cosmetic given, that is, sold, and sold at a high price, to make the hair grow."

"Dear Monsieur Birotteau," said Vauquelin, "not two ounces of Macassar oil have come to Europe. Macassar oil has not the slightest action on the hair; but the Malay women buy it at its weight in gold because of its preserving influence on the hair, not knowing that whale oil is quite as good. No power, either chemical or divine—"

"Oh! divine,—don't say that, Monsieur Vauquelin."

"But, my dear sir, the first law that God follows is to be consistent with Himself: without unity there is no power—"

"Ah! looked at in that way—"

"No power can, then, make hair grow on the bald, just as you never dye red or white hair without danger; but in boasting of the use of oil you are guilty of no fault, no lie, and I think that those who make use of it may preserve their hair."

"Do you think the Royal Academy of Science would approve—?"

"Oh! there is not the least discovery in that," said Vauquelin. "Moreover, quacks have so much abused the Academy's name that it would no longer advance your interests. My conscience refuses to regard hazel-nut oil as a wonder."

"What would be the best method of extracting it: by decoction or by pressure?" Birotteau asked.

"By pressure between two warm plates the oil will be more abundant; but, obtained by pressure

between two cold plates, it will be of better quality. It must be applied," said Vauquelin, kindly, "on the skin itself, and not rubbed into the hair; otherwise the effect will fail."

"Keep good hold of this, Popinot," said Birotteau, with an enthusiasm that lit up his countenance. "You see here, sir, a young man who will count this day among the happiest of his life. He has known of you, venerated you, without having seen you. Ah! there is question of you often at my house, the name that is always in the heart comes often to the lips. We pray for you, my wife, my daughter and I every day, as one ought to do for a benefactor."

"It is a great deal for so little," said Vauquelin, embarrassed by the perfumer's verbose gratitude.

"Tut, tut, tut!" put in Birotteau, "you cannot prevent us from loving you, you who accept nothing from me. You are, as it were, the sun, you shed light, and those whom you enlighten cannot give you anything in return."

The learned man smiled and arose, the perfumer and Popinot arose also.

"Look, Anselme, look well at this office. You permit, sir? Your moments are so valuable, perhaps he will never again return to this place."

"Very well; are you satisfied with business?" Vauquelin asked of Birotteau; "for, indeed, we are both of us people of trade—"

"Fairly well, sir," said Birotteau, as he retired

toward the dining-room, whither Vauquelin followed him. "But to start this oil under the name of *Comagenous Essence* will require a very large capital—"

"*Essence* and *comagenous* are two loud words. Call your cosmetic *Birotteau Oil*. If you do not want to display your own name, take some other instead of it.—But look at the Dresden *Virgin*—Ah! Monsieur Birotteau, you want us to part on bad terms."

"Monsieur Vauquelin," said the perfumer, taking hold of the chemist's hands, "this rarity derives its only value from the persistence with which I hunted it up; it was necessary to rummage all through Germany to find it on China paper—a proof before letters: I knew that you desired it, but that your occupations did not allow you to procure it yourself, I have made myself your commercial traveler. Accept, then, not a paltry engraving, but care, solicitude, steps and strides that prove an absolute devotedness. I would have desired you to wish for some substances that it would be necessary to seek at the base of a precipice, and to have said to you: 'There they are!' Do not refuse me. We have so much chance of being forgotten, let me, for myself, my wife, my daughter and my son-in-law that may be, bring ourselves before your eyes. You will say when looking at the *Virgin*: 'There are good people who think of me.'"

"I accept," said Vauquelin.

Popinot and Birotteau wiped their eyes, so moved were they by the tone of kindness with which the academician spoke these words.

“Do you wish to crown your kindness?” the perfumer asked.

“What is it?” rejoined Vauquelin.

“I will have some friends—”

He supported himself on his heels, assuming, however, an air of humility.

“—as much to celebrate the deliverance of the territory as to have a feast in honor of my being appointed a member of the Order of the Legion of Honor.”

“Ah!” said Vauquelin, astonished.

“Perhaps I have made myself worthy of this signal and royal favor by sitting in the consular court and fighting for the Bourbons on the steps of Saint-Roch, on the thirteenth Vendémiaire, when I was wounded by Napoléon.—My wife gives a ball on Sunday three weeks hence, come to it, sir! Do me the honor of dining with us that day. As for myself, it will be equivalent to my receiving the Cross twice. I will write to you in good time beforehand.”

“Very well, yes,” said Vauquelin.

“My heart swells with pleasure,” exclaimed the perfumer after reaching the street. “He will come to my house. I am afraid I have forgotten what he said about hair; do you remember it, Popinot?”

“Yes, sir, and in twenty years I will still remember it.”

“That great man! what a look and what penetration!” said Birotteau. “Ah! he didn’t make two bites of a cherry; at the first glance he saw into our

thoughts and gave us the means of sinking Macassar oil. Ah! nothing can make the hair grow, Macassar, you lie! Popinot, we have a fortune. And so to-morrow, at seven o'clock, let us be at the factory, the hazel-nuts will come and we will make oil, for it is all very fine for him to say that every oil is good, we would be ruined if the public knew it. If there did not enter into our oil a little hazel-nut and perfume, under what pretext could we sell it at three or four francs for four ounces?"

"You are going to be decorated, sir," said Popinot. "What glory for—"

"For trade, is it not, my boy?"

César Birotteau's triumphant air, sure of a fortune, was remarked by his clerks, who made signs to one another, for the ride in the hack, the get-up of the cashier and his employer had led them into the most extravagant speculations. The mutual satisfaction of César and Anselme, betrayed by diplomatically exchanged looks, the glance expressive of hope that Popinot cast twice at Césarine told of some serious event and confirmed the clerks' conjectures. In that busy and quasi-claustral life the most trifling happenings take on the interest that a prisoner gives to those of his prison. The attitude of Madame César, who answered her husband's Olympian looks with indications of doubt, told of a new enterprise, for on ordinary occasions Madame César would have been satisfied, she whom the success of the retail trade made joyful. It was extraordinary that the receipts on that day amounted

to six thousand francs: people had come to pay some bills in arrears.

The dining-room and the kitchen lighted from a small court, and separated from the dining-room by a passage on which opened the stairway built in a corner of the room back of the shop, were in the entresol, where formerly were the living rooms of César and Constance: the dining-room where the honeymoon had been spent also had the appearance of a little parlor. During dinner Raguet, the emergency boy, watched the shop; but at dessert the clerks went down again to the shop and left César, his wife and daughter to finish their dinner by the fireside. This custom came from the Ragons, with whom the ancient usages and customs of trade, always in force, kept between them and the clerks the enormous distance that formerly separated *masters* and *apprentices*. Césarine or Constance then prepared for the perfumer his cup of coffee, which he took seated in a chair near the hearth. During this hour César informed his wife of the small happenings of the day, he related what he had seen in Paris, what was going on in the Faubourg du Temple, and the difficulties of his factory.

“Wife,” he said when the clerks had gone down, “this is certainly one of the most important days of our life! The hazel-nuts bought, the press ready to work to-morrow, the land business concluded. Here, hold fast, then, to this order on the Bank,” he said, giving her Pillerault’s check. “The renovation of the tenement decided upon, the addition

made to it. Good Heavens! what a very singular man I have seen in the Cour Batave!"

And he told about Monsieur Molineux.

"I see," his wife replied, interrupting him in the middle of a tirade, "that you have run yourself in debt to the amount of two hundred thousand francs!"

"True, wife," said the perfumer with mock humility. "How, for goodness' sake, shall we pay that? For we must count as nothing the Madeleine land, destined though it be to become one day the most beautiful section of Paris."

"One day, César."

"Alas!" he said, continuing his pleasantry, "my three-eighths will be worth a million to me only in six years. And how am I to pay two hundred thousand francs?" continued César, making a gesture of fear. "Well, we will, however, pay it with that," he said, as he drew from his pocket a hazel-nut that he had picked up while visiting Madame Madou, and kept most carefully.

He showed the nut between his two fingers to Césarine and Constance. His wife said nothing, but Césarine, in perplexity, said to her father while serving him with the coffee:

"Ah, there! papa, you are laughing?"

The perfumer, as well as his clerks, had caught during the dinner the glances cast by Popinot at Césarine, and he wanted some light thrown on his suspicions.

"Well, daughter mine, this nut is the cause of a



revolution in the household. After this evening there will be someone less under our roof."

Césarine looked at her father with the air of wishing to say: "What does it matter to me!"

"Popinot is going away."

Though César was a poor observer and had prepared his last phrase as much to place a stumbling-block in his daughter's way as to reach his organizing of the house of *A. Popinot and Company*, his paternal tenderness enabled him to see into the confused feelings that spread from his daughter's heart, bloomed as red roses on her cheeks and on her brow, and colored her eyes, which she lowered. César then thought that some words had been exchanged between Césarine and Popinot. There had been nothing of the sort. These two young people understood each other, like all timid lovers, without having exchanged a word.



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Some moralists think that love is the most involuntary, the most disinterested, the least calculating of all the passions, except however, maternal affection. This opinion involves a gross error. If most men are ignorant of the reasons that lead to love, every physical or moral sympathy is none the less based on calculations made by the mind, sentiment or brutality. Love is a purely egotistic passion. Who speaks of egoism speaks of a profound calculation. Thus, to every mind affected only by results, it may seem at first glance improbable or singular to see a pretty girl like Césarine taken with a poor lame and red-haired youth. Nevertheless, this phenomenon is in harmony with the arithmetic of the feelings of the middle-classes. To explain it will be to take account of marriages always regarded with constant surprise and that take place between tall, beautiful women and small men, between small, ugly creatures and handsome youths. Every man afflicted with a defect in any form, club-feet, limping, humped back, excessive ugliness, wine stains scattered on the cheek, vine leaves, the Roguin infirmity and other monstrosities independent of the subject's will, has only two parts to choose between: either to make one's self dreaded or to acquire exquisite goodness; it is not allowable to him to fluctuate between the middle terms habitual to most men.

In the former case there is talent, genius or strength: a man inspires terror only by the power of evil, respect only by genius, fear only by great strength of mind. In the second case he makes himself adored, he lends himself admirably to the feminine tyrannies, and knows better how to love than do people of irreproachable corpulency. Brought up by virtuous folk, by the Ragons, models of the most honorable section of the middle-class, and by his uncle, Judge Popinot, Anselme had been led, both by his candor and by his religious feelings, to redeem his slight physical defect with the perfection of his character. Struck by this tendency which makes youth so attractive, Constance and César had often praised Anselme in Césarine's presence. Narrow in other respects, those two shopkeepers were great of soul and well understood the things of the heart. These praises awake an echo in a young girl who, despite her innocence, read in Anselme's eyes, pure as they were, a violent passion, ever flattering, whatever be the age, rank and form of the lover. Little Popinot must have many more reasons than a handsome man for loving a woman. If the woman was pretty he would be madly in love on that account until his dying day, his love would give him ambition, he would work himself to death to make his wife happy, he would leave her mistress of the home, he would go anticipate domination. So thought Césarine involuntarily and not so inconsiderately perhaps; she saw with a bird's-eye view into the harvests of love and reasoned by

comparison: her mother's happiness was present to her mind, she desired no other life; her instinct showed her in Anselme another César, perfected by education as she had been by hers. She dreamt of Popinot as mayor of arrondissement, and was pleased to picture herself as one day taking up collections in her parish like her mother at Saint-Roch. She came at last to ignoring the difference that distinguished Popinot's left foot from his right, she would be able to say: "But does he limp?" She loved that eye-ball so limpid, and had been pleased to see the effect produced by her look on those eyes that shone at once with a modest fire and drooped in melancholy mood. Roguin's chief clerk, Alexandre Crottat, gifted with that precocious experience due to attention to business, had a bearing half cynical, half good-natured, which disgusted Césarine, already tired of the commonplaces of his conversation. Popinot's silence betrayed a mild disposition, she loved the half-melancholy smile with which he noticed insignificant vulgarities; the foolish things that made him smile always excited some aversion in her, they smiled or were sad together. This superiority did not keep Anselme from launching into his work, and his indefatigable ardor pleased Césarine, for she surmised that, if the other clerks said:

"Césarine will marry Monsieur Roguin's chief clerk," poor Anselme, lame and red-headed, would not despair of winning her hand. Great hope proves great love.

"Where is he going?" Césarine asked her father, trying to assume an air of indifference.

"He is setting up in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants! and, faith, with the grace of God," said Birotteau, whose exclamation was understood neither by his wife nor by his daughter.

When Birotteau met with a moral difficulty, he did as do insects before an obstacle, he threw himself to left or to right; he accordingly changed the conversation, saying he wanted to chat with his wife about Césarine.

"I have told your uncle of your fears and ideas about Roguin, and he set to laughing," said he to Constance.

"You should never reveal what we say among ourselves," Constance exclaimed. "This poor Roguin is perhaps the most honest of men, he is fifty-eight years old and no doubt no longer thinks—"

She stopped short on seeing that Césarine was paying attention, and by a glance directed César's look toward her.

"I have done well, then, to close the matter," said Birotteau.

"But you are master," she replied

César took his wife's hands in his own and kissed her forehead. This answer was always with her a tacit consent to her husband's plans.

"Well," exclaimed the perfumer, as he went down to his shop and spoke to his clerks, "the shop will be closed at ten o'clock. Gentlemen, a bold stroke. It is a matter of transferring all the

furniture of the second floor to the third during the night! We must, as people say, put all the small vessels in the big ones, so as to leave elbow room for my architect to-morrow.—Popinot has gone out without permission,” said César, not seeing him. “Oh! he does not sleep here, I forgot.—He has gone, I suppose, either to put Monsieur Vauquelin’s ideas in order or to rent a shop.”

“We know the cause of this moving,” said Célestin, speaking in the name of the other two clerks and of Raguet, who were gathered behind him. “May we be allowed to congratulate Monsieur on an honor which reflects on the whole shop?—Popinot has told us that Monsieur—”

“Well, boys, what do you think! they have decorated me. And so, not only because of the liberation of the territory, but also to have a feast in honor of my promotion to the Legion of Honor, we are going to have a gathering of our friends. I have perhaps made myself worthy of this distinguished and royal favor by sitting in the consular court and by fighting for the royal cause which I defended—, at your age, on the steps of Saint-Roch on the thirteenth Vendémiaire; and, faith, Napoléon, styled the Emperor, wounded me! I still carry the scar on my thigh, and Madame Ragon nursed me. Have courage, you will be rewarded! See, my boys, how a mishap ever has its compensation.”

“There will be no more fighting in the streets,” said Célestin.

“Let us hope so,” said César, who changed the

subject to give his clerks a lecture which he ended with an invitation.

The prospect of a ball enlivened the three clerks, Raguet and Virginia, so as to make them as dexterous as rope-dancers. All passed up and down the stairs loaded without breaking or upsetting anything. At two o'clock in the morning the moving was completed. César and his wife slept on the third floor. Popinot's room became Célestin's and the second clerk's. The fourth floor was a provisional store-room for the furniture.

Possessed of that splendid ardor which is the product of affluence of the nervous fluid and which turns the diaphragm into a brazier in ambitious folk or those in love who are taken up with great schemes, Popinot, so mild and quiet, had pranced like a race horse before starting, in the shop, after leaving the table.

"What is the matter with you now?" Célestin asked him.

"What a day! my dear fellow, I am setting up for myself," he whispered in his ear, "and Monsieur César is decorated."

"You are very fortunate, the master is helping you," exclaimed Célestin.

Popinot did not answer, but disappeared as if driven by a furious gale, the hurricane of success.

"Oh! what good luck!" was the remark of a clerk engaged in packing gloves by the dozen, to his neighbor, who was verifying labels; "the master saw the sheep's-eyes that Popinot was making at



Césarine, and as he is very shrewd, is this master, he got rid of Anselme; it would be hard to refuse him, seeing who his relations are. Célestin takes this trick for generosity.”

Anselme Popinot went down the Rue Saint-Honoré and ran along the Rue des Deux-Ecus, to secure a young man whom his commercial *second sight* had suggested to him as the chief instrument of his fortune. Judge Popinot had done a service to the most capable commercial traveler in Paris, to him whose triumphant loquacity and activity gained for him later on the surname *Illustrious*. Specially concerned with the hat trade and the *article Paris*, this king of traveling salesmen was as yet known purely and simply as Gaudissart. When only twenty-two he had already distinguished himself by the power of his commercial magnetism. Then spare, bright-eyed, of expressive countenance, indefatigable memory, able at a glance to take in every one's tastes, he deserved to be what he has been since, the king of commercial travelers, the *Frenchman* preëminently. Some days previously Popinot had met Gaudissart, who had said he was about to leave town: the hope of still finding him in Paris had just sent the lover into the Rue des Deux-Ecus, where he learned that the traveler had kept his place, at the conveyance office. By way of bidding farewell to his dear capital, Gaudissart had gone to see a new piece at the Vaudeville: Popinot resolved to wait for him. To entrust the placing of the hazel-nut oil to this valuable circulator of inventions in trade, already

eagerly desired by the richest houses, was it not to draw a bill of exchange on fortune? Popinot had Gaudissart. The traveling agent, so skilled in the art of getting around the most stubborn people, the small provincial dealers, had allowed himself to be wheedled into the first conspiracy against the Bourbons after the Hundred-Days. Gaudissart, to whom an open-air life was indispensable, saw himself in prison under the load of a capital charge. Judge Popinot, assigned to pass on the indictment, had let Gaudissart go free, finding that his foolish imprudence alone had compromised him in this affair. With a judge desirous of pleasing the powers that be, or of exalted royalism, the unfortunate agent would have gone to the scaffold. Gaudissart, who thought he owed his life to the Committing Judge, was in deep despair at being able to show his savior but barren gratitude. It being out of order to thank a judge for having done justice, he had gone to the Ragons to declare himself a vassal of the Popinots. While waiting, Popinot naturally went to take another look at his shop in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants, to find out the owner's address, so that he could treat with him about the lease. While wandering in the dark labyrinth of the great Market, thinking of the means of organizing a speedy success, Popinot seized, in the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher, a unique opportunity of good augury with which he counted on regaling César on the morrow. While on guard at the door of the Hotel *Commerce*, at the end of the Rue des Deux-Ecus, about midnight, Popinot heard, as far

away as the Rue de Grenelle, a farewell ballad sung by Gaudissart, to the accompaniment of his cane significantly dragged along the pavement.

"Sir," said Anselme, leaving the door and suddenly showing himself, "a word or two with you?"

"A dozen, if you wish," said the commercial traveler, raising his lead-loaded cane in defence against the aggressor.

"I am Popinot," said poor Anselme.

"Quite right," said Gaudissart, recognizing him. "What is it you wish? money? Absent on leave, but we will find out. My arm for a duel? Everything is yours, from the soles of my feet to the crown of my head."

And he sung:

There, there's  
The true French soldier bold!

"Come and talk with me for ten minutes, not in your room, some one might hear us, but on the Quai de l'Horloge: at this hour there's no one there," said Popinot; "it is a question of something most important."

"To warm us up? Let us be off."

"In ten minutes Gaudissart, master of Popinot's secrets, had realized their importance.

"Perfumers, hair-dressers and retailers, show yourselves," exclaimed Gaudissart, mimicking Lafon in the rôle of the Cid. "I am going to inveigle all the shopkeepers of France and Navarre. Oh! an idea! I was going to leave town, but I will stay and

take the orders of the whole perfumery trade of Paris."

"And why?"

"To down your rivals, you simpleton! When I am taking their orders I can make their dastardly cosmetics drink oil, by speaking and being concerned only with yours. What a famous traveler's trick! Ha! ha! we are the diplomats of trade. Famous! And as for your prospectus, I will take charge of that. I have had as a friend since childhood Andoche Finot, son of the hatter in the Rue du Coq, the old man who put me on the road in the hat trade; Andoche, who has considerable talent, for he took that of all the heads covered by his father, is a literary man, and does all the minor theatrical work for the *Courrier des Spectacles*. His father, an old dog full of reasons for not liking talent, does not believe in it: impossible to prove to him that talent is sold, fortunes are made by it. In the matter of talent, he knows only how much three sixes make. Old Finot has a very poor opinion of young Finot. Andoche, a capable man and my friend besides, and I associate with dolts only commercially, Finot is engaged on sketches for the *Fidèle Berger*, that pays, while the newspapers that give him the galley-fever feed him on snakes. Are they jealous, and therefore adopt this course? It is just as with the *article Paris*. Finot had a superb comedy in one act for Mademoiselle Mars, the most famous of the famous. Ah! there's one of them that I love! Well, before he could see

it played, he was compelled to take it to the Gaieté. Andoche understands the prospectus business; he enters into the dealer's ideas, he is not proud, he will make a rough draft of our prospectus *gratis*. Great Heavens, with a bowl of punch and cakes we will fix him up; for, Popinot, no stuffing: I will travel without commission or expenses, your competitors will pay, I will gobble them up. Let us understand each other clearly. For my part, this success is a matter of honor. My reward is that I be best man at your wedding! I will go to Italy, to Germany, to England! I will take with me placards in all languages, I will have them posted everywhere, in the villages, at the church doors, at every favorable place that I know of in the provincial cities! It will shine, it will show for itself, will this oil; it will be on everybody's head. Ah! your marriage will not be a sham, but a swell affair! You shall have your Césarine, or I will not be called the ILLUSTRIOUS! a name that old man Finot gave me, for having made a success of his gray hats. In selling your oil I remain in my rôle, the human head; the oil and the hat are known as preservatives of the public hair."

Popinot returned to his aunt's, where he was to sleep, in such a fever, caused by his prospect of success, that the streets seemed to him to be streams of oil. He slept little, dreamt that his hair was growing in fantastic fashion, and saw two angels that unrolled before his eyes, as in a melodrama, a rubric on which was written: *Césarienne Oil*. He awoke, remembering this dream, and resolved to so

call his hazel-nut oil, regarding this dream-fancy as an order from Heaven.

César and Popinot were in their workshop, in the Faubourg du Temple, long before the arrival of the hazel-nuts; while waiting for Madame Madou's haulers Popinot triumphantly related his treaty of alliance with Gaudissart.

"We have the illustrious Gaudissart, we are millionaires!" exclaimed the perfumer, extending his hand to his cashier with such an air as might have been assumed by Louis XIV. receiving the Maréchal de Villars on his return from Denain.

"We have something else besides," said the happy clerk, taking from his pocket a bottle crushed after the manner of a pumpkin and flat-shaped; "I have found ten thousand flasks like this sample, already made, prepared for use, at four sous and on six months' time."

"Anselme," said Birotteau, contemplating the flask's wonderful shape, "Yesterday"—he assumed a grave tone—"in the Tuileries, yes, no longer ago than yesterday, you said: 'I will succeed.' As for me, I say to-day: 'You will succeed!' Four sous! six months' time; an original form! Macassar is trembling in its boots. What a blow aimed at Macassar oil! Haven't I done well to get all the hazel-nuts to be had in Paris! Where, then, did you find these flasks?"

"I was waiting for an opportunity to speak to Gaudissart and I was sauntering—"

"Like me of old," exclaimed Birotteau.

“On my way down the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher I saw in a wholesale glass-ware place, that of a dealer in blown glass and covers, who has immense stores, I saw this flask.—Ah! it dazzled my eyes like a sudden light. A voice cried out to me: ‘That’s what you’re after!’”

“A born business man! He will have my daughter,” said César, muttering.

“I enter and I see thousands of these flasks in cases.”

“You at once asked all about them?”

“You do not think me so green!” Anselme exclaimed, as if he felt hurt.

“A born business man!” Birotteau repeated.

“I ask for some glass covers to put over little wax figures of the Child Jesus. While bargaining for the covers, I find fault with the form of these flasks. Led on to a general confession, my merchant acknowledges by degrees that Faille and Bouchot, who lately failed, were going to undertake a cosmetic and wanted flasks of singular form; he was distrustful of them and asked half cash; Faille and Bouchot, hoping to succeed, parted with the money; the failure came suddenly while the flasks were being made; the assignees, when asked to pay, succeeded in compromising with him by leaving him the flasks and the money paid, as an indemnity for an article that he pretended was ridiculous and could not possibly find a market. The flasks cost eight sous; he would be satisfied to let them go for four. God knows how long he would have to keep

in storage a style that is not in the market. 'Will you undertake to supply ten thousand at four sous? I can help you to get rid of your flasks, as I am a clerk with Monsieur Birotteau.' I broach it to him, and I lead him on, and I get the better of my man, and I warm him up, and he is ours."

"Four sous!" said Birotteau. "Do you know that we can put the oil at three francs and make thirty sous after allowing the retailers twenty?"

"*Césarienne Oil!*" exclaimed Popinot.

"*Césarienne Oil?*—Ah! Mr. Lover, you want to flatter the father and the daughter. Very well, be it so; go for *Césarienne Oil!* The Césars had the world, they must have had famous hair."

"César was bald," said Popinot.

"Because he did not use our oil, people will say! *Césarienne Oil* for three francs; *Macassar oil* costs double. Gaudissart is in it. We will make a hundred thousand francs a year, for we will put on all heads that respect themselves twelve flasks annually. Eighteen francs! Say ten thousand heads, a hundred and eighty thousand francs. We are millionaires."

The hazel-nuts delivered, Raguét, the workmen, Popinot and César, picked a sufficient quantity, and within four hours they had a few pounds of oil. Popinot went to present the product to Vauquelin, who made a present to Popinot of a formula for mixing the hazel-nut essence with less expensive oleaginous substances and for scenting it. Popinot at once betook himself in haste to obtain a patent of invention and perfecting. The devoted



Gaudissart lent money for the fiscal right to Popinot, whose ambition it was to pay his half of the expenses of the establishment.

Prosperity brings in its train a false enthusiasm that men of small ability never resist. This exaltation had a result easy to be foreseen. Grindot came and showed the colored sketch of a delightful interior view of the future tenement adorned with its furnishings. Birotteau was charmed and consented to everything. Immediately, the masons gave the pick-blows that made the house and Constance tremble. His house-painter, Monsieur Lourdois, a very rich contractor, who pledged himself not to overlook anything, spoke of gildings for the parlor. On hearing this, Constance interposed.

“Monsieur Lourdois,” she said, “you have thirty thousand francs from the funds, you live in a house all by yourself, you can do in it what you please; but as for us—”

“Madame, trade must shine and not allow itself to be crushed by the aristocracy. See, too, Monsieur Birotteau in the Government, he is in evidence—”

“Yes, but he is still a shopkeeper,” said Constance, in the hearing of her clerks and the five persons who were listening to her; “neither I, nor he, nor his friends, nor his enemies will forget it.”

Birotteau arose on tiptoe and fell back on his heels several times, his hands crossed behind him.

“My wife is right,” he said. “We will be modest in prosperity. Moreover, as long as a man is in

trade, he ought to be careful in his expenses, reserved in show. The law makes it an obligation for him. He must not give himself up to *excessive expenses*. If the enlargement of my dwelling and the decorating of it go above the limit, it would be imprudent for me to exceed it; you, yourself, Lourdois, would blame me. The neighborhood has its eyes on me. People who succeed make others jealous, envious of them! Ah! you will soon know that, young man," he said to Grindot; "if they calumniate us, at least don't give them occasion for slander."

"Neither calumny nor slander can hurt you," said Lourdois; "you are in a privileged position, and you have such a great aptitude for trade that you know how to reason out what you undertake. You are a *sly one*."

"True, I have had some experience of business; you know why we have prospered? If I put a heavy forfeit relatively on exactness, it is because—"

"No."

"Well, my wife and I are going to have some friends gathered as much to celebrate the deliverance of the territory as to have a feast on account of my promotion to the Order of the Legion of Honor."

"How, what?" said Lourdois. "They have conferred the Cross on you?"

"Yes; perhaps I made myself worthy of this distinguished and royal favor by sitting in the consular court and by fighting for the royal cause on the thirteenth Vendémiaire, at Saint-Roch, where I was

wounded by Napoléon. Come, and bring your wife and your daughter—”

“Delighted at the honor that you deign to do me,” said the Liberal Lourdois. “But you are a droll fellow, old man Birotteau; you want to be sure that I will not fail to keep my word with you, and that is why you invite me. Well, I will take my best workmen, and we will get up a hell-fire to dry the painting; we have drying processes, for there must be no dancing in a damp atmosphere due to the plaster. We will put varnish on to remove all odor.”

Three days later the trade of the neighborhood was astir over the announcement of the ball that Birotteau was preparing. Everyone could, moreover, see the external stays made necessary by the rapid change of the stairway, the square wooden chutes through which fell the rubbish into tumbrils that were stationed there. The hurried laborers who were working by torchlight, for there were day laborers and night laborers, made idlers and the curious stop in the street, and gossip relied on these preparations to tell of enormous expenses.

On the Sunday fixed for the closing of the land affair Monsieur and Madame Ragon and Uncle Pillerault came about four o'clock, after Vespers. In view of the wreck, César said, he could invite on that day only Charles Claparon, Crottat and Roguin. The notary brought the *Journal des Débats*, in which Monsieur de la Billardière had the following article inserted:

“We learn that the deliverance of the territory will be enthusiastically celebrated throughout the whole of France; but in Paris the members of the municipal body have felt that the moment had come to give to the capital that splendor which, from a feeling of delicacy, had been interrupted during the foreign occupation. Each of the mayors and their deputies propose to give a ball: the winter promises, then, to be a very brilliant one; this national movement will be observed. Among all the feasts that are in preparation, there is much talk of the ball at Monsieur Birotteau’s, who has been made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, and is so well known for his devotedness to the royal cause. Monsieur Birotteau, wounded in the action at Saint-Roch, on the thirteenth Vendémiaire, and one of the most highly esteemed of the consular judges, has doubly merited this favor.”

“How well people write nowadays,” exclaimed César.—“They speak of us in the newspapers,” said he to Pillerault.

“Well, after that?” replied his uncle, to whom the *Journal des Débats* was particularly unfriendly.

“This article will perhaps sell some *Sultana Paste* and *Carminative Water*,” said Madame César in an undertone to Madame Ragon, who did not share her husband’s enthusiasm.

\*

Madame Ragon, a large, withered and wrinkled woman, with a pinched nose and thin lips, had an affected air of a marchioness of the old court. Her eyelids were spread out over a rather large circumference, like those of old women who have felt sorrows. Her severe and dignified countenance, though pleasing, impressed one with respect. She had in her, moreover, that something indescribably strange which attracts without exciting a smile, and which was explained by her dress and manner: she wore mittens, she went out in all kinds of weather with a cane-handled umbrella, like that used by Queen Marie-Antoinette at Trianon; her dress, the favorite color of which was that light-brown called *feuillemort*, fell from her hips in unique folds, known only to the dowagers of old; she held on to the black mantle trimmed with black lace with large square meshes; her bonnet, of antique form, had trimmings that recalled the carvings of the old open-cut frames. She took snuff with exquisite cleanliness while making those gestures that may be remembered by the young folks who have had the happiness of seeing their grandaunts and grandmothers solemnly place gold snuff-boxes alongside of them, on a table, at the same time brushing away the grains of snuff that had fallen on their neckerchief.

The Sieur Ragon was a small man five feet high at most, of the figure of a nut-cracker, in which one saw only the eyes, two sharp cheek-bones, a nose and a chin; toothless, clipping half of his words, fluent in conversation, gallant, pretentious, and ever smiling with the smile that he put on to receive the fine ladies that various chances formerly brought to his shop-door. Powder outlined on his cranium a snowy half-moon well combed, flanked by two horns separated by a small tuft tied with a ribbon. He wore a blue-bottle coat, white vest, breeches and stockings of silk, gold-buckle shoes, and black silk gloves. His most striking characteristic was his habit of holding his hat in his hand when walking along the streets. He had the air of a messenger of the House of Peers, of an usher of the king's cabinet, of one of those folk who are placed near any power whatever so as to be its reflection, while remaining insignificant.

“Well, Birotteau,” he said, in a commanding tone, “do you repent, my boy, for having listened to us on that occasion? Have we ever doubted the gratitude of our well-beloved sovereigns?”

“You ought to be very happy, my dear little woman,” said Madame Ragon to Madame Birotteau.

“Yes, indeed,” replied the perfumer's pretty wife, ever under the charm of that cane-handled umbrella, of those butterfly bonnets, of the neat-fitting sleeves and the big neckerchief *à la Julie* worn by Madame Ragon.

“Césarine is charming.—Come here, sweet

child," said Madame Ragon in her falsetto voice and with a patronizing air.

"Shall we attend to business before dinner?" asked Uncle Pillerault.

"We are waiting for Monsieur Claparon," said Roguin. "I left him dressing."

"Monsieur Roguin," said César, "you took good care to tell him that we dine in a mean little entresol—"

"He found it superb sixteen years ago," said Constance, murmuring.

—"Among the rubbish and in the presence of workmen?"

"Bah! you are going to see a fine youth who is not hard to please," said Roguin.

"I have put Raguet on duty in my shop. No one enters any more by our door; you must have observed that everything is demolished," said César to the notary.

"Why have you not brought your nephew here?" said Pillerault to Madame Ragon.

"Shall we see him?" Césarine asked.

"No, darling," said Madame Ragon. "Anselme is working, the dear boy, fit to kill himself. That airless and sunless street, that stinking Rue des Cinq-Diamants gives me the horrors; the gutter is always blue, green or black. I am afraid that he will perish there. But when young folk get an idea in their head!" she said to Césarine, showing by a gesture that the word *head* meant the word *heart*.

"He has signed his lease, then?" César asked.

“Yesterday, and before a notary,” Ragon replied. “He takes it for eighteen years, but they require six months’ rent in advance.”

“Well, Monsieur Ragon, are you satisfied with me?” asked the perfumer. “I have given him the secret of a discovery—at last!”

“We know you by heart, César,” said Ragon, taking César’s hands and pressing them with a religious friendship.

Roguin was uneasy about Claparon’s appearance on the scene; the latter’s manners and tone might frighten virtuous bourgeois: he accordingly deemed it necessary to prepare their minds for him.

“You are going to see,” said he to Ragon, Pillerault and the ladies, “a character who conceals his ability under an unfavorable and repulsive exterior; for, from very low origin, he has brought himself into prominence by his ideas. He will, no doubt, acquire good manners by the fact of having to associate with bankers. You will, perhaps, meet him on the boulevard or in a café, tipling, open-breasted, playing billiards: he looks a tall, ungainly fellow.—Well, no; he studies, and then thinks of giving a boom to industry by new conceptions.”

“I understand that,” said Birotteau; “I have found my best ideas while sauntering. Isn’t that so, dear?”

“Claparon,” continued Roguin, “then, at night, makes up for the time spent in looking up, in working out business matters during the day. All men of great talent lead a queer, inexplicable life.



Well, in this unconnected way, and I can testify to it, he reaches his end: he has succeeded in making all the owners give in. They did not wish to, they were doubtful of something. He mystified them, he tired them out, he went to see them every day, and we are, in consequence, masters of the property.”

A singular *broum ! broum !* peculiar to drinkers of small doses of brandy and other strong liquors, announced the oddest personage of this history, and the visible arbiter of César's future destinies. The perfumer hurried to the little dark stairway, as much to tell Raguet to shut up the shop as to offer Claparon his excuses for receiving him in the dining-room.

“How so! Isn't one as well off there to chew veg——, to figure out business, I mean?”

In spite of Roguin's shrewd preparations, Monsieur and Madame Ragon, those well-bred bourgeois, the observant Pillerault, Césarine and her mother were at first rather disagreeably impressed by this pretended high-flying banker.

When only about twenty-eight years old this former traveling agent had not a hair on his head, and wore a wig frizzed in corkscrew fashion. This head-dress requires a virgin freshness, a milky transparency, the most charming feminine graces; it accordingly brought out ignobly a blotched, red-brown visage, florid as that of a stage-driver, and the premature wrinkles of which expressed, by the grimaces of their deep and plastered folds, a libertine life, the ill effects of which were still further attested

by the bad condition of the teeth and the black spots scattered over a ruddy skin. Claparon had the air of a provincial comedian jaded by his fatigues, who knows every rôle, burlesques at fairs, on whose cheek the red no longer remains, his lips doughy, his tongue always lively, even when he is drunk, his look devoid of modesty—in short compromising by his gestures. This face, inflamed by the joyous kindling of punch, belied the gravity of business. And so Claparon required long mimic studies before he succeeded in settling down to a bearing in harmony with his assumed importance. Du Tillet had assisted in making up Claparon's toilet, as a stage manager anxious about his chief actor's first appearance, for he trembled lest the coarse habits of that reckless life would break out on the surface of the banker.

“Talk as little as possible,” he had said to him. “Never does a banker jabber: he acts, thinks, meditates, listens and weighs. Thus, in order to have all the airs of a banker, say nothing, or else insignificant things. Suppress the wantonness of your eye and make it look grave, at the risk of rendering it dull. In politics, be for the Government, and launch into generalities like these: *The budget is heavy. There is no possible agreement between the parties. The Liberals are dangerous. The Bourbons ought to avoid all conflict. Liberalism is the cloak for coalesced interests. The Bourbons are preparing for us an era of prosperity. Let us support them, if we do not love them. France has had enough political*

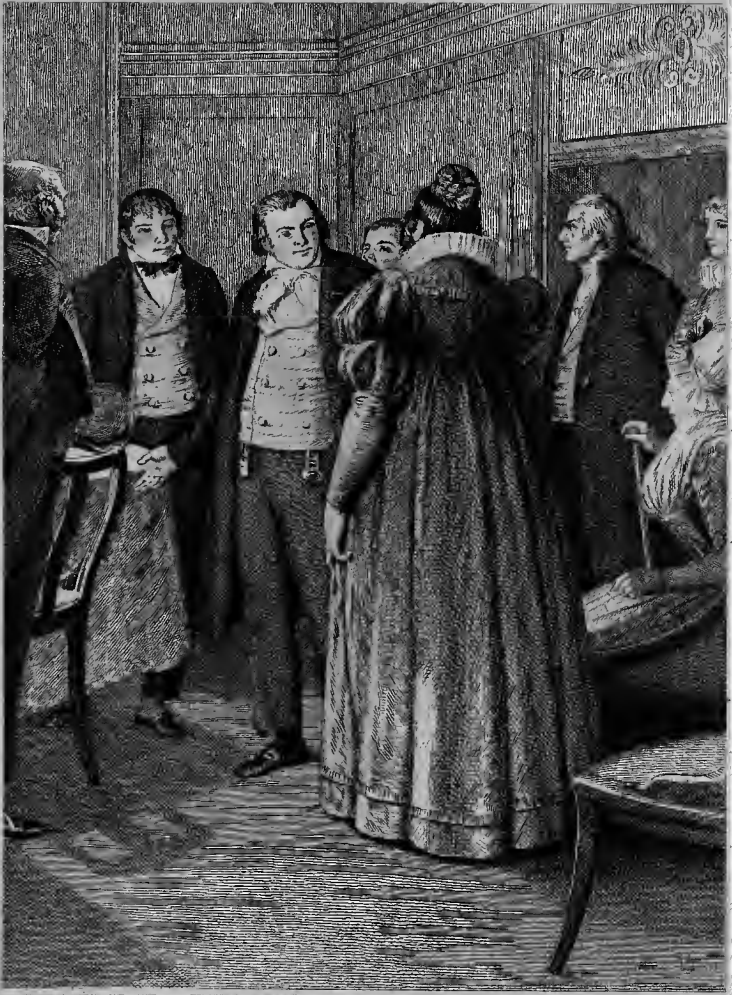
M. CLAPARON, BANKER

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*When only about twenty-eight years old this former traveling agent had not a hair on his head, and wore a wig frizzed in corkscrew fashion. \* \* \* Claparon had the air of a provincial comedian jaded by his fatigues, who knows every rôle, burlesques at fairs, on whose cheek the red no longer remains, his lips doughy, his tongue always lively, even when he is drunk, his look devoid of modesty—in short compromising by his gestures.*



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*experiences*, etc. Don't wallow on every table. Remember that you have to maintain the dignity of a millionaire. Don't take your snuff as an invalid does; toy with your snuff box. Look often to the floor or at the ceiling before answering, and, in fine, assume the air of being profound. Especially, get rid of your unfortunate habit of touching everything. In society, a banker ought to seem weary of touch. Ah, that's it! You sit up at night. Figures make you stupid; you have to get together so many elements to launch a matter of business! So much study! Above all, have a great deal unfavorable to say of business. Business is dull, heavy, hard, thorny. Don't get away from that, and specify nothing. Do not go to table humming your Béranger ballads, and do not drink too much. If you get tipsy, you ruin your future. Roguin will watch over you; you are going to find yourself among moral folk, virtuous bourgeois. Do not frighten them by letting loose on them any of your tap-room principles."

This lecture had produced on Charles Claparon's mind an effect like that produced on his person by his new clothes. That gleeful, care-free man, everybody's friend, accustomed to being carelessly clad with loose garments, in which his body was no more pinched than was his mind in his language, constrained in new clothes that the tailor kept for him until he tried them on, stiff as a picket, restless in his movements as his phrases, withdrawing his hand imprudently stretched out for a flask or a box, just as he stopped in the middle of a phrase, made

himself then remarkable by an inconsistency that was laughable to Pillerault's scrutiny. His red face, his wanton corkscrew wig, belied his manners, as his thoughts were in conflict with his sayings. But the good bourgeois came to regard these continual discords as due to preoccupation.

"He has so much business," said Roguin.

"Business gives him little breeding," said Madame Ragon to Césarine.

Monsieur Roguin heard the expression and put his finger to his lips.

"He is rich, shrewd, and exceedingly honest," he said, leaning towards Madame Ragon.

"One can excuse him somewhat in favor of those qualities," said Pillerault to Ragon.

"Let us read the deeds before dinner," said Roguin; "we are alone."

Madame Ragon, Césarine and Constance left the contracting parties, Pillerault, Ragon, César, Roguin and Claparon, to listen to Alexandre Crottat reading.

César signed, in favor of one of Roguin's clients, a bond for forty thousand francs, secured by mortgage of the land and the factories situated in the Faubourg du Temple; he turned over to Roguin, Pillerault's order on the bank, gave without receipt the twenty thousand francs in his portfolio and the hundred and forty thousand francs in notes payable to the order of Claparon.

"I have no receipt to give you," said Claparon.

"You will deal on your part with Monsieur Roguin as we on ours. Our sellers receive from him their



price in cash. I pledge myself to nothing but to find for you the balance of your share in notes for your hundred and forty thousand francs."

"That is all right," said Pillerault.

"Very well, gentlemen, let us call the ladies back; for isn't it cold without them?" said Claparon, looking at Roguin as if to find out whether the pleasantries were not too strong.

"Ladies!—Oh! the young lady is no doubt your daughter," said Claparon, as he stood erect and looked at Birotteau. "Well, you are not a bad hand at it. None of the roses that you have distilled can be compared with her, and perhaps it is because you have distilled roses that—"

"Faith," said Roguin, interrupting, "I must acknowledge that I am hungry."

"Very well, let us go to dinner," said Birotteau.

"We are going to dine in the presence of a notary," said Claparon, bridling up.

"You do a great deal of business?" said Pillerault, seating himself at the table intentionally near Claparon.

"A very great deal, by the wholesale," replied the banker; "but it is dull, thorny; there are the canals. Oh! the canals! You could not figure out how the canals keep me engaged! and that is easily understood. The Government wants canals. The canal is a necessity that makes itself generally felt in the Departments and that concerns all branches of trade, you know! Rivers, Pascal says, are moving highways. Markets, then, are needed. The

markets depend on the excavations, for there are frightful embankments, and the embankment concerns the poorer classes, whence loans, in a word, are given to the poor! Voltaire said: *Canaux, canards, canaille!* But the Government has its engineers who enlighten it: it is hard to take it in, except by having an understanding with them; for the Chamber!—Oh! sir, the Chamber does us harm! It does not want to understand the political question hidden behind the financial question. There is bad faith on both sides. Would you believe one thing? The Kellers, well, François Keller is an orator; he attacks the Government in regard to funds, in regard to canals. Having returned to his home, my jolly fellow finds us with our propositions. They are favorable. We must have an understanding with this *said* Government, just a moment ago insolently attacked. The orator's interests and those of the banker come in conflict; we are between two fires! You understand now how business becomes thorny. We have to please so many people: clerks, chambers, ante-chambers, ministers—”

“Ministers?” remarked Pillerault, who was bent on seeing through this co-partner.

“Yes, sir, ministers.”

“Well, the newspapers are right, then,” said Pillerault.

“Just see my uncle in politics,” said Birotteau, “Monsieur Claparon is pleasing him.”

“Ever mischievous dogs,” said Claparon; “that’s all these newspapers are! Sir, the newspapers mix

up everything for us; they serve us well sometimes, but they make me spend some restless nights. I would prefer to spend them otherwise; in short, I have lost my sight through reading and calculating."

"Let us return to the ministers," said Pillerault, hoping for revelations.

"The ministers have purely governmental exigencies. But what's that I am eating, food for the gods?" Claparon asked, interrupting himself. "Some of those sauces that one eats only in bourgeois houses; never in eating-houses—"

At this expression the flowers on Madame Ragon's bonnet bounded like rams. Claparon saw that he had been guilty of vulgarity, and wanted to take it back.

"In high banking circles," he said, "the head cooks of swell saloons are called *hashers*, like Véry and the Frères Provençaux. Well, neither these disreputable hashers nor our skilled cooks give us mellow sauces. The first give us clear water acidulated with lemon, the others practice chemistry."

The whole dinner time was spent in attacks on the part of Pillerault, who aimed to sound this man, and who found only vacuum; he regarded him as a dangerous man.

"Everything is going well," whispered Roguin in Charles Claparon's ear.

"Ah! I will no doubt get into undress this evening," replied Claparon, who was suffocating.

"Sir," said Birotteau to him, "if we are obliged to make the salon of the dining-room, it is because

in eighteen days we will have a gathering of some friends here, as much to celebrate the deliverance of the territory—”

“Good, sir; as for myself, I am also the man of the Government. I belong, by my opinions, to the *statu quo* of the great man who directs the destinies of the House of Austria, a famous, jolly good fellow! To keep in order to acquire, and especially to acquire in order to keep—that is the sum and substance of my opinions, which have the honor of being those of Prince Metternich.”

“—As to have a feast in honor of my promotion to the Order of the Legion of Honor,” continued César.

“Oh, yes! I know. Who, then, told me of that? the Kellers or Nucingen?”

Roguin, surprised at such coolness, made a gesture of admiration.

“Ah! no, it was in the Chamber.”

“In the Chamber, from Monsieur de la Billardière?” César asked.

“Precisely.”

“He is delightful,” said César to his uncle.

“He drops phrases, phrases,” said Pillerault, “phrases in which one is swamped.”

“Perhaps I have made myself worthy of this favor—” Birotteau continued.

“By your labors in perfumery: the Bourbons know how to reward all merits. Ah! let us give credit for it to these generous legitimate princes, to whom we are about to owe unheard-of prosperity—

for, you may well believe, the Restoration feels that it ought to measure lances with the Empire; it will make conquests in time of profound peace. You will see conquests!—”

“The gentleman will, no doubt, do us the honor of attending our ball?” said Madame César.

“To spend an evening with you, madame, I would give up a chance of making millions.”

“He is decidedly quite loquacious,” said César to his uncle.

Whilst the glory of the perfumery business, in its decline, was shedding its last rays, a star was rising feebly on the commercial horizon. Little Popinot was at that very moment laying the foundations of his fortune, in Rue des Cinq-Diamants, a narrow little street through which loaded wagons pass with great difficulty, that opens on the Rue des Lombards at one end, and at the other on the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher, opposite the Rue Quincampoix, a famous street of old Paris, in which the history of France has been so much illustrated. In spite of this disadvantage, the close proximity of the dealers in drugs makes this street favorable, and, in this respect, Popinot had not made a bad choice. The house, the second on the side towards the Rue des Lombards, was so dark that, on certain days, it needed to be lit up in full day. The beginner had taken possession, the evening before, of the darkest and most disgusting of places. His predecessor, a dealer in molasses and raw sugar, had left the marks of his trade on the walls, in the court and in the

store-rooms. Picture to yourself a large and spacious shop with heavy iron-bound doors, painted dragon-green, with exposed long iron bands, adorned with nails whose heads resembled mushrooms, provided with grating latticed with iron bars and with a projection below like those of the bakers of old—in fine, with great white stone slabs, most of them broken, the walls yellow and bare as those of a guard-house. Next came a rear shop and a kitchen, lighted from the court; finally, a second store turning back, which formerly must have been a stable. One ascended, by an interior stair-case, built in the rear shop, to two rooms lighted from the street, which Popinot intended to use as his office and for his books and cash. Above the stores were three small rooms backed by the party wall, looking out on the court, and in which he proposed to dwell. Three dilapidated rooms, which had no other outlook, but that on the irregular court, dark, surrounded by walls, where the moisture, in the driest time, gave them the appearance of being freshly painted in stone color; a court between the paving stones of which was found a black and noisome filth due to the occupation by the molasses and the raw sugar. Only one of the rooms had a fire-place; all were unpapered, and paved with square tiles. Since morning, Gaudissart and Popinot, assisted by a journeyman paper-hanger, whom the traveling agent had hunted up, were themselves hanging a fifteen-sou paper in this horrible room, sized by the journeyman. A collegian's bed, with a red, wooden

bedstead, a very poor night-chair, an antique chest of drawers, a table, two arm-chairs and six ordinary chairs, given by Judge Popinot to his nephew, made up the furniture. Gaudissart had put on the chimney-piece a pier-glass, with a very mean mirror, bought second-hand. About eight o'clock in the evening, seated before the fire-place, in which blazed a lighted faggot, the two friends were going to dispose of what was left of their breakfast.

“The cold leg of mutton to the rear! that is not suitable to a house-warming,” exclaimed Gaudissart.

“But,” said Popinot, showing his last twenty-franc piece, which he was keeping to pay for the prospectus, “I—”

“I?” said Gaudissart, as he placed a forty-franc piece on his eye.

A heavy knock then resounded in the court, naturally lonely and sonorous on Sunday, the day on which the industrial class dissipate and abandon their workshops.

“That is the faithful fellow from Rue de la Poterie. As for me,” continued the Illustrious Gaudissart, “*I have!* and not *I!*”

In fact, a young man, followed by two scullions, brought, in three hand-baskets, a dinner fortified with six bottles of wine carefully selected.

“But how will we be able to dispose of so much?” said Popinot.

“And the man of letters!” exclaimed Gaudissart. “Finot knows the *pomps* and the vanities. He will come, artless youth! armed with a startling

prospectus. That's a pretty word, eh! Prospectuses are always thirsty. We must water the seed if we would have flowers. Go, slaves," he said to the scullions, with an important air, "here's gold."

He gave them ten sous with a gesture worthy of Napoléon, his idol.

"Thanks, Monsieur Gaudissart," replied the scullions, better pleased at the pleasantries than with the money.

"As for you, my boy," he said to the young man who remained to wait on them, "there is a portress who sleeps in the depths of a den where sometimes she cooks, as Nausicaa of old did washing, for pure relaxation. Get you to her, implore her to be candid, interest her, young man, in the warming of these dishes. Tell her that she will be blessed, and especially respected, very much respected, by Félix Gaudissart, son of Jean-François Gaudissart, grandson of the Gaudissarts, base proletaires very remote, his ancestors. Hurry up and see that everything is all right, else I will sing you a different tune in C major!"

Another heavy knock resounded.

"That is the witty Andoche," said Gaudissart.

A stout youth, rather chubfaced, of medium height, and who, from head to foot, resembled a hatter's son, of round features in which cunning was buried under a serious manner, suddenly made his appearance. His countenance, sad-looking like that of a man tired of misery, assumed an expression of hilarity when he saw the table set and the bottles



with significant wrappings. On hearing Gaudissart's voice his pale blue eye sparkled, his large head, sunk by his Kalmuk figure, moved from right to left, and he saluted Popinot in a strange manner, without either servility or respect, like a man who feels himself out of place and makes no concession. He then began to feel in himself that he had no literary talent; he thought of remaining in literature for what he could make out of it, to rise in it on the shoulders of witty folk, to make a business of it instead of producing poorly paid work; at that moment, after having exhausted the humility of offers and the humiliation of attempts, he was going, like people of high financial aims, to turn back and become impertinent from set purpose. But he needed the capital to start. Gaudissart had given him the chance by broaching to him the advertising of Popinot's oil.

"You will deal on his account with the newspapers, but do not spoil it; if you do, we will have a duel to the death; give him something for his money!"

Popinot looked at the *author* with a feeling of uneasiness. People who are truly commercial look upon an author with a feeling that partakes somewhat of terror, compassion and curiosity. Though Popinot had been well reared, his parents' habits, their ideas, the dulling cares of a shop and of a counting-house had modified his intelligence by adapting it to the uses and customs of his profession, a phenomenon that may be observed by remarking the metamorphoses undergone in an interval of ten years by a hundred comrades leaving college or boarding-school

almost similarly equipped. Andoche regarded this look as an evidence of profound admiration.

“Very well, before having dinner let us thoroughly go over the prospectus; we will be able to drink without distraction,” said Gaudissart. “After dinner one reads badly. Conversation also digests.”

“Sir,” said Popinot, “a prospectus is often a whole fortune.”

“And for plebeians like me, fortune is only a prospectus,” said Andoche.

“Ha! very well said,” said Gaudissart. “This droll Andoche is as witty as the Forty.”

“As a hundred,” said Popinot, stupefied at this idea.

The impatient Gaudissart took the manuscript and read in a loud voice and with emphasis: CEPHALIC OIL!

“I would prefer *Césarine Oil*,” said Popinot.

“My friend,” said Gaudissart, “you do not know the provincial folk: there is a surgical operation of a similar name, and they are so stupid that they would think your oil was intended to facilitate child-birth; to bring them from that idea to the hair would take too much pulling.”

“Without desiring to defend my expression,” said the author, “I beg to tell you that *Cephalic Oil* means oil for the head, and sums up your ideas.”

“Let us see,” said the impatient Popinot.

Here is the prospectus, such as the trade receives it by the thousand even nowadays.—*Another confirmatory document.*—

GOLD MEDAL AT THE EXPOSITION OF 1824.



## CEPHALIC OIL.

*Patents for Invention and Improvement.*

No cosmetic can make the hair grow, just as no chemical preparation dyes it without danger to the seat of the intellect. Science has recently declared that the hair is a dead substance, and that no agency can prevent it from falling out or turning white. To prevent xerasia and baldness, it suffices to preserve the bulb from which it springs from every external atmospheric influence, and to keep in the head the warmth that is necessary to it. *Cephalic Oil*, based on these principles, established by the Academy of Science, produces this important result, believed in by the ancients, the Romans, the Greeks and the Northern nations, who set a high value on the hair. Learned researches have shown that the nobles, who were of old distinguished for the length of their hair, used no other means; only their process, skilfully discovered by A. Popinot, the inventor of *Cephalic Oil*, had been lost.

To preserve, instead of trying to promote, an impossible or injurious stimulation of the derm that contains the bulbs, is,

then, the purpose of *Cephalic Oil*. Indeed this oil, which stops the exfoliation of the pellicles, which exhales a sweet odor, and which, owing to the substances composing it, into which enters, as a chief element, hazel-nut essence, is proof against all action of the external air on the head, and thus prevents colds, coryza, and all the painful affections of the encephalon, by leaving it its internal temperature. In this way the bulbs that contain the generative liquor of the hair are never attacked either by cold or by heat. The hair,—that magnificent product,—to which both men and women attach so much value, then keeps, by means of *Cephalic Oil*, until the person using it reaches old age, that lustre, that fineness, that freshness which make children's heads so charming.

*Instructions for using* accompany each flask and serve as a wrapper for it.

#### MODE OF USING THE CEPHALIC OIL.

It is quite useless to oil the hair; it is not only a ridiculous prejudice, it is also a troublesome habit, in the sense that the cosmetic leaves its trace everywhere. It suffices every morning to wet a small fine sponge in the oil, to lift up the hair with a comb, to saturate the hair at its roots at each parting, so that the skin receives a light layer, after having previously cleansed the head with brush and comb.

This oil is sold in flasks bearing the inventor's signature, so as to prevent all counterfeiting, and at the price of THREE FRANCS, at A. POPINOT'S, Rue des Cinq-Diamants, Quartier des Lombards, Paris.

PEOPLE ARE ASKED TO WRITE PREPAID.

*Note.*—The house of A. Popinot also keeps the oils of the drug trade, such as neroli, aspic oil, sweet almond oil cacao oil, coffee oil, Palma Christi oil, and others.

“My dear friend,” said the Illustrious Gaudissart to Finot, “it is perfectly written. Zounds, how we are getting to the higher science! We are not going by twists and turns; we are going direct to the fact.

Ah! I offer you my sincere congratulations. This is useful literature."

"What a fine prospectus!" said Popinot, with enthusiasm.

"A prospectus whose first word kills Macassar," said Gaudissart, rising with a magisterial air to pronounce the following words which he scanned with parliamentary gestures: "'No one—can—make—the hair—grow! no one—dyes—it—without—danger!' Ha! ha! there is success. Modern science is in accord with the habits of the ancients. One can have an understanding with the old and with the young. You have to deal with an old man: 'Ah! ha! sir, the ancients, the Greeks, the Romans, were right, and were not so stupid as some would like to make us believe!' You are treating with a young man. 'My dear boy, one more discovery due to the progress of enlightenment. We are progressing. What may we not expect from steam, the telegraph and other things! This oil is the result of a report made by Monsieur Vauquelin!' Suppose we print a passage of Monsieur Vauquelin's memoir to the Academy of Science, confirming our assertions, eh! Famous! Let us go to table, Finot! Let us chew the vegetables! Let us guzzle the champagne to the success of our young friend!"

"I thought," said the author, modestly, "that the time for light and jocular prospectuses had passed. We are entering on the period of science; we must have a doctoral air, a tone of authority, in order to impose on the public."

“We will warm that oil; my feet are itching, and so is my tongue. I have the orders of all those who deal in hair. No one gives over thirty per cent any more; one must make forty per cent discount. I answer for a hundred thousand bottles in six months. I will attack pharmacists, grocers, hair-dressers! and, by giving them forty per cent, all will gull their customers.”

The three young men ate like lions, drank like Swiss, and became intoxicated over the future success of the *Cephalic Oil*.

“This oil goes to the head,” said Finot, smiling.

Gaudissart exhausted the different series of puns on the words oil, hair, head, etc. In the midst of the Homeric laughter of the three friends, as dessert, in spite of the toasts and the reciprocal wishes for success, a loud knock resounded and was heard.

“It is my uncle! It is like him to come to see me,” exclaimed Popinot.

“An uncle?” said Finot; “and we haven’t a glass!”

“My friend Popinot’s uncle is a committing judge,” said Gaudissart to Finot. “It is not a question of mystifying him; he saved my life. Ah! when one has found himself in the pass in which I was, in sight of the scaffold, where *houik*, and good-by to your hair!” he said, imitating the fatal blade with a gesture, “one remembers the worthy magistrate to whom one is indebted for having the pipe through which champagne passes! One remembers him even when dead drunk. You do not know, Finot,

whether you may not need Monsieur Popinot. Zounds, toasts are necessary and six to the franc still."

The noble committing judge called, in effect, to his nephew from the gate. On recognizing the voice, Anselme went down, holding a candlestick in his hand to show the way.

"I salute you, gentlemen," said the magistrate.

The illustrious Gaudissart bowed profoundly. Finot examined the judge with a tipsy eye, and found him passably thick-skulled.

"There is no luxury here," gravely remarked the judge, as he looked around the room; "but, my boy, to be something great, you must know how to begin by being nothing."

"What a profound man!" said Gaudissart to Finot.

"A thought for an article," said the newspaper man.

"Ah! there you are, sir," said the judge, as he recognized the traveling agent. "Eh! what are you doing here?"

"Sir, I wish to contribute with all my little might to your dear nephew's success. We have just been meditating on the prospectus for his oil, and you see in this gentleman the author of this prospectus, which seems to us one of the finest pieces of this wig literature."

The judge looked at Finot.

"The gentleman," said Gaudissart, "is Monsieur Andoche Finot, one of the most distinguished young men in literature, who writes up in the Government

newspapers the more important politics and the minor theatricals; and is now fairly on the way to being an author."

Finot pulled the skirt of Gaudissart's frock-coat.

"Good, my boys," said the judge, to whom these words explained the appearance of the table, on which were seen the remains of a feast that was quite excusable. "My friend," said the judge to Popinot, "get dressed. We are going this evening to Monsieur Birotteau's, to whom I owe a visit. You will sign your partnership deed, which I have carefully examined. As you will have your oil factory on the land in the Faubourg du Temple, I think he ought to give you a lease of the workshop, with the right of assignment. When matters are in good shape they save discussion. These walls to me seem damp; Anselme, put straw mats where your bed is to be."

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Juge," said Gaudissart, with the slyness of a courtier, "we have ourselves hung this paper this very day, and—it—has not—dried—yet."

"Economy! good," said the judge.

"Listen," said Gaudissart in Finot's ear. "My friend Popinot is a virtuous young man; he is going with his uncle. Let us go and spend the rest of the evening with our fair friends."

The newspaper man showed the lining of his vest pocket. Popinot saw the movement, and passed twenty francs to the author of his prospectus. The judge had a hackney-coach at the end of the street,



and took his nephew to Birotteau's. Pillerault, Monsieur and Madame Ragon and Roguin were playing boston, and Césarine was embroidering a neckerchief, when Judge Popinot and Anselme made their appearance. Roguin, who sat opposite to Madame Ragon, near whom was Césarine, remarked the girl's pleasure when she saw Anselme enter; and, by a sign, he called his chief clerk's attention to her blushing as red as a pomegranate.

"It will, then, be the day of deeds?" said the perfumer when, the salutations being over, the judge had told him the reason for his visit.

César, Anselme and the judge went to the third floor, to the perfumer's emergency room, to discuss the lease and the deed of partnership drawn up by the magistrate. The lease was consented to for eighteen years, in order to make it agree with that of the Rue des Cinq-Diamants, an apparently unimportant circumstance, but one that later on served Birotteau's interests. When César and the judge returned to the entresol, the magistrate, astonished at the general upset and the workmen's presence on Sunday at the house of a man so religious as was the perfumer, asked the reason for it, and the perfumer had him there.

"Though you be not a worldly man, sir, you will not think it ill that we should celebrate the deliverance of the territory. That is not all. If I gather together some friends, it is also to have a feast in honor of my promotion to the Order of the Legion of Honor."

“ Ah!” remarked the judge, who was not decorated.

“ Perhaps I have made myself worthy of this distinguished and royal favor by sitting in the Tribunal—oh! of Commerce, and fighting for the Bourbons on the steps—”

“ Yes,” said the judge.

“—Of Saint-Roch, on the thirteenth Vendémiaire, where I was wounded by Napoléon.”

“ By all means,” said the judge. “ If my wife be not ill, I will bring her.”

“ Xandrot,” said Roguin, on the door-step, to his clerk, “ do not think on any account of marrying Césarine, and in six weeks you will see that I have given you good advice.”

“ Why?” asked Crottat.

“ Birotteau, my dear fellow, is going to spend a hundred thousand francs on his ball. He has risked his fortune in this business of the land in spite of my advice. In six weeks those folks will not have even bread. Marry Mademoiselle Lourdois, the house painter’s daughter; she has three hundred thousand francs dowry. I have managed this shift for you! If you only give me a hundred thousand francs as a consideration for my office, you can have it to-morrow.”

\*

The magnificence of the ball that the perfumer was preparing, announced throughout Europe by the newspapers, was quite otherwise heralded in trade by the rumors occasioned by the work going on day and night. Here, it was said that César had rented three houses; there, that he was having his parlors gilded; farther on, the banquet was to have dishes invented for the occasion; over there, merchants, it was said, would not be invited to it, the feast was to be given for employés of the Government; this way, the perfumer was severely criticised for his ambition, and people made fun of his political pretensions, denied that he had been wounded! The ball was the occasion of more than one intrigue in the second arrondissement; friends were peacefully disposed, but the pretensions of mere acquaintances were truly wonderful. Every favor brings courtiers. There were quite a number of people to whom their invitation cost more than one application. The Birotteaus were astounded at the number of friends whom they did not recognize. This pressure frightened Madame Birotteau; her mien became day by day more and more sombre, as this solemnity approached. At first she acknowledged to César that she never knew what face to put on. She was frightened at the innumerable details of such a feast: where find plate, glassware, refreshments,

dishes, service? And who, then, would superintend everything? She entreated Birotteau to take his stand at the entrance to their tenement and not let anyone pass in, but those who had been invited. She had heard strange things told about people who came to bourgeois balls, claiming to be friends of those whom they could not name. When, ten days before, Braschon, Grindot, Lourdois and Chaffaroux, the building contractor, had asserted that the tenement would be ready for the famous Sunday, December 17, there was a laughable conference in the evening, after dinner, in the modest little parlor of the entresol, between César, his wife and his daughter, to make up the list of the guests and send out the invitations, which that morning a printer had sent printed in beautiful English style, on rose-tinted paper, and according to the formula of the code of puerile and honest civility.

"Ah, now! let us not forget anybody," said Birotteau.

"If we forget anyone," said Constance, "they will never forget us. Madame Derville, who had never paid us a visit, landed here yesterday evening in a four-in-hand."

"She looked fine," said Césarine; "I was pleased with her."

"Yet before her marriage she was even less than I," said Constance; "she worked on linen, on Rue Montmartre, making shirts at her father's."

"Well, let us begin the list," said Birotteau, "with the most swell people. Césarine, write:

Monsieur le Duc and Madame la Duchesse de Lenoncourt—”

“My goodness! César,” said Constance, “do not send a single invitation to persons whom you know only from supplying goods to them. Are you going to invite the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, still more closely related to your late god-mother, the Marquise d’Uxelles, than the Duc de Lenoncourt? Would you invite the two Messieurs de Vandenesse, Monsieur de Marsay, Monsieur de Ronquerolles, Monsieur d’Aiglemont, in fine, your customers? You are a fool, greatness is turning your head—”

“Yes! but Monsieur le Comte de Fontaine and his family. Eh! He came under his name of *Grand-Jacques*, with *Le Gars*, who was Monsieur le Marquis de Montauran, and Monsieur de la Billardière, who was called *Le Nantais*, to *La Reine des Roses*, before the great affair of the thirteenth Vendémiaire. That was a time for handshaking! ‘My dear Birotteau, courage! Let yourself be killed like us for the good cause!’ We are old-time comrades in conspiracy.”

“Put him down,” said Constance. “If Monsieur de la Billardière and his son come, they must have some one they can talk to.”

“Write, Césarine,” said Birotteau, “*primo*: the Prefect of the Seine. He may come or may not come, but he is in command of the municipal body: *honor to whom honor is due!*—Monsieur de la Billardière and his son, the mayor. Put the number of those invited at the end.—My colleague, Monsieur

Granet, the deputy, and his wife. She is very plain, but that is all the same, we cannot dispense with her!—Monsieur Curel, the goldsmith, colonel of the National Guard, his wife and two daughters. They are what I call the authorities. Then come the big-wigs!—Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse de Fontaine, and their daughter, Mademoiselle Émilie de Fontaine.”

“An impertinent damsel, who takes me out of my shop to speak to me at her carriage door, no matter what kind of weather it be,” said Madame César. “If she comes, it will be to make fun of us.”

“Then she will perhaps come,” said César, who wanted people by all means. “Continue, Césarine.—Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse de Granville, my landlord, that most famous head-piece of the royal court, Derville says.—Ah! See! Monsieur de la Billardière will have me received as chevalier to-morrow by Monsieur le Comte de Lacépède himself. It is right that I should slip an invitation to the ball and to dinner to the Grand Chancellor.—Monsieur Vauquelin.—Put him down for ball and dinner, Césarine. And, so as not to forget them, all the Chiffrevilles and Protezes.—Monsieur Popinot, judge in the tribunal of the Seine, and Madame Popinot.—Monsieur Thirion, usher to the king’s office, and Madame Thirion, the Ragons’ friends, and their daughter, who is going, it is said, to marry one of Monsieur Camusot’s sons by his first wife.”

“César, do not forget little Horace Bianchon,

Monsieur Popinot's nephew and Anselme's cousin," said Constance.

"Oh, certes! Césarine has indeed put a four after the Popinots.—Monsieur Rabourdin, one of the heads of a bureau in Monsieur de la Billardière's department, and Madame Rabourdin.—Monsieur Cochin, of the same department, his wife and son, the silent partners of the Matifats, and Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselle Matifat, as long as we are at them."

"The Matifats," said Césarine, "have put in a word for Monsieur and Madame Colleville, Monsieur and Madame Thuillier, their friends, and the Saillards."

"We will see," said César. "Our brokers, Monsieur and Madame Jules Desmarests."

"She will be the belle of the ball, will she?" said Césarine; "she pleases me; oh! more than any one else."

"Derville and his wife."

"Put down, then, Monsieur and Madame Coquelin, my uncle Pillerault's successors," said Constance. "They are counting so much on being present that the poor little woman is having my dress-maker make a superb ball-dress: a robe of tulle embroidered with chicory flowers over white satin. A little more and she would have had a dress enriched so as to go to the court. If we failed in that we would have had them for bitter enemies."

"Put down, Césarine—we should honor trade, for we are in it ourselves—Monsieur and Madame Roguin."

“Mamma, Madame Roguin will put on her necklace, all her diamonds and her Mechlin-trimmed dress.”

“Monsieur and Madame Lebas,” said César. “Then the president of the Tribunal of Commerce, his wife and two daughters. I overlooked them in enumerating the authorities. Monsieur and Madame Lourdois and their daughter. Monsieur Claparon, the banker, Monsieur Du Tillet, Monsieur Grindot, Monsieur Molineux, Pillerault and his landlord, Monsieur and Madame Camusot, the rich silk dealers, with all their children, him of the Polytechnic School and the lawyer: he is going to be appointed to a judgeship, on account of his marriage with Mademoiselle Thirion.”

“But in the provinces,” said Césarine.

“Monsieur Cardot, Camusot’s father-in-law, and all the young Cardots. Hold! and the Guillaumes, of the Rue du Colombier, Lebas’s father-in-law, two old people who will fill up: Alexandre Crottat, Célestine—”

“Papa, don’t forget Monsieur Andoche Finot and Monsieur Gaudissart, two young men who are very useful to Monsieur Anselme.”

“Gaudissart? He has been *hauled up in court*. But it is all the same: he is going away in a few days and will travel for our oil—put him down! As for Sieur Andoche Finot, what is he to us?”

“Monsieur Anselme says he will become a somebody, he has ability like Voltaire.”

“An author? All atheists.”



“Put him down, papa; so far there are not so many dancers. Moreover, that fine prospectus for your oil is his work.”

“He believes in our oil,” said César; “put him down, darling.”

“I am putting down my protégés, also,” said Césarine.

“Put down Monsieur Mitral, my constable; Monsieur Haudry, our doctor, for form’s sake, as he will not come.”

“He will come just to do his part,” said Césarine.

“Ah, there! I hope, César, that you will invite Monsieur l’Abbé Loraux to dinner?”

“I have already written to him,” said César.

“Oh! don’t let us forget Lebas’s sister-in-law, Madame Augustine de Sommervieux,” said Césarine. “Poor little woman! she is a great sufferer; she is killing herself with grief, Lebas has told us.”

“That’s what it is to marry an artist,” exclaimed the perfumer. “Just look at your mother going to sleep,” he said in an undertone to his daughter. “Ha! ha! good evening, then, Madame César. Well,” said César to Césarine, “and your mother’s dress?”

“Yes, papa, everything will be ready. Mamma thinks she has only one dress, the China crape one, like mine; the dressmaker is sure she will not have to try it on.”

“How many persons?” César asked in a loud voice as he saw his wife reopen her eyes.

“One hundred and nine, including the clerks,” said Césarine.

“Where shall we put all those people?” remarked Madame Birotteau. “But at last, after that Sunday,” she continued artlessly, “there will be a Monday.”

Nothing can be done in a simple way by people who go up from one social stage to another. Neither Madame Birotteau, nor César, nor anyone could under any pretext intrude on the second floor. César had promised Raguet, his shop-boy, a new suit of clothes for the day of the ball, if he kept faithful guard and carried out his task well. Birotteau, like the Emperor Napoléon at Compiègne at the time of the restoration of the castle for his marriage to Marie Louise of Austria, wanted to see nothing half done; he wished to enjoy *the surprise*. These two former adversaries met once more, without their knowing it, not on a field of battle, but on that of middle-class vanity. Monsieur Grindot was, then, to take César by the hand and show him the tenement, as a guide shows a gallery to a sight-seer. Each person in the house had, moreover, invented *his or her surprise*. Césarine, the dear child, used all of her small treasure, a hundred louis, to buy books for her father. Monsieur Grindot had, one morning, confided to her that there would be two book-cases in her father's room, which formed an office—an architect's surprise. Césarine threw all her savings as a young girl on a bookseller's counter, to get for her father: Bossuet, Racine, Voltaire,

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, Molière, Buffon, Fénelon, Delille, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, La Fontaine, Corneille, Pascal, La Harpe, in fine, those common books that are to be found everywhere and which her father would never read. There was to be an enormous bill for binding. The sloppy and yet famous book-binder, Thouvenin, an artist, promised to deliver the volumes on the eighteenth, at noon. Césarine confided her embarrassment to her uncle Pillerault, and the uncle undertook to foot the bill. César's surprise to his wife was a cherry-colored velvet dress trimmed with lace, of which he had just spoken to his daughter, his accomplice. Madame Birotteau's surprise to the new chevalier consisted of a pair of gold buckles and a solitaire pin. In fine, there was for the whole family the surprise of the tenement, which was to be followed in a fortnight by the great surprise of the bills to be paid.

César weighed carefully which invitations were to be given in person and which should be taken by Raguet in the evening. He hired a hack, into which he placed his wife disfigured with a feather-trimmed hat and the last shawl he had given her, the cashmere that she had desired for fifteen years. The perfumers in full dress disposed of twenty-two visits in a forenoon.

César spared his wife all the trouble caused by the middle-class cooking at home of the different comestibles that the splendor of the feast required. A diplomatic treaty was concluded between the famous

Chevet and Birotteau. Chevet supplied superb plate, to rent which cost as much as an estate; he furnished dinner, wines, servants commanded by a head-waiter of agreeable mien, all responsible for their doings and actions. Chevet required the kitchen and the dining-room of the entresol to set up his general quarters in; he was not the man to slight serving a dinner for twenty persons at six o'clock, and at one in the morning a magnificent collation. Birotteau had an understanding with the Café Foy for iced fruit, served in pretty cups, with silver-gilt spoons and silver trays. Tanrade, another famous personage, furnished the refreshments.

“Make your mind easy,” said César to his wife, on seeing her a little too restless the second evening before; “Chevet, Tanrade and the Café Foy will occupy the entresol, Virginie will look to the third, the shop will be securely closed, we will have only to strut on the second.”

On the sixteenth, at two o'clock, Monsieur de la Billardière came for César to bring him to the Chancellor's office of the Legion of Honor, where he was to be initiated as a chevalier by the Comte de Lacépède, along with a half score other chevaliers. The mayor found the perfumer with tears in his eyes: Constance had just given him the surprise of the gold buckles and the solitaire.

“It is too sweet to be so loved,” he said as he got into the hack in the presence of his assembled clerks, Césarine and Constance.

They all looked at César in black silk breeches,

silk stockings, and the new blue-bottle coat, on the lapel of which was going to shine the ribbon that, according to Molineux, was steeped in blood.

When César returned at dinner-time he was pale from joy; he looked at his Cross in all the mirrors; for, in his first intoxication, he was not merely satisfied with the Ribbon, he was glorious, without any false modesty.

“Wife,” he said, “the Grand Chancellor is a charming man; at a mere suggestion from La Billardière he accepted my invitation; he is coming along with Monsieur Vauquelin. Monsieur de Lacépède is a great man, yes, just as great as Monsieur Vauquelin; he has written forty volumes! But he is also an author who is a Peer of France. Let us not forget to address him as ‘Your Lordship’ or Count.”

“Go on and eat,” his wife said to him. “He is worse than a child, is your father,” said Constance to Césarine.

“How becoming that is in your buttonhole,” said Césarine. “We will have your arms brought to you, and we will go out together.”

“My arms shall be brought to me whenever there are sentries needed.”

At that moment Grindot came down along with Braschon. “After dinner, sir, madame and the young lady may enjoy a look at the rooms. Braschon’s first apprentice is nailing the last of some curtain-holders, and three of the men are lighting the candles.”

“A hundred and twenty candles are needed,” said Braschon.

“A bill of two hundred francs at Trudon’s,” said Madame César, whose complaints were stopped by a look from Chevalier Birotteau.

“Your feast will be magnificent, chevalier,” said Braschon.

Birotteau said to himself:

“Flatterers already! The Abbé Loraux has been so good as to put me on my guard against these stumbling-blocks and hinted to me to remain modest. I will remember my origin.”

César did not understand what the rich upholsterer of the Rue Saint-Antoine meant. Braschon made eleven useless attempts to be invited, he, his wife, his daughter, his mother-in-law and his aunt. Braschon became Birotteau’s enemy. Once on the door-step he no longer called him “chevalier.”

The general rehearsal began. César, his wife and Césarine left the shop and went to their living-rooms by way of the street. The door of the house had been remodeled in grand style, with two sections, divided into equal and square panels, between which was an architectural ornament of cast-iron painted. This door, which has become so common in Paris, was then quite a novelty. At the lower end of the vestibule the stairway was to be seen, divided into two straight flights, between which was that support about which Birotteau had been so anxious, and which formed a species of box in which an old woman could be stationed. This vestibule,

flagged with white and black marble, and painted marble color, was lighted by an antique lamp with four burners. In the architecture, richness was blended with simplicity. A narrow red carpet relieved the whiteness of the steps of the staircase, polished with pumice-stone. A first landing led to the entresol. The door to the living-quarters was after the manner of the street door, but in wood-work.

“How graceful!” said Césarine. “And yet there is nothing that strikes the eye.”

“Precisely, Mademoiselle, that is due to the exact proportions between stylobata, plinths, cornices and ornaments; then I have gilded nothing, the colors are subdued and present no striking tints.”

“It is a science,” said Césarine.

All then entered the ante-chamber, which was in good taste, tessellated, spacious, and simply decorated. Then came a salon with three windows on the street, in white and red, with cornices in elegant profile, with fine decorating, in which there was nothing gaudy. On a white colonnaded marble mantel was a trimming chosen with taste; it presented nothing ridiculous, and was in keeping with the other details. There reigned, in fine, that suave harmony which artists alone know how to bring about by following a system of decorating even in the most minute accessories, and of which middle-class folk are ignorant, but which surprises them. The light of twenty-four candles brought out

the splendor of the red silk draperies, the floor had an alluring appearance that moved Césarine to dance. A green and white boudoir led into César's office.

"I have put a bed there," said Grindot as he opened the doors of an alcove skilfully concealed between two book-cases. "You or madame may be sick, and then each has a separate room."

"But this library furnished with bound books— Oh! wife! wife!" said César.

"No, this is Césarine's surprise."

"Pardon a father's emotion," said he to the architect as he embraced his daughter.

"But do it, do it, then, sir," said Grindot, "you are at home."

In this office prevailed brown colors, relieved by green embellishment, for the most skilfully handled transitions of harmony connected all the parts of the tenement with one another. Thus the color that formed the main feature of one room served as the accessory to the other, and *vice versa*. The engraving of *Hero and Leander* was displayed on a panel in César's office.

"You, you will pay for all that," said Birotteau gaily.

"This beautiful print has been given to you by Monsieur Anselme," said Césarine.

Anselme also had allowed himself a surprise.

"Poor boy, he did as I did for Monsieur Vauquelin."

Madame Birotteau's room came next. There the architect had displayed magnificence of a nature to



please the good people whom he wished to inveigle, for he had kept his word while studying this *restoration*. The room was hung with blue silk, with white ornaments; the furniture was in white cashmere with blue accessories. On the mantel-piece, of white marble, the clock represented Venus set on a fine block of marble; a pretty moquette carpet, of a Turkish pattern, connected this room with Césarine's, which was hung in chintz and very coquettish: a piano, a pretty glass closet, a neat little bed with simple curtains, and all the little articles of furniture that young persons like. The dining-room was behind Birotteau's room and that of his wife; it was entered from the stairway; it had been treated in the style called Louis XIV. with a Boulle clock, buffets of copper and tortoise-shell, the walls hung with stuff with gilt nails. The joy these three persons felt cannot be described, especially when, on returning to her room, Madame Birotteau found on her bed the cherry velvet dress trimmed with lace, given to her by her husband, and which Virginie had brought thither and then went away on tiptoe.

"These rooms are decidedly creditable to you, sir," said Constance to Grindot. "We will have over a hundred persons to-morrow evening, and you will receive praise from every one of them."

"I will recommend you," said César. "You will see *the cream* of trade, and you will become better known in a single evening than if you had built a hundred houses."

Constance was so moved that she no longer thought of expense or of criticising her husband. This is why. In the morning, while bringing *Hero and Leander*, Anselme Popinot, to whom Constance credited a high degree of intelligence and fertile resources, had assured her of the success of the *Cephalic Oil*, on which he was working with unexampled zeal. The lover had promised that, in spite of the great cost of Birotteau's whims, in six months the expenses would be covered by his share in the profits derived from the oil. After having been in trepidation for nineteen years, it was so sweet to yield to even a single day's pleasure that Constance promised her daughter not to mar her husband's happiness by any reflection, and to let him enter into it heart and soul. When, about eleven o'clock, Monsieur Grindot left them, she accordingly threw herself on her husband's neck and shed some tears of satisfaction, saying:

"Oh! César, you make me quite silly and very happy."

"Provided it lasts, is it not?" said César, smiling.

"It will last, I have no more fear," said Madame Birotteau.

"It is time," said the perfumer, "but at last you appreciate me."

People who are big enough to recognize their weaknesses will acknowledge that a poor orphan who, eighteen years before, was head saleswoman at the *Petit Matelot*, on the Ile Saint-Louis, that a poor peasant who had come from Touraine to Paris with

a cudgel in his hand, on foot, in hobnailed shoes, ought to be flattered, happy at giving such a feast for such praiseworthy motives.

“My God, I would give at least a hundred francs,” said César, “for one visit to be made to us.”

“Here comes the Abbé Loraux,” said Virginie.

The Abbé Loraux made his appearance. This priest was then curate at Saint-Sulpice. Never was soul power better revealed than in this holy priest, intercourse with whom left profound impressions in the memory of all who knew him. His sullen countenance, so ugly as to repel confidence, had been rendered sublime by the exercise of Catholic virtues: there shone upon it in anticipation a celestial splendor. A candor infused into his blood kept his ungracious traits within bounds, and the fire of charity purified his irregular lines by a phenomenon the contrary of that which, in Claparon, had animalized and degraded everything. In his wrinkles played the graces of the three beautiful human virtues, faith, hope and charity. He was mild, slow and penetrating of speech. His costume was that of the Parisian priests; he allowed himself to wear a chestnut-brown overcoat. No ambition had stolen its way into this pure heart, which the angels must have borne to God in its primitive innocence. The mild violence of the daughter of Louis XVI. would be needed to make the Abbé Loraux accept even the poorest Paris parish. He looked with a restless eye at all this magnificence, smiled at those three dealers who were delighted, and shook his whitened head.

“My children,” he said to them, “my part is not to attend feasts, but to console the afflicted. I have come to thank Monsieur César, to congratulate you. I wish to come here only to a single feast, to this beautiful girl’s wedding.”

After a quarter of an hour the Abbé retired without either the perfumer or his wife daring to show him the rooms. This grave apparition threw some cold water on César’s ebullition of joy. Each one lay down amid his or her splendor, taking possession of the fine and pretty little articles of furniture that each had wished for. Césarine disrobed her mother before a dressing-table of white marble supporting a mirror. César had provided for himself some superfluities that he wanted to use immediately. All went to sleep picturing to themselves in advance the joys of the morrow. After having gone to Mass and read the Vesper service, Césarine and her mother dressed at four o’clock, having previously turned over the entresol to the profane uses of Chevet’s people. Never had toilet been more becoming to Madame César than that cherry velvet dress, trimmed with lace, with short jockey sleeves; her fine arms, still fresh and young, her shining white breast, her neck, her shoulders so prettily shaped, were enhanced by this rich stuff and by this magnificent color. The unaffected satisfaction that every woman feels on seeing herself in all her glory gave an indescribable suavity to the Greek profile of the perfumer’s wife, whose beauty appeared in all its cameo fineness. Césarine, dressed

in white crape, had a crown of white roses on her head, a rose at her side; a scarf chastely covered her shoulders and bust; she made Popinot crazy.

"Those people overwhelm us," said Madame Roguin to her husband, as she crossed the rooms.

The notary's wife was furious at not being as pretty as Madame César, for every woman always knows in her heart in what way to regard superiority or inferiority in a rival.

"Bah! that will not last a great while; ere long you will despise the poor woman when meeting her on foot in the street, ruined!" said Roguin in an undertone to his wife.

Vauquelin was perfectly gracious; he came along with Monsieur de Lacépède, his colleague at the Institute, who had gone to take him in his carriage. On seeing the resplendent wife of the perfumer, the two scholars fell into scientific compliments.

"You, madame, have a secret that science is ignorant of, to remain so young and beautiful," said the chemist.

"You are somewhat at home here, Professor," said Birotteau. "Yes, Count," he continued, turning to the Grand Chancellor of the Legion of Honor, "I owe my fortune to Monsieur Vauquelin. I have the honor to present to Your Lordship the president of the Tribunal of Commerce. This is the Comte de Lacépède, Peer of France, one of the great men of France; he has written forty volumes," said he to Joseph Lebas, who accompanied the president of the court.

The guests were on time. The dinner was what tradespeople's dinners are, extremely gay, full of good nature, punctuated with coarse pleasantries that always excite laughter. The excellence of the courses, the good quality of the wine, were well appreciated. When the company went back to the salon to partake of coffee, it was half-past nine. Some hacks had brought impatient lady dancers. An hour later the salon was full, and the ball assumed an air of festivity. Monsieur de Lacépède and Monsieur Vauquelin took their leave, to Birotteau's great disappointment, for he followed them as far as the stairway, entreating them to remain, but to no purpose. He succeeded in keeping Judge Popinot and Monsieur de la Billardière. With the exception of three women who represented the aristocracy, finance and the administration: Mademoiselle de Fontaine, Madame Jules, and Madame Rabourdin, and whose decided beauty, get-up and manners were conspicuous in the midst of that assembly, the women presented to the eye dull, solid toilets, that indescribable substantiality which gives to the middle-class masses a common appearance, which the ease and grace of those three women brought into painful prominence.

The middle-class of the Rue Saint-Denis made a majestic display by showing themselves in all the plenitude of their rights of buffoon stupidity. It was indeed that middle-class that clothes its children as lancers and National Guards, that buys *Victories and Conquests*, *The Laborer turned Soldier*, admires *The*

*Poor Man's Funeral*, enjoys itself on guard day, goes on Sunday to a country house by itself, is anxious to have the appearance of distinction, and dreams of municipal honors; that middle-class jealous of everything, and yet good, obliging, devoted, sensible, compassionate, subscribing for General Foy's children, for the Greeks whose piracies are unknown to them, for the Champ-d'Asile at a time when it is no longer in existence, duped by its virtues and cuffed for its defects by a society that is not worthy of it, for it is kind-hearted precisely because it is ignorant of the proprieties; that virtuous middle-class that rears daughters broken to work, full of qualities that contact with the higher classes diminishes as soon as it launches them into it, those girls without intellect, from among whom the good-natured Chrysalus would have taken his wife; finally, a middle-class admirably represented by the Matifats, the druggists of the Rue des Lombards, whose house had supplied *La Reine des Roses* for sixty years past.

Madame Matifat, who wanted to assume a dignified air, danced with her head covered by a turban and wearing a dull red-poppy dress with gold-leaves, a toilet in harmony with a proud bearing, a Roman nose and the splendors of a crimson complexion. Monsieur Matifat, so superb at a National Guard review, where, fifty yards away, one could see his rotund paunch, on which hung his chain and packet of gewgaws, was ruled by that Catherine II. of the counting-room. Stout and short, harnessed with barnacles, wearing his shirt collar as high as the

base of his skull, he attracted attention by his tenor voice and the richness of his vocabulary. Never did he say Corneille, but "the sublime Corneille." Racine was "the sweet Racine." Voltaire! oh! Voltaire, "the second in all lines, more wit than genius, but yet a man of genius!" Rousseau, "a skittish mind, a man filled with pride and who ended by hanging himself." He told in a dull way vulgar anecdotes about Piron, who passes for a wonderful man among the middle-classes. Matifat, enthusiastic over actresses, had a slight tendency to obscenity; it was even said that, in imitation of the good-natured Cardot and the rich Camusot, he kept a mistress. Sometimes Madame Matifat, on observing that he was about to tell some anecdote, lost no time in interrupting him with a head-splitting shout: "Fatty, be careful about what you are going to tell us." She called him familiarly her fatty. This bulky queen of drugs made Mademoiselle de Fontaine lose her aristocratic countenance; the proud girl could not refrain from smiling on hearing her say to Matifat:

"Don't run against the glass, fatty; it is bad form."

It is harder to explain the difference that distinguishes the upper from the middle class than it is for the latter to overcome it. Those women, constrained in their toilets, knew they were in Sunday clothes and unwittingly displayed a joy which proved that the ball was a rarity in their busy life; but as the three women who represented each a social sphere were then as they were to be on the morrow,



they had not the appearance of having dressed expressly. They did not keep thinking of themselves in the unaccustomed marvels of their get-up, were not disturbed about its effect; everything had been done when, in front of their glass, they had given the last touch to the work of their ball toilet. Their figures revealed nothing extraordinary, they danced with grace and the ease that unknown geniuses have given to certain ancient statues. The others, on the contrary, marked with the seal of work, kept to their vulgar pose and amused themselves too much; their looks were inconsiderately curious, their voices did not observe that light murmur which gives inimitable point to ball conversations; especially they had not the serious impertinence that contains the epigram in germ, nor that easy attitude by which people are recognized who are accustomed to keeping great control over themselves. And so Madame Rabourdin, Madame Jules and Mademoiselle de Fontaine, who had anticipated deriving great pleasure from this perfumer's ball, were conspicuous over the whole middle class by their soft graces, the exquisite taste of their toilets, and their jest, just as three leading figures at the Opera are distinguished from the dull hosts of the supers. They were observed by a stupid, jealous eye. Madame Roguin, Constance and Césarine formed, as it were, a bond that connected the figures of trade with these three types of feminine aristocracy. As at all balls, there came a moment of animation when the torrents of light, the glee, the

music and the warmth of the dancing caused a giddiness that made those shades disappear in the combined crescendo. The ball threatened to become noisy. Mademoiselle de Fontaine wished to retire; but as she sought the venerable Vendean's arm, Birotteau, his wife and daughter ran to prevent the desertion of all the aristocracy from their assemblage.

"These rooms display an air of good taste that really astonishes me," said the impertinent girl to the perfumer, "and I congratulate you on it."

Birotteau's head was so turned by the public felicitations that he did not understand; but his wife blushed and knew not what answer to make.

"This is a national feast that does you honor," said Camusot to him.

"I have seldom seen so fine a ball," said Monsieur de la Billardière, to whom an officious lie cost nothing.

Birotteau took all the compliments seriously.

"What a delightful sight! and such a good orchestra! Will you give us balls often?" said Madame Lebas to him.

"What charming rooms! Your own taste?" Madame Desmarests said to him.

Birotteau risked a lie by leaving her to believe that it was he who directed it. Césarine, who would be invited to all the country-dances, knew how much delicacy there was in Anselme.

"If I were to pay attention only to my own wishes," he whispered in her ear as they were leaving table, "I would beg of you to do me the

favor of a country-dance; but my happiness would be too dearly bought at the price of our mutual self-respect."

Césarine, who found that men walked awkwardly when they were erect on their limbs, wanted to open the ball with Popinot. Popinot, encouraged by his aunt, who had told him to make the attempt, made bold to speak of his love to that charming girl during the country-dance, but used the roundabout way taken by timid lovers.

"My fortune depends on you, Mademoiselle."

"How so?"

"There is only one hope that can urge me to make it."

"Hope, then."

"Do you know indeed all that you have said in a single word?" Popinot replied.

"Hope for fortune," said Césarine, with a mischievous smile.

"Gaudissart! Gaudissart!" said Anselme, after the country-dance, to his friend, as he pinched his arm with Herculean strength, "succeed, or I will blow out my brains. To succeed is to marry Césarine. She has told me so, and see how beautiful she looks!"

"Yes, she is prettily decked," said Gaudissart, "and rich. We are going to fry her in the oil."

The clear understanding between Mademoiselle Lourdois and Alexandre Crottat, Roguin's appointed successor, was remarked by Madame Birotteau, who did not without a keen pang give up the idea of

making her daughter the wife of a Paris notary. Uncle Pillerault, who had exchanged a greeting with little Molineux, went to settle himself in an arm-chair near the library: he looked at the players, listened to the conversation, and from time to time went to the door to see the baskets of flowers that were formed by the lady dancers whirling like a hand-mill. His countenance was that of a real philosopher. The men were frightful, with the exception of Du Tillet, who already had fashionable manners; of young la Billardière, a budding youth of fashion; of Monsieur Jules Desmarets and of the official personages. But, amid all the more or less comical figures to which this gathering owed its character, there was one particularly effaced like a Republican hundred sou piece, but whose dress made it curious. One will guess it is the petty tyrant of the Cour Batave, decked in fine linen that had turned yellow in the wardrobe, showing to the eye an inherited lace frill attached by a pin set with a bluish cameo, wearing black short silk breeches that betrayed the spindle-shanks on which they had made bold to rest. César triumphantly showed him the four rooms formed by the architect in the second story of his house.

“Eh! ah! that is your business, sir,” said Molineux to him. “My second so finished will be worth over a thousand crowns.”

Birotteau replied with a pleasantry, but he felt hurt, as if stabbed with a pin by the tone in which the little old man had uttered this expression. “I

will soon regain possession of my second; this man is ruining himself!" Such was the meaning of the words *will be worth* uttered by Molineux with a flourish.

The palish figure, the cut-throat eye of the landlord struck Du Tillet, whose attention had been at first excited by a watch-chain that held up a pound weight of various sounding trinkets, and by a coat of green mixed with white, neck-wear fantastically turned up, that gave to the old man the appearance of a rattlesnake. The banker came then to ask this little usurer by what chance he was chuckling.

"There, sir," said Molineux, as he planted one foot in the boudoir, "I am on the Count de Granville's property; but here," he said, showing the other, "I am on mine; for I am the owner of this house."

Molineux was so complacent to the listener that, delighted with Du Tillet's air of attention, he struck an attitude, told all about his habits, Sieur Gendrin's insolence, and his agreement with the perfumer, without which the ball would not have taken place.

"Ah! Monsieur César has settled his rent with you," said Du Tillet, "nothing is more out of keeping with his habits."

"Oh! I asked it of him, I am so good to my tenants!"

"If old man Birotteau fails," said Du Tillet to himself, "this funny little man will certainly make an excellent master in equity. His punctiliousness is most valuable; he must, like Domitian, amuse

himself with killing flies in the solitude of his home."

Du Tillet went to play cards, where Claparon already was by his orders; he had thought that, behind the shade of a lamp-flame, his semblance of a banker would escape all notice. Their manner towards each other was so clearly that of two strangers that the most suspicious man would not have been able to detect anything that could reveal their relations. Gaudissart, who was aware of Claparon's fortune, dared not approach him when he received from the rich former traveling agent the solemnly cold look of an upstart who does not want to be greeted by a comrade. This ball, like a brilliant rocket, went out at five o'clock in the morning. About that hour, of the hundred and some odd hacks that had filled the Rue Saint-Honoré, there remained about forty. At that hour they were dancing *La Boulangère*, which later on made way for the cotillion and the English galop. Du Tillet, Roguin, Cardot junior, the Comte de Granville and Jules Desmarets were playing *bouillotte*. Du Tillet won three thousand francs. Daylight arrived, made the candles look dim, and the players were taking part in the last country-dance. In those middle-class houses this supreme enjoyment is not carried out without some enormities. The imposing personages have left; the giddiness of movement, the communicative heat of the atmosphere, the spirits concealed in the most innocent beverages have softened the callousness of the old

women, who, from complaisance, take part in the quadrilles and lend themselves to a momentary folly; the men are heated, their disordered hair hangs down over their faces and gives them a grotesque expression that provokes mirth; the young women become frivolous, some of the flowers have fallen from their hair. The middle-class Momus appears followed by his maskers! Laughter breaks out, each one indulges in pleasantry, thinking that on the morrow work will reassert its rights. Mاتیfat was dancing with a woman's bonnet on his head; Célestin gave himself up to sallies. Some ladies clapped their hands inordinately when the figure of that interminable country-dance was made up.

"How they are enjoying themselves," said the happy Birotteau.

"Provided they break nothing," said Constance to her uncle.

"You have given the most magnificent ball that I have ever seen, and I have seen many," said Du Tillet to his old employer, as he saluted him.

In the work of Beethoven's eight symphonies there is a phantasie, grand as a poem, that dominates the *finale* of the symphony in C minor. When, after the slow preparations of the sublime magician so well understood by Habeneck, a gesture of the enthusiastic leader of the orchestra lifts the rich curtain of this decoration, calling up with his baton the sparkling *motif*, towards which all the powers of music have converged, the poets whose hearts palpitate then understand that Birotteau's ball

produced in his life the effect impressed on their souls by that fruitful *motif*, to which the symphony in C perhaps owes its supremacy over its brilliant sisters. A radiant fairy bounds forth raising its wand. One hears the rustling of the purple silk curtains that angels raise. Golden gates sculptured like those of the baptistry of Florence turn on their diamond hinges. The eye is engulfed in splendid views, it takes in a range of marvelous palaces whence issue beings of a superior nature. The incense of prosperity fumes, the altar of happiness is lit up, a perfumed atmosphere is around! Beings with a divine smile, clad in white tunics fringed with blue, pass lightly before your eyes, showing you forms of superhuman beauty, of infinite delicacy. The Loves skip about, scattering the flames of their torches! You feel yourself loved, you are happy with a happiness which you breathe without understanding it while bathing in the waves of this harmony that ripples and pours out to each one the ambrosia that each selects. You are struck to the heart in your secret hopes that are realized for a moment. After having led your footsteps through heaven, the enchanter, by the profound and mysterious transition of the basses, plunges you once more into the marsh of cold realities, to get yourself out of them when he has made you thirsty for his divine melodies, and when your soul exclaims: "Encore!" The psychological history of the most brilliant point of this beautiful finale is that of the emotions lavished by this feast on Constance and



César. Collinet had composed on his flute the finale of their trade symphony.

Weary, but happy, the three Birotteaus slept in the morning in the excitements of that feast, which, in building, repairs, furnishings, expenditures, toilets and library reimbursed by Césarine, reached, without César having suspected it, sixty thousand francs. That was the cost of the fatal red ribbon put by the king in a perfumer's buttonhole. If misfortune befell César Birotteau, this foolish expenditure sufficed to make him indictable before the police court. A merchant is in the state of simple bankruptcy if he incurs expenses that are deemed excessive. It is perhaps more horrible to go into the lowest court on account of silly trifles or blunders than into an assize court to answer for a great fraud. In the estimation of some people, it is better to be a criminal than a dolt.



CÉSAR IN THE CLUTCHES OF  
MISFORTUNE



## CÉSAR IN MISFORTUNE

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A week after this feast, the last spark of the straw fire of eighteen years' prosperity was about to be extinguished, César looked at the passers-by, through his shop window, thinking of the extent of his business, which he found weighing heavily on him! Until then everything had been simple in his life; he was manufacturing and selling, or buying to sell again. To-day the matter of the land, his interest in the house of A. POPINOT AND COMPANY, the paying out of a hundred and sixty thousand francs on the spot, and which was to necessitate either the negotiating of notes, that would displease his wife, or unexpected success in the Popinot house, frightened this poor man by the multiplicity of ideas; he felt he had more irons in the fire than he could attend to. How was Anselme steering his barque?

Birotteau treated Popinot as a professor of rhetoric treats a pupil; he was distrustful of his ability, and regretted not being at his side. The kick he had given him to make him hold his tongue at Vauquelin's explains the distrust with which the young merchant inspired the perfumer. Birotteau was very cautious not to let his wife, his daughter or his clerk see into

his affairs; but he was then, as it were, a mere boatman on the Seine to whom, perchance, a Minister might have entrusted the command of a frigate. These thoughts formed a sort of haze in his mind, by no means fit for meditation, and he remained standing, trying to see his way through it. At that moment there appeared in the street a figure towards which he felt a violent antipathy, and which was that of his second landlord, little Molineux. Everybody has had those dreams full of events that represent a whole lifetime, and in which often recurs a fantastic being entrusted with evil commissions, the villain of the play. Molineux seemed to Birotteau to be charged by chance with an analogous part in his life. This figure had grinned diabolically when the feast was at its height, regarding its sumptuousness with a hateful eye. On seeing him again César remembered so much the more the impressions that had been made upon him by this little forbidding fellow, that Molineux made him feel a fresh aversion on showing himself suddenly in the midst of his reveries.

“Sir,” said the little man, in his atrociously soothing voice, “we have closed up affairs so smartly that you have forgotten to approve the writing over our little signatures.”

Birotteau took the lease to correct his oversight. The architect entered, saluted the perfumer and turned around him with a diplomatic air.

“Sir,” he said, at last in his ear, “you know how it is to get along in the beginning of a trade. You are

satisfied with me, you will oblige me very much by letting me have my honorarium."

Birotteau, who had already emptied his pocket-book and got rid of all his loose change, told Célestin to make out a note for two thousand francs at three months, and to prepare a receipt.

"I was very glad that you assumed responsibility for your neighbor's term," said Molineux in a sullenly bantering tone. "My porter has come to notify me this morning that the justice of the peace has attached the seals in consequence of that man Cayron's disappearance."

"Provided that I am not squeezed for five thousand francs!" thought Birotteau.

"He had the reputation of attending to his business very closely," said Lourdois, who had just come in to leave his bill with the perfumer.

"A man in trade is proof against reverses only after he has retired," said little Molineux as he folded his document with minute regularity.

The architect examined this little old man with the pleasure that every artist experiences on seeing a caricature that confirms his opinion regarding the middle-class.

"When one has an umbrella over his head, he generally thinks that he is under shelter, if it rains," said the architect.

Molineux gave much more attention to the architect's mustaches and imperial than to his figure as he looked at him, and he despised him quite as much as Monsieur Grindot despised Molineux. Then he

remained to give him a tip as he went out. From the habit of living with his cats Molineux had in his manner as well as in his eye something of the feline nature.

At that moment Ragon and Pillerault entered.

“We have spoken of our affair to the judge,” said Ragon in César’s ear: “he pretends that in a speculation of this kind we should have a receipt from the sellers and have the deeds perfected, so that all would be really joint owners—”

“Ah! you are engaged in the Madeleine matter?” said Lourdois. “It is spoken of, there will be houses to build there!”

The painter, who had come in to have a prompt settlement, now found it to his interest not to press the perfumer.

“I will let you off with my bill because it is so near the end of the year,” he whispered in César’s ear; “I don’t need anything now.”

“Well, what ails you, César?” asked Pillerault, remarking his nephew’s surprise, for the latter, stunned by the amount of the bill, replied neither to Ragon nor to Lourdois.

“Oh! a trifle; I took five thousand francs’ worth of notes from the umbrella-dealer, my neighbor, and he has failed. If he had given me bad goods I would have been gulled like a simpleton.”

“It’s a long time, too, since I told you so,” Ragon exclaimed; “he who is drowning would hang on to his father’s leg to save himself, and drown him too. I have seen so much of these failures! one is not so



much of a cheat in the beginning of the disaster, but one becomes so of necessity."

"That is true," said Pillerault.

"Ah! if ever I get to the Chamber of Deputies, or if I have any influence in the Government—" said Birotteau, raising himself on tiptoe and then falling back on his heels.

"What will you do?" asked Lourdois, "for you are a sensible man."

Molineux, who was interested in every discussion on law, remained in the shop; and, as attention on the part of others makes one attentive, Pillerault and Ragon, though acquainted with César's views, listened to him, however, as attentively as did the three strangers.

"I would have," said the perfumer, "a tribunal of irremovable judges with public functions judging in criminal matters. After a hearing, during which a judge would directly perform the present duties of the agent, master and commissary judge, the merchant would be declared either insolvent with the privilege of resuming business, or bankrupt. Insolvent and privileged to resume, he would be obliged to pay all; he would then be agent for his property and for his wife's, for his rights and inheritance would all belong to his creditors; he would, however, carry on business on their account and under surveillance; in fine, he would continue the business, but sign for others thus: *So and so, insolvent*, until he had paid all. The bankrupt would be condemned as of old to the pillory in the hall of the Bourse,

exposed for two hours, with a green cap on his head. His goods, those of his wife, and their rights would be turned over to his creditors, and he would be banished from the kingdom."

"Trade would be a little safer," said Lourdois, "and one would look twice before entering into operations."

"The present law is not carried out," said César, exasperated. "Out of every hundred merchants there are over fifty who are more than seventy-five per cent behind in their business, or who sell their merchandise twenty-five per cent below the inventory price, and who thus ruin trade."

"The gentleman is right," said Molineux, "the present law gives too much latitude. Either absolute surrender or infamy is necessary."

"The deuce!" said César, "a merchant, in the way things are, is going to become a patented thief. With his signature he can draw upon everybody's credit."

"You are not charitable, Monsieur Birotteau," said Lourdois.

"He is right," said old Ragon.

"All those who fail are suspected," said César, exasperated by his small loss, which sounded in his ears as the first cry of the whoop in those of a stag.

At that moment the steward brought Chevet's bill. Then a messenger from Félix, an errand-boy from the Café Foy, and Collinet's clarinet came with the statements from their houses.

"Rabelais' quarter of an hour," said Ragon smiling.

“Faith, you gave a fine feast,” said Lourdois.

“I am engaged,” said César to all the messengers, who left the bills.

“Monsieur Grindot,” said Lourdois, as he saw the architect folding a note signed by Birotteau, “you will verify and indorse my statement; there is nothing to be done but to measure; all the prices were agreed upon by you in Monsieur Birotteau’s name.”

Pillerault looked at Lourdois and Grindot.

“Prices agreed upon between architect and contractor,” said the uncle in the nephew’s ear; “you are robbed.”

Grindot left, Molineux followed him and approached him with a mysterious air.

“Sir,” he said to him, “you have heard me, but you did not understand me. I wish you an umbrella.”

Grindot was seized with dread. The more illegal a profit is, the more the man holds on to it; the human heart is so constituted. The artist had indeed given his closest attention to the tenement, he had devoted to it all his knowledge and his time, and he was in it for ten thousand francs, and now he found himself the victim of his own devotedness; the contractors had little difficulty in leading him on. The irresistible argument and the well-understood threat of doing him an ill service by calumniating him were still less potent than the remark made by Lourdois regarding the matter of the Madeleine land: Birotteau did not count on

building a single house there, he was only speculating in the price of land. Architects and contractors are to one another as an author and the actors, they depend on one another. Grindot, entrusted by Birotteau with stipulating the prices, was for these tradesmen and against the middle-class man. And so three large contractors, Lourdois, Chafaroux, and Thorein, the carpenter, proclaimed him *one of those good young men with whom it is a pleasure to work*. Grindot felt that the bills on which he was to get a commission would be paid, like his honorarium, in notes, and the little old man had just suggested a doubt to him as to their payment. Grindot was going to be pitiless, after the manner of artists, the most cruel folk that the middle-class have to deal with. Before the end of December César had sixty thousand francs' worth of bills. Félix, the Café Foy, Tanrade and the small creditors that one ought to pay cash down, had sent to the perfumer three times. In trade these petty things do more injury than a misfortune, they give warning of it. Known losses are definite; but panic knows no bounds. Birotteau saw his cash-box depleted. Fear then seized upon the perfumer, to whom such a thing had never happened during his life in trade. Like all those who have never had to struggle for a long time against hardship and who are weak, this circumstance, common in the life of most small dealers in Paris, brought trouble into César's brain.

The perfumer gave orders to Célestin to send bills to his customers; but before doing so, the chief clerk

had this unheard-of order repeated to him. The clients, a noble term then applied by retailers to their customers and which César made use of in spite of his wife, who had at last said to him: "Call them as you will, provided they pay!" The clients then were rich persons with whom there never had been any losses to endure, who paid at their pleasure, and who had often owed César fifty or sixty thousand francs. The second clerk took the charge-book and began to copy the highest. César was afraid of his wife. So as not to let her see the dejection into which he had been cast by the *simoom* of misfortune, he wanted to go out.

"Good-day, sir," said Grindot, as he entered with that easy air assumed by artists when they would speak of interests to which they want to appear to be absolute strangers. "I cannot find any kind of money for your paper; I am obliged to ask you to exchange it with me for cash. I am a most unfortunate man in this kind of business, but I have not spoken to the usurers; I would not hawk your signature around, I know enough of trade to understand that it would be to depreciate it; it is then in your interest to—"

"Sir," said Birotteau, stunned, "in a lower tone, if you please; you surprise me strangely."

Lourdois entered.

"Lourdois," said Birotteau, smiling, "do you understand?"

Birotteau stopped. The poor man was going to beg Lourdois to take Grindot's note, joking with the

architect with the good faith of a merchant sure of himself; but he perceived a cloud on Lourdois's brow, and trembled for his imprudence. This innocent raillery was the death-blow to a suspected credit. In such a case a rich merchant takes up his note, and does not offer it. Birotteau felt his head throb as if he had been looking into the depth of a perpendicular abyss.

"My dear Monsieur Birotteau," said Lourdois, taking him to the lower end of the shop, "my bill is made out, adjusted and verified; I beg of you to have the money ready for me to-morrow. My daughter is going to marry little Crottat; he will need money, notaries do not negotiate for nothing; besides, no one has ever seen my signature."

"Send the day after to-morrow," proudly said Birotteau, who counted on the payment of his bills.

"And you also, sir," said he to Grindot.

"And why not at once?" the architect asked.

"I have to pay my workmen in the Faubourg," said César, who had never lied.

He took his hat to go out with them; but the mason, Thorein, and Chaffaroux stopped him just as he was shutting the door.

"Sir," said Chaffaroux to him, "we are in great need of money."

"Well! I own no Peruvian mines," said César impatiently, who went away briskly to about a hundred yards from them. "There is something behind all that. Cursed ball! Everybody thinks you have millions. Nevertheless, Lourdois's manner

was not natural, he thinks there's a snake in the grass."

He walked aimlessly along the Rue Saint-Honoré, feeling all broken up, and stumbled against Alexandre at a street corner, as a ram, or as a mathematician absorbed in the solution of a problem would have run up against another.

"Ah! sir," said the future notary, "a question! Has Roguin given your four hundred thousand francs to Monsieur Claparon?"

"The matter was attended to in your presence. Monsieur Claparon has given me no receipt; my notes were to—be negotiated—Roguin was to have given him—my two hundred and forty thousand francs in cash.—It was said that the deeds of sale would be definitely made out.—Judge Popinot pretends—The receipt!—But—why this question?"

"Why can I put such a question to you? To know if your two hundred and forty thousand francs are in Claparon's or in Roguin's hands. Roguin was connected with you for such a long time, he might out of delicacy have given the money to Claparon, and how nicely you would escape him! But am I a dunce! he has carried it off along with Monsieur Claparon's money, he fortunately had yet sent only a hundred thousand francs. Roguin has fled; he received from me a hundred thousand francs for his office, and I have no receipt for it; I gave it to him as I would intrust you with my purse. Your sellers have not received a farthing, they have just left me. The money that you borrowed on your

land existed neither for you nor for him who loaned it to you; Roguin had got away with it, as he did with your hundred thousand francs—which he—did not have for a long time past.—Thus your last hundred thousand francs have been taken, I remember having gone to get them from the bank.”

César’s pupils dilated so much out of all measure that he no longer saw anything but a red flame.

“Your hundred thousand francs at the bank, my hundred thousand francs for his office, a hundred thousand francs from Monsieur Claparon, there are three hundred thousand francs to whistle for, without the thefts that are going to be discovered,” continued the young notary. “They despair of Madame Roguin; Monsieur Du Tillet spent the night with her. Du Tillet escaped him nicely, did he! Roguin tormented him for a month in order to drag him into this business of the land, and fortunately he had all his money in a speculation with the Nucingen house. Roguin wrote a terrible letter to his wife! I have just read it. He had been tampering with his clients’ money for five years past, and why? for a mistress, the Dutch Beauty; he gave her up a fortnight before he skipped. This spendthrift was left without a farthing, her furniture has been sold, she had signed bills of exchange. In order to escape pursuit, she had taken refuge in a house of the Palais Royal, where she was assassinated yesterday evening by a captain. God soon punished her, who undoubtedly ate up Roguin’s fortune. There are women to whom nothing is



sacred; to eat up a notary's means! Madame Roguin will have no means but the interest on her mortgage, all the ruffian's property is mortgaged beyond its value. The office has been sold for three hundred thousand francs. I who thought I was making a good bargain, and who began by paying a hundred thousand francs additional for the practice, have no receipt; there are items of expense that are going to eat up both office and security; the creditors will believe that I am his accomplice if I speak of my hundred thousand francs, and when one is starting out it is necessary to be careful of one's reputation. You will get scarcely thirty per cent. And to have to eat such soup at my age! A man of fifty-nine to keep a woman!—the old rogue! Three weeks ago he told me not to marry Césarine, that you would soon have no bread to eat, the monster!"

Alexandre might have spoken for a long time; Birotteau was standing petrified. So many phrases, so many blows of a club. He no longer heard but a sound of funeral bells, just as he had begun by seeing only the fire of his conflagration. Alexandre Crottat, who thought the worthy perfumer was strong and capable, was frightened at his paleness and immobility. Roguin's successor did not know that the notary had got away with more than César's fortune. The idea of suicide at once passed through this deeply religious trader's head. Suicide is in such case a means of flying from a thousand deaths; it seems logical to accept only one of them. Alexandre Crottat gave his arm to César and wanted

to make him walk, but it was impossible: his legs failed under him as if he were drunk.

“What, then, is the matter with you?” said Crottat. “My good Monsieur César, have a little courage! It is not a man’s death! Besides, you will recover forty thousand francs; your lender did not have that sum, it has not been delivered to you, there is reason for pleading the rescinding of the contract.”

“My ball, my Cross, two hundred thousand francs in notes on the place, no cash on hand.—The Ragnons, Pillerault.—And my wife who saw clearly—!”

A shower of confused words that called up masses of overwhelming ideas and of unheard-of sufferings fell like a hail shower tearing into shreds all the flowers of the garden of *La Reine des Roses*.

“I would that some one would cut off my head,” Birotteau said at last, “it pains me so much by its size, it serves me to no purpose—”

“Poor old man Birotteau!” said Alexandre, “but you are then in danger?”

“Danger!”

“Well, have courage, struggle.”

“Struggle!” repeated the perfumer.

“Du Tillet was your clerk, he is a noble fellow, he will assist you.”

“Du Tillet?”

“Let us go, come.”

“My God! I would not go back home as I am,” said Birotteau. “You who are my friend, if there are friends, you in whom I have been interested

and who have dined at my house, in my wife's name, take me in a hack, Xandrot; come with me."

The notary-designate with much difficulty placed in a hack the inert machine that bore the name of César.

"Xandrot," said the perfumer in a voice troubled with tears, for at that moment the tears fell from his eyes and loosened somewhat the iron band that encircled his skull, "let us go to my house. Speak for me to Célestin. My friend, tell him there is question of my life and of my wife's also. Under no pretext let any one prattle about Roguin's disappearance. Call Césarine down and entreat her to see that no one speaks of this affair to her mother. One ought to be distrustful of one's best friends, —Pillerault, the Ragons, everybody—"

The change in Birotteau's voice keenly struck Crottat, who understood the importance of this recommendation. The Rue Saint-Honoré led to the magistrate's; he carried out the perfumer's intentions, and Célestin and Césarine saw the victim with affright, voiceless, pale, and as if stupefied, on the floor of the hack.

"Keep my secret about this matter," said the perfumer.

"Ah!" said Xandrot to himself, "he is reviving! I was afraid he was done for."

The conference between Alexandre Crottat and the magistrate lasted a long time. The president of the board of notaries was sent for. César was carried everywhere like a parcel; he did not budge,

and said not a word. About seven o'clock in the evening Alexandre Crottat brought the perfumer back to his house. The idea of appearing before Constance restored tone to César. The young notary was so charitable as to precede him in order to tell Madame Birotteau that her husband had had a slight attack of apoplexy.

"He has his ideas mixed up," he said, making a gesture used to represent the disturbing of the brain; "it will perhaps be necessary to bleed or leech him."

"That was bound to come," said Constance, a thousand leagues from suspecting a disaster. "He has not taken his precautionary medicine at the approach of winter, and for the last two months he has been bringing on the galley-slave fever, as if his bread were not safe."

César was entreated by his wife and daughter to go to bed, and they sent for Doctor Haudry, Birotteau's physician. Old Haudry was a physician of the Molière school, a great practitioner and a friend of the old formulas of the dispensary, drugging his patients neither more nor less than a medicaster, consulting physician though he was. He came, studied César's *facies*, ordered the immediate application of mustard plasters to the soles of his feet: he saw symptoms of cerebral congestion.

"What could have caused him that?" Constance asked.

"The humid weather," replied the doctor, to whom Césarine came to say a word.

Doctors are often obliged to talk nonsense in a knowing way in order to save the honor or life of persons in good standing who are around the patient. The old doctor had seen so many things that he understood a hint. Césarine followed him to the stairway and asked him what rules of conduct to follow.

“Quiet and silence. Then we will risk strengthening remedies when the head is cleared.”

Madame César spent two days at her husband's bedside, and he often seemed to her to be delirious. Put in his wife's fine blue room, he said things that Constance did not comprehend, at the sight of the draperies, the furniture and the costly magnificence.

“He is wandering in his mind,” she said to Césarine at a moment when César got into a sitting posture and in a solemn voice quoted bits and scraps of the articles of the code of commerce.

“If the expenses are thought excessive—Take away the draperies.” After three terrible days, during which César's reason was in danger, the strong nature of the Touraine peasant triumphed, his head became clear. Doctor Haudry ordered him cordials and strong nourishment, and, after a cup of coffee given at intervals, the merchant was on his feet. Constance, fatigued, took her husband's place.

“Poor woman,” said César, when he saw her asleep.

“Come, papa, courage! You are so superior a man that you will triumph. It will not amount to anything. Monsieur Anselme will assist you.”

Césarine spoke in a mild tone these vague words, which tenderness made still milder, and which give courage to the most abject, as a mother's song lulls the pains of a child who is tormented with teething.

"Yes, my child, I am going to struggle; but not a word to anyone in the world, neither to Popinot, who loves us, nor to your uncle Pillerault. I am going first to write to my brother: he is, I think, canon and curate of a cathedral. He spends nothing; he ought to have money. With a thousand crowns a year saved, for twenty years, he must have a hundred thousand francs. In the provinces priests have credit."

Césarine, eager to bring her father a small table and all that he needed to write, gave him what were left of the invitations printed on rose paper for the ball.

"Burn all that!" exclaimed the merchant. "The devil alone must have inspired me to give that ball. If I succumb, I will have the appearance of a cheat. Come, no phrases."

#### CESAR'S LETTER TO FRANÇOIS BIROTTEAU.

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"I find myself in so difficult a business crisis that I entreat you to send me all the money you can dispose of, even should you have to borrow some.

"Entirely yours,

"CESAR.

"Your niece, Césarine, who is looking at me writing this letter while my poor wife is asleep, desires to be remembered to you and sends you her tenderest greetings."

This postscript was added at Césarine's entreaty, and she brought the letter to Raguét.

"Father," she said on going up again, "here is Monsieur Lebas, who wishes to speak with you."

"Monsieur Lebas!" César exclaimed, frightened as if his disaster had made him a criminal; "a judge!"

"My dear Monsieur Birotteau, I take too much interest in you," said the big draper as he entered, "we have known each other for too long a time, we were both elected judges the first time together, not to tell you that one Monsieur Bidault, called Gigonnet, a usurer, has notes of yours passed to his order, *without recourse*, by the Claparon house. These two words are not only an insult, but even the death-blow to your credit."

"Monsieur Claparon desires to speak with you," said Célestin, showing himself; "shall I send him up?"

"We are going to know the cause of this insult," said Lebas.

"Sir," said the perfumer to Claparon on seeing him enter, "this is Monsieur Lebas, judge in the Tribunal of Commerce, and my friend—"

"Ah! the gentleman is Monsieur Lebas," said Claparon, interrupting; "I am delighted to meet you. Monsieur Lebas of the court—there are so many Lebas, without counting *les hauts et les bas*."

"He has," continued Birotteau, interrupting the babbler, "seen the notes that I gave to you, and that, you said, would not get into circulation;

he has seen them with these words: *without recourse.*”

“Well,” said Claparon, “they will not indeed circulate—they are in the hands of a man with whom I am doing much business, old man Bidault. That is why I have marked them *without recourse*. If the notes had had to circulate, you would have drawn them to his order directly. The judge will understand my position. What do these notes represent? a real estate value; paid by whom? by Birotteau. Why do you think that I secure Birotteau with my signature? We ought to pay, each on our own part, our share of the said price. Now, is it not enough to be bound for the whole in regard to our sellers? With me the commercial rule is inflexible: I no more give my guarantee uselessly than I give a receipt for a sum to be received. I suppose everything. Who signs, pays. I do not wish to be exposed to paying thrice.”

“Thrice!” exclaimed César.

“Yes, sir,” replied Claparon. “Already have I guaranteed Birotteau to our sellers; why should I guarantee him again to the banker? The circumstances in which we are, are difficult. Roguin takes a hundred thousand francs from me. Thus, already my half of the land costs me five hundred thousand instead of four hundred thousand francs. Roguin takes two hundred and forty thousand francs from Birotteau. What would you do in my place, Monsieur Lebas? Stand in my boots. I have not the honor of being known to you, any more than I



know Monsieur Birotteau. Pay close attention. We are doing business together by halves. You put up all the money on your part; as for me, I negotiate mine in notes; I offer them to you; you undertake, from excessive complaisance, to convert them into cash. You learn that Claparon, a rich banker, held in high esteem—I accept all the virtues of the world—that the virtuous Claparon is found in default for six millions that he has to reimburse: will you go, at that very moment, and put your signature as a guarantee to mine? You would be a fool! Well, Monsieur Lebas, Birotteau is in the fix in which I suppose Claparon. Do you not see that I may then pay the purchasers as joint guarantor, and be bound still farther to reimburse Birotteau's part to the amount of his notes, if I guaranteed them, and without having—”

“To whom?” asked the perfumer, interrupting.

“And without having his half of the land,” said Claparon, taking no notice of the interruption, “for I would not have any privilege; it would be necessary then again to buy it! Thus I should pay three times.”

“To reimburse to whom?” still asked Birotteau.

“Why to the third holder, if I indorsed and some misfortune befell you.”

“I will not fail, sir,” said Birotteau.

“Good,” said Claparon. “You have been judge, you have had experience in business, you know that one ought to look out for everything, so do not be astonished that I carry out the rules of my trade.”

"Monsieur Claparon is right," said Joseph Lebas.

"I am right," continued Claparon, "right commercially. But this affair is territorial. Now, what ought I to receive, I?—Money, for it will be necessary to give money to our sellers. Let us leave aside the two hundred and forty thousand francs that Monsieur Birotteau will put up, I am sure of it," said Claparon, looking at Lebas. "I have come to ask you for the trifle of twenty-five thousand francs," he said, looking at Birotteau.

"Twenty-five thousand francs!" exclaimed César as he felt ice instead of blood in his veins. "But, sir, on what title?"

"Eh! my dear sir, we are obliged to certify the sale before a notary. Now, as regards the price, we may have an understanding among ourselves; but with the treasury, your servant! The treasury does not trifle by speaking idle words; it only recognizes prompt cash transactions, and we have to put up forty-four thousand francs of earnest this week. I was far from expecting reproaches on coming here, for, thinking that these twenty-five thousand francs might pinch you, I was going to tell you that, by the luckiest chance, I have saved you—"

"What?" said Birotteau, in a tone of distress by which no man is deceived.

"A misery! the twenty-five thousand francs of *odd notes* that Roguin had given me to negotiate, I have credited you with on the registry and a

statement of the expense of which I will send you; there is the small charge for negotiating to be deducted; you will owe me in addition six or seven thousand francs."

"All that seems to me perfectly just," said Lebas. "In the gentleman's place, and he seems to me to understand business very clearly, I would act in the same manner towards a stranger."

"Monsieur Birotteau will not die on that account," said Claparon; "more than one blow is needed to kill an old wolf; I have seen wolves with bullets in their heads running like—and, zounds, like wolves."

"Who can foresee a dastardly act like Roguin's?" said Lebas, as much frightened at César's silence as at such an enormous speculation entirely foreign to the perfumery business.

"I came near giving a receipt for four hundred thousand francs to the gentleman," said Claparon, "and I have had my fingers burnt. I had remitted a hundred thousand francs to Roguin the day before. Our mutual confidence saved me. Whether the money was in his office or at my house until the day of the final contracts, seemed to all of us a matter of indifference."

"It would have been better had each kept his money in the bank until the time for payment came," said Lebas.

"Roguin was the bank to me," said César. "But he is in the affair," he continued, looking at Claparon.

"Yes, for one quarter, on word," replied Claparon.

“After the stupidity of letting him run away with my money, I would be a downright fool to give him any of it. If he sends me my hundred thousand francs, and two hundred thousand more for his part, then we will see! But he will take good care not to send it to me for an affair that requires five years of boiling before giving a first pottage. If he has carried off, as is said, only three hundred thousand francs, he will clearly need fifteen thousand francs income to live comfortably abroad.”

“The bandit!”

“Well, *Mon Dieu!* a passion led Roguin to that,” said Claparon. “Who is the old man who can answer that he has not allowed himself to be dominated and carried away by his last fancy? Not one of us, who are wise, knows how he will end. A last love, eh! is the most violent. Look at the Cardots, the Camusots, the Matifats—all have mistresses! And if we are victimized, is it not our own fault? How is it we were not distrustful of a notary who entered into a speculation? Every notary, every exchange agent, every broker so interesting himself in an affair, is to be suspected. Failure is for them fraudulent bankruptcy. They would go into an assize court, then they prefer to go into a foreign land. I will do no more of such schooling. Well, we are so weak as not to have condemned by contumacy people to whose house we have gone to dinner, who have given us fine balls, people of the world, in fine! No one complains, and more’s the pity.”

“Decidedly wrong,” said Birotteau; “the law regarding failure and insolvency ought to be amended.”

“If you need me,” said Lebas to Birotteau, “I am entirely at your service.”

“The gentleman does not need anybody,” said the indefatigable babbler, the sluices of whose eloquence Du Tillet had opened after having filled him with the needful water.—Claparon was but repeating a lesson that had been most carefully taught him by Du Tillet.—“His affair is clear: Roguin’s failure will give a dividend of fifty per cent, according to what little Crottat has told me. Besides this dividend, Monsieur Birotteau recovers forty thousand francs that his lender did not have; then, he can borrow on his properties. Now, we have to pay two hundred thousand francs to our sellers only in four months. From this time until then Monsieur Birotteau will take up his notes, for the gentleman must not count on Monsieur Roguin having stolen to pay them. But, even should Monsieur Birotteau be somewhat pinched—well, by putting some more notes in circulation, he will get there.”

The perfumer regained courage on hearing Claparon analyze his affair and sum it up by tracing for him, so to say, the plan for him to follow. And so his countenance became firm and decided, and he conceived a high idea of the resources of this former traveler. Du Tillet had thought it proper to give out that he was Roguin’s victim through Claparon. He had sent a hundred thousand francs to Claparon

to give to Roguin, who had given the money back to him. Claparon, restless as he was, played his part up to nature; he told anyone that wanted to listen to him that Roguin cost him a hundred thousand francs. Du Tillet had not regarded Claparon as quite strong enough; he thought he still had too much of the principles of honor and delicacy to trust to him his plans in their full extent; and, moreover, he knew him to be incapable of seeing through him.

“If our first friend is not our first dupe, we would not find a second,” he said to Claparon on the day when, receiving reproaches from his commercial pander, he disposed of him as he would of an instrument that was played out.

Monsieur Lebas and Claparon left together.

“I can get out of it,” said Birotteau to himself. “My debts in notes to be paid amount to two hundred and thirty-five thousand francs, namely: sixty thousand francs for my house, and seventy-five thousand francs for the land. Now, to meet these payments, I have the Roguin dividend, which perhaps will be a hundred thousand francs, I can have the loan on my land annulled, in all a hundred and forty. There is a chance of making a hundred thousand francs on the *Cephalic Oil*, and of getting, with some accommodation notes or a loan from a banker, time for me to make up the loss and wait for the land to reach its highest value.”

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Once a man, when in misfortune, can build up for himself a romance of hopes out of a succession of reasonings more or less correct, with which he stuffs his pillow so as to rest his head upon it, he is often saved. Many people have taken for energy the confidence that illusion gives. Perhaps hope is half of courage, and so the Catholic religion has made a virtue of it. Has not hope sustained many weaklings, by giving them time to await life's chances? Having resolved to go to his wife's uncle's house to explain his position before looking for assistance elsewhere, Birotteau did not go down the Rue Saint-Honoré as far as the Rue des Bourdonnais without experiencing secret pangs of anguish that agitated him so violently that he thought his health was impaired. He was feverish in his entrails. Indeed, people who feel through the diaphragm suffer there, just as people who perceive through the head experience cerebral pains. In great crises the physical being is attacked just where the temperament has put the individual's seat of life: the weak have the colic, Napoléon sleeps. Before mounting to the assault of a confidence by passing over all the barriers of pride, people of honor must have felt more than once in their heart the spur of necessity, that unrelenting escort! And so Birotteau had allowed himself to be

spurred on for two days before going to his uncle's; he even came to a decision only for family reasons: in any state of the case he should have explained his situation to the hard-headed iron and copperware dealer. Nevertheless, on arriving at the door, he felt that inner weakness which every child has experienced on entering a dentist's office; but this weakness of heart affected his whole being instead of causing only a passing pain. Birotteau ascended slowly. He found the old man reading the *Constitutionnel* in the chimney corner, before the little round table on which was his frugal breakfast: a small loaf, butter, Brie cheese and a cup of coffee.

"There is a really wise man," said Birotteau, envying his uncle's life.

"Well," said Pillerault to him as he took off his goggles, "I learned yesterday at the Café David of the Roguin affair, the assassination of the Dutch Beauty, his mistress! I hope that, warned by us who wished to be real owners, you have gone to get a receipt from Claparon."

"Alas! uncle, everything is there; you have put your finger on the sore spot. No."

"Ah! simpleton, you are ruined," said Pillerault as he let his paper fall and Birotteau picked it up, though it was the *Constitutionnel*.

Pillerault was so very much taken up with his reflections that his medallion face and severe expression became bronzed like metal under the force of a coiner's die: he remained transfixed, looked through his window at the wall across the way



without seeing it, as he listened to Birotteau's long discourse. Evidently he understood and was judging, he was weighing the pros and cons with the inflexibility of a Minos who had crossed the Styx of trade when he left the Quai des Morfondus for his little fourth story.

"Well! uncle?" said Birotteau, who was waiting for a reply after having concluded with an entreaty to sell to the amount of sixty thousand francs' worth of bonds.

"Well, my poor nephew, I cannot do it; you are too deeply involved. The Ragnons and I are going to lose each our fifty thousand francs. Those good people have, on my advice, sold their interest in the Vortschin mines: I feel myself obliged, in case of loss, not to make the capital good to them, but to assist them, to assist my niece and Césarine. You will, perhaps, need bread for all; you will find it at my house—"

"Bread, uncle?"

"Well, yes, bread. Look, then, at matters just as they are: *you will not get out of it!* Of five thousand and six hundred francs income I will be able to take four thousand francs to divide between you and the Ragnons. Your misfortune having come, I know Constance: she will work like a slave, she will refuse herself everything, and you also, César!"

"Everything is not to be despaired of, uncle."

"I do not see as you do."

"I will prove the contrary to you."

"Nothing will give me greater pleasure."

Birotteau left Pillerault without making any reply. He had come to seek consolation and courage; he received a second blow, less violent indeed than the first, but, instead of reaching his head, it struck his heart: the heart was the whole life of this poor man. He returned after having gone down a few steps.

“Sir,” he said coldly, “Constance knows nothing; keep my secret at least, and pray the Ragons not to rob me of the peace of my home which I need so much in struggling against misfortune.”

Pillerault made a sign of assent.

“Courage, César!” he added. “I see you are displeased with me, but later on you will do me justice when thinking of your wife and daughter.”

Discouraged by his uncle’s opinion, though he credited him with a special insight into things, César fell from the topmost height of his hope into the filthy marshes of uncertainty. When, in such horrible commercial crises, a man has not a soul strengthened as was Pillerault’s, he becomes the plaything of events: he follows others’ ideas, his own, as a traveler runs after a will-o’-the-wisp. He lets himself be carried along by the whirlwind instead of lying down without looking at it when it passes or standing up to follow its course that he may escape it. In the midst of his grief Birotteau remembered the suit in regard to his loan. He went to the Rue Vivienne, to Derville, his lawyer, to begin proceedings as soon as possible, in case the lawyer would see any chance of having the contract

annulled. The perfumer found Derville wrapped in his white swan's-down dressing-gown, in his chimney corner, calm and sedate, like all lawyers who are used to the most terrible secrets. Biroteau for the first time remarked this necessary indifference, which gives a shiver to the man who is excited, hurt, stricken with the fever of endangered interests, and painfully afflicted in his life, in his honor, in his wife and his children, as Biroteau was when telling of his misfortune.

"If it is proved," Derville said to him after having listened to him, "that the lender no longer had at Roguin's the sum that Roguin would have him loan to you, as there has been no delivery of goods, there is chance for rescinding: the lender will have his recourse on the security, as you for your hundred thousand francs. I answer, then, for the suit as much as one can answer for it, for no lawsuit is won in advance."

The opinion of such an able lawyer gave back a little courage to the perfumer, who entreated Derville to get a verdict within a fortnight. The lawyer answered that perhaps he would have, in three months, a verdict that would annul the contract.

"In three months!" said the perfumer, who thought he had found resources.

"But while getting an early place on the calendar, we cannot get your adversary to come up to your time: he will make use of the delays of procedure. Counsel are not always there. Who knows but your defendant may let the suit go by default? One

does not get along as fast as he would like, my dear master!" said Derville, smiling.

"But in the Tribunal of Commerce?" said Birotteau.

"Oh!" said the lawyer, "the consular judges and the committing judges are two kinds of judges. You fellows do things slap-dash! In the Palace we have forms. Form is the protector of law. Would you like a snap judgment that would make you lose your forty thousand francs? Well, your adversary, who is going to see this sum put in jeopardy, will defend himself. Delays are the barricades of the law."

"You are right," said Birotteau, who bade good-bye to Derville and left with death in his heart. "They are all right. Money! money!" cried the perfumer in the street, speaking to himself, as do all the business people of this turbulent and seething Paris, which a modern poet calls a vat.

On seeing him come in, one of his clerks, who was going everywhere presenting the bills, told him that, on account of New Year's Day being so near, everybody tore the receipt off the bill, which they kept.

"There is no money, then, anywhere!" said the perfumer aloud in the shop.

He bit his lips; his clerks had all raised their heads towards him.

Five days passed thus, five days during which Braschon, Lourdois, Thorein, Grindot, Chaffaroux, in fact all the creditors not settled with, passed through the chameleon-like phases that the creditor

experiences before changing from the peaceful state in which confidence keeps him, to the bloody hues of the commercial Bellona. At Paris the astringent period of distrust is as quick in coming as the expansive movement of confidence is slow in being decided on: having once fallen into the restrictive system of fears and precautions of trade, the creditor has recourse to sinister meannesses that put him below the debtor. From a sweetish politeness, creditors pass to the red heat of impatience, to the darksome, petty annoyances of importunity, to outbursts of disappointment, to the cold blue of a foregone conclusion, and to the black insolence of a prepared summons. Braschon, that rich upholsterer of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, who had not been invited to the ball, sounded the injured creditor's charge in his own wounded vanity; he wanted to be paid within twenty-four hours. He demanded security; not a lien on the furniture, but a second mortgage next to that for the forty thousand francs on the Faubourg land. In spite of the violence of their recriminations, these folk still left some intervals of rest during which Birotteau had time to breathe. Instead of overcoming these first attacks on his exposed condition by a strong resolve, César used his skill to keep from his wife, the only person who could advise him, the knowledge of them. He kept guard on the threshold of his door, around his shop. He had let Célestin into the secret of his temporary embarrassment, and Célestin examined his master with a look of curiosity as well as of

astonishment: César lessened himself in his estimation, as in disaster are lessened men accustomed to success and whose whole strength consists in the acquired knowledge that routine gives to those of medium understanding. Without having the energetic capacity necessary for defence on so many points threatened at one and the same time, César, however, had the courage to look his position in the face. For the end of the month of December and the fifteenth of January he needed, as well for his house as for bills falling due, his rent and his cash obligations, a sum of sixty thousand francs, thirty thousand of it for December 31: all his resources gave him scarcely twenty thousand. He was, then, ten thousand francs short. To him nothing seemed to be in a desperate way, for even now he saw no farther than the present moment, like adventurers who live from hand to mouth. Before the report of his difficulties became public he resolved, then, to try what seemed to him a grand stroke, and he applied to the famous François Keller, the banker, orator and philanthropist, famous for his beneficence and for his desire to be useful to the trade of Paris, with the view of being always one of the Paris Deputies in the Chamber. The banker was a Liberal, Birotteau was a Royalist; but the perfumer judged him according to his heart, and found in the difference of opinions an additional reason for getting credit. In case securities would be necessary, he did not doubt Popinot's devotedness, and he counted on asking him for thirty thousand

francs' worth of notes, which would help him to secure the success of his lawsuit, offered as security to the most pressing of his creditors. The communicative perfumer, who on the pillow told his dear Constance the slightest emotions of his existence, who took courage therefrom, who there sought the lights of contradiction, could not converse on his situation either with his chief clerk, or with his uncle, or with his wife. His ideas weighed doubly on him. But this generous martyr preferred to suffer rather than cast this fire-brand into his wife's soul; he wanted to tell her of the danger when it would be over. Perhaps he recoiled from this horrible confidence. The fear that was inspired in him by his wife gave him courage. He went every morning to hear Low Mass at Saint-Roch, and he took God into his confidence.

"If, on my return home from Saint-Roch, I do not meet a soldier, my request will succeed. It will be God's answer," he said to himself after having prayed God to assist him.

And he was happy on not meeting a soldier. Yet his heart was too oppressed; he needed another heart in which he could groan. Césarine, in whom he had already confided at the time of the fatal news, was in possession of his whole secret. Glances were exchanged stealthily between them, glances full of suppressed despair and hope, of invocations ejaculated with a mutual ardor, of sympathetic questions and answers, of flashes from soul to soul. Birotteau affected to be gay and jovial

with his wife. Should Constance put a question to him, bah! everything was going on all right. Popinot, who was not costing César a thought, was succeeding! the oil was taking! the Claparon notes would be paid! there was nothing to fear. This sham light-heartedness was frightful. When his wife was asleep in that sumptuous bed, Birotteau would get up in a sitting posture, and would fall into contemplating his misfortune. Césarine would then come in sometimes in her night-gown, with a shawl over her white shoulders, and barefooted.

“Papa, I hear you; you are crying,” she would say, weeping herself.

Birotteau was in such a state of torpor after having written the letter in which he asked for an interview with the great François Keller that his daughter brought him into Paris. Only then did he see in the streets enormous red placards, and his gaze was attracted by these words:

#### CEPHALIC OIL.

During the occidental catastrophes of La Reine des Roses the house of A. Popinot was rising radiant in the oriental glare of success. Advised by Gaudissart and by Finot, Anselme had boldly launched his oil. Two thousand placards had been put up within three days in the most conspicuous places in Paris. No one could escape standing face to face with the *Cephalic Oil* and reading a terse phrase, invented by Finot, on the impossibility of making hair grow and on the danger of dyeing it,



accompanied with the quotation from the memoir submitted by Vauquelin to the Academy of Science; a genuine certificate of life for dead hair promised to those who would use the *Cephalic Oil*. All the hair-dressers of Paris, wig-makers and perfumers had decorated their doors with gilt frames containing a fine print, on vellum paper, at the head of which shone the engraving of Hero and Leander, reduced, with this epigrammatic statement: *The ancient people of antiquity preserved their long hair by the use of CEPHALIC OIL.*

“He has invented the permanent frame, the eternal advertisement!” said Birotteau to himself, as he stood dumfounded looking at the front of *La Cloche d’Argent*.

“You have not seen, then, at your own house,” said his daughter to him, “a frame that Monsieur Anselme came himself specially to bring, at the same time leaving with Célestin three hundred bottles of oil?”

“No,” he replied.

“Célestin has already sold fifty to transient, and sixty to regular customers!”

“Ah!” said César.

The perfumer, deafened by the thousand bells that misery tinkles in its victims’ ears, was living in giddy excitement; the evening before, Popinot had waited an hour for him, and had gone away after having chatted with Constance and Césarine, who told him that César was absorbed in his great affair.

“Ah! yes, the affair of the land.”

Fortunately, Popinot, who for a month past had not left the Rue des Cinq-Diamants, spent the nights and worked on Sundays in the factory, had seen neither the Ragnons, nor Pillerault, nor his uncle, the judge. He slept only two hours, the poor youth! He had only two clerks, and, at the rate things were going, he would soon need four. In trade, opportunity is everything. He who does not bestride success and hold on to the mane will fail to make his fortune. Popinot said to himself that he would be well received when, after six months, he would say to his aunt and his uncle: “I am saved, my fortune is made!” well received by Birotteau when he would bring him thirty or forty thousand francs as his share, after six months. He was ignorant, then, of Roguin’s flight, César’s disasters and difficulties; he could not say an indiscreet word to Madame Birotteau. Popinot promised Finot five hundred francs for every great newspaper, and there were ten of them! three hundred francs for every second-rate newspaper, and there were ten more! if mention were made in them, three times a month, of the *Cephalic Oil*. Finot saw three thousand francs for himself in these eight thousand francs, his first stake to be put up in the great, the immense green field of speculation! He accordingly pounced like a lion on his friends, on his acquaintances; he then frequented the editors’ offices; he got close to all the editors’ ears, in the morning; in the evening, he stepped into the foyer of all the

theatres. "Think of my oil, dear friend. I am not in it for nothing; an affair of comradeship, you know! Gaudissart, a good liver!" Such was the first and the last phrase of all his discourses. He went for the bottom of all the last columns in the newspapers in which he had articles inserted by leaving money with the editors. Full of tricks as a dancer who wants to pass as an actor, alert as an acrobat who makes sixty francs a month, he wrote captious letters, he flattered all vanities, he did dirty work for the editors-in-chief, so as to get in his articles. Money, dinners, platitudes, everything served his eager activity. With theatre tickets he bribed the workmen, who, about midnight, close up the columns of the newspapers by taking some articles on minor topics, always at hand, the newspaper's *make-shifts*. Finot was then to be found in the composing-room, engaged as if he had an article to revise. Everybody's friend, he made the *Cephalic Oil* triumph over the *Regnauld Paste*, the *Brazilian Mixture*, and all the inventions that were the first to lead the genius to understand the influence of the newspaper and the piston effect produced on the public by a reiterated article. At that time of innocence many newspaper men were like oxen, they were ignorant of their strength; they concerned themselves with actresses, with Florine, Tullia, Mariette, etc. They lorded it over everything, and gathered up nothing. Andoche's pretensions concerned neither the gaining of applause for an actress, nor the having a piece played,

nor the reception to be given to his melodramas, nor having articles paid for; on the contrary, he offered money at opportune times, a breakfast on set purpose; there was, then, not a single newspaper that did not speak of the *Cephalic Oil*, of its agreement with Vauquelin's analyses, that did not make fun of those who believe that one can make hair grow, that did not proclaim the danger of dyeing it.

These articles filled Gaudissart's soul with joy, and he armed himself with newspapers to break down prejudices and produced the effect in the provinces which since then speculators have called, after him, *the grand sally*. At that time the newspapers of Paris ruled the departments, *as yet without organs*, the unfortunates! The newspapers, then, were seriously studied there, from the title to the printer's name, a line in which might be concealed the ironies of persecuted opinion. Gaudissart, supported by the press, achieved brilliant successes even in the very first cities in which he gave loose rein to his tongue. All the provincial shopkeepers wanted frames with prints of the engraving of *Hero and Leander*. Finot aimed at *Macassar Oil* that charming pleasantry that makes the Funambules laugh so much, when Pierrot takes an old hair broom, nothing of which is left but the holes, puts *Macassar Oil* into them and thus makes the broom become tufted like a forest. This ironical scene excited universal laughter. Later on Finot pleasantly related that, without that thousand crowns he would have died of starvation and grief.

To him a thousand crowns was a fortune. In that campaign he was the first to see into the power of advertising, of which he made such great and such learned use. Three months later he was editor-in-chief of a small newspaper, which he afterwards succeeded in purchasing and which was the foundation of his fortune. Just as the grand sally made by the Illustrious Gaudissart, the Murat of traveling agents, on the departments and the frontiers led to the commercial triumph of the house of A. Popinot, so it triumphed in opinion, thanks to the starvation assault made on the newspapers and which produced that active publicity obtained in the same way by the *Brazilian Mixture* and by the *Regnauld Paste*. In its beginning this taking of public opinion by assault begat three successes, three fortunes, and was worth the invasion of the thousand ambitions that have since come down in thick battalions into the arena of the newspapers in which they have created the paid advertisement, an immense revolution! At that moment the house of A. POPINOT AND COMPANY strutted on the walls and on all the shop fronts. Incapable of measuring the bearing of such publicity, Birotteau was satisfied with saying to Césarine: "This little Popinot is marching in my footsteps!" without understanding the difference of the times, without appreciating the power of the new means of carrying out a plan, the rapidity and extent of which took in the commercial world much more promptly than of old. Birotteau had not set foot in his factory since his ball: he was ignorant

of the movement and activity that Popinot displayed there. Anselme had engaged all Birotteau's workmen, he slept there; he saw Césarine seated on all the cases, lying in all the shipments, printed on all the bills; he said to himself: "She shall be my wife!" when, with his coat off, his shirt sleeves tucked up to his elbows, he courageously drove the nails in a case, in the absence of his clerks on duty elsewhere.

Next day, after having spent the whole night studying what he ought to say and not say to one of the great men of the higher banking world, César reached the Rue du Houssaye, and with horrible palpitations approached the house of the Liberal banker, who held those views so justly accused of desiring the overthrow of the Bourbons. The perfumer, like all the smaller dealers of Paris, was ignorant of the manners and men of the upper banking circle. In Paris, between this circle and trade there are secondary houses; an intermediary useful to banking, it finds in it an additional guarantee. Constance and Birotteau, who had never gone beyond their means, whose till was never empty and who kept their notes in a pocket-book, had never had recourse to these houses of the second order; they were, with so much the more reason, unknown in the upper regions of banking. Perhaps it is a fault not to establish a credit for oneself even though it be useless: opinion is divided on this point. However the case may be, Birotteau regretted very much that he had not given out his

signature. But, known as mayor's deputy and as a man of politics, he thought he had only to give his name and enter; he was ignorant of the quasi-royal affluence distinguishing this banker's audience. Shown into the parlor in front of the private office of this man who was famous for so many reasons, Birotteau saw himself in the midst of a numerous society made up of Deputies, writers, newspaper men, bill-brokers, men high in trade, business people, engineers, and especially intimate friends who passed through the crowd and knocked in a particular manner at the door of the office which they were privileged to enter.

"What am I in the midst of this machinery?" said Birotteau to himself, quite bewildered by the activity of that intellectual shop whence was doled out the daily bread of the Opposition, where were rehearsed the parts of the great tragi-comedy played by the Left.

He heard discussed on his right the question of the loan for the completion of the chief lines of canals proposed by the directors of bridges and roads, and it was a question of millions! On his left, newspaper men who would prey on the banker's vanity were conversing on yesterday's sitting and on the master's improvisation. During a wait of two hours Birotteau three times saw the political banker escorting out three steps beyond his office door some men of importance. François Keller went as far as the ante-chamber with the last, General Foy.

"I am lost!" said César to himself, and his heart sank.

When the banker returned to his office the troop of courtiers, friends and interested persons assailed him, like dogs following a pretty bitch. Some bold curs slipped in spite of him into the sanctum. The conferences lasted five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour. Some went away contrite, others wore a look of satisfaction or put on airs of importance. Time was passing, and Birotteau looked anxiously at the clock. No one paid the least attention to that hidden sorrow that groaned in a gilt arm-chair in the chimney corner, close to the door of that office where resided the universal panacea, credit! César thought painfully that he had been for a moment king at his own house, as that man was king every morning, and he measured the depth of the abyss into which he had fallen. Bitter thought! How many unshed tears during that hour spent there!—How often did not Birotteau entreat God to make that man favorable to him! for he found in him, under a thick covering of popular good nature, an insolence, a choleric tyranny, a brutal disposition to domineer that terrified his mild soul.

At last, when there were only ten or twelve persons left, Birotteau resolved, as soon as he heard the outer door of the office creak, to get ready and put himself on a level with the great orator by saying to him: "I am Birotteau!" The grenadier who first rushed into the redoubt of Moskowa did not



display more courage than the perfumer summoned up to carry out this manœuvre.

"After all, I am his deputy," he said to himself as he arose to announce his name.

François Keller's physiognomy became affable, he evidently wanted to be amiable, he looked at the perfumer's red ribbon, drew back, opened his office door, showed him in, and remained for some time chatting with two persons who bounded in from the stairway with the violence of a water-spout.

"Decazes wishes to speak with you," said one of the two.

"It is a question of killing the Marsan pavilion! The king sees clearly, he is coming over to us!" exclaimed the other.

"We will go together to the Chamber," said the banker as he re-entered in the attitude of the frog that wants to be an ox.

"How can he think of his business?" Birotteau asked himself, quite upset.

The sun of superiority scintillated, dazzled the perfumer, as light blinds insects that like a dull day or the half darkness of a fine night. On an immense table he perceived the budget, the thousand prints of the Chamber, the open volumes of the *Moniteur*, consulted and marked so as to be ready to fling at a minister's head his previous remarks now forgotten and to make him sing recantations to the applause of an unthinking rabble incapable of understanding that events modify everything. On another table, cartons in a disordered heap,

memoranda, plans, the thousand applications entrusted to a man upon whose cash all the nascent industries try to draw. The royal luxury of this office full of pictures, statues, works of art; the encumbering of the mantel-piece, the jumbling together of national or foreign interests piled up like packages, everything struck Birotteau, made him feel small, increased his fear and stagnated his blood. On François Keller's bureau lay files of notes, bills of exchange, trade circulars. Keller sat down and set to signing rapidly the letters that required no examination.

“To what, sir, do I owe the honor of your visit?” he asked of him.

At these words, uttered for him alone by that voice which spoke to Europe, while that greedy hand was going over the paper, the poor perfumer felt as if he had a hot iron in his bowels. He assumed an agreeable mien which the banker had seen assumed for ten years past by those who wanted to encoil him in a matter important to themselves only, and which already gave him the whip hand on them. François Keller cast, then, on César a look that pierced his head, a Napoléonic look. The imitation of Napoléon's look was a ridiculous levity then assumed by some upstarts who were not even the counterfeit presentments of their Emperor. This look fell on Birotteau, a man of the Right, solid with the powers that be, an element of monarchical election, like a custom-house officer's pencil that marks an article of merchandise.

“I do not want to take up your valuable time, sir, I will be brief. I come in regard to a purely commercial matter, to ask you if I can obtain a credit with you. A former judge in the Tribunal of Commerce and known at the Bank, you understand that, if I had a full pocket-book, I would only have to apply there, where you are governor. I have had the honor of sitting on the bench with Baron Thibon, chairman of the discount committee, and he certainly would not refuse me. But I have never used my credit or my signature; my signature is virgin, and you know how many difficulties in that case a negotiation presents—”

Keller shook his head, and Birotteau took this gesture as a sign of impatience.

“Here is the fact, sir,” he continued. “I have entered into a land speculation, outside of my business—”

François Keller, who went on signing and reading, without seeming to listen to César, turned his head and gave him a sign of approval that encouraged him. Birotteau thought his affair had a good chance, and he breathed more easily.

“Go on, I am listening,” Keller said to him good-naturedly.

“I am purchaser to the extent of half the land situated around the Madeleine.”

“Yes, I have heard mention made at Nucingen’s of this immense transaction undertaken by the Claparon house.”

“Well,” continued the perfumer, “a credit of a hundred thousand francs, guaranteed by my half in this affair, or by my stock in trade, would suffice to carry me over to the time when I will realize the profit that ought soon to be derived from an idea belonging purely to the perfumery business. If it were necessary, I would secure you with notes of a new house, that of Popinot, a young house which—”

Keller seemed to take very little interest in the house of Popinot, and Birotteau understood that he had entered on a bad course; he stopped, and then, alarmed at the silence, he continued:

“As regards the interests, we—”

“Yes, yes,” said the banker, “the matter may be arranged; have no doubt of my desire to be serviceable to you. Busy as I am, I have the finances of Europe on my shoulders, and the Chamber takes up all my spare moments. You will not be surprised to learn that I leave my clerks to attend to a multitude of matters. Go and see, down below, my brother Adolphe, explain to him the nature of your securities. If he approve of the operation, you will return with him to-morrow or the day after, at the hour when I make a thorough examination of matters, at five o’clock in the morning. We will be happy and proud of having obtained your confidence. You are one of those consistent royalists to whom one can be politically hostile, but whose esteem is flattering—”

“Sir,” said the perfumer, lifted up by this parliamentary phrase, “I am as worthy of the honor that

you do me as of the distinguished and royal favor—I deserved it by sitting in the consular court and by fighting—”

“Yes,” continued the banker, “your reputation is a passport, Monsieur Birotteau. You would propose only feasible projects. You can count on our assistance.”

A woman, Madame Keller, one of the two daughters of the Comte de Gondreville, Peer of France, opened a door that Birotteau had not seen.

“My friend, I hope to see you before you go to the Chamber,” she said.

“It is two o’clock,” exclaimed the banker; “the battle is on. Excuse me, sir, there is question of overthrowing a Ministry.—See my brother.”

He escorted the perfumer to the parlor door, and said to one of his men:

“Show the gentleman to Monsieur Adolphe’s office.”

Across the labyrinth of stairways through which he was guided by a man in livery to a less sumptuous office than that of the head of the house, but more useful, the perfumer, astride on an *if*, the most pleasant mounting for hope, stroked his chin in regarding as a good omen the famous man’s flattery. He regretted that an enemy of the Bourbons should be so gracious, so capable, so great an orator.

Full of these illusions, he entered an office that was bare, cold, furnished with two cylindrical secretaries, common arm-chairs, adorned with

well-worn curtains and a thin carpet. This office was to the other what a kitchen is to the dining-room, the factory to the shop. There bank and trade affairs were ripped open, enterprises analyzed, and bank discounts on all the profits of industries judged to be profitable laid bare. There were concocted those bold strokes by which the Kellers distinguished themselves in the upper sphere of trade, and by which for some days they made for themselves a rapidly-exploited monopoly. There were studied the defects of legislation and were unblushingly stipulated what the Bourse calls the lion's share, commissions exacted for the smallest services, like bolstering up an enterprise with their name and giving it credit. There were concocted those flowery deceptions of legality that consist in holding out mere promises to doubtful schemes, in order to delay their success and to kill them so as to get possession of them by demanding repayment of the capital at a critical moment: a horrible manœuvre by which so many share-holders have been ensnared.

The two brothers had divided their parts among them. Above, François, a brilliant man and a politician, conducted himself as a king, distributed favors and promises, made himself agreeable to all. With him everything was easy; he entered nobly into business matters, he fuddled new adventurers and speculators of recent date with the wine of his favor and his captious speech, by developing their own ideas for them. Below, Adolphe excused his

brother for his political preoccupations, and he skilfully raked over every proposition; he was the compromised brother, the hard man. It was necessary, then, to have two forms of speech in order to make a bargain with this perfidious house. Frequently the gracious yes of the sumptuous office became a dry no in Adolphe's. This suspensive manœuvre gave time for reflection, and often served to amuse unwary customers. The banker's brother was then conversing with the famous Palma, the intimate adviser of the house of Keller, who retired on the perfumer making his appearance. When Birotteau had explained himself, Adolphe, the shrewder of the two brothers, a true lynx, with a sharp eye, thin lips, sickly complexion, cast at Birotteau, over his glasses and lowering his head, a look that ought to be called the banker's look, and which is of the same order as that of vultures and lawyers: it is greedy and indifferent, clear and dark, bright and sombre.

"Be so good as to send me the papers bearing on the Madeleine affair," said he; "therein lies the security for the loan. We must examine them before opening negotiations with you and discussing the matter of interest. If the affair is good, we may, without overburdening you, be satisfied with a share in the profits instead of a discount."

"Come," said Birotteau to himself, as he returned home, "I see what it is all about. Like the beaver when pursued, I must get rid of a part

of my skin. It is better to let oneself be clipped than to die."

That day he returned home quite gleeful, and his gladness was genuine.

"I am saved," he said to Césarine, "I will have a credit with the Kellers."



\*

Not before December 29 was Birotteau able to find himself again in Adolphe Keller's office. The first time that the perfumer returned, Adolphe had gone six leagues out of Paris to view a farm that the great orator wanted to buy. The second time, both the Kellers were engaged in business for the morning: it was a question of offering a proposed loan to the Chambers, and they begged Birotteau to return on the following Friday. These delays were killing the perfumer. But at last that Friday dawned. Birotteau found himself in the office, seated in the chimney corner, in front of the window, and Adolphe Keller at the other corner.

"All right, sir," said the banker to him when he showed him the papers; "but what have you paid on the price of the land?"

"A hundred thousand francs."

"In money?"

"In notes."

"Have they been taken up?"

"They have to fall due yet."

"But if you have paid too much for the land, in regard to its present value, where would be our security? It would depend only on the good opinion that you inspire and on the consideration that you enjoy. Business does not rest on sentiment. If you had paid two hundred thousand francs,

supposing that a hundred thousand too much were given to get possession of the land, we would then have a security of a hundred thousand francs to answer for a hundred thousand francs discounted. The result to us would be to be owners of your share by paying in your stead. It is necessary, then, to know whether the affair is good. To wait five years to double one's money, it were better to make it available in bank. There are so many things that might happen! You want to float a loan in order to pay notes falling due, a dangerous experiment! One goes back in order to be able to take a better jump. The affair does not go with us."

This phrase struck Birotteau as if the executioner had adjusted the fatal blade over his neck, and he lost his head.

"Let us see," said Adolphe, "my brother takes a deep interest in you, he has spoken of you to me. Let us examine your affairs," he said, casting on the perfumer the look of a courtesan pressed for the payment of her rent.

Birotteau became Molineux, whom he had so superciliously despised. Trifled with by the banker, who was pleased to reel the bobbin of this poor man's thoughts, and who knew how to interrogate a merchant as well as Judge Popinot did to lecture a criminal, César told the story of his enterprises, he trotted out the *Sultana Double Paste*, the *Carminative Water*, the Roguin affair, his lawsuit on account of his mortgage loan, of which

he had received nothing. On seeing Keller's smiling and reflective air, with his waggings of the head, Birotteau said to himself: "He is listening to me! I am interesting him! I will have my credit!" Adolphe Keller laughed at Birotteau as the perfumer had laughed at Molineux. Drawn on by the loquacity peculiar to people who allow themselves to be fuddled by misfortune, César showed the real Birotteau: he gave his measure when he proposed as security the *Cephalic Oil* and the Popinot house, his last card. The simpleton, allured by a false hope, allowed himself to be sounded and examined by Adolphe Keller, who found in the perfumer a royalist numskull ready to go into insolvency. Delighted at seeing a deputy to the mayor of their arrondissement fail, a man decorated so short a time before, a man of the powers that be, Adolphe then told Birotteau plainly that he could not either open an account with him or say anything in his favor to his brother François, the great orator. If François allowed himself to go to the extent of imbecile generosity in order to secure people of an opinion contrary to his own and his political enemies, he, Adolphe, would oppose with all his might his playing the part of a dupe, and would prevent him from reaching out his hand to an old adversary of Napoléon, to one who had been wounded at Saint-Roch. Birotteau, exasperated, wanted to say something of the greed of higher banking, of its hard-heartedness, of its false philanthropy; but he was seized with such a violent pain

that he could scarcely stammer out a few phrases on the institution of the Bank of France, on which the Kellers drew.

"But," said Adolphe Keller, "the Bank will never make a discount that a private banker refuses."

"The Bank," said Birotteau, "has always seemed to me to be wanting in its purpose when it takes credit to itself, in presenting the account of its profits, for having lost only a hundred or two hundred thousand francs with the trade of Paris, for it is its guardian."

Adolphe could not help smiling as he rose with the air of a man who was being bored.

"If the Bank mixed itself up with guarantees for people embarrassed in the most knavish and most slippery way in the world of finance, it would have to close its doors within a year. Already it has great difficulty in defending itself against notes in circulation and false assets; what would be the case if it had to investigate the standing of those who wanted assistance from it?"

"Where am I to find the ten thousand francs that I am short for to-morrow, Saturday, the thirtieth?" said Birotteau to himself, as he passed through the courtyard.

According to custom payment is made on the thirtieth when the thirty-first is a holiday. On reaching the gate, his eyes bathed in tears, the perfumer scarcely saw a fine English horse, sweating, that had stopped right in front of the door

with one of the prettiest cabs that at that time rolled over the Paris pavements. He might well have wished to have been crushed beneath that cab; it would be death by accident, and the disorder in which his affairs then were would have been set down to the account of that event. He did not recognize Du Tillet, who, slender, and in elegant morning dress, threw the reins to his servant and a covering on the sweating back of his blooded horse.

“And by what chance here?” said Du Tillet to his former employer.

Du Tillet knew it well: the Kellers had asked information of Claparon, who, referring them to Du Tillet, had demolished the perfumer’s reputation. Though quickly checked, the poor merchant’s tears spoke eloquently.

“Have you come to ask some favor of those Arabs,” said Du Tillet, “of those cut-throats of trade, who have been guilty of infamous tricks, such as raising the price of indigo after having secured a monopoly of it, lowering rice so as to force holders to sell theirs at the lowest price in order to have all and control the market, to those atrocious pirates who have neither faith, nor law, nor soul! You do not know, then, what they are capable of? They open a credit with you when your affairs are prosperous, and close it against you as soon as you are involved in business difficulties, and they force you to surrender it at a low price. Havre, Bordeaux and Marseilles will tell you fine stories to their

account. Politics serves them in covering up many dirty jobs, you know! And so I make a tool of them without any scruple! Let us take a walk, my dear Birotteau. Joseph, walk my horse about; he is too warm, and he represents three thousand francs.

And he set out toward the boulevard.

“Let us see, my dear master, for you have been my master, do you need money? They have asked you for security, the wretches! I, who know you, offer you money on your mere notes. I have honorably made my fortune against unheard-of difficulties. That fortune, I went to seek it in Germany! I can tell you of it to-day: I bought the credits on the king at sixty per cent discount, then your bond has been very useful to me, and I, yes, I, am most grateful for it! If you need ten thousand francs, they are at your service.”

“What! Du Tillet,” César exclaimed, “is that true? are you not playing with me? Yes, I am somewhat pinched, but it is only for the time being—”

“I know it, the Roguin affair,” Du Tillet replied. “Well, I am in it for ten thousand francs that the old scamp borrowed from me in order to get away; but Madame Roguin will pay them back to me out of her claims. I have advised that poor woman not to be so stupid as to give her fortune to pay debts contracted for a mistress; that would be all right if she paid all, but why favor certain creditors to the detriment of others? You are not a Roguin; I know you,” said Du Tillet, “you would blow out your

brains rather than have me lose a sou. Come, here we are at the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin; come up into my quarters."

The upstart took pleasure in making his former master pass through the apartments instead of taking him into the office, and he led him slowly in order to let him see a beautiful and sumptuous dining-room furnished with paintings purchased in Germany, two salons displaying an elegance and luxury that Birotteau had as yet admired only at the Duc de Lenoncourt's. The shop-keeper's eyes were dazzled with gildings, works of art, silly trifles, precious vases, by a thousand details that threw entirely into the shade the luxury of Constance's tenement; and, knowing the cost of his folly, he said to himself:

"Whence, then, has he got so many millions?"

He entered a bed-room compared with which that of his wife seemed to him to be what the fourth story of a super is to the mansion of a star at the Opera. The ceiling, all in violet satin, had raised work of white satin folds. An ermine bed-spread reached down to the violet colors of a Levant rug. The furniture and the accessories showed new forms and an extravagant taste. The perfumer stopped in front of a charming clock representing Love and Psyche, that had just been made for a famous banker; Du Tillet had secured the only duplicate of it that could be had. At last the old employer and his former clerk reached an elegant fop's office, a catchy place, bespeaking love rather than finance. Madame

Roguin had no doubt offered, in acknowledgment of the attention paid to her fortune, a cutter in engraved gold, malachite files adorned with chased work, all the costly knickknacks of an unbridled luxury. The carpet, one of the richest products of Belgium, astonished the look as much as it surprised the feet by the soft thickness of its rich pile. Du Tillet made the poor, dazzled, confused perfumer sit down beside his fire-place.

“Will you have breakfast with me?”

He rang the bell. A valet came in who was better dressed than Birotteau.

“Tell Monsieur Legras to come up, then go and tell Joseph to come back here; you will find him at the door of the Keller house; you will go in and say to Adolphe Keller that instead of going to see him I will wait for him until it is time to go to the Bourse. Do as I tell you, and quickly.”

These phrases amazed the perfumer.

“He is going to bring that terrible Adolphe Keller here; he whistles him up as he would a dog, does this Du Tillet.”

A page, as round as one's fist, came to set a table that Birotteau had not observed, so small was it, and placed on it a *pâté de foies gras*, a bottle of Bordeaux wine, and all the choice things that made their appearance at Birotteau's only twice in three months, on great days. Du Tillet was pleased. His hatred against the only man who should have had the right to despise him developed so warmly that Birotteau made him experience the deep



sensation caused by the sight of a sheep defending itself against a tiger. A generous idea passed through his heart: he asked himself whether his revenge had not been accomplished, he fluctuated between the counsels of awakened clemency and those of obdurate hate.

"I can annihilate this man commercially," he thought. "I have the right of life and death over him, over his wife, who has put me on the rack, over his daughter, whose hand at one time seemed to me a whole fortune. I have his money. Let us then be satisfied with letting this poor simpleton swim the length of the rope which I hold in my hand."

Honest people are wanting in tact; they have no measure for well-doing, because to them everything is free from wile or subterfuge. Birotteau consummated his misfortune. He irritated the tiger, pierced him to the heart without knowing it; he rendered him implacable by one word, by a eulogy, by a virtuous expression, by the very simplicity of probity. When the cashier came, Du Tillet pointed out César to him.

"Monsieur Legras, bring me ten thousand francs and a note for that amount made out to my order for ninety days by the gentleman, who is Monsieur Birotteau. You understand?"

Du Tillet served some pâté, poured out a glass of Bordeaux wine for the perfumer, who, seeing that he was saved, indulged in convulsive laughter; he dallied with his watch-chain, and put nothing in

his mouth until his former clerk said to him: "You are not eating?" Thus did Birotteau make known the depth of the abyss into which Du Tillet's hand had plunged him, from which it was rescuing him, whither it could plunge him once more. When the cashier returned, after having signed the note, César felt the ten bank bills in his pocket, he could no longer contain himself. A moment before, his section, the Bank, were going to know that he was insolvent, and he must confess to his wife that he was ruined; now all was set right again! The happiness of his deliverance was equal in intensity to the tortures of defeat. The poor man's eyes became moist in spite of him.

"What ails you, then, my dear master?" asked Du Tillet. "Would you not do for me to-morrow what I am doing to-day for you? Is it not as simple as saying good-day?"

"Du Tillet," the good man said, emphatically and gravely, as he rose and grasped his former clerk's hand, "I feel again for you all the esteem in my power."

"What! had I lost it?" asked Du Tillet, feeling himself so severely hurt in the midst of his prosperity that he blushed.

"Lost—not exactly," said the perfumer, dumfounded by his blunder; "I had been told things about your relations with Madame Roguin. The devil! to take another man's wife—"

"You are breaking the bauble, old man," Du

Tillet bethought himself, using an expression belonging to his former trade.

While forming this phrase in his own mind, he went back to his scheme of beating down that virtuous man, of trampling him under foot, of making contemptible in the streets of Paris the virtuous and honorable man by whom he had been caught with his hand in the drawer. Every hate, whether political or private, of woman for woman, of man for man, has no other foundation than such a surprise. One does not hate oneself for interests compromised, for a wound, nor even for a box on the ear; reparation can be made for all that. But to have been caught in the very act of villainy?—the duel that ensues between the criminal and the witness to the crime ends only with the death of one.

“Oh! Madame Roguin,” said Du Tillet, in a bantering tone; “but is it not, on the contrary, a feather in a young man’s cap? I understand you, my dear master: some one may have told you that she had loaned me money. Well, quite the contrary, I have restored her fortune, which had been strangely compromised in her husband’s affairs. The origin of my fortune is pure. I have just told you so. I had nothing, as you know! Young men sometimes find themselves in frightful straits. One may allow himself to fall into the depths of misery. But if, like the Republic, one has made forced loans, well, one pays them back, and one is then more honest than France.”

"That's so," said Birotteau. "My boy—God—Is it not Voltaire who has said:

" 'He made of repentance the virtue of mortals?'"

"Provided," continued Du Tillet, again stabbed by this quotation, "that one does not run away with his neighbor's fortune, heartlessly, basely, as, for example, if you were to go into insolvency within three months and my ten thousand francs went up in smoke—"

"I go into insolvency!" said Birotteau, who had drunk three glasses of wine, and who was becoming fuddled with delight. "People know my opinion of insolvency! Insolvency is death to a trader. I would die!"

"To your health," said Du Tillet.

"To your prosperity," returned the perfumer. "Why don't you buy your goods at my place?"

"Faith," said Du Tillet, "I must acknowledge that I am afraid of Madame César. She always makes an impression on me! and if you were not my master, faith, I—"

"Ah! you are not the first to find her attractive, and many have desired her; but she loves me! Well, Du Tillet," continued Birotteau, "my friend, do not do things by halves."

"How?"

Birotteau explained the matter of the land to Du Tillet, whose eyes became dilated, and he complimented the perfumer on his penetration and foresight, bespeaking wonders for that affair.

“Well, I am very glad of your approbation; you pass for one of the able men of the banking world, Du Tillet! Dear boy, you can procure me a credit at the Bank of France until I realize the profits on the *Cephalic Oil*.”

“I can introduce you to the Nucingen house,” Du Tillet replied, promising himself that he would make his victim dance all the figures of the country-dance of insolvents.

Ferdinand sat down at his desk and wrote the following letter:

TO THE BARON DE NUCINGEN, PARIS.

“MY DEAR BARON,

“The bearer of this letter is Monsieur César Birotteau, deputy to the mayor of the second arrondissement, and one of the most renowned traders in the perfumery business in Paris; he desires to enter into relations with you: do confidently whatever he may ask of you; by obliging him you oblige

“Your friend,

“F. DU TILLET.”

Du Tillet did not put a dot over the *i* in his name. To those with whom he carried on business this voluntary error was a conventional sign. The most urgent recommendations, the warm and favorable insistence of his letter meant nothing, then. Such a letter, in which exclamation points entreated, in which Du Tillet went, as it were, on his knees, was then wrung by powerful considerations; he had not been able to refuse it; it must be regarded as not having reached its destination. On seeing the *i* without

the dot, his friend then gave the cold shoulder to him who solicited. Many people of the world, and some of the most important, are thus trifled with by business men, as if they were children, and by bankers and lawyers, all of whom have a double signature, one negative, the other positive. The shrewdest are caught by it. To recognize this trick, it is necessary to have experienced the double effect of a warm letter and of a cold letter.

“You are saving me, Du Tillet!” said César, as he read this letter.

“Good Heavens,” said Du Tillet, “go and ask for money. Nucingen, on reading my note, will give you as much as you want. Unfortunately, my cash is tied up for some days; otherwise I would not send you to the prince of higher banking, for the Kellers are only pigmies compared with the Baron de Nucingen. It is Law reappearing in Nucingen. With my letter you will be all right by January 15, and we will see to it after that. Nucingen and I are the best friends in the world; he would not disoblige me for a million.”

“It is like an endorsement,” Birotteau said to himself, as he went away filled with gratitude toward Du Tillet. “Well,” he thought, “a kindness is never lost.”

And he philosophized out of sight. Yet a thought soured his happiness. He had indeed for some days kept his wife from thrusting her nose into the books, he had turned over the cash drawer to Célestin while assisting him, he had been able to wish

## IN MISFORTUNE

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*“Yes, mamma,” exclaimed Césarine. “But, father was very courageous. All that I wish is to be loved as he loves you. He thought only of your grief.”*

*“My dream has come true,” said the poor woman, as she let herself fall on her sofa by the fire-place, pale, wan and frightened-looking. “I had foreseen everything. I told you so on that fatal night, in our old room which you have demolished, there would remain to us only eyes to weep with. My poor Césarine! I—”*





Illustration by J. B. ...





that his wife and daughter had the enjoyment of the fine apartments that he had arranged and furnished for them; but, these first minor pleasures having been exhausted, Madame Birotteau would rather be dead than give up seeing for herself to the details of her house, give up, as she herself expressed it, *holding the handle of the frying-pan*. Birotteau found himself at the end of his tether; he had used all his artifices to conceal from his wife the knowledge of the symptoms of his distress. Constance had strongly disapproved of the sending out of the bills, she had grumbled at the clerks, and accused Célestin of wanting to ruin her house, thinking that Célestin alone was responsible for this idea. By Birotteau's orders, Célestin allowed himself to be scolded. Madame César, in the clerk's eyes, ruled the perfumer, for it is possible to deceive the public, but not the members of the household, regarding who has the real superiority in an establishment. Birotteau must confess his predicament to his wife, for the account with Du Tillet was going to be worth a justification. On his return, Birotteau trembled when he saw Constance at her desk, verifying the book of bills falling due and, no doubt, counting the cash.

"What have you to pay with to-morrow?" she asked in a whisper when he sat down beside her.

"Money," he replied, as he drew out his bank-notes and made a sign to Célestin to take them.

"But where do they come from?"

"I will tell you that this evening. Célestin,

write, end of March, a note for ten thousand francs, to the order of Du Tillet."

"Du Tillet!" Constance repeated, terror-stricken.

"I am about to see Popinot," said César. "It is wrong for me not to have gone before now to visit him at his own place. Are they selling any of his oil?"

"The three hundred bottles that he left with us are gone."

"Birotteau, don't go out, I have something to say to you," said Constance, as she took César by the arm and led him to her room with a haste that in any other circumstances would have excited laughter. "Du Tillet!" she said, when she was alone with her husband, and after having made sure that only Césarine was with her, "Du Tillet, who stole a thousand crowns from us! You are doing business with Du Tillet, a monster—who tempted my fidelity," she whispered in his ear.

"A youthful folly," said Birotteau, who had suddenly become strong-minded.

"Listen, Birotteau, you are going crazy, you do not go any more to the factory. I feel that there is something wrong! You must tell me what it is. I want to know everything."

"Well," said Birotteau, "we have come near being ruined, we were even so this morning, but everything is all right now."

And he narrated the horrible story of his fortnight.

"That, then, was the cause of your illness!" Constance exclaimed.

“Yes, mamma,” exclaimed Césarine. “But, father was very courageous. All that I wish is to be loved as he loves you. He thought only of your grief.”

“My dream has come true,” said the poor woman, as she let herself fall on her sofa by the fire-place, pale, wan and frightened-looking. “I had foreseen everything. I told you so on that fatal night, in our old room which you have demolished, there would remain to us only eyes to weep with. My poor Césarine! I—”

“Come, just look at you,” exclaimed Birotteau. “You are not going to rob me of the courage that I need!”

“Pardon, my love,” said Constance, as she took hold of César’s hand and pressed it with a tenderness that went to the poor man’s heart. “I am wrong. Here is misfortune come upon us. I will be silent, resigned and full of strength. No, you will never hear a word of complaint.”

She threw herself into César’s arms, and there said as she wept:

“Courage, my love, courage! I shall have enough for two if it be needed.”

“My oil, wife, my oil will save us.”

“May God protect us!” said Constance.

“Will not Anselme, then, assist my father?” said Césarine.

“I am going to see him,” exclaimed César, too much moved by his wife’s heart-rending tone, for she had not been fully known to him even after

nineteen years. "Constance, do not fear any longer. Here, read Du Tillet's letter to Monsieur de Nucingen. We are sure of a credit. Between now and then I will have won my lawsuit. Besides," he added, as he told a necessary fib, "we have our uncle Pillerault; it is only necessary to be courageous."

"If that were the only question!" said Constance, smiling.

Birotteau, relieved of one great weight, walked like a man just set at liberty, though he felt in himself the indefinable exhaustion that follows excessive moral struggles in which is spent more nervous fluid, more will-power, than one ought to give out daily, and from which one takes, so to say, part of the capital of existence. Birotteau had already grown old.

The house of A. Popinot, in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants, had changed considerably within two months. The shop had been repainted. The shelves, newly done up and filled with bottles, delighted the eye of every trader who knows the symptoms of prosperity. The shop floor was littered with packing paper. The store contained small casks of various oils, the agency for which had been acquired for Popinot by the devoted Gaudissart. The books and the counting-room, as well as the cashier's office, were over the shop and the rear shop. An old cook did the housekeeping for three clerks and Popinot. Popinot, confined in a corner of the shop and behind a desk enclosed with

glass, appeared in a serge apron, with green linen double sleeves, his pen behind his ear, when he was not buried in a mass of papers, as at the moment when Birotteau arrived, at which time he unloaded his messenger, who came in burdened with remittances and orders. At these words: "Well, my boy," spoken by his former employer, he raised his head, locked his cabin, and came out with a joyous air and the point of his nose red. There was no fire in the shop and its door remained open.

"I was afraid you would never come," Popinot replied, with a respectful bearing.

The clerks ran to see the great man of the perfumery business, the decorated deputy, their employer's partner. These mute homages flattered the perfumer. Birotteau, but lately so small with the Kellers, felt the need of imitating them: he stroked his chin, with the aid of his heels he bounded in a way suggestive of vanity, at the same time giving expression to his commonplaces.

"Well, my friend, do the folks get up early?" he asked him.

"No, but they are not always asleep," said Popinot; "one must cling to success."

"Well, what did I say? My oil is a fortune."

"Yes, sir, but the means of execution count for something in it: I have given your diamond a good setting."

"In reality," said the perfumer, "where are we? Are there any profits?"

"At the end of a month!" exclaimed Popinot,

“are you thinking of that? Friend Gaudissart has been on the road only twenty-five days, and has hired a post-chaise without telling me of it. Oh! he is very devoted. We will owe much to my uncle! The newspapers,” he whispered in Birotteau’s ear, “will cost us twelve thousand francs.”

“The newspapers!” exclaimed the deputy.

“You haven’t read them, then?”

“No.”

“You know nothing, then,” said Popinot. “Twenty thousand francs for placards, frames and prints!—a hundred thousand bottles bought!—Ah! everything is sacrifice at this moment. The manufacture is conducted on a large scale. If you had set foot in the Faubourg, where I have spent many nights, you would have seen a small nut-cracker of my own invention that is not worm-eaten. On my own account I have made, these last five days, three thousand francs on nothing but commissions on the oils of the drug business.”

“What a clear head!” said Birotteau, laying his hand on little Popinot’s hair and stroking it as if Popinot had been a mere child. “I predicted it.”

Several persons came in.

“On Sunday we dine at your aunt Ragon’s,” said Birotteau, who left Popinot to his business when he saw that the young man whom he had come to sound was not yet broken down. “Isn’t it extraordinary! a clerk becomes a merchant in twenty-four hours,” thought Birotteau, who could think no



less of Popinot's happiness and stability than of Du Tillet's luxury.

Birotteau had not dreamt that the clerks were looking at him, and that a head of a house has his dignity to preserve at home. There, as at Du Tillet's, the simple-minded man had been guilty of a folly from goodness of heart, and, from want of observing a proper sense of delicacy, expressed in the middle-class fashion, César would have hurt the feelings of any other man than Anselme.

That Sunday dinner with the Ragons was to be the last joy of the nineteen happy years of Birotteau's housekeeping, and a complete joy besides. Ragon lived in the Rue du Petit-Bourbon-Saint-Sulpice, on a third floor, in an old house of dignified appearance, in an old tenement with piers, where danced nymphs in hoop-skirts and where grazed sheep of that eighteenth century whose grave and serious middle class, of comical manners, of respectful ideas regarding the nobility, devoted to sovereign and to Church, was admirably represented by the Ragons. Furniture, clocks, linen, dishes and plates, everything, in fact, seemed to be patriarchal, of forms that were new by their very oldness. The parlor, hung with old damask, adorned with brocette curtains, displayed duchess chairs, what-nots, a superb Popinot, alderman of Sancerre, painted by Latour, Madame Ragon's father, a picture of a jolly good-fellow, and who smiled like an upstart in his glory. At home Madame Ragon was not herself without a little English dog—the King Charles Spaniel

breed—which produced a marvelous effect on the hard little sofa, in *rococo* style, that certainly had never played the part of Crébillon's sofa. Among all their virtues the Ragons were noted for a stock of old wines that had reached a perfect development, and for owning some Madame Anfoux liqueurs, which some people giddy enough to love—hopelessly, it was said,—the pretty Madame Ragon, had brought from the Isles. And so their little dinners were prized! An old cook, Jeannette, served the two old people with a blind devotedness; she would have stolen fruits to make confections for them! Instead of taking her money to a savings bank, she wisely put it into lotteries, hoping one day to draw a big prize for her employers. On the Sunday when they had company, she, in spite of her sixty years, superintended the dishes in the kitchen, and at table served with an agility that would have given points to Mademoiselle Constat in her rôle of Susanna in the *Marriage of Figaro*.

Those invited were Judge Popinot, Uncle Pillerault, Anselme, the three Birotteaus, the three Matifats and the Abbé Loraux. Madame Matifat, but lately having a dancing turban on her head, came in a blue velvet dress, thick cotton stockings and goat-skin shoes, chamois gloves trimmed with green plush, and a hat turned up like a rose and decked with auriculas. These ten persons were assembled at five o'clock. The old Ragons entertained their guests to be punctual. When this

worthy household was invited, care was taken to have dinner at this hour, for those seventy-year-old stomachs did not become accustomed to the new hours adopted by the swells.

Césarine knew that Madame Ragon would place her alongside of Anselme: all women, even the devout and foolish, understand one another in the matter of love. The perfumer's daughter had then dressed herself so as to turn Popinot's head. Constance, who had, not without a pang, given up the notary, who played in her thoughts the part of an hereditary prince, contributed, not without bitter reflections, to this toilet. This foreseeing mother lowered the modest gauze neckerchief so as to show a little of Césarine's shoulders and expose the throat, which was of remarkable elegance. The Greek bodice, crossed from left to right in five folds, could be opened so as to show captivating fulness. The lead-gray merino dress, with furbelows trimmed with green embellishments, clearly outlined a figure that had never appeared so fine or so lithesome. The ears were adorned with wrought gold pendants. The hair, done up in Chinese fashion, allowed one to take in at a glance the sweet freshness of a skin shaded with veins through which the purest life shone at the pale places. In fine, Césarine was so takingly pretty that Madame Matifat could not help acknowledging it, without perceiving that mother and daughter had understood the necessity of bewitching little Popinot.

Neither Birotteau, nor his wife, nor Madame

Matifat, no one, in fact, disturbed the sweet conversation that the two young people, inflamed by love, were carrying on in a low voice in a window recess where the cold was blowing its penetrating north wind. Besides, the conversation of the great personages became animated when Judge Popinot let a word slip regarding Roguin's flight, remarking that he was the second notary who had failed, and that such a crime was formerly unknown. Madame Ragon, on hearing Roguin's name, touched her brother's foot. Pillerault hushed the Judge's voice and both called his attention to Madame Birotteau.

"I know all," said Constance to her friends, in a voice at the same time mild and painful.

"Well," said Madame Matifat to Birotteau, who humbly bowed his head, "how much has he taken from you? If one were to listen to gossipings, you are ruined."

"He had two hundred thousand francs of mine. As for the forty that he had loaned to me in imagination by one of his clients, whose money was squandered by him, we are in litigation."

"You will have a verdict rendered this week," said Popinot. "I felt that you would not want me to explain your situation to the presiding judge; he has ordered the production of Roguin's papers in the council chamber, so as to examine from what period the lender's funds were diverted and the proofs of the fact alleged by Derville, who himself pleaded so as to save you costs."

"Shall we win?" asked Madame Birotteau.

"I do not know," Popinot replied. "Though I belong to the court-room to which the matter has been referred, I will abstain from taking part, even should they call on me."

"But can there be any doubt on the issue of so simple a trial?" asked Pillerault. "Should not the receipt mention the delivery of the goods, and the notaries declare having seen them given by the lender to the borrower? Roguin would go to the galleys if he were in the hands of justice."

"In my opinion," replied the judge, "the lender ought to protect himself against Roguin on the price paid for the office and the security; but, in matters still more clear, sometimes, in the royal court, judges are found six to six."

"What, Mademoiselle, Monsieur Roguin has fled?" said Popinot, as he at last heard what was being talked about. "Monsieur César has said nothing of it to me, to me who would give my life's blood for him—"

Césarine understood that the whole family stuck to this *for him*, for, if the innocent girl had misunderstood the emphasis, she could not be deceived as to the look that enveloped him in a purple flame.

"I was well aware of it, and I told him so, but he concealed everything from my mother and confided only in me."

"You have spoken to him of me, in this connection," said Popinot; "you read in my heart, but do you read all in it?"

"Perhaps."

"I am very happy," said Popinot. "If you wish to rid me of all fear, in a year I will be so rich that your father will no longer receive me so coldly when I speak to him of our marriage. I am going hereafter to sleep only five hours a night—"

"Do not do yourself an injustice," said Césarine, in an inimitable tone, as she cast on Popinot a look in which her whole thought was read.

"Wife," said César, as he was leaving table, "I think these young people love each other."

"Well, so much the better," said Constance, in a grave tone of voice; "my daughter will be the wife of a man of ability and great energy. Talent is the finest gift of a future husband."

She hastily left the parlor and went into Madame Ragon's room. César, during dinner, had spoken a few phrases that made Pillerault and the judge smile, so much ignorance did they betray, and that reminded that unfortunate woman how little strength her poor husband had to struggle against misfortune. Constance wept from her heart; she instinctively distrusted Du Tillet, for all mothers know the *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes* without knowing Latin.

She wept in her daughter's and Madame Ragon's arms, without wishing to acknowledge the cause of her suffering.

"It is nervousness," she said.

The rest of the evening was given up to cards by the old folks, and by the young to those delightful little games called innocent, because they cloak

the innocent mischief of middle-class love. The Matifats interested themselves in the little games.

“César,” said Constance, while returning, “go not later than the eighth to Baron de Nucingen’s, so as to make sure long in advance for your bills falling due on the fifteenth. If any difficulty should arise, is it between to-day and to-morrow that you would find resources?”

“I will go, wife,” replied César, who clasped Constance’s hand and that of his daughter, as he added: “My sweet darlings, I have made you sad New Year’s presents!”

In the darkness of the hackney-coach, these two women, who could not see the poor perfumer, felt warm tears fall on their hands.

“Hope, my love,” said Constance.

“Everything will be well, papa; Monsieur Anselme Popinot has told me that he would shed his blood for you.”

“For me,” rejoined César, “and for the family, is it not?” he said, assuming a cheerful tone.

Césarine clasped her father’s hand, as though to tell him that Anselme was her betrothed.





\*

During the first three days of the year two hundred cards were sent to Birotteau's house. This affluence of mock friendship, these testimonies of favor, are horrible to people who see themselves swept on by the current of misfortune. Birotteau three times visited in vain the residence of the famous banker, the Baron de Nucingen. The opening of the year and its feasts sufficiently justified the financier's absence. The last time the perfumer penetrated as far as the banker's office, where the chief clerk, a German, told him that Monsieur de Nucingen, having returned at five o'clock in the morning from a ball given by the Kellers, could not be seen at half-past nine. Birotteau knew how to interest the chief clerk in his affairs, and with him he remained chatting for nearly half an hour. During the day this minister of the Nucingen house wrote to him to say that the Baron would receive him the next day, the third, at noon. Though each hour brought its drop of bitterness, the day passed with frightful rapidity. The perfumer came in a hack, and stopped within one pace of the house, the courtyard of which was filled with carriages. The poor, honest man's heart became quite depressed at sight of the splendors of this famous house.

“And yet he has failed twice,” he said to himself

as he ascended the superb stairway, decked with flowers, and passed through the sumptuous apartments for which the Baroness Delphine de Nucingen had made herself famous. The Baroness pretended to rival the richest houses of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where she had not yet been admitted. The baron was breakfasting with his wife. In spite of the number of people who were waiting for him in his office, he said that Du Tillet's friends could enter at any hour. Birotteau bounded with hope as he saw the change that the baron's words had produced on the valet's countenance, insolent as it was at first.

“Bardon me, mein tear,” said the Baron to his wife as he arose and made a slight inclination of the head to Birotteau, “mein shentleman eez ein goot royalizt ant de fery indimade frient of Ti Dilet. Moreofer, de shentleman is tebudy of de zegund arontizement ant gifs palls of a Hasiadig macnivizenze; you vill no toudt pe bleased making agvaindance ov him.”

“But I would be very much flattered to go and take lessons from Madame Birotteau at her home, for Ferdinand—(Come, thought the perfumer, she calls him plain Ferdinand!)—has spoken to us of that ball with an admiration so much the more remarkable as he admires nothing. Ferdinand is a severe critic, everything must be perfect. Will you soon give another?” she asked in the most amiable manner.

“Madame, poor people like us rarely amuse

AT THE BARON DE NUCINGEN'S

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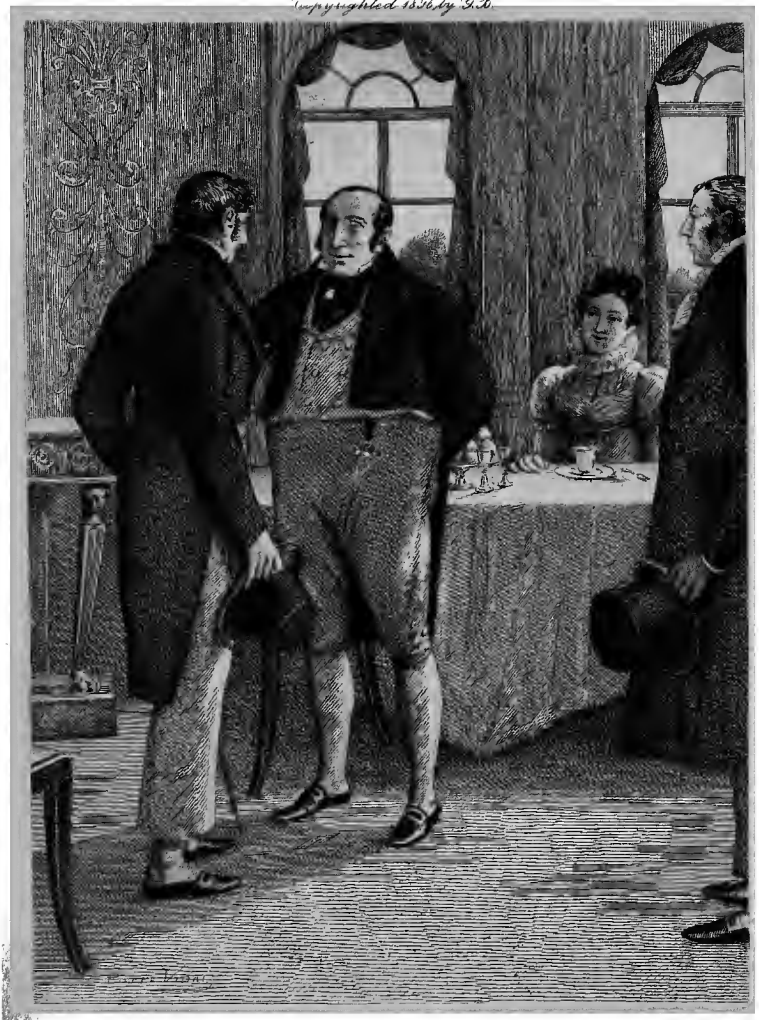
*“Vit his ledder you haf ad mein ouse ein gretid vat is limided pud py te poundts of mein own vortchen—”*

*The exhilarating balm contained in the water presented by the angel to Agar in the desert must have resembled the dew deposited in the perfumer's veins by these half-German words. \* \* \**

*There came into the room in a familiar way a young man whose step, recognized from afar by Delphine de Nucingen, had made her blush deeply.*



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themselves," replied the perfumer, not knowing whether it was raillery or cheap compliment.

"Meinnesir Crintod tiredged the rezdorazion of your abardments," said the Baron.

"Ah! Grindot! a fine little architect who has just returned from Rome?" said Delphine de Nucingen. "I dote on him; he draws such delightful designs in my album."

No conspirator bedeviled by the Venetian inquisitor was more ill at ease in the rack of torture than was Birotteau in his clothes. He detected a bantering air in every word.

"Vee gifs alzo de leedle palls," said the baron, as he cast an inquisitive look on the perfumer. "You zee vat de vorldt zays blainly!"

"Will Monsieur Birotteau breakfast unceremoniously with us?" said Delphine, as she pointed to her sumptuously-supplied table.

"Baroness, I have come on business and am—"

"Yez," said the baron. "Matam, bermid uz to sbeag of pizniss?"

Delphine made a slight sign of assent as she said to the baron:

"Are you going to buy perfumery?"

The baron shrugged his shoulders and turned towards César, who felt desperate.

"Ti Dilet dages de geenest inderest in you," he said.

"At last," thought the poor merchant, "we are coming to the question."

"Vit his ledder you haf ad mein ouze ein gretid

vat is limided pud py te poundts of mein own vortchen—”

The exhilarating balm contained in the water presented by the angel to Agar in the desert must have resembled the dew deposited in the perfumer's veins by these half-German words. The astute baron, in order to have reasons for going back on words well thought out and but indistinctly heard, had adopted the horrible accent of the German Jews, who flatter themselves they know how to speak the language of the country they dwell in.

“Undt you vill haf ein gurrendt aggoundt. Zee how vee vill brozeedt,” the good, the venerable and the great financier said with Alsatian good-nature.

Birotteau no longer doubted of anything. He was a man of trade and knew those who are not disposed to oblige never enter into details as to the carrying out of suggestions.

“I vill not dell you dat of de crate as vell as of de leedle de Pangk temandts dree zignadures. Den, you vill pring your nodes to de ordter off our vrient, Ti Dilet, und I vill sent dem de same tay vit mein zignadure to de Pangk, and you vill haf in vore hours de ordter vor de nodes dat you vill haf zup-zcriped in de morning, und ad de Pangk rades. I vish needer kemmission, nor disgount, notings, vor I vill av de blezhur of peing acreaple doo you—yed I bud vun gundission!” he said, putting his left index finger to his nose with a gesture of inimitable artifice.

“Baron, it is granted already,” said Birotteau,



who thought of some advance discount on what was coming to him.

“Von gondission to vich I addadge de greadest imbordance, pegauze I vish Matame ti Nicinguenne dakes, az zhe haz sed, de leszuns of Matame Pirodot.”

“Baron, do not make fun of me, I entreat you!”

“Meinnesir Pirodot,” said the financier, in a serious tone, “id iz accreed, you vill infide uz doo your negst pall. Mein vife iz chellus, zhe vants doo zee your abbardemends, vor effery potty say ein goodt vordt of dem.”

“Baron!”

“Oh! eev you revoose uz, no aggoundt! you pee in great vafor. Yah! I am avare dat you haf de brevet of de Seine dat haf come to you.”

“Baron!”

“You haf La Pillartière, a shentleman ortinary of de Shamper, Fentéheine, as you as vas vounted —ad Sainte—”

“On the thirteenth Vendémiaire, Baron.”

“You hat Meinnesir de Lassébette, Meinnesir, Fauqueleine of the Agateme—”

“Baron!”

“Eh! der teufel, don’t be zo motest, Meisder Tebudy. I learn dat de ging haz sedt dat your pall—”

“The king?” said Birotteau, who could not bear to hear any more of it.

There came into the room in a familiar way a young man whose step, recognized from afar

by Delphine de Nucingen, had made her blush deeply.

“Coot tay, mein tear Te Marsay,” said Baron de Nucingen, “dake my blace; there is, I haf peen dolt, a heabing vire in mein offeez. I know de reason! de Vortschinne mines gif two gabidals in ingome! Yah, I haf receefed the aggounts! you haf ein hundred tousandt vrancs of ingome more, Matame ti Nicinguenne. You gan puy choindures und all de pauples you vandt do pe breddy, as eef you needed dem.”

“Great God! the Ragons have sold their shares!” exclaimed Birotteau.

“Who are these gentlemen?” asked the young fop, smiling.

“Zee,” said Monsieur de Nucingen, as he turned back, for he had already reached the door, “id zeems do me as dese bersons—Te Marsay, diess iz Mennesire Pirodot, your berfeumer, as gifs dem palls zo macnivizendt Asiatic, whom der ging haz tegoradet—”

De Marsay put on his eye-glass and said:

“Ah! true. I thought that this figure was not unknown to me. You are going, then, to perfume your business with some effective cosmetic, to oil it?—”

“Vell, dese Rakhons,” continued the baron, making a grimace like a man who is dissatisfied, “haf ein aggount mit me, who haf vafored dem mit ein vorchun, und dey haf nod batiencie do vait von tay more.”

“Baron!” exclaimed Birotteau.

The poor man found his business very much in the dark, and, without saluting either the Baroness or De Marsay, he ran after the banker. Monsieur de Nucingen was on the first step of the stairs; the perfumer overtook him at the bottom as he was entering his office. On opening the door, Monsieur de Nucingen observed a despairing gesture of this poor creature, who felt as if he was sinking into an abyss, and said to him:

“Vell, id iz unterstoot? Zee Ti Dilet, und arrainsh eferyting mit heem.”

Birotteau thought that De Marsay could influence the baron. He went up the stairs again with the rapidity of a swallow, glided into the dining-room, where the baroness and De Marsay might yet be found: he had left Delphine waiting for her coffee with cream. He indeed saw the coffee poured out, but the baroness and the young fop had disappeared. The valet smiled at the astonishment of the perfumer, who went down the stairs slowly. César ran to Du Tillet's, who was, he was told, in the country, at Madame Roguin's. The perfumer took a cab and paid to be taken as quickly as the post to Nogent-sur-Marne. At Nogent-sur-Marne the janitor told the perfumer that monsieur and madame had set out for Paris. Birotteau returned all prostrated. When he told his wife and daughter of his journey, he was dazed at seeing Constance, ordinarily perched like a bird of ill-omen on the slightest ruffle of trade, giving him the sweetest

consolations, and assuring him that everything would go well.

Next day, Birotteau found himself at seven o'clock in Du Tillet's street, at day-break, on guard. He entreated Du Tillet's porter to put him in relations with Du Tillet's valet de chambre, and slipped ten francs to the porter. César obtained the favor of speaking to Du Tillet's valet de chambre, and asked him to let him see Du Tillet as soon as Du Tillet would be visible, and he slipped two gold pieces into the hand of the valet de chambre. These little sacrifices and these great humiliations, common to courtiers and beggars, enabled him to attain his object. At half-past eight, just as his old clerk was getting rid of his night-shirt; and throwing off the confused ideas of waking up, was yawning and stretching himself, and excusing himself to his old master, Birotteau found himself face to face with the tiger famishing for revenge which he wished to wreak on his only friend.

"Do, do it," said Birotteau.

"What do you want, *my good César?*" said Du Tillet.

César delivered, not without frightful palpitations, Baron de Nucingen's answer and conditions, which received no attention from Du Tillet, who listened to him while looking for his bellows and scolding his valet de chambre for the awkwardness with which he was lighting the fire.

The valet de chambre was listening. César did not at first observe him, but he saw him at last,

stopped confused, and continued, when spurred by Du Tillet, thus:

“Go on, go on. I am listening to you!” said the distraught banker.

The poor man’s shirt was wet. His perspiration turned cold when Du Tillet directed his fixed stare on him, let him see his silver-white pupils, striped with some golden threads, piercing him to the heart with a diabolical stare.

“My dear master, the Bank has refused notes of yours passed by the Claparon house to Gigonnet, *without recourse*, and is that my fault? What! you, a former consular judge, are you making such blunders? I am, first of all, a banker. I will give you my money, but I could not expose my signature to receiving a refusal from the Bank. I exist only by credit. We are all in that box. Do you want money?”

“Can you give me all that I need?”

“That depends on the amount to be paid! How much do you want?”

“Thirty thousand francs.”

“What a lot of chimney pipe is falling on my head!” said Du Tillet, as he burst out laughing.

On hearing this laughter, the perfumer, misled by Du Tillet’s exuberance, would see in it the laugh of a man to whom the sum was a small matter, and he breathed more easily. Du Tillet rang the bell.

“Tell my cashier to come up.”

“He has not arrived, sir,” the valet de chambre replied.

“Those knaves are taking liberties with me! It is half-past eight. One might have attended to a million’s worth of business by this time.”

Five minutes later Monsieur Legras came up.

“How much cash have you on hand?”

“Twenty thousand francs only. The gentleman has given orders to buy thirty thousand francs’ worth of bonds for cash, payable the fifteenth.”

“True. I must be still asleep.”

The cashier looked squintingly at Birotteau and then left.

“If truth were banished from earth, it would entrust its last word to a cashier,” said Du Tillet.

“Have you not an interest in the Popinot house, which has just been established?” he asked after a horrible pause, during which the perspiration stood out in big drops on the perfumer’s forehead.

“Yes,” Birotteau said, candidly. “Do you think that you could discount his signature for me for a considerable sum?”

“Bring me his acceptances for fifty thousand francs. I will have them passed at a reasonable figure with a certain Gobseck, a very mild fellow when he has much money to place, and he has it.”

Birotteau returned home distressed, not noticing that the bankers had sent him from one to another, like a shuttlecock; but Constance had already seen that any credit was impossible. If so far three bankers had refused, all must have had an understanding about a man as much in evidence as

was the deputy, and consequently recourse could not be had to the Bank of France.

“Try to renew,” said Constance, “and go to Monsieur Claparon, your co-partner, and finally to all those to whom you have given notes for the fifteenth, and propose renewals. It will always be time to return to the discounters with the Popinot paper.”

“To-morrow is the thirteenth,” said Birotteau, quite downcast.

According to an expression used in his prospectus, he enjoyed a sanguine temperament that consumes enormously by emotions or by thought, and that positively needs sleep to repair its losses. Césarine led her father into the salon and played for him, so as to recreate him, *Rousseau's Dream*, a very pretty piece by Hérold, and Constance worked beside him. The poor man allowed himself to drop his head on an ottoman, and, every time that he raised his eyes to look at his wife, he saw her with a sweet smile on her lips; thus he went to sleep.

“Poor man!” said Constance; “for what tortures is he reserved!—Provided that he survives them!”

“Ah! what ails you, mamma?” said Césarine, as she saw her mother in tears.

“Dear daughter, I see a failure coming. If your father is obliged to stop payment, we must not implore any one's pity. My child, be prepared to become a mere shop-girl. If I see you taking your part courageously, I will have the strength to begin life over again. I know your father; he will not

keep a penny. I will give up my rights, they will sell all that we possess. You, my child, take your jewels and your wardrobe to Uncle Pillerault's to-morrow, for you are not in any way involved."

Césarine was seized with unbounded dread as she heard these words spoken with a religious simplicity. She bethought herself of going to see Anselme, but delicacy prevented her.

Next day, at nine o'clock, Birotteau found himself in the Rue de Provence, a prey to anxieties quite other than those through which he had passed. To ask a credit is a very simple matter in trade. Every day, in starting a business, it is necessary to find capital; but to ask renewals is, in commercial jurisprudence, what the police court is to the assize court, a first step towards failure, as misdemeanor leads to crime. The secret of your powerlessness and of your difficulty is in other hands than your own. A merchant puts himself bound hand and foot at the disposition of another merchant, and charity is not a virtue practised at the Bourse.

The perfumer, who of old carried a high head so confidently when he went abroad in Paris, now, weakened by doubts, hesitated as he was about to enter Banker Claparon's; he began to understand that with bankers the heart is only an intestine. Claparon seemed to him so brutal in his gross joy, and he had detected in him so much bad form, that he trembled on approaching him.

"He is nearer the people; he will perhaps have more feeling!"



Such was the first accusing word that the desperation of his position dictated to him.

César drew out his last dose of courage from the bottom of his soul, and ascended the stairs of a mean little entresol on the windows of which he espied green curtains faded by the sun. He read on the door the word OFFICE, engraved in black on an oval copper plate; he knocked, no one answered; he entered. Those places, more than unpretending, showed misery, avarice or neglect. No employé showed himself behind the brass gratings, placed high enough to lean upon on unpainted white wood-work that served as a guard-rail for tables and desks of blackened wood. These deserted offices were encumbered with ink-wells in which the ink was becoming mouldy, pens as much out of order as street urchins, twisted into the form of turnsols; with cartons, papers, printed forms, no doubt useless, littered about. The floor of the passage resembled that of a boarding-house parlor, so worn, dirty and damp was it. The second room, the door of which was adorned with the word CASHIER was in harmony with the sinister humors of the outer office. In a corner was found a large oak-wood cage latticed with copper wire, with a slide-hole, and furnished with an enormous iron box, no doubt abandoned to the rompings of rats. This cage, the door of which was open, contained also a fantastic desk, and a mean arm-chair, full of holes, green, with a cushioned seat from which the hair was escaping, like the master's wig, in a thousand

wanton corkscrews. This room, evidently in former times the salon of a tenement before it was converted into a banking office, had for its chief ornament a round table covered with green cloth, around which were old chairs with black morocco, and nails with the gilding worn off. The mantel-piece, rather elegant, presented to the eye none of the black marks that fire leaves; its shelf was clean; its glass, soiled by flies, had a mean appearance, in keeping with a mahogany clock that came from the sale of some old notary's effects and that wearied one's eyes, afflicted already by the sight of two candlesticks without candles and by a sticky dust. The wall-paper, a mouse gray, bordered with rose, bespoke through sooty tints the unwholesome sojourn of some smokers. Nothing so closely resembled the mean room that the newspapers call the *editor's office*. Birotteau, fearing to be indiscreet, struck three mild raps on the door opposite to that by which he had entered.

"Come in!" exclaimed Claparon, whose tone revealed the distance that his voice had to travel and the emptiness of that room in which the perfumer heard a good fire crackling, but in which the banker was not.

This room served him indeed as a private office. Between Keller's luxuriant audience chamber and the singular carelessness of this pretended great man of business there was all the difference that exists between Versailles and the wigwam of a Huron chief. The perfumer had seen the grandeur

of the Bank; he was going to see its seamy side.

Lying on a sort of oblong box placed behind the office, and where the habits of a careless life had spoiled, soiled, greased, ruined, confused, torn, and destroyed a whole suit of furniture that was almost elegant when it was new, Claparon, as soon as he saw Birotteau, enveloped himself in his dirty dressing gown, put down his pipe, and drew the bed-curtains with a rapidity that laid his morals open to the innocent perfumer's suspicions.

"Be seated, sir," said this imitation of a banker.

Claparon, wigless, and with his head enveloped in a silk handkerchief arranged cross-wise, seemed the more hideous to Birotteau as the dressing gown, being open, showed him a sort of knitted white woolen undershirt turned brown by indefinitely prolonged use.

"Will you have breakfast with me?" Claparon said, as he remembered the perfumer's ball and wanted as much to have his revenge as to return the compliment by this invitation.

In fact, a round table, hurriedly cleared of its papers, betrayed a pretty company on showing a pâté, oysters, white wine, and common kidneys stewed in champagne curdled in their own juice. In front of the coal fire the flame was gilding an omelette with truffles. Finally, two covers and their napkins, stained by the supper of the night before, threw light on the purest innocence. Like a man

who thought himself shrewd, Claparon insisted in spite of Birotteau's refusal.

"I was to have had some one, but that some one is not showing up," exclaimed the malignant traveler, in a way to make himself heard by a person who might have been buried under his bed-clothes.

"Sir," said Birotteau, "I have come only on business, and I will not detain you long."

"I am overwhelmed," Claparon replied, as he pointed to a cylindrical secretary and tables loaded with papers. "They do not leave me a single moment to myself. I receive only on Saturdays, but as for you, dear sir, you are always welcome! I no longer find time either to make love or to stroll. I am losing the attraction for business, which, to regain its life, needs a wisely studied rest. No one sees me any more on the boulevards, occupied in doing nothing. Bah! business makes me tired. I don't want to hear any more talk of business. I have enough money and will never have enough happiness. Faith, I want to travel, to see Italy! Oh! dear Italy! still beautiful amid her reverses, adorable land where I will no doubt find a soft and majestic Italian girl! I have always loved the Italian women! Have you ever had an Italian girl for your own? No. Well, come with me to Italy. We will see Venice, the abode of the doges, and too unfortunately fallen into the unappreciative hands of Austria, where the arts are unknown! Bah! let us leave business aside, canals, loans and peaceful governments. I am a good fellow when I

have my craw filled. Thunder! let us go traveling."

"Only one word, sir, and I will leave you," said Birotteau. "You have passed my notes over to Monsieur Bidault."

"You mean Gigonnet, that good little Gigonnet, a man who is slippery—as a knot."

"Yes," replied César. "I would like—and in this I count on your honor and delicacy—"

Claparon nodded.

"I would like to be able to renew—"

"Impossible," the banker curtly replied. "I am not alone in the affair. We are assembled in counsel, a veritable chamber, where we are as thick as slices of bacon in the frying-pan. Oh! the devil! we are deliberating. The Madeleine land is nothing; we are operating elsewhere. Eh! dear sir, if we were not concerned in the Champs-Élysées, around the Bourse that is nearly completed, in the Saint-Lazare quarter and at Tivoli, we would not be, as big Nucingen says, in *πίζνιζ*. What, then, is the Madeleine? A little brat of a thing. Prrr! We do not *play low*, my good fellow," he said, as he punched Birotteau in the stomach and shook him. "Come, let us see. Have breakfast; we will chat," Claparon continued, so as to soften his refusal.

"With pleasure," said Birotteau. "So much the worse for the companion," thought the perfumer, as he contemplated fuddling Claparon in order to learn who were his real associates in an affair that began to seem dark to him.

“Good! Victoire!” the banker called out.

To this call responded a real Leonarda decked like a fishwoman.

“Tell my clerks that I am not in to anyone, not even to Nucingen, the Kellers, Gigonnet and others!”

“Only Monsieur Lempereur has come.”

“He will receive the fine people,” said Claparon. “The trash will not pass the outer room. They will be told that I am excogitating a bold stroke—some champagne.”

To fuddle an old traveling agent is an impossibility. César took the sally of bad form as a symptom of drunkenness, and he tried to make his associate confess.

“That wretch Roguin is always with you,” said Birotteau. “Should you not write to him asking him to aid a friend whom he has compromised, a man with whom he dined every Sunday and whom he has known for twenty years?”

“Roguin?—a dolt! We have his share. Don’t be sad, my good fellow; everything will be all right. Pay on the fifteenth, and the first time we shall see! When I say we shall see—(a glass of wine!)—bonds do not concern me in any way. Ah! you would not pay. I would not make believe to you, I am in the matter only for a commission on the purchase and a dividend in the sales; by which means I manage the owners—do you understand? You have solid partners, and so I am not afraid, my dear sir. To-day business is divided!

A matter of business requires the combining of so many capacities! Will you join us in business? Don't waste your time with pots of pomade and combs; bad! bad! Shear the public, enter into speculation."

"Speculation?" said the perfumer, "what is that trade?"

"It is trade in the abstract," replied Claparon, "a trade that will remain secret for half a score years or more, if you are to believe the great Nucingen, the Napoléon of finance, and by which a man takes in the totals of figures, skims off the revenues before they exist, a gigantic conception, a method of putting hope in regularly arranged sections,—in fine, a new cabal! There are as yet only ten or twelve strong heads of us initiated into the cabalistic secrets of these magnificent combinations."

César opened his eyes and ears as he tried to understand this composite phraseology.

"Listen," said Claparon, after a pause. "Such strokes mean men. There is the man with ideas who hasn't a sou, like all people with ideas. Such folk think and spend, without paying attention to anything. Picture to yourself a pig wandering in a wood in which truffles grow! He is followed by a jolly fellow, the moneyed man, who awaits the grunting that follows discovery. When the man of ideas has run across a good thing, the moneyed man then taps him on the shoulder and says to him: 'What's that? you are running into the jaw of a furnace, my good fellow; you are not holding the reins

stiff enough; here's a thousand francs and let me bring out this matter.' Good! the banker then calls in the adventurers. 'My friends, to work! prospectuses! death to humbug!' They take hunting horns and cry in trumpet tones: 'A hundred thousand francs for five sous!' or, five sous for a hundred thousand francs, gold mines, coal mines—in fine, all the *high airs* of trade. One buys the opinion of men of science or art, the procession moves, the public enters; it has something for its money, the receipt is in our hands. The pig is housed in its pen with potatoes, and the others wallow in bank-notes. There it is, my dear sir. Go into business. What would you be? A pig, a turkey-cock, a man of straw or a millionaire? Reflect on that: I have formulated for you the theory of modern loans. Come and see me; you will find a good fellow always jovial. French joviality, grave and gay at the same time, does not injure business. On the contrary! Men who tipple are in a good position to understand themselves! Come! another glass of champagne? It is well matured, come! This wine was sent by an Épernay man himself, for whom I made a good sale, and at a good price—I was in my cups.—He shows his gratitude and remembers me in my prosperity. That doesn't often happen."

Birotteau, surprised at the levity and thoughtlessness of this man, whom everybody credited with astonishing depth and capacity, did not dare to question him further. In the bungling state of excitement into which the champagne had put him, he



yet remembered a name that Du Tillet had mentioned, and asked who was or where lived Monsieur Gobseck, the banker.

“Have you come to that, my dear sir?” said Claparon. “Gobseck is as much a banker as the Paris executioner is a physician. His first word is the fifty per cent; he is of the Harpagon school: he holds at your disposal canaries that are only finches, stuffed boas, summer furs, winter nankeens. And what security would you offer him? To get him to take your paper flat you would have to pledge your wife, your daughter, your umbrella, everything, even to your hat-box, your clogs—you indulge in the jointed clog,—shovel, tongs, and the wood you have in your cellar!—Gobseck! Gobseck! pink of misfortune! who has directed you to this financial guillotine?”

“Monsieur Du Tillet.”

“Ha! the rogue, I knew it. We were formerly friends. If we have quarreled so as not to speak to each other, believe me that my aversion is well founded: he let me read the very depths of his muddy soul, and he put me very much ill at ease during the fine ball that you gave us. I cannot bear him with his puppy airs, because he is keeping a notary’s wife! I’ll have marchionesses, I will, when I wish, and he will never have my esteem, not he! Ah! what I prize is a princess, one who will never crowd him in his bed. You are a comical chap. Tell us, then, big papa, how you could palm off a ball on us, and two months afterwards ask for

renewals! You may go very far. Let us do business together. You have a reputation, it will be of service to me. Oh! Du Tillet was born to understand Gobseck. Du Tillet will end badly in the business. If, as people say, he is this old Gobseck's *bell-wether*, he cannot go very far. Gobseck is in the corner of his web, crouching like an old spider that has been around the world. Sooner or later, *Zut!* the usurer sniffs his man as I do this glass of wine. So much the better. Du Tillet played a trick on me—oh! a trick that deserves hanging.”

After an hour and a half spent in babbling that had no meaning, Birotteau wanted to leave when he saw the former commercial traveler ready to narrate to him the adventure of a representative of the people at Marseilles, in love with an actress who was playing the part of the *pretty Arsène!* and who was hissed by the royalist pit.

“He arose,” said Claparon, “and struck an attitude in his box: Who hissed—he! If it is a woman, I despise her; if it is a man, we will see; if it is neither one nor the other, may God’s curse light on it!—Do you know how the adventure ended?”

“Adieu, sir,” said Birotteau.

“You will have to come and see me,” Claparon then said to him. “The first *Cayron* driblet has come back to us protested, and I am endorser, and I paid it. I am going to send it to you, for, business before everything else.”

Birotteau felt himself cut as deeply to the heart

by this cold-blooded and grinning favor as by Keller's hardness and Nucingen's German raillery. This man's familiarity and his grotesque confidences, kindled by the champagne, had blasted the honest perfumer's soul, and he felt as if he were leaving a financial place of ill-repute. He went down stairs, found himself in the street, without knowing whither he was going. He continued along the boulevards, reached the Rue Saint-Denis, bethought himself of Molineux, and directed his course towards the Cour Batave. He climbed up the dirty and tortuous stairway which but lately he had ascended glorious and proud. He recalled Molineux's mean harshness, and trembled at the thought of having to beseech him. As at the time of the perfumer's first visit, the landlord was in his chimney corner, but digesting his breakfast; Birotteau formulated his request to him.

"Renew a note for twelve hundred francs?" said Molineux, in a tone of jeering incredulity. "You are not in that fix, sir. If you have not twelve hundred francs on the fifteenth to pay my note, you will then send me back my receipt for unpaid rent? Ah! I would be sorry for it. I am not in the least polite in the matter of money; my rents are my revenues. Without that, with what would I pay what I owe? A man in trade will not disapprove of this salutary principle. Money knows nobody; it has no ears, money hasn't; it has no heart, money hasn't. The winter is severe, and wood has gone up. If you do not pay on the fifteenth, on

the sixteenth a little notice, at noon. Bah! the good man, Mitral, your constable, is mine; he will send you his notice in an envelope, with all the regards due to your high position."

"Sir, I never received a summons on my own account," said Birotteau.

"There is a beginning to everything," said Molineux.

Dismayed by this little old man's blunt ferocity, the perfumer was downcast, for he heard the knell of his insolvency tinkling in his ears. Each tinkling recalled the memory of the dicta that his pitiless jurisprudence had suggested to him regarding failures. His opinions were outlined in traits of fire on the soft matter of his brain.

"By the way," said Molineux, "you have forgotten to put on your notes: *value received in rents*, which may save my privilege."

"My position forbids me to do anything to the detriment of my creditors," said the perfumer, stupefied at the sight of the chasm yawning before him.

"Good, sir, very well; I thought I had learned everything in the matter of renting with those gentlemen, the tenants. I learn from you never to take notes in payment. Ah! I will go to law, for your answer tells me clearly that you will go back on your signature. This kind of doings interests all the landlords in Paris."

Birotteau left disgusted with life. It is of the nature of those tender and soft souls to be disheartened

at a first refusal, just as a first success encourages them. César no longer had any hope but in little Popinot's devotedness, and of him he naturally thought as he found himself at the Innocents' market.

“The poor youth! Who would have told me that when, six weeks ago, at the Tuileries, I started him!”



\*

It was about four o'clock, just the time when the magistrates leave the Palace. Perchance the committing judge had come to see his nephew. This judge, one of the clearest-headed of men in matters of morals, had a second sight that enabled him to perceive secret intentions, to recognize the meaning of the most indifferent human acts, the germs of a crime, the roots of a delinquency, and he looked at Birotteau without Birotteau knowing it. The perfumer, thwarted by finding the uncle with the nephew, seemed to him constrained, concerned, thoughtful. Little Popinot, always full of business, with his pen behind his ear, was as ever obsequious in the presence of Césarine's father. The common-place phrases spoken by César to his partner seemed to the judge to be but the screens of an important request. Instead of leaving, the shrewd magistrate remained with his nephew in spite of his nephew, for he had calculated that the perfumer would try to get rid of him by retiring himself. When Birotteau left, the judge went also, but he remarked Birotteau strolling in the part of the Rue des Cinq-Diamants that leads to the Rue Aubry-le-Boucher. This very slight circumstance aroused suspicions in old Popinot regarding César's intentions, and he then left by way of the Rue des

Lombards, and, when he had seen the perfumer go back into Anselme's, he promptly returned thither.

"My dear Popinot," César had said to his partner, "I come to ask a favor of you."

"What must be done?" asked Popinot, with generous ardor.

"Ah! you save my life!" the good man exclaimed, happy at that warmth of heart which sparkled amid the icebergs through which he had been sailing for the past twenty-five days—"I must negotiate for fifty thousand francs to the account of my share of the profits. We will have an understanding as to the payment."

Popinot looked steadily at César, and César looked down. At that moment the judge reappeared.

"My boy—Ah! excuse me, Monsieur Birotteau! My boy, I forgot to tell you—"

And with the imperious gesture of a magistrate, the judge beckoned his nephew into the street, and forced him, though in shirt sleeves and bareheaded, to listen to him as they walked towards the Rue des Lombards.

"Nephew, your old employer might find himself so embarrassed in business that it would be necessary for him to stop payment. Before getting there, men who can boast of forty years of probity, the most virtuous men, with the desire of preserving their honor, imitate the wildest gamblers; they are capable of anything: they sell their wives, traffic in their daughters, compromise their best friends, pledge what does not belong to them; they go into



gambling, become comedians, liars; they know how to weep—in fine, I have seen the most extraordinary things. You, yourself, have been a witness to Roguin's ingenuousness, to whom one would have given the Holy Sacrament without requiring his confession. I do not apply these rigid conclusions to Monsieur Birotteau; I think him honest. But if he asked you to do anything that would be contrary to the laws of trade, such as signing accommodation notes and dragging you into a system of kite-flying, which, in my opinion, is a beginning of knavery, for it is false paper-money, promise me that you will sign nothing without consulting me. Think that, if you love his daughter, you must not, in the very interest of your passion, destroy your future. If Monsieur Birotteau is going to fall, what is the use of both of you falling? Is it not to deprive both of you of the chances of your business establishment, which will be his refuge?"

"Thanks, uncle; a word to the wise is sufficient," said Popinot, to whom the desperate appeal of his employer was then explained.

The dealer in refined and other oils returned into his dark shop, his brow marked with care. Birotteau noticed this change.

"Do me the honor of coming up to my room. We will be in a better position there than here. The clerks, though very busy, might hear us."

Birotteau followed Popinot, a prey to the anxieties of the convict between the quashing of his sentence or the rejection of his appeal.

“My dear benefactor,” said Anselme, “you certainly have no doubt of my devotedness; it is blind. Allow me only to ask of you whether this sum will wholly save you, or if it is only a delay of some catastrophe, and then what would be the use of dragging me into it? You want notes for ninety days. Well, in three months it will certainly be impossible for me to take them up.”

Birotteau, pale and solemn, arose and looked at Popinot.

Popinot, in terror, exclaimed:

“I will give them, if you wish.”

“Ingrate!” exclaimed the perfumer, who used what was left of his strength to cast this word in Anselme’s face as a mark of infamy.

Birotteau walked towards the door and went out. Popinot, having recovered from the feeling that this terrible word had produced on him, rushed down the stairs, ran into the street, but he did not find the perfumer. Césarine’s lover never heard that formidable sentence; he had constantly before his eyes poor César’s broken appearance: he lived at last, like Hamlet, with a dread spectre by his side.

Birotteau walked along the streets of that quarter like a man who was intoxicated. Yet he at last found himself on the quay, followed it and went as far as Sèvres, where he spent the night in an inn, crazy from grief; and his wife, distracted, dared not have search made for him anywhere. In such a case an alarm imprudently given is fatal. The wise Constance sacrificed her anxiety to the reputation

of trade; she waited during the whole night, mingling her prayers with tears. Was César dead? Had he gone to make some round outside of Paris, on the trace of a last hope? Next morning she behaved as if she knew the reasons for this absence; but she called in her uncle and entreated him to go to the Morgue, when she saw that, at five o'clock, Birotteau had not returned. During this time the courageous creature was at her desk, and her daughter was embroidering by her side. Both of them, with calm countenance, neither sad nor smiling, waited on the public. When Pillerault returned, he returned in César's company. On his way back from the Bourse he had met him in the Palais-Royal, hesitating as to whether he should go up to gamble. That day was the fourteenth. At dinner César could not eat. His stomach, too violently contracted, refused nourishment. The afternoon was more horrible. The merchant experienced for the hundredth time one of those frightful alternations of hope and despair which, making the soul go up the whole gamut of gladsome sensations, then precipitates it into the lowest feelings of grief, plays with these weak natures. Derville, Birotteau's lawyer, came and rushed into the splendid parlor where Madame César was using all her power to keep her poor husband, who wanted to go to bed in the sixth story, "so as not to see the monuments of my folly!" he said.

"The case is won," said Derville.

At these words César stretched out his contracted

form, but his joy frightened Uncle Pillerault and Derville. The women left in terror to go and weep in Césarine's room.

"I can borrow, then?" exclaimed the perfumer.

"That would be imprudent," said Derville. "They have appealed, the court may reverse the verdict; but in a month we will have a decision."

"A month!"

César fell into a stupor from which no one tried to arouse him. This sort of arrested catalepsy, during which the body lived and suffered, while the functions of the intellect were suspended, this respite given by chance was regarded as a blessing from God by Constance, Césarine, Pillerault and Derville, who thought aright. Birotteau could thus endure the harrowing emotions of the night. He was in an arm-chair near the fire-place; on the other side was his wife, who watched him attentively, with a sweet smile on her lips, one of those smiles which prove that women are nearer than men to the angelic nature, in that they know how to mingle an infinite tenderness with the fullest compassion, a secret that belongs only to angels seen in certain dreams providentially distributed at long intervals over human life. Césarine, seated on a small stool, was at her mother's feet, and from time to time lightly brushed with her hair her father's hands, at the same time giving him a caress into which she tried to put the ideas that, in such crises, the voice makes wearisome.

Seated in his arm-chair, as the Chancellor de

l'Hôpital in his in the peristyle of the Chamber of Deputies, Pillerault, that philosopher ready for everything, showed on his countenance that intelligence graven on the brow of the Egyptian sphinxes, and chatted with Derville in a low voice. Constance had entertained the idea of consulting the lawyer, whose discretion was not to be suspected. Having her accounts arranged in her head, she explained her situation in Derville's ear. After a conference lasting about an hour, held before the stupefied perfumer's eyes, the lawyer shook his head as he looked at Pillerault.

"Madame," he said, with the terrible coolness of men of business, "you must shut up shop. Supposing that by any artifice you succeeded in paying to-morrow, you would have to clear off at least three hundred thousand francs before you could borrow on all your land. Against liabilities of five hundred and fifty thousand francs you have very handsome, very productive, assets, but not realizable; you will succumb at a given time. My advice is that it is better to jump out of the window than to let yourself be rolled down stairs."

"That is my advice also, my child," said Pillerault.

Derville was shown out by Madame César and Pillerault.

"Poor father," said Césarine, who arose sweetly to imprint a kiss on César's brow. "Anselme, then, has been able to do nothing?" she asked when her uncle and her mother returned.

“Ingrate!” exclaimed César, struck by this name in the only living part of his memory, like a key of a piano when the hammer is about to strike its string.

From the moment when this word was hurled at him like an anathema, little Popinot had not a moment’s sleep nor an instant’s peace. The unhappy youth spoke ill of his uncle, and had gone to find him. To make that old judiciary experience capitulate, he used the eloquence of love, hoping to win over the man on whom human words fell like water on oil-cloth, a judge!

“Commercially speaking,” he said to him, “usage allows the managing partner to turn over a certain sum to the silent partner in anticipation of the profits, and our firm ought to realize it. A thorough examination being made of my affairs, I feel the reins strong enough in my hands to pay forty thousand francs in three months! Monsieur César’s honesty encourages the belief that these forty thousand francs are going to be used to take up his notes. Thus the creditors, if bankruptcy comes, will have no reproach to make against us! Moreover, uncle, I prefer to lose forty thousand francs than to lose Césarine. At this moment, as I am speaking, she has, no doubt, been informed of my refusal, and is going to think less of me. I have promised to shed my blood for my benefactor! I am in the case of a young sailor who should sink as he holds his captain’s hand, of a soldier who should perish along with his general.”

“Good-hearted, but a bad business man, you will not lose my esteem,” said the judge, as he clasped his nephew’s hand. “I have thought a great deal of this,” he continued. “I know that you are madly in love with Césarine. I believe that you can comply both with the laws of the heart and the laws of trade.”

“Ah! uncle, if you have found the means, you save my honor.”

“Advance to Birotteau fifty thousand francs by making a deed of redemption relative to your interests in your oil, which has become, as it were, a property. I will draw up the deed for you.”

Anselme embraced his uncle, returned to his house, made out notes for fifty thousand francs, and ran from the Rue des Cinq-Diamants to the Place Vendôme, so that at the moment when Césarine, her mother and their Uncle Pillerault were looking at the perfumer, surprised at the sepulchral tone in which he had uttered that word “Ingrate!” in answer to his daughter’s question, the parlor door opened and Popinot appeared.

“My dear and well-beloved master,” he said, as he wiped his brow, wet with perspiration, “here’s what you have asked of me.”

He was handing him the notes.

“Yes, I have thoroughly studied my position. Have no fear, I will pay; save, save your honor!”

“I was quite sure of him,” Césarine exclaimed, as she seized Popinot’s hand and pressed it with convulsive strength.

Madame César embraced Popinot. The perfumer posed as a just man listening to the trumpet of the last judgment. He arose as if he were coming out of a tomb! Then he reached out his hand in a frenzied movement to take hold of the fifty stamped papers.

“One moment!” said the terrible Uncle Pillerault, as he snatched the notes from Popinot; “one moment!”

The four personages who made up that family, César and his wife, Cézarine and Popinot, stunned by their uncle’s action and by his tone, looked at him in amazement as he tore the notes and threw them into the fire, which consumed them without anyone stopping them on the way.

“Uncle!”

“Uncle!”

“Uncle!”

“Sir!”

It was four voices, four hearts in unison, a frightful unanimity. Uncle Pillerault took little Popinot by the neck, pressed him to his heart and kissed him on the forehead.

“You are worthy of the adoration of all those who have a heart,” he said to him. “If you loved my daughter, and were she to have a million, and were you nothing to me but that—he pointed to the black ashes of the notes—if she loved you, you would be married in a fortnight. Your employer,” he said, referring to César, “is a fool. Nephew,” the grave Pillerault continued, addressing the perfumer, “no



more illusions! One ought to do business with money, and not with sentiments. That is sublime, but useless. I have spent two hours at the Bourse. You have not two farthings' worth of credit; everybody was speaking of your disaster, of renewals refused, of your efforts with several bankers, of their refusal, of your follies, six flights of stairs ascended to go to find a landlord as prattling as a magpie, in order to renew for twelve hundred francs, your ball given to conceal your stringency.— Some go so far as to say that you had nothing at Roguin's. According to your enemies, Roguin is a pretext. One of my friends, instructed to find out everything, has come to confirm my suspicions. Everyone has a presentiment of the issuing of the Popinot notes; you set him up purposely in order to make him a medium for notes. In fine, all the calumnies and slanders that are drawn upon himself by a man who wants to ascend one step higher on the social ladder are circulating at this moment in the world of trade. You might peddle in vain for a week Popinot's fifty notes at all the offices; you would meet with humiliating refusals, and no one would have them: no one knows the number of them that you have issued, and people are waiting to see you sacrificing this poor youth in order to save yourself. You would have destroyed by certain loss the credit of the Popinot house. Do you know what the boldest of discounters would give you for these fifty thousand francs? Twenty thousand. Twenty thousand, do you understand! In

trade there are moments when it is necessary to be able to keep yourself before the world for three days without eating, as if one had indigestion, and, on the fourth, one is admitted to the larder of credit. You cannot live these three days; everything is in that. My poor nephew, have courage; you must stop payment. Look at Popinot, look at me. We are going, as soon as your clerks go to bed, to work together in order to spare you this anguish."

"Uncle!—" said the perfumer, as he clasped his hands.

"César, do you want, then, to reach a shameful settlement in which there will be no assets? Your interest in the Popinot house saves your honor."

César, having his mind cleared by this fatal and last ray of light, finally saw the frightful truth in all its bearing. He fell back in his chair, then on his knees. His mind wandered, he became a child again. His wife thought he was dying; she knelt down to raise him up. But she joined with him when she saw him clasping his hands, raising his eyes and reciting, with resigned compunction, in the presence of his uncle and Popinot, the sublime prayer of Catholics:

"Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven: GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen."

Tears came to the stoic Pillerault's eyes; Césarine, overwhelmed, and in tears, had her head bent on Popinot's shoulder, pale and fixed as a statue.

"Let us go down," said the former merchant to the young man, as he took hold of his arm.

At half-past eleven o'clock, they left César to the care of his wife and daughter. At that moment Célestin, the chief clerk, who had managed the house during this secret storm, went up to the apartments and was entering the salon. On hearing his step, Césarine ran to open the door for him, so that he would not see the master's sad plight.

"Among the letters that came this evening," he said, "there was one from Tours, which was imperfectly addressed, thus causing delay. I imagine that it is from the master's brother, and have not opened it."

"Father," said Césarine, "a letter from my uncle in Tours!"

"Ah! I am saved," César exclaimed. "Brother! brother!" he said, as he kissed the letter.

#### FRANÇOIS BIROTTEAU'S REPLY TO CÉSAR.

"TOURS, 17th inst.

"MY DEARLY BELOVED BROTHER,

"Your letter has been a most severe affliction to me; and so, after having read it, I went to offer up to God the holy sacrifice of the Mass for your benefit, interceding with Him, by the blood that His Son, our Divine Redeemer, shed for us, to cast on your sorrows a look of mercy. At the moment when I pronounced my prayer *Pro meo fratre Cæsare*, my eyes

were filled with tears as I thought of you, from whom, unfortunately, I am separated at a time when you must need the aid of fraternal friendship. But I thought that the worthy and venerable Monsieur Pillerault would no doubt take my place. My dear César, do not forget, amid your sorrows, that this life is a transitory life and full of trials; that one day we will be rewarded for having suffered for the Holy Name of God, for His Holy Church, for having observed the maxims of the Gospel and practised virtue; otherwise, the things of this world would have no meaning. I repeat these maxims for you, knowing how pious and good you are, because it may happen to persons who, like you, are thrown amid the storms of the world and cast on the perilous sea of human interests, to allow themselves to blaspheme amid adversities, carried away as they are by grief. Speak ill neither of the men who will injure you, nor of God, who, at His pleasure, mingles bitterness with your life. Have no regard for earth; on the contrary, ever raise your eyes towards Heaven: thence come consolations for the weak; there are the riches of the poor, there are the terrors of the rich—

“But, Birotteau,” said his wife to him, “pass that, and see if he is sending us something.”

“We will re-read it often,” replied the merchant, as he wiped away his tears and opened out the letter, from which fell an order on the Royal Treasury. “I was quite sure of him, poor brother,” said Birotteau, as he took up the order.

“—I went to Madame de Listomère’s,” he continued, reading in a voice broken by his sobs, “and, without telling her the reason for my request, I entreated her to lend me all that she could spare in my favor, so as to add to my own savings. Her generosity has enabled me to make up a sum of a thousand francs; I send it to you in an order on the Treasury from the receiver-general at Tours.

“What a fine advance!” said Constance, as she looked at Césarine.

“By cutting off some superfluities in my living, I will be able, in three years, to pay back Madame de Listomère the four hundred francs that she has loaned me, so do not be uneasy about it, my dear César. I send you all that I have in the world, wishing that this sum may help to a happy ending of your commercial embarrassments, which, no doubt, will be only temporary. I know your delicacy, and wish to anticipate your objections. Do not think of giving me any interest for this sum, or of paying it back to me in a time of prosperity, which will not be long in coming to you, if God deign to hear the prayers that I will address to Him every day. According to the last letter I received from you, two years ago, I thought you rich, and believed I could dispose of my savings in favor of the poor; but now all that I have belongs to you. When you will have got over this passing difficulty in your sailing, still keep this sum for my niece, Césarine, so that, at the time of her settlement, she may use it for some trifle that will recall to her an old uncle whose hands will be ever raised to heaven to ask God to shed His blessings on her and on all those who will be dear to her. In fine, my dear César, think that I am a poor priest who goes about by God’s grace as the larks in the fields, walking in His path, without making any fuss, trying to obey the commands of our Divine Saviour, and who, consequently, needs but little. So do not have the least scruple in the difficult position in which you find yourself, and think of me as of some one who loves you tenderly. Our excellent Abbé Chapeloud, to whom I have said nothing of your situation, and who knows that I am writing to you, has asked me to convey to you his kindest regards for every member of your family, and wishes you continued prosperity. Adieu, dear and well-beloved brother. I pray that, in the circumstances in which you are placed, God will do you the favor of keeping you in good health, and not only you, but your wife and

daughter ; I wish all of you patience and courage in your adversities.

“FRANÇOIS BIROTTEAU,  
“Priest, Vicar of the Cathedral and Parish Church of  
Saint-Gatien at Tours.”

“A thousand francs,” said Madame Birotteau, furious.

“Hold on to them,” César said, gravely ; “that’s all he has. They belong to our daughter, and may keep us alive without our asking anything of our creditors.”

“They will think that we have set large sums aside.”

“I’ll show them the letter.”

“They’ll say it’s a trick.”

“My God! my God!” exclaimed Birotteau, terrified, “I thought that of poor people who, no doubt, were in the position that I am in now.”

Too ill at ease on account of the condition in which César found himself, mother and daughter worked with the needle near him in deep silence. At two o’clock in the morning, Popinot gently opened the door of the salon and made a sign to Madame César to come down. On seeing his niece, the uncle removed his spectacles.

“My child, there is hope,” he said to her, “all is not lost ; but your husband would not endure the alternatives of the negotiations to be made and that Anselme and I are going to try. Do not leave your shop to-morrow, and take all the addresses on the notes ; we have until four o’clock. Here is my

idea. Neither Monsieur Ragon nor I am to be feared. Suppose, now, that your hundred thousand francs deposited with Roguin were remitted to the purchasers; you would no more have them than you have them now. You are in the presence of a hundred and forty thousand francs signed over to Claparon that you must by all means pay in any case; so it is not Roguin's bankruptcy that ruins you. I see, available to meet your obligations, forty thousand francs to borrow sooner or later on your factories and sixty thousand francs of Popinot's notes. One may struggle, then; for, afterwards, you can borrow on the Madeleine land. If your chief creditor consents to aid you, I will have no regard for my fortune; I will sell my bonds; I will have no money. Popinot will be between life and death. As far as you are concerned, you will be at the mercy of the slightest accident in trade. But the oil will no doubt bring large profits. Popinot and I have just had a consultation; we will support you in this struggle. Ah! with the greatest pleasure will I eat dry bread if success dawns on the horizon. But everything depends on Gigonnet and the Claparon partners. Popinot and I are going to Gigonnet's between seven and eight o'clock, and we will know what course to follow regarding their intentions."

Constance, quite distracted, threw herself into her uncle's arms, with no other voice than tears and sobs. Neither Popinot nor Pillerault could have known that Bidault, called Gigonnet, and Claparon were but Du Tillet's doubles, and that Du Tillet

wanted to read in the *Petites-Affiches* this terrible article:

“Judgment of the Tribunal of Commerce which declares the Sieur César Birotteau, dealer in perfumes, residing in Paris, in the Rue Saint-Honoré, No. 397, in a state of bankruptcy, provisionally fixes the opening of it for January 16, 1819. Commissary Judge, Monsieur Gobenheim-Keller. Agent, Monsieur Molineux.”

Anselme and Pillerault studied until daylight over César's affairs. At eight o'clock in the morning, these two heroic friends, the one an old soldier, the other a sub-lieutenant of yesterday, who was never to know but by power of attorney the terrible anguish of those who have ascended Bidault's, called Gigonnet, stairs, went on their way, without exchanging a word, towards the Rue Grenétat. They were suffering. Several times did Pillerault pass his hand over his forehead.

The Rue Grenétat is a street in which all the houses, invaded by a multitude of trades, present a repulsive appearance. The buildings there have a hideous character. The ignoble filthiness of factories dominates there. Old Gigonnet lived on the fourth floor of a house all the windows of which opened vertically and had dirty little square panes.

The stairway extended out to the very street. The portress was lodged in the entresol, in a coop that derived its light only from the stairway.



With the exception of Gigonnet, all the tenants followed a trade. Workingmen were coming in and going out continually: the steps were, accordingly, covered with a layer of hard or soft mud, according to the weather, and on them filth sojourned. On this fetid stairway, each landing presented to the eye the name of the artisan written in gold on sheet-iron, painted red and varnished, with samples of his masterpieces. Most of the time the open doors allowed one to see the strange combination of housekeeping and manufacturing; there escaped therefrom indescribable cries and grunts, songs, whistlings recalling the hour of four with the animals in the Jardin de Plantes. On the second floor were made, in an infected little tenement, the most beautiful bands of the *Paris Article*. On the third were made, amid the dirtiest of filth, the most elegant bindings that deck the stalls on New Year's Day. Gigonnet died worth eighteen hundred thousand francs on the fourth floor of this house; for no consideration could have made him leave it, in spite of the offer of Madame Saillard, his niece, to provide apartments for him in a hôtel in the Place Royale.

"Courage!" said Pillerault, as he pulled the hind's-foot that hung by a cord at Gigonnet's gray and clean door.

Gigonnet came to open his door himself. The two sponsors for the perfumer, struggling in the field of insolvencies, passed through an antechamber that was neat and cold, without curtains to the windows. All three sat down in the second, where

the discounter kept himself before a fire-place full of ashes, in the midst of which the wood defended itself against the flame. Popinot's soul was chilled by the usurer's green cartons, by the monastic rigidity of that office, in which the air was like that of a cave. He looked with a dullard air at the somewhat bluish paper on which were scattered tricolor flowers pasted to the walls for the past twenty-five years, and carried back his saddened eyes to the mantel-piece, adorned with a clock in the form of a lyre and with oblong vases of Sèvres blue, richly mounted with gilt copper. This piece of jetsam, picked up by Gigonnet in the shipwreck of Versailles, where the populace broke everything, came from the queen's boudoir; but this magnificent article was accompanied by two candlesticks of the most wretched design, in wrought iron, that recalled by this wild contrast the circumstance that brought it here.

"I know that you cannot have come on your own account," said Gigonnet, "but in behalf of the great Birotteau. Well, friends, what's up there?"

"I know that you have nothing to learn, and so we will be brief," said Pillerault. "You hold some notes in Claperon's favor?"

"Yes."

"Will you exchange the first fifty thousand for these notes of Monsieur Popinot, at a discount, of course?"

Gigonnet took off his frightful green cap, which seemed to have been born with him, showed his

cranium of the color of fresh butter and devoid of hair, made his Voltairian grimace, and said:

"You want to pay me in hair oil, though I have no hair?"

"As you are only poking fun, we have only to take our leave," said Pillerault.

"You talk like the wise man that you are," Gignonnet said to him, with a flattering smile.

"Well, if I endorsed Monsieur Popinot's notes?" said Pillerault, as he made a final effort.

"You are bar gold, Monsieur Pillerault; but I have no need of gold. I must have my money only."

Pillerault and Popinot bade him good-day and left. At the foot of the stairs, Popinot's limbs still shook under him.

"Is it a man?" said he to Pillerault.

"It is so pretended," rejoined the old man. "Always remember that short session, Anselme! You have just seen banking without the masquerade of its pleasant forms. Unforeseen events are the vise of the press. We are the grapes, and bankers are the vats. The affair of the land is no doubt good; Gignonnet, or someone behind him, wants to strangle César that he may clothe himself in his skin. Everything has been said; there is no further remedy. That is banking. Never have recourse to it!"

After that frightful morning, on which, for the first time, Madame Birotteau took the addresses of those who came to look for their money and sent away the Bank messenger without paying him, at

eleven o'clock, this brave woman, happy in having spared her husband these sorrows, saw Anselme and Pillerault returning, while awaiting whom she had been a prey to increasing anxieties. She read her sentence on their countenances. The closing out of the business was inevitable.

"He is going to die of grief," said the poor woman.

"I wish that he may," Pillerault said, gravely; "but he is so religious that, in the present circumstances, his director, the Abbé Loraux, can alone save him."

Pillerault, Popinot and Constance waited for a clerk to be sent for the Abbé Loraux before presenting the balance sheet that Célestin was preparing for César's signature. The clerks were in despair; they loved their employer. At four o'clock the good priest arrived. Constance told him of the misfortune that had befallen them, and the Abbé Loraux went up as a soldier goes up to the breach.

"I know why you come," Birotteau exclaimed.

"My son," said the priest, "your sentiments of resignation to the Divine Will have long been known to me; but it is a question of applying them. Keep your eyes constantly on the Cross. Never cease to look upon it while thinking of the humiliations to which the Saviour of mankind was treated, how cruel His passion was, and you will thus be able to bear the mortifications that God sends you—"

"My brother, the Abbé, has already prepared me,"

said César, as he showed him the letter, which he had re-read, and which he handed to his confessor.

"You have a good brother," said Monsieur Loraux, "a virtuous and sweet wife, a tender daughter, two real friends, your uncle and dear Anselme, two indulgent creditors, the Ragons; all these kind hearts will incessantly shed balm on your wounds and aid you to bear your cross. Promise me that you will have the firmness of a martyr to face the blow without wincing."

The Abbé coughed so as to notify Pillerault, who was in the salon.

"My resignation is unbounded," said César, calmly. "Dishonor has come; I should think only of reparation."

The poor perfumer's voice and his manner surprised Césarine and the priest. Yet nothing was more natural. All men bear better a known, definite misfortune, than the cruel alternatives of a lot which, from one moment to another, brings either excessive joy or extreme pain.

"I have dreamt during twenty-two years, I re-awaken to-day with my cudgel in my hand," said César, become a Touraine peasant once more.

On hearing these words, Pillerault clasped his nephew in his arms. César observed his wife, Anselme and Célestin. The papers that the chief clerk held in his hand were very significant. César tranquilly contemplated that group, in which all the countenances were sad, but friendly.

"One moment!" he said, as he took off his cross,

which he handed to the Abbé Loraux; "you shall give it back to me when I will be able to wear it without shame. Célestin," he added, addressing his clerk, "write my resignation as mayor's deputy. The Abbé will dictate the letter to you. You will date it the fourteenth, and have Raguet take it to Monsieur de la Billardière."

Célestin and the Abbé Loraux went down stairs. For about a quarter of an hour a deep silence reigned in César's office. Such firmness surprised the family. Célestin and the Abbé returned; César signed his resignation. When Uncle Pillerault laid the balance sheet before him, the poor man could not repress a horrible, nervous movement.

"O! God, have pity on me!" he said, as he signed the terrible document and handed it to Célestin.

"Monsieur, Madame," then said Anselme Popinot, over whose clouded brow there passed a luminous flash, "do me the honor of giving me Mademoiselle Césarine's hand."

At this phrase all those present had tears in their eyes, except César, who arose, took Anselme's hand, and in a hollow voice said to him:

"My boy, you will never marry a bankrupt's daughter."

Anselme looked fixedly at Birotteau:

"Sir, you engage, in the presence of your whole family, to consent to our marriage, if the young lady accepts me for her husband, the day on which you will be released from your insolvency?"

There was a moment's silence, during which each

one was moved by the sensations that were pictured on the perfumer's dejected countenance.

"Yes," he said at last.

Anselme made an indescribable gesture in order to take Césarine's hand; she extended it to him, and he kissed it.

"You consent also?" he asked of Césarine.

"Yes," she said.

"I am, then, one of the family at last. I have the right to concern myself with its affairs," he said, with a peculiar expression.

Anselme left precipitately, so as not to show a joy that would contrast too much with his master's grief. Anselme was not precisely happy, on account of the failure, but love is so mastering, so egoistic! Césarine herself felt in her heart an emotion that was not in keeping with her bitter sadness.

"While we are at it," said Pillerault, in Césarine's ear, "let us strike every blow."

Madame Birotteau let slip a sign of grief, and not of assent.

"Nephew," said Pillerault, addressing César, "what do you think of doing?"

"Continuing business."

"That is not my advice," said Pillerault. "Wind up and divide your assets among your creditors. Never again reappear as a business man in Paris. I have often supposed myself in a position similar to yours—Ah! everything must be foreseen in trade! The merchant who does not think of insolvency is like a general who would count on never

being beaten; he is only half a merchant.—As for me, I never would have continued. What! always abashed in the presence of men to whom I have done wrong, receive their distrustful looks and their tacit reproaches? I think of the guillotine!—in an instant all is ended. But to have a head that springs up again and feels itself cut off every day, is a punishment that I would try to evade. Many people resume business as if nothing had happened to them! So much the better;—they are stronger than Claude-Joseph Pillerault. If you do a cash business, and you are bound to it, people say that you know how to look out for a rainy day; if you are without a sou, you can never raise yourself again. Good evening! Give up your assets, then, let your property be sold, and do something else.”

“But what?” César asked.

“Eh!” said Pillerault, “look for a situation. Have you no influence? The Duc and Duchesse de Lenoncourt, Madame de Mortsauf, Monsieur de Vandenesse! Write to them, see them. They will place you in the king’s household with about a thousand crowns; your wife will get quite as much; your daughter, perhaps, also. The crisis is not so desperate. The three of you together will bring in nearly ten thousand francs a year. In ten years you could pay a hundred thousand francs, for you will take nothing from what you earn: your two women will have fifteen hundred francs at my house for expenses, and as for you, we will see!”

Constance, and not César, meditated on these



wise words. Pillerault directed his course towards the Bourse, then in a temporary wooden building, and which formed a round hall, to which entrance was had from the Rue Feydeau. The perfumer's failure, expected and hinted at, already known, in fact, was the general talk in the higher circle of trade, then constitutional. The Liberal dealers saw in Birotteau's feast a bold manœuvre against their opinions. The Opposition folk wanted to have the monopoly of love of country. Let the Royalists be allowed to love the king, but to love the country was the privilege of the Left: the people belonged to it. It was wrong in the Government to rejoice, through its organs, by reason of an event that the Liberals wanted to turn to their own account exclusively. The fall of a protégé of the Château, of a ministerialist, of an incorrigible royalist, who, on the thirteenth Vendémiaire, insulted liberty by fighting against the glorious French Revolution—this fall excited the turmoil and applause of the Bourse. Pillerault wanted to know, to study opinion. He found, in one of the most animated groups, Du Tillet, Gobenheim-Keller, Nucingen, old Guillaume and his son-in-law, Joseph Lebas, Claparon, Gigonnet, Mongenod, Camusot, Gobseck, Adolphe Keller, Palma, Chiffreville, Matifat, Grindot and Lourdois.

“Well, how prudent one ought to be!” said Gobenheim to Du Tillet. “It was only by holding on by a thread that my brothers-in-law did not grant a credit to Birotteau.”

“As for me, I am in for ten thousand francs that he asked of me a fortnight ago. I gave them to him on his simple signature,” said Du Tillet. “But he formerly obliged me; I will not regret losing that sum.”

“He has done like all the rest, has your nephew,” said Lourdois to Pillerault; “he gave feasts! That a knave should try to throw dust in people’s eyes, so as to inspire confidence, I understand; but for a man who passed for the cream of honest folk to have recourse to the tricks of that old charlatanism, to which we always catch on!”

“Like blood-suckers,” said Gobseck.

“Have confidence only in those who live in paltry lodgings, like Claparon,” said Gigonnet.

“Vell,” said big Baron Nucingen to Du Tillet, “you wanted to blay me a durn py zenting me Piroddot. I to nod know vy,” he said, as he turned towards Gobenheim, the manufacturer, “he hav nod zent do dake vrom me vivdy douzand vrancs. I vould haf kifen dem.”

“Oh! no, Baron,” said Joseph Lebas. “You must have known very well that the Bank had refused his paper; you had it rejected by the discount committee. The affair of that poor man, for whom I still profess a high esteem, presents singular circumstances—”

Pillerault’s hand clasped that of Joseph Lebas.

“It is impossible, indeed,” said Mongenod, “to explain what is happening unless we believe that there were, concealed behind Gigonnet, bankers who want to kill the Madeleine business.”

“There is happening to him what will happen to those who go outside their specialty,” said Claparon, interrupting Mongenod. “If he had himself mounted his *Cephalic Oil*, instead of coming to enhance for us the value of land in Paris by rushing into speculation, he would have lost his hundred thousand francs with Roguin, but he would not have failed. He is going to work under the name of Popinot.”

“Keep your eye on Popinot,” said Gigonnet.

Roguin, according to this group of merchants, was *the unfortunate Roguin*, the perfumer was *that poor Birotteau*. The one seemed excused by a great passion, the other seemed more guilty because of his pretensions. On leaving the Bourse, Gigonnet passed by the Rue Perrin-Gasselín, before returning to the Rue Grenétat, and went to Madame Madou’s, the dealer in dry fruits.

“My big mamma,” he said to her, with his cruel simplicity, “well, how goes our little trade?”

“Smoothly,” Madame Madou said, respectfully, as she offered her only chair to the usurer with an affectionate servility that she had had only for *the dear departed*.

Mamma Madou, who floored a recalcitrant or too free wagon driver, who was not afraid to take part in the assault on the Tuileries on the tenth of October, who bantered her best customers, capable, in fine, of speaking, without trembling, to the king in the name of the Market ladies, Angélique Madou received Gigonnet with profound respect. Without

strength in his presence, she trembled under his sour look. Folk of the people will tremble for a long time yet before the executioner, and Gigonnet was the executioner of trade. In the Market, no power is more respected than that of the man who keeps money in circulation. The other human institutions are nothing compared with it. Justice itself is translated in the eyes of the Market by commissary, the personage with whom it is associated. But usury, seated behind its green cartons, usury implored with fear in the heart, dries up pleasantries, parches the throat, humbles the pride of look and makes people respectful.

“Have you anything to ask of me?” she said.

“A nothing, a trifle: keep yourself in readiness to meet the Birotteau notes; the poor man has failed. Everything becomes demandable. I will send you the account to-morrow morning.”

Madame Madou's eyes were first concentrated like those of a female cat, and then vomited flames.

“Ha! the beggar! the scoundrel. He came here himself to tell me that he was deputy, to fly colors for me! Matigot, it goes like that, trade does! No more faith in mayors. The Government is deceiving us. Just wait. I am going to go and make him pay me, I—”

“Eh! in those matters, each pulls himself out as he can, my dear child!” said Gigonnet, as he raised his leg with that dry little movement like to that of a cat trying to pass a place that is damp, and to which it owes its name. “There

are big-wigs that think of withdrawing their pin from the game."

"Good! good! I am going to withdraw my hazelnuts. Marie Jeanne! my stockings and my rabbit's-hair cashmere, and quick, or I will warm you with a box on the ears."

"It's going to be hot in the upper end of the street," Gigonnet said to himself, as he rubbed his hands. "Du Tillet will be satisfied; there will be scandal in the quarter. I do not know what that poor devil of a perfumer has done to him; as for me, I pity him as a dog that breaks his paw. He is not a man; he has no strength."

Madame Madou rushed out, like an insurrection in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, at seven o'clock in the evening, to poor Birotteau's door, which she opened with excessive violence, for the walk had still further animated her spirits.

"Heap of vermin, I must have my money, I want my money! You will give me my money, or I'm going to carry off sachets, satin gewgaws, fans, in fine, merchandise, for my two thousand francs! Has anyone ever seen mayors stealing from those they govern! If you do not pay me, I will send him to the galleys. I am going to the king's attorney. The dread of justice will have its effect! Take notice. I do not leave here without my money."

She made a show of wanting to take the glass from a case in which were valuable articles.

"The Madou is carrying on," Célestin said to his neighbor, in a low voice.

The female dealer heard the word, for in the paroxysms of passion the organs are either obliterated or perfected, according to constitutions, and she applied to Célestin's ear the most vigorous cuff that was ever given in a perfumery shop.

"Learn to respect woman, my angel," she said, "and not to smirch the name of those you are robbing."

"Madame," said Madame Birotteau, as she came out of the rear shop, where, perchance, was her husband, whom Uncle Pillerault wanted to take away, and who, in order to obey the law, drove humility so far as to want to let himself be taken to prison; "Madame, for Heaven's sake, don't make a disturbance among the passers-by."

"Eh! let them come in," said the woman. "I will tell 'em about the matter, a story to make them laugh! Yes, my merchandise and my crowns, gathered up with the sweat of my brow, help to give your balls. In fine, you go about clad like a queen of France with the wool that you have shorn from poor lambs like me! Jesus! It would burn my shoulders, yes, mine, stolen property would! I have only rabbit's-hair on my carcass, but it is mine. Brigands of robbers, my money or—"

She grasped a pretty inlaid box in which were valuable toilet articles.

"Leave that alone, Madame," said César, as he showed himself. "Nothing here belongs to me; everything belongs to my creditors. I no longer own but my own person, and, if you wish to take

possession of it, put me in prison. I give you my word of honor—a tear sprang from his eyes—that I will wait for your constable, the sheriff's officer and his attendants—”

The tone and gesture, in harmony with the action, made Madame Madou's wrath fall.

“My money has been carried away by a notary, and I am innocent of the disasters that I am causing,” César continued; “but you will be paid in time, should I die in the effort and have to work as a laborer in the Market, taking the position of porter.”

“Come, you are a brave man,” said the Market woman. “Pardon my words, Madame; but I must, then, throw myself into the river, for Gigonnet is going to push me, and I have only ten months' paper with which to take up your damned notes.”

“Come and see me to-morrow morning,” said Pillerault, as he showed himself. “I will arrange your affair for five per cent, with one of my friends.”

“What! it's that good old man Pillerault. Eh! but he is your uncle,” she said to Constance. “Come, you are honest folks. I will not lose anything, will I?—To-morrow, old Brutus,” she said to the former dealer in iron and copper ware.

César wanted to insist on remaining amid his ruins, saying that he could thus explain himself to all his creditors. In spite of his niece's entreaties, Uncle Pillerault encouraged César, and made him go up to his rooms. The shrewd old man ran to Doctor Haudry's, explained Birotteau's condition to

him, got a prescription for a sleep-giving potion, went to order it and returned to spend the evening with his nephew. In concert with Césarine, he forced César to drink like them. The narcotic put the perfumer to sleep, and he reawoke, fourteen hours later, in his Uncle Pillerault's room, in the Rue des Bourdonnais, imprisoned by the old man, who himself slept on a folding-bed in his salon. When Constance heard the rumbling of the hack in which her Uncle Pillerault was taking César away, her courage failed her. Our strength is often stimulated by the necessity of supporting a being weaker than ourselves. The poor woman wept on finding herself alone in her own house with her daughter, as she would have wept for César dead.

"Mamma," said Césarine, as she sat down on her mother's knees and caressed her with those feline graces that women use well only among themselves, "you have told me that if I took my part bravely, you would find strength against adversity. Do not weep, then, my dear mother; I am ready to enter any shop, and I will no longer think of what we have been. I will be, as you in your youth, a head girl, and you will never hear a complaint or a regret. I have a hope. Have you not heard Monsieur Popinot?"

"The dear youth. He will not be my son-in-law—"

"Oh! mamma—"

"He will really and truly be my son."

"Misfortune," said Césarine, as she embraced her



mother, "has that much of good in it that it tells us how to know our true friends."

Césarine succeeded in soothing the poor woman's grief by playing towards her the part of a mother. Next morning, Constance went to the Duc de Lenoncourt's, one of the first gentlemen of the king's chamber, and there left a letter in which she asked of him an audience at a certain hour of the day. In the meanwhile, she came to Monsieur de la Billardière's, stated to him the plight in which the notary's flight had put César, entreated him to plead his cause with the Duc and to speak for her, being afraid that she would explain herself badly. She wanted a place for Birotteau. Birotteau would be the most honest of cashiers, if there was any distinction to be made in honesty.

"The king has just appointed the Comte de Fontaine to the general directorship in the management of his household. There is no time to lose."

At two o'clock La Billardière and Madame César ascended the great stairway of the hôtel de Lenoncourt, Rue Saint-Dominique, and were introduced to that one of his gentlemen whom the king preferred, if it be that King Louis XVIII. had any preferences. The gracious reception accorded by this great lord, who belonged to the small number of the real gentlemen whom the preceding century had bequeathed to this one, gave hope to Madame César. The perfumer's wife showed herself great and simple in grief. Grief ennobles the most commonplace persons, for it has its grandeur;

and, to receive lustre from it, it suffices for it to be genuine. Constance was an essentially true woman. It was necessary to speak to the king at once.

In the midst of the conference, Monsieur de Vandenesse was announced, and the Duc exclaimed:

“There is your savior!”

Madame Birotteau was not unknown to this young man, who had come to her house once or twice to ask there for trifles, often as important as great things. The Duc explained La Billardière's intentions. On learning of the misfortune that had overwhelmed the godson of the Marquise d'Uxelles, Vandenesse went at once, along with La Billardière, to the Comte de Fontaine's, entreating Madame Birotteau to wait for him.

The Comte de Fontaine was, like La Billardière, one of those fine provincial gentlemen, those almost unknown heroes who made the fame of La Vendée. Birotteau was not a stranger to him; he had formerly seen him at *La Reine des Roses*. The people who had risked their all for the royal cause enjoyed at that time privileges that the king kept secret, so as not to irritate the Liberals. Monsieur de Fontaine, one of Louis XVIII.'s favorites, passed for being entirely in his confidence. Not only did the Comte positively promise a place, but he came to the house of the Duc de Lenoncourt, then in service, to entreat him to get a moment's audience in the afternoon and to ask for La Billardière an audience with MONSIEUR, who was particularly fond of this old Vendean diplomat.

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That very evening the Comte de Fontaine went from the Tuileries to Madame Birotteau's, to tell her that her husband would, after he had made settlement, be officially appointed to a place at two thousand five hundred francs in the Sinking Fund office, as all the places in the king's household were then filled with supernumerary nobles, to whom they had been pledged.

This success was only a part of Madame Birotteau's task. The poor woman went to the Rue Saint-Denis, to the *Chat qui pelote*, to find Joseph Lebas. During this journey she met, in a brilliant equipage, Madame Roguin, who, no doubt, was making purchases. Her eyes and those of the notary's pretty wife met. The shame that the happy woman could not repress as she saw the ruined woman gave Constance courage.

"Never will I ride in a carriage with other people's money," she said to herself.

Wellreceived by Joseph Lebas, she entreated him to procure for her daughter a situation in a respectable business house. Lebas promised nothing; but, a week later, Césarine had board, lodging and a thousand crowns in the richest novelty house in Paris, which was founding a new establishment in the Quartier des Italiens. The cash and the overseeing of the shop were entrusted to the perfumer's

daughter, who, put over the head girl, took the place of the master and mistress of the house.

As for Madame César, she went that very day to Popinot's to ask him for the care in his house of the cash, the correspondence and the housekeeping. Popinot saw that his house was the only one in which the perfumer's wife could find the respect that was due to her and a position devoid of inferiority. The noble youth gave her three thousand francs a year, board, his own lodgings that he had fitted up, and took for himself a clerk's garret. Thus the pretty perfumeress, after having enjoyed the luxuries of her tenement for a month, had to dwell in that horrible room, looking out on the dark and damp court, where Gaudissart, Anselme and Finot had inaugurated the *Cephalic Oil*.

When Molineux, appointed receiver by the Tribunal of Commerce, came to take possession of César Birotteau's assets, Constance, assisted by Célestin, verified the inventory with him. Then the mother and daughter left, on foot, in simple garb, and went to their Uncle Pillerault's without looking back, after having dwelt in that house the third part of a life-time. They walked in silence towards the Rue des Bourdonnais, where they dined with César for the first time since their separation. It was a sad dinner. Each had had time to make his or her own reflections, to measure the extent of their obligations and to sound their courage. All three were, as it were, sailors ready to struggle with stormy weather, without deceiving themselves as to

the danger. Birotteau regained courage on learning with what solicitude great personages had arranged an opportunity for him; but he wept when he learned what was going to become of his daughter. Then he extended his hand to his wife as he saw the courage with which she began to work once more.

Uncle Pillerault had his eyes moistened for the last time in his life at the sight of the touching picture of these three united beings mingled in an embrace, in the midst of which Birotteau, the weakest of the three, the most broken down, raised his hand as he said:

“Let us hope!”

“For economy’s sake,” said the uncle, “you will lodge with me, keep my room and share my bread. I have long been tired of being alone; you will take the place of that poor boy whom I lost. From here you will have only a step to go, by the Rue de l’Oratoire, to your office.”

“God of Mercy,” exclaimed Birotteau, “when the storm is at its height a star guides me.”

By being resigned, the unfortunate man consummates his misfortune. Birotteau’s fall was from that time accomplished. He gave his consent to it; he became strong again.

After having stopped payment, a dealer should no longer concern himself about anything but finding an oasis in France or abroad, and live there without taking part in anything, like the child that he is: the law declares him a minor and incapable of

every legal act, both civil and civic. But such is not the case. Before reappearing, he awaits a passport which has never been refused by either a commissary-judge or a creditor, for, if he were found without this *exeat*, he would be sent to prison; while, armed with this safeguard, he walks like a member of parliament, into the enemy's camp, not out of curiosity, but to baffle the unfavorable intent of the law in relation to insolvents. The effect of every law that touches on private fortune is to give a prodigious development to the knaveries of the mind. The concern of insolvents, as of all those whose interests are thwarted by any law whatever, is to annul it in their own regard. The condition of civil death, in which the insolvent remains, as it were, in the chrysalis state, lasts about three months, the time required by the formalities before reaching the meeting at which is signed, between creditor and debtor, a treaty of peace, a transaction called the agreement. This word clearly indicates that harmony reigns after the tempest stirred up between violently opposing interests.

On examining the balance-sheet, the Tribunal of Commerce immediately appoints a commissary-judge, who watches over the interests of the bulk of the unknown creditors, and has also to protect the insolvent against vexatious doings on the part of his irritated creditors: a double part that it would be glorious to play if commissary-judges had the time for it. This commissary-judge invests a receiver with the right of handling funds, bills

collectible, and merchandise, of verifying the assets carried on the balance-sheet; in fine, the clerk of the court calls all the creditors together, and this is done by the trumpet call of advertisements in the newspapers. The creditors, whether genuine or not, are bound to come and get together in order to name provisional assignees, who take the place of the receiver, stand, as it were, in the insolvent's shoes, become, by a fiction of the law, the insolvent himself, and may liquidate everything, sell everything, pass upon everything, and, finally, cast the die for the profit of the creditors, unless the insolvent be opposed to it. Most failures in Paris stop with the provisional assignees, and this is why:

The appointment of one or more definite assignees is one of the most anxious acts in which creditors, excited by the spirit of revenge, laughed at, scouted, bantered, taken in, duped, robbed and cheated, can take part. Though in general, creditors are cheated, robbed, duped, taken in, bantered, scouted and laughed at, there does not exist in Paris any commercial passion that lasts ninety days. In business, commercial notes are the only ones made out, demanding prompt payment, for three months. In ninety days, all the creditors, worn out with fatigue by the marches and counter-marches required by a failure, sleep with their excellent little wives. This may enable foreigners to understand how definitive in France is the provisory: out of a thousand provisional assignees there are not five who become definitive. The reason for this abjuring of the

hates stirred up by failure will soon become clear. But it is necessary to explain the drama of a failure to people who have not the good luck to be merchants, in order to make understood how it constitutes at Paris one of the most monstrous of legal pleasantries, and how César's failure was going to be a striking exception.

This pretty commercial drama has three distinct acts: the act of the receiver, the act of the assignees, the act of the agreement. Like all theatrical pieces, it presents a double spectacle: it has its setting for the public, and its hidden machinery; there is the representation seen from the pit and the representation observed from behind the scenes. Behind the scenes are the insolvent and his proctor, the traders' lawyer, the assignees and the receiver, and, finally, the commissary-judge. No one outside of Paris knows, and no one in Paris but knows that a judge in the Tribunal of Commerce is the strangest magistrate that a community has allowed itself to create. This judge may at any moment be in dread of his own justice in regard to himself. Paris has seen the president of its Tribunal of Commerce forced to stop payment. Instead of being a former merchant retired from business, and to whom this magistracy would be the reward of a well-spent life, this judge is a trader, overloaded with enormous undertakings, at the head of an immense house.

The indispensable condition of the election of this judge, bound to pass on the avalanches of commercial trials that are incessantly rolling down in the



capital, is to have much trouble in conducting his own affairs. This Tribunal of Commerce, instead of having been instituted as a useful connecting link by which the merchant would raise himself without ridicule to the regions of the nobility, is made up of actual merchants, who may suffer from their sentences on finding their parties dissatisfied, as Birotteau found Du Tillet.

The commissary-judge is, then, necessarily, a personage before whom much talking is done, who, while listening, is thinking of his business, and refers the public matter from himself to the assignees and the proctor, except in a few strange and singular cases, in which thefts appear with curious circumstances, and make him say that either creditors or the debtor are tricky folks. This personage, placed in the drama like a royal bust in an audience hall, sees himself in the morning, between five and seven o'clock, in his lumber shed, if he is a dealer in woods; in his shop if, as formerly was Birotteau, he is a perfumer; or, in the evening, after dinner, between the fruit and the cheese, always, moreover, dreadfully in a hurry. Thus this personage is generally mute. Let us do justice to the law; legislation, made in haste, which rules the matter, has tied the commissary-judge's hands, and in several cases he sanctions frauds without being able to prevent them, as you are going to see.

The receiver, instead of being the creditors' man, may become the debtor's man. Each one hopes to be able to increase his share by getting the insolvent

to favor him, and the insolvent is always supposed to have hidden treasure. The receiver may act to the advantage of both sides, either by not mixing up the insolvent's affairs, or by securing something for influential folk: he runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds. Often has a shrewd receiver had judgment rendered by redeeming the credits and relieving the merchant, who then bounds up like an elastic ball. The receiver turns towards the best furnished rack, whether it be necessary to cover the strongest creditors and expose the debtor, or to sacrifice the creditors to the merchant's future. Thus the assignee's act is the decisive act. This man, as well as the proctor, plays to the best advantage in this piece, in which they both accept their positions only when sure of their fees. In an average of a thousand failures, the receiver is nine hundred and fifty times the insolvent's man. At the time when this history took place, nearly always the proctors went to see the commissary-judge and submitted to him the name of a receiver to be appointed, their own man, a man to whom the merchant's affairs were known, and who knew how to reconcile the interests of the whole with those of the honorable man who had fallen into misfortune. For some years past shrewd judges have had the receiver suggested who was desired, in order not to appoint him, and have tried to name one supposed to be honest.

During this act the creditors, whether spurious or genuine, present themselves, to designate the

*provisory* assignees, who are, as has been said, *definitive*. In this electoral assembly, those have the right to vote to whom fifty sous are due, just as much as have creditors to the amount of fifty thousand francs; the votes are counted, not weighed. This assembly, in which are found fictitious creditors introduced by the insolvent, the only ones who never fail to attend the election, propose as candidates the creditors, from among whom the commissary-judge, president without power, is *bound* to choose the assignees. Thus the commissary-judge nearly always takes, at the insolvent's suggestion, the assignees whom it is convenient for him to have: another abuse that makes this catastrophe one of the most burlesque dramas that justice can protect. The honorable man who has fallen into misfortune, master of the ground, then legalizes the theft that he had meditated. Generally, the small trade of Paris is free from all blame. When a shopkeeper reaches the stopping of payment, the poor honest man has sold his wife's shawl, has pledged his silverware, has shot off his last arrow and has succumbed empty handed, ruined, without money even for the proctor, who cares very little for him.

The law wishes that the agreement, which restores to the merchant a part of his debt and gives back his business to him, be voted by a certain majority of amounts and persons. This great work requires skilful diplomacy directed amid the contrary interests that cross and butt against one another, by the insolvent, his assignees and his proctor. The

customary, the common procedure, consists in offering, to the portion of the creditors who form the majority contemplated by the law, the instalments to be paid by the debtor, besides the dividends arranged at the agreement. For this gigantic fraud there is no remedy: the thirty Tribunals of Commerce that have succeeded one another know it from having practised it. Enlightened by long usage, they came lately to decide to annul notes stamped with fraud; and, as insolvents have an interest in complaining of this *extortion*, the judges hope thus to reform insolvency: creditors will encounter some method still more villainous, which the judges will frown down as judges, and of which they will take advantage as merchants.

Another trick very much in use, to which we owe the expression *bona fide creditor*, consists in creating creditors, as Du Tillet had created a banking-house, and in introducing a certain number of Claparons, under whose skin is concealed the insolvent, who, from that time, diminishes by so much the real creditors' dividends, and thus creates for himself resources for the future, while at the same time managing the quantity of votes and sums necessary to obtain his agreement. The *fictitious creditors* are like false electors introduced into the electoral college. What can the *bona fide* creditor do against the *fictitious creditors*? Get rid of them by attacking them! Good. To drive out the intruder the *bona fide creditor* has to give up his business, entrust his case to a proctor, which proctor, making

hardly anything out of it, prefers to *direct* failures and makes short work of this petty case. To dislodge the sham creditor, it is necessary to enter into the labyrinth of operations, to go back to remote periods, to fumble through books, to obtain, by authority of justice, the documents bearing on those of the false creditor, to discover the unlikelihood of the fiction, to demonstrate it to the judges of the court, to plead, to go, to come, to warm many cold hearts; then to carry on that Don Quixote trade in the case of each *unlawful and mock* creditor, who, if he comes to be convicted of *mockery*, retires saluting the judges and saying: "Excuse me, you are deceived. My claim is *bona fide*." And all without prejudicing the rights of the insolvent, who can bring the Don Quixote into the royal court. During this time the Don Quixote's affairs are going badly, and he is likely to stop payment.

Moral: The debtor names his assignees, verifies his credits and arranges his settlement himself.

According to these data, who does not see through the intrigues, Sganarelle turns, Frontin inventions, Mascarille lies and Scapin empty bags developed by these two systems? There is not a failure in which enough are not begotten to furnish as much matter as is contained in the fourteen volumes of *Clarissa Harlowe* to an author who would wish to describe them. A single example will suffice. The illustrious Gobseck, the master of the Palmas, the Gigonnets, the Werbrusts, the Kellers and the Nucingens, having found himself in a failure into

which he proposed rudely to drag a merchant who knew how to trick him, received in notes, to fall due after the settlement, the sum which, added to that of the dividends, formed the sum total of his credit. Gobseck determined on the acceptance of a settlement that gave seventy-five per cent rebate to the insolvent. See the creditors played to the advantage of Gobseck! But as the merchant had signed the unlawful notes of his firm in insolvency, and he could apply to these notes the deduction of seventy-five per cent, Gobseck, the great Gobseck, received scarcely fifty per cent. He always saluted his debtor with ironical respect.

All the operations in which an insolvent had been engaged ten days before his failure being liable to be overhauled, some prudent men are careful to close up certain matters with a certain number of creditors whose interest it is, like that of the insolvent, to reach a prompt agreement. Very shrewd creditors go in search of very simple or very busy creditors, make the failure look as ugly as possible to them, and purchase their credits from them at half of what they will be worth at the time of settlement, and then recover their money from the dividend on their credits, and the half, the third, or the fourth gained on the credits they have purchased.

Failure is the more or less hermetical closing of a house in which pillage has left some bags of money. Happy is the merchant who crawls out through the window, through the roof, through the cellar, through any hole, who takes a bag and increases

his share! In that rout, in which is heard the Beresina cry of "save himself who can!" everything is legal and illegal, true and false, honest and dishonest. A man is admired if he *saves himself*. To save one's self is to get possession of some securities to the detriment of the other creditors. France has resounded with debate on a great failure that broke out in a city in which a royal court sat, and in which the magistrates, having current accounts with the insolvents, had put on such heavy rubber cloaks that the mantle of justice was thereby getting threadbare. Because of legitimate suspicion, it was found necessary to refer the judgment on the failure to another court. There was neither commissary-judge, nor receiver, nor sovereign court possible in the place in which the bankruptcy had occurred.

This frightful commercial mess is so well appreciated at Paris that, unless one be interested in the failure to the amount of an important sum, every merchant, however far from busy he may be, accepts the failure as a disaster without remedy, puts down his share to the account of *profit and loss*, and is not guilty of the stupidity of wasting his time; he continues to work at his business. As for the small trader, harassed by his bills coming in at the end of the month, taken up with following the chariot of his fortune, a lawsuit that terrifies by reason of its duration, and the costs it entails, frightens him; he gives up seeing his way clear through it, imitates the large merchant, and droops his head as he realizes his loss.

Large merchants no longer stop payment. They settle amicably: the creditors give a receipt on taking what is offered to them. Then dishonor is avoided, as well as judiciary delays, proctors' fees, and depreciation of merchandise. Each one believes that failure will give less than liquidation. There are more liquidations than failures in Paris.

The act of the assignees is intended to prove that every assignee is incorruptible, that there never is the least collusion between them and the insolvent. The creditors who have been assignees, know that every assignee is a preferred creditor. It listens, it believes what it wishes, and reaches the day of settlement after three months spent in verifying the proofs of the liabilities and the proofs of the assets. The provisory assignees then make to the meeting a short report, the general purport of which is as follows :

“Gentlemen, a million was due to all of us together. We have chopped up our man like an old foundered frigate. Nails, iron, wood, and copper have produced three hundred thousand francs. We have, then, thirty per cent of our claims. Lucky in having found this sum when our debtor might have left us only a hundred thousand francs, we declare him an Aristides. We vote him premiums for encouragement, we award him crowns, and propose to leave him his assets, giving him ten or twelve years to pay us fifty per cent that he is good enough to promise us. This is the agreement. Pass it on to the office. Sign it!”



On hearing this discourse, the happy merchants congratulate and hug themselves. After the approval of this settlement, the insolvent again becomes a merchant as before; his assets are returned to him. He begins his business over again, without being deprived of the right of failing in the promised dividends, a long-delayed failure that is often to be seen, like a child born of a mother nine months after her daughter's marriage.

If the settlement does not succeed, the creditors then name definitive assignees, take exorbitant measures by forming themselves into an association for the purpose of making the most of their debtor's property and trade, seizing everything that he may have, his inheritance from his father, his mother, his aunt, etc. This severe measure is carried out by means of a contract of union.

There are, then, two kinds of failure: the failure of the merchant who wishes to get another hold on business, and the failure of the merchant who, having fallen into the water, is satisfied with going to the bottom of the river. Pillerault was well aware of this difference. It was, according to him, as well as according to Ragon, as difficult to come out clean from the first as to come out rich from the second. After having advised general surrender, he went to speak to the most upright proctor of the place to get him to act in settling the failure and putting the assets at the disposal of the creditors. The law means that the creditors, as long as this drama lasts, support the insolvent and his family.

Pillerault gave the commissary-judge to understand that he would provide for the wants of his niece and nephew.

Everything had been arranged by Du Tillet to make the failure a constant agony to his old employer. This is how: Time is so valuable in Paris that generally, in failures, of two assignees, only one is engaged in the affair. The other is a matter of form: he approves, like the second notary in notarial acts. The acting assignee depends rather frequently on the proctor. By this means, in Paris, failures of the first kind are attended to in such a summary way that, in the delays desired by the law, everything is rushed, tied up, served, arranged! In a hundred days the commissary-judge may utter the atrocious expression of a minister: "Order reigns at Warsaw." Du Tillet desired the perfumer's commercial death. And so the names of the assignees, appointed by Du Tillet's influence, were significant to Pillerault. Monsieur Bidault, called Gigonnet, the chief creditor, was not to take any part in it at all. Molineux, the crotchety little old man, who was losing nothing, was to concern himself with everything. Du Tillet had thrown to this little jackal that noble commercial corpse to torture while devouring it. After the meeting at which the creditors named the assignees, little Molineux returned to his lodgings, *honored*, he said, *with the suffrages of his fellow-citizens*; happy to rule Birotteau as a child having an insect to tease. The landlord, astride on the law, entreated Du Tillet to

aid him with his lights, and he bought a copy of the Commercial Code. Fortunately, Joseph Lebas, warned by Pillerault, had first got the president to select a wise and well-disposed commissary-judge. Gobenheim-Keller, whom Du Tillet had hoped to have, found himself replaced by Monsieur Camusot, substitute judge, the rich Liberal silk-merchant, owner of the house in which Pillerault lived, and said to be an honorable man.

One of the most horrible scenes in César's life was his forced conference with little Molineux, that being whom he regarded as so much of a nullity, and who, by a fiction of the law, had become César Birotteau. He had to go, accompanied by his uncle, to the Cour Batave, to ascend the six flights and again enter that old man's very mean tenement, the home of his tutor, his quasi-judge, the representative of the mass of his creditors.

"What ails you?" asked Pillerault of César, as he heard an exclamation.

"Ah! uncle, you do not know what a man that Molineux is!"

"For the last fifteen years I have seen him from time to time at the Café David, where he plays dominoes in the evening: and so I have come with you."

Monsieur Molineux was exceedingly polite to Pillerault and disdainfully condescending to his insolvent. The little old man had studied his conduct, thought out the shades of his bearing, and prepared his ideas.

“What information do you want?” Pillerault asked. “There is no dispute as regards the claims.”

“Oh!” said little Molineux, “the claims are all right, everything is verified. The creditors are *bona fide*. But the law, sir, the law! The insolvent’s expenses are out of proportion with his fortune.—It is plain that the ball—”

“Which you attended,” said Pillerault, interrupting him.

“—Cost nearly sixty thousand francs, or that this sum was expended on that occasion, the insolvent’s assets did not then reach more than a hundred and some thousand francs.—There is reason for handing the insolvent over to the extraordinary judge, on the charge of simple bankruptcy.”

“Is that your opinion?” Pillerault asked, as he saw the dejection into which this statement had cast Birotteau.

“I make a distinction, sir; this man Birotteau was a municipal officer—”

“You have not brought us here, apparently, to explain to us that we are going to be dragged into the police court?” said Pillerault. “The whole Café David would laugh this evening at your conduct.”

The opinion of the Café David seemed to irritate the little old man very much, and he looked at Pillerault as if scared. The receiver counted on seeing Birotteau alone; he had resolved to pose as sovereign arbiter, as a Jupiter. He counted on frightening Birotteau by the thundering requisition prepared, on brandishing the police-court axe over his head,

on playing on his fears, his terrors; then on calming down while letting himself seem merciful, and on making his victim an ever-grateful soul. Instead of his insect, he met the old commercial sphinx.

"Sir," he said to him, "it is not a laughing matter."

"Excuse me," Pillerault replied. "You are consulting rather too much with Monsieur Claparon; you are abandoning the interests of the others in order to get a decision that will make you privileged in regard to your claims. Now, I can intervene as a creditor. The commissary-judge is there."

"Sir," said Molineux, "I am incorruptible."

"I know it," said Pillerault; "you have, as the saying is, withdrawn your stake from the game. You are shrewd. You have acted in that as with your tenant—"

"Oh! sir," said the receiver, again becoming a landlord, as the cat metamorphosed into a woman runs after a mouse, "my affair of the Rue Montorgueil has not been passed upon. There has happened what is called an incident. The tenant is chief tenant. This intriguer now pretends that, having paid a year in advance, and not having more than a year to—"

Here Pillerault cast at César a glance that meant for him to pay the closest attention.

"—And the year being paid, he can strip the place. A fresh lawsuit. Indeed, I ought to keep my securities until full payment is made; he may owe me for repairs."

“But,” said Pillerault, “the law gives you the furniture as security for rent only.”

“And collaterals!” said Molineux, attacked in his centre. “The article of the Code is interpreted by the decisions rendered on the subject. An amendment, however, should be made by the Legislature. I am at this moment working out a memoir to His Highness the Custodian of the Seals on this gap in legislation. It would be worthy of the Government to concern itself with the interests of property. Everything is in that for the state; we are the backbone of taxation.”

“You are quite capable of enlightening the Government,” said Pillerault, “but in what respect can we enlighten you, yes, we, in relation to our affairs?”

“I want to know,” said Molineux with authoritative emphasis, “whether Monsieur Birotteau has received money from Monsieur Popinot.”

“No, sir,” said Birotteau.

A discussion followed on Birotteau’s interest in the Popinot house, the result of which was that Popinot had the right to be paid in full for his advances, without becoming a party to the insolvency, for the half of the establishment’s expenses due by Birotteau. Receiver Molineux, managed by Pillerault, came back gradually to mild forms that proved how much weight he attached to the opinion of the regular customers at the Café David. He at last gave consolation to Birotteau, and asked him, as well as Pillerault, to share his modest dinner. If

the ex-perfumer had come alone, he would perhaps have irritated Molineux, and the matter would have been aggravated. On this occasion, as well as on some others, old Pillerault was a guardian angel.

It is a horrible punishment that the commercial law imposes on insolvents; they must appear in person, between their provisory assignees and their commissary-judge, at the meeting at which their creditors decide their fate. To a man who puts himself above everything, as to the merchant who is seeking revenge, this sad ceremony is by no means to be dreaded; but to a man like César Birotteau this scene is a punishment that has no analogy except in the last day of one condemned to death. Pillerault did everything in his power to make this dreadful day endurable to his nephew.

This was Molineux's procedure, agreed to by the insolvent. The suit regarding the land situated in the Rue du Faubourg du Temple was won in the royal court. The assignees decided to sell the property, and César made no opposition to this. Du Tillet, informed of the Government's intentions concerning a canal that was to join Saint-Denis with the upper Seine, by passing through the Faubourg du Temple, bought Birotteau's land for the sum of seventy thousand francs. César's interest in the matter of the Madeleine land was abandoned to Monsieur Claparon, on condition that he, on his part, would give up all claim in relation to the half due by Birotteau on account of the expenses of registering and passing on the contract, the charge of paying

the price of the land by handling, in the failure, the dividend that fell to the sellers. The perfumer's interest in the house of Popinot and Company was sold to the said Popinot for the sum of forty-eight thousand francs. The business of *La Reine des Roses* was bought by Célestin Crevel for fifty-seven thousand francs, with right to the lease, merchandise, furniture, the *Sultana Paste* and *Carminative Water* patents, and the renting for twelve years of the factory, the utensils of which were also sold to him. The assets realized a hundred and eighty-five thousand francs, to which the assignees added seventy thousand francs resulting from Birotteau's rights in the unfortunate Roguin's settlement. Thus the total reached two hundred and fifty-five thousand francs. The liabilities amounted to four hundred and forty thousand, so that there was more than fifty per cent. Failure is like a chemical operation, which the shrewd merchant tries to get out of fat. Birotteau, entirely distilled in this retort, produced a result that made Du Tillet furious. Du Tillet believed in a dishonest insolvency; he saw an honest one. Far from being pleased with his gain, for he was going to have the Madeleine land without opening his purse, he would have wished the poor retailer dishonored, discredited, vilified. The creditors, at the general meeting, were no doubt going to carry the perfumer in triumph. In proportion as Birotteau's courage returned to him, his uncle, like a wise physician, graduated the doses for him by initiating him into the operations of the insolvency. These



violent measures were so many blows. A merchant does not learn without grief of the depreciation of the things that represent to him so much money, so much care. The news that his uncle gave him petrified him.

“Fifty-seven thousand francs for *La Reine des Roses!* but the shop cost ten thousand francs; but the apartments cost forty thousand francs; but the *fitting up* of the factory, the utensils, the moulds, the cauldrons, cost thirty thousand francs; but, allowing a rebate of fifty per cent, there is ten thousand francs’ worth in my shop; but the *paste* and the *water* are a property worth a farm!”

These Jeremiads from poor ruined César scarcely frightened Pillerault. The old dealer listened to them as a horse receives a drenching at a gate, but he was alarmed at the perfumer’s stolid silence at the mention of the meeting. To one who understands the vanities and weaknesses that in each social sphere attack man, was it not a horrible punishment for this poor man to return as an insolvent to the commercial court-house in which he had sat as a judge? to go to receive affronts where he had gone so often to be thanked for the services that he had rendered, he, Birotteau, whose inflexible opinions in regard to insolvents were known to the whole trade of Paris; he who had said: “One is still an honest man when he stops payment, but one leaves a meeting of creditors as a cheat?” His uncle studied the hours favorable for familiarizing him with the idea of appearing before his assembled

creditors, as the law required. This obligation was killing Birotteau. His mute resignation made a deep impression on Pillerrault, who often, in the night, heard him through the partition exclaiming: "Never! never! I shall be dead before that."

Pillerrault, that man so strong by the simplicity of his life, understood the weakness. He resolved to spare Birotteau the anguish to which he might succumb in the terrible scene of his appearance before the creditors, an inevitable scene! The law on this point is strict, formal, exacting. The merchant who refuses to appear may, from this single fact, be brought into the police court on the charge of simple bankruptcy. But if the law compels the insolvent to present himself, it has not the power to make the creditor come there. A meeting of creditors is an important ceremony only in certain cases: for example, if there be occasion to dispossess a cheat and to make a deed of agreement, if there be disagreement between favored and injured creditors, if the settlement is ultra-dishonest and the insolvent needs a doubtful majority. But in the case of a failure in which everything is realized on, as well as in the case of a failure in which the cheat has arranged everything, the meeting is a formality. Pillerrault went to entreat each creditor, one after the other, to sign a power of attorney for his proctor. Each creditor, Du Tillet excepted, was sincerely sorry for César after having broken him down. Each one knew how the perfumer had conducted himself, how correct his books were, how

straight were his affairs. All the creditors were satisfied at not seeing among them any *sham* creditor. Molineux, at first receiver, then assignee, had found in César's house all that the poor man possessed, even the engraving of *Hero and Leander* given by Popinot, his personal jewelry, his pin, his gold buckles, his two watches, that an honest man would have carried off without thinking that he lacked in honesty. Constance had left her modest jewel-case. This touching obedience to the law struck the trade keenly. Birotteau's enemies represented these circumstances as signs of stupidity; but sensible folk saw them in their true light, as a magnificent excess of probity. Two months later, opinion at the Bourse changed. The most indifferent people acknowledged that this failure was one of the rarest curiosities of trade that had been seen on Change. And so the creditors, knowing that they were going to realize about sixty per cent, did all that Pillerault asked of them. Proctors are very few in number; it happened, then, that several creditors had the same proxy. Pillerault succeeded in reducing this formidable meeting to three proctors, himself, Ragon, the two assignees and the commissary-judge.

On the morning of that solemn day, Pillerault said to his nephew:

"César, you can go without fear to your meeting to-day; you will find no one there."

Monsieur Ragon wanted to accompany his debtor. When the former owner of *La Reine des Roses* made

his dry little voice heard, his ex-successor grew pale; but the good little old man opened his arms to him, Birotteau rushed into them as a child into its father's arms, and both perfumers bedewed each other with their tears. The insolvent regained courage on seeing so much indulgence, and went in a hack with his uncle. Precisely at half-past ten o'clock all three arrived at the Saint-Merri cloister, where at that time the Tribunal of Commerce sat. At that hour there was no one in the insolvency hall. The hour and the day had been chosen by agreement with the assignees and the commissary-judge. The proctors were there on account of their clients: thus there was nothing to intimidate César Birotteau. Yet the poor man did not go into Monsieur Camusot's court-room, which by chance had been his own, without feeling a deep emotion, and he shuddered at the thought of entering the insolvency hall.

"It is cold," said Monsieur Camusot to Birotteau. "These gentlemen will not be sorry for remaining here instead of going to freeze us in the hall—he avoided saying insolvents—. Be seated, gentlemen."

Each took a seat, and the judge gave his arm-chair to Birotteau, who was confused. The proctors and the assignees signed.

"By reason of the abandonment of your assets," said Camusot to Birotteau, "your creditors unanimously release you from further liability; your settlement is couched in terms that may assuage

your grief; your proctor will have it approved promptly: so you are free. All the judges of the court, dear Monsieur Birotteau," said Camusot as he took hold of both his hands, "are moved at your position, without being surprised at your courage, and there is no one who has not done justice to your probity. In misfortune you have been worthy of what you were here. Twenty years have passed since I have been in trade, and this is the second time that I have seen a merchant who had fallen, winning once more the public esteem."

Birotteau took the judge's hands and pressed them, with tears in his eyes. Camusot asked him what he counted on doing. Birotteau replied that he was going to work to pay his creditors in full.

"If in carrying out this noble task, you need a few thousand francs, you can always get them from me," said Camusot. "I would give them with great pleasure to be witness of a fact rather rare in Paris."

Pillerault, Ragon and Birotteau retired.

"Well, it was not like having to drink the sea dry," said Pillerault to him at the court-room door.

"I am grateful for your services, uncle," said the poor man, tenderly.

"You are restored; we are but two steps from Rue des Cinq-Diamants; come and see my nephew," Ragon said to him.

"That was a cruel sensation through which Birotteau had to pass on seeing Constance sitting in a little office in the low and dark entresol situated over the shop, where dominated a sign-board rising

one-third the height of her window, intercepting the light, and on which was written: A. POPINOT.

“There is one of Alexander’s lieutenants,” Birotteau said, with the pleasantness of misfortune, as he pointed to the sign.

That forced pleasantness, in which was unaffectedly shown the inextinguishable feeling of the superiority that Birotteau thought he possessed, produced, as it were, a shiver in Ragon, in spite of his seventy years. César saw his wife bringing down to Popinot some letters to sign, and he could not restrain his tears nor keep his countenance from turning pale.

“Good-day, my friend,” she said to him, with a laughing air.

“I need not ask you if you are happy here?” said César, as he looked at Popinot.

“As with my son,” she replied in a tender tone that struck the ex-merchant.

Birotteau took hold of Popinot, and embraced him, saying:

“I have just lost forever the right of calling him my son.”

“Let us hope,” said Popinot. “*Your* oil is going, thanks to my efforts in the newspapers, to those of Gaudissart, who has done the whole of France, who has inundated it with placards and prospectuses and who is now having printed at Strasbourg prospectuses in German, and is going to descend like an invasion on Germany. We have succeeded in placing three thousand gross.”

“Three thousand gross,” said César.

“And I have bought, in the Faubourg Saint-Marceau, a tract of land, and at a not high figure, either, where a factory is being built. I will hold on to that of the Faubourg du Temple.”

“Wife,” said Birotteau, in Constance’s ear, “with a little assistance we might get out of it.”

From that fatal day César, wife and daughter understood one another. The poor employé wanted to attain a result if not impossible, at least gigantic: the entire payment of his debts! These three beings, united by the bonds of ferocious honesty, became penurious and refused themselves everything: a farthing seemed to them sacred. In a studied way, Césarine had for her trade the devotedness of a young girl. She spent the nights devising how to increase the prosperity of the house, invented designs in stuffs, and displayed an innate commercial genius. Her employers were obliged to moderate her ardor for work, they rewarded her with presents; but she refused the adornments and jewels that her employers offered to her. Money! was her cry. Each month she brought her wages, her little savings, to her Uncle Pillerault. César did the same, and so did Madame Birotteau. All three knowing themselves not to be shrewd, each of them wished to place on him the responsibility of watching the money market, so they gave over to Pillerault the supreme direction of the investing of their savings. Having become a man of business once more, the uncle followed the money market in the Bourse

reports. It was learned later on that he had been aided in this work by Jules Desmarets and Joseph Lebas, both of them eager to tell him of safe investments.

The former perfumer, who lived with his uncle, did not dare to question him on the use made of the amounts acquired by his labors and by those of his daughter and wife. He went, with bowed head, through the streets, concealing from the gaze of all his downcast, disturbed and stolid countenance. César reproached himself for wearing fine clothes.

“At least,” he said, with an angelic look at his uncle, “I do not eat my creditors’ bread. Your bread seems to me sweet, though given from the pity that I inspire you with, knowing that, owing to this holy charity, I steal nothing from my salary.”

The merchants who met the employé did not find in him any trace of the perfumer. The indifferent conceived a great idea of men who had failed at the sight of this man on whose countenance the blackest sorrow had set the seal of its mourning, who showed himself overthrown by what had never made its appearance in his house, *thought!* He is not lost who wills. Thoughtless people, without conscience, to whom everything is indifferent, can never present the spectacle of a disaster. Religion alone impresses a special seal on fallen beings: they believe in a future, in a Providence; there is in them a certain effulgence that marks them, an appearance of holy resignation mingled with hope that



causes a sort of tenderness; they know all that they have lost as an exiled angel weeping at the gate of Heaven. Insolvents cannot present themselves at the Bourse. César, driven from the domain of probity, was an angel sighing for pardon.



\*

For fourteen months, full of the religious thoughts with which his fall had inspired him, Birotteau refused every pleasure. Though sure of the friendship of the Ragons, it was impossible to prevail upon him to go to dine with them, or with the Lebases, or with the Matifats, or with the Protezes or with the Chiffrevilles, or even with Monsieur Vauquelin, all of whom showed their eagerness to honor in César a superior virtue. César preferred to be alone in his room to meeting the look of a creditor. The most cordial advances from his friends reminded him bitterly of his position. Constance and Césarine did not, then, go anywhere. On Sundays and holidays, the only days when they were free, these two women came, at the hour for mass, to take César, and kept him company at Pillerault's after having performed their religious duties. Pillerault invited the Abbé Loraux, whose words supported César in his life of trial, and they then remained as in family life. The old iron and copper-ware merchant was made up of too honest a fibre of probity to disapprove of César's sense of delicacy. And so he had thought of increasing the number of persons among whom the insolvent could show his blanched face and look a man straight in the eye.

In the month of May, 1821, this family, in the

grasp of adversity, was rewarded for its efforts by the first feast that the arbiter of its destinies prepared for it. The last Sunday of this month was the anniversary of the consent given by Constance to her marriage with César. Pillerault had rented, along with the Ragons, a small country house at Sceaux, and the former iron and copper-ware dealer wanted to have a joyous house-warming.

“César,” said Pillerault to his nephew on Saturday evening, “to-morrow we are going to the country, and you will come along.”

César, who wrote a superb hand, spent the evening in copying for Derville and other lawyers. Now, on Sunday, authorized by the pastor’s permission, he worked like a negro.

“No,” he answered, “Monsieur Derville is waiting for a guardian’s account.”

“Your wife and daughter clearly deserve a reward. You will find only our friends: the Abbé Loraux, the Ragons, Popinot and his uncle. Besides, I want it.”

César and his wife, caught in the whirlwind of business, had never returned to Sceaux, though from time to time both of them wished to go back there, so as to see the tree under which the chief clerk of *La Reine des Roses* had almost fainted. During the journey that César made in a hack with his wife and daughter, and Popinot, who drove them, Constance cast on her husband knowing looks without being able to bring a smile to his lips. She whispered some words in his ear, and his only réply

was to shake his head. The sweet expressions of that tenderness, unchangeable but forced, instead of lighting up César's countenance, made it more sombre and brought some repressed tears to his eyes. The poor man had made this journey twenty years before, rich, young, full of hope, in love with a young girl as pretty as now was Césarine; he then dreamt of happiness, and to-day saw in the bottom of the coach his noble child pale from sitting up at night, his brave wife no longer having but the beauty of cities over which have passed the lava streams of a volcano. Love alone had remained! César's attitude stifled joy in his daughter's heart and in that of Anselme, who represented to him the charming scene of that day of old.

"Be happy, my children, you have the right to be," that poor father said to them in a heart-rending tone. "You can love each other without any after-thought," he added.

Birotteau, while speaking these last words, had taken hold of his wife's hands and kissed them with a holy and admiring affection that touched Constance's heart more than the liveliest pleasantry. When they reached the house, at which they were awaited by Pillerault, the Ragons, the Abbé Loraux and Judge Popinot, these five select personages had a bearing, looks and words that put César at his ease, for all were moved at seeing that man ever on the morrow of his misfortune.

"Go and take a walk in the Bois d'Aulnay," said Uncle Pillerault, as he placed César's hand in

that of Constance, "go there with Anselme and Césarine; you will return at four o'clock."

"Poor creatures, we shall make them uneasy," said Madame Ragon, moved to tenderness by her debtor's genuine sorrow; "he will be quite jocund in a short time."

"It is repentance without having sinned," said the Abbé Loraux.

"He can become great only through misfortune," said the judge.

To forget is the great secret of strong and creative lives; to forget after the manner of nature, which recognizes no past, which begins at every moment the mysteries of its indefatigable productiveness. Weak lives, as was that of Birotteau, live in sorrows, instead of changing them into apothegms of experience; they become saturated with them, and use themselves up by looking back every day at the misfortunes that have taken place. When the two couples had reached the path that leads to the Bois d'Aulnay, placed like a crown on one of the prettiest hillsides in the neighborhood of Paris, and the Vallée-aux-Loups was seen in all its attractiveness, the fineness of the weather, the beauty of the landscape, the first verdure and the sweet memories of the most charming day of his youth distended the sad chords of César's soul: he pressed his wife's arm against his palpitating heart, his eye was no longer glassy, the light of pleasure shone in it.

"At last," said Constance to her husband, "I see you again, my poor César! It seems to me that we are

in good enough shape to allow ourselves a little pleasure from time to time.”

“And can I do so?” said the poor man. “Ah! Constance, your affection is the only possession I have left. Yes, I have lost even the confidence that I had in myself. I have no more strength; my only desire is to live long enough for me to die square with the world. You, dear wife, you who are my wisdom and my prudence, you who saw clearly, you who are irreproachable, you can be pleasant; I only, of the three of us, am guilty. Eighteen months ago, in the midst of that fatal feast, I saw my Constance, the only woman whom I have loved, more beautiful perhaps than was the young person with whom I traversed this path twenty years ago, as our children now traverse it!—In twenty months I have scarred that beauty—my pride, my allowable and lawful pride. I love you the more the better I know you—Oh! *dear*,” he said, as he gave to this word an emphasis that touched his wife’s heart, “I would rather hear you complain, instead of seeing you caress my grief.”

“I did not believe,” she said, “that after twenty years of housekeeping a woman’s love for her husband could increase.”

This expression made César for a moment forget all his misfortunes, for he had so much heart that this word was a fortune. He therefore almost joyously approached *their* tree, which perchance had not been blown down. The husband and wife sat down there, looking at Anselme and Césarine, who

were turning round the same lawn without perceiving it, thinking perhaps that they were going straight ahead.

“Mademoiselle,” said Anselme, “do you think me so heartless and greedy as to have taken advantage of the gaining of your father’s share in the *Cephalic Oil*? I am lovingly keeping his half for him, for him am I taking care of it. I am discounting with his interests; if there are doubtful notes, I take them on my responsibility. We can be each other’s only on the morrow of your father’s being himself again, and I am hastening that day with all the strength that love gives.”

The lover had been very careful to tell this secret to his mother-in-law. With the most innocent lovers, there is always the desire to seem great in their mistresses’ eyes.

“And will it be soon?” she asked.

“Soon,” said Popinot.

This answer was given in so penetrating a tone that the chaste and pure Césarine extended her brow to dear Anselme, who imprinted an eager and respectful kiss upon it, so much nobility was there in this youth’s action.

“Papa, everything is going on well,” she said to César, in a delicate way. “Be agreeable, chat, give up your sad look.”

When this family, so united, returned to Pille-rault’s house, César, though far from observant, noticed in the Ragons a change of manner that bespoke some event. The welcome extended by



Madame Ragon was particularly gracious; her look and tone told César: "We have been paid."

At dessert the Sceaux notary presented himself, Uncle Pillerault made him sit down and looked at Birotteau, who began to suspect a surprise, without being able to imagine its extent.

"Nephew, for the past eighteen months your wife's, your daughter's, and your own savings have amounted to twenty thousand francs. I received thirty thousand francs as the dividend on my claim; we have, then, fifty thousand francs, to give to your creditors. Monsieur Ragon has received thirty thousand francs as his dividend, the Sceaux notary brings you a receipt for payment in full, including interest, made to your friends. The balance of the amount is at Crottat's, for Lourdois, old woman Madou, the mason, the carpenter, and your more needy creditors. As for next year, we will see. With time and patience one does wonders."

Birotteau's joy is not to be described; he threw himself weeping into his uncle's arms.

"Let him wear his Cross to-day," said Ragon to the Abbé Loraux.

The confessor fastened the red ribbon in the buttonhole of the employé, who looked at himself in the parlor mirror a score of times during the evening, showing a pleasure at which people who think themselves superior would have laughed, and which comes naturally to those good folk of the middle class. Next day Birotteau betook himself to Madame Madou's.

"Oh! it's you, good man," she said. "I didn't know you, you have turned so gray. Yet you people don't have to toil: you have places. But I make myself as sick as a poodle dog turning a crank, who deserves baptism."

"But, madame—"

"Eh! I mean no offence," she said; "you have a receipt."

"I have come to tell you that I will pay you at Master Crottat's, the notary, to-day, the balance of your claim and interest—"

"Is that so?"

"Be at his place at half-past eleven o'clock—"

"That is honor, with good measure and *the four* per cent," she said, as she ingenuously admired Birotteau. "See here, my dear sir, I am doing a good business with your little red-headed chap; he is a gentleman, and he gives me a big profit without dickering as to the price, so as to indemnify me; well, I will give you a receipt; keep your money, my poor old man! The Madou may flare up, she is a scold, but she has that," she said, as she patted the most voluminous cushions of live flesh that have been known in the Market.

"Never," said Birotteau; "the law is strict, I want to pay you in full."

"Then I won't do much praying," she said. "And to-morrow, in the Market, I'll trumpet your honor. Ah! it is a rare interlude!"

The good man went through the same scene at the house-painter's, Crottat's father-in-law, but

with variations. It was raining. César left his umbrella standing in a corner of the door-way. The enriched painter, seeing the water making its way into the fine room in which he was breakfasting with his wife, was not in the most amiable mood.

“Well, what do you want, my poor old Birotteau?” he said in a harsh tone that many people assume in speaking to beggars who will not be put off.

“Sir, your son-in-law has not told you, then?—”

“What?” Lourdois interrupted, impatiently, thinking of some request.

“—To be at his place this morning at half-past eleven o’clock, to give me a receipt for the full payment of your claim?”

“Ah! that’s another matter.—Be seated, then, there, Monsieur Birotteau, and eat a bite with us—”

“Give us the pleasure of sharing our breakfast,” said Madame Lourdois.

“It’s all right, then?” the fat Lourdois asked him.

“No, sir, I have had to be satisfied with a meagre breakfast every day at my office in order to get some money together; but, in time, I hope to repair the injury done to my neighbor.”

“Truly,” said the painter, as he gulped down a tart loaded with pâté de foies gras, “you are a man of honor.”

“And what is Madame Birotteau doing?” Madame Lourdois asked.

“She is book-keeper and cashier at Monsieur Anselme Popinot’s.”

“The poor creatures!” said Madame Lourdois, in a low voice, to her husband.

“If you need me, my dear Monsieur Birotteau, come and see me,” said Lourdois. “I might be able to assist you.—”

“I need you at eleven o’clock, sir,” said Birotteau, who then retired.

This first result gave courage to the insolvent, without bringing back rest to him; the desire of regaining honor troubled his life out of all measure; he entirely lost the freshness that had adorned his countenance, his eyes were sunken and his cheeks hollow. When old acquaintances met César in the morning at eight o’clock, going to Rue de l’Oratoire, or returning at four in the afternoon, wrapped in the overcoat that he had at the time of his fall, and which he took care of as a poor sub-lieutenant takes care of his uniform, his hair entirely white, pale, timid, some attracted his attention in spite of himself, for his eye was alert; he crept along the walls after the manner of thieves.

“Your conduct is known, my friend,” someone would say to him. “Everyone regrets the severity with which you are treating yourself, as well as your daughter and your wife.”

“Take a little more time,” said others; “the money plague is not mortal.”

“No, but rather the plague of the soul,” poor, weakened César replied one day to Matifat.

In the beginning of the year 1823 the Saint-Martin Canal was decided on. The land situated in the Faubourg du Temple reached fabulous prices. The project cut Du Tillet's property, formerly that of Biotteau, clean through the middle. The company to which the canal was awarded agreed to an exorbitant price if the banker could deliver his land at a specified time. The lease given by César to Popinot was in the way. The banker came to Rue des Cinq-Diamants to see the druggist. If Popinot was indifferent to Du Tillet, yet Césarine's affianced husband bore an instinctive hatred against that man. He was ignorant of the theft and the infamous combinations concocted by the lucky banker, but a voice within him cried out: "That man is an unpunished robber." Popinot would not have the slightest dealings with him, his presence was odious to him. At that moment, especially, he saw Du Tillet growing rich on the spoils of his former employer, for the Madeleine land was beginning to rise to a price that presaged the exorbitant value to which it attained in 1827. And so, when the banker had explained the nature of his visit, Popinot looked at him with concentrated indignation.

"I do not want to refuse to give up my lease to you, but I must have sixty thousand francs for it, and not a single farthing less."

"Sixty thousand francs!" Du Tillet exclaimed, as he made a feint of withdrawing.

"My lease has fifteen years yet to run. I will spend three thousand francs more a year to get

another factory. So sixty thousand francs, or we will say nothing more about it," said Popinot, as he went back into the shop, whither Du Tillet followed him.

The discussion became heated. Birotteau's name was mentioned; Madame César came down and saw Du Tillet for the first time since the famous ball.

The banker could not repress a feeling of surprise on seeing the change that had taken place in his old mistress, and his eyes drooped, frightened as he was at his work.

"The gentleman," said Popinot to Madame César, "is making of *your* land three hundred thousand francs, and he refuses *us* sixty thousand indemnity for *our* lease—"

"Three thousand francs income," said Du Tillet, emphatically.

"Three thousand francs!—" Madame César repeated, in a simple and penetrating tone.

Du Tillet turned pale; Popinot looked at Madame Birotteau. There was a moment's deep silence that made this scene still more inexplicable to Anselme.

"Sign for me your release, which I have had prepared by Crottat," said Du Tillet, as he drew a stamped paper from his side pocket. "I am going to give you a draft on the Bank for sixty thousand francs."

Popinot looked at Madame César without dissembling his profound astonishment; he thought he was dreaming. While Du Tillet was making out his draft on a high desk table, Constance disappeared

and went back to the entresol. The druggist and the banker exchanged their papers. Du Tillet left, giving Popinot a cold salute.

“At last, in a few months,” said Popinot, who looked after Du Tillet as he went along the Rue des Lombards where his cab had stopped, “thanks to this singular affair, I will have my Césarine. My dear little wife will no longer spend her life’s-blood in working. What! a look from Madame César sufficed! What is there between her and this brigand? What has just taken place is rather extraordinary.”

Popinot sent the draft to the Bank to have it cashed and went up to speak to Madame Birotteau; but as he did not find her at the cashier’s desk, she was no doubt in her room. Anselme and Constance lived as live son-in-law and mother-in-law, when son-in-law and mother-in-law agree; he accordingly went into Madame César’s room with the natural eagerness of a lover who is attaining his happiness. The young merchant was very much surprised at finding his future mother-in-law, whom he reached by a cat-like bound, reading a letter from Du Tillet, for Anselme recognized the handwriting of Birotteau’s former chief clerk. A lighted candle, the black and moving phantoms of letters burned on the hearthstone made Popinot shudder, and he, favored with a piercing glance, had seen, without wanting to do so, this phrase at the beginning of the letter that his mother-in-law was holding: “*I adore you! you know it, angel of my life, and why—*”

“What influence, then, have you over Du Tillet

to make him agree to such an affair?" he said, as he laughed with that convulsive laughter that the suppression of an evil suspicion causes.

"Let us not speak of that," she said, while giving evidence of being greatly disturbed.

"Yes," Popinot replied, quite stunned, "let us speak of the ending of your sufferings."

Anselme wheeled around on his heels and went to drum with his fingers on the window panes, as he looked into the court.

"Well," he said to himself, "though she may have loved Du Tillet, why should I not conduct myself as an honest man?"

"What ails you, my boy?" said the poor woman.

"The account of the net profits on the *Cephalic Oil* reaches two hundred and forty-two thousand francs, the half is a hundred and twenty-one," Popinot said, brusquely. "If I deduct from that sum the forty-eight thousand francs given to Monsieur Birotteau, there remain seventy-three thousand, which, added to the sixty thousand francs from the surrender of the lease, gives *you* a hundred and thirty-three thousand francs."

Madame César listened in anxious happiness that made her palpitate so violently that Popinot heard the heart-beats.

"Well, I always considered Monsieur Birotteau as my partner," he continued; "we can dispose of that sum to reimburse his creditors. By adding it to that of the twenty-eight thousand francs of your



savings invested by your uncle Pillerault, we have a hundred and sixty-one thousand francs. Our uncle will not refuse us a receipt for his twenty-five thousand francs. No human power can prevent me from lending to my father-in-law, on account of the profits for next year, the sum necessary to complete the amounts due to his creditors.—And he—shall be—made all right again.”

“Made all right again,” exclaimed Madame César, as she bent her knee on her chair.

She joined her hands while reciting a prayer, after having let the letter drop.

“Dear Anselme!” she said, when she had blessed herself, “dear boy!”

She clasped his head, kissed him on the forehead, pressed him to her heart, and did a thousand simple things.

“Césarine may well be yours! my daughter will then be very happy. She will leave that house in which she is killing herself.”

“From love,” said Popinot.

“Yes,” the mother replied, smiling.

“Listen to a little secret,” said Popinot, as he looked at the fatal letter with the corner of his eye. “I obliged Célestin so as to enable him to get possession of your business, but I put a condition on my favor. Your rooms are just as you left them. I had an idea, but I did not believe that chance would be so favorable to us. Célestin is bound to sublet to you your old apartments, in which he has not set foot, and all the furniture of which will be

yours. I have reserved to myself the third floor to live in it with Césarine, who will never leave you. After my marriage I will come to spend the days here, from eight in the morning until six in the evening. To make a new fortune for you I will buy in Monsieur César's interest for a hundred thousand francs, and you will thus have, with his emolument, ten thousand francs income. Won't you be happy?"

"Tell me nothing more, Anselme, or I'll become silly."

Madame César's angelic attitude and the purity of her eyes, as well as the innocence of her fine brow, so splendidly belied the thousand ideas that revolved in the lover's brain that he wanted to put an end to his monstrous thought. A fault was irreconcilable with the life and ideas of Pillerault's niece.

"My dear adored mother," said Anselme, "in spite of me, a horrible suspicion has just entered my mind. If you want to see me happy, you will destroy it at this very instant."

Popinot had reached out his hand for the letter and had taken hold of it.

"Without wishing it," he continued, frightened at the terror that was pictured on Constance's countenance, "I read the first words of this letter written by Du Tillet. These words agree so singularly with the effect that you have just produced in determining that man's ready agreement to my extravagant demand that any man would explain it

as the devil explains it in spite of myself. Your look, three words sufficed—”

“Do not finish,” said Madame César, as she took hold of the letter again and burned it before Anselme’s eyes. “My boy, I am very cruelly punished for a very small offence. Know all, then, Anselme. I do not want the suspicion inspired by the mother to injure the daughter, and, moreover, I can speak without having to blush: I told my husband what I am going to acknowledge to you. Du Tillet wanted to tamper with my virtue. My husband was at once notified; Du Tillet must be dismissed. The day on which my husband was to discharge him, Du Tillet took three thousand francs from us!”

“I suspected it,” said Popinot, expressing all his hatred in his tone.

“Anselme, your future, your happiness, demands this confidence; but it must die in your heart, as it was dead in mine and in César’s. You must remember my husband’s *grumbling* on the occasion of an error in the cash. Monsieur Birotteau, to avoid a lawsuit and not to ruin that man, no doubt put back into the drawer three thousand francs, the price of that cashmere shawl that I did not get for three years afterwards. There is my exclamation explained. Alas! my dear boy, I will acknowledge my childish behavior to you. Du Tillet had written to me three love letters, which pictured him so well,” she said, as she sighed and drooped her eyes, “that I had kept them—as a curiosity. I

have never read them more than once. But at last it became imprudent to keep them. On again seeing Du Tillet, I thought of them. I came up to my room to burn them, and I was looking at the last when you came in.—That is all, my friend.”

Anselme knelt down on one knee and kissed Madame César's hand with an admirable expression that made the tears come to both their eyes. The mother-in-law raised up her son-in-law, stretched out her arms towards him and clasped him to her heart.

That day was to be a day of joy for César. The king's private secretary, Monsieur de Vandenesse, came to the office to speak to him. They went out together through the small court of the Sinking Fund office.

“Monsieur Birotteau,” said the Vicomte de Vandenesse, “your efforts to pay your creditors have by chance become known to the king. His Majesty, touched by conduct so rare, and knowing that, out of humility, you do not wear the badge of the Legion of Honor, has sent me to order you to put it on again. Then, wishing to aid you in meeting your obligations, he has charged me with giving you this sum, taken from his private purse, regretting that he could not make it larger. This must remain a profound secret. His Majesty regards the official publication of his good works to be anything but royal,” said the private secretary, as he put six thousand francs into the hand of the employé, who during these remarks felt inexpressible sensations.

Birotteau could utter only incoherent words, which he stammered, and Vandenesse smilingly bade him good-morning. The feeling that animated poor César is so rare in Paris that his life had gradually excited admiration. Joseph Lebas, Judge Popinot, Camusot, the Abbé Loraux, Ragon, the head of the large house in which Césarine was employed, Lourdois, and Monsieur de la Billardière had spoken of it. Opinion, already changed in his regard, carried him to the clouds.

“There goes an honorable man!” This expression had already resounded several times in César’s ear when he was passing in the street, and produced in him the emotion experienced by an author on hearing it said: *There he goes!* This good fame was assassinating Du Tillet. When César had the bank-notes sent by the sovereign, his first thought was to use them in paying his former clerk. The good man went along the Rue de la Chaussée-d’Antin, so that, as the banker was returning to his house from his rounds he ran across his old employer on the stairway.

“Well, *my poor* Birotteau!” he said, in a wheedling way.

“Poor?” proudly exclaimed the debtor. “I am quite rich. I will lay my head on my pillow this evening with the satisfaction of knowing that I have paid you.”

These words, full of probity, were a speedy torture to Du Tillet.

In spite of the general esteem, he did not esteem

himself; an irrepressible voice cried out to him: "That man is sublime!"

"Pay me! What business are you doing, then?"

Certain that Du Tillet was not going to repeat his confidence, the former perfumer said:

"I will never resume business, sir. No human power could have foreseen what has happened to me. Who knows that I might not be the victim of another Roguin? But my conduct was represented to the king, his heart deigned to have compassion on my efforts, and he has encouraged them by sending to me on the spot a rather large sum which—"

"Do you want a receipt?" said Du Tillet, interrupting him; "do you pay?"—

"In full, and even the interest; and so I am going to ask you to come a couple of steps from here, to Monsieur Crottat's."

"Before a notary!"

"But, sir," said César, "I am not prevented from thinking of rehabilitation, and authenticated deeds are, then, unobjectionable—?"

"Come," said Du Tillet, who went out with Birotteau, "let us go; it is only a step. But whence had you so much money come to you?" he continued.

"I do not take it," said César. "I earn it with the sweat of my brow."

"You owe an enormous sum to the Claparon house."

"Alas! yes, that is my biggest debt. I think, indeed, that I will die in the attempt."

"You will never be able to pay it," said Du Tillet, harshly.

"He is right," thought Birotteau.

The poor man, on returning home, passed through the Rue Saint-Honoré, absent-mindedly, for he always took a roundabout course, so as not to see either his shop or the windows of his tenement. For the first time since his fall, he again saw that house in which eighteen years of happiness had been wiped out by the anguish of three months.

"I had, indeed, thought of ending my days there," he said to himself.

And he hurried his steps, for he had observed the new sign:

### CÉLESTIN CREVEL

SUCCESSOR TO CÉSAR BIROTTEAU.

"My sight is dim.—Isn't that Césarine?" he exclaimed, as he remembered having seen a blond head at the window.

He indeed saw his daughter, his wife and Popinot. The lovers knew that Birotteau never passed in front of his old house; and, not being able to imagine what was happening to him, they had come to make some arrangements regarding the feast that they were thinking of giving César. This strange apparition so keenly astonished Birotteau that he stood spell-bound.

"There is Monsieur Birotteau looking at his old house," said Monsieur Molineux to the dealer opposite *La Reine des Roses*.

“Poor man,” said the perfumer’s old neighbor, “he gave one of the finest of balls there.—There were two hundred carriages.”

“I was at it. He failed three months afterwards,” said Molineux. “I was assignee.”

Birotteau hurried off, his limbs trembling under him, and ran to his Uncle Pillerault’s.

Pillerault, informed of what was going on in the Rue des Cinq-Diamants, thought that his nephew would have difficulty in bearing the shock of so great a joy as that caused by his rehabilitation, for he was a daily witness to the moral vicissitudes of that poor man, always confronted by his inflexible doctrines relative to insolvents, and all of whose strength was in requisition at every moment. Honor was to César a death that might have its Easter-day. That hope made his grief incessantly active. Pillerault undertook to prepare his nephew to receive the good news. When Birotteau entered his uncle’s house he found him thinking of the means of attaining this end. And so the joy with which the employé related the evidence of interest that the king had given seemed of good augury to Pillerault, and the astonishment at having seen Césarine at *La Reine des Roses* was an excellent preparation for the subject.

“Well, César,” said Pillerault, “do you know how that comes to you? From Popinot’s impatience to marry Césarine. He will no longer, and should not, on account of your exaggerated probity, allow his youth to pass in eating dry bread to the savor



of a good dinner. Popinot wants to give you the money necessary for the full payment of your debts."

"He is buying his wife," said Birotteau.

"Isn't it honorable to put one's father-in-law in good shape?"

"But there is room for debate. Moreover,—"

"Moreover," said the uncle, feigning anger, "you may have the right to sacrifice yourself, but you should not sacrifice your daughter."

A rather heated discussion followed, which Pillerrault designedly made exciting.

"Well! if Popinot lent you nothing," Pillerrault exclaimed, "if he had considered you as his partner, if he had regarded the price given to your creditors for his share in the *oil* as an advance of profits, so as not to rob you—"

"I would have the appearance of having, in concert with him, deceived my creditors."

Pillerrault feigned to let himself be beaten by this reason. He was well enough acquainted with the human heart to know that, during the night, the worthy man would quarrel with himself on this point; and that internal discussion accustomed him to the idea of his rehabilitation.

"But why," he said, at dinner, "were my wife and daughter in my old apartments?"

"Anselme wants to rent them in order to live there with Césarine. Your wife is on his side. Without saying anything to you about it, they have gone and had the bans published, so as to

compel you to consent. Popinot says that he will have less merit in marrying Césarine after you are made all right. You take the king's six thousand francs, and you do not want to accept anything from your relatives! As for me, I can very well give you a receipt for what is coming to me. Do you refuse me?"

"No," said César, "but that would not prevent me from saving up in order to pay you, in spite of the receipt."

"That's all subtlety," said Pillerault, "and in matters of honesty I ought to be believed. What a stupid thing you said a moment ago! Shall you have deceived your creditors when you will have paid them all?"

At that moment César was examining Pillerault, and Pillerault was moved at seeing, after three years, an unrestrained smile for the first time animating the saddened features of his nephew.

"True," he said, "they would be paid—but it is selling my daughter!"

"And I want to be bought," exclaimed Césarine, as she made her appearance along with Popinot.

The two lovers had heard these last words as on tiptoe they entered the ante-chamber of their uncle's little quarters, and Madame Birotteau followed them. All three had hurried in a carriage to the creditors that remained to be paid, to get them to assemble in the evening at Alexandre Crottat's, where the receipts were being prepared. The logical power of Popinot, the lover, triumphed over César's scruples,

though the latter persisted in calling himself a debtor, pretending that he was defrauding the law by an innovation. But he let the researches of his conscience yield to an exclamation from Popinot:

“You want to kill your daughter, then?”

“Kill my daughter?” said César, stunned.

“Well,” said Popinot, “I have the right, among the living, to make you a present of the sum that, conscientiously, I think to be yours in my business. Would you refuse me?”

“No,” said César.

“Well, let us go to Alexandre Crottat’s this evening, so that we will not have to go back over that business; we will arrange there at the same time about our marriage-contract.”

A petition for rehabilitation and all the documents supporting it were presented, by Derville’s care, to the attorney-general of the royal court of Paris.

During the month that the formalities and publications of the bans for Césarine’s marriage to Anselme lasted, Birotteau was affected by feverish sensations. He was restless, he was afraid he would not live until the great day when the decision would be given. His heart palpitated without cause, he said. He complained of dull pains in that organ, so much used up by his emotions of sorrow that he was fatigued by this supreme joy. Decrees of rehabilitation are so rare in the business of the royal court of Paris that it pronounces scarcely *one* in ten years. To those who take society seriously, the formalities of justice have something

indescribably great and serious. Institutions depend entirely on the weight that men attach to them and the grandeur with which they are clad by thought. And so, when nothing is left, not of religion, but of belief, in a people, when primary education has loosened therein all the conservative bonds by habituating the child to a pitiless analysis, a nation is dissolved; for it is no longer a body except by the ignoble welding of material interests, by the commandments of the worship of a well-understood egotism. Fed on religious ideas, Birotteau took justice for what it ought to be in men's eyes, a representation of society itself, an august expression of the accepted law, independent of the form in which it is produced: the older, the more worn, the more hoary a magistracy is, the more solemn, moreover, is the exercise of its priesthood, which means so profound a study of men and things, which sacrifices the heart and hardens it under the tutelage of palpitating interests. They become rare, those men who do not climb with keen emotions the ladder of the royal court, in the old Palais de Justice at Paris, and the former merchant was one of these men. Few persons have remarked the mysterious solemnity of that stairway so admirably situated to produce an effect: it is found above the exterior peristyle that adorns the Palace court, and its doorway is in the middle of a gallery that leads from one end to the immense Salle des Pas Perdus, from the other to the Sainte-Chapelle, two monuments that may well make everything around them look

mean. The church of Saint-Louis is one of the most imposing edifices in Paris, and the approach to it has an indescribably sombre and romantic appearance from the end of that gallery. The great Salle des Pas Perdus, on the contrary, has a vista full of light, and it is difficult to forget that the history of France is bound up with that hall. This stairway must, then, have some rather imposing characteristic, for it is not too much crowded by these two magnificences. Perhaps the soul is there moved at the aspect of the place where decrees are rendered, seen through the rich grating of the Palace. The stairway opens on an immense room, the antechamber to that in which the court holds the sessions of its first chamber, and which forms the Salle des Pas Perdus of the court. Imagine what emotions must have been experienced by the insolvent, who was naturally impressed by these accessories, as he ascended to the court surrounded by his friends: Lebas, then president of the Tribunal of Commerce; Camusot, his former commissary-judge; Ragon, his old employer; the Abbé Loraux, his confessor. The holy priest pointed out those human splendors with a reflection that made them still more imposing in César's eyes. Pillerault, that practical philosopher, had thought of exaggerating in advance his nephew's joy, so as to relieve him from the dangers of the unforeseen events of that feast. Just as the former merchant was completing his toilet, he saw his true friends approaching, and they deemed it an honor to accompany

him to the bar of the court. This escort developed in the brave man a contentment that threw him into the exaltation necessary to bear up against the imposing spectacle of the court. Birotteau found other friends assembled in the hall of the solemn sessions, where sat a dozen judges.

After the cases had been called, Birotteau's lawyer made the request in a few words. On a sign from the first president, the advocate-general, invited to give his conclusions, arose. In the name of the law, the attorney-general, the man who represents the public right, went himself to ask that he restore honor to the merchant who had only pledged it: a unique ceremony, for the culprit can be but pardoned. People with feeling may imagine Birotteau's emotions when he heard Monsieur de Granville pronouncing a discourse, of which the following is a synopsis :

"Gentlemen," said the famous magistrate, "on the sixteenth of January, 1820, Birotteau was declared in a state of insolvency by a decree of the Tribunal of Commerce of the Seine. The stoppage of payment was not caused either by this trader's imprudence, or by false speculations, or by any reason that could stain his honor. We feel the need of saying so distinctly: this misfortune was caused by one of those disasters that have been repeated to the great grief of justice and of the city of Paris. It was reserved for our age, in which for a long time yet will be fermented the unwholesome leaven of the manners and ideas of the Revolution,

to see the notary's office in Paris straying away from the glorious traditions of the preceding ages, and producing in a few years as many failures as are to be found in two centuries under the old monarchy. The greed for gold rapidly acquired has attacked the ministerial officers, those guardians of the public fortune, those intermediary magistrates!"

There was a tirade on this text, in which, in obedience to the necessities of his office, the Comte de Granville found the means to incriminate the Liberals, the Bonapartists and other enemies of the throne. The event has proved that this magistrate was right in his apprehensions.

"The flight of a Paris notary, who ran off with the money entrusted to him by Birotteau, decided the petitioner's ruin," he continued. "The court, in this case, has rendered a decision which proves to what extent the confidence of Roguin's clients was shamefully deceived. A settlement intervened. We will state, to the petitioner's honor, that the operations were remarkable for a purity that is to be found in none of the failures of a scandalous character with which the trade of Paris is every day afflicted. Birotteau's creditors found the smallest things that the unfortunate man was possessed of. They found, gentlemen, his clothing, his jewelry, in fine, the articles of purely personal use, not only belonging to himself, but those of his wife, who abandoned all her rights to swell the assets. Birotteau, on this occasion, was worthy of the consideration that had been won for him by the municipal

offices he had held; for he was then deputy to the mayor of the second arrondissement and had received the decoration of the Legion of Honor, granted as much because of the devotedness of the Royalist who fought in Vendémiaire on the steps of Saint-Roch, then stained with his blood, as to the consular magistrate esteemed for his intelligence, loved for his conciliatory spirit, and to the modest municipal officer who had refused the honors of the mayorship while suggesting one more worthy, the Honorable Baron de la Billardière, one of the noble Vendéans, whom he had learned to esteem in evil days."

"That phrase is better than mine," César whispered in his uncle's ear.

"And so the creditors, finding sixty per cent of their claims by the surrender of all that this loyal merchant, his wife and his daughter possessed, have recorded the expressions of their esteem in the settlement that was made between them and their debtor, and released him from the rest of their claims. These testimonies recommend themselves to the attention of the court by the manner in which they are conceived."

Here the attorney-general read the terms of the settlement.

"In the presence of these kindly dispositions, gentlemen, many merchants would have felt themselves in a position to consider themselves liberated, and would have walked out proudly in public. Far otherwise, Birotteau, without allowing himself to be



dejected, formed in his conscience the plan of reaching the glorious day that dawns here for him. Nothing has daunted him. A place is accorded by our well-beloved sovereign to give bread to the wounded man of Saint-Roch, the insolvent reserves the salary for his creditors without taking anything from it for his own wants, for the devotedness of the family has not failed him—”

Birotteau, weeping, wrung his uncle's hands.

“His wife and daughter poured into the common treasury the fruits of their toil; they had espoused Birotteau's noble idea. Each of them went down from the position that she had occupied to take one inferior to it. These sacrifices, gentlemen, ought to be highly honored; they are the most difficult of all to make. Such was the task that Birotteau imposed upon himself.”

Here the attorney-general read the résumé of the balance-sheet, pointing out the sums that remained due and the creditors' names.

“Each of these sums, interest included, has been paid, gentlemen, not by receipts over private signatures that call for the strictest inquiry, but by authentic receipts by which the scruples of the court could not be taken by surprise, and which have not prevented the magistrates from doing their duty by proceeding to the inquiry demanded by the law. You will give back to Birotteau not honor, but the rights of which he had been deprived, and you will do justice. Such sights are so rare in your presence that we cannot refrain from testifying to the

petitioner how much we applaud such conduct, which had already been encouraged by august protection."

Then he read the formal conclusions in the Palace style.

The court deliberated without retiring, and the president arose to pronounce the decree.

"The court," he said, in closing, "charges me to express to Birotteau the satisfaction that it feels in giving such a judgment.—Clerk, call the next case."

Birotteau, already clad in the caftan of honor by the phrases applied to him by the illustrious attorney-general, was thunderstruck with pleasure as he heard the solemn phrase spoken by the first president of the highest royal court of France, and which betrayed emotions in the heart of impassible human justice. He was unable to leave his place at the bar, he seemed to have been nailed to it, looking in a stupefied way at the magistrates, as if they were angels who had come to reopen to him the gates of social life; his uncle took him by the arm and led him into the hall. César, who had not obeyed Louis XVIII., then mechanically put the ribbon of the Legion of Honor in his button-hole, and was all at once surrounded by his friends and carried in triumph to his carriage.

"Where, my friends, are you taking me?" he asked Joseph Lebas, Pillerault and Ragon.

"To your home."

"No, it is three o'clock; I want to go to the Bourse and use my right."

"To the Bourse," said Pillerault to the driver, as he made an expressive sign to Lebas, for he noticed disturbing symptoms in the rehabilitated, and he was afraid his mind would become affected.

The former perfumer entered the Bourse, giving his arm to his uncle and Lebas, those two venerated merchants. His rehabilitation was known. The first person who saw the three merchants, followed by old Ragon, was Du Tillet.

"Ah! my dear master, I am delighted to know that you have got out of it. I have, perhaps, contributed to this happy ending of your troubles, by the ease with which I let little Popinot make a good thing. I am as well pleased at your happiness as if it were my own."

"You could not be otherwise," said Pillerault. "That will never happen to you."

"What do you mean, sir?" said Du Tillet.

"Zounds! a good hit," said Lebas, smiling at Pillerault's revengeful malice, for the latter, without knowing anything, regarded this man as a criminal.

Matifat recognized César. All at once the merchants of best repute surrounded the former perfumer and gave him a Bourse ovation; he received the most flattering compliments, hand-shakings that awakened many jealousies, excited some remorse, for, out of a hundred persons who were parading there, more than fifty had failed. Gigonnet and Gobseck, who were chatting in a corner, looked at the honest perfumer as physicians must have looked

at the first *electric gymnote* that was shown to them. This fish, possessing the power of a Leyden jar, is the greatest curiosity of the animal kingdom. After having breathed the incense of his triumph, César went back into his hack and set out to return to his house, where the marriage-contract between his dear Césarine and the devoted Popinot was to be signed. He had a nervous laugh that struck his three old friends.

A failing of youth is to believe everybody as strong as it is itself, a failing that, moreover, belongs to its qualities. Instead of seeing men and things through glasses, it colors them with the reflections from its flame, and casts its exuberance of life even on old people. Like César and Constance, Popinot kept in his memory a gorgeous image of the ball given by Birotteau. During those three years of trials, Constance and César had, without saying so to themselves, often heard Colinet's orchestra, again seen the flowery assemblage, and tasted that joy so cruelly punished, as Adam and Eve must sometimes have thought of that forbidden fruit that gave death and life to all their posterity, for it seems that the reproduction of the angels is one of Heaven's mysteries. But Popinot could think of that feast without remorse, nay, with delight: Césarine, in all her glory, had promised to be his, when he was poor. During that evening he had been assured that he was loved for his own sake. And so, when he had redeemed from Célestine the apartments that Grindot had restored,

stipulating that everything should remain intact, when he had scrupulously preserved intact the smallest things that had belonged to César and Constance, he dreamt of giving his ball, a marriage ball. He had lovingly prepared for this feast, imitating his employer only in the expenses that were necessary, and not in foolishness: the foolishness had been done. Thus the dinner was to be served by Chevet, the guests were almost the same. The Abbé Loraux took the place of the grand chancellor of the Legion of Honor; the president of the Tribunal of Commerce, Lebas, did not fail to attend. Popinot invited Monsieur Camusot to thank him for the good wishes that he had lavished on Birotteau. Monsieur de Vandenesse and Monsieur de Fontaine came instead of Roguin and his wife. Césarine and Popinot had distributed their invitations for the ball with discernment. Both equally dreaded the publicity of a wedding; they had obviated the friction that annoys tender and pure hearts by arranging to give the ball on the day of the contract. Constance had found again that cherry dress in which, for a single day, she had shone with such flitting splendor! It had pleased Césarine to give Popinot the surprise of showing herself in that ball toilet, of which he had spoken to her many and many a time. Thus the rooms were going to present to Birotteau the enchanting spectacle that he had enjoyed during a single evening. Neither Constance, nor César, nor Anselme had perceived the danger that César would incur in this great surprise, and they awaited him

at four o'clock with a joy that made them do childish things.

After the inexpressible emotions that he had just experienced on account of his re-entering the Bourse, that hero of commercial honesty was going to receive the shock that awaited him in the Rue Saint-Honoré. When, on re-entering his former home, he saw at the foot of the stairs, that had remained new, his wife, in a cherry velvet dress, Césarine, the Comte de Fontaine, the Vicomte de Vandenesse, the Baron de la Billardière, the illustrious Vauquelin, there came a slight veil over his eyes, and his Uncle Pillerault, who gave him his arm, felt an internal trembling.

"It is too much," said the philosopher to Anselme, the lover; "he will never be able to stand all the wine that you are pouring out for him."

Joy was so deeply impressed on all hearts that each one attributed César's emotion and his staggering to some quite natural intoxication, but one that is often mortal. On finding himself again in his own house, on again seeing his parlor, his guests, among whom were women in ball dress, suddenly the heroic movement of the finale of Beethoven's grand symphony burst forth in his head and in his heart.

That ideal music radiated, played in all its moods, made clarion sounds in all the meninges of that wearied brain, for which it was to be the grand finale.

Overwhelmed by this internal harmony, he went

## THE DEATH OF CÉSAR BIROTTEAU

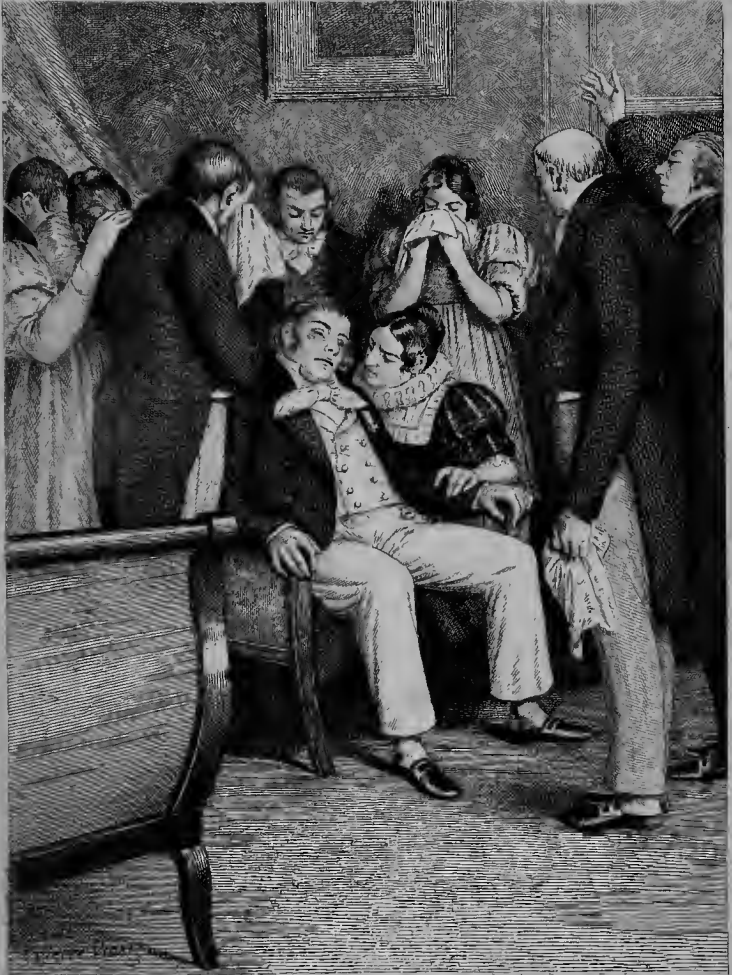
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*“Behold the death of the just,” said the Abbé Loraux, in a grave voice as he pointed to César with one of those divine gestures that Rembrandt has interpreted in his painting of Christ bringing Lazarus back to life.*





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to take his wife's arm and to whisper in her ear, in a voice stifled by a continuous flow of blood:

"I am not well!"

Constance, frightened, led her husband into her room, which he did not reach without difficulty, and where he threw himself into an arm-chair, saying:

"Monsieur Haudry! Monsieur Loraux!"

The Abbé Loraux came, followed by the guests and the women in ball costume, all of whom stopped and formed a stunned group. In the presence of those flower-bedecked people, César pressed his confessor's hand and leaned his head on his kneeling wife's bosom. A vessel had already burst in his chest, and the flow from the aneurism strangled his last breath.

"Behold the death of the just," said the Abbé Loraux, in a grave voice as he pointed to César with one of those divine gestures that Rembrandt has interpreted in his painting of *Christ bringing Lazarus back to life*.

Jesus orders the earth to give up its prey, the holy priest pointed out to Heaven a martyr of commercial honesty to be decorated with the eternal palm.

Paris, November and December, 1837.



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